

Outcome-based Teaching & Learning: Implementation of Backward Design in an MA Translation Course

Hui, Maggie Ting Ting

Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Maggie.hui@polyu.edu.hk

Abstract

Applications of Outcome-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) in local higher education have been advocated by the University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong since 2005. A majority of universities and tertiary institutions, in their strategic plans, have formulated desired outcomes for their graduates and undertaken steps to maximize the extent to which those outcomes can be achieved. Two universities I have served over the past decade employ the Constructive Alignment (CA) model (Biggs & Tang 2007), and have their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and courses' syllabuses present the alignment between programme intended learning outcomes (PILOs), course intended learning outcomes (CILOs), teaching and learning activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks (ATs). The direction is: ILOs determine TLAs and ATs. I have been impressed by the Backward Design process (Wiggins & McTighe 2005), a variation of Constructive Alignment: ILOs determine ATs, and ATs decide on TLAs. In Academic Year 2016-17, I adopted the Backward Design and revised an MA translation course, with course materials almost the same as the ones used in the course in Academic Year 2015-16. In this presentation, two examples are to be given to demonstrate the difference in course delivery between the two academic years, and a brief comparison conducted between the two cohorts' feedback on teaching and learning.

Keywords

Backward Design, Constructive Alignment (CA), Outcome-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL), Translation Pedagogy, Translator Training

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1. Introduction

Rodgers (1989, cit. Richards 2005: 39) suggests that the concept of curriculum “includes not only what pupils [learners] learn, but how they learn it, how teachers help them learn, using what supporting materials, styles and methods of assessment, and in what kind of facilities”. How learners learn and how the teacher helps learners learn seem to be more a focus than what the teacher teaches.

Traditionally, much institutionalized education in Western industrialized societies, including Britain and its then colony Hong Kong, was based on the quantitative concepts of learning and teaching. Learning is a matter of how much is learned – the more the better; and the teacher “transmits knowledge from their heads to those of their students” (Biggs & Watkins 1995: 10).

Today’s students will be tomorrow’s professionals, and Kiraly (2000: 19) believes it is within the institution itself that empowerment has to take place. “Empowerment” refers to a shift of authority, responsibility and control in the education process from the teacher to the learner, and learners attain competence in a professional domain, i.e. they acquire the expertise and thus the authority to make professional decisions, assume responsibility for their actions, and achieve autonomy to follow a path of lifelong learning (Kiraly 2000: 1).

To help students learn better, or to empower them, Kiraly (2000: 23) argues that learning should be seen as a “personal, holistic, intrinsically motivating and socially effectuated construction process”. Thus, a shift from a quantitative to a qualitative conception of learning is suggested. The qualitative perspective adopts a constructivist view of learning, so students extract their own meanings from their experience, while the teacher just acts as a facilitator of learning (Biggs & Watkins 1995: 11).

Constructivism is a view of learning that emphasizes the relativity of knowledge; stressing that knowledge is constructed by the individual, not transferred by the teacher, and that individual constructions vary according to previous knowledge (Biggs & Watkins 1995: 17). In other words, learners construct new knowledge based on their prior knowledge.

The paradigm shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered has become an international trend, marked by higher education institutions and professional bodies’ designing curricular in terms of the outcomes students are meant to achieve at different levels, the crux of Outcome-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL).

2. OBTL: Constructive Alignment and Backward Design

In the outcome-based teaching and learning (OBTL) model, the principle of constructive alignment is upheld. “Constructive” refers to its sense in the Constructivist theory: learners, via their own activities, to construct their knowledge as interpreted through their own existing schemata. “Alignment” means coherence between the intended learning outcomes of a programme/course and design of teaching and assessment. Assessment tasks are criterion-referenced, not norm-referenced; thus students’ performance is measured against a set of predetermined criteria of learning standards, presented by rubrics, rather than a distribution of scores resembling a “bell curve” when graphed.

