

New Frontiers in Translation Studies

Jackie Xiu Yan  
Jun Pan  
Honghua Wang

# Research on Translator and Interpreter Training

A Collective Volume of Bibliometric  
Reviews and Empirical Studies on  
Learners

 Springer

# **New Frontiers in Translation Studies**

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and Empirical Studies on Learners

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September 2017

Jackie Xiu Yan  
Jun Pan  
Honghua Wang

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This book is the result of synergies and years of collaboration between Jackie Xiu Yan, Jun Pan and Honghua Wang in their research studies based on translation and interpretation (T&I) classroom teaching in universities in Hong Kong. The first part of the book is on a series of bibliometric reviews of studies on T&I training through a database we built over the years. The second part is a collection of our classroom-based empirical studies on T&I learners.

The studies included in this volume started in the 2010s. As researchers and college translation and interpretation trainers, we needed to know what our field of study is like. But we found that none of the reviews were able to provide a clear picture for the rapid growth of the field of Translation Studies (TS) in general and translator and interpreter training in particular. According to Pöchhacker (2008), the discipline “has progressed along numerous milestones and undergone theoretical and methodological shifts” (41). However, the review articles that we found were mainly “based on the authors’ own judgement only” (Yan et al. 2013: 447), or they were not up-to-date.

Without a clear overview of the discipline, the students of TS feel as if they are walking in a dark forest, not knowing the direction for a safe way out. Inspired by Holmes’s map of TS (from Toury 1995: 10) and the relatively new corpus-based research studies, we decided to “map” the discipline again. The purpose was to present a more current overview of the studies in the field. Journal articles were chosen for the review because firstly they are “timely”, they feature the latest studies, lead the trend of research with the most representative types and cover a wide range of articles. Secondly, they are under-represented in studies introducing the field, whereas “the importance of monographs and edited collections has often been acknowledged” (Zhang et al. 2015: 225). Thirdly, in a database, it is better to have a more consistent inclusion. The journals were selected on the basis of their “geographic coverage and size of readership” (Yan et al. 2013: 449); more importantly, the quality of journal articles is reliable and quantity remarkable, as “Peer-reviewed journals, especially those included in international or national

journal indexes and databases, have become the most valued mode of dissemination and publication” (Rovira-Esteva and Orero 2012: 272).

The bibliometric approach was adopted for the project because we found it the best way to serve our purpose: to generate a precise, comprehensive “map” of the field. Bibliometric studies are descriptive in nature, the findings of which can be used to present knowledge about the discipline from different perspectives. According to Martínez-Gómez (2015) and Gauthier (1998), bibliometrics is the most proper tool for review studies since “bibliometric studies allow for the depiction of the current state and the evolution of research in different disciplines at different levels of aggregation—micro (individual researchers), meso (institutions, research groups), and macro (regions, countries or even the global scholarly system)” (Martínez-Gómez 2015: 206).

The first step was to build a bibliographic database. Once the database was built, the analysis started with simple publication counts, believed to be “the most traditional bibliometric technique and have a mainly descriptive focus...are based on a selection of bibliographical attributes (authors, publication date, publication type, journal, publisher, etc.) upon which statistical analyses are performed” (Martínez-Gómez 2015: 206–207). The database built with all the articles in the journals selected can be divided or adapted into various “sub-data” bases, which may serve different purposes of reviewing the various aspects of TS and Interpreting Studies.

A series of review projects have been completed using the database; for example, the milestone review of the field Interpreting Studies was published in 2013: “Mapping interpreting studies: The state of the field based on articles in nine major translation and interpreting journals (2000–10)”. The first two authors (Jackie Xiu Yan and Jun Pan) of this volume participated in this study, which set a good example of the way to approach the bibliometric review of studies in a discipline: (1) select articles and build a corpus; (2) turn the corpus into database; (3) conduct a thematic analysis; (4) adopt a multilayer classification system for various topics in the field; (5) present the findings: identify proportions of studies in each category and sub-categories, discover representative studies, and display the social and geographic distribution of the articles. Since each step is stated clearly in the article, readers not only “get a map” reading the large number of publications, but they would “know how these maps are drawn in order to be helped instead of unconsciously steered by them” (Rovira-Esteva et al. 2015: 160). More importantly, researchers may use this “map” as a guide in conducting their own review studies. As a matter of fact, the procedures adopted in the study by Yan et al. (2013) had a great influence on researchers in the field of TS, and a surge of bibliometric reviews followed. For example, in 2015, the journal *Perspectives* had a special issue dedicated to the bibliometric review of the field of TS.

