



On Status Quo, Problems, and Future Development of BTI in the Central and Western Regions of China—The Revelation from Western Sydney University

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Abstract. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has significantly boosted the demand for interdisciplinary translation and interpretation talent in China's central and western regions. Despite the growing number of universities qualified to offer the Bachelor of Translation and Interpretation (BTI) degree in these areas, the development of high-quality translation education at the undergraduate level faces several challenges. These include outdated teaching methodologies, a shortage of experienced faculty, and a misalignment between course content and local economic needs. This study examines the successful integration of translation teaching and professionalism at Western Sydney University in Australia. By analyzing their teaching model, this research proposes a novel approach for BTI education in China's central and western regions, focusing on curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, and faculty development. The goal is to enhance BTI education quality, enabling these regions to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the BRI for rapid and high-quality development.

Keywords: The Belt and Road Initiative, BTI, undergraduate education, education reform

1 Introduction

Launched in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents a cornerstone of China's outward engagement, encompassing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. This initiative, viewed as a component of China's "Go Global" strategy, is hailed for reflecting China's ascent as a significant global economic force, fostering economic growth, and driving regional integration. It is recognized that the BRI as a testament to China's economic prowess and its strategic response to future challenges and opportunities ^[1,2], and as a critical facet of China's foreign policy aimed at realizing the "Chinese dream." ^[3]

As the BRI deepens, the demand for translators and interpreters in various languages in central and western China has surged, highlighting the need for enhanced quality and proficiency in translation and interpretation services ^[4]. In this vein, the teaching and

training model of translation talents in the central and western regions must also be further optimized accordingly to satisfy the increasing demand. However, these regions face unique challenges compared to their coastal counterparts in the east and south, such as limited educational resources, weaker economic foundations, and fewer practical engagement opportunities. The development of undergraduate translation programs in these areas is still in a formative phase, with significant room for improvement in teaching methodologies, training models, and curriculum development [5]. There's a pressing need to incorporate international best practices into these programs.

A few Chinese scholars have recognized the importance of learning from advanced translation teaching experiences in foreign countries, but their focus mainly lies on Europe, the United States, Canada, and so on [6,7]. The investigation of Australia is scarce. Like other migrant countries, Australia boasts a large number of ethnic groups and rich language types, close political, economic, and cultural ties between countries and regions, frequent people-to-people exchanges, as well as a significant demand for high-quality translators. Due to this substantial market demand, Australia established its international translation certification evaluation system earlier than other countries [8].

Australia, as a pioneer in interpreting and translation education, boasts a sophisticated teaching model and has established consistent professional standards. Among its leading institutions, Western Sydney University (WSU) stands out for its remarkable achievements in translation teaching and training. Launched in 1985, WSU's translation program is distinguished as the sole Australian university with both its undergraduate and master's programs accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). This accreditation underscores WSU's role as a benchmark in translation education, making its educational philosophy for both Bachelor of Translation and Interpretation (BTI) and Master of Translation and Interpretation (MTI) programs a valuable model for educational reform and enhancement in China's central and western regions.

The authors of this paper took advantage of a study visit at WSU to gain insights into its BTI program, focusing on training content, pedagogical approaches, faculty selection criteria, and professional development for teachers through systematic analysis. This research aims to address the challenges facing BTI education and shed light on translation teaching and translation in China's central and western regions. By doing so, it seeks to cultivate more inter-disciplinary translation professionals who can cater to the varied demands of the market, and assist in the comprehensive implementation of the IBR.

2 The features of BTI education at WSU

WSU's BTI program is distinguished by its unique standing as the sole undergraduate program in Australia fully accredited by NAATI. This program is characterized by two primary features:

1) NAATI-Endorsed Curriculum System: WSU's curriculum is comprehensively structured to meet NAATI's rigorous standards, ensuring that students are well-prepared for the demands of the translation profession.

