

Problems Existing in Interpretation Education

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From the following three dimensions: listening input, interpreting output, and training materials, this paper explores the problems existing in college interpreting education in the viewpoint of English majors in USST in China, and tends to suggest some solutions.

Keywords: interpretation, problem, education

Introduction

With the increasingly frequent international exchanges, the competition between Chinese interpreters becomes increasingly fierce, and the quality of interpretation has been called for higher requirements. In China, although many English majors have obtained TEM-4 and TEM-8 certificates, which are aimed to test their English proficiency, English major students are still not fully qualified for the tasks of general business reception, business negotiation, accompanying tour guides and interpreting, etc. This phenomenon implies that in Chinese interpretation education there still exists some problems, which are worthy of careful consideration and detailed discussion by teachers, researchers, and learners.

Lack of “Sense Group” Training in Listening Input

Listening serves as the first step in the interpreting process, and grasping the listening material stands for the foundation of interpretation. The key of interpreting, in a sense, is the overall understanding of the “sense group”, rather than the partial understanding of the individual words. “Sense group” is the linguistic unit that constitutes a sentence, and it is the key to analyzing and understanding the meaning of a sentence. Listening, understanding, and translating sentences based on the group of ideas will improve the listening ability and promote the overall comprehension and accurate understanding of the paragraph meaning.

Due to the lack of training students to lay emphasis on sense group during their listening, many students tends to unduly focus on the meaning of every single word and therefore they are constantly confused and even cannot understand the general meaning of the whole text, especially after listening to a long paragraph. A typical example of such misunderstanding took place in this year’s rematch of the 8th National Interpretation Competition, particularly on the interpretation of the sentence “The rest of the homework included a multiplication table and reading exercises”. All the eight USST student participants failed to grasp the main theme of the interpretation passage “homework of ancient Egyptian school children”, and were badly judged

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for the accuracy. They created extremely ridiculous interpretation by misjudging “multiplication table” as “multiple choice” and “reading exercises” as “riding exercises”, whose meanings were completely inconsistent with the general idea of the original paragraph.

Consequently, proper listening training plays a vital role in interpretation. Strategies on listening, such as how to focus on sense group, how to capture the key information in the first-time listening as accurately as possible, should be put on the first priority in interpretation education. Students’ improper listening habits, such as overly paying their attention to the single word and specific phrase should also be corrected. In the process of interpreting memory teaching, students should be trained to foster the ability to identify the theme of listening material, grasp the key sentences, filter out redundant information, and conduct logical analysis. Training methods may cover summary of source language, summary of target language, source language retelling, target language retelling, shadow reading, etc. (Li, 2018, p. 141).

These above tips can also help increase students’ opportunities to win in certain interpretation competitions. Some interpretation competitions of high academic value, such as the Cross-Strait Interpretation Competition, have made some adjustments and turned to test students’ ability to summarize the listening material as a part of its scoring criteria.

Lack of Confidence in Interpreting Output

The second problem existing in most USST English majors lies in their too much emphasis on textbooks or theoretical knowledge, and their ignorance of some on-the-spot skills. Interpretation work must be in a certain situation, and real situation interpretation needs some on-the-spot skills, such as the relevant foreign affairs etiquette, reception manners, and talking skills. On-the-spot skills mean a lot in outputting, since interpretation is a kind of interpersonal interaction and cross-cultural communication behavior. The education of interpreting calls for actual practice, which is the purpose of interpreting.

Low frequency of practice often leads to interpreters’ lack of confidence in interpretation and even causes “translation aphasia”, which is a pathological phenomenon meaning the disorder of speech expression and understanding. The original language function is damaged or lost due to the damage of cerebral cortex and language center, and some speech disorders occur such as redundancy, repetition, errors, and omissions in the speech behavior and the loss of the ability to choose language units and organize speech may also happen during the process (Peng & Xu, 2018, p. 37). The effects of such translation aphasia are quite negative. Some practical examples show that many students are not experienced and they are often at a loss in real situations, which results in language incoherence and affects the quality of interpretation output.

Lack of Effectiveness and Practicability in Training Materials

Topics of interpretation in reality may cover almost all kinds of fields and include almost no boundaries of knowledge. However, most textbooks used in Chinese interpretation education are only properly divided by thematic training on some common topics, rather than effective and practical materials. For example, the interpretation textbook for USST students is *Challenging Interpreting: A Coursebook of Interpreting Skills*, which only explains the interpretation process and includes exercises on some common topics such as economy, politics, environment, and so on. By simply knowing some basic terminology of various fields but without deeper understanding of such relevant background information, students can hardly be successful interpreters. As early as 2009, Wang Yan from China Foreign Affairs University proposed that in addition to solid language

foundation, proficient interpretation skills, and certain professional knowledge, it is quite essential to accumulate good political quality, broaden international vision and solid diplomatic background knowledge associated with international relations (Guo & Wen, 2018, p. 118).

Since the reform and opening up, China's foreign exchanges have become increasingly frequent. Many topics related to these updating-with-time issues have also been covered in Shanghai Intermediate and Advanced Interpretation Tests. Therefore, training materials for college interpreting education should contain more contents in a wide range of fields, varying from those ancient classical cultural information to those really up-to-date conversation and documents, such as, One Belt and Road Initiative, the Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the First China International Import Expo, as well as many other major social events updating in time.

As is described in Schema theory, reading comprehension or listening comprehension is actually a dynamic interactive process between input information and knowledge of the world in the human brain. Background knowledge contributes to listening (Liu, 2001, p. 70). In this sense, training materials applied in class should have close connection with popular domestic and international events, news, press conferences, and newspapers, so that students' outlook can quickly be broadened, their knowledge enlarged, and their understanding of the outside world deepened.

From the perspective of the multi-dimensional epistemology of interpretation, interpreting is also a kind of social-cultural activity. From this perspective, interpreting is regarded as the communication between speakers and audiences in different social-cultural contexts (Wang, 2019, p. 21). Hence much attention should be paid to the training of students' speech ability (like minimizing unnecessary pauses, improper tone words and avoiding grammatical errors), and to the training proper expressions and manners. More simple, colloquial dialogue materials with fewer professional words are required to be added in the daily class practice. Teachers' feedback and comments should always be encouraged. Thus, students' ability and confidence in terms of interpretation in various circumstances will be enhanced. Besides, Chinese teachers should strive to create and open up more opportunities for students to practice interpretation. They can lead students to participate in small exhibitions and business conferences for business interpretation training. Different roles of the receptionist, interpreter, visiting guest and interpreter should be designed among students in advance, so that students can participate in the actual practice of interpreting and cultivate their ability to interpret on the spot.

Conclusion

As an interdisciplinary subject, the vitality of interpreting studies lies in constantly expanding research topics, methods and approaches, deepening research achievements and constructing systematic disciplinary theories. This paper discusses three potential problems in the current situation of Chinese interpretation education from the perspective of listening input, interpreting output, and training materials. It also proposes relevant solutions to real interpreting situations based on the problems mentioned above.

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