

# Innovating Translation and Interpreting Pedagogy to Strengthen China's International Discourse Rights

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## ABSTRACT

This research project aims at solving the common difficulties translation major would face at undergraduate level in mainland China, and proposes resolutions in terms of innovating translation pedagogy and improving teaching and learning effectiveness. The ultimate aim is to strengthen the international discourse rights of China through innovating translation training model. Translation in this project refers to both written translation and interpreting. This research will base its analysis on first-hand class observation in major translation departments and schools of translation at Chinese tertiary institutions. To understand the current teaching practices in depth and in reality, we have collected more than 500 translation students' instant feedback and conducted interviews with both students and teaching staff. We should like to identify the key features of translation pedagogy in different translation schools/departments in China, and incorporate them in our research with the significance of instilling China's international discourse rights.

**Keywords:** *Translation pedagogy, Interpreting pedagogy, International discourse rights of China, Intercultural competency, Innovating translation training model*

## 1. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This project investigated the following areas in teaching scholarship of translation at undergraduate level: (1) Searching for the common learning difficulties faced by translation major; (2) Maximizing teaching and learning effectiveness; (3) Possible reforms in curriculum design; (4) Innovating translation pedagogy to enhance international discourse rights of China.

At present, major programmes of Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting (BTI) and Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) are offering translation courses with the following concentrations: practical translation and interpreting, translation theories, culture and translation, and internship. We have collected more than 500 questionnaires from students of different schools of translation and foreign languages. From their responses, the self-evaluation was that students' competency in English was generally strong. Yet in class, in particular interpreting which requires instant reaction, no matter it was students' first attempt or those who have taken university English courses before, the class practices are always challenging, if not mission impossible. The difficulties include: lack of intercultural

competence, incomprehension of English language and foreign culture, inadequate aptitude and slow reaction, poor vocabulary banks etc. The idea of "international discourse rights" seem remotely attained in their translation and interpreting practices.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

According to the *Annual Report of Languages Industry in China 2020*, the current needs for qualified translators or interpreters with a first degree are 2 million at least. At present, only 40,000 could be regarded qualified. In other words, there is a gap of needing 160,000 qualified translators, or the current and future markets need at least 160,000 translation graduates. In mainland China, massive emphasis and resources have been invested into translation schools and/or departments at tertiary level. The well-known ones include: Shanghai International Studies University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. In each of these universities, their specific school of translation targets at different learning outcomes, e.g. some are equipping their graduates to work at European Union and some the Ministry of Diplomacy. Nonetheless, obtaining a first degree in "translation" remains a

common “entry ticket”. We are not the only educators trying to seize the aforementioned potential market of translation training. How can translation educators solidify and excel our teaching and learning to contribute the expertise and professional skills required in China now?

The research questions this paper should like to address include: (1) What specific and common difficulties are students facing while learning translation? (2) How to deal with such difficulties, and what implications can be drawn on curriculum reform and syllabus design with special reference to outcome-based teaching and learning (OBTL), as well as criteria-referencing assessment (CRA)? (3) What “learning outcomes” should be mostly emphasized in a 4-year study plan and how to address their significance in China’s international discourse rights? and (4) How to innovate our translation pedagogy, i.e., what can we translation educators do to maximize teaching and learning effectiveness by incorporating the latest development of translation and interpreting studies, and by collaborating the western and Chinese strengths with the ultimate purpose of strengthening China’s international discourse rights? We propose to look into these areas by comparing and collaborating with major schools of translation in China, and find out possible resolutions for the better and brighter development of translation education in the long run.

### ***2.1. Learning outcomes and curriculum of translation major in China***

In the teaching requirements of Bachelor Degree in Translation and Interpreting (hereinafter BTI) published by the Ministry of Education in 2012, the curriculum was classified into three categories: (1) Language knowledge and ability – the core courses include comprehensive English, English listening, oral English, English reading, English writing; (2) Chinese -- contemporary Chinese and Chinese language; (3) Translation knowledge and ability – core courses include introduction to translation, translation from Chinese to English and from English to Chinese, applied translation, interpreting, consecutive interpreting, interpreting in special topics. .

Furthermore, the requirement that the proportion of language knowledge and translation knowledge should be 80%, and related knowledge and ability would occupy 20%. In language and translation, the proportion of skill-oriented courses would be more than 70% . It is a progress that the curriculum of BTI is classified, though the classification is still ambiguous in the sense that the requirement, competency and learning outcomes were not fully analysed.

### ***2.2. Translation pedagogy worldwide***

The issue of translator training has been widely discussed and studied by translation scholars and trainers all around the world. They focus more on the teaching methodology. Should it follow the traditional and influential teacher-centered way, or as Nida mentioned: “Present critical developments in European multilingualism have brought to the fore the growing importance of training translators and interpreters and the need for a more innovative, less teacher-centred approach?” (Nida, in Tennent, 2005: XIII)[21]. Kiraly (1995: 11)[12], one of the pioneers in translation training commented, “There has been little or no consideration of learning environment, student-teacher roles, scope and appropriateness of teaching techniques, co-ordination or goal-oriented curricula, or evaluation of curriculum and instructor.”

