

A Review of Researches on Translation and Interpretation Contests by Chinese Scholars over the Past 30 Years (1988-2021)

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Abstract

This article sorted out and reflected on the relevant papers of the Chinese translation and interpretation contest research in the past 30 years and more, and examined the trend of its development over time. Generally speaking, its development can be divided into two stages: initial stage and comprehensive development stage. Meanwhile, the article summarized the current status of the existing researches, finding that most of papers focus on the evaluation and reflection on the translation texts or analyze the washback of these contests on translation and interpreting instruction and training, but other types of studies are in small quantities and scattered. On this basis, the author points out that more efforts should be made to discuss the construction of translation and interpretation contest corpus and exploring emotional impacts on performance and results of contests. In addition, the author also believes that aided translation in this field is gaining momentum, and assessment research on text quality or translators' and interpreters' competence is still novel. Learning from the past will provide references for subsequent related researches.

Keywords

Interpretation Contest; Translation Contest; Diachronic Development; Research Status.

1. Introduction

Every year, large-scale translation and interpretation contests attract teachers and students from colleges and universities, researchers from scientific research institutes and translation enthusiasts to participate in China. On the one side, these contests offer great opportunities to show teaching achievements, promote translation practice and facilitate teaching reform (Lu & Mu 2013). On the other side, the translation texts, interpretation audios and on-site performances of the contestants also attract the attention of scholars.

Since 1988, the research on translation and interpretation contests (hereinafter referred to as TICs) has a history of more than 30 years in China, during which there has been no lack of insightful discussions, but the article that sorts out and summarizes the researches on TICs from a macro perspective has not yet been published. Several review researches on this topic discuss various types of interpreting contests at all levels in China, to understand its development pattern (Han 2012), or investigate a specific translation contest over time to provide references for translation practice and training (Yang et al 2021), without paying attention to the contest research. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the development context and evolution process of the existing Chinese TIC researches, and comprehensively summarize and review the research results and shortcomings for the reference of scholars.

2. Data Collection

All study objects are the papers from the database - China National Knowledge Infrastructure. To collect all relevant papers on the topic of TICs, the key words “Interpreting/ion + Contest”, “Interpreting/ion + Competition”, “Interpreting/ion + Match”, “Translation + Contest”, “Translation + Competition” and “Translation + Match” are input into the search bar. Through checking the titles, abstracts and frameworks of these retrieved papers one by one, the author deletes some repeated papers and eliminates the ones that are not closely related to this topic, such as contest notices, work reports, and exhibitions of excellent translation versions. To collect all papers on this topic, the retrieved papers’ references are also be checked to find out the omitted ones. Finally, 184 papers are obtained, including 136 journals, 41 theses and dissertations, and 7 academic conference papers respectively. In view of the numerous sources of these papers and their varying qualities, this study focuses on reviewing and examining papers indexed by Chinese core journals and published in international conferences, which to a large extent can reflect and represent the research level of Chinese TIC. Because there are only 4 papers related to the interpreting contest, in order to show the full picture of the researches in the interpreting field, 14 other papers with high citation and download frequency are selected and included in the analysis scope of this paper. In the end, 71 papers are collected, among which 41 papers are from Chinese Translators Journal, 4 Shanghai Journal of Translators, 3 Foreign Language Education, 2 Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal, 1 Contemporary Foreign Languages Studies, 1 Foreign Language World, 1 Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages, 1 Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice, 1 Journal of Soochow University (Philosophy & Social Science Edition), 1 Education Reform, Management Innovation and Social Science, 1 International Conference on Humanities Science and Society Development; 2 Journal of Harbin University, 1 Heilongjiang Education (Theory & Practice), 1 Journal of Dalian University, 1 Journal of Huaihua University, 1 Journal of Jixi University (Comprehensive Edition), 1 Journal of Language and Literature Studies, 1 Foreign Languages and Translation, 1 Translation Horizons; and 2 dissertations of Hunan University, 1 Jilin University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, 1 Huazhong University of Science and Technology. The deadline for literature collection is April 8, 2022, and the number of papers published over the years is shown in the figure below:

