

Research on Part-time Translators and Interpreters in Language Service Industry in Mainland China

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Abstract. From the perspective of part-time translators and interpreters, this paper explores the acceptability of language service industry in mainland China. The survey was conducted in the form of questionnaires and interviews. The analysis of the survey results shows that for part-time translators and interpreters, in addition to their translation skills, their awareness of rights protection, responsibility and service are equally important. They should evaluate their abilities correctly and be responsible for the quality of each translation service. Moreover, the language service industry is in urgent need of a corresponding legal system to regulate the order of the industry.

Keywords: part-time translators and interpreters, language service industry, professional competence.

1. Introduction

According to Translators Association of China, the global value of language services reached 50 billion dollars for the first time in 2019. From *Report on the Development of Language Service Industry in China 2018* by Translators Association of China, in China, there are 369,935 enterprises providing language services, and 9,734 enterprises providing language services as the primary business, with a total output value of 37.22 billion yuan, up 3.6% annually. According to *Report on the Development of Language Service Industry in China 2023*, by 2023, the market size of China's translation and language service industry will reach 50 billion yuan, with a growth rate of more than 10%. Half of the language service providers are optimistic about the value of language services in 2023.

There is no doubt that the translation market has great potential. The investigation targets mainly on MTI students because they involve actively in part-time translation and interpretation. Although studies on MTI students' training and language market are available, published researches on part-time translators and interpreters are rare.

In addition to filling the research gap in domestic study on part-time translators and interpreters, this thesis also provides reference to MTI universities and government as well as institutions for improvements on MTI training, management of language market and evaluation of language talents.

Table 1. Mode of translation process in main cities

District	Mode of translation process	Number	Total number	Percentage
Beijing	Crowdsourcing translation model	24	61	39.34
	Project management model	34		55.74
	Traditional translation workshop	3		4.92
Shanghai	Crowdsourcing translation model	20	57	35.08
	Project management model	36		63.15
	Traditional translation workshop	1		1.75
Guangzhou	Crowdsourcing translation model	7	22	31.81
	Project management model	11		50.00
	Traditional translation workshop	4		18.1
Wuhan	Crowdsourcing translation model	5	15	33.3
	Project management model	7		46.7
	Traditional translation workshop	3		20

To start with, it would be better for our understanding of this thesis if we have a big picture of the work patterns of Chinese translation market. The following table will help with this goal (see Table

1). The data come from “Investigation and Analysis of the Current Situation of Domestic Translation Service Market” by Min Min and Ma Wen Qing in 2015.

According to the table, it can be concluded that project management model occupies the largest part in enterprises, followed by the crowdsourcing translation model. The model that translation enterprises adopt has affected the development of translation industry’ specialization and standardization.

2. Project Design And Operation

2.1. Research Design

The objects of questionnaire will be divided into two groups: MTI students and part-time language workers who have graduated. The purpose is to diversify research projects to explore China’s language market in a more objective way. The MTI students come from seven universities: University of International Business and Economics, Foreign Affairs University, Beijing Forestry University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Central South University, and Xi’an International Studies University. The MTI students from the same university may have the possibility of attending the same activities or joining the same enterprises for part-time job. In this way, the research results would be similar. So, I choose get samples from different universities to ensure the veracity of the research.

The interviewees in the research are a senior manager in a medium-sized translation enterprise and a full-time interpreter. Both of them have more than 3 years of working experience. Therefore, they have close contact with language workers and customers and can consider both from demand side and supply side. The interview mainly focuses on their opinions towards part-time interpreters and translators as well as the whole language service market. Advice to improve the language industry is expected from them.

Based on research objectives, the author design 26 questions in the questionnaire. In order to collect and analyze data effectively, 24 questions are choice questions, including single and multiple-choice questions. These questions a wide range of content from the background of participants, the channels that respondents engage in part-time jobs, the advantages of part-time translation work, the certificates required for part-time translators and interpreters to the status quo of current language market in China.

