Teaching Reform Strategies of University Interpretation Courses in the Post-Epidemic Era

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Abstract: In the post-epidemic era, the profits of some enterprises have dropped sharply, for which prefer to choose employees with practical and productive skills in order to reduce their training expenses. This situation brings new challenges to university language education, especially the teaching of English-Chinese interpretation courses. At present, there are several problems in the English-Chinese interpretation courses, such as students’ weak listening and speaking skills, teachers outdated teaching methods and separation of learning and use of teaching materials, which are not conducive to the development of students’ English practice and output ability. This paper introduces the “Production-oriented approach” theory, which emphasizes language output, into the university English-Chinese interpretation teaching, carries out teaching reform in terms of teaching objectives, teaching design and teaching evaluation, and focuses on the practice of three links: driving, facilitating and evaluating. The results of the comparison study between the experimental class and the regular class show that the production-oriented approach has obvious advantages in promoting students’ output in English. Applying the production-oriented approach in the English-Chinese interpretation course can stimulate students’ interest in learning, enhance their self-confidence in English-Chinese conversion, improve their English application ability and employment competitiveness, and increase their employment rate. In this regard, teachers should actively adopt the teaching concept of Production-oriented approach, aim at cultivating students’ language output ability in classroom teaching, increase the practical aspects of students’ language output as much as possible, combine the input learning of language knowledge and output application, promote both, guide students to use in learning, use in learning, and cultivate application-oriented talents with language output and practical ability.

Keywords: English-Chinese Interpretation Education, Production-Oriented Approach, Teaching Reformation

1. Introduction

Influenced by the outbreak of the new coronal epidemic, the global economy has declined, and most enterprises’ income has declined sharply, which has led to their inability to invest a large amount of budget in employee training. Therefore, enterprises tend to hire employees with strong practical ability and language production ability when recruiting. According to statistics, companies at the 2023 Spring Campus Job Fair pay more attention to the self-learning ability, professional level and logical thinking ability of job seekers. [1] The traditional teaching mode of the current college interpretation course makes it difficult for students to get effective training of their interpretation skills and to achieve the teaching objectives effectively.

In this case, it has become an urgent issue to reform language courses to respond to companies’ hiring standards that focus on language practice, ensure teaching quality, and improve students’ employment rate. This paper takes the English-Chinese interpretation course as the research object, and analyzes the feasibility of production-oriented approach (POA) to improve students’ language practice ability and employment competitiveness from the existing problems of course teaching. POA is a foreign language teaching theory with Chinese characteristics, advocating the principles of “learning center”, “learning-use integration” and “whole-person education”, aiming at effectively solving the problem of “separation of learning and use” in foreign language teaching, trying to achieve the best teaching effect and realize “learning to use” and “learning to achieve”, which is exactly in line with the goal of educating people in universities. [2] By designing the teaching objectives,
completing the teaching process, and comparing the teaching results, the paper discusses the countermeasures of applying the POA to teaching practice, and provides reference ideas for the teaching reform of English-Chinese interpretation courses in universities in the post-epidemic era.

2. Problems in Teaching English-Chinese Interpretation Courses

The English-Chinese interpretation course is a core course in language teaching in general higher education, aiming to cultivate students’ bilingual conversion ability and English application ability, as well as to improve their intercultural communication awareness, so as to meet the needs of students’ professional study and work employment. However, there are many problems in the undergraduate English-Chinese interpretation course at the present stage.

Firstly, Students’ English speaking and listening skills are weak, and they cannot adapt to the difficult interpretation training. Most universities only offer listening and speaking classes in freshman and sophomore years, with only 2 class hours per week. The lack of class hours causes students’ listening and speaking skills to be very weak compared with their reading and writing skills, so they cannot understand, remember and translate in English-Chinese interpretation classes. [3] Moreover, some students lack the motivation to practice English-Chinese interpreting skills, have poor independent learning ability, and even have aversion to learning. Some students lose their confidence and interest in interpreting when they always make mistakes in difficult interpreting training, and turn to give up on themselves, so their classroom performance is very passive. [4]