The first two authors, Jackie Xiu Yan and Jun Pan, participated in the project mapping the rather obscure field of Interpreting Studies (Yan et al. 2013; not included in this volume). After the paper was published, we were joined by Honghua Wang and focused our attention on the field of translator and interpreter training. We zoomed in on the database with articles on T&I studies in general and

focused on the articles on training, and updated the database by adding newly published articles. The result of this effort is TIEJAD (the Translation and Interpretation English Journal Article Database), a database designed to collect articles in the English language from selected academic journals in the field of Translation and Interpreting Studies, which has been and will keep on developing. Several fruitful reviews were born using TIEJAD (see Chaps. 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the book). In these reviews, systematic procedures of analysis were developed based on the Yan et al. (2013) study in categorizing the articles, conducting top-down and bottom-up thematic analyses, and finding the social-geographical distribution of the data entries.

“Maps” were produced as the result of the above-mentioned reviews, covering different areas in the originally “dark forest” of translator and interpreter training. Part I of this book (Chaps. 2–5) presents these “maps”, which clearly depict the “landscape” of the research studies on interpreter and translator training. These maps provide the much-needed tool with which researchers can steer themselves and know exactly where to head for in their strenuous journey for new discovery.

In Chap. 2, we put forward our review of the research on both written translation and interpreting in the new millennium. The bibliographic database TIEJAD consists of entries from 10 major T&I journals in English published between 2000 and 2012. Altogether 323 articles were identified from 2274 entries. The facts and figures displayed in the findings turned some originally blurred pictures crystal clear. Among some of the major findings, a remarkable achievement of this study lies in the production of a comprehensive map with three layers of subcategories under T&I training research, which is equivalent to the “applied” portion of the famous Holmes’s map of translation studies (see Toury 1995: 10). The present findings have updated and enriched Holmes’s map, which consists of just one layer of sub-fields under “Applied Translation Studies” (translator training, translation aids and translation criticism). With detailed explanations of each category, the present study may guide researchers, practitioners and teachers through the labyrinth of the burgeoning field of research on T&I training. It should be emphasized that the map presented in the study, which differs from the theoretical ones (e.g. Toury 1995: 10; Munday 2016: 20), is based on the real distribution of publications on T&I training research.

After an overview of studies on T&I training, we further zoomed in on the database and focused on translator training. The database TIEJAD from Year 2000 was updated to 2014, and quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted on 284 articles in 8 English journals on translator training research, the results of which are presented in Chap. 3. At this stage, we had constant correspondence and contact with journal editors and peer researchers at international conferences. We were constantly asked for information on regional features of T&I studies. This is why we conducted a global review of research on translator training. Among other findings, a teaching-dominant research perspective is found to prevail in the last decade. While searching for common practice and current trends in translator training research, we also tried to identify idiosyncratic features in research entries and themes in different regions on the five continents. For example, in Europe,

translator training is a major theme for research: European countries have contributed more than half the article entries in the corpus. Asia ranks second in research on translator training, the Greater China Area being the major contributor. Reading the detailed information on different continents, readers are provided with an innovative “world map” depicting the bibliometric features in the field of translator training research.

Chapter 4 presents findings on interpreter training research with 180 articles from 10 journals contained in TIEJAD from 2000 to 2014. Growth in research was observed as the number of articles doubled every five years. The phenomenon of more attention being paid to the field of interpreter training can be the result of the burgeoning development of translation and interpreting programs worldwide in this period. “Teaching”, “Learning” and “Assessment” were found to be the major themes in interpreter training research. The number of articles on teaching has increased much faster than those on learning and assessment. It should also be noted that research in training constitutes only a small fraction of TS. These findings suggest that more studies should be conducted on T&I training, especially on learners and on issues related to assessment.

