

Exploring the Innovative Cultivating Approaches to Improve Student Translators' Communicative Translation Competence

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Abstract

In response to China's strategic need to enhance international communication competence, this study proposes an innovative framework for cultivating student translators' communicative translation competence. Grounded in the conceptualization of national translation competence, the framework delineates four developmental approaches—management, practice, dissemination, and development—to systematically enhance student translators' individual competence. It details a dynamic implementation process involving multiple actors, blended environments, and concrete tasks, alongside a tripartite evaluation system. By directly linking translation pedagogy to national strategic objectives, this research contributes to empowering future translators as strategic narrators capable of effectively telling China's stories, shaping its international image, and facilitating meaningful cultural exchange.

Keywords: Student translators, Communicative Translation Competence (CTC), Cultural exchange, Innovative cultivating approaches

1. Introduction

Since the cooperation between all countries becomes more and more integrated, enhancing international communication competence has been elevated as a national priority, fundamental to bolstering soft power and shaping the national cultural image (Du, 2022). Effective international communication and the construction of international discourse power are inextricably linked to translation, and more fundamentally, to the overarching national translation competence (Ren & Li, 2021; Wu, 2022). National translation competence, defined as “the sum of a country’s abilities to formulate and implement translation-related policies and plans, conduct translation practice and enhance the dissemination effect of translation products, and utilize and develop relevant resources to further advance translation and related undertakings” (Ren & Li, 2021, p. 6), serves as a critical pillar within the enhancement of international communication competence.

While national translation competence is a complex macro-system, its realization is dependent on and manifested through aggregated individual translation competence. If high-end translation professionals constitute the main force in elevating national capacity, then student translators represent the crucial reserve force and future key agents. Therefore, a pivotal question arises for translation educators and learners alike: how can the approaches for translation learners be innovated to systematically enhance their individual competence, thereby empowering them to better tell China’s stories and serve national strategic needs?

Existing research on translation competence cultivation has extensively explored models, curricula, and teaching methodologies (e.g., Huang, 2019; Mu, 2021). Bibliometric analysis shows evolving foci from foundational pedagogy and discipline building to more recent themes like “Belt and Road”, “language services”, and “talent cultivation systems”. However, a gap persists: many approaches remain oriented towards meeting language service industry demands, with less systematic integration into the broader framework of national image shaping and international discourse system construction. This study aims to address this gap by proposing novel approaches to translation learners’ development, explicitly anchored in the perspective of international communication competence and the constitutive elements of national translation competence.

2. Key Concepts of Communicative Translation Competence

The proposed framework operates within a nested conceptual hierarchy, establishing a clear theoretical lineage from national strategy to pedagogical practice.

2.1 International Communication Competence

This is the overarching strategic goal. It refers to a nation’s cross-linguistic and cross-cultural information dissemination capabilities in the international arena. Its ultimate aim is to effectively present national stances, culture, and values, thereby enhancing cultural soft power and international discourse power (Wu, 2022). It transcends mere language transfer, encompassing strategic narrative building, image management, and cultural diplomacy.

2.2 National Translation Competence

This is the key mediating mechanism through which international communication is operationalized at a systemic level. It is conceptualized not as a static resource but as a dynamic process encompassing four interconnected sub-capacities (Ren & Li, 2021), they are 1) Management Capacity. This involves the top-down orchestration of translation activities. It includes the formulation of national translation policies and industry standards, the establishment of assessment and certification systems (e.g., China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters, CATTI), and the strategic control and allocation of translation resources (funding, databases, technologies); 2) Practice Capacity. This constitutes the core operational layer. It encompasses both routine translation services for various industries and institutions, as well as emergency translation response capabilities for major societal events, crises, or public health emergencies, ensuring timely and accurate information flow; 3) Dissemination Capacity. This focuses on the “product” and its “effect”. It concerns the media reach, cultural acceptability, and ultimate influence of translation products in the target socio-cultural context. It asks not just “is it translated correctly?” but “is it received effectively?” and “does it shape perception?”; 4) Development Capacity. This ensures sustainability and growth. It pertains to the long-term cultivation of resources, including strategic language pair planning, talent pipeline development, pedagogical innovation, research advancement, and the development of new translation technologies and tools.

2.3 Individual Translation Competence

This is the micro-level foundation upon which the macro-capacities rest. This study specifically focuses on “student translators”, defined primarily as undergraduate students majoring in translation studies. They represent nascent or primary-level translation talent—the crucial cohort being shaped for future contribution. Their individual competence, when aggregated and strategically directed, forms the bedrock of national translation competence. Since the mid-1980s, many scholars have proposed models of translation competence (TC) focused on suggesting components from different perspectives (PACTE Group, 2020), such as Nord (1988, 1992); Kiraly (1995); Alves and Gonçalves (2007); Göpferich (2008, 2009) and so on.

