# Translation Competence Training of Non-English Majors from the Perspective of Eco-Translation

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates into the translation competence of non-English majors in a Chinese mainland Vocational College. It argues that Chinese novice learners as non-English majors have their distinctive translation competence features, which may help teachers and researchers to put forward pedagogy to improve their translation competence. Eighty-two Chinese students aged between 18-22, all as non-English majors were divided into two groups, one being experiment group and the other the control group. The students in the experiment group took 4 weeks of translation instruction and training, after which, the teacher assigned both groups a translation and a journal writing task, which allows them to translate a passage and then ask them to write down what translation techniques or standards they have applied and why. This would explain their translation behavior and the development of their translation competence on the continuum. The research results show that Chinese novice learners adopt a sign-oriented and a bottom-up translation approach, which affects their rendering of the source text. Parallel texts and translation strategy help novice learners to modify their translation work.

**Keywords:** Eco-translation; Translation competence; Parallel text; Translation journal

## 1. Introduction

Ecological features have rich implications for translation system. Based on the philosophy of ecological holism, all the sub systems interact with one another and function better when they are integrated as a whole. Translation system can be divided into several sub systems, including translation management ecological system, translation market ecological system, translation technology ecological system and translation education ecological system. Nowadays, the translation education ecological system focuses mainly on English majors at both Bachelor level and Master level, while little attention is paid to non-English majors, who often times occupy an indispensable position in the translation market for they are better equipped with their specialized knowledge, such as in the field of medicine, environment and technology, etc. This paper deals specifically with the translation competence of non-English majors.

### 1.1. Translation competence

What is translation competence? Scholars tend to break translation competence down into a set of interrelated sub-competences. There is a widespread agreement that developing translation competence is a fundamental objective of any translation program and that competence can indeed be developed.

Schäffner and Adab proposed that, translation competence is characterized by complexity, heterogeneity, approximation, open-endedness, creativity, situationality and historicity. PACTE based their research on empirical studies and argued that translation competence consists of five sub competences, communicative competence in both languages, extralinguistic competence, transfer competence, instrumental professional competence and psychological competence. PACTE conducted their research among professional translators with at least 5 years of experience and language teachers with 5 years and above rather than novice learners. Their research shows that the translation competence as demonstrated by professionals is an interaction of the five sub competences. However, the translation competence model they put forward offer limited insight into that of the novice learners.

Different scholars both home and abroad do agree on the notion that and different developmental stage demonstrated distinctive features of translation competence. Colina believed that translation competence is a on a continuum, where novice learners, semi-professionals and professionals demonstrate particular features at various stages of the developmental continuum. She conducted both descriptive and empirical studies among student translators and professional translators and demonstrated the features at various stages of the translation competence continuum. Harris & Sherwood believed

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*International Journal of Intelligent Information and Management Science*
*ISSN: 2307-0692, Volume 9, Issue 2, April, 2020*

that there are three stages of translation competence as it develops with age, namely pre-translation, auto-translation and transduction.

## 2. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate into the distinctive features of their translation competence. It mainly uses participants' English to Chinese translation journal to collect data and identify features and look at how parallel texts work.

### 2.1. Research questions

This research is aimed at answering the following questions.
What translation competence does the training of non-English majors should follow?
Do non-English major students make any progress in their development of translation strategy by resorting to parallel text?

### 2.2. Participants

82 first-year students aged between 18-22 from a Higher Vocational College participated in this project. They were all admitted into the vocational college through National College Entrance Examination.

### 2.3. Research tools

The research in this article utilizes two tools, namely English to Chinese translation multiple-choice test and English to Chinese translation test.

### 2.3.1. Language proficiency test

Before the research, all the participants took an English to Chinese translation multiple-choice test to test their English proficiency level. They are asked to do 10 English to Chinese translation multiple choice questions, which are all authentic test questions selected randomly from the previous Practical English Test Level B for Colleges. The questions are designed to test students whether they understand the English sentences. The total score for the tests are 10 points.
82 tests were handed out and 77 were valid test papers. Test results show that there is no obvious difference between the average score and the standard deviation of the two groups of students. It can be concluded that the English language proficiency level and translation level are almost the same. This is the premise of the research and then class 1 was chosen as the experiment group, while class 2 was chosen as the control group.

### 2.3.2. English to Chinese translation test

The test is a 124-English-word passage, which introduces the tourist attractions and agreeable weather in Dalian. It is extracted from a listening exercise from the textbook. The words are easy to understand and the sentence struc-ture is fairly simple. The text type is an exposition and the purpose is to invite people to visit Dalian to boost its tourism. Students are asked to translate the passage into Chinese on their own and submit it within a week.

### 2.4. Procedures

In the experiment, both the experiment group and the control group take college English courses once a week as always. The experiment group takes 4 weeks of translation instruction and training, where students are lectured on translation theories and strategies, especially on how to use parallel texts and on text types and functions. Translation theories mainly introduce the difference between domestication and foreignization, dynamic equivalence proposed by Nida and the skopos theory, etc. Students learn to look for parallel texts online before they translate a certain text. The participants from the experiment group work in small groups and they do self assessment and peer assessment.
After four weeks, both the experiment group and the control group are assigned the translation task. They are allowed to use online dictionary to look up new words or ask the teacher just to clarify the meaning of the sentences. The teacher did not talk about anything regarding the text, not even analyze the textual function and the translation strategy and only answer questions in class on the linguistic level. After one week they are asked one more time to revise their work and write a journal as detailed as possible about why they made this revision and their thinking process.

