

Project-based Learning in Translation Teaching: A Case of Audiovisual Translation Project

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Abstract

Much has been researched and discussed on the translator training and a variety of translation teaching methods have been in active use in translation classrooms. To have teaching more closely connected and interact with actual translation practice, explorations are still in need. Taking the project-based learning as the approach, this paper made an attempt in integrating the contracted project into classroom teaching of translation, illustrated with a real case of audiovisual translation in the pursuit of offering reference for translation teaching and translator training. Reflections and summaries of the students, the teacher instructor, editors and the project manager show that the project-based learning is fruitful for all the agents involved, especially for the students who benefit most for their translation learning. As it is expected, there are some aspects in students' translation learning that cannot be reached by classroom teaching. Students participated in the project have been improved in their translation competence in terms of extra-linguistic knowledge, knowledge about translation, strategic choices with the help of their own mistakes and professionals in the industry.

Keywords

Project-based learning, translation teaching, audiovisual translation

With the continuous evolving of the international political and economic situation and the development of cultural exchanges across the world, translation has never played a more important role than it does today and has never been as eager to find its place in social practice. "Academic associations and societies in the field of translation studies are mostly devoted to research issues, but as training has been a much researched subject in our field and many researchers are also translator trainers, most have an interest in it" (Kelly, 2005, p. 42). Therefore, the training of translators and translation researchers can be integrated for students majoring in translation studies in view that they are likely to become professional translators. Translation teaching in colleges and universities need to pay equal attention to translation research and practice, and to seek interaction and cooperation with enterprises and government departments to provide students with opportunities for translation practice and internship in translation industry" (Yang Ke, 2013, p. 58). Project-based learning in translation teaching will help students apply the knowledge they have acquired to social practice, gain the experience of being engaged in real translation tasks, and continuously improve their translation competence through interaction with project implementers and organizers.

1. PjBL in translation teaching and translation competence development

The strong practical nature of the discipline of translation studies itself dictates that translation research cannot only stay on paper, and the training of translators in the graduate program cannot be confined to the classroom. Douglas Robinson once stated in his book *The Translator's Turn*, "to offer translators tools, not rules" (1991: xvi). The PACTE group believes that translation competence is the potential knowledge system and skill system required by translators to

complete a translation job or task or project, which “consists of 6 sub-competencies, namely bilingual, extra-linguistic, knowledge about translation, instrumental, strategic and psycho-physiological components (PACTE, 2003). This model of translation competence, to a large extent, describes the construction of knowledge system for the training of translators. It also allows us to see that translators need not only language skills, but also various abilities and knowledge related to linguistic conversions. In an actual translation project, they need analytical, research, technological, interpersonal and time-management skills. “The situation on the translation market has been changing and evolving dynamically, along with the perspective of the translator’s profession, and translation teachers must pay even closer attention than before to the process of skills and competence development in students (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk & Bogucki, 2015, p. 50).

In translation teaching, the acquisition of these sub-competencies and knowledge is mainly achieved through the design of teaching methods and corresponding practical training. There are many explorations in the academic circles on translation teaching methods, including contrastive English-Chinese translation teaching, task-based teaching, translation workshops, translation teaching leveraging parallel texts, computer-aided translation teaching, PBL teaching method (Problem-Based learning) and so on. However, most of the above teaching methods are largely limited to classroom and textual materials, and the introduction of “project-based learning” into the translation classroom provides students with the possibility to participate in actual translation projects and learn from outside the classroom.

Scholars have long discussed the “project-based learning” as a teaching method. According to Blumenfeld et al. (1991), “Project-based learning is a comprehensive perspective focused on teaching by engaging students in investigation”. Students set out to do their research by asking questions, investigating, analyzing, collecting data, drawing conclusions, exploring further, and asking new questions. It can be seen that it is mainly discussed as a classroom teaching method, highlighting its training of analytical and critical reasoning skills. Some scholars in China like Wang Oujian (2012), Yang Ke (2013), Liu Hui (2013), Zhang Zheng, Wang Zhen (2020) and others have discussed “project-based learning” in translation teaching from different perspectives. Wang Oujian (2013:86) believes that Project-based learning is a teaching activity carried out by teachers and students to jointly implement a project, which is based on cultivating students' practical ability as the starting point, emphasizing that the project is the main line throughout the teaching process. Students acquire knowledge and skills in the process of completing projects, improve their ability in information collection and processing, problem analysis and problem-solving, communication and cooperation skills, and become more self-directed in learning.

On the whole, the understanding and application of “project-based learning in translation teaching” in China is more inclined to teaching based on practical projects and project management.