Applications of outcome-based teaching and learning in local higher education have been advocated by the University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong since 2005. A majority of universities and tertiary institutions, in their strategic plans, have formulated desired outcomes for their graduates and undertaken steps to maximize the extent to which those outcomes can be achieved. Two universities I have served over the past decade employ the constructive alignment (CA) model (Biggs & Tang 2007), and have their undergraduate and

postgraduate programmes and courses' syllabuses present the alignment between programme intended learning outcomes (PILOs), course intended learning outcomes (CILOs), teaching and learning activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks (ATs). The direction is: ILOs determine TLAs and ATs. This concept, however, is twisted a little by backward design advocates Wiggins and McTighe (2005), who propose that the teacher should start with the end and identify desired results (goals or standards), think like an assessor and determine if students have attained the desired understandings, and finally plan learning experiences and instruction; hence ILOs decide on ATs, and ATs decide on TLAs.

Impressed by the Backward Design process, I adopted Backward Design and revised an MA translation course in Academic Year 2016-17, with course materials almost the same as the ones used in the course in Academic Year 2015-16. This presentation/paper is to present two examples to demonstrate the difference in course delivery between the two academic years, and a brief comparison between the two cohorts' feedback on teaching and learning.

3. Test the Waters: An MA Translation Course

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) adopts constructive alignment, and coherence between programmes' intended learning outcomes (PILOs), their courses' ILOs (CILOs), teaching and learning activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks (ATs) is presented in its programme documents, which are distributed to teaching staff at the beginning of every academic year and to new students at the start of their first-year studies. Teachers are expected to take the alignment principle into serious account when designing a course, and students should be able to achieve those outcomes (ILOs) upon completing the course/programme.

The direction is: **PILOs**→**CILOs**→**TLAs**→**ATs**.

Attempting to test the effectiveness of backward design, I experimented on one of my 3-credit courses in 2016-17, CBS564: Translation: Discourse & the Translator. This is one of the compulsory courses of PolyU's MA in Translating & Interpreting Programme (MATI); students are to complete 30 credit hours for graduation.

The course (CBS564) is offered in the fall and spring semesters, i.e. twice per year, but the student profiles are very different (Table 3a).

Table 3a. CBS564 student profiles

Semester	Fall semester (Sem. 1)	Spring semester (Sem. 2)
Daytime/Evening	Daytime course	Evening course
Full-time/Part-time	Full-timers	Part-timers
Hometown	Mainland China; Taiwan	Hong Kong
Age	Most in their early 20s	From mid-20s to 50s
Work experience	Limited; many fresh graduates	Most with full-time jobs
Majors	English/Translation/ Language-related	Varied

Sticking to the principle of constructive alignment, CBS564 already ran smooth and earned positive feedback in 2015-16. To reduce variables, I kept most course materials unchanged but modified the design of assignments (Section 3.1) and the way the same teaching focus to be taught (Section 3.2) in 2016-17.

Besides, I compared subjects taking the course in spring semesters, when course adjustments matured, not in fall semesters, when they were still on trial.

The direction is: **PILOs**→**CILOs**→**ATs**→**TLAs**.

This presentation/paper focuses on only the order of ATs and TLAs (Table 3b). Table 3c shows the alignment plans for the two academic years.

Table 3b. Setting the scene

Cohort	2015-16 (Spring)	2016-17 (Spring)
Subject	“Control group”: HK part-timers	“Experiment group”: HK part-timers
OBTL	Constructive alignment (CA)	CA w/ backward design
Direction	CILOs→TLAs→ATs	CILOs→ATs→TLAs
Example 1: AT design (3.1)	Assignment 1: CE translation (Register)	Assignment 1: <u>Mapping</u> between translation considerations and CE translation (Register)
Example 2: TLA design (3.2)	Advertising discourse: translation class work	Advertising discourse: <u>Relationship between translation purposes and selection</u> of translation approaches