Secondly, teachers’ teaching methods and evaluation standards are outdated and ignore students’ learning subjectivity. Due to the time limitation of class and classroom, most teachers still use the traditional teaching methods like lecture method and questioning method, in order to fulfill the requirements of teaching tasks. The teacher usually processes are same in every class: lead-in, introduce the interpretation skills, explain the key points, issues the interpretation task, asks the students to translate in a limited time, and reviews the students’ answers to review the interpretation skills learnt before. [5] This traditional “fill-in” teaching method lacks students’ language output, fails to provide students with sufficient opportunities to practice interpreting or to motivate students to participate in class, kills students’ interest and enthusiasm in learning English-Chinese interpreting, and prevents students from truly mastering the ability of language conversion. Teachers mostly evaluate students’ results of interpretation learning by regular tests, final exams or CATTI grades, which lack evaluation of students’ language output ability. The problem-oriented method and the case study method are not used much in interpretation teaching, and the evaluation methods are monotonous, which cannot fully reflect the students’ learning subjectivity.

Third, the teaching resources are outdated, and the curriculum is out of touch with society. The teaching materials for interpretation class have long preparation, trial and publication cycles, and generally lack oral expression contents that meet practical applications. The practical contents in class are mostly simultaneous interpretation of press and news conferences, but the scenes students face in the workplace are mostly exhibition interpreting and easy consecutive interpreting. It is the consensus of undergraduate interpretation teaching to focus on skills teaching, but there are some outstanding problems in traditional classroom teaching, such as limited time for students’ skills training due to limited class time and teachers’ inability to conduct individual evaluation. [6] Moreover, the reference answer provided by the teaching materials are close to the translations rather than interpretation, for missing the spoken language features, which cannot give students positive guidance. [7]

3. Strategies for the Application of Production-Oriented Approach in University Interpretation Courses

The study focuses on a university English-Chinese interpreting course, based on an “Production-Oriented Approach” for teaching reform, in terms of teaching objectives, teaching design, and teaching evaluation. Taking “Challenging Interpreting: A Coursebook of Interpreting Skill Unit 5 Note-taking” as an example, the study designs teaching programs by combining students’ professional characteristics and POA.

3.1. Introduction of Production-Oriented Approach

Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is a new educational concept proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang of Beijing Foreign Studies University, combining the local characteristics of English teaching in China. The original theory was based on American language educator Krashen's Input hypothesis and Canadian linguist Swain's Output Hypothesis. [8] Since then, Professor Wen and her team have continued to explore, improve and refine the theoretical framework of the Production-oriented approach. This philosophy believes that classroom teaching should be based on the ultimate goal of “learning to happen” and proposes the “student-centered theory”, which requires teachers to aim at “students learning to know” in their teaching activities. In the field of English language teaching, the research on POA is mainly focused on two aspects: theoretical exploration and practical application. There are significant differences between the authors of these two areas. The authors of the theoretical exploration category are mainly members of Wen Qiufang’s team, while the articles on teaching practice mainly focus on the application and validation of the POA. In the area of output skills, “writing” is the main focus, while “speaking” and “translation” are less studied. [9]

The POA-based teaching and learning activities include the following three links: driving, facilitating and evaluating,
which are interlinked and in a continuous cycle. [10] In the process of task execution, students will consciously analyze their own deficiencies in language expression and vocabulary application according to the English teaching content, which will generate internal motivation for learning and drive students to learn actively; the facilitation link involves input and output, in which teachers provide input materials according to the teaching content and guide students to process the materials in order to obtain the information needed to complete the task. The assessment session involves input and output, in which the teacher provides input materials and guides students to process the materials in order to obtain the vocabulary, language expressions, grammatical structures and other information needed to complete the task, thus contributing to the completion of the task; the assessment session is the teacher's immediate evaluation of students’ task completion and remedial teaching based on the evaluation results. [11]

