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## A study on the dynamics of domestic translation textbooks (1999-2023)

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#### **Abstract**

This paper systematically combs through the research status of translation textbooks in China over the past 25 years (1999-2023). Based on the analysis of the current situation of translation textbooks, it points out the prominent problems in the construction process of translation textbooks and advocates the scientific management of translation textbooks, the innovation of translation textbook design concepts, the diversification of translation textbook development and the interdisciplinary research of translation textbooks, so as to contribute to the construction of translation textbooks and the cultivation of translation professionals in China, and to produce high-quality translation textbooks meeting the needs of the times.

Keywords: Translation textbooks, dynamics research, review

#### Introduction

In the era of globalization and informatization, China urgently needs a large number of translation talents, and conducting translation teaching is an effective way to cultivate qualified translation talents. In translation teaching, teachers implement the syllabus and organize teaching activities through textbooks, which play a pivotal role in the teaching process by carrying forward the course concepts and expressing the course contents. In recent years, more and more universities have offered undergraduate and master's degrees in translation, as well as various translation courses, and translation textbooks have been published in a rich variety. According to incomplete statistics, more than 1, 000 translation textbooks have been published since 1999, but their quality varies. There is a lack of systematic research on the construction of translation textbooks in China. The reason for this is that the academic community lacks a systematic review of the currently circulating textbooks, making it difficult to grasp the real market dynamics, and the research on output is difficult to hit the difficulties and pain points of users. The lack of comprehensive review and sorting of the existing translation textbooks is not conducive to the production of highquality translation textbooks and hinders the cultivation of translation professionals. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically review the current situation of domestic translation textbook construction in the past 25 years (1999-2023) following Professor Zhang Meifang's research on Chinese English-Chinese translation textbooks (1949-1998), and to comprehensively evaluate the current situation in order to propose targeted reform measures.

#### A Review of Research on Domestic Translation Textbooks

Before the advent of the new century, most studies were conducted from the perspective of translation teaching research. These articles did not delve into the specific content of translation textbooks, nor did they form a trend-oriented research on the compilation of textbooks. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the field of translation textbook construction, but their research focuses have been differentiated. Based on the different perspectives of domestic scholars' research, the following classifications are compiled: 1) Practical research on translation textbooks; 2) Research on the theory of translation textbook writing; 3) Research on the design and writing principles of translation textbooks. The summary of the three research perspectives is as follows.

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#### Practical research on translation textbooks

Professor Zhang Meifang (2001) [1] conducted an in-depth research and analysis on the English-Chinese translation textbooks published in mainland China since 1949, and divided the existing translation textbooks into three categories, namely, "lexical and syntactic schools", "functional schools", and "contemporary translation theory schools". The characteristics of various English-Chinese translation textbooks were summarized and their theoretical basis was traced, their advantages and disadvantages were explored, and suggestions for reconstructing a series of translation textbooks were proposed. It can be said that Zhang Meifang's work is a masterpiece and pioneering work in the study of English-Chinese translation textbooks, with strong practical and theoretical value. However, the textbooks studied by Professor Zhang Meifang are only those before the new century, and the research on specialpurpose translation textbooks is limited. Another scholar who has also conducted practical research on translation textbooks is Ji Chunping (2001) [2], whose research idea is: firstly, to sort out the history and current situation of translation textbooks for Russian undergraduates; then, to discuss in detail from three major directions of the dominant theory, the foundational theory and the construction theory of the Russian undergraduate translation textbook system. In of the reasonable framework of Russian undergraduate translation textbooks, research is conducted from three perspectives: teaching purpose, teaching content and teaching methods. Practical research is also conducted from three aspects, namely, students, teachers and the translation market, ultimately constructing a system of Russian undergraduate translation textbooks. Among its research achievements, it is worthwhile to learn from its ability to design translation textbooks from different levels, as discussed in Chapter 2, which explores the teaching purposes, current status and content design of textbooks at different levels. Based on the corpus and using the theory and method of citation analysis of scientific and technological literature, Xu Jun (2008) [3] conducted a detailed statistical analysis of the literature published in the domestic academic journals between 1980 and 2006 on the research of English translation textbooks and translation teaching in China from the perspectives of bibliography and science, and found that although the current research on translation textbooks involves many fields, such as theories, construction. teaching discipline techniques, teaching reform, theories and techniques, textbook evaluation, textbook construction, textbook reform, etc. However, the narrative boundaries between the categories are not very clear, and there is confusion, overlap and ambiguity in the categories and definitions. Wen Jun and Zhang Yuqing (2009) [4] evaluated and analyzed the overall structure and material content of 95 interpreting textbooks on the market from 1988 to 2008, and put forward several suggestions for the compilation of interpreting textbooks. On the basis of summarizing and reviewing the relevant translation studies in recent years as well as comparing the mode of translation teaching with that in Hong Kong and Macao, Wang Yinquan (2009) [5] pointed out three major problems of the current translation teaching which are detached from social reality, and called for the reform of the translation teaching and textbooks to be imperative. Ji Chunping (2016) [6] conducted empirical research on the problems related to the construction of

