



# Construction and Application of a Corpus-based Teaching Platform for English Translation of Chinese Classics

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## Abstract

The course of English translation of Chinese classics is an important cultural course for undergraduate and postgraduate translation majors. It is an important way to train cultural translation talents and promote the strategy of “Chinese culture going global”. The translation of Chinese classics involves transfers between ancient Chinese and modern Chinese and between Chinese and English languages, which adds difficulty to teachers and students in their understanding and expression and leads to their demand for plentiful professional reference materials. However, paper textbooks are very limited in content capacity and thus unable to satisfy teachers’ and students’ special demand for reference materials in translating Chinese classics. Bilingual parallel corpus in this area can better solve the problems existing in the teaching of English translation of Chinese classics at present, due to its advantages of large corpus size, authentic translation examples, fast retrieval and convenience in autonomous learning, etc. Based on the special demand of teaching in the English translation of Chinese classics, this study discusses how to build a corpus-based teaching platform for this course, and apply it to the complete teaching steps of pre-class preparation, in-class teaching, and after-class consolidation, as well as evaluation to the students, so as to cultivate cultural translation talents with sufficient competence in translation, technology application, and autonomous learning.

## Keywords

English translation of Chinese classics; Corpus; Teaching platform

## 1. Introduction

As a large-scale collection of natural language texts, corpora not only contain a large number of use cases of authentic language materials but also show the correspondence between different languages. They provide valuable materials for translation practice, teaching, and research. Cultural translation often poses a great challenge to translators because many cultural factors in the source language have no equivalent expressions in the target language. With the continuous accumulation of bilingual data of traditional Chinese culture and the construction of corpora, corpus-based teaching has become an important teaching model for cultural translation courses.

In the context of globalization in the 21st century, there have emerged unprecedented situations of mutual penetration, influence, and integration of cultures. The Chinese government has proposed the strategy of “Chinese Culture Going Global”, advocating for equal participation in the dialogue among world civilizations and promoting global understanding

and recognition of China. Chinese classics embody the cultural values and wisdom formed through Chinese people's practice over thousands of years and thus represent a crucial pathway for Chinese culture to go global. They also signify an important manifestation of China's cultural self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-improvement. In light of this, an increasing number of universities in China have incorporated the course of "English Translation of Chinese Classics" into their curricula for Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting (BTI) and Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI), aiming to cultivate students' cultural quality and translation abilities. This enables them to tell China's stories well in foreign languages, disseminate China's voice effectively, and present a true, three-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China to the world. However, Chinese classics are mostly written in ancient Chinese, posing challenges in translation due to semantic differences between ancient Chinese and modern Chinese, as well as between Chinese and English languages. The content of Chinese classics is often complex, covering various fields such as history, philosophy, and literature, which necessitates teachers to possess extensive knowledge and profound cultural backgrounds to provide accurate and in-depth explanations of Chinese classics during the teaching process. Chinese classics contain rich and complex cultural information, historical backgrounds, and profound philosophical thoughts, which are difficult to convey accurately and comprehensively in translation. There is a scarcity of printed textbooks on the English translation of Chinese classics, and they can contain only a limited number of language materials, which hinders the development of the course teaching. Furthermore, some teachers themselves lack practical experience and competence in translating Chinese classics into English. These factors result in this course nearly becoming a course of translation theories or translation appreciation, with few students competent in the translation of Chinese classics.

The construction and application of bilingual parallel corpora for the English translation of Chinese classics can overcome the difficulties mentioned above to a great extent due to their large-scale material storage, authentic translation examples, and convenient retrieval functions. They can facilitate the formation of a teaching community between teachers and students, where translation tasks serve as a link and parallel texts as a reference, enabling the active production of diversified translations, thereby improving practical translation abilities and teaching levels in this field. This paper primarily explores the theoretical basis and significance of applying bilingual parallel corpora to the teaching of English translation of Chinese classics, as well as the methods to construct and apply a corpus-based teaching platform for this purpose. It aims to provide insights for the reform of the teaching of English translation of Chinese classics.

