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On Cultivation of English Majors' Humanistic Literacy in Translation Teaching

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Abstract

Taking translation teaching for English majors as the research object, this paper explores the importance of cultivating humanistic literacy and its practical approaches. It first analyzes the current state of translation teaching, pointing out that the current teaching tends to focus on skill training while neglecting the humanistic connotations, leading to a lack of humanistic literacy and insufficient cross-cultural interpretation ability among English majors. It then proposes that translation is not only a language conversion but also a bridge for cultural dissemination and communication, and humanistic literacy is an indispensable core competence for translators. In response to the current teaching situation, this paper suggests improvements from such aspects as reconstructing the curriculum system, optimizing teaching content, innovating teaching methods, reforming evaluation mechanisms, and building teaching resources, supplemented by relevant typical cases and insights from both domestic and international contexts. It finally emphasizes that constructing a translation teaching model centered on humanistic literacy is of profound significance for cultivating high-quality translation talents with cross-cultural communication competence.

Keywords

English majors; Translation teaching; Humanistic literacy; Cultivation; Enhancement

1. Introduction

Humanistic literacy, an important part for measuring a translator's comprehensive ability, is formed on the basis of learning and internalizing certain cultural knowledge. In the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, it has become the core competitiveness that distinguishes high-quality translation of translators from machine translation. With China putting forward the strategy of promoting Chinese culture internationally, translation is playing an increasingly prominent role in cross-cultural communication. In view of this, cultivating humanistic literacy in translation teaching helps to enhance students' cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to better convey the essence of Chinese culture in translation practice and contribute to the international dissemination of Chinese culture.

Current research on the cultivation of humanistic literacy involves these perspectives: the enhancement of teachers' humanistic literacy (Zhou, 2015; Huang & Dai, 2019; Wang, 2019); explorations of the cultivation of college students' humanistic literacy at the institutional level, such as Wei Qin (2014) who discusses methods for cultivating undergraduates' humanistic literacy in application-oriented universities, Yan Zhang (2016), Lei Li and Yanliang Chen (2018) who respectively propose integrating intangible cultural heritage and revolutionary traditions and values into the higher education system to enhance college students' humanistic quality, Min Zhao (2018) who points out that

integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into ideological and political education in colleges can achieve the goal of enhancing students' humanistic literacy, and Fengbiao Liu (2021) who, from the view of integrating core values into the curriculum, suggests that exploring the ideological concepts, humanistic spirit, and moral norms contained in traditional Chinese culture is an effective way to cultivate students' humanistic literacy; there are also analyses from the perspective of grading translation questions in TEM 8 on the impact of students' humanistic literacy on translation quality (Zhao & Cai, 2018); analyses from the perspective of social needs on the cultivation of humanistic literacy in student translators (Zhang & Zhang, 2017); and research on the cultivation of humanistic literacy from the perspective of translation teaching, though relatively scarce, such as the view that introducing feminist translation theory in teaching can help enhance students' humanistic literacy (Chen & Zeng, 2016), and Ping Liu (2013) who believes that selecting appropriate translation examples in E-C and C-E translation teaching can improve students' language aesthetic ability and humanistic literacy. From the research above, it can be noted that there is a lack of research specifically exploring the cultivation of English majors' humanistic literacy from the perspective of translation teaching. Therefore, exploring the ways of integrating humanistic literacy into translation teaching can not only optimize the training model for cultivating translation talents but also provide theoretical references for promoting the humanistic shift in the translation discipline, which is of significant educational and social values.