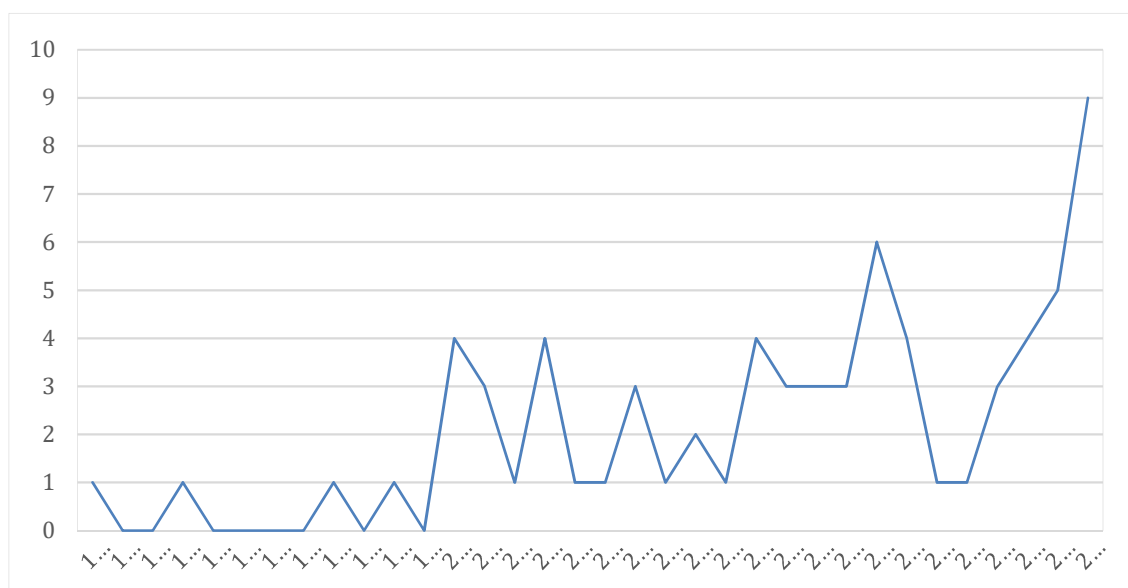


Figure 1. Number of publications over the years

Figure 1 shows the number and general trend of articles published by year. As can be seen from the figure, the number of published articles is generally on the rise, which is related to the popularity of the “Han Suyin Youth Translation Award” (hereinafter referred to as HSY) competition and cross-disciplinary research in recent years. Meanwhile, as of November 2021, the number of MTI programs across the country has increased to 316 (the data comes from the China National Committee for Translation & Interpreting Education), cultivating more translation and interpreting talents for this industry. Therefore, more students participate TICs year by year, providing broader scope and richer materials for TIC research, and stimulating the increase in the number of studies.

3. The Evolution of Researches on Chinese TICs

The researches on Chinese TICs can be roughly divided into two stages, i.e. the initial stage (1988-2013) and the development stage (2014-2021). At each stage, both material and non-material researches (Gao 1999) exist and become dominant alternately. Among them, the material researches often analyze the works of the HSY contests, and the audios of All China Interpreting Contest and the Cross-Strait Interpreting Contest. Non-material researches focus on the washback effect of the contests on translation and interpretation instruction and training.

3.1. Initial Stage

The researches in the initial stage are mainly empirical summaries and most of the scholars are also translators, with a dual foundation of theory and practice. These scholars pay more attention to analyzing the original text and the translation of its words, sentences and discourse stylistic features, and dealing with the difficulties in translation brought about by rhetoric and cultural factors, or combine different theoretical categories to discuss translation problems and their countermeasures. At this stage, accuracy, fidelity, smoothness, and stylistic feature of the target language are high-frequency keywords in the researches and these researches aim at strengthening translators' skills and competences and improving translation quality, and emphasize the thorough understanding of the original text and the authentic and fluent expression of the translation.