After we reviewed research on translator and interpreter training in Chap. 2, translator training in Chap. 3 and interpreter training in Chap. 4, we wanted to examine a specific journal as a case study. We reviewed the pedagogical research published in *Meta: The Translators’ Journal* in the last 15 years, with 98 entries of pedagogical research published in the English language in *Meta* from 2000 to 2014. We presented the findings at the conference for the 60th Anniversary of META in 2015. The presentation was later developed into Chap. 5. The study adopted a diachronic and a synchronic perspective in examining the latest pedagogical research in *Meta* and compared it with several other journals in the database. A three-step process was followed: (1) the screening on the texts to be included in the corpus/database, (2) a thematic review of the texts, and (3) comparisons of findings in the thematic review. Among other findings, a dominance of teaching-related themes was found in *Meta*. This shows that, *Meta* presents a similar general landscape to that of other T&I journals. However, *Meta* was found to have some particular sub-themes that are significantly different from those of other T&I journals. Also, *Meta* excelled in publishing pedagogical studies, taking up almost half of those produced by the other nine T&I journals. This does not count *Meta*’s publication in French. This shows that *Meta* is a major platform for publishing T&I pedagogical research. Therefore, *Meta* serves as a representative case for us to study the translator and interpreter training research.

The reviews of T&I pedagogy in Part I provide useful “maps” for researchers in this field to identify their positions and guide them through the entire process of their study. People who benefit most from these reviews are ourselves. In our exploration of the previous studies through the bibliometric analysis, our questions about the state of the field are answered. The “maps” produced from these reviews enable us to target precisely at the research problems we need to address. As a result, we are well prepared for our own empirical studies on T&I learners. Part II is

a collection of the articles resulted from a series of T&I classroom-based projects. The focus of our studies is on learners.

All the projects are conducted in university T&I programs. The universities are mainly in Hong Kong, some of them are in mainland China. However, no matter where the studies are conducted, the findings are valuable and can be used as reference for training programs in other regions. This is because, based on our reviews of T&I training studies (see Part I of this volume), tertiary programs and learner factors have long been overlooked by researchers. However, tertiary-level T&I programs have a long history and are developing very fast in many areas. Unlike professional trainees, tertiary-level T&I learners have many language and affective problems in addition to their difficulties related to T&I techniques. Therefore, classroom-based research studies have great practical value, which would also contribute to the theoretical development in the “Applied” section (see Holmes’s map in Toury 1995).

The study in Chap. 6 draws attention to the importance of learners’ self-perception in interpreter training. We point out first in the study, that although there are a large number of interpreter training programmes in order to meet the demands for high-quality interpreting, there is a dearth of empirical studies on the learning of interpreting. The purpose of this study is to examine the interplay between learner factors, self-perceived language ability and interpreting achievement in tertiary-level classes. One of the important contributions of this study is the development of a learner information cluster, which can be adapted to suit the needs of other research studies. The findings show that learner factors such as gender, motivation and personal habits are closely related to students’ language learning and interpreting learning. Female students tend to perform better than male students in interpreting classrooms. Personal habits, for example, the habit of reading English- and Chinese-language newspapers, have an impact on students’ self-perceived language abilities (in English and Chinese) and their learning of interpreting. Language abilities and interpreting ability are found to be closely related. It has also been found that, in interpreting between English and Chinese, learners’ self-perceived overall competence in the English language and their self-perceived English writing ability are the most important predictors of their success in interpreting learning. The findings indicate that firstly, the students in tertiary T&I programs have inadequate foreign language proficiency. The problem is generally neglected by T&I faculty members, who too often emphasize that translation classes are not language classes, and the students should be responsible for their own language problems. We’d like to suggest that trainers in tertiary-level classes should address this problem directly by first differentiating language and translation problems, helping students to remove the obstacles in the foreign language. Secondly, students’ self-perception affects their learning; so the trainers may help guide students to have an appropriate self-perception which may help them to handle their learning difficulties in a more positive way. Thirdly, interpreting skills cannot be acquired within a short time. Students need to form good habits in learning and accumulating knowledge from different fields. The high predicting power of self-perceived foreign language writing ability indicates that interpreting

requires high-level ability in organizing one's language. Training in writing may help improve the oral output in interpreting practice.