## 2. Review of the Application of Corpus in Translation Teaching

Since Professor Mona Baker pioneered the study of corpus translation in 1993, some scholars have turned their attention to the application of corpus in translation teaching. For example, Bernardini (1997, 2004) believes that corpus helps to create an environment for discovery-based learning and suggests that translation teaching should be supplemented by parallel corpus retrieval, enabling students to form translation "consciousness", "reflection" and "strain". Zanettin (1998) proved that parallel corpora can improve students' ability to understand the original text and translate it into a fluent target language. Barlow (2000) believes that corpora can enable students to explore the main corresponding items in words and structures in the two languages and construct appropriate schemata-meaning associations. Bowker (2003) and Bernardini (2004a, 2004b) discussed the teaching resources, means, and significance that bilingual parallel corpora might provide in interpreter training and translation teaching. Pearson (2003) argues that parallel corpus enables students to observe the strategies employed by the translators when constrained by the source text. Lopez-Rodriguez and Tercedor-Sanchez (2008) constructed learner corpora and reference corpora, aiming to help students master translation strategies and improve translation evaluation ability. Castagnoli (2011) discussed the design of a translation teaching corpus for the purpose of training translators. Kübler (2018) built a translation teaching framework, based on corpus linguistics, term management, cooperation with experts, and quantitative analysis of translation quality.

Although corpus-based translation teaching in China started relatively late, Ye (2003) conducted a preliminary exploration of translation techniques at the lexical level based on a self-constructed Chinese-English parallel corpus of *Hong Lou Meng (A Dream of Red Mansions)*. Since then, an increasing number of scholars have delved into the specific applications of corpora in translation teaching, as well as classroom teaching models. Professors Hu Kaibao and Wang Kefei are pioneers in exploring the use of bilingual parallel corpora in translation research and teaching in China, inspiring numerous domestic scholars to engage in research on corpus-based translation and corpus-based teaching. Yu (2004) discussed four major functions of corpora in translation teaching: dynamically presenting contextual co-occurrences through concordances, analyzing textual equivalence probabilities, quantitatively analyzing translation style characteristics, and comparatively analyzing multiple translations. Qin and Wang (2007) explored the application principles and methods of Chinese-English-aligned corpora in translation teaching. Luo and Liu (2009) attempted to apply open corpora in translation teaching research. Liu and Liu (2011) applied multimedia computer technology and corpus methods to reform translation teaching, explored the construction and application of student translation corpora, and established a set

of corpus-based translation teaching routines and translation evaluation models. Zhu and Mu (2013) studied corpus-based translation teaching oriented towards textual interpretability. Zhu and Chen (2015) discussed the theoretical conception and engineering practice of corpus-based computer-aided translation teaching platforms. Wang and Qin (2015) explored the rationale, motivations, and methods for applying parallel corpora in translation teaching, arguing that parallel corpora can improve translation evaluation methods and create high-quality self-directed and discovery-based translation teaching environments. Xiong (2015) explored the construction and operation of a translation teaching model based on Chinese-English bilingual parallel corpora, elaborating on the content arrangement, implementation principles, and operational methods of this teaching model. Chai and Wang (2017) introduced the construction process of the Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) Translation Corpus, discussing the principles and methods for constructing translation teaching corpora, corpus acquisition methods, corpus annotation methods, etc. Chai (2019) introduced the module composition of a corpus-based professional translation teaching platform and explored its application in translation teaching. Li (2021) regarded corpora as intelligent language teaching and research platforms, analyzing their development purposes, modules, and functions, with a focus on exploring their applications in translation teaching. Liu and Cao (2021) constructed a Chinese-English parallel corpus of *Shui Hu Zhuan (Water Margin)*, annotating background knowledge, part of speech, techniques, etc., to enhance the applicability of parallel corpora in translation teaching. Wang and Liu (2023) proposed a learner-centered teaching model for the translation of discourse with Chinese characteristics based on two self-built corpora: the Chinese-English parallel corpus and the learner parallel corpus of *Xi Jinping Tan Zhiguo Lizheng (Xi Jinping: The Governance of China)*.

To sum up, scholars have actively explored corpus-based translation teaching and achieved certain results, providing a theoretical basis and practical test for the significance of corpus-based translation teaching. However, there are few researches on the application of corpus to teaching of English translation of Chinese classics, so there is still a large space for research in this field.

### 3. Significance of Application of Corpus into Teaching of English Translation of Chinese Classics

A corpus not only encompasses a vast array of authentic examples of language usage from classical texts but also demonstrates the correspondence between different languages, providing valuable materials for translation practice, teaching, and research. A bilingual parallel corpus of classical texts can serve as an important auxiliary tool in the teaching of English translation of Chinese classics, enriching teaching resources and creating an environment for autonomous learning. It not only facilitates students to freely select learning materials from the corpus for independent learning and exploration but also allows teachers to dynamically track students' daily use of the corpus, thereby enabling more objective evaluations of their learning process. Furthermore, corpus-based teaching can effectively enhance both teachers' and students' competence in information technology, enabling them to better adapt to the current new trend of digital teaching.