3. The Construction of Innovative Approaches to Enhance Student Translators’ CTC

The innovative approaches function as a comprehensive system consisting of three integrated, cyclical components, they are the design, the implementation, and the evaluation. It is visualized not as a linear process but as an interactive ecosystem where each component informs and refines the others.

3.1 The Design Part

Moving beyond a monolithic curriculum, this part proposes four parallel yet interconnected developmental approaches, each mirroring a sub-capacity of national translation competence, they are 1) The Management Approach. This approach aims to develop learners’ meta-cognitive awareness and strategic understanding of the translation ecosystem. It involves policy literacy, which studies key national translation policy documents,

understanding their rationale and implications for practice; and standard awareness, which means familiar with industry quality standards), localization guidelines, and ethical codes; and resource governance, which means the skills in controlling and utilizing translation resources, including advanced computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, terminology management systems, corpora, and parallel text databases. The goal is to cultivate translators who are not just tool users but informed participants within a governed professional landscape; 2) The Practice Approach. This is the cornerstone approach, focused on building robust, versatile, and context-aware translation skills, consists of industry-specific translation, which refers to developing competence in specialized domains such as legal, technical, medical, and business translation; and institutional translation, which means understanding the norms, constraints, and purposes of translation for government agencies, international organizations, and cultural institutions, where accuracy and political sensitivity are paramount; and emergency translation response, that is, simulating scenarios requiring rapid, accurate translation under pressure for crisis communication, public announcements, or disaster relief, fostering adaptability and resilience; 3) The Dissemination Approach. This approach elevates the focus from production to impact, training learners to be “communication strategists”, who are expected to learning to analyze target audiences and cultural contexts to enhance the acceptability of translations, understanding how different media platforms (e.g., social media, official websites, streaming services, publishing) influence the reception and spread of translated content, and practicing translation as a means to construct coherent, compelling narratives about China, moving beyond literal fidelity to strategic framing; 4) The Development Approach. This approach instills a mindset of sustainability, innovation, and contribution to the field’s growth, including resource development, which means engaging in activities like building specialized corpora, compiling glossaries, or documenting translation cases; pedagogical and research literacy, which means gaining basic skills in teaching translation, peer feedback, and conducting applied translation studies research; technology engagement, which means moving beyond using tools to understanding their principles, contributing to testing new technologies, or developing simple, tailored solutions for specific translation problems.

3.2 The Implementation Part

The implementation of these approaches is not a one-size-fits-all prescription but a dynamic process requiring careful consideration of several factors, including 1) Actors. The model expands the traditional teacher-learner dyad. In the AI era, technology (e.g., adaptive learning platforms, AI-powered writing assistants, interactive corpora) becomes a co-agent or even a primary actor in certain instructional scenarios such as personalized drill exercises and simulated translation environments. Learners also act upon each other through peer review and collaborative projects; 2) Operational Methods, which are tailored to approach objectives, which include practice-oriented, such as real-world or simulated translation projects, internship placements, case study analysis; teaching-oriented, such as micro-teaching sessions, designing lesson plans for specific translation problems, providing structured peer feedback; research-oriented, such as guided action research projects, critical discourse analysis of published translations, systematic reviews of translation strategies for specific

genres; and development-oriented, such as Hackathons for translation app prototyping, workshops on corpus building, collaborative glossary development projects; 3) Implementation Environment. A blended ecology is essential, which can be static and dynamic, online and offline, in-class and extra-curricula. In the static and dynamic environment, research tasks may favor static, resource-rich library or online database environments, while practice and dissemination tasks thrive in dynamic, interactive settings like translation labs, media studios, or community-engagement projects. In the online and offline environment, the online platforms facilitate access to global resources and remote collaboration, while the offline, face-to-face environments are crucial for nuanced discussion, teamwork, and mentoring. In the in-class and extra-curricular environment, formal classroom instruction provides structure, while internships, competitions, and student-led translation clubs offer authentic, self-driven learning experiences; 4) Task Instructions. Concrete tasks operationalize each approach. For example, the management task: “Analyze the China’s National Plan for the Development of Translation and Interpreting (2021-2025)’ and draft a proposal for how your university’s translation program could align its goals with two of its key initiatives.”; the dissemination task: “Select a Chinese short story, translate it for a Western young adult audience, and design a social media campaign (including platform choice, visual elements, and hashtag strategy) to promote it.”; the development task: “Collaborate in a team to build a small, annotated parallel corpus on ‘Chinese Green Technology Policy Documents’ and write a brief manual on its potential uses for translators.” and so on.

