

COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING REFORM DRIVEN BY THE TRANSLATION COMPETITION OF UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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Abstract: This study implemented a College English teaching model for non-English majors, driven by the translation competition of “Understanding Contemporary China” and theoretically framed by the Production-Oriented Approach (POA). A 12-week teaching experiment involving two non-English major classes was conducted, employing translation tests, competition performance analysis, classroom observation, and a questionnaire to systematically assess the impact of the model on students’ translation competence, thematic cognition, and international communication awareness. Findings indicates that the model significantly enhances students’ accuracy in translating core Chinese terminology, deepens their thematic understanding, and strengthens their intercultural communication awareness, thereby establishing an effective cycle of promoting learning through competition and application through learning. The research offers practical insights for integrating competitions into College English instruction and suggests future directions in pedagogical synergy, technology integration, and cross-institutional collaboration.

Keywords: Translation competition; POA; English teaching reform; Intercultural awareness; Understanding Contemporary China

1 INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of telling China’s story well being elevated to a national strategy for international communication, foreign language education has been entrusted with the new mission of shaping the national image and contending for international discourse power [1,2]. As one of the most widely offered courses in universities, College English should play a central role in enhancing the Chinese narrative competence of the students. However, the current teaching system remains predominantly focused on linguistic skill training, characterized by fragmented content and a lack of context. This results in students who, despite possessing language proficiency, struggle to effectively explain China’s path and wisdom in English, creating a competency gap of knowing the language but not the narrative [3,4]. Consequently, a misalignment exists between College English education and the demands of national strategic needs.

The ongoing promotion of the “Understanding Contemporary China” textbook series and the translation competition of the FLTRP·Guocai Cup (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press·Guocai Cup) provides a practical opportunity to address this dilemma. The competition, with its focus on core discourses such as China’s path, governance, and logic, cultivates a sense of national identity and belonging and a global perspective. By providing official reference translations, it integrates authentic external communication tasks into the classroom. Translation theory posits that translation is not merely linguistic transfer but a deeper process of intercultural meaning negotiation and discursive practice [5,6]. This provides a theoretical foundation for using translation competitions to boost narrative competence. Empirical research further indicates that such competitions help enhance learning motivation, intercultural sensitivity, and text production quality [7,8]. Current research primarily targets graduate students or translation majors, leaving a relative dearth of systematic studies on integrating translation competitions into College English teaching for non-English majors.

In response to this challenge, the present study is grounded in the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) proposed by Wen [9,10]. POA provides a pedagogical framework for integrating competitions into the curriculum through a process driven by authentic tasks, supported by selective input and skill scaffolding, and evaluated via multi-faceted feedback, thus forming an integrated learning-using cycle. By embedding competition tasks within this framework, a teaching chain that encompasses translating national discourse, adapting it for international audiences, and facilitating multimodal communication can be established while preserving the generalist nature of the College English course. This enables the construction of a new teaching model that aligns with national communication strategies. Accordingly, the study attempts to construct and implement a competition-driven College English teaching model for non-English majors. Through a semester-long teaching experiment, it systematically investigates the impact of the model on students’ translation competence, thematic cognition, and international communication awareness. The findings aim to provide pedagogical references and practical pathways for College English to serve the national strategy for international communication, particularly in contexts of relatively advantaged learner profiles.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research on telling China's story well has progressed along three dimensions: teaching, translation, and communication. In the teaching dimension, exploration has centered on textbook reconstruction and the integration of curriculum-based ideological and political education. Xiao [11] and Tian & Mo [12] focus on College English textbooks, proposing the principle of systematic embedding of narrative elements, thereby providing a content vehicle for telling China's story well. Chan [13] and Yue & Zhuang [14], from the perspective of curriculum-based ideological and political education, emphasize incorporating intercultural narrative competence into the evaluation system, aiming to achieve an intrinsic integration of value guidance and competency cultivation.

