

# Reform and Practice of College English Translation Teaching Based on OBE Concept

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**Abstract:** Outcome Based Education (OBE) is an educational approach that structures, executes, and assesses instruction around predetermined learning outcomes. To address the challenges currently facing translation teaching, the OBE educational philosophy has been introduced to reform and enhance teaching objectives, instructional methods, evaluation systems, and so forth. Based on the principles of OBE, a teaching model has been proposed along with relevant strategies, thereby fostering a seamless integration of translation theory and practical application. This framework enables students to significantly enhance their translation skills, meet the demands of society, and improve their employability.

**Keywords:** College English translation teaching; OBE educational concept; Teaching model

## 1. Requirements and Current Status of College English Translation Teaching

### 1.1. Requirements for College English Translation Teaching

College English Teaching Guidelines (2020 Version) clearly outlines the importance of college foreign language education within the context of higher education in China. It emphasizes the crucial role that college English plays in enhancing the knowledge, skills, and overall qualities of college students. As a mandatory foundational course for the majority of non-English major students at the undergraduate level, college English is essential for the cultivation of talents. It is emphasized that college English courses should be aligned with national standards for undergraduate professional education, taking into account the guidelines provided in order to support the educational objectives of the institution, the talent cultivation goals of the department, and the individualized developmental needs of students. [1] In particular, College English Teaching Guidelines stresses the importance of serving the educational objectives of the school, the talent cultivation objectives of the department, and the individualized development needs of students [2].

College English Teaching Guidelines outlines the translation ability skills across three levels of teaching objectives. (1) Basic objectives: At the basic level, students should be able to translate familiar topics with a clear structure and lower language difficulty between English and Chinese using a dictionary. Translations should be essentially accurate, with minimal comprehension and language expression errors. Translation skills should be used sparingly at this level. (2) Intermediate objectives: Moving to the intermediate level, students are expected to translate literature materials related to familiar topics or their major with moderate language difficulty. They should also be able to translate formal articles with the assistance of a dictionary. Translations should be clear, meaningful, and generally accurate. Students should be proficient in using common translation skills. (3) Advanced objectives: At the advanced level, students should be able to translate formal editorial or written materials on various topics, providing interpretations of domestic and foreign situations or cultural texts with a certain depth. Translations should be accurate, coherent, and free of significant mistranslations or omissions. Text should flow logically and be meaningful, with few language expression errors. Students should also be able to translate literature materials related to their major or future profession, demonstrating a clear understanding of the original text and translating it with precision and coherence that align with the requirements of professional research and business work. Translation skills should be used appropriately at this level [1]. Institutions and teachers should set their own objectives based on their specific circumstances and conditions, and enable students who have a relatively higher English proficiency and stronger capacity for learning to meet the intermediate or advanced requirements.

College English Test (CET) serves as a widely recognized assessment of English proficiency for

non-English major students in China. This test holds significant social prestige and is a crucial indicator for talent recruitment by enterprises [3]. Along with English Test for International Communication (ETIC), it plays a role in evaluating the effectiveness of college English teaching. The International English Proficiency Test has gained widespread acceptance from universities and employers for its role in assessing job readiness, employment prospects, and talent selection [4]. Although translation teaching, as a pivotal component of college English courses, is not offered as a separate subject, it plays a vital role in class instruction and assessment. In CET-4 or CET-6, the translation component constitutes fifteen percent of the total score. However, candidates often struggle to produce satisfactory translations, emphasizing the need for sustained effort to achieve excellence in this area. Thus, there is an urgent need to identify issues in translation teaching, implement reforms, and establish an effective model for translation instruction.

### ***1.2. The Current State of College English Translation Education***

At present, translation courses are only offered to English majors in Chinese universities. Translation teaching is often marginalized within the college English curriculum, which can be only performed through limited practice in English courses [5]. It is evident that translation instruction comprises a small fraction of college English education, with textbooks rarely incorporating translation theory and techniques. Moreover, many translation instructors lack a comprehensive understanding of translation theory, often focusing only on developing students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, giving an emphasis on grammatical explanations in translation teaching, neglecting cultural input and penetration [6]. This inadequate emphasis on translation in Chinese education institutions has an adverse impact on students' translation proficiency [7]. The predominant method of instruction in translation classes is lecture-based, with students being passive recipients of information, leading to a lack of effective assessment and feedback mechanisms. Additionally, the content of textbooks is often outdated, failing to keep pace with the latest advancements in science and society. Furthermore, the theoretical nature of teaching renders it challenging for students to apply their translation skills in real-life scenarios, thereby hindering their practical proficiency and failing to meet the demands of employers and society [8]. Therefore, there is a critical need for a holistic approach to translation education that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical skills [8].