3.2. Teaching Practice Based on Production-Oriented Approach

The experimental classroom with the Production-oriented approach applied, compared with the traditional teaching method in which the teacher explains words, grammar and analyzes the structure and writing features of the text, the atmosphere of the formerly dull classroom becomes active, and the majority of students actively participate in the communicative scenes set in the driving session, and their interest and enthusiasm in learning English are greatly increased; while the output of the relevant vocabulary and syntax previously learned, it also promotes In addition, the classroom increased students’ opportunities for practice, which improved their oral expression ability and improved their ability to use English as they were previously afraid to speak. The driving and facilitating sessions in groups also enhance students' sense of group cooperation and collaboration. The evaluation of teacher-student collaborative assessment in POA includes before, during and after the class. [12] The evaluation part of interpretation teaching, translation commentary, is mainly done in class: teachers also involve students in this part, and translation commentary is also done through teacher-student cooperation to a certain extent. The main difference between the teacher-student evaluation and the evaluation of interpretation teaching lies in the pre- and post-lessons. It is these pre- and post-lesson activities that solve the problems of teaching interpretation in large classes as described in the previous section.

The author conducted a survey in the form of a questionnaire with 42 students in the class on the application of the new teaching method of Production-oriented approach, and 40 valid questionnaires were returned. The results of the questionnaire survey showed that 35 students gave positive feedback, saying that they liked the new teaching method very much, that the English class was very different from the previous one, and that the teacher no longer sang a monologue and filled the classroom. Only five students, because of their weak English foundation, although they also participated in the driving session, could not fully express themselves in English, could not complete the task, and thus either had no opinion or preferred the passive way of learning by listening to the lecture.

3.2.1. Teaching Objectives

The teaching objectives based on the POA are divided into 3 objectives: language objectives, communicative objectives and unit output objectives. [13] The POA teaching objectives play an overarching role in the whole teaching process. The language objectives of this unit include students can understand the skills of taking interpretation notes, master the principles of layout of note-taking and symbols creating. The communicative objectives include students can conduct source language retelling and consecutive interpretation with the help of notes, recognizing notes as an auxiliary tool in the interpretation process, and balancing the relationship between memorizing with the brain and memorizing with the pen. The output goal of the unit include students can identify and extract important information in the discourse, interpret the speaker’s thoughts efficiently and accurately, and apply interpreting skills to production.

3.2.2. Motivating Process

The motivating process is a crucial part of the three parts of the teaching process. In this session, teachers set up specific scenarios for students in the classroom, explain the teaching objectives and output activities, specify the types of output activities, and allow students to express their opinions and complete communicative tasks of language output. [14] Students enter the output scenario and try to complete the output task, realize the gap between themselves and the output goal, and understand the deficiencies and gaps in language content and structure in the process of completing the task in order to stimulate students to generate interest in learning.

The classroom is not able to complete all the teaching contents of each unit in the textbook due to the limitation of teaching time. Therefore, how to reasonably arrange online independent learning, realize pre-class drive and create a highly efficient offline classroom has become a crucial issue in interpretation teaching and interpretation classroom.

Before the class, the writer first let students study the teaching video accompanying the textbook. Through the self-study online course, students had a certain understanding of the task objective of this unit, i.e., mastering interpretation note-taking skills. Before the lesson, the teacher first asked three questions in the discussion forum of the communication platform to introduce the class topic.

1) What do you think are the macro principles of consecutive interpreting notes?
2) What are the functions and nature of notes in consecutive interpreting?
3) How to use consecutive interpreting notes effectively?

The instructor sets up real discussion scenarios for each unit and asks students to discuss and try out the output before learning the specific skills of the unit to discover their own deficiencies in expression skills, interpreting skills and logical thinking. The instructor will answer and solve students'
questions in a timely manner in the discussion area, and become a helper to help students express their own ideas and improve their confidence in oral expression. At the same time, teachers also ask students to upload their self-learning knowledge into the learning platform as mind maps, videos and audios to stimulate students’ desire to learn interpretation and complete self-evaluation and evaluation among their classmates.

3.2.3. Enabling Process

In the enabling process, teachers should design and progressively implement facilitation activities to address the gaps that exist for students and to help them overcome difficulties and cognitive challenges in language content and structure and gradually achieve output goals. [15] Teachers should provide the necessary materials needed for communicative scenarios, such as vocabulary, phrases, linguistic structures and expressions, and discourse structures. Subsequently, the teacher instructs students to select the content based on the materials provided by the teacher and to choose appropriate and effective materials for systematic learning, practice and memorization to ensure the completion of the output task.

