

Charting the Integration of Machine Translation Post-editing into College English Translation Teaching

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Abstract:

This study investigates the attitudes, usage patterns, and training needs of university students regarding machine translation post-editing through a survey of 284 non-English majors. Findings reveal widespread adoption of MT tools, with 96 percent of students acknowledging the necessity of post-editing to address quality limitations such as “lacking emotional depth” and “inferior accuracy”. Despite high reliance on MT, about 75 percent of respondents expressed strong demand for training in PE techniques. Based on these insights, the study proposes a reform framework for College English translation teaching, including teaching objectives, teaching content, instructional periods, and teaching methodologies and emphasizing practical translation competence, cross-cultural communication, technological proficiency, and critical thinking. Recommendations include allocating 20 to 25 percent of instructional periods to translation modules, integrating task-driven and case-based methodologies, and leveraging blended learning models. This research is expected to offer technological innovations, pedagogical practices, and strategies to enhance translation teaching in college English in the AI era.

Keywords:

Machine Translation Post-editing, College English Translation Teaching, Curriculum Reform

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of machine translation (MT) technologies, such as neural machine translation (NMT) and large language models (e.g., ChatGPT), has revolutionized language processing and cross-cultural communication. In this context, machine translation post-editing (MTPE) has emerged as significant tools and methods in the field of translation. Especially, the integration of machine translation and post-editing has become an important topic of research in the field of translation education. And it is noted that university students increasingly rely on MT tools to overcome language barriers in English learning and translation tasks.

By conducting a survey among college students, including students' personal information, MT usage patterns, evaluations of MT software, attitudes toward post-editing, and willingness to participate in related training, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of how students perceive and utilize MTPE in their English learning and translation practice. These findings based on the survey will also provide recommendations for college English translation teaching, aiming to improve the teaching quality and better meet the needs of students in the context of the widespread application of MTPE.

2. Literature Review

The integration of MTPE into educational and professional contexts has got significant scholarly attention over the past decade. This section synthesizes existing research across four key themes: (1) machine translation adoption and challenges in academia; (2) post-editing practices, training, and cognitive demands; (3) cross-cultural competence and translation pedagogy and (4) technological integration and pedagogical innovation.

2.1. Machine Translation Adoption and Challenges in Academia

The widespread adoption of MT tools in academic settings has reshaped language learning and translation practices. Bowker and Buitrago-Ciro [1] examined MT's role in academic writing, revealing that students frequently use MT for drafting but lack systematic training in refining outputs. Similarly, Sun and Zhu [2] surveyed Chinese universities and found high MT adoption rates among foreign language majors, though institutions rarely provide structured guidance. These studies highlight a critical gap: while MT is ubiquitous, its integration into curricula remains fragmented.

Jiménez-Crespo [3] further explored ethical implications, warning that over-reliance on MT risks diminishing students' critical thinking and independent translation skills. This aligns with the current survey's finding that about 80 percent of students acknowledge the necessity of post-editing, suggesting a pragmatic awareness of MT's limitations. Li et al. [4] investigated the influence of pre-editing on post-editing and the quality and efficiency of translation, which contextualizes the survey's emphasis on balancing efficiency with quality through pedagogical reforms.

2.2. Post-Editing Practices, Training, and Cognitive Demands

Post-editing has emerged as a vital skill to bridge MT's limitations. Isabel et al. [5] expanded this by analyzing cognitive effort in post-editing, showing that effective post-editing requires both linguistic expertise and technical proficiency. These findings support the study's proposal to allocate 6–8 instructional periods to post-editing techniques, emphasizing error correction and semantic adjustment.

Vieira et al. [6] indicated that the potential benefits of integrating machine translation into human translation workflows are now widely recognized and provided a brief overview of post-editing as a practice, service and research topic. Guerberoof [7] underscored the value of targeted training, demonstrating that skilled editors achieve higher quality with reduced effort, a finding mirrored in students' strong demand for post-editing training.

2.3. Cross-Cultural Competence and Translation Pedagogy

Cultural adaptation remains a persistent challenge for MT. Aldelaa et al. [8] demonstrated that MT often fails to capture idiomatic expressions or cultural references, necessitating human intervention. This aligns with the survey's finding that students criticize MT outputs for "lacking emotional depth." Huang [9] emphasized that cultural awareness significantly improves translation acceptability, supporting the integration of cross-cultural case studies into curricula.