#### 3.1 Enriching the Teaching Resources of English Translation of Chinese Classics

The bilingual parallel corpus of Chinese classics can break through the limitations in translation examples and quantities of paper textbooks, and provide a variety of bilingual pair translation samples for a certain search term, phrase, common structure, sentence paragraph, and text, which is convenient for teachers and students to extract different translations of classical texts and translation materials required for teaching. Therefore, it can be a useful supplement and teaching aid for textbooks of classical texts. Chinese classics are the concentrated embodiment of Chinese traditional culture, philosophical thoughts and values, and contain a large number of complex and profound cultural terms, which are difficult in translation practice and teaching. The bilingual parallel corpus contains one original text and several different translations at the same time, which is convenient for teachers and students to extract the core terms in the classics, construct a multilingual term database, and enhance the ability to understand and translate the terms in the classics. Teachers and students can also use the algorithm of term alignment to obtain the word frequency statistics of different translations, classify and compare the stylistic styles of these term translations, and find the differences between different translators and translations in terms of styles and strategies, so as to cultivate students' language awareness and critical thinking required for translation.

#### 3.2 Creating an Environment for Autonomous Learning and Discovery-based Learning

A corpus trains translation skills through discovery-based learning and data-driven approaches, enhancing technical awareness, improving translation abilities, and fostering capabilities in autonomous learning. With retrieval software, a

corpus can create a discovery-based learning environment for students. The vast amount of digitized text can be stored in the corpus, including multi-modal texts in the forms of text, picture, audio and video. With a corpus of English translations of Chinese classics, historical materials far away from our lives can be transformed into real-life translation tasks and vivid learning scenarios, effectively stimulating students' interest in learning and increasing their motivation for self-engagement. Students can quickly search and filter corpus materials based on their interests and needs, enabling personalized learning. The convenience of rapidly extracting learning materials encourages students to actively explore the semantic shifts between ancient and modern Chinese in classical texts, the similarities between Chinese and English, and the techniques or patterns of interlingual translation. Additionally, corpus-based teaching platforms assist translation instructors in tracking and monitoring students' autonomous learning progress, providing a more intuitive and clear analysis of their learning processes and outcomes.

### **3.3 Enhancing the Information Technology Skills of Teachers and Students**

Corpus-based teaching can encourage both teachers and students to continuously improve their corpus usage techniques to meet the needs of the integration of translation teaching and information technology in the new situation. For example, teachers and students can master efficient data retrieval skills through using repeatedly corpus software for keyword searches and context filtering. They can enhance their abilities in data processing and visualization by using corpus analysis tools for frequency statistics, collocation analysis, and semantic network construction. They can improve their translation efficiency and quality by utilizing corpus data for post-editing or managing translation memory databases. In summary, corpus-based translation teaching can provide a wealth of information technology tools for the teaching of translating Chinese classics into English, construct a digital learning environment, encourage continuous learning and professional development, and promote the modernization and efficiency of the teaching of English translation of Chinese classics.

## **4. Construction and Application of Teaching Platform of English Translation of Chinese Classics Based on Bilingual Parallel Corpus**

With the advent of educational informationization and digital era, the teaching of English translation of classical classics should adapt to the new requirements of digitalization of translation teaching. One of the important approaches is to build a corpus-based teaching platform for the translating Chinese classics into English based on the teaching objectives of cultural courses and the characteristics of translation of Chinese classics. Teachers should continuously enrich the teaching content, adopt digital teaching methods and task-driven teaching methods, and implement a diversified teaching evaluation system to improve students' translation level and further ensure the quality of translation talent training.

### **4.1 Construction of a Corpus-based Translation Teaching Platform**

The construction of a small-scale bilingual corpus with alignment and tagging that meets the translation teaching is an important way to achieve the technological and informational aspects of teaching in English translation of Chinese classics. Firstly, teachers should fully understand the characteristics of translation teaching corpora and the methods of building a corpus, including the collection, retrieval, extraction, alignment, and tagging of bilingual corpora. Secondly, they should carefully collect and select those classical texts and their translations, that reflect the advanced thoughts and achievements of ancient China or have universal value, such as philosophical classics that embody Chinese concepts of harmony, friendliness, integrity, benevolence and righteousness, and scientific and literary classics that demonstrate the advanced artistic standards, technological levels, and literary achievements of ancient China. Teachers can utilize retrieval software such as Paraconc or translation software like DéjàVu, Snowman, and memoQ, as well as professional corpus software like AntConc, WordSmith, and Monoconc Pro, to build a Chinese-English parallel corpus containing terminology and texts of Chinese classics. They can employ the bilingual alignment tools of this software to achieve accurate bilingual alignment processing, namely, to save original works and translated works into two separate texts and align them according to the relationship between segments or sentences. Furthermore, tools like COCOA for tagging can be used to annotate the corpus appropriately, in order to maximize the utility of the parallel corpus. Tagging involves marking useful information in the corpus with a set of symbols. Here, it refers to marking the corpus text with such information as the source of the materials and patterns of bilingual comparison and conversion according to teaching needs. Some tagging tools have software tagging settings that can hide the annotations to keep the corpus neat. In this way, the source of the language examples can be displayed in the search, and the full text can be displayed in contrasting forms.

