

Application of Divergent Thinking in English Thesis Writing Teaching

—An Analysis of Topic Selection on Translation for English Major Students

Nan Zhao¹, Yunxia Yan², Xinfu Yuan¹

¹Department of Foreign Languages, Baoding University, Baoding, China

²Teaching and Research Office, Hebei Foreign Studies University, Shijiazhuang, China

Email: ckaren2006@126.com

Received 24 March 2015; accepted 21 April 2015; published 23 April 2015

Copyright © 2015 by authors and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

At present, duplicate research has become very common among English thesis writing in universities. This thesis aims at applying divergent thinking in English thesis writing teaching, trying to find ways of choosing good topics in thesis writing.

Keywords

Divergent Thinking, English Thesis Writing Teaching, Topic Selection, Translation

1. Introduction

Thesis writing can be regarded as a kind of exploring activity, which does well not only for cultivating students' writing ability, but also for students' forming creative thinking so as to apply what they have learned in practice through connecting theory to practice. Successful writing, especially significant topic selection is beneficial for the students to do further research in the future and can provide guidance for their later practice.

Thesis writing on translation is closely related to practice. Translation theory comes from practice, and can guide translation practice. Thus, in the process of thesis writing, students can choose an aspect of translation theory to analyze, or to find a point for penetration by connecting theory with practice. They enjoy freedom to a large extent. However, similar topics are always researched again and again, graduates after graduates nowadays. Keeping the structure unchanged, some theses are just similar to the others and are lack of creativeness. Many students are not willing to share more time selecting an interesting and significant topic which makes them find they couldn't go on with writing after finishing a part of the thesis or the thesis they hand in is insignificant or

not creative. Besides, according to the questionnaire survey having been done by the research group of “Application of Divergent Thinking in English Thesis Writing Teaching” (Project No. 1412001), 91% of English teachers in Baoding University think the topics chosen on translation by the students are not creative, and only 1% of the students think their topic selections are appropriate and needn’t be changed.

Some people used to publish papers on divergent thinking, and some scholars used to do research in thesis writing. For example, Lu (2007) points out “Topic selection for English Major B A. degree paper should follow the rules of being within a suitable scope, not being too outmoded and being researchable by themselves”. Ma (2011) points out “Creative thinking is the key in the process of thesis writing”. Fu Yongcui and Han Hushan (2003) hold that “the process of writing is a process of thinking during which the author takes language as the medium”. Wang (2001) thinks that “the creativeness of a thesis can be seen from the novelty and uniqueness of thinking”. Yet theses combining divergent thinking and English thesis writing teaching are rarely few. The study aims at applying divergent thinking in English thesis writing teaching, trying to find ways of choosing good topics in thesis writing.

2. Topic Selection Is the Top Concern in Thesis Writing on Translation

The process of selecting an interesting, suitable, academic and significant topic may well unfold the divergent thinking process.

2.1. Topic Selection According to the Writer’s Interest

Topic selection should be theoretical as well as fresh that the writer’s interested in, which may inspire the students to go on with the research. However, that doesn’t mean interest can make sure the research can go deep enough. Significance and feasibility of the topic selection should be highlighted. As for undergraduates, they can link their grasp of knowledge with their points of interest and try to select the topics that they can find various materials and are good at writing and can penetrate into further study.

In selecting topics, topics of succession in new fields and topics that haven’t been done by former researchers instead of repeated topics are encouraged to be written on.

2.2. Topic Selection Concerning about Suitable Content and Scope

The word “Suitable” here not only refers to the interesting topics, but also refers to the topics that can be researched on and clearly analyzed within limited words.

2.2.1. Suitable Content for Research

Topics come from life. Creative thinking can help the writer discover suitable content and find materials for the research. A certain topic reflects what the author intends to research and the author’s thought comes from practice, i.e. every aspect of daily life. The choice of topics on translation is especially from life. However, even in the same university, similar topics always appear in students’ thesis. Thus, the students should broaden their eyes and not be limited to a certain field. And according to the book “THE MAP—A Beginner’s Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies” written by Williams and Chesterman (2004), the field of translation research can be generally divided into 12 aspects as follows:

- 1) Text Analysis and Translation.
- 2) Translation Quality Assessment.
- 3) Genre Translation.
- 4) Multimedia Translation.
- 5) Translation and Technology.
- 6) Translation History.
- 7) Translation Ethics.
- 8) Terminology and Glossaries.
- 9) Interpreting.
- 10) The Translation Process.
- 11) Translator Training.
- 12) The Translation Profession.

