



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### RESEARCH ON INNOVATIVE TRANSFORMATION FROM *UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY CHINA: A CHINESE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION TEXTBOOK* INTO "LEARNING-ORIENTED MATERIALS"

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#### ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of New Liberal Arts development, this study centers on transforming *Understanding Contemporary China: A Chinese-English Translation Textbook* into "learning-oriented materials". Utilizing test questions from the Translation section of the "FLTRP Cup National Foreign Language Proficiency Competition for University Students", it tested 67 students at R University and analyzed their translations. The findings reveal that: students' translation errors predominantly fall into four categories: missing subjects/predicates, part-of-speech misuse, subject-verb disagreement, and mistranslation of culture-loaded terms; High-scoring students (top 10) tended to accumulate cultural expressions through authentic materials like the English edition of *China Daily*, while low-scoring students (bottom 10) relied more on exam-oriented training; The accuracy rate for grammatical explicit terminology was higher than for implicit terminology requiring cultural decoding, highlighting students' shortcomings in Chinese literacy and cross-cultural cognition. Based on this, a three-dimensional transformation strategy is proposed: integrating instrumental and humanistic teaching approaches, restructuring textbook content to enhance contrastive Chinese-English thinking skills, and constructing authentic-material-driven learning pathways. This study provides practical evidence for innovating foreign language teaching materials and has practical significance for cultivating students' ability to "tell China's stories well in English."

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## INTRODUCTION

Under the New Liberal Arts initiative, foreign language programs must cultivate talents equipped with the fundamental competencies outlined in the *National Standards for Teaching Quality*, enabling them to authentically understand China, accurately present China to the world in foreign languages, and interpret the world for Chinese audiences. The *Understanding Contemporary China* textbook series emerged precisely within this context. Nevertheless, it remains a critical scholarly imperative for foreign language educators to rigorously evaluate students' learning outcomes from this series, utilize insights to enhance pedagogy, empower teachers to refine instructional approaches, and advance the innovative transformation of "teaching materials" into "learning-oriented materials."

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Using the search query ((title='learning-oriented materials') AND (title='teaching materials/textbook') AND (CSSCI)) within CNKI's journal database, 10 relevant articles were retrieved, including 2 addressing foreign languages. Current academic consensus on converting teaching materials into learning-oriented materials to optimize teaching efficacy and learning experiences centers on three dimensions:

- Transformative Goals: Prioritizing student-centered design. For instance, Li Zhichao (2020) advocates transitioning from a "hierarchical knowledge framework" to a "networked knowledge structure"; Guo Baoxian (2025) contends that materials should "ignite learning motivation and scaffold learning processes."
- Transformative Pathways: Emphasizing teacher agency. Xia Jimei (2008) urges educators to treat materials as multidimensional tools—"learning-oriented materials, application resources, and research resources"; Gao Haijun (2023) proposes a tri-phase strategy of "deconstruction-integration-extension."
- Disciplinary Practices: Contextualized and interdisciplinary designs have been piloted in subjects like Chinese (Ye Tuo *et al.*, 2022) and geography (Duan Yushan *et al.*, 2024).

#### However, extant research reveals three gaps:

- Limited foreign language focus: Only Guo Baoxian examines features of learning-oriented materials for English, without addressing translation competence development;
- Narrow scope: Overemphasis on K-12 textbooks, neglecting ideological-linguistic materials like *Understanding Contemporary China*;
- Incomplete transformation framework: Absence of solutions for cultural transcoding challenges in Chinese-English translation.

Thus, scholarly discourse on effectively leveraging the *Understanding Contemporary China* series to evolve it into student-centered learning-oriented materials remains underdeveloped. This project addresses this gap by investigating students' learning realities, thereby catalyzing the series' transformation. Ultimately, this will equip students to profoundly comprehend China, articulate China's narratives fluently in foreign languages, and communicate China's perspectives globally.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Research Objectives

- Diagnose typical error patterns in students' Chinese-English translation and their root causes through quantitative and qualitative analysis;
- Investigate differences in learning strategies between top scorers (top 10) and low scorers (bottom 10);
- Propose targeted strategies for transforming teaching materials into "learning-oriented materials" based on error distribution and item scoring patterns.

**Research Subjects:** 67 translation competition participants from the School of Foreign Languages at R University, all entrants in the *Translation Section of the "FLTRP Cup" "Understanding Contemporary China" National Foreign Language Proficiency Competition for University Students (English Group)*.

### Research Procedure

#### Stratified Data Processing:

#### Ranked 67 translation scripts by score and categorized them into:

- Top scorers (Top 10)
- Low scorers (Bottom 10)
- Mid-range scorers (Remaining scripts)
- Error Annotation and Attribution: Conducted content analysis to tag four error types:
- Missing subjects/predicates
- Part-of-speech misuse
- Subject-verb disagreement
- Mistranslation of culture-loaded terms Mapped high-frequency errors to specific knowledge points.

