

Research on Translation Teaching Strategies in Public English Courses Under the Framework of China's Discursive System Construction

MA Yuan

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

This paper explores innovative approaches to translation pedagogy within China's college public English curriculum, situated within the national strategic imperative of constructing a distinctive Chinese discursive system. It identifies a critical gap in current pedagogy, which often prioritizes linguistic proficiency and Western cultural import over the capacity for effective cultural export and value communication (Pan, 2015). Arguing for a paradigm shift, the study proposes a core teaching philosophy that integrates seminal Chinese translation theories with the contemporary demands of national development and international communication. The proposed strategy repositions translation training from a mere linguistic exercise to a vital conduit for ideological-political education and cultural agency. It constructs a practical pedagogical framework centered on a parallel corpus of authoritative Chinese discourse, scaffolded learning modules, and authentic application scenario. The paper concludes that such a reformed, discourse-aware translation pedagogy is essential for empowering the vast cohort of non-English majors to become competent narrators of China's story, thereby directly contributing to the enhancement of China's cultural soft power and international discursive influence.

Keywords: Chinese discursive system, public English teaching, translation pedagogy, ideological-political education, international communication

Introduction: The Imperative for Pedagogical Reform

The construction of a Chinese discursive system is a pivotal national strategy in the new era, aimed at articulating China's developmental path, theoretical innovations, and cultural values to a global audience. This macro-strategic demand necessitates a profound re-evaluation of educational practices, particularly in the domain of foreign language education. College public English courses, which enroll nearly all non-English majors in China, represent the most extensive platform for cultivating foundational international communication competencies. Historically, these courses have effectively served the goal of "bringing in" knowledge and cultural perspectives, focusing on general language skills and comprehension of Western contexts. However, a significant disconnection has emerged: While students' receptive skills have improved, their productive capacity to "tell China's story well"—to explain, describe, and advocate for Chinese perspectives in accurate and compelling English—remains underdeveloped, a phenomenon often termed "Chinese aphasia" in cross-cultural settings (Huang, 2015).

This deficiency stems from a pedagogical misalignment. Traditional translation exercises within public English curricula are frequently isolated, decontextualized tasks focusing on daily life or superficial cultural elements. They lack systematic engagement with the authoritative texts, core concepts, and narrative frameworks that constitute the evolving Chinese discursive system (Yuan, 2020). Consequently, graduates, even with passable English scores, often struggle to translate key terms like “Chinese modernization” or “common prosperity” with precision or to contextualize them within coherent global narratives. This gap between national strategic needs and current educational output underscores an urgent necessity for reform. Therefore, translation teaching within public English must be strategically reconceptualized and redesigned to bridge this gap, transforming it into a frontline practice for building national discursive capacity.

Core Philosophy: Combining Traditional Wisdom and Contemporary Mission

The proposed reform is anchored in a core philosophy that synthesizes China’s rich translation heritage with its modern communicative imperatives. This fusion provides both a theoretical compass and a practical methodology.

On one hand, the timeless wisdom of Chinese translation theory offers foundational principles. Yan Fu’s tripartite standard of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” remains profoundly relevant. In the context of external communication, “Faithfulness” demands accurate representation of the original meaning and ideological stance; “Expressiveness” requires fluency and clarity in the target language; and “Elegance” evolves into the pursuit of appropriate and resonant discourse that aligns with target-culture aesthetics and logic to facilitate acceptance (Wang, 2020). Similarly, Qian Zhongshu’s concept of “Sublimation” guides students beyond literal translation towards the artistic recreation of the source text’s spirit, minimizing cultural distortion when conveying uniquely Chinese concepts (Zhang, 2018).