2) Dual-Certification Faculty: The teaching staff at WSU are not only academically qualified but also possess practical and professional credentials, offering a blend of theoretical knowledge and real-world expertise.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), established by the Australian federal government, outlines the requisite qualifications for various occupations, including those in the translation industry. NAATI, founded in 1977, is the only authoritative body for the certification of interpreters and translators in Australia, mandating that professionals must obtain NAATI certification to legally practice in the field. WSU's pioneering approach requires its translation students to achieve NAATI certification before graduation, aligning its curriculum with a practical and practice-oriented focus. This strategy aims to develop versatile, interdisciplinary talents capable of meeting the diverse needs of the local and international markets.

2.1 Depth and Breadth of Curriculum Content

WSU's BTI program is meticulously designed with clear educational objectives to produce professionally ethical interpreters and translators, recognized by both the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) and accredited by NAATI. The curriculum skillfully integrates the rigors of higher education with the practicality of vocational training, ensuring a comprehensive educational experience (As shown in Table 1).

The curriculum is structured to enhance language proficiency and translation skills comprehensively. Courses in language competency are tailored to bolster students' foreign language mastery, laying a strong foundation in linguistic abilities. Advanced translation courses then build on this foundation, equipping students with the skills needed for both oral and written translation across various genres.

Acknowledging the significant local demand for interpreters and translators in community services, healthcare, and legal sectors, WUS prioritizes specialized courses in these areas. The curriculum includes targeted training in community service interpreting, medical translation, and legal translation, complemented by specialized knowledge in these fields and practical observation opportunities. This approach ensures students not only grasp theoretical concepts but also apply them in real-world settings.

These courses aim to cultivate an international perspective, enhance intercultural communication abilities, and heighten sensitivity to cultural differences, preparing students for the global demands of the translation profession.

WSU offers courses designed to broaden students' understanding of Australia's history, society, legal system, language policies, and cultural diversity. These courses aim to cultivate an international vision, enhance intercultural communication abilities, and heighten sensitivity to cultural differences, preparing students for the global demands of the translation profession.

Table 1. A General description of WSU's undergraduate program of translation

Training Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interpreting and translation are professions governed by the Australian Translators Association Code of Ethics. Students must demonstrate their abilities to comply with the Code. Students are required to adhere to the practices of ethical principles. 2. Students should have a high level of language competency (native or near-native), the ability to communicate effectively and fluently verbally in English and a language other than English (LOTE), and the ability to deliver clear and accurate messages in line with the situation. 3. Students can perform well in various translation and interpreting practices and in an ever-changing academic and professional environment.
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Note: The information is retrieved on <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/> on 28th Jan, 2024.

Furthermore, the curriculum at WSU aligns closely with NAATI's stringent criteria for professional translation and interpretation skills development. This alignment includes:

1) Language Proficiency: Students are trained to excel in both their native and foreign languages, attaining the ability to grasp and accurately translate nuanced semantic meanings into the target language with fluency;

2) Fundamental Skills: The curriculum covers essential skills such as document drafting, information retrieval, and data research;

3) Terminology and Vocabulary: Students develop skills in terminology research and vocabulary building, which are crucial for professional translation tasks;

4) Specialized Knowledge: There is an emphasis on acquiring foundational knowledge in science, technology, and economics to support specialized translation work;

5) Translation Techniques: Mastery over translation processes and post-editing methods is emphasized, ensuring students can deliver polished, professional work;

6) Professional Ethics and Project Management: Ethical conduct and basic project management skills are integral parts of the curriculum, with a dedicated course on translation ethics (see Figure 1) to instill the principles of confidentiality, accuracy, and fairness in future professionals.