As for the two interviews, it covers the development model of the translation company they stay, their opinions towards part-time translators and interpreters, the requirements of the translation market for part-time translators and interpreters, their remuneration, as well as the advantages and challenges of the profession.

2.2. Background of the Respondents and Interviewees

In all the 109 respondents that participated in the questionnaire, the number of MTI students (82, occupying 75.23% of the total) far outweighs part-time translators and interpreters that have graduated (27, occupying 24.77%). Male respondents take up 21.1% while female respondents take up 78.9%.

The first interviewee is Miss Tang, a project manager in a translation enterprise with more than 50 staff. The second interviewee is Miss Li, a full-time interpreter in a translation enterprise in Shanghai. She has 4 years of working experience.

3. Survey Results

3.1. The channels that respondents engage in part-time jobs

According to the results of the questionnaire, the main channels that respondents engage in part-time jobs are summarized (Figure 1).

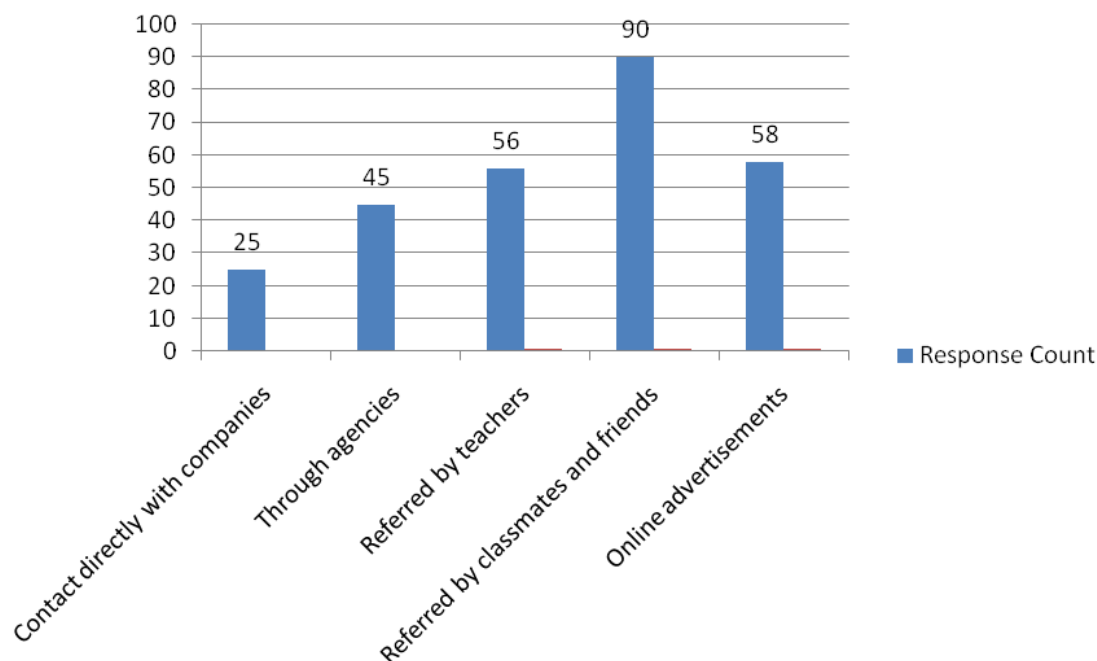


Figure 1. The channels that respondents engage in part-time jobs

The data reveal that most part-time translators and interpreters are recommended by classmates and friends (90, 82.57%). The other two main channels are online advertisement (58, 53.21%) and reference by teachers (56, 51.38%). Only a few respondents (25, 22.94%) connect directly with translation companies. According to the results, part-time interpreters and translators don't have a regular channel to get a job, and most of them get a job through recommendation.

