

# On the Application of Service Learning in Translation Teaching\*

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Service learning includes preparation, service, reflection, and evaluation, which can speed up the process of knowledge internalization and improve students' ability to apply knowledge through service practice. This paper reviews the current development of translation teaching in China through exploring the problems and puts forward some suggestions on the application of service-learning in translation class.

*Keywords:* service-learning, translation teaching, application

## Introduction

The rapid development of the global politics and economy, along with the acceleration of internationalization and globalization, has intensified the demand for translation talents. Chinese universities and colleges have increased large investment in translation teaching. Translation teaching has been a compulsory course for College English or business English majors. However, the effect of translation teaching has not yet made significant progress. In some translation courses, teachers teach the translation skills according to the content of the project by means of analyzing translation cases. Introducing translation knowledge, translation theories, and some basic skills, teachers guide the students to carry on lots of translation practice, which covers literature, commerce, and tourism. These contents can be found scattered, short paragraph, no continuity and lack of overall planning. In addition, they are mainly designed for translation theory, serving translation teaching specifically rather than serving actual social needs. As a result, this teaching model may be only aimed at training students' translation competence while neglecting its function of serving the society. Since the ultimate goal of cultivating talents in higher education is to serve the society, teachers and students in translation teaching should take "serving the society" as their duty. Only by doing so can their teaching better realize the social function and will be more relevant, practical, and meaningful.

## Service Learning

Service learning is a form of instruction and learning that connects the subject matter and the student to the real world (Lisman, 1998). With its origin in America, service learning, as a teaching and learning strategy, has attracted great attention from educators. Service-learning implies a method of learning that is integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the service activity and that provides students with opportunities to use newly

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acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own community (Silcox, 1995, p. 25). The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey's: The interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning (Ehrlich, 1996, p. xi). Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh (2006) stated:

Service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity that in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility. (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006, p. 12)

In other words, service-learning provides students with an opportunity that they can put what they have learned in class into use in a real problem-solving surrounding and then come back to class for the unsolved problems.

A program named *Beyond the Voice* advocated by an associate professor CAI Liang in Zhejiang University Ningbo College of Science and Engineering in 2009 had attracted wide attention both from educators and media. This program consisted of a team of college students with an aim of social practice in English language. In the last four years, they interviewed more than 700 foreign people from over 50 countries to make a study of their dreams and how to make their dreams come true in Ningbo. Professor SHU Ding-fang in Shanghai International Studies University, who was president of Chinese Cognitive Linguistics Research Association, said it upheld "the unity of knowledge and action" teaching idea and integrated the teaching of language into the real communicative environment, cultural environment, and social environment, which helped greatly to promote language learners' learning motivation and learning strategy. Students involved in the program found themselves with more self-confidence, more responsibility to spread Chinese culture, and more enthusiasm to English learning (WANG, 2013)

This case is a perfect example of application of theory of service learning in English learning. Bloom (2008), Morris (2001), and Weldon (2003) pointed out that service learning has been a successful teaching method in many academic disciplines, including foreign language instruction. To design a service program for translation class, there are three stages both for teachers and students to know clearly (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996).

First is the well-planned preparation. Teachers should understand the benefits of service learning for translation class and make themselves and students ready for the service program. Students should be informed that service program is a part of translation curriculum and informed of the details, such as when, where, and how to carry out.

Next is to provide service. According to the service program, students attend the translation agent or companies' activities.

Third is to reflect and evaluate. After every service, students are required to meet and discuss with teachers in group to find out what they have learned through providing translation service and what they are still short for the reality.

This is one round of service activity for translation course. Doing so will help to transform teacher-centered into student-centered model, renew teaching material with the real-life ones, and increase students' engagement in translation class.