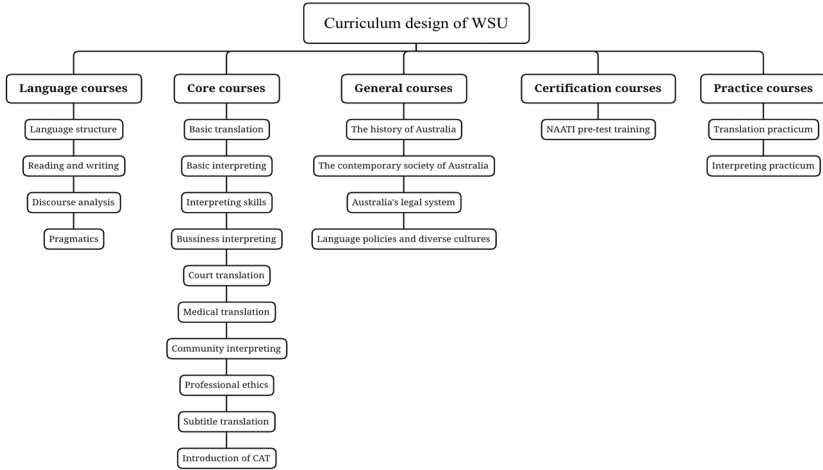


Fig. 1. The Curriculum design of WSU’s undergraduate program of translation

To bolster students’ readiness for NAATI certification, WSU encourages a variety of practical translation experiences. These include, but are not limited to, court interpreting observations and participation in community volunteer interpreting and translation services, facilitating immersive learning and a deeper comprehension of the local market's needs and industry standards. To fulfill the practical training requirement, students must complete 75 hours of practice and submit a report of no less than 2,000 words by the end of their undergraduate studies. This comprehensive approach ensures students are not only academically prepared but also professionally ready to meet the high standards of the translation industry.

In conclusion, the Translation and Interpretation undergraduate program at WSU is distinguished by its well-defined educational objectives, coherent and systematic curriculum, and balanced focus on both academic rigor and vocational training. With the attainment of NAATI certification as its ultimate educational aim—aligned with market needs—WSU is committed to developing interdisciplinary translation professionals equipped to meet the dynamic demands of the global translation industry.

2.2 Faulty Professionalism at WSU

WSU meticulously integrates professional theoretical knowledge with practical skills in its faculty composition, ensuring a robust teaching team. This dual focus entails the following two key practices.

The first practice is its certification requirements. WSU insists that faculty members hold professional qualifications in translation and interpretation recognized in Australia or internationally. This includes certifications such as the Australian translation professional qualification, the European Union Interpretation Certification (JICS), membership in the Association of International Conference Interpreters (AIIC), or the Canadian Interpretation and Translation Work Committee (CITC).

The second practice is the mandatory practical experience. WSU prioritizes hands-on experience for its translation faculty. For instance, instructors in court translation are required to have direct professional experience in the field. Moreover, a significant majority (over 80%) of the full-time faculty are actively engaged in the translation or interpreting industry. This ongoing involvement ensures they bring current market insights into the classroom, fostering a learning environment that closely mirrors real-world demands.

The faculty at WSU serves a dual role as both industry practitioners and academic instructors, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This connection between the market and academia allows for the incorporation of real-time industry trends and requirements into the curriculum, ensuring students receive an education that is directly relevant to their future careers.

Overall, the professional standards and experiential requirements WSU sets for its translation and interpreting faculty highlight a commitment to excellence that aligns with market needs. This approach offers significant lessons for universities in central and western China, suggesting a model for developing translation programs that are both academically rigorous and practically oriented, tailored to meet the specific challenges and opportunities of their regional context.

3 Challenges and Opportunities in BTI Education in Central and Western China

The China Translation Service Industry Research Report (2014) has observed a rapid development in the language service industry of central and western China, spurred by the IBR and the cultural “going out” policy. These policies not only provide direction for translation education in these regions but also emphasize the need to blend professional education with Chinese characteristics. The objective is to cultivate in-demand translation talents to support national strategic goals and facilitate global understanding of China. This underscores the heightened demand for quality language services in the modern era and sets a clearer path for translation education goals^[9].

However, A survey of the translation service market in Yunnan Province reveals that a significant portion of translators, approximately 55.2%, only hold a bachelor’s degree. Among local universities, only Dali University and Chuxiong Normal University offer the BTI program, indicating a pressing need to expand and enhance BTI education in these regions^[10]. This scenario presents both challenges and opportunities for translation teaching in central and western China.