Therefore, personal relationships and word of mouth are of critical importance. For translation companies, taken translation quality into consideration, they would like to turn to teachers and translators they have worked with in seek of excellent part-time translators and interpreters. This mode of working makes the career life of part-time interpreters and translators unstable. An effective formal website or APP or other means of presenting translation demand is needed to help the language service market develop.

3.2. Part-time Translators and Interpreters as a Profession

3.2.1. Flexibility

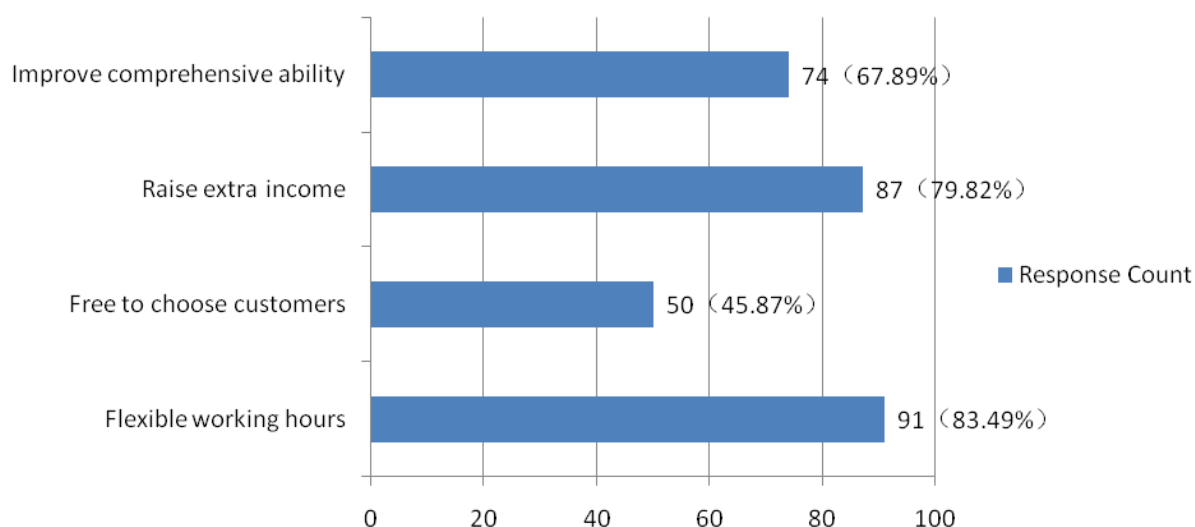


Figure 2. The advantages of part-time translation work

In this part, respondents were asked if they agree with the above statements about the advantages of being a part-time translator or interpreter. According to their answers (see Figure 2), nearly all

participants (91, 83.49%) agree that they have flexible working hours. This is the most attractive advantage for people who want to engage in translation market with limited free time. And Fifty respondents (45.87%) consider that a part-time translators or interpreter could choose customers freely. Free translators and interpreters, also called freelancers, often don't sign employment contracts with companies, thus having the right to decide whom they would like to service. They can develop their business based on their industry experience and expertise. More than half (87, 79.82%) think being a part-time language worker could raise extra income. As many as 74 (67.89%) agree that this profession is helpful in improving comprehensive ability.