In this way, translation teaching is combined with actual translation projects, which is in line with the characteristics of the translation activity. In the teaching of students majoring in translation studies, the author has adopted the translation teaching method based on practical projects for several times, and has achieved good results. It is found that the most obvious advantage of actual project-based learning for students is that they go through a process of learning – practicing – modifying – improvement. The author takes the actual project of translation of television series participated by graduate students in translation studies as a case study, discusses the application of actual project-based learning in translation teaching, and discusses its role in improving the teaching effects of practical training courses and stimulating students' research interest.

2. The implementation of PjBL in translation teaching

Translation teaching based on practical projects entails the introduction of translation projects in the process of translator and translation researcher training. It features actual translation project and is one of the student-centered, process-oriented translation teaching method, which aims to improve students' comprehensive translation competence. “Typical of this approach is that students are usually invited to complete an authentic practical translation project either in small groups or as individuals” (Defeng Li et al., 2015).

The implementation of translation teaching based on practical projects is an interactive process that combines both the training outside the classroom and inside the classroom. Zhang Zheng and Wang Yun (2020) believe that project-based translation teaching can be divided into four stages: initiation, planning, implementation and completion, which can generally describe the process of it. Based on the experience in actual projects of translation, this paper also summarizes and presents the seven steps of implementing the PjBL in translation teaching.

The first step is the nailing down of the project. Generally speaking, after a series of meeting and negotiations, a project contract will be signed between the university and enterprises, institutions or government departments, then the university will have an actual project that can be introduced into the translation teaching. The sources of projects mainly include off-campus internship base, entrusted or outsourced projects by enterprises or institutions, etc. So, it usually

takes teachers' initiative to build ties with entities in the translation industry for opportunities of cooperation.

The second step is the selection of student translators to participate in the project. The teachers, and also the instructors play an organizational and coordinating role. They work with the clients to preliminarily formulate a translator recruitment plan according to the project workload and the degrees of difficulty in undertaking the project work, and then select students suitable for the project through trial translation to become project members.

The third step is to make a team and set up a working mechanism for the specific implementation of the project. Usually, there are at least two teachers as instructors and coordinators on the university side will establish direct contact with the project manager, and together they will develop translation plans, assign translation tasks, arrange schedules, formulate translation criteria and strategies, and guide selected student translators to work on the tasks.

The fourth step is to submit the finished translation as required by the clients both in terms of form and translation quality. The project manager will assign the translated texts to editors, who will give feedbacks, very often the suggestions for corrections and modifications after reviewing it. The student translators, as asked, will further modify the translation, submit it again, and finally complete the tasks with evaluation of the manager.

The fifth step, both sides of the project will hold a project summary meeting to analyze and evaluate the implementation of the project. This is a very important occasion for students to learn about translation project management, an expected competence for professional translators.

The sixth step, students reflect on the problems and difficulties encountered in the translation of the project as well as the gains from the project.

The seventh step, in class, teachers give lectures on the translation theory and practice of project-related knowledge and guide students to use theories to analyze and solve problems, encouraging them to explore further.

In general, in the teaching of translation based on practical projects, students are faced with actual translation tasks, limited completion times, and demanding requirements, which often awakens their sense of responsibility and great potential, which helps them to develop more comprehensive translation skills in the process of constantly seeking to solve difficult problems. At the same time, when working on the same project together, it is easier to exercise students' team coordination skills, decision-making skills, etc. Teamwork and collaboration are very much valued among participants. "Students are often divided into groups of varied sizes, where they work together, share their findings and decide how to best represent their new knowledge. They must learn to work in a community and therefore take shared responsibilities and credits" (Defeng Li et al., 2015).

3. A case of audiovisual translation project

The nature of translation studies entails that in the training of graduate students specialized in translation, it is necessary to pay attention not only to the cultivation of students' theoretical awareness and the development of research competence, but also to the improvement of practical translation competence. The author teaches a course titled "Frontiers in Translation studies", which aims to enlighten students with the latest development in the field of research, in which a series of topics are covered. And audiovisual translation is one of them. To have students better informed and enlightened in this line of research, the projects of television series translation are introduced into the class teaching. As we have an internship base with a renowned film & tv corporation, my university has constant cooperation with it and has completed several translation projects¹. Each project is completed in accordance with the seven steps outlined above.

In the following part, the author takes the audiovisual translation projects, in which she has acted as an instructor on the university side, as a case to analyze the specific implementation of translation teaching based on the actual project. Both the positive aspect and problems encountered during the course for the reference of the academic community.