## **2. Definition and Importance of OBE Theory in College English Translation Teaching**

The concept of Outcome-based Education (OBE) is a pedagogical approach centered around learning outcomes, which originated from educational reforms in the United States and Australia. Initially introduced in the United States, OBE garnered widespread acceptance and adoption in countries like the United Kingdom and Canada. The United States, being a leader in education, faced challenges in technology and educational outcomes, prompting a reevaluation of the practicality of education. In response to this, OBE was conceptualized by Spady in 1981 and quickly gained traction as a means to drive excellence in education. Over the course of a decade, OBE evolved into a comprehensive theoretical framework and continues to be viewed as the pathway to educational advancement. During the 1980s and early 1990s, OBE was a prevalent topic within the American education sphere. The American scholar Spady delved deep into this model in his book "Outcomes-Based Education: The Debate and the Answers," defining OBE as a method that "clearly focuses and organizes the education system around ensuring that students achieve significant success in future life endeavors." According to Spady, OBE has led to a fundamental shift in the educational paradigm.

The core principle of OBE lies in aligning educational policies with well-defined teaching objectives to facilitate student achievement. This pedagogical approach involves five key steps: determining learning outcomes, designing the curriculum, implementing teaching strategies, assessing students, and evaluating outcomes [9]. These steps serve as a critical guide in realizing teaching objectives, fostering effective communication and practice in higher education teaching, and instilling a student-centered approach to learning.

OBE emphasizes the importance of students reaching desired learning outcomes by establishing teaching objectives based on graduation requirements, implementing teaching practices through curriculum design and evaluation, and continuously improving the teaching process. By adhering to the OBE framework, English teaching can adopt a student-centered approach, revolutionize traditional teaching methods, and facilitate the attainment of educational goals. In light of the growing emphasis

on Chinese-English translation within the broader context of the "Chinese culture going global" initiative, college English programs are placing increasing importance on translation instruction. Therefore, integrating a self-directed learning model rooted in the principles of OBE into college English translation teaching has become a top priority for educators. By refining the language and structure of the text, the revised version maintains the essence of the original content while enhancing its academic rigor and clarity. The modified version also offers a more concise and coherent presentation of the significance of OBE theory in college English translation teaching.

### **3. Problems in Traditional Translation Teaching Model and Its Improvement Measures**

#### ***3.1. Problems in Traditional Translation Teaching Model***

Our university, as an application-oriented engineering institute, is designated as one of the pioneering universities for the CDIO (Conceive Design-Implement-Operate) engineering education reform initiated by the Ministry of Education. Additionally, it is recognized as one of the initial institutions chosen for the "Excellent Engineer Education and Training Plan" by the Ministry of Education. Engineering education accreditation involves a rigorous evaluation of various engineering disciplines by professional accreditation committees to ensure that students meet the required standards and criteria for employment in the industry upon graduation. This certification serves as an authoritative validation of students' knowledge and skills in relevant professional fields, supplementing their degree certificates.

The latest Engineering Education Certification Standards (2022 version) was published by the China Engineering Education Professional Certification Association on July 15, 2022. These standards consist of two main components: general standards and specialized supplementary standards. The former represents the baseline requirements applicable to all certified disciplines, while the latter consists of specific standards tailored to individual fields, emphasizing their unique demands. The criteria related to foreign language proficiency are embedded in the "graduation requirements" within the general standards, with the 10th indicator "communication" directly addressing foreign language skills. This indicator attaches importance to students' ability to effectively communicate complex engineering concepts to industry peers and the public, including writing reports, drafting design documents, delivering presentations, and engaging in cross-cultural communication.