3.2.1. Low Threshold

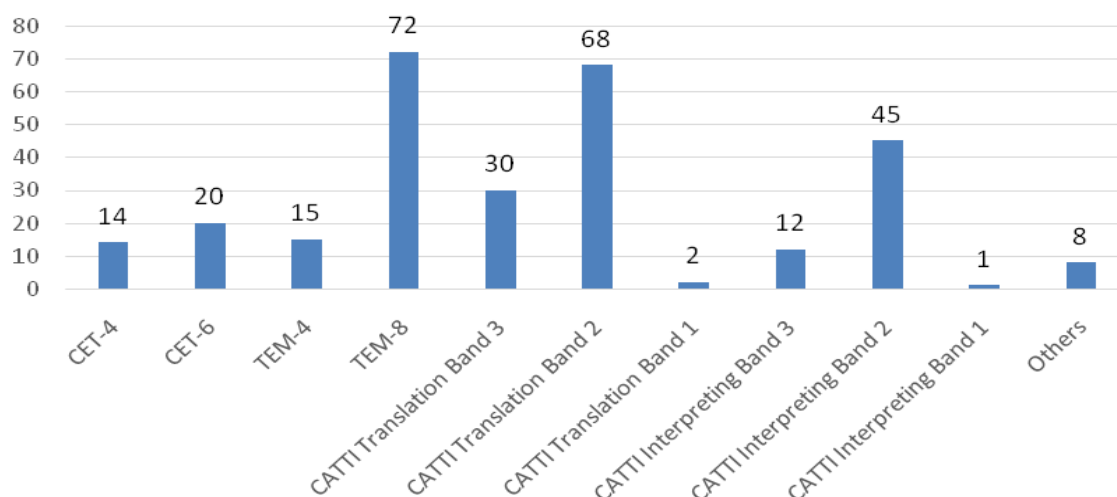


Figure 3. The certificates required for part-time translators and interpreters

The table presented above shows the certificates required for part-time translators and interpreters (see Figure 3). TEM-8 (72, 66.06%) occurs most frequently, followed by CATTI Translation Band 2 (68, 62.39%) and CATTI Interpreting Band 2 (45, 41.28%). Fourteen respondents choose CET-4 (14, 12.84%), the basic level of English certificate and 20 respondents choose CET-6 (20, 18.35%), the junior level of English certificate. Not many enterprises require CATTI Translation Band 1 and CATTI Interpreting Band 1. We can conclude from the table that TEM-8 is vital for proving one's English expertise in mainland China.

The first interviewee Miss Tang reveals that every translation enterprise uses its own recruitment process. CATTI certificate or MTI diploma is not a must. Translation experience is valued a lot.

Generally, there is a relatively low threshold for part-time translators and interpreters. The language service market is accessible for English amateurs and translation beginners. And extra income and opportunities to get acquaintance with elites add to the attraction of being a part-time translator or interpreter.

3.2.1. Insufficient Business Volume

Although part-time translators or interpreters as a profession has many advantages, it also poses some challenges. When the author asked respondents about the challenges of being a freelancer, every item is frequently chosen (see Figure 4).

