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Review of the Competence of Translation and Interpreting

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the relevant aspects of building translation and interpretation capacity for Masters of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) in China. It clarifies the distinction between linguistic competence and translation competence. Moreover, this review also indicates three dimensional aptitudes of qualified interpreters. Finally, it offers suggestions to improve the training and cultivation of MTI in China.

Keywords: competence, interpreting, review, translation.

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I. Introduction

The degree of Master of Translation and Interpreting was established in 2007 in China. MTI in China underwent rapid development especially after the Belt and Road initiative was proposed in 2013. Nearly 200 Chinese colleges and universities have offered MTI majors, and the enrollment of MTI is still further expanding. However, current cultivation of MTI is mainly affiliated with colleges or schools that are responsible for foreign language learning and training. The courses that most MTI can choose are mainly offered by instructors specializing in literature, linguistics, or pedagogy. The exploration of how to effectively integrate existing resources and systematically cultivate MTI's translation competence is still what most training schools need to further elaborate and refine.

II. Language Aptitude

Hymes (1972) views linguistic competence as the interaction of grammatical (i.e., what is formally possible), psycholinguistic (i.e., what is feasible in terms of human information processing), sociocultural (i.e., what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance), and probabilistic (i.e., what actually occurs) systems of competence. Canale and Swain (1980) state that communicative competence includes three main competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discursive and strategic competence. Bachman (1990) develops communicative competence and further proposes three components including linguistic competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms. Here, linguistic competence refers to linguistic abilities needed in communication. Strategic competence refers to pragmatic abilities in communication and the reflective abilities within the self-cognition structures in communicative contexts, including assessment, planning, and execution. Psychophysiological mechanisms refer to neural and physiological processes in language use, such as distinguishing between visual and auditory channels and between output and input modes (Bachman, 1990). Bachman's language competence has become the theoretical basis for language aptitude testing and assessment (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

III. Foreign Language Aptitude

There are 10%–320% foreign language learners whose foreign language aptitude is obviously lower than other learning abilities. To identify this aptitude at an early period, a number of tools are created to quantify language aptitude, among which two are widely known. They are Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) (Pimsleur, 1966) and the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll & Sapon, 1959).

In particular, PLAB mainly predicts the language aptitude for middle school students, college students

and adults. It is composed of six parts including grades of main courses, interest in foreign languages, test of native language vocabulary, language analysis ability, sound discrimination, and sound-symbol association. PLAB is useful in predicting and diagnosing students' aptitude in foreign language acquisition and performance. It can predict whether a student has potential in foreign language learning and diagnosing the differences in terms of the written and oral competence of the foreign language learner.

MLAT puts greater emphasis on the thinking ability of the foreign language learner. It measures four components: phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, rote learning ability and inductive language learning ability. This model consists of five tasks. First, it is the number learning. A test-participant is asked to express numbers with the foreign language. Number learning can test the rote learning ability; Second is the phonetic script that aims to test the learners' ability to link sounds with symbols. Third is the spelling clue. It aims to examine learners' phonetic coding ability and their knowledge and amount of L1 vocabulary. Fourth is the words in sentences, which measure learners' grammatical sensitivity. This is the most effective part in MLAT, particularly testing learner's ability to identify the grammatical functions of words in a sentence without reference to overt grammatical knowledge and/or terminology. Fifth is the paired units, involving a word-learning task in a new foreign language. It aims to test learners' visual memory ability.

PLAB and MLAT have played an important role in predicting the success of foreign language learning. However, due to the lack of structural validity, it is difficult to make explanations except for factor analysis. PLAB and MLAT, combined with other tests, can distinguish changes among elements of language ability. In addition, the original intention of these language aptitude tests is to examine listening, speaking and reading abilities, rather than more sophisticated skills such as writing and translation.

IV. Translation Aptitude

A. Definition of Translation Competence

There has not yet been a consensus about translation potential. Cao (1996) argues that translation potential evolves naturally from the interaction of language and society, while others emphasize empiricism, arguing translation potential is the dynamic result of the accumulation of experience, training, and feedback (Neubert & Shreve, 1992). Wilss (1982) and Kiraly (2009) firstly claim that translation competence consists of three elements: receptive competence of the source language, paraphrasing competence of the target language, and super-competence in transferring information from source language to target language. Presas (2000) further refines super-competence, and claims that it is different from bilingual competence. The translators' potential is to use specific linguistic and cultural knowledge to mediate the conflict between the information reception of the source language and the output of the target language, which means translation is the transformation of sense rather than the transformation of separated codes of two related languages (e.g., translation between words, phrases, and sentences).

