

Rethinking the Connotations of Translation Competence in the Current Era with an Ethical Perspective

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of rapid advancement of language service industry and translation technology, there is currently a call for the training of “language service talents” instead of the training of translators and interpreters. One research question arises: will this change “change” the connotations of translation competence? This paper examines the void and synergy between translation and language services in their respective demand for competence through literature reading and comparative analysis while ethical consideration is involved. It is found that language and professional competence is still anchored at the center of translation competence while technology development and language service industry serve as a stimulant to enrich the connotations of translation competence.

Keywords

Translation Competence; Language Services; Ethics.

1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the bloom of language service industry, quick development of translation and interpreting technology and keen demand for emergency T&I services heightened by COVID-19 (Ren, 2021).

In light of the CSA (Common Sense Advisory) Research, the global output value of language service businesses increased from 23.5 billion dollars to 49.6 billion dollars from 2009 to 2019, achieving an annual growth of 7.76%. China's LSI output value, with a share over 11% in the global market, reached 5.568 billion.

According to Nimdzi Research, we're in a language market today where more words are translated every single day via machine translations than what was translated throughout the entire corpus of human language in the past. The daily translation volume delivered by Huawei's translation center with pure machine translation and no post-editing has reached 100 million characters, and is still increasing (Ren, 2019). Technology in the contemporary day is not an option in the professional context; on the contrary, it is a necessity (Dos Santos, 2016). With human-machine interaction and machine translation involved, translation technology is changing the nature of T&I as once a uniquely and exclusively human communication activity. In consideration of differences in type, text, subject, role, sector and many others, translation technology is arguably changing the way how T&I is defined and operated (Ren, 2021).

Upon entering the 21st century, a kaleidoscopic range of disasters were sewn into people's daily life. Moreover, these disasters have already crossed the borders of countries and catapult themselves into the highlight of global survival issues. Disasters and epidemics in current era form in a cumulative manner and break in a sudden way. Corresponding to this change is the galloping demand for emergency T&I services.

Against the backdrop of rapid advancement of language service industry and translation technology, there is currently a call for the training of “language service talents” instead of the

training of translators and interpreters (Ren, 2021). One research question arises: will this change “change” the connotations of translation competence? Taking localization as an example, language services companies must process massive amounts of information in a short period of time to save valuable time for localized companies and occupy target markets in a timely manner. However, the traditional translation method alone cannot meet the requirements of localized companies. This requires translators to have strong technical knowledge and practical competences such as machine translation, computer-assisted translation, post-translation editing, project management, term-base construction and maintenance, and technical writing. At the same time, since translation projects usually involve multiple translators and departments, translators must have strong communication competence and coordination and management competence. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct in-depth and detailed research on the competence structure and development characteristics of language service practitioners to meet the needs of the language service market (Zhong et al, 2016).

To answer the proposed question, comparative analysis will be adopted in examining the similarities and differences between competences needed in translation and in language service. Different from previous investigations, an ethical point of view will be integrated into the research since ethics serves as a time-honored issue in T&I heightened in the current era and still lacks theoretical and practical attention from both China and abroad (Ren, 2021). Ethical considerations can be applied to different parts of translation, going from inquiries of professional practice to issues such as the role of translators in encouraging intercultural communication or in appropriately addressing SL authors' thoughts (Giuseppe Palumbo, 2009). A decision has been taken to restrict the present survey to studies on translation and thus leave out interpreting, probably a separate research field in its own right today and thus deserve deeper, wider and more competent treatment. It is hoped that this thesis can be regarded as an attempt at rediscovering translation competence in the new era and a supplement to the on-going studies on translation and interpreting competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies on Translation Competence

The word competence in translation studies has to do with what empowers a person to translate (a text, a sentence or a single item) from one language to another.