House [10] and Katan [11] explored the role of translators as cultural mediators, arguing that MT struggles with context-dependent nuances. For instance, Baker [12] warned that cultural misrepresentation in MT can lead to misunderstandings, reinforcing the need for teaching strategies that address cultural disparities in values or linguistic styles. These insights justify the study's recommendation to analyze practical cases of cultural conflicts in translation, such as idiomatic expressions in advertising or literature.

2.4. Technological Integration and Pedagogical Innovation

Effective translation education requires balancing technological proficiency with pedagogical innovation. Kenny and Doherty [13] stressed the importance of hands-on MT tool training, a principle reflected in the survey's high demand for software tutorials (e.g., Baidu Translate, Youdao Translate). Sha et al. [14] demonstrated that collaborative platforms enhance post-editing accuracy through peer feedback, informing the proposal for group-based translation projects.

Finally, Pym [15] cautioned against uncritical MT reliance, advocating for pedagogical models that foster independent thinking, a theme central to the study's emphasis on critical analysis and autonomous learning.

While existing literature extensively documents MT's capabilities and challenges, significant gaps remain. Few studies address the needs of non-English majors, particularly those in design, media, or fine arts, who may prioritize visual-linguistic accuracy over textual fidelity. The current study attempts to address this gap by proposing a curriculum tailored to interdisciplinary demands.

3. A Survey Report on College Students' Attitudes and Usage of MTPE

3.1. Survey Methodology and Sample

Complemented in 2024, the survey was conducted in the form of questionnaires distributed via the WeChat platform, with data collected at different time points. A total of 284 valid responses were obtained. The questionnaire covered respondents' personal information, MT usage patterns, evaluations of MT software, attitudes toward post-editing, and willingness to participate in related training. The sample primarily consisted of non-English major undergraduates from college, with diverse academic backgrounds such as design, fine arts, broadcasting and so on, ensuring a certain level of representative scope.

3.2. Analysis of Survey Results

3.2.1. Personal Information

For gender and major distribution in the data, the number of female respondents significantly exceeded that of their male counterparts, accounting for approximately

62 percent and 38 percent, respectively. The majors of respondents were widely distributed, including design, fine arts, broadcasting, and media production, with students from fine arts and design majors constituting a relatively higher proportion.

On duration of English learning, the majority of respondents had studied English for 9 to 12 years, indicating a solid foundation in English that enables them to make relatively accurate judgments and effective use of MT.

In terms of exam preparation status, in addition to regular exams at college, about 86 percent of respondents were preparing for the College English Test Band 4, with some also preparing for College English Test Band 6 or other English competitions, such as the National English Competition for College Students in China, TOEFL or IELTS.

3.2.2. Machine Translation Usage Patterns

As to frequency of usage, approximately 59 percent of respondents reported “occasional” use of MT, while around 39 percent indicated “frequent” use, and only about 2 percent stated they “never” used it. This suggests a relatively high adoption rate of MT among university students, though few remain less dependent on it.

For translation direction for MT, about 79 percent of respondents used MT for both English-to-Chinese and Chinese-to-English translation, while 15 percent primarily used it for English-to-Chinese, and 5 percent for Chinese-to-English. This indicates a balanced application of MT across different translation directions, with a slightly higher demand for English-to-Chinese translation.

During the questionnaire survey, NMT was booming and mostly free, while machine translation based on large language models was just emerging and was charged domestically. As a result, students generally used NMT software. As to software preferences, more respondents generally considered Google Translate, Baidu Translate, and Youdao Translate as user-friendly and high-quality MT tools. Baidu Translate and Youdao Translate were mentioned more frequently, accounting for approximately 51 percent and 50 percent of responses, respectively, while Google Translate was favored by around 29 percent of students.

3.2.3. Evaluation of Machine Translation Software

Regarding advantages, respondents widely acknowledged the “speed” and “efficiency” of MT, with approximately 88 percent and 69 percent citing these as key benefits, respectively. A smaller proportion (around 36 percent) mentioned “high quality” as an advantage, indicating that while MT excels in delivering quick results, there is still room for improvement in translation quality.

Regarding disadvantages, about 70 percent of respondents identified “inferior quality compared to human translation” as a drawback, while 69 percent criticized MT for “lacking emotional depth.” This highlights MT’s limitations in handling complex semantics and emotional expression, making it unable to fully replace human translation.

As for collaboration methods, approximately 87 percent of respondents reported modifying MT outputs based on the original text, while 9 percent used MT outputs without any modifications, and 4 percent made minor adjustments without considering the source text. This suggests that most students engage in some level of post-editing to enhance translation quality.