3.3 The Evaluation Part

Evaluating the complex outcomes of this multi-approach framework is a recognized challenge. A multi-level, formative, systematic evaluation system is proposed as 1) Intra-Evaluation. This assesses whether the learner has achieved the core competency goals within each specific approach. It uses criteria aligned with the approach’s focus. For example, a management approach assessment might evaluate a student’s policy analysis report; a dissemination approach assessment might critique the audience adaptation strategy in a translation portfolio; 2) Extra-Evaluation. This assesses the direct, tangible outputs of the approach implementation. This is the traditional realm of product assessment but expanded. It looks at the quality and quantity of translation products in a portfolio; the measurable improvement in proficiency in a specific language pair or domain; the contributions to a shared class resource (e.g., a termbase); or the successful completion of an internship; 3) Inter-Evaluation. This is the most complex level, assessing the indirect, longer-term outcomes and broader effects. It seeks evidence of synthesis and impact. Metrics might include the actual reach and engagement metrics of a translation published on a platform (for Dissemination); a learner’s demonstrated ability to self-direct further learning or initiate a project (for Development); or the learner’s reflective analysis showing how management awareness influenced a practical translation decision. This often requires longitudinal tracking and qualitative methods like portfolios and interviews.

4. Practical Cases for Capacity Training Projects

Based on the core framework which maps the four sub-capacities (i.e., Management, Practice, Dissemination, Development) of national translation competence onto corresponding developmental approaches for learners, the following provides specific, actionable innovative case examples aligned with each approach.

4.1 Cases for the Management Capacity

This approach aims to cultivate learners' awareness of policies, standards, and resource governance.

Case 1 “National Translation Policy Simulation Workshop” Course Module

Within courses like Introduction to Translation or Translation Project Management, a dedicated module is established. Students are grouped and assigned roles (e.g., national ministry policy researcher, industry association representative, university program director, language service CEO). Given a real or simulated national policy document (e.g., National Plan for the Development of Translation and Interpreting), each group discusses its implications for practice, talent cultivation, and technology development from their assigned perspective and drafts an “Implementation Proposal”.

This case transforms passive reading of policy texts into active “policy decoding” and “implementation simulation”, fostering a deep understanding of how management capacity shapes the professional ecosystem from a macro level and develops strategic thinking.

Case 2 “Translation Resource Audit and Development” Project

Student groups conduct a translation resource audit for a specific domain (e.g., “International Communication of Carbon Neutrality Policies”). The audit covers: the completeness and quality of relevant bilingual termbases, parallel text corpora, and authoritative reference translations; the suitability of mainstream CAT tools; key domestic and international dissemination platforms and audiences. The final deliverable is not just an audit report but also a concrete proposal for resource supplementation (e.g., co-building a specialized termbase).

This case elevates resource usage skills to resource evaluation and development capabilities. Students shift from being resource “consumers” to “contributors”, directly addressing the national translation competence requirements for “resource control” and “development capacity”.

4.2 Cases for the Practice Capacity

This approach moves beyond generic translation exercises to hone skills in authentic or highly simulated complex scenarios.

Case 1 “Institutional Translation Full-Process Simulation” Workshop

Collaborating with a local government foreign affairs office or cultural institution, this workshop simulates the translation preparation and execution for a major international event

(e.g., a Sister City Forum). Students complete: compilation of background briefing packs, pre-translation of keynote speeches, simulated consecutive interpreting, minute-taking and translation of Q&A sessions, and post-event press release compilation. A “revision-feedback-revision” mechanism is implemented throughout, with instructors and experienced institutional translators acting as reviewers.

This case integrates industry, institutional, and emergency (responding to impromptu questions) translation scenarios. Students experience the complete workflow, norms, and pressures of translation as an integral part of institutional work, developing comprehensive practical and adaptive skills.

Case 2 “Multilingual Information Collaboration for Major Public Events” Platform

During public health or natural disaster events (or simulations), students participate in the volunteer translation of authoritative information into multiple languages. For example, teams are formed to quickly and accurately translate official guidelines, situation reports, or safety notices, distributing them through designated channels. The focus is on terminology consistency, information accuracy, speed, and collaboration.

This case directly addresses “emergency translation capacity”. It tightly couples translation practice with social responsibility, allowing students to deeply appreciate translation’s critical role in public communication and enhancing their sense of mission and operational capability.

4.3 Cases for the Dissemination Capacity

This approach focuses on the reach and impact of translation products, cultivating learners’ literacy as “communicators”.