### Problems of Current Translation Teaching Situation in China

Education is inseparable from the demand of the society. English is a language used everywhere in the world. With the globalization, most Chinese colleges and universities have set up their English department and enrolled students to learn English. English used to be an extremely hot major. Translation course has always been an important and practical one for English major students. However, with the limitation of teaching method, textbooks used, and its course setting and course contents, how to make translation teaching vigorous and effective has been a headache both for teachers and students.

First, the teaching model should be improved. The most widely used teaching model is first to explain translation skills with abundant examples, followed with homework related to the specific skill, and then properly a second lecture to make clear misunderstandings, mistaken translations, and correct translation based on students' exercise books. This teaching model can be easily seen as teacher-centered class. Teachers are in control of the class and students are passive to receive what has been taught and do the exercises without their own willingness, which is one cause of the less vigorous in translation class.

Teaching contents is another factor. There are a variety of the translation textbooks which can be found to date, such as *A Course on English Chinese and Chinese English Translation* compiled by KE Ping, *A Course in Translative Art* by HUANG Long, *A Practical Course in English Chinese Translation* by XU Qi-hua, *A New Practical Textbook of Translation From Chinese Into English* by CHEN Hong-wei, *A Course in Translation Between English and Chinese* by YANG Li-li, *A New Book on English Chinese Translation* by LI Zheng-zhong, *An Applied Theory of Translation* by FAN Zhong-ying, and *A Course in English-Chinese Translation* by ZHANG Pei-ji. Generally speaking, all of them have been compiled in the same structure that begins with translation history and theory and the relation between language and culture. Then, they deal with the collocation among Chinese and English words, sentences, and passages one step by another by using translation skills, such as amplification, conversion, repetition, negation, division, adverbial clauses, attribute clauses, and nominal clauses. Although such a structure seems clearer in details, the course contents are just presented in an isolated and segmented manner which makes them appear far away from the useful purpose. Moreover, most of these textbooks were compiled or amended in last century and seem out of date.

Third, scheduled time is not sufficient. Translation course is compulsory for English majors, which starts from the third year and last one semester. Take Quzhou University for example, translation course is a combination of E-C (English-Chinese) and C-E (Chinese-English), twice (totaled three hours) a week. Except for teaching translation theory and skill, students need more time to use translation skills for real setting practice. If they have some opportunities to participate in the real translation activities, such as for the local business companies, local government, or community, students will make great progress after social practice. At the same time, it will fulfill their social responsibility.

While facing the current discouraging Chinese-English translation teaching situation, many researchers had made some suggestions that teachers who shoulder the translation course should gain further training and make themselves more capable and knowledgeable. They also advised that teaching materials should be modified to fit the different levels in terms of students' English and Chinese proficiency. However, in order to solve the root of the problem in translation class, effective measures should be taken according to the characteristics of translation

class subject. The theory of service learning has been proved successful in a program named *Beyond the Voice* advocated by a Chinese associate professor (WANG, 2013). Translation teaching demands translation practice, which should become an integral part of translation teaching. Practice makes perfect. Integrating service-learning into translation teaching conforms to its course nature, revitalizes translation class, and serves the society.

### **Suggestions on Application of Service-Learning in Translation Teaching**

Translation teaching is to systematically inform the basic rules, fundamental theories, skills, and strategies of translation (LIU, 1986) instead of grasping language structure and enriching language knowledge. And most importantly, students will have the ability to use all the rules, theories, skills, and strategies in real translation practice. Language learners must be given opportunities to use the rules as they are learning. As a result, creating a real context or environment for translation practice turns out to be more significant. However, English teaching in most East Asian countries is traditionally dominated by a teacher-centered and book-centered grammar-translation method and an emphasis on rote memory (LIU & Littlewood, 1997). So is translation class in China, in which the teacher focuses on the textbook or teaching material, gives lectures on translation theory and skills with examples, analyzes classic translation works, and reviews students' assignments. Students themselves are supposed to listen to teachers and receive knowledge. It is a cramming process without any active learning. To change the current awkward situation, application of service-learning in translation class can be an ideal option. Whereas, service-learning is a fairly new concept in China. In order to take a trial, some prerequisites should be taken into consideration.