Albrecht Neubert noted translation competence involves language competence, textual competence, disciplinary competence, cultural competence and transfer competence (Roger T. Bell, 1991)

According to Giuseppe Palumbo (2009), competence is summarized as follow:

Traditionally, this competence tended to be equated with linguistic competence and no distinction was made between the competence of professional translators and that of bilingual individuals with no specific training in translation (or, at any rate, bilinguals not acting as professional translators). In recent years, the focus of interest is on translation competence as observed in professional translators. The specific areas of interest for researchers include: the particular strategies adopted by translators in performing a task; their competence in using translation aids and researching vocabulary; the way they develop and apply so-called ‘translation routines’, i.e. standard transfer operations leading to Target Language equivalents that are appropriate to the task at hand. Translation competence is thus today understood as the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable an individual to act as a professional translator...

Little consensus was reached on more detailed definition of competence and its distinctive components. Scholars such as Schaffner and Adab (2000) examined the developing process of competence and the method to acquire it for trainees; some others (e.g. Kiraly 2000) still won't

straddle the line of their demarcation between 'translation competence' and 'translator competence'.

Among various models of competence proposed by scholars, Pym (2003) noted that since the 1970s four tendencies can be identified:

(1) competence as a summation of bilingual competencies from a traditional viewpoint.

(2) competence as 'no competence': as translation deals with the actual use of languages (Giuseppe Palumbo, 2009), Pym (2003:484) pointed out that it would be paradoxical, in Chomskyan terms, to describe as 'competence', something which is really 'performance' -- the term has thus variously been replaced by the scholars who took this approach with cognate notions such as 'proficiency', 'strategies', 'expertise', etc.;

(3) competence as a multicomponential notion which involves sets of skills that are linguistic, cultural, technological and professional.

(4) competence as 'supercompetence', i.e. something which defines translating and nothing but translating. Pym (2003:489) himself tends to a 'minimalist' notion of competence, which was seen as the ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text for relevant source text plus 'the ability to select only one viable Target Text from this series, quickly and with justified confidence' (Giuseppe Palumbo, 2009).

The overall tendency among scholars, in Pym's words, has been to extend the multicomponent model in order to carry new abilities and proficiencies into the field of translator training. This trend might continue to proceed with the expanding utilization of electronic apparatuses. Here it is contended, in any case, that the multicomponential developments of skill are incompletely grounded in institutional interests and are theoretically imperfect in that they will forever be a couple of steps behind market requests. Thus, a straightforward moderate idea of translation competence, on the basis of the creation then disposal of alternative options, can assist with directing translator training in the midst of quick technological and professional change (Pym, 2003).

In China, in the more authoritative *A Dictionary of Translation Studies in China*, the entry "translation competence" refers to the competence to translate the source text into the target language. The comprehensive reflection of bilingual competence, translation thinking competence, bilingual cultural competence and skill application competence (Fang, 2011: 17). Wang (2013: 26-44) believed that when considering translation competence, we must take into account the comprehensiveness of translation competence, and explore comprehensive translation competence based on China's national conditions and the actual situation of English-Chinese translation teaching, including lingual-discoursal-pragmatic competence, cultural competence, strategic competence, tool-use competence, thinking competence, and personal coordination competence. Through the review of previous studies on translation competence, it is not difficult to find out that there are commonalities at the core of translation competence: bilingual competence, professional knowledge, cultural communication, logical thinking, and tool use (Fu, 2015).

2.2. Previous Studies on Language Services

Domestic language service research can be roughly divided into two schools, one is the generalized language service research scholars who think that language service research is a branch of linguistics, belonging to applied linguistics or pragmatics, they discuss language services in a broad sense, including the formulation of national language policies, language policies in multi-ethnic and multilingual areas, and specific language services for various industries (Zhong et al, 2016). Representative scholars include Shao (2012), Zhao (2012), Guo (2012) and Li (2014, 2016). They define language services from a macro perspective. Language services refers to the use all derivatives of language (including words), language knowledge,

language art, language technology, language standards, language data, and language products to meet the needs of the government, society, families, and individuals (Li, 2014: 93).