**Comparative Analysis of Learning Strategies:** Administered semi-structured interviews to top/low scorers focusing on:

- Self-study content
- Resource selection criteria
- Terminology translation approaches
- Correlated findings with classroom observation records to identify strategy-performance linkages.

**Item Scoring Attribution Analysis:** Calculated scoring rates for each test item; Identified characteristics of high/low-scoring items; Developed corresponding transformation strategies by integrating error patterns and learning strategy disparities.

## DISCUSSION

The Translation Section of the "FLTRP Cup 'Understanding Contemporary China' National Foreign Language Proficiency Competition for College Students" primarily assesses Chinese-English translation competence. With its scientifically designed tasks demonstrating high reliability and validity, the competition results effectively serve as robust data for evaluating students' mastery of *Understanding Contemporary China* curriculum content. This study utilizes the English Translation Section test materials from the

"FLTRP Cup 'Understanding Contemporary China' National Foreign Language Proficiency Competition for College Students" at University R as assessment tools. Based on student translation performance data, it analyzes the translation competence of participants from the university's School of Foreign Languages. Through investigating and diagnosing students' learning status, the research aims to empower English instructors to optimize the pedagogical application of the *Understanding Contemporary China* textbook series, and facilitate the strategic transformation of teaching materials into learning materials in order to enhance students' capacity to comprehend and articulate China's narratives and equip learners to tell China's stories effectively in foreign languages. Analysis above reveals three key findings: First, based on errors in student translations, four categories of student translation errors were identified: *subject-verb omission*, *misused parts of speech*, *subject-verb disagreement*, and *mistranslation of culturally loaded terms*. Second, through classroom observation and interviews comparing the top-ten and bottom-ten performing students, significant differences in learning approaches emerged:

- Top-ten students typically engaged with authentic English media during self-study (e.g., watching American TV series, reading *China Daily*, *The Economist*)
- Bottom-ten students predominantly practiced exam-oriented exercises (e.g., CET-4/6 test drills)

Third, item analysis showed higher scores on terminology with explicit grammatical structures (e.g., "*Wánzhěng Zhūnquè Quánmiàn Guānchè Xīn Fāzhǎn Lìniàn*": fully, accurately, and comprehensively implement the new development philosophy), while lower scores occurred with culturally embedded expressions requiring non-literal interpretation (e.g., "*wú yòng zhī yòng*": the usefulness of the useless form Zhuangzi philosophy; "*gé gù dīng xīn*": replacing the old with the new). This pattern underscores students' deficiencies in Chinese cultural literacy, indicating that pedagogy must: Emphasize English's cultural dimension beyond instrumental purposes; Reject a purely utilitarian view of language teaching. Countermeasures and Suggestions Based on the research data, error attribution in student translations, and the differences in learning strategies between high- and low-performing groups, this section proposes concrete pathways for transforming "teaching materials" into "learning materials" from three dimensions: "balancing English as a tool and a humanities attribute," "guiding students to strengthen bilingual cognitive awareness," and "constructing an authentic material-driven learning path." The aim is to enhance students' translation competence, particularly their cultural translation competence. Balancing English as a Tool and a Humanities Attribute. The disparity in learning methods between high- and low-performing groups in this study warns that exam-oriented training focused solely on linguistic forms can easily lead to deficiencies in students' cultural transcoding ability. Therefore, teaching must move beyond a purely instrumental view of language. Linguistic form training (instrumentality) should be anchored in the deep interpretation of Chinese ideological and cultural content (humanities). While consolidating foundational grammatical structures, teachers should utilize political documents and cultural terminology in teaching materials to ensure that the study of grammatical rules serves the needs of content expression. This approach achieves a spiral integration of linguistic form practice and cultural meaning construction, ultimately empowering students to convey Chinese wisdom in English.

### Guiding Students to Strengthen Bilingual Cognitive Awareness

- Add a Chinese-English Thinking Comparison Module: Use visual charts to analyze syntactic differences between Chinese and English (e.g., Chinese parataxis vs. English hypotaxis), supplemented by error-correction exercises using typical erroneous sentences. This helps students cross the "zone of proximal development" to achieve conceptual restructuring.
- Develop Cultural Concept Transcoding Strategies: For culturally loaded terms and philosophical terminology (e.g., "*gé gù dīng xīn*": replacing the old with the new), provide an

analytical framework of "etymological tracing – semantic deconstruction – translation method evolution." This prompts students to internalize cultural symbols to achieve cross-linguistic cognitive restructuring, thereby strengthening their cultural translation cognition.

- Constructing an "Authentic Material-Driven" Learning Path Drawing on the learning experiences of high-performing groups, reconstruct the teaching task system: Guide students to grasp the connotations of terminology through materials such as current affairs reports and video subtitles of leaders' speeches. Through "meaning negotiation" in authentic contexts, design a learning path of "terminology extraction – context adaptation – connotation translation" to achieve "scaffolded" competence transfer.

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