On the other hand, this traditional wisdom must be directed towards a clear contemporary mission: serving the nation’s need for effective international discourse. Translation pedagogy must explicitly aim to equip students with the tools to participate in global dialogues on China’s terms. This involves a deliberate shift in textual focus—from primarily translating into Chinese to mastering the translation from Chinese into English. The curriculum must systematically incorporate source materials that reflect China’s contemporary realities: key government documents (e.g., White Papers), policy explanations, narratives of developmental achievements, and articulations of socialist core values (The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 2021). The goal is to enable students to act not merely as linguistic conduits but as culturally conscious mediators who can navigate the space between “What is said” in Chinese and “How it can be best understood” in English, thereby achieving the dual objective of cultural transmission and value projection (Hu, 2019).

Constructing a Pedagogical Framework: From Theory to Practice

Translating this core philosophy into actionable teaching requires a structured, multi-dimensional framework. This framework is built on three interconnected pillars: ideological guidance, corpus-based learning, and scenario-driven practice.

The first pillar establishes ideological-political education as the guiding compass. Translation choices are never neutral. They are inherently linked to perspective and stance. Therefore, translation teaching must be deeply integrated with curriculum ideology. When analyzing how to translate a term like “targeted poverty alleviation”, instruction should extend beyond finding an equivalent phrase. It should involve exploring the socio-political

philosophy behind the term—the precision, the grassroots mobilization, the people-centered development approach—so that students grasp the “why” behind the “what”. This cultivates critical discourse awareness, helping students deconstruct potential biases in foreign media portrayals of China and consciously construct balanced, authentic narratives in their translations (Pan, 2015).

The second pillar involves building learning on a foundation of a parallel corpus of authoritative Chinese discourse. Consistency and accuracy are paramount in diplomatic and external publicity discourse. Students must be familiar with standardized, officially recognized translations of key terminology. A curated bilingual corpus, comprising aligned texts from major government portals, “China Daily”, and key speeches, serves as an essential reference tool (China Daily, 2023). Through guided corpus analysis, students internalize standard renditions (e.g., “whole-process people’s democracy”, “ecological civilization”, and “a moderately prosperous society in all respects”) and study their contextual usage. This moves translation practice away from guesswork and towards disciplined, informed language production that aligns with national discursive norms.

The third pillar connects learning to multi-dimensional practical scenarios. Competence is forged in application. Classroom activities should mirror real-world tasks:

CET-4/6 translation enhancement: Directly address the Chinese-to-English translation section of the CET exams. Training should focus on strategically incorporating culturally-loaded terms and contemporary socio-economic concepts into coherent, grammatically sound paragraphs, directly linking curriculum reform to assessment.

Simulated external publicity projects: Engage students in authentic, motivating tasks, such as translating promotional materials for their university’s international office or creating English captions for a local museum’s exhibits. These projects require audience analysis, stylistic adaptation, and persuasive writing, moving translation beyond the sentence level to discourse construction (Zhang, 2018).

Critical media translation and analysis: Select news stories about China from both domestic and international sources; have students translate the domestic report and then critically compare it with its foreign counterpart. This exercise sharpens their ability to identify narrative frames, ideological subtext, and translation strategies, empowering them to produce translations that proactively shape a truthful and constructive image of China (Pan, 2015; Yuan, 2020).

Conclusion

In the context of China’s active engagement in global governance and cultural exchange, the role of public English education must evolve. The translation component, in particular, holds untapped potential as a critical interface between domestic narratives and global audiences. By deliberately aligning translation pedagogy with the project of constructing China’s discursive system—through the integration of traditional translation aesthetics, explicit ideological guidance, corpus-based methodology, and authentic practice scenarios—public English courses can transform from general language classes into powerful incubators for national discursive competence. This reform will empower millions of non-English major graduates, the future professionals in diverse fields, to become effective, confident communicators of China’s story. Their enhanced ability to translate not just words, but meanings, contexts, and values, will constitute a fundamental, grassroots contribution to strengthening China’s voice and shaping a more objective and friendly international public opinion landscape (Hu, 2019; Huang, 2015).

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