3.2.4. Attitudes Toward Post-Editing

Concerning necessity of post-editing, around 96 percent of respondents “completely agreed” or “mostly agreed” that MT outputs require post-editing to be usable, while only 4 percent expressed disagreement. This demonstrates that most students recognize the critical role of post-editing in improving translation quality.

For active adoption for MTPE, about 70 percent of respondents indicated that they actively chose the “MTPE” approach under conditions such as “limited time,” or “high translation difficulty.” This reflects students’ preference for leveraging MT and subsequent editing to achieve satisfactory results when faced with time constraints or challenging tasks.

3.2.5. Willingness to Participate in Related Training

As for recognition of competence, around 85 percent of respondents believed that non-English major undergraduates “should” possess post-editing skills for MT, while 15 percent disagreed. This reveals a divergence in opinions regarding the necessity of post-editing skills for non-English majors, though the majority viewed it as a beneficial capability.

For training demand, approximately 75 percent of respondents expressed a willingness to participate in training related to MT post-editing, while 25 percent were unwilling. This indicates a strong desire among students to enhance their post-editing skills through professional training.

3.3. Conclusions for the Survey Report

Based on the aforementioned survey report, the following conclusions can be draw: 1) widespread application of MT. MT has gained significant traction among university students, particularly non-English majors, serving as a common translation aid. Its speed and efficiency make it a valuable tool for meeting students’ daily learning and translation needs; 2) importance of post-editing. Most students recognize the necessity of post-editing to enhance MT quality and actively engage in modifying outputs. This reflects a clear understanding of MT’s limitations and a pragmatic approach to leveraging its strengths while addressing its shortcomings; 3) high demand for training. Students exhibit a strong interest in training related to MTPE, highlighting their desire to improve their translation competence. This presents an opportunity for educational institutions and related industries to develop training programs and educational services; 4) disciplinary and cognitive differences. Students from different academic backgrounds exhibit varying habits and attitudes toward MT usage, and opinions on whether non-English majors should possess post-editing skills vary, likely influenced by individual learning experiences and perceptions of translation needs.

4. Recommendations for College English Translation Teaching

Based on the aforementioned survey report, the following are recommendations for teaching reform in the translation component of College English courses, encompassing teaching objectives, teaching content, instructional periods, and teaching methodologies.

4.1. Teaching Objectives

4.1.1. Cultivating Practical Translation Competence

The survey indicates that about 75 percent of students engage in post-editing after using machine translation, and more than 70 percent actively adopt a “MTPE” approach in specific contexts, demonstrating a foundational awareness and capability in post-editing. The teaching objective should therefore be defined as enabling students to proficiently utilize MT tools, master post-editing skills, and independently produce high-quality translations [16], including both English-to-Chinese and Chinese-to-English tasks.

4.1.2 Enhancing Cross-Cultural Communication Competence

The survey highlights students’ critique of MT outputs as “lacking emotional depth,” underscoring the importance of affective and cultural expression in translation. Drawing on the research [17], which testified that it can effectively improve the students’ ability of evaluation, learning and inference by integrating discourse analysis with intercultural communication and translation, the objective should aim to cultivate students’ ability to navigate cultural disparities (e.g., values, idiomatic expressions) and avoid conflicts in cross-cultural contexts. By guiding students to focus on cultural factors, their cross-cultural communication competence can be significantly enhanced. Additionally, the high demand for cross-cultural learning among students reflects their sensitivity to cultural differences and strong willingness to learn. Thus, the teaching objective should aim to help students understand the cultural disparities between the East and the West, enabling them to communicate effectively in cross-cultural contexts, avoid cultural conflicts, and achieve smooth interactions.

4.1.3. Strengthening Information Literacy and Technological Proficiency

The investigation reveals that students frequently use MT software and exhibit a strong demand for related training (about 75 percent expressing willingness to participate), indicating a high level of acceptance and eagerness to learn technological applications. Hou [18] advocated for blended learning models combining online tutorials and hands-on practice, ensuring students stay updated on tools like AI-driven translation and terminology databases. The teaching objective should focus on cultivating students’ ability to skillfully use MT software, stay updated on the latest developments in translation technology, and leverage modern information technology to support their translation studies.