This division provides references for undergraduates to find different angles of doing research. Take the third

point “Genre Translation” as an example. There are many different researching aspects that the students can penetrate into like Drama, Poetry, Prose Fiction, Religious Texts, Children’s Literature, and Tourism Texts, etc. Students can select the one that they are interested in and familiar with. They can compare different genres. For example, when considering whether drama is a good aspect to research, students may note down their every inspiration as shown in **Figure 1**. First they may think about what kind of drama they’d like to do research in, the script for performance or just for reading? Then the first branch can be drawn as in the following graphic. If the students are interested in the style of the script, they may consider whether the script is for fully performance or just a rough one which only requires the translation of the main content. They may also get the inspiration from the time and place of the performance as well as the translation style of different translators, etc. Thus, even within one genre, students may have various topics to choose to research.

Take “Technical Texts” as another example. Since most English major students learned liberal arts in their high schools and are not quite familiar with technical texts or technical terms. Then the research may be very difficult. So this field may not be the best for research.

2.2.2. Suitable Scope for Research

After determining the general content of researching, the step of narrowing down follows. The process of topic selecting is a process of expanding and narrowing down. A good topic can ensure the smooth carrying out of the research. Take film translation as an example. Although students are very interested in it, many similar topics are always chosen. How to make the topic novel and original? The thesis still tries to analyze it in **Figure 2**.

The topic of film translation is too extensive. But film translation may include many different aspects. Students can note down their inspirations getting from material reading and their daily life in circles, which can help them find more aspects to do research in, like the translation of subtitles, advertisements in the films, the theme song of the films, rhetorical devices adopted in the scripts, and idioms used in the films, etc. Thus, the range of the topic has been expanded, yet the content of the research can be narrowed down. The topic of film translation can be narrowed down into Translation of the Film Theme Songs, Translation of Idioms in the films, Name Translation in films, etc. Considering focusing on unidirectional translation is more practical, the topics can be narrowed down into E-C translation or C-E translation. Then the students may choose a topic that they are interested in and the materials of which are easy to find for their theses.

Besides, it is possible that some new researching fields be found during the process of researching certain content, which may even cause the change of the topic. Take name or term translation as an example which is shown in **Figure 3**. There are many different names like names of dishes, companies, places, films, books, etc. Thus, more circles can be drawn in the graphic. Then the author can give more branches to the graphic. As for the translation of books, novels, classics, poems, scientific and children’s books and so on can all be included. Thus translation is connected to literature and science. Yet the topic can still be deepened. As for poetry translation, students can do research in the meter or content of the poem which make their thesis more delicate. If choosing names of places to research, more branches can also be given like names of cities, of places of interest, of streets, etc. From the graphic drawn by themselves, the students can find there are many topic they are interested in and can do research in.

However, the topic’s still a bit extensive and not suitable for a thesis of several thousand words. Then try to give more branches to names of streets. In people’s daily life, one can not only see names of streets, but also various signs, and names of companies, etc. **Figure 4** shows that as for companies, people may also find relevant leaflets and advertisements which can also form the theme of their research.

While, if the students think this kind of topic seems a bit narrow, the topic can be expanded again. Names of places of interest may associate people with C-E translation of attractions introduction, road signs, names of plants, and handbooks, etc., which has been shown in the following graphic. Comparing the two graphics, the information colored is correlated to each other. Since advertisement, handbook, and names of dishes, etc. all belong to signs, C-E Translation of Signs can be considered as the topic of the thesis. This topic covers a wider range than the Translation of Names of Streets, yet still seems a bit extensive. Then a further narrowing down is workable to change the topic into a certain kind of signs translation. Thus, through adopting creative thinking, a more suitable topic may be found. This thinking process can be shown in **Figure 5**.

2.3. Topic Selection Concerning about Significance

It is important to consider whether the topics chosen as shown in the above are significant or not. Being signifi-

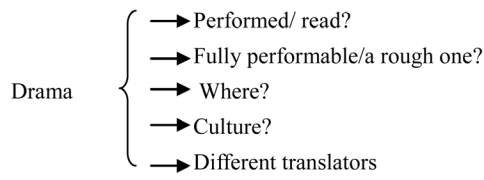


Figure 1. Genre translation.

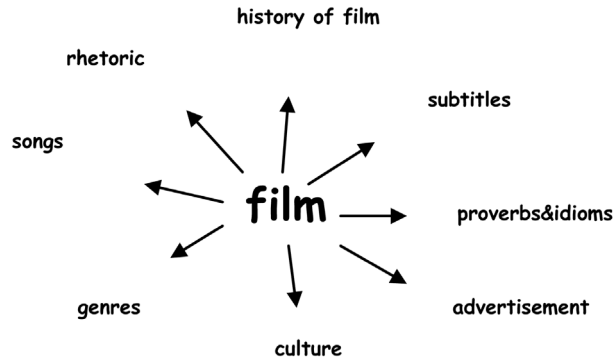


Figure 2. Example of film translation.

