

# A Study on Translation Teaching for English Majors from the Perspective of Cohesion and Coherence: Taking Guangzhou College of Technology and Business as an Example

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**Abstract:** *The paper analyzes the status of college translation teaching and evaluates students' translations from the perspective of cohesion and coherence. The purpose of this paper is to explore better teaching ways and offer some feasible recommendations for improving college translation teaching and students' learning effects.*

**Keywords:** *cohesion and coherence; college translation teaching; students' learning effects*

## 1. Introduction

Translation teaching in most colleges and universities centers more on teaching translation techniques through a single sentence, with little focus on passages which should have been used as teaching materials. Most students prefer to practise translation with sentences instead of passages. Consequently, their textual awareness is not cultivated in translation learning and their passage translations are inflexible and stiff, lacking cohesion and coherence as they do not have textual awareness in terms of comprehending the source text and producing the target text. Based on this common phenomenon, the paper aims to offer some strategies for improving college translation teaching and students' learning effects.

## 2. Cohesion and Coherence

Halliday illustrates the relationship between cohesion and texture<sup>[1]</sup>. Thematic and informational characteristics contribute to clause complexes which help build long sentences in English. The application of cohesion and coherence in translation teaching helps students foster textual awareness and produce logical and idiomatic English translations. On the other hand, to comprehend the English source text from the perspective of cohesion and coherence is useful in English-to-Chinese translation as an accurate comprehension of the source text is the primary step in reproducing accurate information.

Discourse is a complete, natural semantic unit. Cohesion and coherence are the two important principles and characteristics in keeping the whole discourse and its paragraphs coherent<sup>[2]</sup>. Translation teaching should begin with discourse instead of emphasizing a single sentence as there is context in discourse, which enables students to have an accurate understanding of the original and produce a fluent target text.

Cohesive devices are classified into five kinds which are reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion<sup>[3]</sup>. Reference includes personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. Ellipse is an indication of cohesion and coherence<sup>[4]</sup>. That means what is omitted can be implied from the context and thus omission has a function of making a target text cohesive and coherent. As to substitution, it is a way to avoid repetition, which is commonly seen in texts of native English speakers. In terms of conjunction, the English language is featured by overt coherence by using different cohesive ties such as relative pronouns, conjunctions, and adverbs to illustrate logical relations between words, phrases and clauses. Lexical cohesion includes reiteration and collocation. More attention needs to be paid to English-to-Chinese translation regarding the collocation of subjects and predicates, verbs and nouns, nouns and prepositions and so on.

### 3. Significance of Applying Cohesion and Coherence in College Translation Teaching

The application of cohesion and coherence is useful to remedy the weaknesses existing in college translation teaching. Also, it can cultivate students' ability to translate and the way they think. The obvious advantages are as follows:

(1) Helpful to cultivate students' textual awareness which is particularly important in translation learning. This is because there are differences between the Chinese and English language and to learn translation is to learn two types of different thinking. When the Chinese language is rendered into the English language, it involves not only the conversion of information but also the conversion of thinking. Textual awareness contributes to more accurate comprehension of source texts and more fluent target texts.

(2) Useful to make students think coherently. In English-to-Chinese translation teaching, if cohesion and coherence is employed, students can be guided to think and express coherently through translation learning.

(3) Workable to improve students' ability to read between the lines. It is essential to make clear the meaning of the source text. This is the primary step in translation learning. To understand the original text accurately depends largely on the discourse itself or context. Hence, translation teaching should focus on passages as teaching materials and guide students to produce target texts that are cohesive and coherent.

### 4. Current Situation of Translation Teaching and Student's Learning Effects

Translation courses for English majors are generally offered in the third year in colleges and universities. Students in this stage have a certain English language foundation and good English language output ability. But learning translation well is not the same as learning English well. Translation learning needs to have good English and Chinese reading and output abilities, which is the first step in learning translation well. Based on the author's observation and translation teaching in Guangzhou College of Technology and Business for two years, teachers tend to select a sentence to illustrate translation techniques or only use some examples from the textbook most of which are outdated and for which most students show little learning interest. On the other hand, most students are obsessed with translation techniques, and prefer to learn translation techniques and practise translation exercises through a single sentence or a single phrase, ignoring context to comprehend source texts and produce target texts. This leads to poor teaching and learning effects.

The author takes a class in the third year of business English majors at Guangzhou College of Technology and Business as research objects. The students in this class have learned some translation techniques, including conversion, omission, addition, inversion, etc but have not learned cohesion and coherence. Judging from their homework, the author finds that their translations especially English translations are stiff and unreadable. The following target text is an example:

Yunnan is a province in the southwest of China, with an average altitude of 1 500 meters. Yunnan has a long history, beautiful scenery and pleasant climate. Yunnan has a superior ecological environment and diverse creatures, and is known as a paradise for wild animals and plants. Yunnan also has a variety of mineral deposits and abundant water resources, and provides favorable conditions for the sustainable development of the province's economy. Yunnan has 25 ethnic minorities and most of them have their own languages, customs and religions. Yunnan's unique natural scenery and rich national culture make it one of the most popular tourist destinations in China, attracting a large number of domestic and foreign tourists to visit every year.