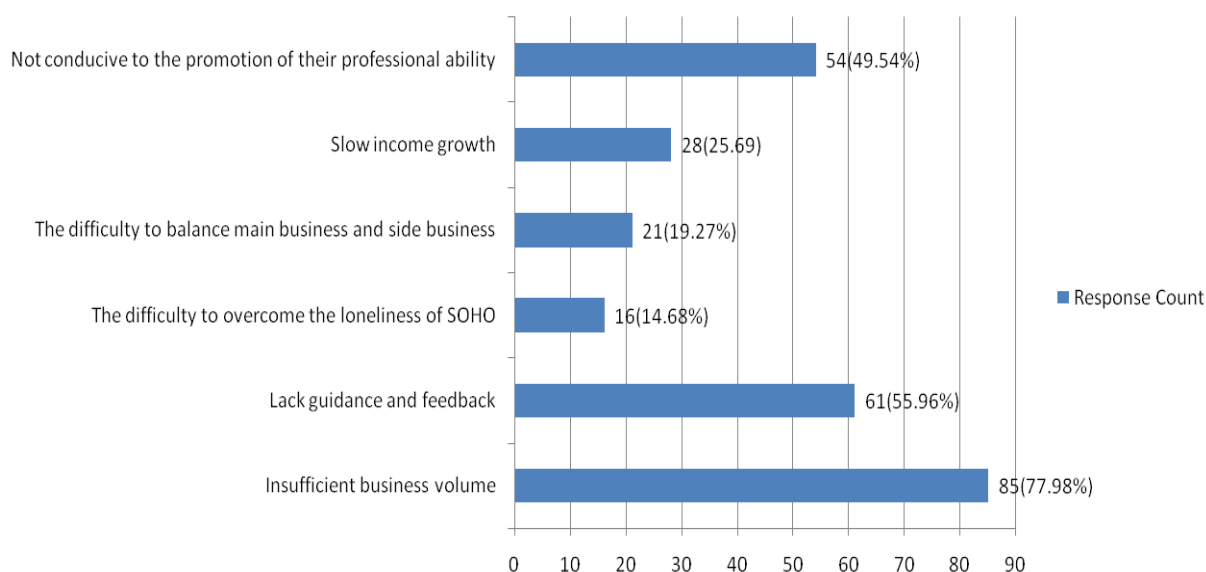


Figure 4. The challenges of part-time translation work

According to the data above, insufficient business volume is the biggest challenge that part-time interpreters and translators face, occupying 85 (77.98%) of the total. Over a half of participators (61, 55.96%) admit they lack guidance and feedback, which means they have to depend on themselves in real work and don't have channels to receive other's comments about their work. Nearly half (54, 49.54%) think their part-time job is not conducive to the promotion of their professional ability. Other problems include the difficulty to overcome the loneliness of SOHO (16, 14.68%) and balance main business and side business (21, 19.27%), as well as slow income growth (28, 25.69%). Each problem has a rate over 10%.

3.3. Language Service Market

3.3.1. Unreasonable Payment

In current language service market, there exists some threats which hinder the development of language industry and they are increasingly prominent. They will become malignant cancer if not properly solved. In the questionnaire, the author collected the opinions of respondents about these problems (see Table 2).

Table 2. Opinions of respondents about the language service market

Statement	Response Count	Rate
Payment is not reasonable without uniform standard.	78	71.56%
The market is chaotic and unregulated.	66	60.55%
The competence of translators varies greatly.	81	74.31%
There is a lack of qualification system.	53	48.62%
There is a lack of useful platform.	63	57.8%
The overall status of the language industry is low.	40	36.7%
The industry is short of policy support.	44	40.37%

The table above shows precise result of each statement. All statements receive a support rate of more than 30%, which indicates that these statements are kind of supported by most participators. About three quarters of respondents (81, 74.31%) which is the highest rate in this question, agree that the competence of translators varies greatly. 78 respondents (71.56%) agree that payment is not reasonable without uniform standard. And 60.55% think the current translation market is chaotic and unregulated. The three factors will be carefully analyzed in the following part one by one.

