

An empirical survey of employment and MTI competence in China

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Abstract

The Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) of China is controversial as less than 10% of graduates take translation as their job, in contrast to over 89% employment rate. The striking disparity poses a question: why MTI graduates are popular with the employment market? This research, uses questionnaires and comparative empirical research to explore the impact of employment requirement on MTI competence from the perspective of 'professionalism'. We find that that a cluster of technology applications have entered the employment requirement and becomes integral to the MTI competence, framing a new type of professionalism that focus on information acquisition and language conversion. Employment recruitment also put emphasis on sector practice. The MTI education may improve the employment rate via these enhancement measures relating to professionalism.

Keywords: *MTI; employment; professionalism; translation technology cluster; sector practice.*

1. Introduction

From 2007 to 2022, China Higher Education approved 316 educational organizations to run a major called Master of translation and interpreting (MTI) which aims to cultivate talents with professional competences in translation and interpreting and meet the growing needs of foreign exchange in terms of language. Over these years, some researchers claim that, in terms of employment fulfillment, MTI is self-evidenced by the tremendous expansion in scale (Zhang & Wang, 2020). Data show that the employment rate of MTI graduates has reached 87.85% on average, indicating that cultivation in this regard can meet the needs of employment (Zhang & Wang, 2020). Cui (2017) has conducted a series of survey on the MTI major, finding that MTI competence is ‘strong’ adaptable to employment, considering the fact that less than 30% of MTI graduates are engaged in translation and interpreting-related jobs. However, previous research rarely discussed the adaption of MTI to the employment in terms of competence. This present research explores the feature of the ‘strong’ adaptability of MTI to jobs in light of recruitment requirements, using MTI graduates as empirical samples.

In the context of relationship between employment and MTI education, we make contribution to the literature in that with translation technology as the strong influencing factor, MTI is newly labeled as being more adaptable to employment.

2. Study Design

In this study, a sample survey and information retrieval method was used to collect 70 questionnaires from 170 graduates from the grades 2018 and 2019 of Shanghai Maritime University (Wang & Wang, 2020). The recovery rate of questionnaires was 41.3%. The valid questionnaires were 70 with a 100% questionnaire efficiency rate. We distributed the questionnaire to collect the data by means of the Questionnaire Star, Wechat and other network channels. The questionnaires included (1) the employment satisfaction, industries engaged, income status, and career development of MTI graduates; (2) the opinions of MTI graduates on the curriculum after working for some time.

The questionnaire focused on the translation competence of MTI graduates, which mainly includes: students’ initial goal of applying for MTI degree program, expected occupation, and actual occupation, working industry, employment channels, factors affecting their employment competence, employment satisfaction, salary, expected translation competence, etc. Considering the validity, the questionnaire contains 18 questions, among which questions 1-5 involve basic questions such as students’ name, gender, working industry, age, and income; questions 6-18 include expected employment, expected industry, expected curriculum of employers, demand for practical courses of employers, etc. In addition, there

are 3 multiple-choice questions and 8 questions with fill-in-the-blank options within those 18 questions.

From the perspective of the market, we download 72 pieces of job information related to translators from mainstream recruitment websites, such as Zhaopin, Liepin, HunterOn, Qiankun Headhunting, and Sunsharer Headhunting. Those job requirements involve translation competence, industry, major, salary, communication ability, and job scope, which are similar to the design and content of the questionnaire, thus facilitating further comparison, analysis, and categorization. The questionnaires collected and the job advertisements are comparable for their number are the same.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Employment and Engagement of MTI

Enhancing competence in translation and interpreting is an important teaching goal for the MTI major. Translation competence is essential for MTI students (Liu, 2011; Han, 2020). Zhu (2019) equates professional knowledge with professionalism from the original purpose of MTI training. Based on this, one prevailing view is that the specialization of polytechnics be combined with specialized courses of each university (Li, 2020), and allocate more training requirements to practice of translation for special purposes (Liu, 2017). Li (2020) and Sun (2015) claim that the Higher Education Steering Committee stresses on professionalism but ignores the necessity of practice in special fields. In summary, professionalism needs to be oriented at employment. Professionalism is affected by employment requirements (Yao, 2020) but is not detailed.

In the questionnaire of this research, we designed question 2 “What is your expected occupation before employment?” and question 3 “What is your current occupation?” to compare the employment expectation and actual engagement (See Table 1).

Table 1. Expected Employment and Actual Engagement of MTI Students.