Table 3c. Alignments for 2015-16 (extracted from MATI’s programme document) & 2016-17

	2015-16: CA: CILOs→TLAs→ATs	2016-17: CA w/ backward design: CILOs→ATs→TLAs	
OBTL: Constructive Alignment	<u>Intended learning outcomes of the CBS564</u> Upon completing the course, students should be able to: a) Present complex ideas clearly and articulately in English and Chinese. b) Translate complex Chinese passages (including classic Chinese texts) into idiomatic English. c) Make use of different language skills and strategies to undertake translating assignments of various types in a professional context. d) Comprehend the issue of discourse analysis and how this relates to professional practice. e) Have a solid understanding of translation as a profession and analyze, process and complete translating tasks by professional standards, and professional ethics.		OBTL: Constructive Alignment with Backward Design
	<u>Teaching-and-learning activities</u> Translation class work; translation consideration discussion: register, intended readership, text function, translation purposes, translation approaches	<u>Assessment tasks</u> 4 translation assignments: (e.g.) focus on <u>mapping between translation considerations and translation work</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2 English-to-Chinese and 2 Chinese-to-English ● The first EC and CE assignments to align with ILOs (a), (b), (c) and (d); the second EC and CE assignments to align with all ILOs 	
	<u>Assessment tasks</u> 4 translation assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2 English-to-Chinese and 2 Chinese-to-English ● The first EC and CE assignments to align with ILOs (a), (b), (c) and (d); the second EC and CE assignments to align with all ILOs 	<u>Teaching-and-learning activities</u> E.g. To create mapping experiences in class	

3.1. Assignment Design - An Example

CBS564 is a practical translation course. I introduce to students the very practical part of a translation job (e.g. publishing considerations and readers’ needs and expectations) and the theories that are highly relevant to practitioners’ concerns (e.g. Reiss’ language function, Vermeer’s Skopos Theory, Newmark’s establishment of relationship between intended text

function and translation approaches, Yan Fu’s purpose of the translation and selection of source texts as well as specific translation strategies, Chesterman’s expectancy norms, and Halliday’s concept of register...), and encourage them to consider such factors before translating a text.

In Academic Year 2015-16, I instructed students to think about and discuss the translation specifications (or the “brief”), including register, before rendering class work into the target language individually/in groups. The source text could be a formal/casual dialogue and/or a specialized/general text. During class discussion, I always reminded them that the renditions should be able to reflect those specifications. Students tended to perform better in the L2-to-L1 direction than the L1-to-L2 one. However, I noticed a problem when marking their assignments: Some students could present sensible specifications in the lesson, but failed to deliver a rendition that matched those specifications; making translation considerations and working on a translation could be two irrelevant tasks.

In Academic Year 2016-17, I twisted the assignment design with the backward design principle in mind: to begin with the **End**. In this case, the end is that students should be able to submit a rendition that matches the client/boss’ expectation/specification. Figure 3.1 demonstrates an example. The pivot is not on the nature, direction or level of difficulty of the source text, but on the mapping between the factors listed in the Considerations table and the target text. Students were told to (1) take on the role of the client and fill out the table, then (2) resume the translator’s responsibility and finish the translation, and finally (3) act as the editor and assess the target text based on not only its linguistic quality but also on how well it matches the factors raised by the translation requester. I advised students to hand in their work only after the mapping was achieved; they were also told that marks would be deducted if the considerations did not make sense, if the translation was not satisfactory, and/or if the translation did not match its considerations behind.

In class, we also went through these three stages. First, students read the source text and made all the considerations, and shared them with the whole class. Second, they translated the text on their own or with their friends. Third, they were reminded to read their translations again and modify any parts that were not in line with those considerations.

Figure 3.1. An assignment example

CBS564 Translation: Discourse and the Translator
Assignment 1 (25%)

Fill out the tables and translate the texts into English.