In terms of the translation industry’s current state, there is a notable need for improvement in translators’ compensation, academic qualifications, and professionalism. Translation education still lags in achieving professionalization and systematization^[10].

A survey of undergraduate translation education identifies three critical issues in the regions’ translation teaching: 1) Curriculum design lacks organization and effectiveness in meeting training objectives; 2) There is a shortage of professional faculty; 3) Teaching content does not align with market demands^[11].

Since the BTI program was launched in 2006, a significant observation is the vague understanding among translation teachers of the distinction between foreign language teaching and translation teaching, often conflating professional translation with literary translation^[12]. This has led to a continuation of traditional, teacher-centered foreign language teaching methods. In addition, the uniformity in teaching content across universities, despite varying local market demands, hampers the development of students' translation skills and their ability to meet societal needs for translators^[10].

The subsequent sections will focus on the solutions to address these identified challenges in BTI education within central and western China.

4 Strategies for Advancing BTI Education in the Central and Western China

Addressing the challenges faced by BTI education in central and western China necessitates a strategic approach that integrates the unique features of local universities with the regional economy and culture^[5]. This approach should aim to craft a distinctive BTI education that not only aligns with market demands but also fosters versatile translation professionals suited for the multifaceted requirements of the BRI.

Drawing on the successful teaching model of WSU, there is considerable potential for adopting similar strategies in China's central and western regions, particularly in nurturing professional and versatile translation talents. The key to reforming BTI education in these areas involves leveraging local strengths, accentuating educational uniqueness, fostering collaboration in teaching and resource sharing, and ensuring that educational offerings are closely linked with market demands. Adopting these principles could significantly contribute to the evolution of BTI education, preparing a new generation of translators who are not only academically proficient but also highly adaptable to the changing landscapes of the global and local translation markets.

4.1 Tailoring BTI Curriculum for Regional Needs

To meet the burgeoning demand for translation professionals prompted by the BRI, universities in central and western China must strategically utilize their disciplinary strengths to refine their educational objectives and underscore their unique institutional identities^[2].

These universities are encouraged to investigate less commonly taught languages that hold significant demand in their regions. By introducing elective courses in oral and written translation for these languages, students can gain exposure to a diversity of linguistic landscapes^[13]. While mastery of these lesser-known languages may not be achieved immediately, such courses will provide a solid foundation for advanced study at the master's level, preparing students for sophisticated translation work beyond English^[14].

In addition, it is imperative for these institutions to incorporate core courses focused on professional ethics in translation and industry standards. Adding practical modules,

such as translation project management, career development in translation, and translation technology, will equip students with the necessary skills to navigate and thrive within the translation industry.

Furthermore, universities should offer comprehensive courses on the countries within the BRI corridor, aiming to develop multifaceted talents who are not only adept in major and regional languages but also versed in the cultural, political, geographical, and social nuances of these nations. By fostering an international outlook and cross-cultural communication skills, graduates will be well-prepared to contribute to the BRI's objectives, enhancing understanding and cooperation across borders ^[15].

4.2 Enhancing BTI Faculty with Dual Expertise and Global Insights

To elevate the caliber of translation education, universities in central and western China are advised to adopt a twofold strategy for faculty development ^[10]. Firstly, these institutions should facilitate opportunities for young faculty members to engage in academic and professional exchanges, both domestically and internationally. This could include study visits to prestigious universities and collaborations with leading companies, enabling participation in high-level translation exchanges and practical experiences that foster personal and professional growth.

Secondly, emulating the successful model of WSU, universities can enrich their teaching resources by incorporating experienced translators from the industry as external consultants. These professionals can offer invaluable practical guidance to both educators and students, ensuring the curriculum remains aligned with the latest industry trends and demands.