The other is language service research scholars and language service practitioners with narrower perspective, who believe that language services is a new orientation of China's translation industry (Yuan, 2012: 80-83). Language service research is an emerging discipline independent of linguistics, language services is inclusive of traditional translation, company and website localization, software and hardware development for translation, language consulting and training, and others (Zhong et al, 2016). Yuan (2014: 22) defines language services in details from the operational level that language services aim to help people solve language barriers in interlingual information exchanges by providing direct language information conversion services and products, or technologies, tools, knowledge, or skills for converting language information to assist people in completing the conversion processing of language information. It can be also said that language services are service activities in which directly language information conversion services and products, or technologies, tools, knowledge, skills are provided to help people address language barriers that arise in interlingual information exchange.

According to the CSA Research, language services is mainly inclusive of translation (such as MT post-editing and transcreation), interpreting (on-site interpreting, telephone interpreting, conference interpreting, machine interpreting, video remote interpreting, and remote simultaneous interpreting) localization (such as software localization, website localization, multimedia localization, game localization and mobile localization), project management, media (such as dubbing, narration, subtitling, voice-over), desktop publishing, search engine optimization, and transcription.

In summary, the academic understanding of language services needs to be further unified, but there is also a consensus that language translation is generally considered to be an important part of language services, but not the whole; language services is a brand-new industry, covering much richer content than translation (Zhong et al, 2016).

3. Theoretical Framework

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003:533), ethics refers to moral rules or principles of behavior for deciding what is right and wrong. It is visible that ethical contemplations can be applied to different parts of translation, going from inquiries of professional practice to issues such as the role of translators in encouraging intercultural communication or in fittingly addressing SL authors' thoughts (Giuseppe Palumbo, 2009).

In light of Chesterman (2001), four fundamental strands can be distinguished in the scholarly discussions around the ethics of translation:

(1) *Ethics of representation* (labelled by Chesterman) is the specific attention from some scholars with translation as a representation of the Other. The translator's ethical difficulty has to do with how to decide on an interpretation of the original text that limits distortion. A line of thought begins from Friedrich Schleiermacher in the 19th century and proceeds with all the more as of late with Berman (1984) and Venuti (1998) who considers translation to be continually including understanding and interpretation, during the process of which translators unavoidably embed TL values and beliefs that are likely to misshape the portrayal of the Other in original texts.

(2) *Ethics of service* that sees translation as a commercial service provided to a client, which concerns the identification of the practices that best serve the requirements of the translation brief agreed between translator and client. Nord (1991, 1997) proposed the notion of loyalty which features the responsibility translators hold towards their partners, including source text authors, target text commissioners or target text readers. In functionalist approaches, Nord

(1997:125) argued that loyalty is ‘a moral principle indispensable in the relationship between human beings, who are partners in a communication process’; it is ‘an interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between people’.

(3) *Ethics of communication* that considers translation to be by and large pointed toward cultivating intercultural communication and sees the translator's performance of an intercommunicative role between individuals or cultures as a fundamentally ethical question. This is the approach taken, for example, by Pym (2000), who considers translators to be acting in an ethically appropriate manner when their translations foster cooperation (Giuseppe Palumbo, 2009).

(4) *Norm-based ethics* which is premised on points that regard translation as a norm-governed activity. Acting ethically, from this viewpoint, implies acting to the norms that anticipate that translators should provide translations that can be trusted as honest representation of original texts.

4. Discussion and Analysis

In this part, typical models as regards competence in translation and language service will be comprehensively considered while an ethical viewpoint will be adopted.