Exercise 1 (12%)

A: 有公司投資者認為我們應將更多營運項目外判。
 B: 真糟糕，拜託，別提了。
 A: 我們擴充得很快，而且現在有些營運項目，像資料處理、包裝等等，根本不是公司的主要目標。
 B: 所以我們就應該外判，以換取惡劣的工作品質嗎？
 A: 試想想，你是行銷經理，卻要監管帳務。
 B: 但我擅長管帳啊，總比我一家根本不在乎我們的二流公司來做好！
 A: 這我知道，但外判是現今趨勢，公司需要提高效率才有競爭力。
 B: 付一大筆錢還放棄掌控權？我不認為那樣會有競爭力。
 A: 這我可不确定。
 B: 公司內部作業讓我們更能掌控營運品質。
 A: 好了，我們下次開會時可以跟其他主管討論這個問題。

Consideration	Description	Remarks
1. Register		
* Field		
* Mode		
* Tenor		
2. Intended readership		
3. Intended text function		
4. Purpose of the TT translator		
5. Translation approach		

Students encountered source-text comprehension problems in their assignments, but none in this cohort submitted an unsensible literal rendition, hoping the teacher/reader would be able to interpret the meaning behind. Generally possessing some/much work experience,

these Hong Kong part-time students tended to be prepared and able to present their translation considerations/requests/specifications easily as the client/boss/editor, and to check if the final translation matched the criteria they had set at the beginning of the task.

Table 3.1. Assignment design: CA vs. CA (backward design)

Year	2015-16		2016-17	
Direction	CA: ILOs→TLAs→ATs		CA (w/ backward design) ILOs→ATs→TLAs	
Description	<u>TLAs</u> (1) Class discussion: translation brief (2) Translation	<u>ATs</u> Translation: E→C; C→E	<u>Design of ATs</u> (1) “Client”: list considerations (2) “Translator” (3) “Editor”: mapping	<u>TLAs</u> (1) Discussion: considerations (2) Translation (3) Polish failed mapping attempts

3.2. Design of Teaching-and-learning Activities for a Teaching Focus - An Example

Advertising discourse is one of the must-have focuses in the CBS564 syllabus. In 2015-16, I selected a CNN soft news article with around 1,000 words entitled “10 things to know before visiting Brazil” as part of the class work for advertising discourse. The passage tells some political background of Brazil in the introduction and presents 10 features of the country, including the languages spoken (Portuguese, and English in only Rio de Janeiro and St Paulo), unique fruits and juices, exotic music and dances, piranhas, landscapes and industries. Advanced lexical choices, Portuguese terms/expressions and the 10 sub-headlines make translation challenging.

In class, students were given around 10 minutes to skim through the source text, and another 10 minutes to ponder and discuss with peers its text type, intended text function, register, intended readership, and potential purpose and approach of translation. Afterwards, we had a class discussion. I picked the introduction and four features for students’ rendition. I invited students to read aloud their versions after the whole class finished translating for a feather, followed by my comments. Students’ next home assignment was to render a Lonely Planet text on Scandinavia into Chinese, syntax and lexis of which are more user-friendly than the one on Brazil, but literal translation may not be appropriate because some expressions are too negative for a Chinese advertising text.

Most student translations achieved a high degree of accuracy and fluency, but might not be suitable for travel book publishing – Scandinavia’s weaknesses would scare would-be travelers away. Besides, an informative-and-should-be-highly-vocative source text finally became an informative rendition, which could hardly raise the mood for a leisurely read. Most intended learning outcomes could still be achieved, but not the one(s) related to “professional practice” i.e. ILOs (d) and (e) in Table 3c.

In 2016-17, I determined to use the Brazil text for advertising discourse again, but stuck to the backward design principle and reviewed the assessment goal as well as the planning of the teaching-and-learning activities. In the assessment task, students had to be able to demonstrate their translation competence by establishing a linkage between their translation purposes and selection of translation approaches and strategies; hence more training on this part in class.