Russin undergraduates' translation textbooks by using the questionnaire survey method to understand the current situation of translation teaching in Russian undergraduates, to explore the selection and evaluation of textbooks for this discipline, and to propose problems and countermeasures for the construction of Russian undergraduate translation textbooks.

#### Research on the theory of translation textbook writing

Wenjun and Yu Senlin (2002) [7] think that the new unified translation curriculum should be based on the latest theoretical achievements of contemporary linguistics and translation research, absorb the reasonable components of traditional translation theory, pay attention to the combination of theory and practice, and take practice as the root. Tao Youlan (2005) [8] examines the construction of undergraduate translation textbooks in China from multiple perspectives. She advocates that good traditions should be inherited and developed in the teaching of translation textbooks. At the same time, we should not forget to pay attention to the corresponding effective translation principles. Only by combining translation theory with research and relevant teaching theories, psychological theories, communicative theories, readability theories as well as marketing theories can we fully tap into the essential roots of textbook construction. Later on, Professor Tao Youlan (2006) [9], in "On the Theoretical Reconstruction of Chinese Translation Textbook Construction", sorted out the theoretical foundations of translation textbook construction, including teleology, communication theory, pedagogy and psychology theory, readability theory and marketing theory. He also analyzed the main factors affecting the compilation of textbooks: syllabus, teaching objectives, translation teachers, students, linguistic theories, translation theories, and socio-cultural factors, etc., and put forward a groundbreaking proposal: translation textbooks under the Skopos theory should focus on practicality, follow the diversified translation standards, and highlight the subjectivity of translators. More than ten years later, Tao Youlan (2017) [10] studied translation textbooks more comprehensively and deeply on the basis of existing research results, constructively put forward the positioning of translation textbook construction and divided it into five stages, namely, the period of inception, development, prosperity, diversification and specialization. In addition, she talked about the relationship between theory and textbook writing from the perspectives of Chinese and Western translation theories, and analyzed the relationship between national policies, syllabus, teachers, students and social contexts and translation textbook writing. She concluded that the above factors are non-linguistic factors affecting the construction of translation textbooks, and the factors complement each other to jointly determine the compilation and design mode of translation textbooks. Scholar Li Huimin (2016) [11] studied translation textbooks from the perspective of the Western demand analysis theory in the 1980s and believed that the current problems in translation teaching lie in the lack of considering students' current English level, target needs and learning needs. At the same time, it is also requested that the translation textbooks used in the extension courses of non-English majors in local institutions should not only set the target needs and learning needs based on their own English level, but should also take into account factors such as market

demand, school needs and students' needs when writing. Liu Jichun (2017) [12] proposed to use the principle of "conceptual construction" to write translation textbooks. The so-called "conceptual construction" is to discuss translation on the axis of "translation concept". In other words, each chapter is titled with a translation concept, or each chapter conveys a translation concept. According to Professor Xu Jun (2023) [13], translation textbooks are written under the guidance of various pedagogies. Each textbook is guided by an ideology and method, such as grammar-translation pedagogy, contextual pedagogy, communicative pedagogy, functional pedagogy and so on. From this point of view, there are still some deficiencies in the theoretical guidance of translation textbook writing. Up to now, as far as the theoretical guidance for the construction of translation textbooks is concerned, whether it is summarizing, exploring or sorting out, the space for research is very broad.