B. Relationship between Linguistic Competence and Translation Competence

Linguistic competence is not equal to translation competence. Bilingual ability cannot guarantee translation competence, because bilingual ability is not sufficient to construct an effective difficulty response mechanism for skilled translation (Presas, 2000). Seleskovitch puts forward the concept of "interpretation", clarifying the cognitive ability that is necessary to interpreters (Seleskovitch, 1999. p. 56). It revised the long-lasting inappropriate view that linguistic ability equals translation competence.

Previous research on translation competence mainly proposed the procedure model of translation from information processing, cognitive psychology, cognitive pragmatics, neurolinguistics and communication science, and revealed the operation mechanism of translation (e.g., Ackerman, 1988; Angelelli, 2007; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980), but this research did not verify the relationship between linguistic competence and translation competence. However, translation competence has richer connotations than linguistic competence. The previous research on translation procedure highlighted theoretical verification, but lacked control of variables in assessing linguistic competence, so this research cannot accurately demonstrate how translation competence is higher than the linguistic competence. In reality, translation aptitude includes not only grammatical and textual competence, but also sociocultural and sociolinguistic adaptability, environmental adequacy and even subject knowledge (Yang, & Li, 2021).

C. Development of Translation Aptitude

Tests about language learners' learning aptitude are emerging, such as the foreign language aptitude test of Carroll (1978), and the personality characteristic test of Lambert (1992). But these tests are all empirical. Schweda Nicholson (2005) establishes the theoretical basis of potential tests. "The most advanced competence mode of translation research" (Marta, 2008. p. 290) is proposed by PACTE team who believes that translation competence consists of bilingual sub competence, extra-linguistic sub competence, knowledge about translation sub competence, strategic sub competence, instrumental sub competence and

psycho-physiological sub competence (PACTE, 2003, 2005, 2011).

Meanwhile, the study of interpreting aptitude is also developing. The Paris Interpreting Forum (Keiser, 1978) proposed that interpreters should grasp such abilities as comprehension, flexibility, expression, general knowledge, adaptation to the subject, public speaking, decency, politeness, physical and psychological endurance. Carroll (1978), from the perspective of second language acquisition and test, studied the entrance test for the admission of interpreting students at Georgetown University, and developed five cognitive elements: the linguistic intelligence, general culture, word fluency (i.e., a theme of rapid and coherent expression of the concept, in a variety of ways of expressive and associative fluency), naming facility, and shadowing. Longley (1989) further proposed that interpreters should be qualified for cooperation and able to work under long-time pressure.

In 2010, AIIC provided the personal traits to be a conference interpreter, namely the good command of various linguistic styles and domains of knowledge, a complete mastery of target languages, the proficiency in the target language culture, commitment and willingness to help others communicate, a strong desire to learn about current events, a broad educational education and rich life experience, the ability to focus on a topic of discussion, the pleasant voice and diction, a friendly and cooperative attitude, the calmness, an appropriate language, effective judgment, a sense of humor, and a strong willingness to follow rules of behavior (e.g., confidentiality). Mellinger and Korpal (2022) focuses on cognitive characteristics and personalities of interpreters in community settings, highlighting the importance of self-care in interpreting practice and its significant role in shaping professional interpreters' resilience.

V. Interpreters' Three-Dimensional Aptitude

A. Language Aptitude

Interpreting is assumed to be one of the most complex language tasks. Interpreters have to concurrently comprehend the continuously presented new information of the source language, and simultaneously convert the input to the understandable output of another target language (Christoffels *et al*., 2003). AIIC (2010) defines working languages A, B and C in their professionalization criteria based on native and non-native, active and passive languages: A language refers to the native language of the interpreter (or a language equivalent to the native language), and the interpreter can translate all other working languages into A language. B language refers to the non-native but perfectly fluent language of the interpreter and is not recommended to work as target language in general (especially in the simultaneous interpreting). However, in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, interpreters can translate other languages into B language as a last resort.

According to the Inhibitory Control Model (Green, 1998), both activation and inhibition will consume brain resources during the bilingual switch of translation tasks. When translating into different directions of A and B languages, the brain resources required for conversion are asymmetrical, that is more energy is consumed when translating into the dominant language, because inhibiting the dominant language consumes more energy, and similarly more brain resources are consumed when restarting. However, with interpreters' better command of A and B language, their code-switching capability between the two languages tends to be automated, which is not available to ordinary bilinguals.

Interpreting usually involves the use of technical terms and specific register, which is different from daily language. Therefore, interpreters should study how the specialized community speaks, and carry out specific linguistic training through combining specific linguistic communication methods within the discipline and the professional fields (Cai, 2019).

B. Cognitive Aptitude

Interpreting skills take up very complex cognitive processes (Christoffels *et al*., 2003; MacWhinney, 1997), involving cognitive processes of listening, comprehension, planning and output between two languages. Interpreters have no control over the content and frequency of the input. In particular, the interpreter stores the semantic information that has just been processed, actively listens to information that is about to be input, manages the processing of information, analyzes the logical relation of the information, segments and reconstructs it according to the analysis and the interpreter's own abilities.