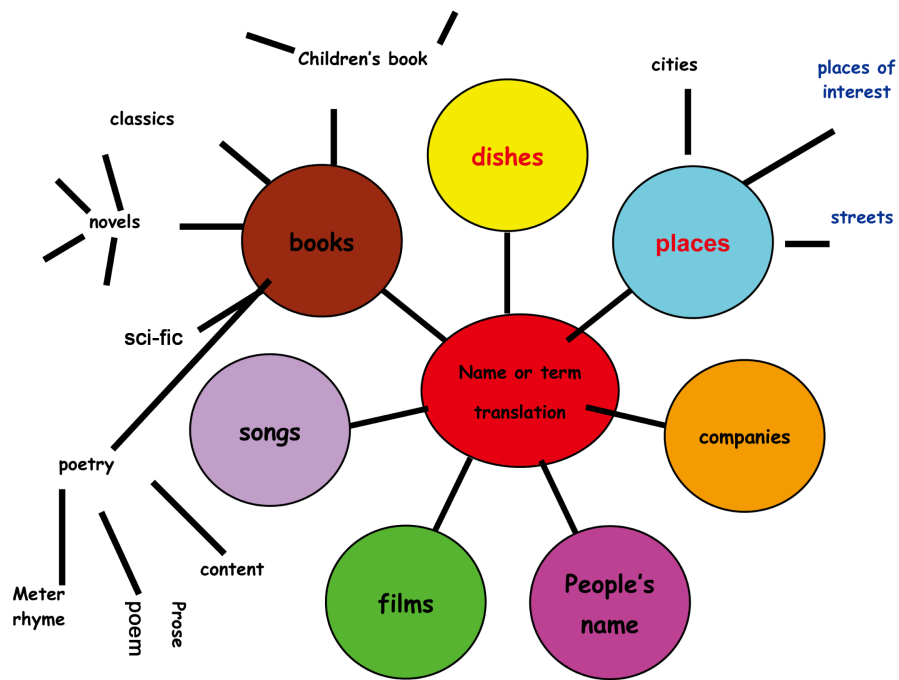


Figure 3. Example of name or term translation.

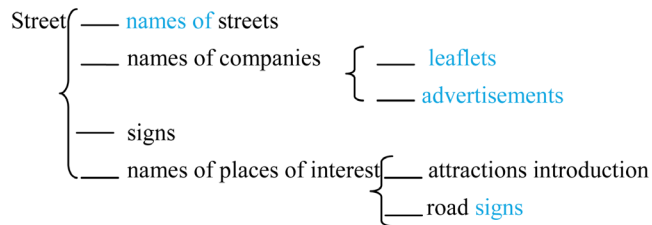


Figure 4. More branches to names of streets.

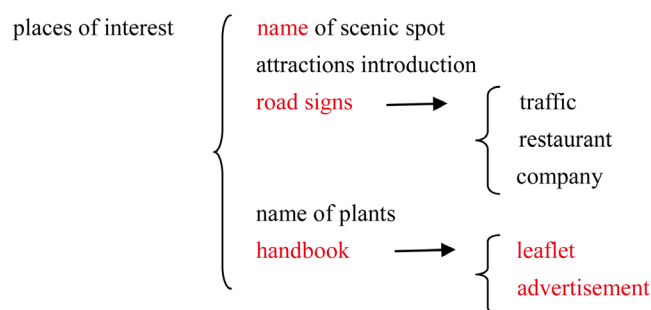


Figure 5. Topic expansion.

cant means being useful for the development of the society. For example, research on signs translation is helpful for purifying linguistic environment and improving the city's image which makes it significant. Meantime, students should also keep avoiding repeated research into consideration.

2.4. Academic Topic Selection

The topic has been chosen should be academic and relative to the student's major. Various topics can be chosen in translation field, such as research on theories, translating practice under the guidance of certain theories, analysis of translation works by different translators, and evaluation of translation process and so on. Take signs translation as an example. Practice needs guidance of certain theories. One cannot translate without any rules. Students can review the translation theories they have read, select the one that suits to the research of their researching field and check whether the translation is suitable or not under the guidance of the theory, which may help them go further in their research. During this process, the students may explore different angles of research as well as the field that hasn't been researched, thus making their research up to date as well as fresh and significant. It's a process of finding, analyzing and solving problems. Through the retrospect of translation theories, the topic of signs translation may be narrowed down to Signs Translation from the Perspective of Skopos or Adaptation and Translation of Dish Names, which is more suitable for undergraduates to write on. Thus, topic selecting in thesis writing should be macro, prospective, academic and creative.