### Research on the design and writing principles of translation textbooks

Liu Jichun (2001) [14] believes that the new system of translation textbooks must reflect the principles of "knowledge leadership" and "description-based". He classified the textbooks according to the form in which they are written and according to different ideas. His starting point is the two directions of Chinese to foreign translation and foreign to Chinese translation. He emphasized that the compilation of textbooks should be linked to the actual translation process to avoid the disconnection between theory and practice. Zhang Yu (2003) [15] put forward four principles: combining theory with practice, keeping abreast of the times, integrating Chinese and Western cultures, and market orientation. According to Yang Zijian (2006) [16], editors should comprehensively consider the knowledge system, theoretical system and skill training system to build a trinity of translation textbooks with a logical system. Zheng Ye and Mu Lei (2007) [17] suggested that the research on translation textbooks remains at the level of criticism or praise, but there are not many scholars who can really give the reasons behind them and propose improvement plans with a reasonable and valid basis. That is to say, the research of scholars has been halted at the theoretical level, and not many of them are able to design a feasible plan for the compilation of teaching materials. There are many translation textbooks that talk about theories or techniques, but very few of them can truly use theories to guide the practice and incorporate theories into the lectures on translation examples in the textbooks. As a result, many students and teachers have been led to believe that "translation theory is not necessary for translation, nor is it necessary for teaching translation". He Gangqiang (2009) [18] summed up his practical experience in compiling professional textbooks for master's degree in translation and proposed four principles of "precise theory, close to reality, highlighting practice, and teaching students how to translate". Scholars Zeng Jianping and Lin Minhua (2010) [19] believe that a set of reasonable and scientific translation textbooks should include seven aspects. Firstly, general knowledge of translation; secondly, comparative knowledge between English and Chinese; thirdly, translation theory. Translation theory is not all translation theories, but representative theories that play a major role in guiding the practice of translation, such as cultural translation theory,

communicative translation theory, and functional translation theory; fourth, the exploration of the specific application of translation skills and strategies, not based on individual translation examples, but on the discourse as a unit, with an emphasis on analyzing the logical and cohesive relationships between sentences; fifth, the selection of materials should adhere to practicality. In terms of material selection, the principle of practicality should be adhered to, and multiple themes should be compatible. For example, it mainly focuses on practical genres, such as business, literature, economy and trade, law, technology, tourism, medical care, etc.; Sixth, translation commentaries, including the appreciation of good translations and criticism of mistranslations; Seventh, translation exercises. Scholar Wang Shuhuai (2011) [20] constructively put forward the principles of systematicity and linkage in the preparation of textbooks, believing that "a good textbook should not only take into account students' basic and personalized requirements, but also conform to the systematic, structural and sequential nature of knowledge learning". Professor Xu Jun (2022) [21] believes that a comprehensive but not too profound approach should be a criterion for the preparation of introductory translation theory textbooks. The so-called "comprehensiveness" refers to the coverage of content, which should cover the basic issues of translation and the main aspects of translation research, such as the essence of translation, the subject of translation, the process of translation, the value of translation, etc. The so-called "profundity" does not mean that it should be like a monograph or a dissertation, but rather that it should have a correct orientation based on a comprehensive view and distinctive viewpoints. Some viewpoints may be elaborated in detail, while some may be pointed out to the point, so as to achieve a balance between lightness and heaviness, and a detailed and appropriate approach. The preparation of introductory textbooks should be good at grasping the key points of each topic, and the outline should be clear, while others may be discussed in passing. Professor Liu Junping (2023) [22] believes that the compilation of textbooks should reflect the principles of cultivating talents for the country and editing according to talent. The so-called "cultivating talents for the country" means that as an important carrier for implementing the fundamental task of establishing morality and cultivating people, the compilation of textbooks must prioritize the principles of "cultivating people through translation", "combining literature with morality", and "integrating literature with morality", because different textbooks reflect different political tendencies and ideologies. The concept of "editing according to talent" means that teaching materials should be written with a clear target audience and purpose in mind. Teaching materials should be advanced in concept, complete in knowledge, practical in compilation method, and clear in target; and attention should be paid to the fact that the significance and utility of teaching materials vary due to the different level and type of the translation profession and different target audience.

The above scholars' elaboration on translation textbooks not only involves the empirical research, writing theories and principles of translation textbooks, but also mentions some problems existing in current translation textbooks. However, these expositions are not detailed enough and specific enough, and do not involve the specialized translation textbooks.

