

# A Corpus-Based Approach to Teaching Business English Translation

**Abstract:** With the increasing demand for business English translation skills, it is necessary to explore new and effective methods to enhance translation competence. This paper proposes the use of self-built corpora in business English translation teaching. The paper first introduces the concept and characteristics of corpora and explains the advantages of using corpora in translation teaching. Then, it discusses the process of building a self-built corpus and the application of corpus-based methods in business English translation teaching. The paper also provides practical examples of how to use the self-built corpus in translation tasks and how to develop students' translation skills through corpus-based teaching. The results of the study indicate that the use of self-built corpora can effectively improve students' translation competence and promote their awareness of language usage in specific contexts. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on the application of self-built corpora in translation teaching.

**Key Words:** Business English translation; Corpus-based Instruction; Self-Built Corpus

## 1. Introduction

Chinese scholars have proposed various applications of corpus-based translation teaching in the past decade. Liu & Liu (2011) explore the construction and application of translation corpora for learners, and attempt to establish a corpus-based translation teaching route and translation analysis model which allows learners to reflect on their translation process and product in an intuitive and quantitative manner. Wang (2015) develops a theory-informed tagging system and a dual-mode in-depth data annotation to facilitate teaching and self-teaching of translation. In addition, other scholars have proposed the irreplaceable role of monolingual corpora in translation teaching. For example, Zhu (2011) explored the use of the COCA and CCL corpora in translation teaching, and Sun (2018) summarized the corpus-driven translation teaching model using the BCC Chinese corpus in English-Chinese translation teaching. Fois (2021) discuss how integrating corpora into English language teaching for translator training allows to overcome the major limits of English course books for general purposes. The common thread in the aforementioned research is the exploration of leveraging the advantages of rich corpus and efficient retrieval tools to serve teaching objectives, while also emphasizing the role of corpus in fostering students' autonomous learning ability. However, it should be noted that beginner translators may struggle to quickly and accurately summarize real language data or certain translation phenomena through corpus-based learning. Furthermore, the use of specialized corpora in teaching is often limited due to high copyright restrictions. Therefore, this article suggests that teachers can collect corpora according

to the needs of their course design and create corpora that are designed to help students understand specific language phenomena. By fully utilizing their own corpora, teachers can effectively assist translation teaching. Compared to large corpora, small self-built corpora are more targeted, timely, and innovative in assisting teaching, and in the preparation of translation textbooks and teaching materials (Zhao, 2007: 31). Furthermore, in translation teaching, teachers can combine parallel corpora, comparable corpora, and monolingual corpora in various forms to meet teaching objectives. The author will take the "Business English Translation" course as an example to illustrate how to build small-scale topic-specific corpora according to teaching objectives, and demonstrate how to use corpora to carry out business translation teaching.

## 2. Building a Corpus

### 2.1 Categorization and Selection of Texts

Given the specialized and constantly evolving nature of Business English, it is crucial to carefully select representative and timely texts that showcase the use of formulaic language for standardization purposes (Gao, 2013: 39). Texts can be sourced from a variety of outlets, including the internet, newspapers, and magazines. When building a corpus, it is recommended to categorize texts by business genre and create specialized, small-scale corpora according to teaching goals and requirements. Su et al. (2016) determined the core and extended topics of business translation by analyzing influential Chinese business translation textbooks. Drawing from their findings, the present study selected texts that revolve around "company introductions," "business letters," and "business advertisements" for classroom use. For example, the "company introduction" texts presented in this study were primarily sourced from official websites of well-known companies, as well as publications such as the Financial Times and The Economist.

### 2.2 Alignment of the Language Data

After collecting the language corpus, the next crucial step in building a parallel corpus is aligning the language data. Wang and Sun (2009) presented the use of computer-assisted translation software (CAT) for aligning language data. They employed the WinAlign component in TRADOS Translator's Workbench for alignment. However, the aligned corpus needs to be exported and imported into the Déjà vu CAT software for a series of text format conversions to generate plain text. Other CAT software, such as SnowmanCAT, also has alignment functions (Wang, 2016), but requires a series of format conversions into usable TXT text.