3.2. Development Stage

Most of the researches in the development stage have combined interdisciplinary knowledge and integrated different research paradigms. The number of research objects increases and the scale of research data continues to expand. During this stage, the most notable feature of the interdisciplinary study is to explore the washback effect of translation contests such as “promoting learning through contests” on translation and interpreting instruction. By observing students' performance in competition and their entry translations, the scholars explore out their significant problems, and make use of teaching and instruction methods to present corresponding optimization strategies, encouraging the reform of teaching content and modes. Among them, the inspiration and enlightenment for translation teachers brought by the translation contests are mainly to ask students to master translation skills, increase the amount of translation training, pay attention to translation comparison and cultivate critical thinking. While the interpreting contests inspire college teachers to develop students' on-the-spot ability and adaptability, diversify listening materials to cover current affairs and hot spots and adjust teaching schedules and goals. In addition, under the background of informatization and the Internet age, the researches on internet-assisted translation have been paid more attention by scholars, and it has also gradually extended to the field of translation contests. Some scholars analyze the positive effect of Internet on the pre-, while and post- translation processes respectively. Meanwhile, making use of the original texts of the translation contests as the corpus, the research, comparing the language characteristics of human and machine translation,

also fully demonstrates the interdisciplinary characteristics of this stage. Finally, the anxiety in the interpreting contests has also become the research object of some theses and doctoral dissertations, exploring its negative impact and proposing strategies to overcome and alleviate it.

In recent years, with the maturity of corpus technology, corpus linguistics, corpus translation studies and other disciplines have been continuously developed, and this new research paradigm - based on corpus - has become the focus and hot topic of language researches. The interpretation and translation corpus collected from the actual contest scene retains the ecological effect of translation, and also provides many materials for constructing the corpus. The construction of corpus has a certain feedback effect on the practice and instruction of translation and interpretation, and makes the sources of research corpus for scholars more abundant. At this stage, the corpus studies for the interpreting contest are few in number, and most of them analyze the feasibility, methods and significance of corpus construction. The officially available corpus bank has not yet been opened. At the same time, in interpreting contest research, although speculative researches and case studies still occupy a particular proportion, the number of empirical research has gradually increased. Especially in the theses and dissertations, empirical research has become one of the mainstream research paradigms.

4. Analysis on the Current Status of Chinese TIC Researches

After reading the papers indexed by relevant journals in the past 30 years, the author has summarized the current status of Chinese TIC research, which can be concluded into the following three aspects:

4.1. Evaluation and Reflection Studies are Mainstream

On the whole, the researches of Chinese TICs mainly aim at evaluating the entry translations or excellent ones among them, reflecting on the translation problems, summarizing the experience for young translation enthusiasts to refer to, and improving the translators' competence and translation quality. Fang (1988) outlined the situation of a translation competition jointly held by Shanghai Translation News and Shanghai Journal of Translators for Science and Technology, emphasized that translators should understand the background and language features of the original text, grasp its connotation, and made several requirements for the translation of titles, long sentences and language styles. Meanwhile, he also encouraged translators to create a good translation atmosphere and maintain a serious attitude towards it. Since then, the HSY contest has swept the country, and its influence has continued to expand, providing materials for scholars' translation evaluation and analysis. When Chinese-English translation was added for the first time in the HSY translation contest, Fu (1996) reviewed the entry translations, and put forward the requirements of "faithfulness, smoothness, and appropriateness" in translation. He believed that the first step to keep faithful was thoroughly understanding the original text, and on this basis, split and reorganize the original text for translation to ensure "smoothness". Finally, avoiding piling up words into sentences, inappropriate collocations and mixed language styles can promote the "appropriateness" of the translation. Scholars such as Gao (1998), Wei (2000), Wang & Zhang (2004) also deeply analyzed the original texts and translated texts of the HSY Contest in terms of understanding and expression. On the other hand, some scholars examined the year's reference translations and discussed their pros and cons (Zeng 2001; Shi 2006), providing different voices for the translation community and promoting the improvement of the contest translations. In the 1920s, evaluation and reflection studies on contest translation became differentiated, some of which discussed the translation from a macro perspective and others from a micro perspective. For instance, Zhou (2010) addressed the faithfulness of translation from a macro view of culture, social context and target language style and introduced the difficulties and problems worth scrutinizing in translation - the art of