The alignment between these indicators and the role of college English courses as instrumental and humanistic is evident. College English functions instrumentally in enhancing students' overall language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, while also supporting their professional development and facilitating international communication in academic and professional settings. This resonance with the expectations outlined in the aforementioned indicators emphasizes the necessity for engineering students to possess strong cross-cultural communication skills. Effective communication and collaboration hinge on a robust command of language; addressing "complex engineering problems" necessitates proficiency in academic and professional English relevant to the engineering discipline; and the medium of communication may vary, encompassing written tasks like report writing and document design, as well as verbal interactions such as presentations, articulations, and response to instructions.

Traditional college English translation courses can be characterized by the following aspects.

1) **Teacher-centered course:** In traditional college English courses, with strict regulations regarding course time, translation texts, and methods, teachers concentrate solely on delivering a certain translation theory and expect students to adhere to a specific translation method when translating a predetermined text within a set time frame. As the center of the class, teachers teach translation theory, translation methods, as well as vocabulary and grammar knowledge, imparting key content to students. Students take notes, passively receive classroom highlights, and complete tasks assigned by the teacher. Teachers require students to use the translation methods to translate the pre-set text within the specified time, neglecting the status of students, their perspectives and understanding, as well as their varying levels of acceptance. Aiming at taking exams alone, students lose their enthusiasm for learning the language and fostering actual ability to translate, which leads to rote memorization and inability to master the practical translation skills. Students are unclear about their own translation level, thus failing to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

2) **Limited opportunities for student in translation practice:** Traditional college English translation courses follow a fixed learning process where teachers unilaterally impart knowledge without

considering individual student's English proficiency level. This restricts students' opportunities and methods for success as teachers develop a uniform curriculum and teaching design, disregarding students' diverse learning methods and needs. Consequently, students lose interest and motivation, making it challenging to achieve successful learning outcomes.

3) Focusing on grades: The traditional evaluation mode for college English translation typically involves exams where students translate texts to earn higher scores. However, students' varying English foundations, abilities, and acceptance levels make it unfair to assess learning outcomes by a uniform standard. This disparity would deprive students with weaker foundations or abilities of motivation and enthusiasm for learning, leading to unsuccessful outcomes.

4) Individualistic approach to translation learning: Traditional college English translation teaching prioritizes individual student performance, with teachers grading students based on their individual exam and assessment results. This competitive learning environment can create tension among students, with superior students aiming to maintain their status and refusing to help inferior students who have the sense of inferiority. This hinders collaboration and support among students, making it difficult for them to achieve successful learning outcomes.

5) Emphasis on translation outcome instead of translation process. The translation content is not closely integrated with the subject and major, and students have a narrow perspective, who are confined to testing. The keys to translation are presented in the form of standard answers, which are too mechanical and rigid. Teachers should cultivate students' qualities and abilities in cooperation, communication, reflection, and innovation through various teaching methods and means, such as group cooperation, translation appreciation, and discussion, in the process of translation teaching, all of which are closely related to graduation requirements.

### ***3.2. Its Improvement Measures***

Based on an analysis of the current problems of college English translation teaching and the reform of teaching methods under the framework of OBE, and with reference to the "College English Teaching Guidelines", the college English curriculum teaching plan has been recently revised. The revised plan aims to shift the focus of English language courses towards practical usage and to enhance students' English proficiency, thereby preparing them to effectively communicate and exchange ideas in English within the realms of academia, daily life, and future professional endeavors.

The translation part in CET-4 and CET-6 covers a wide range, from scientific and humanistic topics, with an emphasis on translating aspects of "Chinese culture" in accordance with the national initiative to promote Chinese cultural heritage globally. Chinese cultural elements incorporated in the translation topics include technological advancements, educational practices, economic development, agricultural innovations, historical landmarks, natural landscapes, traditional customs, and societal aspects such as clothing, cuisine, architecture, and transportation, providing a balanced representation that caters to students from various academic backgrounds.

The translation teaching design is student-centered, with student translation practice as the main focus in class, supplemented by teacher case explanations. The teacher stresses the importance of practical application and outcome-driven evaluation, promoting a more interactive and engaging learning environment. Thus, assessment of student translations is not solely based on exam scores, but practical results that are approved can be directly adopted.