Scholars' studies on specialized translation textbooks mainly focus on technology, business, law and medicine. Han Ziman (2007) [23] suggested that English-Chinese textbooks for scientific and technological translation textbooks should also keep pace with the times, and improve existing textbooks in terms of the characteristics of scientific and technological English, explanation of translation skills, and selection scope of translation examples. Gu Weiyong (2007) [24] explored the principles of selecting translation examples from the mistranslations in business English translation textbooks. Fu Jingmin (2011) [25] combed through the current English-Chinese legal translation textbooks in China, analyzed the problems and reasons in the compilation of some legal translation textbooks, and pointed out the following problems: (1) the outline and objectives of the textbooks are not clear; (2) the textbooks lack systematicity; and (3) the discussion of translation examples is too abstract. Zhao Junfeng and Luo Wenqi (2012) [26] categorized 43 legal translation textbooks published in China (1992-2012) according to the characteristics of publication and content, and analyzed the results of the categorization qualitatively on the basis of the elements of realizing the communicative function of legal discourse. Xin Tongchuan (2014) [27] sorted out and categorized the various medical translation textbooks published in China since the reform and opening up, explored the basic features of various medical translation textbooks, and pointed out that the publication of China's medical translation textbooks has shown a trend of steady development, and that the Chinese-English translation textbooks of Chinese medicine are unique in that they integrate the features of lexical, syntactic, functional and contemporary translation theory schools. However, on the whole, there are not many contemporary translation theories into medical translation textbooks; although both Chinese and Western medical translation textbooks have introduced and explained the skills of using machine translation and its application software to varying degrees, they are rather shallow; and there is a shortage of medical interpreters. Tao Youlan (2014) [28] talked about the construction of thematic translation textbooks through the compilation of English-Chinese technological translation tutorials and put forward the following compilation principles: firstly, selecting qualified compilers and advocating co-operation; secondly, paying attention to the elaboration of macro theories to enhance students' translation abilities; thirdly, displaying authentic translation cases, highlighting the thematic knowledge and integrating relevant vocational knowledge; fourthly, combining the research and compilation and focusing on explaining the difficulties and key points in thematic translation; fifthly, providing English-Chinese parallel texts and electronic resources on translation topics and encouraging students to flexibly use learning resources beyond textbooks such as corpora.

To sum up, all the above works and literature have discussed various factors affecting translation textbooks, and the trend presented is also increasingly concerned about the changes of times. The ultimate goal of studying the preparation, theories, principles and reforms of translation textbooks is to make the complication of textbooks meet the requirements of the times and professional talent cultivation, and meet the standards of translation teaching, ultimately cultivating professional translators. Although almost all aspects of research are involved in the study of translation

textbooks, no scholars have yet given a clear answer to the questions of how to determine the theoretical guidance for the preparation of translation textbooks, how to apply relevant disciplinary theories to the preparation of translation textbooks, how to systematically compile core translation textbooks, and what are the factors affecting the construction of translation textbooks.

#### **Shortcomings and prospects**

Based on analysis and reflection, it is found that there are still some problems in the current domestic translation textbooks by summarizing the research results in the above aspects.

- 1. Although there are a large number of various types of translation textbooks existing in the Chinese textbook market, their quality and content vary. The applicable targets and the levels are not clear.
- In general, the overall writing mode of translation textbooks has not broken away from the relatively outdated narrow framework, and there is too much repetition and a lack of innovation and timeliness in terms of the concept, content and framework of the textbooks.
- 3. Translation theory and practice are not well integrated together, lacking guidance for practice, and the writing of translation textbooks is inconsistent with the goal of cultivating translation talents.
- 4. Lack of parallel texts and electronic resources.

Aiming at the status quo and existing problems of domestic translation textbooks, this paper puts forward the following suggestions:

Scientific management of translation textbooks. Recently, the market of translation textbooks is relatively open, with a wide variety of names, varying in quality, and a high repetition rate, which brings a lot of confusion to users and readers of textbooks. Therefore, while China vigorously promotes the construction of translation majors, it should also incorporate the construction of translation textbooks into the construction system of translation majors and implement scientific management of translation textbooks. The first way is to classify all translation textbooks into different levels and recommend different levels of textbooks for learners at different levels, such as translation textbooks for higher vocational colleges, translation textbooks for undergraduate postgraduate students of non-English non-translation majors, translation textbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate students of English majors, translation textbooks for undergraduate students of translation majors, translation textbooks for master's degree, and textbooks for translation examinations, such as textbooks for the Certificate of Interpretation Examination and the Certificate of Translation Qualification Examination for CATTI, and so on. Through the feedback of online readers and the recommendation of publishers for excellent translation textbooks, unqualified textbooks will be blacklisted to purify the translation textbook market. The second way is to set up a committee for the construction of translation textbooks, in which a system of textbook research, design, writing, distribution and evaluation will be established as the main body, with the

committee taking the lead and combining the efforts of colleges and universities, publishers and other relevant departments of the society, so as to finally form a system of researching, publishing and distributing, quality evaluating, and evaluating the teaching materials. This cyclic mode of operation promotes the preparation of textbooks by research, evaluates the quality of them through use, and promotes the research and writing by combining with the evaluation of textbooks, so as to finally form a benign interaction system of textbooks research and development in our country.

- Innovative design concepts of translation textbooks. The construction of translation textbooks should follow the basic concept of ecological design, i.e. to build a harmonious ecological environment of translation textbooks and encourage the interaction of translation textbooks; to take people as the center, strengthen the connection between translation textbooks and learners' lives and personal experience, and increase the teaching cases; to establish a good ecological relationship of knowledge and strengthen the connection between translation knowledge and adjacent disciplines, and increase the knowledge content in translation textbooks; to present the translation events in a descriptive way to make textbooks interpretable and maintain dynamic balance. The teaching materials should be compiled in a way that the students can interpret and maintain dynamic balance. The compilation of translation textbooks should be student-centered, with a view to compiling a hierarchical and diversified series of textbooks for different types of audiences, with the goal of cultivating translation awareness among translation students, not only to improve their translation ability, but also to strengthen the cultivation of their translator's ability (including cross-cultural communication ability and professional ability).
- Diversified development of translation textbooks. Publishers and textbook writers should work together to strengthen the communication with users, conduct second-degree development of existing good textbooks and guide the creative use of textbooks through teachers' training courses and website readers' interactions, and continually adapt and update the according to students' level and requirements, so as to reduce the repetitive writing of low-quality textbooks. At the same time, strengthen the research on the market demand of textbooks and conduct the user satisfaction survey on existing textbooks, attract professional translators to join the team of writers, increase the knowledge of the translation industry and the translation ethical norms, and reduce the ratio between the compilation of translation tutorials and their use; speed up the integration and application of translation technology in the translation textbooks, and establish a multimodal translation teaching resource base by selecting authentic language materials from high-quality translation corpora and databases to realize the threedimensionalization of electronic, intelligent and diversified translation textbooks.
- 4. Interdisciplinary research of translation textbooks. One of the functions of translation textbooks in the new century is to transform the latest translation research

results as soon as possible, apply interdisciplinary (linguistics, theories pedagogy, informatics, marketing) and related translation theories to guide the compilation of textbooks, and improve the educational function of "transforming intellects into abilities." Translation textbooks cover topics ranging from grammatical knowledge and translation skills to cultural differences and comparisons as well as the impact of translation on the development of human civilization and nature. They also cover disciplines ranging from linguistics to culture, sociology, anthropology and ecology. The interdisciplinary study of translation textbooks has attracted more and more attention from the academia and translation communities. In addition, in the new era of humanities, editors should also change their mindset and develop Civics teaching materials to serve teaching.

#### Conclusion

The development of China's social economy and information technology has put forward brand-new requirements and challenges for the language service industry, and as a key link in outputting high-quality bilingual communication talents, translation teaching is particularly important. Translation textbooks are precisely the core key for translators to learn theoretical knowledge, acquire practical skills and improve their comprehensive quality. Attaching importance to the construction of domestic translation textbooks is not only conducive to meeting the urgent demand of the society for high-quality bilingual talents, but also enhancing the theoretical level of local translation research and accelerating the improvement of China's translation discourse system. Starting from a systematic review of domestic translation textbooks, this paper, based on an analysis of the current situation of translation textbooks, points out the prominent problems in the process of research and development of translation textbooks and their use. It advocates the scientific management of translation textbooks, the innovation of translation textbook design concepts, the diversification of translation textbook development, and the interdisciplinarity of translation textbook research, so as to produce highquality translation textbooks to meet the needs of the times.

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