“dancing in fetters”. Lin & Miao (2014) analyzed the participating translations and thought there was a general problem of lack of textual awareness and the translators spent their energy on word-to-word translation instead of considering the whole discourse texts. And the authors believed shifting attention from words to text can help to achieve the effect of smoothness and faithfulness. Other scholars have studied, from a micro perspective, the translation of the titles, words, sentences and annotations and introduced translation methods and skills from their own practical experience. Ye et al. (2014) specially discussed the translation of news titles and proposed recommendations on selecting proper English vocabulary, organizing sentences and making annotations, and even the use of punctuation marks during translation. Zhang (2015), through his own translation experience, summed up three methods of translation between English and Chinese: direct borrowing, pattern imitation (parody or adaptation), and creative rendering. Compared with previous studies, the English-Chinese translation methods proposed in this article are more practical and have great references for young translation enthusiasts.

4.2. Studies on Washback Effect on Teaching Come Second

Interpreting and translation contests held by Chinese universities, institutions or publishing houses can not only test the results of translation and interpreting teaching, but also have washback effects on the teaching, promoting its development and continuous reform and improvement. Hu (2002) analyzed the translation problems presented by 298 college students in a translation contest, including lack of background knowledge and translation skills, misunderstandings, and taking the words too literally. Besides, the author suggested it was necessary to add or revise the requirements of the translation instruction in the college English teaching syllabus to help students to avoid these problems, and she gave the other corresponding improvement methods for translation problems. This is an earlier article in China that discusses the effect of translation contests on translation teaching, affirms its significance, and provides new methods and perspectives for cultivating translation students. Shao (2013) specially wrote an article to discuss the enlightenment of the interpreting contests to college teaching and training of interpreting. She claims that the evaluation standards of the interpreting contests offer good references for the colleges to set up their own purposeful quantitative translation evaluation standards, and there is a good interactive relationship between the contest and training. Apart from those, the author also discusses the inspiring function of these contests from the type and difficulty of interpreting materials, listening comprehension training, interpreters' psychological quality and on-the-spot adaptability. Wan (2015) combined his own experience in organizing and guiding young teachers and students to participate in the HSY contest, and verified the positive effects of the mode of “promoting learning through contests” by observing the number of prizes teachers and students obtained and their performances. Gao (2016) investigated one university's students' contest performances and was inspired to adjust curriculum settings, training objectives and methods, improve faculty structures, and formulate test and evaluation mechanisms. The effect of this teaching adjustment has been recognized by the interviewed students. From the above-mentioned studies, we can know previous studies are mainly speculative ones based on scholars' practical experience or observation results. However, Wang et al (2019), based on the existing research results, used interviews and questionnaires and combined with mathematical statistics methods to investigate the role of interpreting contests in promoting student's psychological quality, interpreting skills, bilingual ability and encyclopedic knowledge, and they also indicated the direction of future interpreting training reforms according their investigation results.

4.3. Other Types of Studies are Scattered

51 papers focus on evaluating and reflecting on the translation texts or analyse the washback of these contests on translation and interpreting teaching, accounting for 72% of the total. The

remaining 20 papers belong to different types of studies and each has not yet formed a certain scale, whose topics can be roughly divided into four items: corpus research on TICs, aided translation research, translation quality evaluation or translator/interpreter competence evaluation, and the impact of anxiety on contest performance. These four research topics require further study from different translation or interpretation directions, different translation types and dimensions to enrich relevant research results. Among them, the number of studies on the impact of anxiety on contest performance is the least, which can only be seen in several dissertations, which is relatively the most vacant field.