Occupation	Expected Employment	Actual Employment	Standard Deviation (SD)
Translators	36.3%	9.1%	0.19
Teachers	39.4%	33.3%	0.04
No expectations	6.1%	9.1%	0.02
Others	18.2%	48.5%	0.21

It can be seen the characteristics of the expected and actual engagement of MTI students. 1) the gap between expected employment and actual engagement in being a translator is huge. The expected proportion (36.3%) is much larger than the actual employment (9.1%). And the Standard Deviation (SD=0.19) shows that expecting to be a translator, in the eyes of pre-training students, is not sufficient for employment. 2) In terms of the occupation as a teacher, the percentages of expected (39.4%) and actual employment (33.3%) are nearly the same while the SD (0.04) is comparatively small, indicating that the language skills of MTI students are still an important component for employment. 3) In the choice of “others”, the expected percentage (18.2%) is lower than the actual percentage (48.5%), with SD at 0.21, indicating that MTI students are employment ready with other competencies.

The above characteristics suggest that the actual demand for MTI students is hooked to the basic language skills and new competencies (Hu & Tian, 2020).

3.2 The New MTI Competence Under Employment

The employment requirement for MTI job market post challenge to MTI education. Li (2019) pointed out, the MTI curriculum should not only include basic language courses, but also cultivate professional skills. So what professional competence required for job markets do MTI students have?

Question 12 of the questionnaire is a multiple-choice question “Which aspects of the specialized courses offered by the MTI program have contributed most to the development of your professional competence?” The options include translation technology, translation theory, economic and trade translation, science and technology translation, literary translation, and others. We searched “translator and interpreter” on the job page and randomly selected the job advertisements listed. After manual screening to remove duplicate and invalid job offers, we obtained 72 job offers from mainstream headhunters and job sites. Then, we sorted them by high-frequency words, removed words unrelated to competence, and obtained keywords such as Computer-Aided Translation, Translation Certificate, English Competence, Translation Practice, and Relevant Industry Experience. And the ratio of demand was calculated based on the word frequency. The integration of student questionnaires and job recruitment is shown in Figure 1.

From Figure 1 we can see that, first of all, the demands from employers (12%) and students (55%) both focus on translation skills despite various percentages. Secondly, the demand for industry experience (32%) of employers is greater than the maximum percentage of any individual industry (18%) in translation from students’ viewpoint. These findings indicate that students and markets both agree that translation technology is a distinctive feature that distinguishes MTI majors from other foreign language majors. Therefore, we believe that translation technology and industry experience should act as part of professional competence in MTI job market.

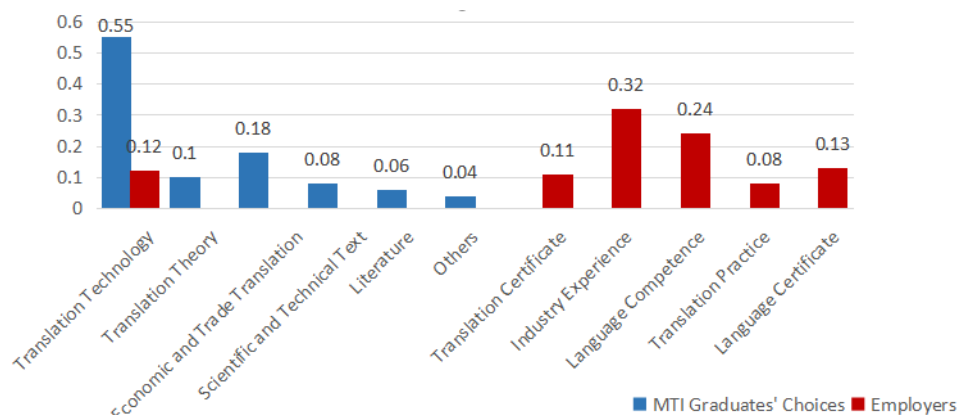


Figure 1. Comparison of competence between MTI graduates' expectations and employers' demands.

3.3 Translation Technology as New Competence

In 2014, the World Translation Conference on Man vs. Machine? The Future of Translators, Interpreters, and Terminologists was held in Dublin, highlighting the shift in translation studies towards technology. Translation talents with technical ability can meet the needs of the market (Miao & Wang, 2010; Yao, 2013). But what is translation technology? Does translation technology promote employment?