Before the implementation of the project, the students were invited to have a tour to the film and television corporation to observe the process of subtitling and dubbing, which aroused their interest and get them better prepared for the coming work in the project. In the process of implementing the project, of course, the students were faced with many difficulties that exposed their incompetence in the integration of the knowledge they learned with social practice. However, it is precisely the solution of these problems that has helped students understand the aspects of film and television translation, including the differences between subtitling and dubbing, the stylistic requirements of subtitle translation, the handling of image-text relationships, and the regulations of relevant censorship systems on translation.

After submitting the first draft of the translation, editors from the film and television corporation provided students with one-on-one translation reviewing and revision, and every annotation was clearly marked for students' reference,

¹ As the examples cited are for academic discussion, the specific sources and the corporation name are not identified in this paper at the discretion of the business corporation.

which is proved very helpful to students' translation practice. Taking specific subtitle translation as an example, the common problems from several aspects are analyzed to generalize expertise in translating films and TV series and integrate it into translation teaching.

(1) Students' translation tends to be in much of a written style and sounds too formal. Since the subtitles of film and television series are mostly in the form of dialogue, and exhibits a clear colloquialism, in the translation process, it is necessary to consider the roles and dispositions of characters, their emotions on the spot, scenes and the specific content of the conversations as they all have part to play in translational decision-making. When students are studying in a classroom, they are exposed to a lot of written materials, which may be able to explain why their translation has the problem of being too formal. According to the feedback of the project manager and editors, this is also the most prominent problem in students' translation. It is clearly reflected in some examples.

Example 1

Source Text: yǒu shì er gān ma bù huí jiā shuō.

Student Version: Tian Zhiyuan: Why do you choose here as our meeting place?

Editor's Revision: Why do we meet here? (EP5 revised)

Example 2

Source Text: wǒ mén děi gǎi diào zhè gè huài pí qì.

Student Version: We should get rid of our bad temper.

Editor's Revision: We can't act like spoiled children.

From the two examples above, it can be seen that the students' translations use more complex sentences and complete sentences. The written style is prominent, and the translation seems to be blunt considering the relationship between the characters, which distances the relationship between them in translation. The revised translation shows the vividness of everyday language and a natural dialogue.

(2) Failure to coordinate with the image

Translating for dubbing is quite different from that for subtitling. The translator has to take into consideration whether the translated lines are fit for voicing out. So, it is a common practice in the industry that the translated subtitles need to be further revised by voice actors.

Example 3

Source Text: wǒ shuō nǐ yǒu wán méi wán, nǐ jué dé yǒu yì sī mā?

Student Version: What's the matter with you. It's not interesting.

Editor's Revision: Having a little fun yourself, are you? It's not funny.

(EP 18 revised)

In example 3, the student translated “wǒ shuō nǐ yǒu wán méi wán” into “What's the matter with you”, showing that he/she focuses only on the subtitle itself and ignored coordinating images. If we get back to the source Chinese TV, we will see that when this line appears on the screen, the lady is blaming the man in a joking manner and there is this pleasant atmosphere between them. The revised translation adopts an interrogative sentence, and at the same time replaces “interesting” with “funny”, so that the translated subtitle and the image can be complementary, achieving a much better effect. By participating in the project, students were enlightened on the requirements for different types of job in audiovisual translation.

(3) Mistranslations and missed information in translation

For some student translators, subtitle translation can be a real challenge. They tend to commit grammatical errors and omit sentences of the ST in translation, simply out of their carelessness.

Example 4

Source Text: ai, cuò le, Su jiào shòu nǐ wán quán cuò le, tā kě bǐ wǒ

cōng míng, tā bǎ zǐ zhè me yì pǐe, nòng le zhè me dà yī gè táng huì, wǒ zhè gè xì bān bān zhǔ jiù dài zhe xì bān zi, dào zhè er lái lái dēng tái chāng xì le. wǒ shàng xià fān fēi, chū lì chū hàn, tā zài pāng biān zuò xiǎng qí chéng. nǐ shuō, tā shì bú shì bǐ wǒ cōng míng. (EP 18 revised)

Student Version: Then you're wrong, Professor Su. He is definitely the smarter one. He is doing things with head, me

with hand. I lead my team to realize his ideas. Doesn't it?

It is apparent that the student barely represented the information in the source text. A large part of the conversation was omitted due to a low level in translation competence and the expression is far from satisfaction. And this is not a rare problem in his/her translation. The editor made several annotations in asking the translator to watch the video again and pay close attention to the time duration of the subtitles and redo it. Actually, the awareness of temporal and spatial constraints on subtitling and dubbing has always been deemed as important for avoid causing visual troubles for the viewers. The duration for the subtitle to show on the screen should match the speaking time of the characters.