5. Reflection and Prospect for Chinese TIC Researches

Based on analyzing and summarizing the research status, this study reflected on the shortcomings and vacancies of existing researches, and looked forward to the trend of future researches.

5.1. Discussions on the Construction of TIC Corpus are Inadequate

Among 71 research objects, there are only 3 papers on the corpus research of the TIC, of which 2 are for translation and 1 for interpretation, and the overall number is insufficient. The 3 researches include: Zhu et al (2018), through building the 28th HSY Chinese-English translation corpus and two comparison sub-databases, evaluated the stylistic features of the participating translations, and found that the style of translated text is deviated from that of source language text and the reason is that the conjunctions and BY-passives are frequently used, and the lexical richness is not enough in the translated text. This article provides a reference for translation contestants to grasp the translation style better and it is also the first one to use the corpus method to evaluate the translation style quantitatively. Wang & Yu (2019) introduced the procedures for building HSY contest corpus and its application in translation courses in Xiamen University of Technology. Their study deeply explored the corpus resources of the Han Suyin translation contest's corpus resources, inspiring and motivating other universities engaged in this contest to build their own students' translation corpus. Liu & Li (2020) discussed the feasibility and basic steps of establishing a corpus bank for interpreting learners and considered it to be of great significance to interpreting practices and theoretical researches. To sum up, the primary source of the translation corpus for the translation contest is the entries of the HSY contest at present. Subsequent researches can expand the range of corpus sources and include more translation texts from different competitions. Meanwhile, the studies on the construction of the corpus for the interpreting contests need to be enriched quickly, and the scholars in this field should write papers to introduce construction steps and difficulties. Besides, the construction of multimodal interpreting contest corpora is also an area to be developed in future research.

5.2. Aided Translation Studies Attract More Scholars' Attention

The rapid development and popularization of the Internet has brought great convenience to translation practice, and the use of tools such as the Internet and translation machines to assist practice has become an essential skill for modern translators. In 2012, Wan Zhaoyuan, for the first time, combined the personal experience of participating in the HSY translation contest to summarize the main functions of Internet-assisted translation and introduce its effects on helping pre-translation understanding, while-translation verification and post-translation polishing. By 2014, Jiang Yue used the reference versions of the 5th HSY English-Chinese translation contest as research materials to explore the similarities and differences of linguistic quantitative properties between human and machine translations, which offers a reference for the optimization of language features in terms of vocabulary and syntax in online machine translation. His study provides a new method for linguistic comparative research from the

perspective of quantitative linguistics. Yang & Jia (2019) explored the differences between the reference version and the machine translation version of the HSY contest from the aspects of vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure, focusing on the problem of text coherence caused by the differences. The above papers are mostly material-based studies, focusing on the linguistic properties of the translated texts, but have not yet set foot in the field of interpretation. That is due to the time-limited and impromptu nature of interpreting. However, the researches of technology-assisted pre-interpreting preparation for contests or post-interpreting reflection are still with theoretical value and application prospects.