2. Current Situation of the Cultivation of Humanistic Literacy in Translation Teaching

Translation is not merely the conversion of linguistic symbols, but also the transmission of culture and the ideas. Humanistic literacy encompasses knowledge in various fields such as literature, history, philosophy, and art, and is the core for translators to understand the source language culture, grasp the style of the source text, and successfully achieve cross-cultural communication. However, current translation teaching for English majors often focuses on the training of language skills and translation techniques, neglecting the cultivation of humanistic literacy. This has led to the phenomenon that students have the ability to transform between two languages but lack in cultural awareness, ethical judgment, and aesthetic expression. Mingjian Zha (2017) once pointed out: "The present education for English majors in China, with a clear utilitarian and practical orientation, focuses on the cultivation of students' language skills, while neglecting the enhancement of their professional abilities and humanistic qualities." This "technical" tendency can easily reduce translation to a mechanical language operation, weakening the humanistic value of translation teaching. Especially in translating these texts involving literature, philosophy, history, etc., if translators lack humanistic literacy, it is difficult for them to accurately grasp the essence of the original text, and they may even cause controversy due to cultural misinterpretation, failing to accurately disseminate Chinese culture to the world. The current disadvantages in the cultivation of humanistic literacy in translation teaching are reflected as follows:

Firstly, the curriculum is imbalanced. Translation courses in most colleges are primarily "technology-oriented", such as computer-aided translation and terminology management, while courses like literary translation and cultural comparison are underrepresented. Although students master translation techniques, they lack the ability to distinguish the cultural differences between China and the West as well as the historical contexts connoted in texts. For example, some students, when translating ancient Chinese poetry, only aim to achieve formal correspondence in the target text, neglecting the cultural characteristics and connotations of the images.

Secondly, the teaching methods lack diversity. The classroom teaching often adopts a stereotypical model of "text-technique-practice", which is limited to conversion between texts and lacks in-depth exploration of cultural backgrounds, historical contexts, and social values, with the result that translation practice is reduced to a mechanical operation of language conversion. For example, when translating philosophical texts, students often misinterpret core concepts due to a lack of relevant knowledge.

Thirdly, the evaluation criteria are somewhat utilitarian. Translation evaluation often focuses on accuracy and fluency as indicators, neglecting the cultural adaptability and creativity of the translation, as well as the comprehensive consideration of students' humanistic literacy, which results in the situation that students tend to use standardized expressions, ignoring cultural contexts and the rhetorical features or cultural connotations of the original text.

Fourthly, there is a deficiency in teachers' grounding in the humanities. Some translation teachers have inadequate humanistic knowledge base, making it difficult to integrate resources from disciplines. For example, when teaching the translation of cultural texts, if teachers have limited understanding of the relevant cultural background or historical facts, it is difficult for them to effectively teach students to appropriately do the translation of culturally-loaded words.

3. Approaches to Enhancing Students' Humanistic Literacy in Translation Teaching

3.1 Restructuring the Curriculum System

Restructuring the curriculum system is the foundation for cultivating humanistic literacy. Firstly, the proportion of compulsory humanities courses should be increased, such as *Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Cultures*, *Translation Ethics*, and *Appreciation of Literary Translation*, to systematically build students' humanistic knowledge system. Secondly, humanistic elements should be integrated into core professional courses, such as adding cross-cultural communication modules to interpretation courses and strengthening cultural interpretation of texts in translation courses. Thirdly, diversified courses should be offered, such as introduction to philosophy, art history, and sociology, to broaden students' humanistic horizons. Finally, a trinity teaching mode of "language skills + translation techniques + humanistic literacy" should be established to ensure that humanistic literacy cultivation runs through the entire process of translation teaching. Through the systematic restructuring of the curriculum system, a solid institutional guarantee and content pattern for humanistic literacy cultivation are provided.

3.2 Optimizing Teaching Content

The optimization of teaching content is key to the cultivation of humanistic literacy. In the selection of texts, emphasis should be placed on choosing classic works rich in humanistic connotations, such as literary masterpieces, philosophical works, and historical documents, so that students can receive humanistic influence in translation practice in a subtle way. In the process of imparting knowledge, it is not only necessary to explain language conversion techniques but also to deeply analyze the cultural context, values, and ways of thinking behind the texts, for the purpose of cultivating students' cultural sensitivity and critical thinking. In the cultivation of abilities, teachers should emphasize that translation is not only a linguistic activity but also a cultural exchange activity, guiding students to pay attention to ethical issues and value judgments in translation. Additionally, thematic modules such as "Translation and Cultural Identity" and "Translation and Ideology" can be developed to deepen students' understanding of the humanistic dimensions of translation.