Due to the existence of multiple translations by translators from China and abroad for many classics, such as *Lunyu*

(*Analects of Confucius*), *Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching)*, and *Sunzi Bingfa (The Art of War)*, teachers can collect different English versions of these classics and input them into the corpus, forming a rich collection of bilingual translation samples and facilitating teachers and students to extract materials for exercise or reference. English translation of Chinese classics also relies on a large number of reference materials from different periods, such as annotations, commentaries, and exegeses related to classical texts. These materials can also be included in corpora. The collected original works of Chinese classics, and their translations and various reference materials can be divided into four major modules: literary classics, philosophical classics, scientific classics, and ethnic minority classics, making it convenient for teachers and students to select appropriate material and distinguish and mark their difficulty levels of such material in different modules. For example, the collection of short stories from the Ming and Qing dynasties “San Yan Liang Pai” (Three Words and Two Beats) in the literary classics module can be marked as low-difficulty material, while *Chu Ci (The Songs of Chu)* and *Li Sao* can be marked as high-difficulty material. Similarly, traditional Chinese medicine classics such as *Huangdi Neijing (Yellow Emperor’s Cannon of Internal Medicine)* and *Jin Gui Yao Lue (Essentials of the Golden Cabinet)* in the scientific classics module can be marked as high-difficulty material. The marks facilitate teachers to select materials of different difficulties for students at different levels. Students can extract learning materials based on the types and difficulty levels of classic, and their own interest. This teaching corpus should be open, dynamically adjustable, and expandable. Teachers and students can continuously supplement and enrich new materials, and also comment on and annotate existing materials (for example, providing unique explanations for philosophical terms such as “Dao”), “Tian”, “Li” and “Qi”, making the corpus more complete and beneficial for teaching. This design gives teachers full control and allows for continuous in-depth development of the corpora. This corpus-based platform for the English translation of Chinese classics integrates three major functions: translation teaching, practical training, and academic research, and can serve as an important auxiliary tool for the teaching of English translations of Chinese classics.

## 4.2 Application of a Corpus-based Translation Teaching Platform

Once the teaching platform based on Chinese-English bilingual parallel corpus is built, it can be applied to the whole teaching process, which will greatly promote the informatization and technicalization of teaching of English translation of Chinese classics. Teachers can use the corpus to publish tasks before class, provide numerous translation examples during classroom explanation, and assign and correct homework after class. Teachers can monitor and guide students’ learning process in real time, correct their mistakes timely, and help them improve their translation level.

### 4.2.1 For Pre-class Preparation

A corpus can serve as a tool for teachers to assign pre-class preparation tasks. Based on the teaching objectives and students’ actual proficiency levels, teachers can select typical sentence examples and text fragments from a corpus of English translation of Chinese classics that cover common difficulties and key points in the course teaching, using these as pre-class preparation tasks. By completing these tasks, students can gain in advance an understanding of the contents of the classics they will learn. This helps students form initial perceptions and lays the foundation for deeper learning in the classroom. For instance, before lecturing on the translation of Chinese philosophical classics, teachers can extract some terms, and famous quotes (such as “Dao ke dao, fei chang dao; ming ke ming, fei chang ming” (The way that can be told is not the eternal Way; the name that can be named is not the eternal Name), “Zhi da guo ruo peng xiao xian” (Governing a large country is like cooking a small fish), “Shang shan ruo shui, shui shan li wan wu er bu zheng” (The highest good is like water. Water benefits all things without trying to compete with them), or paragraphs from a bilingual corpus of *Dao De Jing*, and ask students to utilize the annotations in the corpus to better understand their meanings. Students can then form their own understandings and insights based on different annotations and finally provide their own unique translations.