In the translation dimension, Zheng [15] validates the effectiveness of progressive training across terminology, discourse, and culture for non-native language majors. Bao & Tao [16] introduce external publicity translation projects into translation courses for English majors in science and engineering universities, emphasizing the use of authentic or simulated translation scenarios as teaching materials. Their research finds that such practices significantly enhance students' intercultural awareness and translation practice ability, effectively aligning with national strategic needs for external communication and strengthening the integration of translation teaching with curriculum-based ideological and political education. Zhao [17], based on large language model analysis, points out defects such as keyword omission and fragmented context in the Chinese cultural narratives within CET-4 and CET-6 translation tests. These mainly manifest as insufficient representation of revolutionary culture, absence of modern political discourse, and weak individual narratives, affecting the complete expression and communication effectiveness of China's stories.

In the communication dimension, Cai [18] further emphasizes that the key to international communication competence is not general language proficiency, but discursive competence, namely the ability to adjust expression according to disciplinary norms and audience context. This view is corroborated at the curricular level: Wu [19], through a content analysis of 58 English major training programs, points out that current programs prioritize educational functions over communicative ones, with mass communication courses occupying an extremely low proportion. This results in students lacking both practical ability in international communication and awareness of discourse conversion. Translation plays a crucial role in this process, often intertwined with power and ideology [20]. This necessitates that translation teaching transcend mere skill training and guide students to recognize and actively construct discourse conducive to the national image [21]. In recent years, the integration of translation teaching and curriculum-based ideological and political education has gradually become a research focus, with systematic implementation emerging at the interdisciplinary level. Based on an empirical study of a Master's program in Translation and International Communication, Ren and Zhao [22] construct an integrated training model. By synthesizing dual-disciplinary content, authentic tasks, and multi-dimensional evaluation, the model provides a complete practical pathway for developing students' interdisciplinary narrative competence and audience awareness, thereby addressing the complex demands of telling China's stories well.

Building on the need for such integrated approaches, this study recognizes that while existing research offers valuable insights within single dimensions, the dynamic nexus among teaching, competition, and communication merits further empirical exploration. To contribute to this broader understanding, the present research is grounded in the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) proposed by Wen. It seeks to investigate how translation competitions can be productively woven into the fabric of College English instruction for non-English majors, thereby expanding the repertoire of pedagogical strategies available for cultivating international communication competence.

3 CONSTRUCTION OF A TRANSLATION COMPETITION-DRIVEN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING MODEL

3.1 Research Design and Methods

This study selected two non-English major classes (one from the School of Public Management and one from the School of Materials and Energy, totaling approximately 100 students) from a Double First-Class university. These classes represented both humanities or social sciences and science or engineering backgrounds, offering certain disciplinary representativeness. A 12-week teaching practice integrating reading, writing, and translation was implemented (within a 16-week semester, with 4 weeks dedicated to the audio-visual and speaking course).

Data for assessing the model's effectiveness were collected primarily through pre-and post-translation tests, classroom observation, and a questionnaire. Additionally, an analysis of competition performance was conducted. The competition performance analysis, focused on students' translations in mock and preliminary rounds, served primarily as a source of formative feedback to inform real-time instructional adjustments and to provide qualitative insights into the development of students' discourse conversion strategies. Its findings are thus integrated into the qualitative discussion of teaching optimization, whereas the quantitative assessment of the model's effectiveness relies principally on the pre-post translation tests and the questionnaire survey.

The translation tests focused on key terms reflecting contemporary Chinese development concepts, such as innovation-driven development, resilience of industrial and supply chains, and strengthening the country through science and technology, as well as traditional cultural concepts, including harmonizing all nations, following the way of nature, an open mind as vast as a valley, and cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world, and so on.

Competition performance analysis examined students' translations of themed passages in mock competitions and the university-level preliminary round, for example, on topics such as common values of humanity, building a world-class,

market-oriented, law-based, and internationalized business environment, as well as translation tasks designed around key policy terms like carbon peaking and carbon neutrality and their integration into broader narratives of ecological civilization.