Applying this teaching method allows students to consolidate relevant vocabulary and syntax previously learned for effective output, as well as to input new vocabulary and sentence structures, which facilitates better completion of the task. Teachers can also encourage students to find out the relevant knowledge they need to complete the communicative tasks on their own. The POA advocates that students are the main subjects of the classroom and the teacher is only the designer of the scenario. The teacher participates in the classroom teaching activities as an intermediary, encouraging students to actively participate in the tasks and guiding them to produce the tasks.

Based on the content of the text and the predicted difficulty of the task, the writer decomposed the facilitation into two steps, input facilitation and output facilitation, and built scaffolds from three major areas, namely language, interpretation skills and cultural knowledge, to assist students to complete the task gradually and precisely, and achieve comprehensive development in the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension. [16]

Language facilitation is an important part of the interpretation class, and it is also a major weakness of our students. When designing language facilitation tasks, the author designed more output activities, which took up more class time. Considering that some students are not confident and have weak foundation, the output facilitation starts from recognizing vocabulary and expressions, and starts from sight translation to listening translation gradually, and the activities are from easy to difficult, hoping that the students can steadily and steadily achieve the requirements of immediacy and instantaneousness of interpretation.

One of the cores of interpretation teaching is interpretation skills training. In general, interpretation skills include comprehension, memorization, note-taking, attention distribution, conversion and other skills. In this unit, the interpretation skill is listening and discerning the main body of sentences, and the difficulties of students’ listening and discerning mainly come from the improper intake of the main points of the original sentences and the untimely understanding and conversion when listening to English. To address the above problems, after explaining the skills and instructive exercises, the writer designed sentence summarization exercises from the practice of distinguishing the main idea of a sentence to help students grasp the main idea of the sentence and get rid of the source language. At the same time, to address the weakness that students have not experienced systematic translation training, the author explains the translation methods of direct translation and paraphrase for the common set phrases within the topic, and designs a simple translation exercise for the set phrases of etiquette. The skill-enhancing activities gradually increase in difficulty from sight translation to listening and discernment.

Interpretation training should pay attention to cultivating students’ intercultural communication skills, enhancing their ability to deal with different cultural factors, converting rationally and effectively, and producing appropriate information in the translated language. The writer provides corresponding texts and video materials and asks questions, asking students to think and discover the etiquette knowledge that needs to be presented by different roles such as speakers, interpreters and listeners in etiquette speech occasions according to the questions, and finally organize and summarize them, present them in class in the form of reports and present them in the final interpretation output task. For the cultural connotations reflected in the language, such as the different titles in Chinese and English and the common Chinese and foreign proverbs and idioms used in speeches, the teacher will present them in the form of videos for students to watch in class, and the teacher will review and test them in the language and skill facilitation session.

Students discuss with their peers based on a typical interpreting task, and then the teacher invites students to give their comments. The teacher gives positive guidance on the direction of the evaluation to avoid students focusing only on language or information details and neglecting the use of simultaneous interpretation skills, and also reminds students to think about the causes of the problems and solutions while identifying them. Depending on the complexity of the task and the time available in the classroom, the teacher may choose the scope of student discussion, either in pairs or in small groups.

3.2.4. Assessing Process

In addition to the two important aspects of classroom teaching and learning, the last important aspect of classroom activities is effective assessment of students’ learning. In the evaluation process, teachers measure students’ performance in terms of output targets and test the effectiveness of output activities. The purpose of evaluation is to test the effectiveness of student learning so that students receive timely and effective feedback in order to understand their learning
outcomes and identify problems; combined with evaluation, teachers provide scientific guidance to students and offer constructive comments for students to modify and improve. Teachers’ evaluation of students’ output also allows teachers to understand the teaching effect and to make some corrections and remedial teaching for the outstanding problems, which can further improve the quality of students’ output.