4.1.4. Fostering Critical Thinking and Autonomous Learning Abilities

The survey results show that students have a clear understanding of the limitations of MT, with approximately 96 percent acknowledging the necessity of post-editing, providing a solid foundation for developing critical thinking. Following competency framework of Zhong et al. [19], the teaching objective should therefore aim to guide students in maintaining a critical mindset when using MT, enabling them to identify translation errors and make independent revisions, while encouraging them to autonomously explore translation techniques and methodologies.

4.2. Teaching Content

4.2.1. Machine Translation and Post-Editing

The report highlights students' frequent use of MT software and their high recognition of post-editing, indicating a strong demand for this content and its relevance to their learning needs. The teaching content should systematically explain the working principles, advantages, and disadvantages of MT, as well as the usage of common MT tools (e.g., neural machine translation and large language models). Emphasis should be placed on teaching post-editing techniques, including grammatical correction, lexical substitution, and semantic adjustment.

4.2.2. Cross-Cultural Translation Techniques

The survey's mention of students' criticism of MT outputs as "inferior in quality to human translation" and "lacking emotional depth" reflects the importance of affective and cultural expression in translation. By focusing on cultural factors, teachers can effectively enhance students' cross-cultural communication competence. Moreover, students' high demand for cultural background knowledge indicates their strong emphasis on cultural connotations.

To address MT's cultural shortcomings, comparative analysis of MT and human translations in technical texts from Wang [20] demonstrated the need for case studies on cultural adaptation. Therefore, the teaching content should incorporate practical case studies to illustrate the manifestation of cultural differences between the East and the West in translation, such as cultural backgrounds, values, and linguistic styles. Students should be taught how to address cultural conflicts during translation and achieve accurate conveyance of cultural imagery.

4.2.3. Translation Practice and Case-Based Training

The report notes students' high demand for practical opportunities, with around 70 percent actively choosing the "MTPE" approach in specific contexts. It demonstrates students' enthusiasm for hands-on experience. Thus, the teaching content should include the design of practical translation projects, such as translation competitions and simulated translation tasks, allowing students to hone their translation skills through practice. Collaboration with professional teachers and translators should be encouraged to help students accumulate practical experience.

4.2.4. Translation Technology and Tool Application

According to the survey results, students frequently use MT software and exhibit a strong demand for related training, indicating their high acceptance and willingness to learn technological applications. Integrating tools like translation memory systems into curricula reflects Hou's emphasis on translation technology [18]. The curriculum should integrate the latest advancements in translation technology, such as AI-driven translation, translation memory systems, and terminology databases, teaching students how to utilize these tools to enhance translation efficiency and quality.

4.3. Classroom Instructional Periods

The survey shows that students have a strong interest in and demand for translation instruction, and increasing the allocated periods can better meet their learning needs without significantly impacting other teaching modules. Based on the total instructional periods of the College English course, it is recommended that the translation module constitute 20 to 25 percent of the total periods. For example, if the

total course duration is 112 periods, the translation module could be allocated 22-28 periods.

For a 112-period course, the specific distribution of instructional periods could be as follows:

Machine Translation and Post-Editing: 6-8 periods. This is the content that students are most interested in and have the greatest demand for. Through systematic explanation and practical exercises, students can acquire basic skills in a relatively short period.

Cross-Cultural Translation Techniques: 6-8 periods. By incorporating practical case studies, students' cross-cultural communication competence can be effectively enhanced, while also meeting their demand for cultural knowledge.

Translation Practice and Case-Based Training: 6-8 periods. Through practical cases, students can apply their knowledge to real-world translation tasks, gaining experience and improving their abilities.

Translation Technology and Tool Application: 3-4 periods. Given students' high interest in translation technology, introducing and practicing the use of relevant tools can enable them to quickly master their application.

4.4. Teaching Methodologies

4.4.1. Task-Driven Teaching Method

The survey indicates that students have a strong interest in translation practice, and the task-driven approach can stimulate their learning motivation while fostering autonomous learning and teamwork skills. Specific translation tasks, such as translating short passages, news reports, or advertising copy, can be designed to allow students to learn translation techniques and methods through task completion. Tasks can be divided into individual and group assignments, encouraging students to collaborate on complex translation projects.

4.4.2. Case-Based Teaching Method

Additionally, students show a high level of interest in the impact of cultural factors on translation, and the case-based approach can help them better understand the cultural connotations in translation, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural communication competence. Typical translation cases can be selected for analysis, focusing on translation strategies, cultural handling, and linguistic expression. Through case analysis, students can summarize lessons learned and improve their translation proficiency.