Evaluating from the perspective of cohesion and coherence, the target text is a Chinglish translation. Firstly, "Yunnan" is always repeated in the target text, although it does repeat in the source text. However, it is not idiomatic and readable in English as such translation looks incoherent. The English language is inclined to use a reference such as "this", and "it" to substitute the same expression so that it can be cohesive and coherent. For substitution, synonyms or hypernyms can replace "Yunnan" to make the target text more cohesive and coherent. Regarding conjunction, almost no subordinate connectives like "which" and "whom" show logical relations between clauses in the target text and thus there is little coherence and cohesion, as well as little readability.

The common features of students' translations are that almost all students translate the text word by word and they focus much on translating what the original is, with no consideration of readability in the

target text. Nearly all students lack the awareness of cohesion and coherence in English-to-Chinese translation translation. Their translations, though without severe mistakes, are of low readability. Hence, to teach students to produce a target text that is idiomatic and readable is necessary as a target text without readability will not be accepted by target readers. In order to help improve better teaching and learning effects, the author introduces cohesion and coherence.

## 5. Translation Teaching from the Perspective of Cohesion and Coherence

To improve students' textual translation, the author introduces cohesion and coherence to instruct them to learn how cohesive devices including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion make a passage cohesive and coherent and how to produce readable and idiomatic English target texts. Passages written by English native speakers are selected as teaching materials for better understanding and production of idiomatic target texts.

### 5.1 Reference

In discourse, reference is a kind of semantic relation, which means that a constituent of discourse functions as a reference item of another constituent. For example:

(1) Some enlightened officials are taking a new tack. In the south-western province of Yunnan they have not only revamped the physical-education test in the *Zhongkao*, an examination for entrance to senior secondary school. They have also given it the same weighting in the exam as all-important subjects like maths and Chinese. (*The Economists*)

(2) If unemployment stays low and wages grow for the working class and poor, more Americans will be able to reap the benefits of our new marital ideal, enjoying a stable marriage that helps them pursue a meaningful life. If that transpires, educated liberals will indeed have paved the path—not to marital collapse, but to a stable and more fulfilling approach to family life. (*The Atlantic*)

In example (1), the exact meaning of the pronoun “they” is determined by its referent. For precise comprehension, the context is of great help. It can be seen from the context, the pronoun “they” refers to “some enlightened officials”. The pronoun “it” refers to “Zhongkao” in the previous sentence. Such references make the text cohesive as the understanding of “they” relies on the context. In example (2), the reference “that” refers to the previous sentence and hence the two sentences are connected. Thereby coherence and cohesion are achieved.

In the class, students need to be told that when they learn translation, especially English-to-Chinese translation translation, they should treat their English target texts from a perspective of how words are organized in an idiomatic English passage. That means they must firstly learn through a host of idiomatic English materials that how words are organized to make a cohesive and coherent passage. That is because the common features are that most students are trapped in original Chinese texts and their English target texts are a word-for-word reproduction of the original, which are stiff and do not have readability. Reference is a good way to improve their English translations.

### 5.2 Substitution

Substitution means that a substitute is used to replace a constituent mentioned in the previous sentences, which can avoid repetition and achieve cohesion and coherence. For example:

(3) Everyone asks boring questions but your question is an interesting one.

In example (3), the word “one” is a substitution of the word “question”, which avoids repetition and makes the sentence cohesive.

### 5.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis omits parts of the context to avoid repetition and achieve cohesion and coherence. For example:

(4) Neither of them could make it home again the year for her birthday, though it was her sixty-seventh. She understood, as she always did. Always had. Always would. (*The Bridges of Madison County*)

In example (4), the complete sentences “Always had. Always would.” are “she always had understood. She always would understood.” Only with the help of the context, can the omitted parts be found.

#### 5.4 Conjunction

Conjunctions such as “because”, “which”, or “where” show logical relations between clauses. The English language is featured by parataxis with frequent use of connectives to show overt cohesion and coherence. For example:

(5) If that transpires, educated liberals will indeed have paved the path—not to marital collapse, but to a stable and more fulfilling approach to family life. (*The Atlantic*)

(6) They tend to have less control over their schedules and less money to pay a babysitter, so they may struggle to get regular time alone with their spouse. When they find such time, they are more likely to arrive to the conversation feeling emotionally depleted from other stressors, and the topics of discussion—how to stretch the money this month, how to wrangle child care with a demanding work schedule—are often thornier. (*The Atlantic*)

In example (5), the connective “If” shows a kind of conditional relation for the clauses, and “but” showcases a kind of adversative relation. Such logical relations are explicitly seen with the use of connectives. In Example (6), “so” indicates result, “when” indicates time, “and” suggests coordinate relation, and “how” indicates manner. All these conjunctions show a particular logical relation, making the passage cohesive and coherent.