3. Creative and Critical Thinking in Topic Selection

Translation is not only a newly emerging subject, but also a subject closely related to other subjects and enjoys a relatively wide content of research, which provides broad domain for researchers to explore. Graduate thesis writing on translation isn't limited to literature translation, but can also touch upon translation in industry, agriculture, and entertainment and may do cross-subject research. The topic selecting process discussed above reflects the divergent thinking process. Topic selection on translation can be related to almost all subjects, such as linguistics, literature, culture, aesthetics, law, science and technology and so on. Meantime, the research may also be narrowed down to a certain field of a certain subject and still makes sense. For example, the title of the thesis can be shown as, "Divergent Thinking and the Translation of Idioms", "An Analysis of Lin Daiyu's Poetry Translation in The Dream of Red Mansions from the 'Three Beauties' Theory", "Influence of Chinese-English Cultural Differences on the Translation of Tourism Texts" or "The Translation of English Film Titles from Cultural Perspective". English is always considered as a tool of communication and this kind of communicative function should be brought into fully play in research.

Only doing cross-subject research doesn't mean being creative. Take Tourism English Translation as an example. Many scholars used to do research in this field. Thus literature review is necessary. Students may find the researching blank of Tourism English Translation and try to fill in the blank by further research. Reading and digesting is very important for thesis writing. It is a process of discovering and solving problems. With critical attitude, students read materials with questions in mind, which is similar to translation criticism. Of course, students shouldn't be satisfied with finding problems, but should go on exploring the keys to the problems. If the problems have been solved by other scholars, the students could try to see whether there are better ways of solving these problems. If one cannot find any solutions through literature review, he or she should then consider a suitable way of solving the problems. So regarding reading as a process of finding and solving problems,

with critical thinking, it will be much easier for the students to find creative topics. And sometimes, the students should make a mountain out of a molehill.

Theory and practice are closely connected with each other. Creative thinking should be tested by practice. Only when a creative topic is applied in practice, can it be regarded as a kind of valuable creation.

4. Topic Selecting Shouldn't Be Separated from One's Major

Some students go far away from their direction of research when choosing topics. Their topics may be like "Thoughts after reading 'Wuthering Heights'" and "Character analysis in 'Jane Eyre'" which have nothing to do with translation. However, just a little change may change it into a thesis related to translation like "Reflection of Personalities of the Characters in the Translation of 'Jane Eyre'" and "Cultural Features reflected in the translation of 'Wuthering Heights'" which may better suit to their direction of research.

5. Cultivation of Students' Learning Initiative

Students' learning initiative should be cultivated during topic selecting process. Students should be active in material collecting, literature review analysis, theory researching and so on. Since the translation theory research is far from being mature, the students may find it difficult to find materials and doing research in. Yet, this may also provide possibilities for creation, which requires the students to make explorations with divergent thinking initiatively. Since it's the first time for many students to write graduation thesis, they tend to go through references on line which is helpful for their writing. But on the other hand, some students use the same structure or even the same topic and viewpoints in their theses. Creation cannot be shown in this kind of imitation. However, with divergent thinking, considering the topic from another aspect instead of complete acceptance may help the students to draw a more feasible conclusion.

In conclusion, suitable and significant topics as well as creative ones should be considered in topic selecting during thesis writing.

Acknowledgements

Sincere appreciation must be given to all that have given their support to the research.

This paper is the research result of Research on Application of Divergent Thinking in English Thesis Writing Teaching which belongs to the "12th Five-Year Plan project on Education Science in Hebei Province" (Project No. 1412001). The thesis is the research result of Research on the Inclusive Development of Talent Cultivation during the Stage of Basic Education Which Belongs to the "12th Five-Year Plan Project on Education Science in Baoding" (Project No. 201301153).

The authors would like to show special thanks to Baoding University for the generous support.

References

- Fu, Y. C., & Han, H. S. (2003). Creative Thinking and Thesis Writing. *Applied Writing*, 2, 32-34.
- Lu, D. F. (2007). Thinking Training and Ability Cultivation of Raising Questions in Topic Selection for English Major B A. Degree Paper Writing. *Journal of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University*, 4, 95-99.
- Ma, L. (2011). Creative Thinking Mode and the Standardization of Academic Papers. *Journal of Lanzhou*, 10, 214.
- Wang, R. S. (2001). On Creative Thinking and Thesis Writing. *Journal of Liaoning Public Security Judicial Management Cadre Institute*, 1.
- Williams, J., & Chesterman, A. (2004). *THE MAP A Beginner's Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.