Following Pym (2003), the four tendencies in studying models of competence can be identified as follow in Fig. 1:

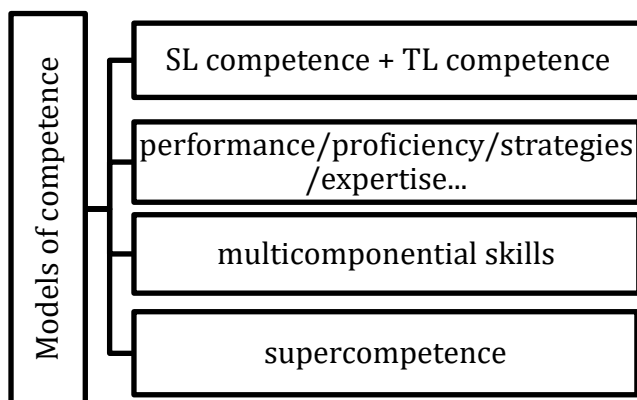


Fig 1. Four Tendencies in Studying Models of Competence

Typical models as regards translation competence are sorted out:

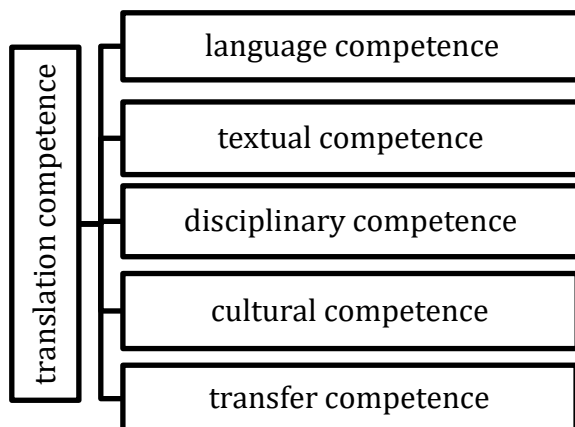


Fig 2. Translation Competence by Roger T. Bell (1991)

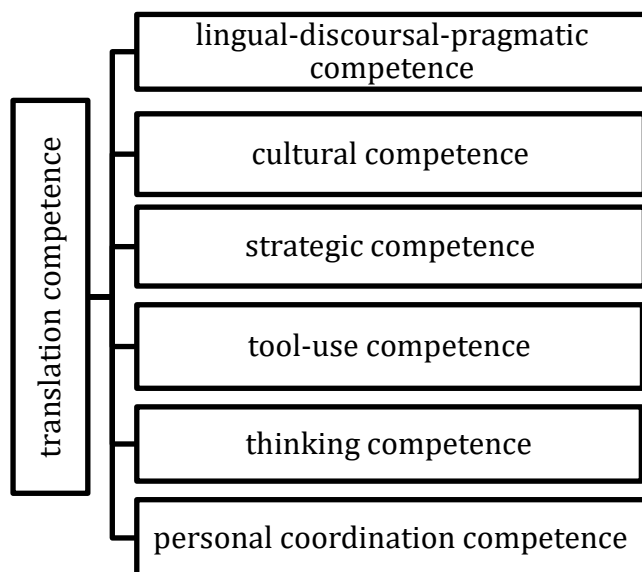


Fig 3. Translation Competence by Wang (2013)

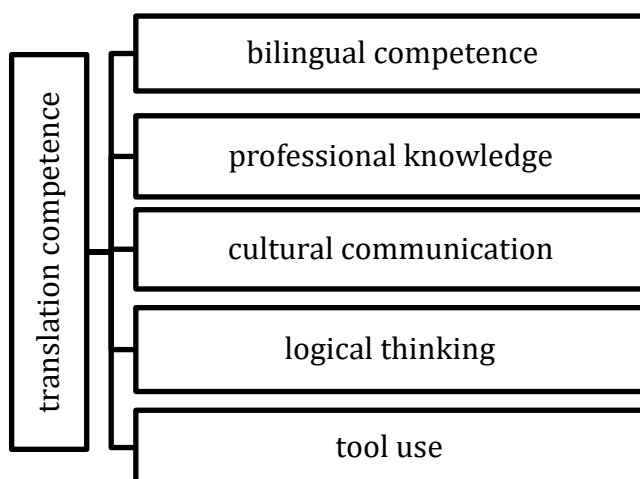


Fig 4. Translation Competence by Fu (2015)