3.3 Innovating Teaching Methods

Innovative teaching methods can effectively promote the internalization of humanistic qualities. Case studies can help cultivate students' cultural awareness and ethical judgment by teachers' analyzing cultural misinterpretations and value conflicts in typical translation cases; project-based learning can design translation projects with humanistic content, such as language services and cultural heritage translation, allowing students to experience the social value of translation in real-life contexts; scenario simulation can create cross-cultural communication scenarios to train students' cultural adaptability and empathy. In addition, flipped classrooms and seminar-style teaching can stimulate students' active thinking and value exploration, while digital humanities technologies such as virtual reality can provide immersive cultural experiences. These innovative methods shift the cultivation of humanistic qualities from knowledge transmission to ability development and value shaping.

3.4 Reforming the Evaluation Mechanism

Establishing a scientific and comprehensive evaluation mechanism is an important part of ensuring the effectiveness of humanistic literacy cultivation. In terms of evaluation content, in addition to assessing language proficiency and translation skills, factors such as cultural understanding, ethical judgment, and aesthetic ability should also be added. In terms of evaluation methods, diversified assessment tools should be adopted, such as portfolio evaluation to record students' humanistic growth, which may include students' translation manuscripts of literary/philosophical texts (with annotations on cultural connotations), comparative analyses of parallel texts, reflective essays on ethical dilemmas encountered in translation practice, extended reading list with critical reviews and feedback from teachers and peers regarding their cultural awareness, peer evaluation to cultivate humanistic care awareness, and reflective journals to promote value introspection. In terms of evaluation standards, clear evaluation indicators of humanistic literacy should be formulated and incorporated into the course assessment and graduation requirements system. At the same time, a dynamic tracking mechanism should be established to evaluate the long-term effects of humanistic literacy cultivation and continuously optimize teaching strategies. Through a comprehensive reform of the evaluation mechanism, we can ensure that humanistic literacy cultivation is implemented effectively and achieves tangible results.

3.5 Constructing Teaching Resources

High-quality teaching resources are imperative for the implementation of the goal of cultivating humanistic literacy. In addition to classic literary translations, corpus resources can be introduced during the teaching process to boost students' cultural cognition, enhance their contextual understanding, and assist them in learning accurate, authentic, and culturally appropriate translation expressions. For example, the Peking University Corpus of Chinese Philosophical Classics in English Translation includes multiple versions of English translations of Chinese philosophical classics, offering multi-version comparative searches for keywords (such as "heaven" and "mind"), is a valuable resource for cultivating students' ability to analyze concepts and interpret culture. The Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Modern Chinese, developed by the Center for Chinese Foreign Language and Education Research at Beijing Foreign Studies University, which includes important modern and contemporary Chinese works and their high-quality English translations, can help analyze the translation strategies of culturally loaded words (such as "Red Sorghum" and "Cultural Revolution") in the works of such writers as Mo Yan and Yu Hua, explore the cross-cultural journey of literary imagery, and assist students in analyzing how Chinese texts are translated into English as well as summarizing effective methods and techniques for external communication.

The construction of teaching resources should be thematic, comparative, and authentic, making the resource repository a "thought engine" rather than a "sentence database" to assist students' exploratory and research-oriented learning, allowing them to cultivate humanistic spirit through comparison, critique, and choice.

4. Representative Cases

Translation is not a mere exercise in code-switching but a complex humanistic endeavor deeply rooted in cultural traditions, involving the transmission of values and the reconstruction of meaning. In the context of translation pedagogy for English majors, enhancing students' humanistic literacy is the key to raising the quality of talent cultivation. Top universities at home and abroad have already advanced beyond the traditional craftsman-oriented approach to translation training, exploring distinctive pathways for fostering students' humanistic literacy. The following will present effective practical models both domestically and internationally for the purpose of getting insights from them.