(4) Failure to meet the requirements of dubbing

Although in the early stage of the project, the film and television corporation conducted some training for the students involved, the students' understanding of audiovisual translation was still insufficient, not to mention the requirements for dubbing. Therefore, it is almost impossible for their translation to meet the requirements of dubbing, especially in terms of time duration and oral presentation.

Example 5

Source Text: yín huā tóng zhì, yí dào guān jiàn shí kè nǐ jù quē shǎo cháng yuǎn yǎn guāng.

Student Version: Flora, you don't have a long-term perspective in key events.

Revised Version (by voice actor): Just think about it, Flora. You need to be practical. You haven't realized that it will benefit us.

With the revisions of editors and modifications by English voice actors, the translation takes a shift of the perspective and expresses it in a language that is convenient for English pronunciation and better to show the character's dispositions and relationships between the characters, without a major deviation in meaning. Through the collaboration of multiple agents involved in the project, a good translation effect was achieved, and the students also learned some key elements of dubbing translation with the help of the professionals.

4. Integration of PjBL in classroom teaching

On the part of the classroom teaching, as the instructor of the project for the students, the teacher is supposed to carried out a special teaching on the topics involved in project, for instance, it is audiovisual translation in my case. In the lectures, an overall review of the research and practice in the field is offered to equipped students with a general framework of understanding the audiovisual translation. While teaching relevant knowledge, the teacher integrated the problems encountered by students in actual projects and authentic translation cases into lectures and asked students to consult relevant literature to explore and find possible solutions. It includes the classification of the audiovisual translation, the framework of translation theories that can be used for reference, such as the discussion of the professionals within the literary system in rewriting theory, the comparative and contrastive linguistic knowledge on English and Chinese, and the actor network theory of socio-translation studies. Students summarize and reflect on the translation practices they have participated in to improve their translation skills. However, sometimes, we can see "the students' failure to follow through on problems they had identified and commented on" (Baer & Koby, 2003, p. 70).

Project-based translation teaching provides students opportunities to get access to the authentic translation tasks, focusing on the hands-on experience, but at the meantime, the teacher needs to seize the opportunity as well to track students' performance in the project to identify their problems and gives timely professional advices for improvement. So that student translators can check whether what they have learnt about translation and translation theories stand valid in authentic task and make prompt modifications. It is no denying that project-based learning plays an irreplaceable role in translation learning for students. The reflections and feedback of students show that they are highly satisfied with the teaching effect of project-based translation. And the teachers' evaluation results showed that students' overall translation competence has also seen progress.

The following is a quote from students' reflections:

Because the translation is to be dubbed by English professionals, during the translation process we must consider whether the language is catchy and whether it can be read within a limited time duration. In the process of translation, students also learned to work together, often discussing translation problems together, and made progress to varying degrees on the handling of the difficulties, tactics and skills of their translation tasks. Luckily, we have support from professional translators, voice actors and teachers. It is a great opportunity to learn.

As it is pointed out,

...it is indeed possible and necessary to evaluate the implementation of new proposals for translation teaching. This is especially important today when teachers and researchers alike are eager to borrow ideas and theories from neighboring

disciplines (e.g. education, language teaching or linguistics) and introduce innovative practices into translation classrooms (Defeng Li et al., 2015, p. 17).

With all the positive effects of project-based learning in translation teaching, the limitations of it are also obvious. First of all, the implementation of the project is faced with risks, such as the termination of the cooperation with the off-campus practice and internship base, the personnel changes in the client corporation; and other project-related problems, which can cause a failure in implementing of the project, and subsequently in translation teaching. Secondly, the training obtained by students is usually limited to a particular field and in a given time, the subject on which practice is based is relatively fixed within a single project, such as film and television subtitling, book translation, publicity material translation, etc., which are not comprehensive for students. Finally, the content of practical project training is more accidental than planned, and can only be related to part of the course teaching.

5. Implications

In the process of project-based translation learning, students demonstrate a progressing model of observation-practice-interacting (with professionals)-modification-reflection-improvement, which is rarely found in other translation teaching practice. So, it is safe to say that if they are provided with such opportunities, their translation competence can be enhanced in a rather comprehensive way as they tend to do more independent learning, teamwork and communication in a project, laying a foundation for future employment. Teachers need to do a kind of scaffolding job both in project implementing and classroom learning. And considering the nature of translation studies as a discipline, it is always a good option to have project-based integrated into classroom, which also imposes a requirement on the part of translation teaching faculty. More initiative is expected from the teachers in a project-based learning, especially for signing a contract to get an actual project for students. As there are some aspects in students' translation learning that cannot be reached by classroom teaching. Students participate in the project would see improvement in their translation competence in terms of extra-linguistic knowledge, knowledge about translation, strategic choices with the help of their own mistakes and professionals in the industry.

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