To eliminate these conversion operations, modern online language data and intelligent translation platforms offer more efficient options. For example, the intelligent alignment algorithm developed by Tmaxmall (<https://www.tmxmall.com/products/aligner>) can quickly and automatically align source-target sentence pairs, recognize one-to-many, many-to-one, and many-to-many sentence correspondences, greatly improving alignment efficiency and accuracy. The alignment interface is intuitive, and the platform supports importing 36 mainstream formats, such as docx, xlsx, pptx, pdf, and txt, and exporting tmx, xlsx, txt, docx, and other formats directly.

### 2.3 Building a Parallel Corpus

Once the aligned txt language data files are ready, one method is to use a parallel corpus retrieval tool. Paraconc is a classic bilingual parallel corpus retrieval tool that provides a demo software for download on its website. However, Chinese text cannot be directly used for retrieval in Paraconc and requires segmentation processing of the language data. This article recommends using BFSU ParaConc from Beijing Foreign Studies University, which does not require word segmentation for Chinese text. For English-Chinese language data files, they need to be named as \*.ZH.txt and

\*.EN.txt and then imported for use. This method conveniently presents the correspondence relationship between the original text and the translated text at the word/phrase/sentence level. Another method is to use computer-assisted translation software that provides flexible and convenient bilingual parallel corpus functionality. The aligned corpus tmx file can be imported into the CAT software and saved as a translation memory, which can be viewed and called upon to assist translation teaching. Although Trados trial version or Snowman free version can be downloaded, installation and operation of these software can be time-consuming. Therefore, this article recommends using a more straightforward online translation management platform, such as Yicat, which has all the core functions of CAT and can be used for free by simply opening the website. After registering, users can import the tmx file into the memory library management to retrieve and view the bilingual parallel corpus.

#### 2.4 Building a Bilingual Comparable Corpus

A bilingual comparable corpus, which is related to translator training, is defined by Zanettin (1998: 617) as a collection of independent texts in different languages based on similar content, domain and communicative function. Prior to the advent of corpora, the use of such bilingual comparable texts in translation research and training was already common. Snell-Hornby (1988), for example, collected public notices in English and German for comparison. She argued that by comparing large amounts of texts of the same genre in the source and target languages, it is possible to define the prototype characteristics of the text, providing the translator with the basic "outline" for the translation. Such bilingual comparable corpora are ideal tools for cultivating language intuition and learning specialized expressions in translation classrooms. In the process of designing and implementing teaching activities, comparable corpora can "construct input target language materials." Compared with parallel corpora, students can "analyze phenomena and find rules in the language data provided by independent research, rather than blindly imitating the translation of predecessors" (Zhu, 2011: 33).

There are many analysis tools available for building this type of corpus, and the most widely used is AntConc. Its interface is simple and intuitive, its functions are professional and practical, and users only need to download and install it to use it. However, this software can only be used for language analysis of English texts. Therefore, BFSU PowerConc is also recommended, which supports both Chinese and English languages and allows for retrieval of both raw and annotated language data. Researchers can use it to build a bilingual comparable corpus of English and Chinese, for example, to help students master the language features of the same genre in both languages.

#### 3. Application of Self-built Corpora in Translation Teaching: a Teaching Case

In this section, the author presents how to use self-built corpora to conduct Chinese-English translation teaching. This course is a required course for third-year students majoring in Business English, called "Business English Translation." The overall goal of the course is to help students become familiar with representative business texts in international business activities, and to focus on the characteristics of different business genres in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and stylistic features from a translation perspective. Students should be able to appropriately use or adjust translation strategies to meet the requirements of the target language culture regarding the stylistic features, genre, and vocabulary of the translation. Unlike traditional translation course designs, this teaching does not directly explain the language and text characteristics of the involved genres and their corresponding translation strategies to students, but rather, through the

use of corpora, encourages student thinking to solve translation problems and develop basic skills and qualities of translators.

The corpora used in this study include the "Chinese-English parallel corpus of corporate introductions," consisting of 13,726 Chinese words and 8,862 English words, which mainly includes some corporate introductions selected by the author that are suitable for teaching, such as Lenovo, China Mobile, Huawei, and their high-quality English translations. The second corpus is the "Chinese-English comparable corpus of corporate introductions," which consists of "Chinese corporate introduction texts" and "English corporate introduction texts." The "Chinese corporate introduction texts" are the Chinese corpora in the parallel corpus, while the "English corporate introduction texts" (i.e., original English corporate introductions) were collected from foreign corporate websites and some English publications, totaling 8,240 words.