4.1 Case at Home

The School of Foreign Languages at Fudan University has adopted a thematic translation pedagogy that focuses on the cultural elements of texts, with its representative initiative entitled the "*Translation Workshop for Chinese Philosophical Classics*". Rather than beginning with translation methods and techniques, the course first engages students in the study of Chinese classics such as *Tao Te Ching* and *The Analect*s, and philosophy professors are invited to elucidate the core ideas and historical contexts of those books. Once students have gained a profound understanding of philosophical concepts such as "Tao (道)" and "Ren (仁)", they work in groups to compare the versions produced by translators like Arthur Waley and D.C. Lau, analyzing the cultural perspectives and philosophical interpretations that inform their strategic choices. Students then attempt to translate selected passages and articulate their translation philosophies. This process integrates translation training with an in-depth exploration of native culture and cross-cultural interpretation, enhancing students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and capacity to interpret Chinese culture in an effective way.

4.2 Case from Abroad

The Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS) is renowned for its experiential teaching philosophy, in which the cultivation of humanistic sensibilities is thoughtfully embedded into real-world projects. For example, the school maintains long-term partnerships with local museums, human rights organizations, and other institutions, requiring students to translate materials for special exhibitions, oral history archives, or public service campaigns. In the "Immigrant stories" project, students must develop a deep understanding of the historical trauma, cultural identity, and emotional narratives of specific communities, weighing ethical considerations in deciding whether to domesticate the text to heighten readers' engagement or to preserve foreign elements to underscore cultural differences. Such decision-making in authentic ethical contexts compels learners to move beyond the textual level, fostering a profound appreciation of the social functions of translation, the translator's responsibilities, and the importance of humanistic care, thereby enabling learners to integrate knowledge and skills with their values.

The shared characteristic of these successful cases lies in their departure from the conventional translation teaching approaches, transforming the courses into comprehensive educational platforms that are interdisciplinary, inquiry-driven, and practice-oriented. The teaching model has shifted from "teacher-led and skill-focused" to "student-centered and inquiry-based", placing emphasis on the internalization of humanistic literacy through the resolution of complex problems encountered in real or closely simulated cultural projects.

5. Conclusion

The National Standards for the Quality of Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Education in Higher Education Institutions (English Major), issued by the Ministry of Education in 2018, together with *Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors in Regular Higher Education Institutions* released in 2020, place patriotism, humanistic literacy, and English proficiency at the forefront of requirements concerning knowledge, quality, and capability. Min Li and Wenbin Wang (2018), in their discussion on the development of foreign language pedagogy, propose that the long-term objective of foreign language education should not only be the cultivation of students' self-learning ability, independent thinking, and innovative capacity, but also the fostering of humanistic literacy and critical thinking. Jiajin Xu (2025) holds that humanistic literacy constitutes the foundation of the foreign language discipline, and that foreign language majors should possess profound literary and cultural comprehension. In the era of generative artificial intelligence, the accumulation of humanistic literacy can provide a distinct advantage in coexisting with AI. From the foregoing research, it is clearly evident that humanistic literacy in the cultivation of English major talents is of great necessity and significance.

Translation teaching involves not merely the transmission of language skills, but also the nurturing of the humanistic spirit. In light of the current inadequacy in cultivating humanistic literacy in translation teaching, and drawing upon her years of teaching experience, the author proposes advancing the transformation of translation teaching towards greater depth and substance through multi-dimensional collaborative measures, including curriculum redesign, content refinement, methodological innovation, evaluation reform, and resource development. Furthermore, by referencing exemplary cases both domestically and internationally, the author underscores that only by integrating humanistic care, cultural awareness, and value orientation throughout the teaching process can we develop translation talents who are not only linguistically proficient but also possess a rich cultural heritage, a profound sense of national identity, and a broad international outlook. In the years to come, we should further strengthen the integration of humanistic values and practical application, thereby achieving a radical transformation from skill-orientedness to philosophy-orientedness in translation teaching.

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