## 3. Data Analysis

### 3.1. Data collection & analysis

75 translation assignments were received. The study uses bottom-up qualitative research methods to compare the works of both group and their translation journal, with the aim to look at the features of their translation competence at this stage and whether parallel texts contributed to the better quality of their works.
Results are as follows:

### 3.1.1. Redundance in the rendering of the source language

In the translation journal, there is widespread agreement that their rendering of the source text is redundant and awkward. One participant wrote in his journal, "My expression is really awkward." In translating "It is neither too cold in winter nor too hot in summer" from the passage, one participant translated it literally, with eight Chinese characters. When he was revising it, he rendered the Chinese expression as a four-word idiom. He commented on his own work, saying that "the rendering was simply redundant, while Chinese tend to use four- character idioms."

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*International Journal of Intelligent Information and Management Science*
*ISSN: 2307-0692, Volume 9, Issue 2, April, 2020*

Students tend to translate the text from the bottom up approach, ignoring the bigger picture, which also means they translate word by word and can not break free from the linguistic form of the source text. This is in line with what Colina has found out in her research. Colina concluded in her empirical study that novice translators tend to adopt a sign-oriented approach.

### 3.1.2. Poor selection of words in target text

When translating "With clear sky, green mountains, blue seas, fine beaches, clean streets and lovely buildings, our city is beautiful", one participant translated it exactly as the format of the original text, with an adjective plus a noun. This translation only renders the basic meaning the target text and the selection of adjectives do not match with that of the nouns. Participants from both group reported this problem. One participant from the control group reported that, "I can fully understand what the sentence means, but I just fail to find to right adjectives for the nouns. " This shows that students have showed some signs of translation strategic competence but is hard to find the solution.

### 3.1.3. Parallel texts help students break free from the form of source text

There are many versions of translation with regard to this sentence, "With clear sky, green mountains, blue seas, fine beaches, clean streets and lovely buildings, our city is beautiful. One participant reported that, "when I first translate it, I strictly follow the structure of the source text, which is adjective plus a noun. When I read my translation the second time, I feel in Chinese, people seldom talk in this way. Finally, I turn to online parallel texts, which gives me inspiration. I broke free form the adjective plus noun and revised it into "under the blue sky, there stands green mountains and fine beaches extend to blue oceans, while lovely buildings are surrounded by clean streets" (This is literally translated from his Chinese translation) The participant delivered the function of the original text and demonstrated good translation strategic competence. His work completely broke free from the linguistic form of the source text and even builds a better image of this picture, which enhances the function of this expressive text. This is evidence of how parallel texts inspired participants enormously. There are so such reports in the translation journal of those from the control group.

### 3.2. Discussion

To train the translation competence of non-English majors, we should select passages that matches their linguistic level, because bilingual proficiency is the foundation. According to the research, participants from both groups, with higher or lower scores in the multiple-choice questions have no wrong understanding of the text.

This shows that they are able to understand new words with online dictionary and within group discussions. After all, for non-English majors, teachers should encourage students to solve language problems before hand within their groups and discuss more about translation strategy in class.

Translation strategic competence is not strongly correlated with linguistic competence. In an interview with some participants with higher score on multiple-choices questions, they did not show any sign of translation strategy while they do spend less time on understanding the source text and on translating. They believed that, "translation is to help me better understand the text. As long as I have a good command of the vocabulary and grammar, there will not be much trouble in translating. "

Parallel texts contributes to the development of translation strategy competence, but students need to learn more about translation theories to further develop their translation competence. Some participants from the control group with higher score on multiple-choice questions argued that, reading parallel texts offer little help and is a mere waste of time.

### 3.3. Limitation

Regarding the limitation of research, the sample is relatively small. In addition, this is a qualitative research and is only limited to the samples surveyed, so the results can not be extended to a larger area. It would be a better research if samples are selected from different majors from different types of colleges. Lastly, qualitative research and quantitative research can cross check each other to make the research more reliable and valid.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to investigate into the distinctive features of their translation competence. It identifies the competence features and how parallel texts contribute to revising their work. The research shows that, firstly, as for first-year non-English majors, they are at the beginning stage of developing translation strategic competence. Secondly, translation strategic competence is not positively correlated with linguistic ability. At a low linguistic level, students still need to be instructed on translation theories and techniques so as to better their translation work. Translation competence and linguistic competence can develop hand in hand. Finally, parallel texts reading can trigger students' awareness of translation strategy, which needs to be looked at from an ecological perspective.

## 5. Acknowledgment

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*International Journal of Intelligent Information and Management Science*
*ISSN: 2307-0692, Volume 9, Issue 2, April, 2020*

of Non-English majors from Henan Vocational College under the Belt and Road Initiative"

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