According to the international standard for translation service ISO17100:2015, translation technology contains three levels: technical tools, management, and communication. Technical tools involve alignment software such as ABBYY Aligner, translation software such as MemoQ and Trados, self-built terminology database, OCR recognition, format conversion, and other over twenty technologies. Translation project management includes complex missions such as forming teams, formulating programs, arranging schedules, and assigning tasks. Communication includes instant messaging software such as Facebook, QQ, WeChat, and email. Although Wang (2020) did not divide translation technologies into three categories, his classification also mainly covers the first two parts. With a total number of nearly thirty, all these diverse technologies involve translation corpus, format conversion, and project management. Therefore, MTI students need to spend a lot of time learning as many as 30 types of technology. And Fu (2015) points out that “relevant skills must be acquired with special training”(p.81), which also illustrates the difficulty of translation technology learning. In this regard, we believe that translation technologies are unique to MTI students with the competence that effectively runs through the whole process of translation.

3.4 Industry Experience in Specialized Field

The division of labor in the translation industry is becoming more and more detailed. In the job market, MTI students should have much practice experience, so they can be competent in different fields of translation work (Zhao & Yang, 2021). We analyzed 72 pieces of job advertisements for translation positions that contained industry experience statements, selected their high-frequency words about translation experience, and made them classified. See Figure 2.

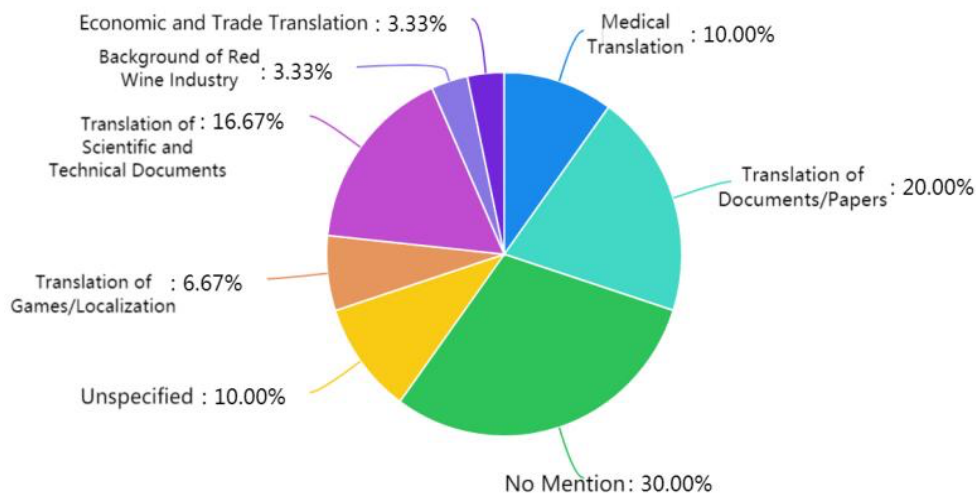


Figure 2. Industry experience for employers' consideration.

It is shown that most employers (70%) require industry experience for MTI graduates, while 30% do not specify their industry requirements. To make it clear, the translation of documents or papers accounts for 20%, the translation of scientific and technical documents accounts for 16.67%, and the translation of economic and trade documents accounts for 3.33%, revealing the proportion of employers' demand for industry/profession. It can be seen that employers measure the professionalism of translators by their experience and practice in different translation industries. Professionalism should be reflected through industry practice. As Xu (2010) pointed out that MTI education must be classified considering the market factors, such as engineering, medicine, law, economy and trade, literature, and so on.

4. Conclusion

Against the background of technology trends such as CAT, intelligent translation, and deep learning, the MTI competence represented by professionalism is insufficiently studied. This may be caused by the traditional translation model based on basic language skills and translation skills, has rooted in education as absolute soundness. But translation has entered

the machine translation age, thus simply focusing on students' basic language skills and translation skills, and ignoring such translation technologies as computational linguistics and corpus linguistics will "obviously fail to meet the demand for talents in the society of language intelligence development" (Hu & Tian, 2020).

Based on the questionnaires of MTI graduates from Shanghai Maritime University and the feedback from employers, we can find that the employment market has redefined the MTI competence by highlighting the role of translation technology. Such technology cluster used in the translation process, in terms of the type of technology and the length of learning time, has essentially distinguished MTI majors, and should be viewed as a key component of the professionalism of MTI.

From the perspective of the teaching program, MTI curriculum should pay attention to the training of translation technology in order to meet the needs of the market and improve the efficiency of the translation. As Wang (2012) pointed out, the MTI course setting should consider the market demand and the content should emphasize the combination of theory and practice. So we propose that the curriculum design of MTI should open courses focusing on translation technology (cluster) and translation professional practice to ensure the effectiveness and employment rate, and further meet the market demand for translating practitioners.

This study has some limitations. Participants in this survey from the same university may result in homogenization. Also how translation technology can be included in the curriculum remains to be designed. Therefore, a larger sample nationwide may present a deeper understanding of the role of translation technology to employment in MTI education.

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