I encouraged students to talk with peers ALL the potential purposes of the translation and respective translation approaches as well as strategies, in addition to register, intended readership and intended text function. Students’ views varied. That is because the rendition of the Brazil text could be (1) author-centered and mainly expressive, when it is to be published for English (self-) learning, resembling what English learning magazines are doing in Taiwan;

(2) mainly informative, when it is to serve as soft news; or (3) reader-oriented and mainly vocative, when it is to be posted by travel bloggers. Semantic translation serves better for (1) and communicative translation works better for (2) and (3). I instructed them to translate for (3). Afterwards, I discussed with them and showed them how translation strategies selected for (2) and (3) could/should be different although communicative translation approach is deemed appropriate for both. Tone adjustment is especially crucial for (3). Students watched fascinated as they had not expected that the final translation product could be that different when the translator had a different purpose in mind. This cohort has come to understand the yardstick of success better, reflected by their performance in the same assignment on Scandinavia.

4. Findings: Comparison of Two Cohorts' Feedback on Teaching & Learning

I relied on PolyU's SFQ (student feedback questionnaire) results to compare the two cohorts' feedback on their learning experience and my teaching. I did not do any videotaping while conducting classes, which seems intrusive and would make students uncomfortable; any insights gained from class observation may be helpful but could be partial, and thus of secondary importance in this exploratory study.

The PolyU questionnaire provides both quantitative and qualitative findings. The first part of the SFQ employs a 5-point Likert scale (Table 4a) for students to rate the extent to which they agree/disagree with four statements on their learning experience of the subject and eight others on the lecturer's teaching (Table 4b).

Table 4a. The 5-point Likert scale

Point	1	2	3	4	5
SFQ	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No strong view	Agree	Strongly agree

Table 4b. SFQ statements: 4 on learning experience and 8 on teaching

<i>Item (On learning experience of the subject)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev.</i>
1. I have a clear understanding of what I am expected to learn from this subject.		
2. The teaching and learning activities (e.g. lectures, discussions, case studies, projects, etc) have helped me to achieve the subject learning outcomes.		
3. The assessments require me to demonstrate my knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject.		
4. I understand the criteria according to which I will be graded.		
<i>Item (On the teaching)</i>		
5. The staff member's teaching was well-organized.		
6. The staff member gave help when I asked for it.		
7. The staff member gave useful feedback on my work.		
8. The staff member showed enthusiasm in his/her teaching.		
9. The staff member's teaching stimulated my interest in the subject.		
10. The teaching of the staff member has provided me with a valuable learning experience.		
11. Overall, I think that the staff member is an effective teacher.		
12. Grand mean of items on Overall View		

The twelfth item is considered as the most important to all faculty staff, which serves as the mark/grade for their teaching throughout the course, and to the university management, which they use to appraise teaching members' performance and assess their teaching competence.

The second part comprises four open-ended questions regarding the subject and the teaching, offering us qualitative findings:

Question 1. What aspects of the subject were most useful to your learning?

Question 2. How could the subject be improved to help you learn better?

Question 3. What aspects of the staff member's teaching were most helpful to your learning?

Question 4. How would you like the teaching be changed (if at all), to help you learn better in the subject?

4.1. Quantitative Results

Ten of 19 students (52.6%) in the 2015-16 cohort and 16 of 29 students (55.2%) in the 2016-17 cohort filled out the online questionnaire. I ran a T-test, with two-tailed distribution and assuming unequal variance, before comparing two years' figures. The p value is 0.000081839, far lower than 0.05; the two sets of data are significantly different. Figure 4.1 demonstrates a comparison of their means of every item.