### 3.1 Teaching Steps

On the pre-translation stage, students are divided into groups of 3-4 and are required to use corpus tools to have a deeper understanding of the Chinese-English corporate introduction texts from the levels of words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourse. This stage requires students to summarize their observations through group cooperation within a specified time, and share their group observations in the classroom. The assigned tasks are as follows:

First, observe the main content and vocabulary characteristics of the Chinese and English corporate introduction texts in the comparable corpus, such as which type of vocabulary appears more frequently, and what text effects these words can achieve. Are there any consistencies in the vocabulary used in the Chinese and English introductions?

Second, observe the sentence structure of the English corporate introductions in the comparable corpus, such as sentence length, and the use of conjunctions between sentences.

Examine the discourse structure of the Chinese and English corporate introduction texts in the comparable corpus, and find their commonalities and differences, such as the introduction, the order of the text, and the conclusion.

Third, observe the translation of rhetoric in the parallel corpus, and identify how the translation of rhetoric is handled in the translated text (retained, deleted, or changed), and reflect on and evaluate such treatment.

On the translation stage, the teacher will present a Chinese original text to students, and require them to translate it into English within a specified time. The following is an example of a well-known domestic enterprise profile:

本公司成立于 1984 年，经过三十余年的发展，已成为国内领先的城乡建设与生活服务商，公司业务聚焦全国经济最具活力的三大经济圈及中西部重点城市。2016 年本公司首次跻身《财富》“世界 500 强”，位列榜单第 356 位，2017 年、2018 年接连上榜，分别位列榜单第 307 位、第 332 位。

公司核心业务包括住宅开发、物业服务、租赁住宅；在住房领域，公司始终坚持住房的居住属性，坚持“为普通人盖好房子，盖有人用的房子”。2018 年，公司将自身定位进一步迭代升级为“城乡建设与生活服务商”，所搭建的生态体系已初具规模，在巩固住宅开发和物业服务固有优势的基础上，业务已延伸至商业开发和运营、物流仓储服务、租赁住宅、产业城镇、冰雪度假、养老、教育等领域，为更好的服务人民美好生活需要、实现可持续发展奠定了良好基础。未来，公司将始终坚持“大道当然，合伙奋斗”，以“人民的美好生活需要”为中心，以现金流为基础，深入践行“城乡建设与生活服务商”战略，持续创造真实价值，力争成为无愧于伟大新时代的好企业。

In this stage, students are expected to complete the following tasks: First, they must read and comprehend the original text, and then identify the sentence patterns and discourse structure characteristics summarized during the pre-translation stage. Using this information, they should determine the intended effect of the translated text. Next, students should identify difficult words in the original text and search for their English translations in parallel corpora. They can use the word index function in an English comparable corpus to check the usage and context of these words. Each student is required to submit a translation within a specified time frame.

During the post-translation stage, the teacher will analyze and evaluate the students' translations. While traditional translation evaluation methods involve browsing through each translation, this can be time-consuming and inefficient. Instead, the teacher can use corpus retrieval tools to provide objective and comprehensive evaluations. Before the next class, the teacher will organize the students' translations and establish a translation corpus using tools such as Antconc or BFSU Paraconc. They will use corpus alignment, parallel corpus construction, or online translation memory tools to check for issues such as word usage and collocation in the students' translations, in order to determine the focus of the second class.

### 3.2 Students' Finding:

Regarding vocabulary, students found that Chinese corporate introductions often use positive words, particularly four-character words, combined with degree adverbs, affirmative adverbs, range adverbs, etc., such as "largest," "top 100," "unique," "world-class," "global leader," and "excellent." While English corporate introductions also use similar positive and promotional vocabulary, such as "most," "top 100," "leading," "quality," and "outstanding," the overall language is concise, the vocabulary is simple, and the expression is direct. Therefore, students concluded that when translating, the translator should adjust the information in the original text and use objective and concise vocabulary to translate the repetitive words in the original text.