Classroom observation recorded students' ability to use textbook knowledge to explain Chinese-specific practices during group tasks. The questionnaire collected student feedback on thematic cognition and their evaluation of the teaching model.

The teaching reform took the translation competition of FLTRP·Guocai Cup as its core driver, deeply integrating with four reading and writing unit themes from the semester: Unit 1 (Logic and Rational Discourse Construction), Unit 2 (Cultural Identity and Aesthetic Discourse Power), Unit 5 (Labor Narrative and Social Development Perspective), and Unit 6 (Global Issues and the Chinese Approach). This constructed a teaching process in the sequence of driving, facilitating, evaluating, and transforming, focused on cultivating translation competence for Chinese-specific content and intercultural communication ability.

The choice of the translation competition as the core teaching driver was based on several considerations. First, the competition system covers three levels: university preliminary, provincial semi-final, and national final, with clearly graded question types and difficulty, facilitating a step-by-step teaching approach from the basics. The university-level preliminary round focuses on key term translation and short non-literary translation, aligning closely with College English course content and serving as a suitable starting platform for non-English majors. Second, the competition content closely follows the theme of Understanding Contemporary China, involving multi-dimensional issues such as political discourse, traditional culture, and social development, which highly aligns with the modular teaching content designed for this study. Third, the competition provides official reference translations and grading criteria, offering clear benchmarks for teaching evaluation and student self-study, contributing to a virtuous cycle of promoting learning through competition and improving through evaluation. Therefore, using this competition as a lever can effectively connect classroom learning, competency training, and authentic communication tasks, assisting students in transitioning from the role of language learner to cultural communicator.

This reform, based on POA, constructed a teaching model driven by competition tasks, supported by modular content, safeguarded by multi-dimensional evaluation, and extended through outcome transformation, forming a four-stage teaching cycle consisting of driving, facilitating, evaluating, and transforming (See Figure 1). This model aims to achieve the coordinated development of language ability, thematic cognition, and intercultural communication literacy through the drive of authentic competition tasks. Specifically: it takes the FLTRP·Guocai Cup translation competition as the starting drive; systematically facilitates learning through three modules (political discourse, traditional culture, and practical cases); implements evaluation via a multi-faceted mechanism consisting of peer review, teacher feedback, and competition judging; and finally transforms learning outcomes into a translation resource bank, learning platform dissemination, and thematic sharing sessions, completing the transformation and feeding back into teaching, thereby achieving the integrated teaching objective of learning, competing, and applying.

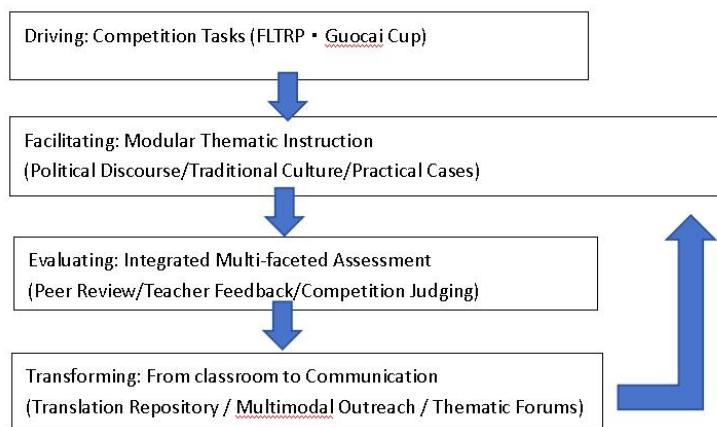


Figure 1 Framework of the College English Teaching Model Driven by the Translation Competition

3.2 The Driving Stage: Anchoring Learning Objectives with Authentic Competition Tasks

This stage, following the POA principle of production-driven, takes the translation competition task of FLTRP·Guocai Cup as the starting point. By designing challenging, authentic production tasks, it aims to stimulate student motivation and clarify learning goals. Unit teaching content is deeply integrated with competition themes, forming a cyclical driving mechanism of production task guidance coupled with input learning support.