### 4.2.2 For In-class Teaching

Corpora facilitates teachers to present a large number of translation examples and materials. When explaining the content of each unit, teachers can use corpora to display, explain, and analyze typical translation cases, providing students with a rich index of translations. Students can understand the meaning of terms and chapters in the classics through these cases and indexes, and discuss, induce, and summarize translation skills by observing these diverse translation materials. Since the corpus includes different English translations of the same classical text, students can simultaneously retrieve several different versions for comparison and adjust or revise their own translations based on these materials. For example, students can simultaneously retrieve translations of the *Lunyu* by James Legge, Gu Hongming, Lin Wusun, Xu Yuanchong, and other translators from ancient and modern times, as well as from China and abroad. Paper textbooks have a significant capacity limit and cannot provide such a rich array of translation examples. Students improve their translation skills by

appreciating diverse translations. By comparing the translation styles of different translators and reflecting on the deep reasons for the formation of these styles, students develop critical and divergent thinking. In terms of information technology, students can understand and master professional skills such as the preparation and alignment of corpora, the compilation of terminology databases, etc., through repeated use of the Chinese-English parallel corpus for translation of Chinese classics. In summary, the corpus teaching platform effectively helps students preview and understand the difficulties and key points in the teaching by providing a wealth of original texts and translated materials from the classics, and functions in vocabulary frequency statistics and collocation analysis, etc., thereby improving students' translation abilities.

#### **4.2.3 For After-class Consolidation**

The corpus-based translation teaching platform can be used as a platform for teachers to correct homework after class. Through this platform, teachers can assign homework after class, and refer to the relevant information such as annotations and translations of Chinese classics inputted in advance into the corpus, so as to make objective and accurate evaluation of the translation quality of students more quickly. In addition to correcting students' homework by themselves, teachers can also make use of the interactive functions of the platform, such as real-time translation comparison, translation strategy discussion area, etc., to guide students to deeply explore the cultural connotations and translation strategies contained in classics, and organize students to check and revise their respective translations, so as to promote teacher-student interaction and student-student communication, and improve class participation and learning efficiency. In addition, the teaching platform can also be used as a translation training platform for one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many synchronous and asynchronous interaction between humans and computers, creating an environment for autonomous learning and individualized learning for students, thus stimulating their initiative and creativity in autonomous learning. The corpus contains some translations of Chinese and foreign translators in different periods, some of which have high accuracy and authority, and can provide students with a very valuable standard reference, turning learners' attention to the typical (or atypical) treatment of typical problems found by mature translators or expert translators (McEnery & Oakes, 1996: 211) to ensure the effect of self-directed learning. It can be seen that the teaching platform based on bilingual parallel corpus can be used as a reference system for teachers' homework correction and students' autonomous learning.

#### **4.2.4 For Evaluation of the Students**

The teaching platform for translation of Chinese classics based on Chinese-English parallel corpora plays a significant role in assisting teachers in conducting process-oriented assessment and evaluation of students. In process-oriented assessment, formative evaluation is a crucial component. It emphasizes continuous and dynamic assessment of students' learning processes to promptly understand their learning status, identify issues, and make adjustments. The corpus teaching platform can retain all assignments completed by students during their learning period, along with teachers' corrections, students' participation and contribution quality in group discussions, and their autonomous learning activities. This not only facilitates teachers to adjust teaching strategies and methods at any time based on students' translation progress and assignment completion, providing more personalized guidance and assistance, but also serves as a strong basis for teachers to conduct comprehensive, objective, and effective evaluations of students' learning processes. These evaluations include assessments of translation abilities, proofreading skills, autonomous learning abilities, time management skills, and proficiency in using translation tools such as corpora. In summary, the corpus-based teaching platform for the translation of Chinese classics can support formative evaluation and promote reflection on translation practice.

## **5. Conclusions**

Since most Chinese classics are written in ancient Chinese, which are rich in connotation and difficult to understand, they are not only difficult in translation practice but also difficult in teaching. The corpus-based translation teaching platform includes abundant linguistic materials such as the original texts, multiple versions of translations, and annotated texts, which provides valuable reference materials for teachers and students to understand and translate classics, and thus can solve the special needs of English translation teaching of classics. It has an incomparable advantage over printed textbooks and reference books in terms of the richness and dynamic adjustment of linguistic materials. The platform can be applied to the whole teaching process. Before class, the platform can be used to arrange pre-class tasks and lay a solid foundation for classroom learning. In the course, the platform can provide abundant translation examples and references of translation quality, effectively assist the English teaching of classical books, and help students understand the difficulties and key points in classical books. After class, the platform can realize timely teaching feedback and adjustment through the function of homework submission and online correction. At the same time, it can create an autonomous learning environment for students, provide targeted exercises and expansion resources, and strengthen the learning effect. In conclusion, corpus-

based teaching platform for English translation of Chinese classics can not only enrich teaching methods, significantly improve teaching quality and learning effectiveness, but also support formative evaluation and promote reflection on translation practice, providing strong support for training talents for translating Chinese classics into English.

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