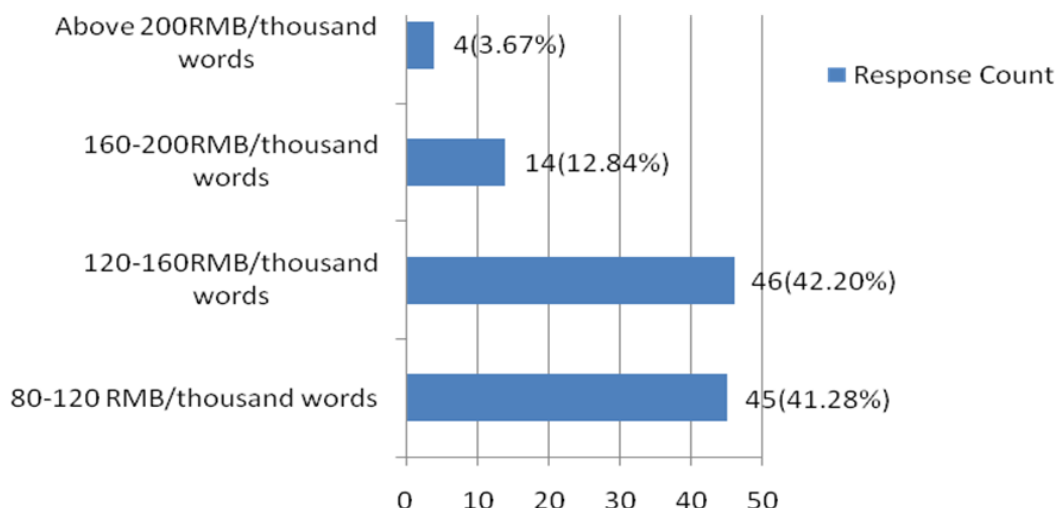


Figure 5. The remuneration of part-time translators

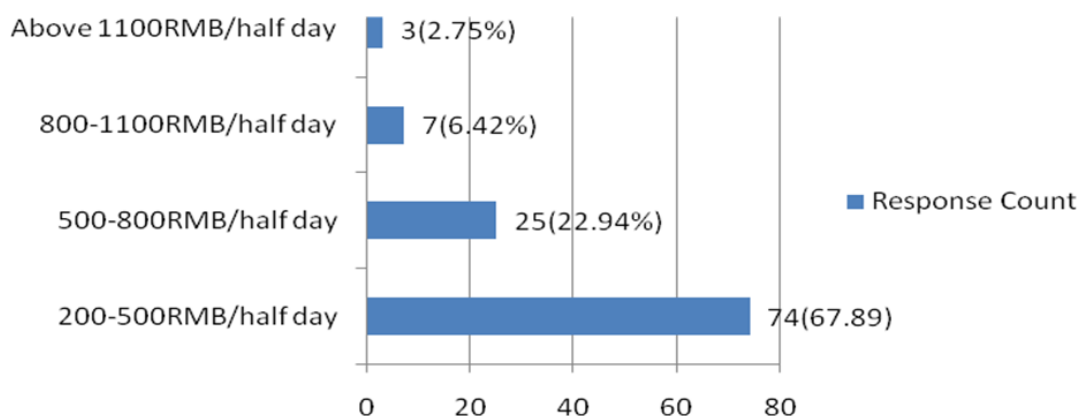


Figure 6. The remuneration of part-time interpreters

According to the statistics above, most respondents receive a relatively low payment, which means part-time translators and interpreters are at a lower end of the language service market (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). As is shown in the table, 45 (41.28%) respondents take part-time translation at a price of 80-120 RMB/thousand words and 46 (42.2%) gain payback at 120-160 RMB/ thousand words, followed by 160-200RMB/ thousand words (12.84%). Only 4 (3.67%) reported their remuneration above 200 RMB/thousand words. As for part-time interpreters, over half of respondents (67.89%) receive 200-500RMB/half day, much higher than the second place, 500-800RMB/half day (22.94%). Seven report their reward at 800-1100 RBM/half day and only 3 can get more than 1100 RMB/half day. From the survey, the payment of part-time translators and interpreters fluctuates greatly with several different levels. The salary of interpreters and translators is generally set by prior negotiation between the language service provider and the employer, and it seems that both sides have made a big concession to the agreed salary. Most part-time language service workers get a pay that far below full-time ones in terms of per thousand words and per half day they can earn.

The questionnaire also investigated the monthly income that part-time translators and interpreters earn by providing language service. More than half (52.29%) gain less than 1000 RMB, which means for most respondents, the part-time job doesn't bring them much financial return. 34 respondents (31.19%) report they earn 1000-2000 RMB per month by doing part-time job. Only 7 (6.42%) respondents earn 2000-3000 RMB every month. It's interesting to find that as many as 11 (10.09%) respondents have more than 3000 RMB income by offering part-time language service. It reflects that even though the unit price for part-time translation and interpretation service is not high, by accumulating orders, a group of part-time language workers could still earn a relatively high monthly income.

Zeng Liren (2011) revealed that former news reports on interpretation, especially on interpreters who are dubbed as "golden collar" workers misled many candidates to enter the major of interpretation with the hope of earning big money. But while those at the top are doing better than ever, average wages have barely budgeted.