Unit 1 (Logic and Rational Discourse Construction): Using the task of explaining the concept of Lingnan architectural preservation and revitalization as the production output, students were guided to utilize logical fallacy identification tools from the text "Love and Logic: The Story of a Fallacy". Emphasis was placed on training students to avoid the trap of Hasty Generalization, not simplistically equating cultural heritage protection with closed-off preservation. Instead, through analyzing specific practices, such as how the Guangdong Museum uses digital technology to restore Chen Clan Academy brick carvings in exhibitions and dynamically present the streetscape ecology of Cantonese

vernacular Qilou buildings, students systematically explained how preservation and innovation complement each other. This aimed to construct a cultural narrative with both historical authenticity and contemporary explanatory power, responding to the international community's one-sided perception of Chinese cultural heritage as ossified or stagnant.

Unit 2 (Cultural Identity and Aesthetic Discourse Power): Based on the text "The Misleading Perception of Beauty" and its discussion on the social construction of aesthetics, the production task centered on how to explain core concepts of Chinese aesthetics to an international audience. This guided students to reflect on and construct Chinese aesthetic discourse. How to explain in English concepts like the beauty of harmony and equilibrium (zhonghe zhi mei) or vividness of spirit and rhythm (qiyun shengdong), or contemporary ideas of diverse aesthetics and cultural confidence? How to respond to stereotypical international presentations of Eastern aesthetics? When translating terms like landscape artistic conception (shanshui yijing) or guochao (national trend), students were encouraged not merely to seek literal equivalence but to supplement cultural contextual explanations, making them understandable and culturally profound narratives.

Unit 5 (Labor Narrative and Social Development Perspective): Using the task of comparing Chinese and Western labor narratives to explain Chinese labor values as the production orientation and aided by the text "The Weight Men Carry" and its depiction of labor, gender, and social roles, translation tasks related to Chinese labor values and gender equality practices were introduced. Students were guided to compare differences in Chinese and Western labor narratives. When translating terms like craftsman spirit (gongjiang jingshen) and model worker spirit (laomo jingshen), training emphasized linking them to China's craft traditions, industrialization process, vocational education, and national honor systems. When narrating progress in gender equality, students were encouraged to cite achievements of women in fields like scientific research, aerospace, and rural revitalization to construct a developing, concrete narrative of Chinese gender equality.

Unit 6 (Global Issues and the Chinese Approach): Using explaining the concept and practice of China's ecological civilization construction as the production task, and starting from the text "The Coming Energy Crisis" and its discussion on global energy dilemmas, links were made to competition topics on China's ecological civilization construction and contribution to global climate governance. Students were guided to consider: How to explain the connotation and practices (such as photovoltaic poverty alleviation, river and lake chief system, and carbon market) of lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets to an international audience? When translating dual carbon goals (shuangtan mubiao), how to clearly convey its strategic positioning, phased planning, and sectoral pathways? This required students to start from universal energy challenges and engage in contextualized interpretation and effectiveness demonstration of Chinese policies.

Through these integrations, translation competition tasks became persistent inquiry themes running through text learning, driving students to learn with clear application goals: to acquire linguistic tools and intercultural perspectives usable for analyzing, explaining, and defending Chinese practices. This enhanced learning motivation and a sense of real-world mission, making language learning directly serve the national strategic and personal development goals of enhancing international communication efficacy and promoting understanding.

3.3 The Facilitating Stage: Building Translation Competence through a Modular and Graded Training Chain

To effectively empower students to achieve the production targets set in the driving stage, this study, guided by the POA facilitating concept, systematically integrated and provided input for language, knowledge, and skills. It also designed a three-level progressive training chain consisting of micro-training, project task, and mock competition to offer structured support from comprehension to production.