4.4.3. Blended Online and Offline Teaching

Moreover, students frequently use MT software and have a strong demand for related training, making blended teaching an effective way to leverage online resources and improve teaching efficiency. Online platforms can be used to provide tutorials on MT software and video resources on translation techniques, allowing students to engage in self-directed learning before class. In-class sessions can then focus on addressing challenging issues, organizing practical exercises, and facilitating discussions.

4.4.4. Group Collaboration and Discussion

Students exhibit a strong interest in collaborative learning, and group work and discussions can stimulate their enthusiasm while fostering teamwork and communication skills. In practice, students can be divided into groups to discuss and collaborate on translation tasks, collectively completing projects. Through group collaboration, students can develop their teamwork and communication abilities.

5. Conclusions

The survey report including students' personal information, MT usage patterns, evaluations of MT software, attitudes toward post-editing, and willingness to participate in related training, provides a crucial reference for teaching reform. Based on the survey, the paper tries to offer some suggestions on reforming the teaching objectives, teaching content, instructional periods, and teaching methodologies in College English translation teaching. It is expected that the learning and practical needs of students in English studies and translation can be better satisfied. Through optimizing teaching content, increasing practical opportunities, and integrating modern technology, students' translation competence and overall proficiency can be effectively enhanced, promoting the development of translation instruction in College English courses. However, the survey focuses on non-English majors in one university in China that limits the generalizability of findings. Future studies could expand to diverse regions to capture broader socioeconomic and educational variations. As AI-driven translation evolves, ongoing updates to curricula will be essential.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Appendix

Survey on Attitudes and Usage Towards Machine Translation and Post-Editing from College Students

With the rapid development of neural machine translation (NMT) models, machine translation is becoming increasingly sophisticated and evolving at an unprecedented pace. Post-editing, as a crucial aspect of human-computer interaction in translation, represents the future direction of translation services. Cultivating college students' post-editing skills is an innovative approach to advancing the digitalization and informatization of College English translation teaching. To enhance students' translation abilities and transform the modes of College English translation teaching, please complete this questionnaire.

1. Your class: [Open-ended question]

2. Gender: [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. Location of your home (province/city): [Open-ended question]

4. Duration of learning English: (Please fill in Arabic numerals) [Open-ended question]

5. Are you preparing for any English exams other than course exams of the university? [Multiple-choice question]

- ☐ CET-4 (College English Test Band 4)
- ☐ CET-6 (College English Test Band 6)
- ☐ National English Competition for College Students
- ☐ TOEFL/IELTS
- ☐ Other, please specify: _____

6. When I need to translate, I () use machine translation: [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Always use it entirely
- ☐ Frequently use it
- ☐ Occasionally use it
- ☐ Never use it

7. What is your primary translation direction when using machine translation? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ English to Chinese
- ☐ Chinese to English
- ☐ Both

8. Do you find machine translation tools (e.g., Google Translate, Youdao Translate, Baidu Translate) easy to use? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. Which machine translation tool do you think has the highest accuracy and quality? [Multiple-choice question]

- ☐ Google Translate
- ☐ Baidu Translate
- ☐ Youdao Translate
- ☐ Bing Translator
- ☐ Kingsoft Translator

- ☐ WPS Built-in Translator
- ☐ Other, please specify: _____

10. What are your reasons for using machine translation? [Multiple-choice question]

- ☐ To complete translation assignments
- ☐ To assist in understanding English texts
- ☐ To learn new skills
- ☐ Other, please specify: _____

11. Are you aware of the advantages and disadvantages of machine translation? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Very aware
- ☐ Somewhat aware
- ☐ Not aware

12. What do you think are the advantages of machine translation? [Multiple-choice question]

- ☐ High quality
- ☐ Fast speed
- ☐ High efficiency

13. What do you think are the disadvantages of machine translation? [Multiple-choice question]

- ☐ Lower quality compared to human translation
- ☐ Lacks emotional nuance
- ☐ Low efficiency

14. How do you collaborate with machine translation? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Use machine translation entirely without modification
- ☐ Modify machine translation based on the original text
- ☐ Make minor edits to machine translation without considering the original text

15. Do you think machine-translated texts need post-editing before adoption? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Slightly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

16. In the following situations, I would actively choose to use “machine translation + post-editing”: [Multiple-choice question]

- ☐ Any translation scenario
- ☐ Limited translation time
- ☐ High translation difficulty

- ☐ Low translation quality requirements

17. Do you think non-English major undergraduates should possess post-editing skills for machine translation? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. Are you willing to receive training on machine translation post-editing? [Single-choice question]

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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