First of all, to re-examine the relationship between teachers and students. During the process from learning, service, reflection to re-learning, teachers need to pay close attention to the performance of each student and provide timely help for students, while students should actively participate in the whole service learning plan and communicate effectively with teachers and their peers in the reflection stage after the service to adjust learning strategies. All of this are inseparable from the effective organization of teachers.

Secondly, the integration of classroom and service practice needs school support. The school should be a good coordinator so as to avoid all organizational work being undertaken by teachers.

Thirdly, the establishment of the relationship between school and community will be a long-term plan for exploring. The establishment of the relationship between schools and social institutions (profit organizations, communities, government agencies) requires a series of negotiations, contacts, and communication processes, which requires a lot of manpower and material resources.

Only when the above three aspects are put in place will it be likely to apply service-learning to translation class. Then, it is time to discuss some suggestions on its application.

#### **Step One: Preliminary Preparation**

This step is mainly about making service-learning program on defining what kind of activity should be included. For instance, providing translation and employee English training services for some local enterprises or providing tour guide services at some tourist attractions. Also, it involves specific detailed rules, such as time, place, the number of students and the instructors participating, their responsibilities in service practice, and the coordination with the community and related people.

**Step Two: Implementation**

Before the program, students must have a clear goal of service practice and teachers should assign students' tasks based on their ability and character, pay close attention to the progress, and timely adjust the plan to ensure activities to be carried out step by step. At this stage, students should timely record practice experience and seek for help in the face of difficulties. Dividing the class into groups and establishing translation workshop will enhance students' enthusiasm and confidence. XIAO (2005) suggested translation workshop approach as an effective teaching method to improve the quality of translation teaching. Translation workshop is a form similar to translation center where two or more translators gather together to conduct translation activities (Gentzler, 1993). Since each group is a separate workshop, the group members will have to work together before they can complete the translation. After the discussion, the group will be able to complete the translation task. Each group sends a representative to explain their work. Finally, the teacher should comment and analyze each group's work. In the process of such translation teaching, it will not only promote students' cooperation, translation ability, and organizational capabilities, but also achieve the purpose of social service.

**Step Three: Reflection and Evaluation**

Completing the first two steps, students and teachers are required to come back to classroom to reflect, which distinguishes it from the simple and pure service. This process also reflects the ultimate goal of service practice is to improve the efficiency of learning. Teachers can organize the students to carry out the service practice report and let them exchange their service experience. They can also collect students' English practice report and ask them to carry out English debate on the problems and difficulties in practice and put forward their solutions. In this process, students should focus on their reflection on the past learning experiences, including learning methods, learning content and social needs, training of learning content, and learning methods. Most importantly, they should aim to cultivate the ability to choose learning contents and control learning process. In a word, reflection is an important step in which students reflect on not only the experience of language learning, but those knowledge from service. They will certainly improve their ability of critical thinking and enhance their awareness of social responsibility.

**Step Four: Evaluation**

Evaluation is vital to service-learning which entails the program itself, service process, and service results. For translation class, evaluation step is involved in whether the service-learning scheme is reasonable, how the students perform, how the service they complete, and what yet to be done both for the service and learning. It is essential to make sure the gap between what has been learned in class and the application in the real situations. Therefore, it will provide useful information for further learning. In short, evaluation aims for a better performance for next round of service-learning.

**Conclusion**

Translation course is critical and useful for English students. However, the current translation class teaching is not exciting, including teachers' qualification, teaching methodology, teaching models, and textbooks. By improving one of them, the quality of translation class is likely to have some changes but not a thorough change. In order to maintain a long-run benefit both for teachers' teaching enthusiasm and students' competence for

future job, it is urgent and worthwhile to have a try on applying service learning to translation class, modifying the traditional teacher-center teaching model with an extension of one third time translation practice.

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