Regarding sentence structure, students observed that Chinese corporate introductions are often long sentences in active voice, with multiple "predicate + object" structures embedded in them, consistent with the characteristics of "meaning coupling" in Chinese. In contrast, English introductions are often simple sentences that enable readers to quickly understand the relevant information about the company. Therefore, when translating, the logical relationship of Chinese should be considered, and the subject, predicate, and non-predicate components should be handled properly, and conjunctions should be correctly added to make the translated text conform to the reading habits of the target language readers.

Regarding discourse, Chinese corporate introductions usually include the company's history, nature, business scope, marketing situation, strength, and position. The first paragraph generally introduces the establishment of the company and uses data to explain the company's sales, profits, etc. The central paragraph introduces the company's market positioning and advantages, and the final paragraph accepts the company's future prospects. In contrast, English corporate introductions are more diverse in discourse structure and content organization, such as Zappos telling the company story to be closer to readers, and Heineken focusing on introducing the diverse team behind the product, company values, and the global influence of its products. Students believe that when translating, appropriately deleting the original text's verbose content is acceptable.

Regarding translation of rhetoric, the most common rhetoric used in Chinese corporate introductions are parallelism, antithesis, and repetition. Through observation of parallel corpora,

students found that the translations of parallelism and antithesis in the original text are usually translated using the same parallelism and antithesis in the translated text. However, repetition is often expressed using synonyms or different expressions in the translated text to avoid monotony.

### 3.3 Students' translating

Based on the findings on the pre-translation stage, students first consider the desired effect of the translation and propose translation strategies and methods. They believe that the translation should be concise, emphasize key content, and be in line with the reading habits of English readers. To achieve this translation effect, students propose feasible translation strategies and methods.

Firstly, for the lengthy introduction of enterprise business in the original text, appropriate deletions and adjustments can be made. Secondly, sentence structure should pay attention to the combination of long and short sentences and the logical connection between language blocks. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the original text can be adjusted. Finally, the scattered content of the original text can be concentrated and adjusted according to the topic. In the translation process, the role of the corpus is mainly reflected in improving the intuition of the target language and cultivating translation retrieval ability. For example, students can use parallel corpora to find authentic expressions for certain vocabulary, such as "Fortune Global 500" for "世界 500 强" and

"housing management" for "物业服务". For certain sentence structures, such as "位列榜单第 356

位", students can search for "位列" in parallel corpora and find that the usage of "rank" is different.

To determine the active and passive usage of "rank" in the same context, students can use comparable corpora to search for English original corporate introductions and find examples such as "Sainsbury's, ranking 17 in The Times 1000 with 82,000 employees, when considering appointing a senior." and "The successfully transformed supermarket chain and multiple retailer Tesco -- ranked 22 in The Times 1000 and employing 71,000 -- similarly described headhunters as good." Therefore, it can be concluded that both usages of "rank" are acceptable in the same context.

### 3.4 Post-translation

After the classroom translation teaching activity, the teacher organizes the translation works submitted by the students. By using AntConc for diagnostic analysis, translation problems can be classified, which will serve as the teaching focus of the post-translation stage. In this article, the second sentence of the student translation is used as an example. By indexing the student's translation with AntConc and generating a word list, it can be observed that most students

correctly translated "《财富》世界 500 强" as "the Fortune Global 500". It is found that there are some inappropriate verb collocations used by students. By observing this, some questions can be sorted out, such as whether "enter", "go into", "get into" and other words can be used before "the Fortune Global 500"? What is the most commonly used and authentic expression? By using the same method, the student's translation can be analyzed, and the discovered problems can be listed as teaching focuses.

## 4. Conclusion

In summary, this article suggests that teachers should use corpus tools and internet resources to establish a corpus based on teaching objectives and student needs, fully leveraging its auxiliary

role. In Business English translation teaching, the application of corpus can transform students' perception of translation activities by enabling them to discover and solve translation problems through the comparison and discussion of real-life corpora. Corpus can not only provide answers but also stimulate students' thinking, and enhance their independent learning and inductive abilities. Corpus-based Business translation teaching can help students gradually develop discourse and genre awareness, establish translation patterns for specific genres, and cultivate the basic skills and autonomy of translators, demonstrating their ability to handle and solve problems encountered in actual translation processes. Additionally, this approach can stimulate independent thinking, cultivate basic skills, and demonstrate the ability to handle and solve the problems encountered in actual translation processes.

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