Chapter 7 presents specific problems perceived by students in their interpreting process. Although the study is about tertiary-level interpreter training programs, and addresses perceptions, the perspective is very different from the one in Chap. 6. Some of the findings in the two studies can be compared, especially the ones that display regional differences in mainland China (in Chap. 7) and Hong Kong (in Chap. 6). However, the design and targeted problems in the two studies are very different. Chapter 7 brings the exploration on learner-perceived problems to a higher level. That is, when the study in Chap. 6 is still discussing the importance of learner perceptions, the one in Chap. 7 already treats "learner-perceived" problems as specific "real" problems which would hinder the learning of interpreting. The study revealed some very concrete problems with practical value to trainers. For example, learners in tertiary-level interpreting classes were to a great extent restricted by word-level linguistic problems; the greatest majority of participants worried about "failure to produce corresponding words"; they regarded capturing the overall content as most important in interpreting; male students tended to have more word-level and sentence-level linguistic problems, and they tended to be more concerned about fluency issues at the presentation level than female students were. These are all specific problems and provide a lot of information for classroom teachers in the design of curriculum and class activities. The value of this study lies more in the possibility for all trainers to replicate this classroom-based research and discover what their students' problems are.

Many of the constructs that are examined in language learning classrooms need to be investigated in T&I classes, given the close relationship between language-related problems and T&I achievement. Chapter 8 presents a study on the role of foreign language anxiety, willingness to communicate and other learner factors in tertiary interpreting classes. "Foreign language anxiety" and "willingness to communicate" are among the most frequently studied constructs in language learning, and their impact on learning has been proved to be significant and the results are stable. However, researchers in TS are not familiar with them. People with high-level foreign language anxiety or low-level willingness to communicate are expected to encounter difficulties in listening- or speaking- oriented interpreting classes. All we need to do is to prove the correlation between these variables and interpreting achievement and identify the idiosyncratic features of these variables in T&I learning. Chapter 8 shows significant correlations between foreign language anxiety and students' interpretation learning achievement, foreign language anxiety and WTC. Both foreign language anxiety and WTC significantly correlate with many other factors concerning the learning of interpreting. The study shows that the variables that affect language learning may also have a role to play in T&I learning. The findings provide important pedagogical insights into tertiary interpreting education.

Different from the other three chapters in Part II of this volume, which show empirical studies in interpreter training classes, Chap. 9 presents a study on learning in written translation classes, which explores the impact of second language writing

anxiety on translation. The influence of anxiety on second language writing is established in the field of language learning, but few empirical studies, if any, have been conducted to examine the problems derived from second language anxiety in translator training contexts. Translation and second language writing both involve the process of producing in a second language, and they differ in many ways. For example, writing is a “creative” process, but writing in second language can both be “creative” and may involve “translation” if the second language writer thinks in his or her mother tongue and “translates” these ideas in his or her mind before writing them out. Translators have to be “faithful” to the source text provided, but they also need to be creative since, more often than not, exact equivalents cannot be found in the other language. The complex interrelationship between writing and translation makes it even more interesting to see if anxiety affects translation as it does writing. The findings show that there are significant correlations between second language writing anxiety, translation performance, and language ability (real and perceived). Learning habits and learner-specific factors are examined. The results show that a positive correlation is found between the frequency with which students read English newspapers or magazines and their Chinese-to-English translation performance. Other factors, such as gender, length of study, age, and family background, have not been found to be significantly correlated with translation performance. A number of factors provoking second language writing anxiety in the translation class are identified. Among these, the fear of being evaluated and the general apprehension of writing in English have a highly predictive power in students’ success in translation learning. The implications for tertiary-level classroom training seem to be that teachers should be aware of anxiety-provoking practices; they may also try to help learners reduce anxiety levels and encourage student translators to form correct and positive self-perceptions about their language abilities.

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