(1) Modular Content Integration and Language-Knowledge-Skill Input

The Logic and Discourse Construction Module (Unit 1): Combined with the text "Love and Logic: The Story of a Fallacy", systematic input was provided on logical fallacy identification and analysis frameworks, supplemented by bilingual materials containing data and cases (such as excerpts from China Cultural Heritage Protection Reports). This helped students master how to use logical tools in translation to enhance argument persuasiveness and accuracy. The Cultural Identity and Aesthetic Interpretation Module (Unit 2): Centered on the text "The Misleading Perception of Beauty" and supplementary texts interpreting Chinese aesthetics, students were guided to deeply understand the philosophical connotations behind cultural terminology. Intercultural interpretation strategies were provided to enhance students' cultural narrative ability in translation. The Social Issues and Global Responsibility Module (Units 5 & 6): Based on the text "The Weight Men Carry", "The Coming Energy Crisis", and related policy texts, systematic input was provided on materials such as comparisons of Chinese and foreign labor perspectives and examples of ecological civilization construction. Students were trained to integrate expression across three levels: fact, policy, and value, strengthening their information organization and intercultural adaptation abilities in translation.

(2) Design and Implementation of a Three-Stage Progressive Training Chain

Classroom Micro-training: Short, timed translation exercises focused on key words and phrases from each module (such as high-quality development and cultural confidence) were conducted to reinforce linguistic accuracy and immediate response ability. Unit Project Task: After each module, students completed a comprehensive production task, such as writing an external publicity draft for Lingnan cultural heritage or a commentary on China's ecological civilization practices, accompanied by a translation strategy explanation, to promote knowledge internalization and integrated application. Mock Competition: At the end of the semester, a mock written translation or short video subtitle translation competition, aligned with the question types of the FLTRP·Guocai Cup, was held. This helped students transition

smoothly from classroom learning to competition practice, testing and enhancing their comprehensive application ability.

3.4 The Evaluating Stage: Implementing a Dual-Track, Multi-Faceted Feedback Mechanism with a Process-Result Orientation

This model adopted a dual-track evaluation system combining classroom formative assessment and competition summative assessment to comprehensively examine and promote students' translation competence development. Classroom formative assessment ran throughout the teaching process, encompassing structured peer review, teachers' immediate targeted feedback on micro-training outputs, and annotated feedback on project assignments. The evaluation focus extended beyond linguistic accuracy to include logical coherence, thematic interpretation depth, and cultural appropriateness. Competition summative assessment used the competition grading criteria as an external reference, introducing core evaluation dimensions of thematic accuracy, linguistic appropriateness, and communication effectiveness. Students were encouraged to actively optimize their translations using the intercultural perspectives learned from the texts, aiming to enhance their acceptability and communication effect among international audiences.

3.5 The Transforming Stage: Promoting the Value Extension of Learning Outcomes towards Socialized Communication

To achieve the ultimate goal of "learning-using integration," this model systematically planned multi-dimensional pathways for transforming learning outcomes, promoting the leap of translation competence from classroom exercises to authentic communication practice. Building a Teaching-Derived Resource corpus: Outstanding student translations of text themes, competition translations, and explanatory texts were systematically archived to construct a bilingual teaching case library or corpus on the theme of general texts followed by contemporary China, uploaded to the teaching platform to feed into subsequent teaching. Organizing Multi-Level Outcome Showcases: Students' translations integrating text knowledge and competition themes were publicly displayed through online and offline platforms such as class interaction groups, English corners, and the teaching platform, fostering a positive application atmosphere. Expanding Real Communication Practice Fields: Under teacher guidance, students were encouraged to adapt textual works into short videos or graphic posts suitable for social media release, conducting safe, regulated "micro-communication" attempts. This allowed them to test and optimize their translation outputs in near-authentic international communication scenarios, ultimately completing the role experience from "classroom learner" to "cultural communicator."

4 PRACTICAL EFFECTIVENESS, CHALLENGES, AND REFLECTION

Through a 12-week teaching practice and systematic evaluation, this model demonstrated significant effectiveness in College English teaching for non-English majors, while also revealing several challenges for improvement.