The rise of language service industry calls for new requirements for translation competence structure in the current era. The demand for translation and localization talents from language service industry is changing, and the content, subjects, methods and means of the current translation service industry are different from the past (Zhong, 2015). In terms of content and subjects, translation needs from the medical, legal, IT, and business fields have greatly exceeded that in the literature field; in terms of methods, cooperative translation is gradually emerging, requiring translators to translate in groups of 3 or under the guidance of a group member; in terms of means, translation tools have become the weapon that translators rely on for survival. Fu (2015) pointed out that for translators, language competence, professional competence, technical competence, and management competence, communication competence, cultural competence and self-assessment competence are necessary.

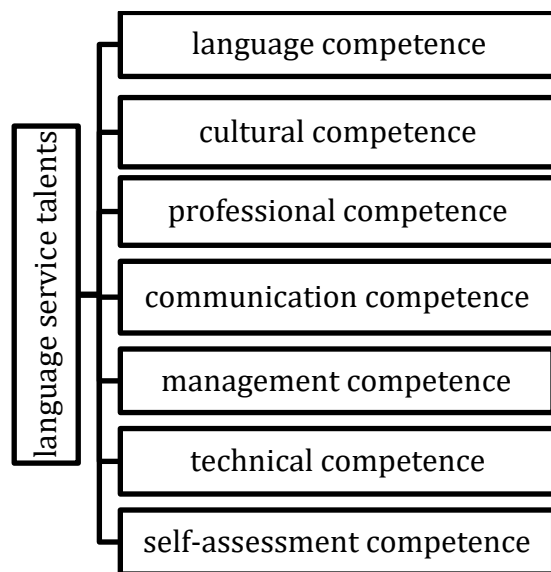


Fig 5. Translation Competence by Fu (2015)

For competence training, through the analysis of the competence characteristics of various translators required by language service industry, it is essential to pay heed to the translator's awareness of detail, cooperation competence, technical competence, cooperation competence, quality management competence, terminology competence, and problem-solving competence (Mu et al, 2017).

By comparing the typical models of translation competence and language service industry in different developing phases, it is found out that, in studies across a century, language competence, cultural competence, professional competence are part and parcel of the shared competence for translation and language service while new elements such as competence of tool using and coordination emerge with the bloom of language service industry as well as quick development of translation technology in the new era. The most notable new requirements for translation competence in the current era are technical and management competence.

Apart from these commonalities and differences, as the language service industry presents diverse ethical scenarios, the client-centeredness of language service industry challenges traditional translation ethics, the rapid development of language technology leads to more complex ethical relations, and the need for emergency language services creates unpredictable ethical choices (Ren, 2021), the complicated "cultural locations and situational determinants" (Pym, 2001:137) also calls for attention to translators competence in dealing with ethical issues rarely seen before.

In reference to model of translation ethics by Andrew Chesterman, ethics of representation asks translators to faithfully represent the original source and author. However, questions as regards faithfulness arise when translating "authorless texts" or texts with many authors (Ren, 2021). Ethics of service requires translators to best serve the requirements of the translation brief agreed between translator and client, but the client-centeredness of language service industry sometimes contradicts the traditional ethics. Ethics of communication sees the translator's performance of cultivating intercultural communication and achieving the understanding between the texts and the Other, but what about communication among multiple translators in crowdsourcing or collective translators in translation project? Norm-based ethics expects translation to meet the expectations of the target readers, but what about the expectations of the translators themselves?