Case 1 Digital Storytelling and Cross-Platform Dissemination of China’s Stories” Project

Students select an item of Chinese intangible cultural heritage (e.g., Longquan Celadon, Kunqu Opera) and create a dissemination package targeting overseas Gen Z. Tasks include: writing and translating core introductory copy; producing subtitles and voiceovers for short videos; designing social media posts for platforms like Instagram/TikTok; drafting a promotional email for overseas KOLs. Final outputs are published on simulated or real overseas social media accounts, with interaction data analyzed.

This case deeply integrates translation with new media communication, digital storytelling, and audience analysis. Assessment criteria extend beyond linguistic quality to include communicative power (e.g., views, engagement rates), perfectly embodying “translation dissemination capacity”.

Case 2 “Game Localization and Player Community Building” Simulation

Students select a culturally themed Chinese indie game and develop a “localization proposal”. This includes: in-game text translation and cultural adaptation; creative translation of character and skill names; writing community announcements and patch notes for overseas

players; designing community engagement activities. During the project defense, students role-play as localization managers, pitching their translation strategy to “game producers” on how it balances fidelity and appeal to attract and retain an international player base.

This case uses cutting-edge cultural products as a vehicle, allowing translation learning to directly engage with the global dissemination chain of cultural products. Students understand how translation creates user experience and builds cultural communities, representing a vivid, impact-oriented practice.

4.4 Cases for the Development Capacity

This approach focuses on the sustainable development of the translation ecosystem, fostering innovation and contribution.

Case 1 “Peer Teaching” Micro-teaching and Course Resource Development

In an advanced Translation Workshop course, students take turns acting as “lead learner”. The lead learner researches a specific translation challenge (e.g., “Translating Chinese Political Metaphors into English”), designs a 15-minute teaching plan, prepares examples and exercises, and leads a micro-teaching session. Their teaching materials (slides, exercise bank, reference list) are incorporated into a course resource repository for iterative use by subsequent cohorts.

This case implements the cultivation of “translation teaching capacity”. The “teaching-to-learn” approach deepens understanding of translation problems while contributing reusable pedagogical resources to the field, creating a virtuous cycle.

Case 2 “AI Translation Prompt Engineering and Optimization” Innovation Lab

A dedicated research group is formed to move beyond simply using LLMs like ChatGPT for translation and to delve into “prompt engineering”. The task: for a specific genre (e.g., government white papers, Tang poetry, web novels), design and test different prompt templates, systematically evaluating output quality. The goal is to produce a guide to optimized AI translation prompts for specific genres and attempt to develop simple interactive prompt tool plugins.

This case transforms students from passive technology users into active technology optimizers and light developers. This directly corresponds to “translation technology and product development capacity”, cultivating future-oriented, human-AI collaborative development skills.

These cases share common features, such as authentic contextualization, task complexity, role diversity, and socially relevant outputs. They translate the macro-framework of national translation competence into concrete, implementable pedagogical activities, enabling “approach innovation” to be operationalized. Implementation is recommended through a Project-Based Learning model, integrating formative assessment (e.g., process logs, peer review) and summative assessment (e.g., project deliverables, impact reports) to comprehensively evaluate student growth across each approach.

5. Conclusion

This study has proposed an innovative framework for cultivating student translators' communicative translation competence, explicitly designed to bridge the gap between individual skill development and the strategic national goal of strengthening international communication capacity. This study ensures that translation education moves beyond a narrow focus on industry-ready linguistic skills to holistically prepare future translators as strategic agents capable of contributing to national discourse power and cultural image building.

The framework's strength lies in its integrated, cyclical nature, encompassing detailed considerations for design, dynamic implementation, and a multi-faceted evaluation system. The proposed implementation process, involving diverse actors (including AI as a co-agent), tailored operational methods, blended environments, and concrete task instructions, provides a practical road map for educators. The tripartite evaluation system (intra-, extra-, and inter-evaluation) offers a robust mechanism to assess the complex, layered outcomes of this competency-based training, from specific skill acquisition to long-term synthetic impact and professional identity formation.

The illustrative practical cases demonstrate the framework's viability and transformative potential. By engaging students in authentic, complex scenarios—from policy simulation and resource development to digital storytelling and AI prompt engineering—these cases foster not only translation proficiency but also meta-cognitive awareness, strategic communication skills, and a contributor's mindset. This approach cultivates translators who are not merely executors of text but informed, adaptive, and impactful participants in the global information ecosystem.

In conclusion, this research contributes to translation pedagogy by offering a coherent, strategic, and operational model that directly aligns learner development with higher-order national objectives. It posits that empowering student translators with this expanded, communication-oriented competence is fundamental to building a sustainable pipeline of talent for enhancing national translation competence.

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