4.1 Dual Enhancement of Translation Competence and Thematic Cognition

Research data indicates that students exhibited a significant shift in their translation of China-specific content, moving from a focus on linguistic form to an emphasis on meaning construction and intercultural adaptation. Results from translation tests showed that the accuracy rate for translating core terminology reflecting contemporary Chinese development concepts increased from a baseline of approximately 46% to 83%. More importantly, over 65% of students proactively adopted an intercultural compensation strategy of "paraphrasing followed by exemplification" when translating culturally rich Chinese philosophical expressions, demonstrating initial awareness of contextual supplementation and meaning negotiation. The thematic cognition survey further confirmed: through project-based learning, over 90% of students developed a more systematic and structured framework for understanding the China-specific discourse system, laying the groundwork for their role transition from "language learners" to "cultural communicators."

4.2 Initial Formation of Intercultural Communication Awareness

Students' audience awareness and intercultural adaptation ability significantly increased. The proportion of students who actively considered international readers' needs in their translations rose from about 25% to 72%. Approximately 65% of teams autonomously added visual elements in their project presentations to enhance communication effectiveness. Student reflections indicated that their focus had expanded from linguistic correctness to communication effectiveness and intercultural acceptability, with their role perception shifting from "information receiver" towards "cultural communicator."

4.3 Synergistic Effect of Teaching and Competition

This model constructed a virtuous cycle of classroom learning, competition practice, and teaching optimization. The experimental classes showed significantly increased enthusiasm for competition participation, with project works

performing well in both thematic accuracy and communication clarity. Teachers dynamically adjusted teaching emphases based on competition feedback, making guidance more targeted. The classroom ecology improved synchronously, with student active participation increasing by approximately 40%, and over 85% of students agreeing that competition-based learning was “more goal-oriented and rewarding.” The translation competition played a dual role as catalyst and calibrator in this process, effectively activating learning motivation and optimizing teaching content. This study’s practice preliminarily verifies the feasibility and promotional value of the competition-driven, learning-using integrated teaching pathway in College English courses for non-English majors.

Notwithstanding the model’s positive outcomes, this study reveals several limitations in practice and design that warrant further attention. First, the current evaluation system still prioritizes linguistic form over the cultivation of discourse conversion and intercultural communication competence. Future assessment frameworks should integrate the translation of China specific themes and project or competition based performance as core components to establish a more holistic competency oriented system. Second, the communicative effectiveness and feedback mechanisms for student translations remain underdeveloped, lacking validation in authentic international contexts. Lightweight overseas feedback channels and guided microcommunication initiatives could provide students with structured cross cultural engagement. Third, the scope of the study is inherently limited by the size of the sample. As a preliminary exploration involving only two classes, the findings and applicability of the model require further verification through larger-scale, more diverse implementations to ensure broader generalizability.

5 CONCLUSION

This study took the translation competition “FLTRP·Guocai Cup: Understanding Contemporary China” as its core driver and POA as its theoretical framework to construct and implement a College English teaching model for non-English majors. Through a teaching chain involving thematic module reconstruction, competition task embedding, and outcome transformation and dissemination, it effectively addressed the dual dilemmas of insufficient Chinese thematic content and inadequate international expression in traditional instruction. Practice demonstrates that this model significantly enhances students’ applied ability, cognitive level, and initial communication awareness in using English to explain Chinese issues, and has preliminarily achieved a positive interaction of “promoting learning through competition and promoting application through learning.”

To further advance the pedagogical integration explored in this study, several directions for future research and practice are proposed. First, deepen the synergy among teaching, competition, and communication by designing more coherent project tasks to enhance students’ comprehensive narrative ability. Second, rationally utilize technological tools, such as introducing AI-assisted translation and comparative training, to improve efficiency and quality in handling authentic texts. Third, expand cross-campus cooperation by establishing connections with relevant courses at domestic and foreign universities, building platforms for student work exchange and joint practice, and jointly exploring feasible pathways for cultivating a new generation of young foreign language talents who “cherish their homeland and communicate with the world.”

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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