Located in Beijing, a city renowned for its rich history and cultural heritage, our university leverages its geographical advantages by integrating bilingual signage from historical sites and cultural landmarks into translation practice materials. Students are encouraged to observe and collect translation samples on-site, fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural context. In class, exemplary translations are shared and critiqued, while errors are addressed through revisions or retranslations. The teaching approach follows a structured three-stage process: pre-class preparation, in-class review, and post-class reflection, allowing students to refine their translation skills through continuous practice and feedback [10]. During the pre-class preparation stage, students are encouraged to meticulously gather authentic translation cases which can be used in retranslation exercises. In the classroom, students present their translated texts for peer evaluation, followed by group discussions and critiques, with the teacher providing immediate feedback and guidance. In the post-class reflection phase, students compare and evaluate different translations, identify errors, and practice similar texts repeatedly. This practice is not only aligned with students' cognitive and emotional needs but also reflects the current political emphasis on enhancing China's cultural influence. Furthermore, it is in line with the focus of

translation tests such as CET4 and CET6. The optimization of this process enhances learning outcomes and fosters a deeper understanding of translation principles.

#### 4. Construction of a Teaching Model for College English Translation from Chinese to English Based on OBE Concept

Teachers should remodel the existing unitary teacher-centered pattern of College English translation teaching by introducing OBE Concept. Thus, the English translation teaching mode based on the OBE concept is tailored according to the teaching objectives. For students aiming to pass the national CET-4 and CET-6 exams, the teaching content and method will center around the specific types of questions and exercises in these exams, utilizing lectures and practical exercises. On the other hand, for college English courses, the teaching objective is to develop students' overall English language proficiency, covering listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills. By graduation, students should be able to effectively communicate in spoken and written English for professional and social interactions. The key steps for implementing OBE include defining learning outcomes, designing curriculum structures, establishing teaching approaches, implementing self-referential assessments, and progressively achieving peak performance.

The essential steps in implementing OBE concept are proposed by Hu Liping as follows: Firstly, establish the learning outcomes. It is crucial to clearly define the ultimate learning goals (peak outcomes) and ensure they are directly or indirectly assessed. Secondly, develop the curriculum structure. Each skill within the competency framework should be supported by a well-defined curriculum. It is important to establish a clear mapping relationship between the competency framework and the curriculum structure to ensure that students acquire the intended competencies upon completing the curriculum. Thirdly, determine the instructional strategies. OBE shifts the focus from what teachers teach to what students can learn, emphasizing the outcomes of the teaching process over the inputs. Personalized instruction is emphasized over traditional teaching methods. Tailored teaching plans should be crafted based on individual needs, offering diverse learning opportunities [11]. Personalized instruction necessitates teachers to accurately understand each student's learning path, such as the unique requirements of different majors in Chinese-English translation, individual goals, prior English proficiency, and learning progress, in order to devise personalized instruction plans and provide varied learning opportunities. Fourthly, employ self-referenced assessment. Evaluation in OBE centers on learning outcomes rather than teaching content, duration, or methods. Multiple and hierarchical evaluation criteria are utilized, highlighting the achievement of learning outcomes and individual learning progress, instead of student comparisons. Lastly, progress towards peak outcomes gradually. The student's learning journey should be divided into distinct stages, with learning objectives set for each stage. These objectives should be progressive, culminating in the attainment of peak outcomes.

OBE refers to the educational process that focuses on defining and achieving learning objectives through teaching design and implementation. It revolves around four key questions: What specific learning outcomes do we aim for students to attain? Why are these outcomes important? How can we effectively facilitate students in reaching these outcomes? How can we assess if the students have successfully achieved these outcomes? Based on the OBE teaching philosophy, a tailored teaching model for college English translation has been devised which is illustrated in Figure 1.