During the self-assessment, students improve their initial self-assessment in conjunction with the class lecture so that the self-assessment comments meet the requirements set forth by the instructor in class in terms of relevance, accuracy and completeness. On this basis, students revise their own translations. [17] They correct their problems on the self-assessment text and add reasonable ways of handling simultaneous interpretation in text form; then they do several interpretation exercises on the training materials and deliberately use the correction scheme until they are satisfied. Students carry out mutual evaluation within the group and select the best translation of the group. Students upload the files of their re-evaluation and translation revisions to the assignment management platform. Each group will share the selected best translation for the whole class, and the best translation will be shared in the pinned class group for others to study.

Since most students have a weak foundation in English, especially in oral English expression. The writer's assessment of students is overwhelmingly positive in order to encourage students to express themselves boldly, increase their confidence in learning, and increase their sense of access; comments are made on the more prominent or common problems so that students can improve after class. The writer involves students in the evaluation process as well, allowing them to fully express their ideas and opinions. Through peer assessment, students can see the strengths of others, recognize their own shortcomings and improve them; teachers can also learn about students' thoughts and ideas to facilitate future adjustments in teaching for better implementation of the POA.

The assessment method of this course is guided by POA and adopts a combination of “formative assessment + summative assessment” and “basic listening and speaking skills assessment + academic discussion skills assessment”. The formative assessment takes into account and records the results of the assessment. The formative assessment takes into account and records the quality of students’ output, including: the completion of interpretation practice in each group seminar; the completion of interpretation practice in each group seminar; the completion of presentation after each group practice; and the completion of independent study in each group after class. The summative assessment consists of a final oral examination and a written examination, which give full consideration to the students’ output. The oral examination includes a general interpreting skills assessment and academic research skills assessment conducted in small groups; the written examination includes a general interpreting skills assessment and a conference interpreting skills assessment. The assessment mainly evaluates whether students have mastered the keynote interpreting, consecutive interpreting skills and interpreting note taking strategies taught in the previous classroom teaching, and whether they have really improved their comprehensive interpreting skills.

3.3. Effectiveness of Production-Oriented Approach in University Interpretation Course

POA is a breakthrough from the traditional input-based teaching and learning approach and emphasizes the learner-centered approach, while the teacher intervenes as an educational intermediary to guide students to produce tasks to facilitate teaching and learning and to test the effectiveness of learning.

3.3.1. Teaching Effects

Compared with the traditional teaching mode, POA teaching puts more demands on teachers’ language ability, classroom management and control ability. First of all, English teachers should break through the traditional teaching mode of interpretation, change the indoctrination method of teaching interpretation, dig deeper into the interpretation materials to develop relevant and novel language output tasks, find suitable input materials, and improve their guiding power, classroom control and critique ability. Interpretation teachers can work in teams to redesign the teaching plan of each unit of the interpretation textbook with the guidance of Production-oriented approach, especially focusing on the design of actual output tasks of interpretation. Teachers should explain the tasks to be completed to students before the interpretation class, so that students can learn with clear goals and motivation, and use the output tasks as the driving force to motivate students to listen and read input, leading to the output of the interpretation tasks.

3.3.2. Learning Effects

Students also face many challenges in a POA interpretation classroom. Students must be willing to accept challenges, overcome face problems, speak up, and have the ability to sift and organize information, work in teams, and learn on their own. This mode of teaching not only encourages students to actively engage in language input and acquire language knowledge, but also allows them to test and review the interpretation skills they have learned, thus improving their language use and interpretation practice.

4. POA-Based Reform of University Interpretation Courses

This study is a very meaningful attempt to reform the teaching of interpretation courses. Using the POA to reform the teaching of interpretation, diverse teaching activities are designed to focus on the output results of students in this major, thus better meeting the talent training objectives of students’ knowledge application ability and professional skills.
4.1. Setting Clear Course Objectives

In the process of reforming the interpretation curriculum, it is necessary to insist on taking the needs of society and enterprises for talents as the starting point, set clear course objectives according to the requirements of the teaching syllabus, make the objectives of the interpretation curriculum specific, require every teacher of interpretation to clarify their teaching tasks and teaching objectives, and carry out teaching activities according to the refined teaching objectives, continuously improve students' listening and speaking ability, cultivate high-quality.