3.4. Professional Competence

3.3.1. Translation Skills

The author asked respondents "how do you agree with the following statement about your translation abilities?" in the questionnaire.

In this part, 1 means strongly dissatisfied, 2 means somewhat dissatisfied, 3 means average level, 4 means somewhat satisfied, 5 means very satisfied. The answers are collected and presented below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Opinions of respondents about translation abilities

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of linguistics	2(1.83%)	8(7.34%)	58(53.21%)	33(30.28%)	8(7.34%)
Specific field knowledge	2(1.83%)	15(13.76%)	64(58.72%)	21(19.72%)	7(6.42%)
Command of certain terms	3(2.75%)	16(14.68%)	67(61.47%)	18(16.51%)	5(4.59%)
Translation skills	6(5.5%)	18(16.51%)	56(51.38%)	24(22.02%)	5(4.59%)
Preparation before translation	1(0.92%)	5(4.59%)	47(43.12%)	46(42.2%)	10(9.17%)
Discourse analysis competence	1(0.92%)	7(6.42%)	36(33.03%)	57(52.29%)	8(7.34%)
Reaction capability	2(1.83%)	8(7.34%)	37(33.94%)	55(50.46%)	7(6.42%)

About 5.5 % of them are strongly dissatisfied with their translation skills. 16.51% of them are somewhat dissatisfied with their translation skills, which is the highest rate in the "somewhat dissatisfied" column, followed by somewhat dissatisfied in command of certain terms (14.68%) and specific field knowledge (13.76%). About 94.5% respondents choose above average level and satisfied in preparation before translation.

It can be concluded that among all the items, respondents are most dissatisfied with their translation skills and scope of knowledge (comprising of command of certain terms and specific field knowledge). They are most satisfied with their preparation before translation.

3.3.2. Scope of Knowledge

About 28% of the respondents choose somewhat dissatisfied with their scope of knowledge. A good command of various of knowledge would be helpful for translators and interpreters when they have to service customers with different background.

The second interviewee Miss Li offered the assessment model of interpreting competence in her company (see Figure 7).

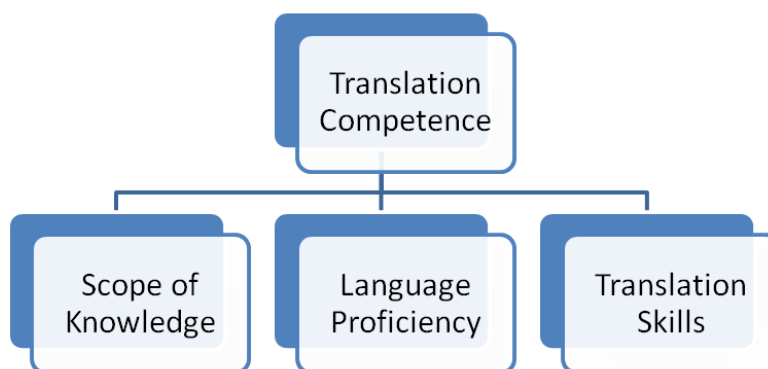


Figure 7. The assessment model of interpreting competence

She added that in the recruiting process, the importance of knowledge is equal to language proficiency and translation skills. The company she works prepared tests to evaluate the scope of

knowledge of candidates. They want to make sure that the translators and interpreters they hire can work under various complex situations.

3.3.3. Preparation before Translation

According to the data from the questionnaire, as many as 94.5% respondents choose above average level and satisfied in preparation before translation, which means most part-time translators and interpreters have the awareness to show professionalism as much as possible in the translation or interpretation work.

Xin Yanyan (2019) concluded that preparation before interpretation should be divided into five parts. And the author uses the following graph to display her classification (see Figure 8).