In English-to-Chinese translation translation, students should be instructed to employ conjunctions to produce English translations because the English language is featured by parataxis while the Chinese language is characterized by hypotaxis. The use of conjunctions in English texts are frequent and makes the texts logical and cohesive.

#### 5.5 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion means that expressions in sentences should be in line with idiomatic expressions. Especially in English-to-Chinese translation translation, the awareness of the importance of collocation in target texts must be improved. Students should be instructed that collocations of subjects and verbs, verbs and objects should be logical when a Chinese sentence is translated into English. Here is a student’s translation. For example:

(7) The big eyes of Su Mingjuan appear in the poster of the Hope Project.

From the perspective of collocation, the translated sentence is illogical because if a person’s big eyes appear in a poster, it will be terrible. According to the Chinese meaning and guided by collocation, the translated sentence should be revised into “A photo of the big eyes of Su Mingjuan appear in the poster of the Hope Project.” In this sense, the English sentence is reasonable and logical in terms of the collocation of the subject and verb.

After the demonstration of cohesion and coherence, students are required to conduct a discourse analysis of their first version of translation and then to revise it based on the five cohesive devices. Here is an example revised based on the above-mentioned target text guided by cohesion and coherence:

Yunnan, a province that is situated in southwestern China, is at an average elevation of 1500 metres. The province boasts a long history, gorgeous scenery, and a pleasant climate. It is acclaimed as a paradise for wild animals and plants thanks to its superior ecological environment and diversified species. Moreover, its various minerals and adequate water resources provide favorable conditions for the sustainable development of its economy. There are 25 ethnic minorities, most of whom have their own languages, customs and religions. Its distinctive natural landscape and rich ethnic cultures make it one of the most popular tourist destinations, which attracts numerous domestic and foreign visitors for sightseeing each year.

For the revised target text, a reference like “it” is used to refer to “Yunnan”, and thus the third translated sentence has textual connection with the first two translated sentences. The substitution, “the province”, is employed to avoid repetition of “Yunnan”, which is conformed with how native English speakers express. In addition, logical connectives including “that” “moreover”, and “whom” are used in

the translated text, showcasing logical relations within the target text. The revised target text is in line with parataxis which is the prime characteristic of the English language. In a word, the application of cohesive devices make the target text more idiomatic and coherent.

## 6. Countermeasures for Improving Translation Teaching and Learning Effects

From the above analysis, it is quite feasible to teach translation guided by the perspective of cohesion and coherence. Here are some specific measures offered.

(1) Teaching translation through discourse. Teachers should choose passages as teaching examples or as students' translation exercises because there is high context. With context, students can understand the meaning of the original text more accurately and produce target texts more idiomatically.

(2) Properly introducing theories to inculcate translation techniques and to help them evaluate their translations and reference ones. When teaching translation, it is important to expound principles behind these techniques. Only in this way, students are able to apply those techniques flexibly. In addition, with the guidance of principles or theories, students can judge their translations and reference ones reasonably

(3) Paying attention to students' translation exercises and giving comments and feedback. Teachers should assign translation assignments or translation exercises before class. After learning new and key points in class, students are required to revise and polish those assignments or exercises so that they can have a comparative analysis. Also, teachers should review the students' translation assignments respectively and give students feedback so that teachers themselves can understand teaching effects and students themselves can learn their learning effects.

(4) Participating in translation projects and adapting translation projects for translation teaching. Translation is a discipline that emphasizes practice. Only when teachers take part in translation projects for enterprises and understand the market demand for translation talents can they impart translation knowledge and experience to students in a more instructive and targeted way. In addition, teachers are advised to use materials selected from their translation projects in classroom teaching and examine students' translations according to standards of translation companies.

## 7. Conclusion

In summary, in English to Chinese teaching, it is recommended to guide students to analyze the original text from the perspective of discourse for an accurate understanding of the source text. Second, in English-to-Chinese translation teaching, it is advised to guide students to revise the target text from the perspective of discourse to make it idiomatic as the English language pays much attention to cohesion and coherence. Third, teachers are supposed to select popular articles from foreign periodicals as teaching materials to arouse students' learning interest and expand their knowledge scope. The application of cohesive devices in translation teaching can help students comprehend source texts accurately and produce idiomatic target texts. College teachers are suggested to focus on discourse teaching and properly introduce theories such as cohesion and coherence to help produce idiomatic target texts.

## References

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