Figure 4.1. Comparison of two cohorts' means of every item/statement in the SFQ

Feedback	Academic Year	2015-16 (HK)		2016-17 (HK)	
Feedback on learning experience	Q1	4.1	82%	4.6	92%
	Q2	4.3	86%	4.8	96%
	Q3	4.3	86%	4.6	92%
	Q4	4	80%	4.6	92%
	MEAN	4.175	83.5%	4.65	93%
Feedback on teaching	Q5	4.4	88%	4.7	94%
	Q6	4.6	92%	4.7	94%
	Q7	4.6	92%	4.7	94%
	Q8	4.5	90%	4.7	94%
	Q9	4.1	82%	4.6	92%
	Q10	4.3	86%	4.6	92%
	Q11	4.4	88%	4.7	94%
	Q12	4.4	88%	4.6	92%
MEAN	4.413	88.3%	4.663	93.3%	

The 2016-17 respondents' mean figures are overwhelmingly higher than their 2015-16 counterparts', although the latter have already been deemed more than satisfactory. This indicates the benefits brought by the backward design: a landslide majority of the 2016-17 students perceived themselves to have grasped a clear understanding of what they should learn from the subject (Q1) and of the grading criteria (Q4), and believed that the assessment tasks (Q3) as well as the teaching-and-learning activities (Q2) were helpful; they were simply happier with the teaching performance (Q12).

4.2. Qualitative Findings

Students' replies to the open-ended questions are collected, compared and demonstrated in Table 4.2. The 2015-16 cohorts tended to express positive views on only the part of analysis and the usefulness of Teacher's feedback and class/home exercises.

With the adoption of backward design in 2016-17, students said that the course was "carefully planned with clear objective", the teacher "led students step-by-step" in translation tasks, they gained a "clear understanding of different translation approaches" and could "apply translation theories to exercises", and they had an "enjoyable learning experience", in addition to their appreciation of what had been mentioned by their previous cohort.

Table 4.2. Comparison of two cohorts' replies to the open-ended questions in SFQ

Q/Cohort	2015-16 (HK)	2016-17 (HK)
Q1. What aspects of the subject were most useful to your learning?	1. Discourse analysis ; 2. The lecturer's suggested answers and feedback ; 3. Class work, exercises and discussion are helpful in learning the translation skills	1. Have a clear understanding of different translation approaches to different ST discourses; 2. Class exercises were interesting and useful; 3. Equipped with a higher level of translation skills ; 4. Course was carefully-planned, objective was clear ; 5. Application of translation theories (e.g. functionalism) in translation tasks in class; 6. Editing skills ; 7. Content range; 8. One of the best classes in terms of both width and depth in the MA programme
Q2. How could the subject be improved to help you learn better?	Suggested versions for both EC and CE translation tasks	May add TV programs and more interesting stuff to help students learn
Q3. What aspects of this staff member's teaching were most helpful to your learning?	Immediate feedback for class exercises is effective	1. Abundant examples and practical tasks ; 2. Very well-organized , helped us learn step-by-step and offered clear and detailed explanations ; 3. Passionate, motivated, and very responsible ; 4. Give useful advice ; 5. Textual analyses in class were helpful for working on assignments; 6. Made learning enjoyable .
Q4. How would you like the teaching be changed (if at all), to help you learn better in the subject?	1. Suggested versions for both EC and CE translation tasks; 2. Can provide more class exercises	Lecturer can speak a little slower

The 2015-16 cohort seemed to be more timid than its 2016-17 counterpart. The former was very hardworking, but tended to be quiet most of the time, whereas the latter was more involved in class activities as well as discussion, and the classroom was often filled with laughter when they analyzed if and defended how their renditions matched the translation considerations of the client/boss. Intended learning outcomes were achieved apparently better with the use of backward design.

5. Conclusions

Backward design is a varied version, or merely a little twist, of constructive alignment in outcome-based education. Not even time- or effort-consuming, swapping the order of teaching-and-learning activity planning and assessment design further underpins the goal-oriented curriculum. Students tend to be more capable of understanding the learning outcomes they have to achieve, and performing in a confident manner. Teaching and learning also makes more sense to students' experience and current/future careers, and seems to be more enjoyable.

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