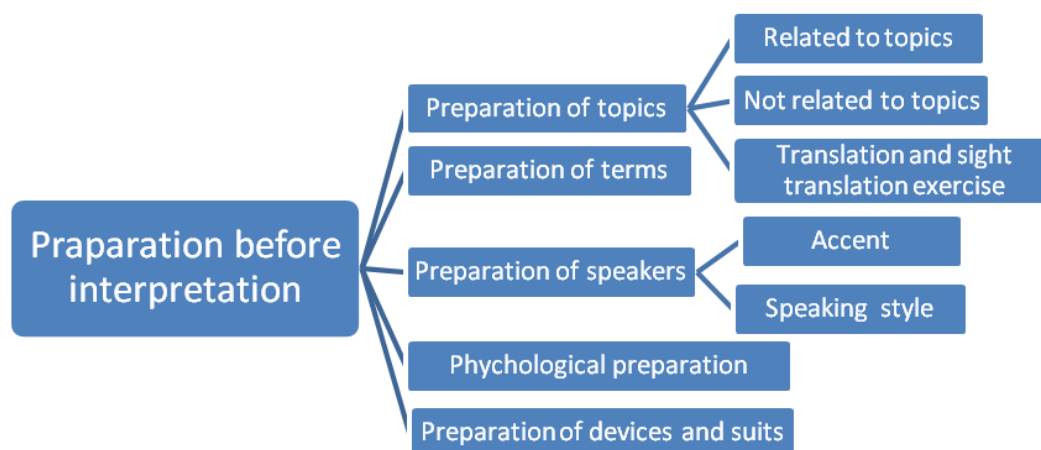


Figure 8. Preparation before interpretation

Preparation before translation is an important condition for the successful implementation of interpretation and translation activities, which requires a lot of time and energy. It is not a short-term task, but a long-term task that runs through the interpreter's life. Only by maintaining a constant state of readiness can interpreters and translators deliver a satisfactory performance to customers.

4. Conclusion

The investigation has several valuable findings from questionnaire analysis and opinions of professionals. Firstly, most MTI students would like to participate in part-time interpretation and translation during spare time. They account for a large proportion of the part-time language service providers in the market. The main channel that helps them find a part-time job is the recommendation of classmates and teachers. Most people choose to work part time because of flexible working hours freedom to choose customers.

Secondly, the requirements for part-time language providers are relatively low. CATTI certificate is not a must and many translation enterprises do not organize any phonetic test or trial translation in advance. The feedback on the translation ability of MTI students is mixed. Opinions of professionals imply that there are many shortcomings and room for improvement in MTI cultivation mode. At present, MTI programs have some problems: insufficient translation training for students; lack of unified evaluation criteria for students' translation ability; the training faculty is insufficient; lack of systematization of teachers' translation teaching knowledge; limited translation teaching resources; backward management of translation training. Therefore, the current MTI training programs is hard to train the diversified and compound senior translators and interpreters needed by the market. Higher education should pay more attention to the demand of the market and enterprises for professional translation talents, and combine the teaching demand with the social demand to train compound translation talents with more market competitiveness and professional practice ability.

Thirdly, the payment of part-time language workers is not high, far below the average payment of full-time ones. For part-time translators, they usually earn less than 200 RMB per thousand words.

For part-time interpreters, they usually earn less than 800 RMB per half day. The unit price is at the lower end of the market. Most part-time language workers have less than 1000 RMB monthly income. Moreover, free language service is not a strange phenomenon.

Fourthly, the current translation market lacks regulations and systematic law to supervise enterprises and protect the legal rights of language service workers. Because the translation involves education, foreign affairs, heralded, science and technology, not a government department responsible for overseeing the translation industry. And the power of the Translation Association of China is limited. Due to lack of macro guidance of translation industry in China, the vicious competition between translation enterprises and agencies seriously affected the healthy development of the industry. In addition, translation enterprises only need 30,000 yuan to register in the industrial and commercial department, without special requirements that differ from other types of companies. Therefore, industry access mechanism is yet to be established. China's translation service industry should move up to the upstream of the industrial chain and develop high-tech and branded translation service.

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