

On Compiling Interpreting Textbooks from the Perspective of Critical Thinking Ability Training*

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In recent years, many interpreting textbooks have been published in China, making a great contribution to the training of interpreting talents. However, some interpreting textbooks have deficiencies, such as topic repetition and structure similarity, too academic in content, and too much emphasis on written translation. This paper takes *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) as an example, and draws on the compiling methods of other interpreting textbooks which reflect critical thinking concept, in order to put forward suggestions for compiling interpreting textbooks to cultivate students' critical thinking ability to the greatest extent.

Keywords: interpreting teaching, critical thinking, *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.)

Critical thinking is the ability to think and discriminate, including analysis, reasoning, judgment, and other thinking activities; to discriminate refers to the analysis of situation, category, and reason of things. Many interpreting textbooks have been published in China in recent years. However, He (2016, pp. 1-5+94) pointed out that in the current study on interpreting textbooks, "a considerable number of textbooks are still at the academic research level of translation, so in these books, traditional academic style is overemphasized". There are some problems existing in the publication of interpreting textbooks, such as high repetition rate of topic selection, great similarity of structure, scattered publication, too academic in content, and too much emphasis on written translation. Yang (2020, pp. 11-14) claimed, the new era of the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics has not only provided a broad stage for the foreign language education and profound development prospects, but also proposed new missions, namely how to construct the Chinese characteristic foreign language curriculum and teaching material system, helping to actively adapt to the educational policy of "strengthening morality, cultivating people and serving the country" in an all-round way. Taking the *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd edition) (Feng, 2014) as an example, this paper discusses the compilation and publication of Chinese-English interpreting textbooks designed to cultivate critical thinking ability, in order to provide reference for the compilation of English textbooks for the purpose of strengthening critical thinking ability.

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Overview of Interpreting Textbook Publication

In the past two decades, a large number of interpreting textbooks have been published in China. The three major domestic publishing houses, namely Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, and Higher Education Press, have published nearly 30 interpreting textbooks, such as: *Oral Interpretation: A Course Book* (Wu, 1998); *Field Interpreting* (Lin, 2004); *A New Interpretation Course for College Students* (Mei, 2008); *Chinese-English Interpreting-Developing Transference Competence* (Wang, Wu, & Lin, 2012); *A New Course Book on English-Chinese Interpretation* (Cui, 2005); *Chinese-English Interpreting (Revision)* (Zhan, Wang, & Wu, 2012); *A Basic Course Book of Interpreting* (Deng, 2011); etc. However, after comparison, we found that many interpreting textbooks had high repeatability in the structure, and few interpreting textbooks met the standards of national or ministerial planned textbooks, award-winning textbooks, and big number of printing or sales volume.

Critical Thinking Education Reflected in Interpreting Textbooks

Some interpreting textbooks show different structures and compiling concepts from other textbooks, reflecting the concept of critical thinking ability cultivation.

At present, the book winning most awards is *Contemporary Oral Interpretation: A Course Book* (edited by Wu, Dai, Ke, & Zhou, 2010). One of the most prominent features of this book is its using of “terminology system” to provide vocabulary preparation for every interpreting topic, rather than giving several terms separately like what most interpreting textbooks do. On the basis of the terminology system of each topic, students will be inspired to search for relevant professional information and have a comprehensive grasp of the conceptual system of the topic when learning interpreting. They will be prepared to think about and analyze the meaning of those terms encountered in interpreting in the conceptual system of a topic, so interpreting teaching is more likely to cultivate the critical thinking ability needed by the society.

A New Interpretation Course for College Students (Mei, 2008) is a national planned textbook. The introduction part of interpreting guides students to supplement their understanding of the topic by asking them questions instead of just providing background introduction. *Field Interpreting* (Lin, 2004) boasts the biggest number of printing. Its author is not a college teacher, but an interpreter who has been engaged in professional interpretation for a long time. Its content is divided into different fields of knowledge in the English introduction. So, besides interpreting theory and skills, interpreting learners are encouraged to strengthen their critical thinking ability and acquire the ability of doing interpreting in different professional fields. So it has advantages that other textbooks do not have, and is known as a “masterpiece in real combat”.

This paper takes *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) as an example to study the embodiment of critical thinking ability training in interpreting textbooks published in China, so as to understand the achievements that have been made and the areas that need to be improved. In this way, we will enable students to improve their critical thinking ability while learning interpreting, so as to meet the need of the current society.

Critical Thinking Embodied in *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd Ed.)