4.2. Integrating Course Contents

When integrating teaching contents for students of interpretation courses, it is necessary to pay attention to the relevance and practicality of the teaching contents. Only with professional knowledge can students better master the interpretation skills, so that they can conduct reasonable listening and speaking training and consolidate the professional knowledge they have learned. [18] At the same time, the teaching content should be as vivid as possible, because the professionalism of the interpretation course is relatively strong and students are easily distracted in the learning process. Teachers should use the Internet to actively find relevant teaching resources according to the teaching content and integrate these resources to meet students' learning needs. The selection of teaching resources has a direct impact on the teaching content, so the selected teaching resources should take into full consideration the social needs and the actual needs of employment positions, and take the output as the guide, and explain the relevant theoretical knowledge on this basis, so as to stimulate students' learning internal drive, improve the teaching efficiency, and continuously improve students' application and working ability.

4.3. Using Diverse Teaching Methods

In the actual teaching process of interpretation class, diversified teaching methods need to be used according to the characteristics of the course. In order to enhance the interest of the course, teachers can use multimedia teaching methods to carry out teaching activities. Teachers should prepare multimedia lessons well in advance, provide students with pictures and sound information through multimedia equipment, improve the comprehensiveness of teaching information, and create a scene atmosphere related to the teaching content for students, so that students can actively integrate into the teaching atmosphere and make them participate in formal business activities with less the teacher can show a clip of an interpretation activity for the students. Teachers can play clips of interpretation activities for students to exercise their listening, improve the vividness of the class, mobilize students' initiative and enthusiasm, and enhance their learning effect. In addition, students can use the equipment in the speech room for independent learning and choose the modules they want to learn according to their actual needs, so as to better meet the different learning needs of students. [19] Since interpretation is a practical course, teachers should pay attention to students in real time and find out their problems in learning and provide active guidance in order to let students apply the interpretation skills they have learned. In classroom teaching, teachers can use learning groups to carry out teaching activities, focusing on speaking and interpreting, allowing groups to simulate interpreting scenarios and communicate with each other. In this way, students can create a professional interpreting practice environment and continuously improve their interpreting ability.

4.4. Building a Scientific Assessment System

When applying the Production-oriented approach for teaching reform, a scientific assessment system needs to be established, and a combination of process assessment and final assessment is adopted. The process assessment is mainly a course quiz and stage quiz for key knowledge content, a demonstration-type grading for the difficult points of the course, which is reflected in the teacher's evaluation and the peer's mutual evaluation, and the final assessment results are unified and released through the assessment system. The final assessment can be divided into oral and written exams to test students' listening and speaking skills and knowledge learning effects. [20] Under the guidance of Production-oriented approach, the focus is on assessing the key points and difficult points of the interpretation course and giving certain scores to follow up the stage learning results and process assessment to continuously enhance the students' learning autonomy and enthusiasm. The final assessment is designed to test students' listening and speaking ability in all aspects through a combination of oral and written exams at the end of the course.

5. Conclusion

In order to meet the recruitment standards of the post-epidemic era, the teaching mode of English-Chinese interpretation courses needs to be reformed and innovated, so as to train more talents to cope with the volatile enterprise employment standards. To sum up, applying the POA to English interpretation classrooms in applied universities, students are all gainful in class, stimulate their learning initiative and enthusiasm, improve their comprehensive application of English, and avoid inefficient teaching. The teaching concept of Production-oriented approach should be adopted in interpretation teaching in applied colleges and universities. In classroom teaching, the goal should be to cultivate students' language output ability, increase the practical aspects of students’ language output as much as possible, combine the input learning of language knowledge and output application, and promote both mutually, guide students to use what they learn and use what they learn, and cultivate the innovative applied talents needed in the new era. This study only uses one unit of the textbook as an example to illustrate the application of POA in teaching, and it has not
yet formed a complete application system, and each aspect of teaching needs to be further optimized. Teachers of English interpretation in colleges and universities need to study and analyze the POA more in the practice of interpretation teaching, so as to gradually improve the application system of the Production-oriented approach and enhance the teaching quality of English interpretation courses.

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