The processing of linguistic information is not limited to the language task, but also challenges cognitive skills such as working memory (Engle *et al*., 1991), reasoning ability (Wang *et al*., 2022), and perceptual speed abilities (Ackerman, 1988; Ownby *et al*., 2008). Reasoning ability is the linguistic, environmental, and affective analysis of the interpreter's understanding and prediction of source language information, which can manage the planning and production of the target language (Cokely, 1992; Colonomos, 2008; MacNamara, 2009). Working memory is the ability to store and process information. The information being stored is different from the information being processed. Abundant evidence proves that the ability to store information while thinking and processing is correlated with language comprehension and text processing abilities (MacNamara, 2011). The most basic cognitive abilities of interpreters are reflected in how to

process and solve problems, reason, plan, manipulate, and transform the information they hear.

C. Personality Traits Aptitude

Personality traits also highly determine the success of interpreters. The successful manifestation of linguistic and cognitive abilities often relies on excellent personal qualities, or personality traits. They can be specifically demonstrated in three main personality traits including their willingness to engage in challenging, cognitive tasks, the constant self-need for spiritual and material rewards, and the sensitivity to challenges and adventures in interpretation (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Interpreters should also have the flexibility to change the degree of willingness to commit to different tasks, the expectancy of rewards, the proactive subjective judgment standards of adventures and challenges, and a positive attitude and possible flexibility to solve problems (Lopes, 2007). Conversely, interpreters who do not possess these personality traits may adopt an avoidant attitude and become more anxious when facing potential difficulties, resulting in declined working memory, lower interpretation qualities (Mellinger & Korpal, 2022), and more errors in language output (Macnamara *et al*., 2011).

VI. Enlightenment On MTI Cultivation

A. Building Appropriate Testing Mechanism for MTI Students

When selecting students, MTI training schools should consider all dimensions of translation competence and provide aptitude tests, so as to better measure all kinds of abilities, rather than just focus on bilingual ability and general knowledge. Taking tests for interpreters as an example, Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2008) surveyed 18 schools, revealing that these schools test five abilities: language, communication, comprehension, analysis, general knowledge. But they did not find any significant correlation between students' performance in the entrance tests and their performance in final exams or interpreting tests. Therefore, Angelelli (2007) states that language ability and interpreting competence should be tested separately.

In particular, the chapter-based materials for interpreting tests must have clear content and structural validity, and interpreting tests should be separate from students' personality traits and language skills tests. Second, although sight translation is adopted in many MTI entrance exams, it cannot represent interpreters' readiness, which is a label of language acquisition, can be nurtured and cannot reflect aptitude (Angelelli, 2007).

B. Constructing Translation Competence-Oriented Curriculum

The construction of MTI curriculum system needs to improve students' thinking ability, translation practice ability, translation theories, intercultural communication ability, integration of different knowledge and disciplines, and should reflect localization characteristics. The curriculum system should value the learning of translation knowledge, translation strategies, intercultural communication knowledge, and modern technology knowledge as the starting point, construct multiple translation competence, focus on developing specialized practical courses including culture translation, business translation, scientific and technological translation, computer-aided translation etc. In this way, MTI institutions can systematically cultivate specialized translators or interpreters with comprehensive translation competence.

At the same time, MTI institutions need to offer diversified elective courses to enrich students' translation knowledge. In addition, the translation market demands translators or interpreters to be specialized in a certain field, such as in science and technology, finance and medical field. Therefore, translators and interpreters also need to be skilled in certain specialized field knowledge. MTI institutions should increase the number of MTI elective courses, adopting diverse ways such as on-campus cooperation, school-enterprise cooperation or school-school cooperation.

C. Emphasizing the Development of Translation Competence

The fundamental goal of translation training is to develop students' translation competence. The formation of students' translation sub-competence is a systematic and dynamic process in MTI training. In order to ensure effective improvement of translation sub-competence in concrete translation practice, translation teaching should make strategies and steps for the cultivation of translation competence in each period based on teaching objectives and actual learning contexts. Translation competence-oriented teaching can cultivate and develop students' translation competence to the largest extent.

VII. Conclusion

Translation competence research can guide translation teaching. This paper summarizes the core elements of translation competence through the review of language aptitude, foreign language aptitude and translation aptitude, and further elaborates the three-dimensional interpreting aptitude. The cultivation of

MTI can learn from research of translation competence, construct teaching objectives and curriculum system of MTI based on translation competence, explore the teaching methods based on translation competence, strengthen students' translation competence, and thus provide better MTI education.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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