González (in Tennent, 2005:78)[21] mentioned that the teaching method could revolve around teacher/student and student/student interaction in a way that enabled students to experience, negotiate and discuss translation issues. He believed that translation teaching should be catering for the specific needs of students, mainly to acquire advanced translation skills. (González in Tennent, 2005:78)[21]. He also “emphasize[d] the consistent use of carefully structured syllabi with stated aims and objectives that take into account specific stages of learning” (Davies and Kiraly 2006:83)[5].

Gabriela Mahn (in Krawutschke, 2008: 101)[14] raised a series of questions concerning translator training and pedagogy, such as “What methods and strategies will be implemented to attain our desired objectives? Questions about standards and evaluation: How will we evaluate the quality of work produced by students? What should be the boundaries, limitations, and cut-off points for the program? Finally, questions about program evaluation: How will we determine whether we are actually accomplishing our program objectives?” His research team conducted experimental researches at SUNY-Binghamton by redesigning their translation program to be “better integrated and cohesive” (Mahn, in Krawutschke , 2008: 101)[14]. The teaching model followed by them integrates a series of steps which include “identifying instructional goals, writing performance objectives, developing criterion-referenced tests, designing and conducting formative evaluation, among others” (Mahn, in Krawutschke , 2008: 101)[14] .

### ***2.3. Translation assessment and curriculum***

Wilss (in Krawutschke, 2008: 91)[14] suggested that translator trainers must possess declarative and processing knowledge. He supported that “translation pedagogy must provide the ability to break down a translation problem appropriately into its structural elements with the assistance of an operative system or

operative inventory and then to search for its ‘rules of recomposition’.”

With the rapid development of global economy and technology, a further innovation of translation curriculum, taking in more new elements to better prepare translation trainers for their future work is necessary (Cintas 2008, Malmkjar 2004)[4]. Proposed new topics include: “localization”, “new technology applied in translation”, “translation ethics”, etc. How to incorporate those new topics into the current curriculum still needs further research.

Translation assessment is another important topic which attracts many translator trainers’ attention: “currently, there is no one definition of translation competence and its components that is universally accepted within the academic field of translation studies” (Arango-Keith & Koby 2003, in Angelelli et. al. 2009, 13)[1]. Angelelli proposed for “sub-components of a rubric to assess the construct of translation competence”, which can be regarded as a reference for translation trainers (ibid.). Kim (in Angelelli et. al. 2009, 123)[1], from a systemic functional linguistics approach, suggested a meaning-oriented assessment system. The feasibility of those assessment models is still questionable which needs further experimentation and exploration.

### 3. RESEARCH OUTCOMES

#### 3.1. *Implications for future research*

European universities need to meet the requirement of the Bologna Declaration (1999) for translation curriculum, but there are neither unified teaching guidelines nor designated teaching materials. Their schools of translation are pursuing the most suitable curriculum based on their own situation. In China, in contrast, the general teaching guideline is designed and decided by the Ministry of Education. Each sub-institution enjoys a certain extent of freedom to make adjustment accordingly, but has no right to amend the principal one. Researches in China focused on how to design an appropriate curriculum under the umbrella of the principal guideline. In this proposed study, combining with the western advantages of translation pedagogy, it is hoped that the models followed and practiced in China can be integrated into the special context of training translators to be a language professional as well as a well-trained bicultural expert.

We took Mahn’s teaching model as the starting point, because our research is similar to their redesigning of the translation curriculum at SUNY-Binghamton in terms of “identifying instructional goals, writing performance objectives, developing criterion-referenced tests, designing and conducting formative evaluation, among others” (Mahn, in Krawutschke, 2008: 101)[14].

#### 3.2. *Significance*

Our first research output was to scrutinize the overall curriculum and translation pedagogy, in order to improve and reform the OBTL and CRA if necessary. This research takes a step further than Mahn in terms of investigating not only one’s own translation programme but other major schools of translation in order to draw constructive comparison. Subsequent to an attempt to research into the major schools of translation in China systematically, the major finding is the desperate need for “real knowledge in real subject matter”. It means on top of language competency and translation/interpreting skills, the expertise in a chosen professional field is necessary in the current job market. More significantly, in each course in terms of course design and teaching practices, more current affairs should be added in. The purpose is to allow students to have an exposure to the current mission of being a professional translator and/or interpreter.

### 4. CONCLUSION

We propose that bilingual competency and bicultural sensitivity are crucial components in a translation training model. More significantly, an understanding of China’s current needs for professional translators and interpreters. By doing so, not only can we have an in-depth understanding of the current and future development of translator training, but also we can be benefited from innovating translation pedagogy in order to strength our competitiveness in international status quo as well as upgrading China’s international discourse rights.

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