5.3. Evaluation Studies on the Translation Quality or Ability are Still Novel

Translation quality evaluation (or translator competence assessment) is a necessary part of translation contests, and its reliability and validity will directly affect the final score of contestants. At present, most high-quality studies on translation evaluation research focus on the field of interpretation contests. Wang (2011) investigated the process of the two National English Interpreting Contests and discussed the evaluation concept, modes and specific test design of interpreting competence, which provides references for interpretation instruction and self-improvement of interpreters. Su (2020) paid attention to the gist interpreting, proposed evaluation indicators for this type of interpreting from two dimensions of the intra-text and inter-text and collected 45 contestants' audios from the Cross-Strait Interpreting Contest as corpus to confirm the explanation and discrimination of the proposed evaluation system. The article focuses on the first link of the interpreting competition, and the proposed evaluation criteria are more pertinent, clarifying the goals for the practice of gist interpreting. Deng & Yong (2021) expanded the evaluation subjects, including guests, peers, and audiences, set up evaluation forms for them respectively, and handed them out to the subjects to collect data. After analyzing the data, they find that the evaluation system is credible. The study describes the contestants' performance from a richer and more specific dimension, and further improves the evaluation system of the interpretation competition. In the future, the research on the evaluation of interpretation competitions can also refine the evaluation links, and provide an evaluation system with multi-party evaluation and verification for different links of the competition (generally including gist interpreting and conference interpreting). Meanwhile, the evaluation of different interpreting directions and simultaneous interpretation competitions is also worthy of in-depth exploration, so as to obtain a more scientific, comprehensive and feasible interpretation evaluation system. In addition, the evaluation system for translation competition also needs to be further developed and explored because the current studies on it are not abundant at all and don't present specific and detailed evaluation methods.

5.4. Impacts of Emotions on Contest Performance Should be Explored Further

Anxiety is one of the critical emotional factors that affect interpreting performance. The research on the causation, degree and impact of interpreting anxiety has attracted the attention of scholars at the beginning of this century (Kang 2011; Dong 2013). The researches, on developing the interpreting anxiety scale and discussing the influence of anxiety on consecutive and simultaneous interpretations, have gradually shown its value. However, most of them are empirical studies and the subjects are generally school students, so the actual interpreting ecology can't be kept well. At the same time, a few studies focus on the influence and mitigation methods of anxiety in contest interpreting, which only can be seen in a few theses and dissertations (He 2015; Deng 2018). On the other hand, the research on anxiety effects of translation contests has not yet been published. The reason may be that the most influential translation contest in China "Han Suyin Youth Translation Award" is different from regular competitions or tests, and does not require the contestants to complete the translation task in a relatively limited time and in a fixed venue. However, most of other local translation contests

set a prescribed time (usually 2-3 hours) for translating the texts under specific circumstances, such as the Hunan Translation Contest for Postgraduates and Jiangxi Translation Contest. Therefore, the studies exploring the anxiety of translation still have particular practical significance, which need to be analyzed by follow-up researches.

At this point, the whole picture of the researches on the TICs in China in the past three decades has been outlined basically. Most of the researches are material-based ones and they focus on evaluating the translation quality and presenting the inappropriateness of translation to alert translation enthusiasts and practitioners; Meanwhile, the discussion on the washback effect of contests is relatively mature, and the model of “promoting learning by contests” has been affirmed by instruction and research personnel in colleges and universities. On the other hand, scholars should put more effort into deepening and refining corpus-based research, aided translation research, translation and interpretation quality assessment and emotion impact research of TICs. Among them, the connotation and extension of aided translation, in the era of rapid technological progress, will continue to be developed. For example, machine-assisted translation and interpretation gradually enter the field of scientific research and application.

6. Conclusion

This article takes the studies on the TIC as the objects, clarifies their development context, and examines the research status and characteristics over the past three decades. It is found that the papers of evaluation and reflection on the entry translations occupy the dominant position, demonstrating the features of empirical summary in the initial stage. The washback effect of contests on teaching and training has also aroused the attention of college teachers and a certain number of relevant studies have been produced. Although the studies on the construction of corpus in the interpretation and translation contest have been indexed by some high-quality journals, it is still small in number and limited in study coverage. The number of studies of aided translation, translation and translators’ competence evaluation and emotional impact on contest performance is relatively small, so the scholars can put more efforts into these topics and produce more results to enrich this field. With this article, the author hopes to provide a reference for scholars in related fields and enrich the research results in this direction.

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