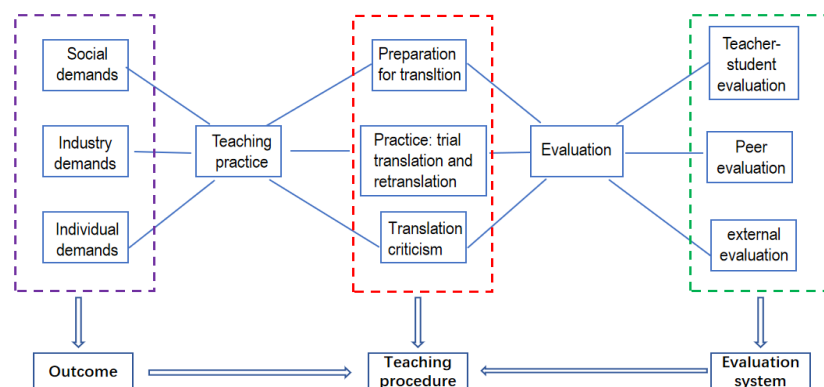


Figure 1: Teaching Model for College English Translation.

To begin with, the OBE teaching philosophy places a strong emphasis on individualized assessment. Through the establishment of personalized assessment levels tailored to each student's unique characteristics, timely evaluations are conducted to accurately gauge students' learning progress and make necessary adjustments to the teaching approach. In the context of Chinese-to-English translation instruction, tasks can be customized according to students' proficiency levels. Those with weaker foundations may start with translating simple sentences, while students with a solid grasp of the language can be challenged with more complex sentence structures. Advanced learners can even progress to translating entire paragraphs. By evaluating students' translation work, instructors are able to pinpoint language-related challenges such as limited vocabulary, grammar weaknesses, and cultural misunderstandings.

Second, OBE attaches importance to the adaptability in education, refraining from a one-size-fits-all instructional approach while adhering to predefined learning objectives. Teachers are encouraged to tailor their methods to meet the unique needs of each student, catering to both high achievers and struggling learners with flexible strategies. Moreover, OBE places the emphasis on the concept of mastery, advocating for the belief that all students have the potential to achieve mastery of the curriculum regardless of their initial proficiency level. By offering diverse and flexible teaching techniques aimed at engaging students, educators aim to foster a genuine interest in learning English, with activities serving as a vehicle to enhance language skills and knowledge.

What's more, in the realm of Chinese-to-English translation instruction, teachers are encouraged to curate a wide array of materials that align with the complexity and subject matter of the course. By incorporating engaging content like comparative analyses of tourist attractions, cultural landmarks, and historical sites, students are encouraged to actively participate in translation activities and collaborative feedback sessions. Additionally, students are urged to collect and share translated materials from real-life encounters during outings, fostering a sense of accomplishment and igniting a lasting passion for learning [12].

Lastly, OBE advocates for competency-based education, with an emphasis on equipping students with the tools necessary to thrive in their future endeavors. Educational objectives should clearly outline specific core competencies, each accompanied by detailed curriculum guidelines. Translation tasks should be assigned based on students' academic majors, linking language acquisition directly to their professional studies. By integrating language practice with industry-specific tasks such as translating academic presentations or industry documents, students come to understand English not merely as a language skill, but as a vital instrument for professional communication and cross-cultural exchange. Through industry and societal evaluations of their translations, students gain real-world feedback and validation of their language proficiency.

In conclusion, student-centered approach based on OBE concept stresses the importance of individualized assessment, adaptability, mastery, and competency-based education. By implementing these principles in Chinese-to-English translation instruction, educators are able to cultivate a vibrant learning environment where students are empowered to excel and succeed.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the principles of OBE teaching theory, the primary objective of college English courses is to assist students in establishing a robust language foundation and deliver tailored instruction to cater to various talent development needs [13]. This includes fostering students' practical English skills, strengthening their cross-cultural communication awareness and proficiency, and nurturing their autonomous learning capabilities to enhance their overall cultural literacy. By doing so, students are equipped with a sense of patriotism and the ability to effectively utilize English in academic pursuits, daily activities, social interactions, and future career endeavors to meet the demands of the nation, society, educational institution, and personal growth. This pedagogical approach not only ignites students' enthusiasm for learning and advances their linguistic and translation proficiency but also fosters their independent study habits and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, OBE mandates that educational institutions and educators define the learning objectives upfront, accommodate diverse and adaptable personalized learning needs, and enable students to confront self-realization challenges during the learning process. This process involves receiving feedback to enhance the initial course design and instructional methods. Teaching outcomes are not only tested and evaluated solely through school exams, but also evaluated in the industry and society.

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