The discussed questions all above synthesized, the following mode regarding translation competence in the new era was put forward:

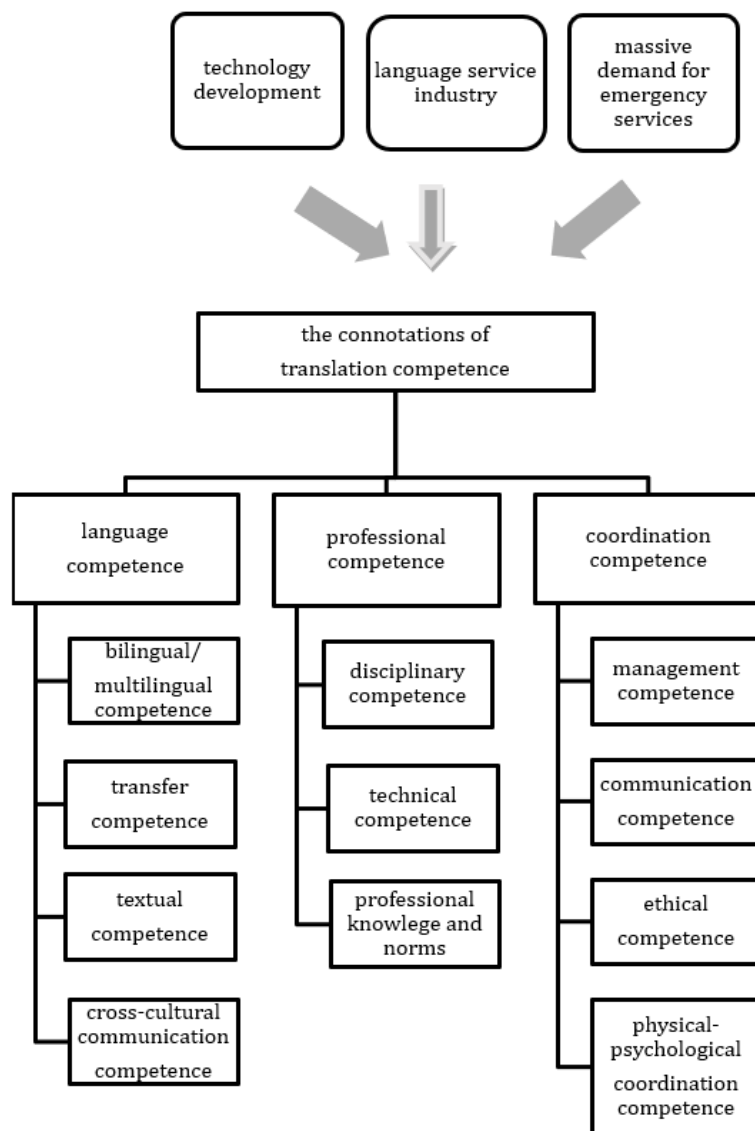


Fig 6. Connotations of translation competence in the new era

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the typical models of translation competence and language service industry in different developing phases at home and abroad, it is found that language competence and professional competence are part and parcel of the shared competence for translation and language service while new parameters such as technical competence, management competence, ethical competence (in dealing with new-arising ethical issues) emerge with the bloom of language service industry as well as quick development of translation technology in the new era. Taking the new norm into consideration, it is attempted to reburnish the structure of translation competence in the new era. Translation competence is thus divided into three parts, including language competence, professional competence and coordination competence. Language competence, a more traditional concept, covers bilingual or multilingual competence, transfer competence, textual competence and cross-cultural communication competence; professional competence involves disciplinary competence, technical competence and other professional requirements hereby summarized as professional knowledge and norms; coordination competence includes management competence, communication competence, ethical competence and physical-psychological coordination competence.

In summary, language and professional competence in a more traditional viewpoint is still anchored at the center of translation competence while technology development and language service industry serve as a stimulant to enrich the connotations of translation competence, provoking contemplations on the void and synergy between translation and language service as well as rethinking of the ethical issues that are rising but still lacking focused and in-depth exploration in China and beyond.

Since a decision has been taken to restrict the present survey to studies on translation, the current study leaves out interpreting, probably a separate research field in its own right today and thus deeper, wider and more competent treatment were expected for future research on interpreting competence. It is hoped that this thesis can be regarded as an attempt at rediscovering the connotations of translation competence in the new era and a supplement to the on-going studies on translation and interpreting competence.

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