To further strengthen faculty capabilities, universities should focus on building a team of educators who are not only academically qualified but also possess significant industry experience. This approach emphasizes the importance of balancing theoretical knowledge with practical application, thereby attracting more specialized translation instructors rather than general foreign language teachers. Additionally, the creation of a dynamic and collaborative faculty environment is recommended. Establishing a mobile, shared pool of translation instructors, along with a professional advisory group, can facilitate the development of a comprehensive evaluation and incentive system. Such initiatives would encourage ongoing dialogue and mentorship among faculty members, particularly benefiting young educators by motivating them to continually enhance their skills and knowledge.

Through these strategies, universities in central and western China can cultivate a faculty that embodies both academic excellence and practical expertise, significantly improving the quality of BTI education and better preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the global translation market.

4.3 Advancing BTI Education with a Triparte Mode of Classroom + Observation + Practical Training

To embrace the concept of “collaborative education”, colleges and universities in central and western China are encouraged to adopt an integrative teaching model inspired

by WSU, encapsulating “classroom instruction, observation, and practical training”. (as depicted in the following Figure 2). This model is especially pertinent for regions like Yunnan province, where tourism significantly contributes to the local economy, and students in these universities should engage in at least 4 hours of practical training each semester. Tailoring BTI education to meet the demands of the local market, such as in tourism translation, is essential for developing relevant translation skills.

This approach goes beyond conventional classroom instruction by incorporating “observation and practical training” as critical components of student evaluation and facilitating through partnerships with local governments and businesses. Students could observe real-life tourism interpreting scenarios or participate in translation activities. Such immersive experiences are vital for translating theoretical knowledge into practical skills, embodying the essence of “collaborative education” and steering the development of translation professionals towards greater professionalism.

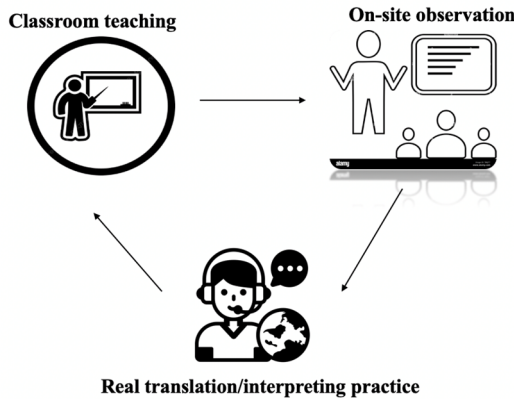


Fig. 2. A tripartite mode of classroom + observation + practical training

By implementing this tripartite model, universities can offer students a holistic learning experience that combines academic rigor with practical application, ensuring graduates are well-equipped to meet the specific needs of the translation industry and contribute effectively to their local economies.

5 Conclusion

The cultivation of comprehensive translation talents is pivotal for advancing the IBR effectively. However, there is still a large gap between the development of such talents in central and western China and the regional economic needs for skilled translators.

As primary incubators of translation talents, colleges and universities in these regions must align with contemporary developmental trends. Seizing the IBR as a strategic opportunity, these institutions are tasked with absorbing and integrating advanced

international translation teaching methodologies. This involves a holistic reconstruction of academic programs and faculty teams to forge an impactful teaching and training ecosystem. This system should prioritize current market-relevant professional knowledge, foster students' appreciation for humanities, and underscore the necessity of understanding the social, cultural, and historical contexts of countries involved in the BRI.

Furthermore, translation educators should place a premium on professional translation training, focus on cultivating students' professional awareness, instill robust professional ethics, and actively engage them in authentic translation activities. Achieving professional qualifications prior to graduation enhances their readiness for the demands of the translation industry. Institutes of higher learning should earnestly and thoroughly embrace the ethos of collaborative education, nurturing applied and practical language talents. This endeavour is crucial not only for supporting the BRI's implementation but also for spurring regional economic growth and bolstering China's engagement in global governance. Through such dedicated efforts, central and western China can bridge the gap in translation talent cultivation and contribute significantly to the nation and region's evolving needs.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by Social Science Fund of Hubei Province under Grant 22Q099, Wuhan Polytechnic University under Grant XQ2023016 and Shaanxi Normal University under Grant 2023KYQDF0034.

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