Interpreting teaching should comprehensively cultivate critical thinking ability and improve comprehensive interpreting quality while training interpreting skills. Based on this, we can tell China’s story well and help to promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Compared with other Chinese-English interpreting textbooks, *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) (2014) embodied the concept of critical thinking ability training in many aspects. Since the publication of its first edition by PLA Publishing Press in 1997, which was then edited by Yilin Press in 2002, the textbook had been widely used by many Chinese colleges and universities, translation training institutions, and staffs of foreign affairs department. *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) has two volumes. The first volume includes note-taking in interpreting, digital translation, idiom translation and other important interpreting skills, and interpreting drills on topics such as “China’s foreign policy” and “China’s environmental protection”. The second volume uses interpreting topics as the main line. Topics such as “Tourism in China”, “Education in China”, “Culture in China”, and “Population and Family Planning in China” are integrated with interpreting skill training. The teaching materials are rich and practical, which fully reflect China’s national situation and diplomacy in the new century.

The concept of critical thinking ability training reflected in this textbook mainly includes the following three aspects.

1. With the task of training qualified interpreters, we should cultivate students’ critical thinking ability of analyzing domestic and foreign cultures in interpreting teaching, and make sure that the teaching content covers various relevant topics and subtopics. The course of *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) clearly pointed out that an important purpose of interpreting teaching is to train students to understand the background and development trend of various fields and to be familiar with relevant policies. So, students are supposed to read the texts in English and Chinese analytically, for the purpose of getting a comprehensive understanding of the domestic and foreign affairs.

In each chapter, there is a “background reading” section before interpreting tasks, which provides a wealth of relevant events and policies in both Chinese and English, and is conducive to students’ knowledge and vocabulary preparation before interpreting. Almost all the reading materials in the first edition are changed in the second edition, in order to reflect the latest developments in related fields in China, which drive students to think actively and holistically for a certain knowledge of the important happenings and policies in and out of the country.

As pointed out in the preface of the *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.), China is increasing its efforts to go global and unique Chinese elements have become the focus and difficulty in E-C translation. In the teaching of Chinese-English interpreting in colleges and universities, we should cultivate students’ critical thinking ability of analyzing the proper way of interpreting Chinese culture-loaded words into English. This thinking ability is needed for making sure that readers of the English translation really understand the Chinese cultural features introduced in it.

2. Building a “terminology system” in the vocabulary preparation section is helpful for enlarging interpreting learners’ vocabulary and improving their critical thinking ability. The terminology system reflects the conceptual system of a topic or discipline. In a topic-based interpreting textbook, preparing vocabulary in the form of a terminology system motivates students to think about the conceptual system and acquire a holistic understanding of the topic, so that they can not only complete the interpreting tasks of the topic with a more systematic background knowledge, but also build a complete knowledge system in the process of learning interpreting. The most striking difference between *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) and other textbooks is the construction of a “terminology system” in the interpreting vocabulary preparation section. Instead of providing only a few words needed for accomplishing the interpreting task, this textbook helps students improve the critical thinking ability needed by today’s society.

3. Interpreting teaching needs to improve students' ability to respond to on-site situations, based on the practical nature of interpretation itself. Students at Monterrey Institute of International Studies (MIIS) say that in their interpreting training, there are very few standard answers, which allows them to develop the ability to actively gather information and to judge the accuracy of the translation. *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) does not provide reference translations in the book, in order to preserve the live and authentic nature of classroom interpreting training and improve the effectiveness of interpreting teaching. The teaching of interpreting should develop students' ability to actively think and explore how to provide better translations, and encourage students to develop the habit of active thinking.

Suggestions for Publishing Interpreting Textbooks Cultivating Critical Ability

By analyzing *A Practical Course in Oral Interpretation* (3rd ed.) and drawing on the methods of critical thinking ability cultivation in other interpreting textbooks, the authors believe that the following three aspects are important for empowering interpreting textbooks to serve the purpose of cultivating students' critical thinking abilities to the greatest extent.

1. Interpreting source texts had better reflect various aspects of Chinese and foreign excellent cultures. The reading and interpreting materials in interpreting textbooks should include materials reflecting excellent national cultures, guiding and encouraging college students to think about and make comparisons between Chinese and western cultures, so as to gain a comprehensive understanding of the different cultural manifestations in the world.

2. Terminology system is needed for acquiring an overall understanding of the conceptual system of a professional field. Interpreting materials should help to develop students' ability of searching for information, preparing for interpretation and thinking in an overall and critical manner, so vocabulary does not need to be given as an objective presentation of knowledge in both English and Chinese or as isolated words. In many interpreting textbooks, vocabulary is presented in the manner of correspondence between two words in the source and target language, but this kind of correspondence is often found to be rigid, confusing or misleading. Therefore, it is recommended that the vocabulary for each topic be presented as a terminology system, so as to push students to form an overall understanding of the conceptual system of the professional area to be interpreted. This will facilitate their analysis and deciphering of the words appearing later in the interpreting task.

3. Questions should be asked to promote critical thinking abilities in addition to interpreting abilities. In the part related to background knowledge preparation and post-interpreting summary, students had better be guided by carefully designed questions to think about the important knowledge in interpreting topics rather than be given objective background introduction.

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