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母语水平与口译能力关系的实证分析

An Empirical Study on the Relationship between Native Language Proficiency and Interpreting Competence

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Abstract

This thesis explores the influence of native language proficiency on interpreting competence. Native language has traditionally been taken for granted in interpreting, which is the reason why it has been sidelined in interpreting training and research. This study, however, demonstrates that native language proficiency varies among interpreting learners and there is a significant correlation between native language proficiency and interpreting competence. Therefore, more attention should be paid to native language proficiency in interpreting training and research.

An overview of research on native language proficiency in second language acquisition, translation and interpreting is presented to highlight a knowledge gap in the study of native language proficiency in interpreting. Following that, a conceptual framework, based on Underlying Common Proficiency Hypothesis and Threshold Theory in second language acquisition, is proposed to account for the influence of native language proficiency on interpreting competence.

The following research questions are addressed in the thesis:

- (1) Is there a relationship between native language proficiency and B-A interpreting competence?
- (2) Is there a relationship between native language proficiency and A-B interpreting competence?
- (3) For interpreting students with different English speaking proficiency levels, is there any difference in terms of the influence of native language proficiency on A-B interpreting competence?

To answer these questions, an experiment is conducted, in which Chinese writing proficiency, Chinese speaking proficiency, English speaking proficiency, E-C and C-E interpreting are tested on 14 graduate-level interpreting students. The quantitative analyses of the results reveal that native language proficiency correlates positively with both B-A and A-B interpreting competence and that the correlation is more significant in students with higher English speaking proficiency.

This is the first empirical study to explore the effects of native language proficiency on interpreting competence. Through thorough analysis of subjects' language proficiency and its relationship with their interpreting performance, the study

highlights the significant role played by native language proficiency in interpreting. It is hoped that the findings of the study can provide some implication for training future interpreters.

Key words: native language proficiency; interpreting competence; quantitative analysis

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摘要

本文尝试探索母语水平对口译能力的影响。在口译研究中，母语通常被视作口译学习者已掌握的技能，因此在教学和研究中未得到充分重视。然而，本文证实了口译学习者母语能力存在差异，且母语水平和口译能力之间有显著的相关性。因此，母语应当得到口译教师和研究者的更多关注。

由于口译研究中关于母语水平的文献较少，本文回顾了母语在二语习得、笔译以及口译领域的研究。在文献回顾中，笔者指出在口译教学和研究中关于母语研究的缺口。通过借鉴二语习得中深层共享能力假说和阈值定理，本文提出了研究母语水平影响口译能力的理论框架，并试图回答以下三个研究问题：

- (1) 母语水平是否与译入母语的能力存在相关关系？
- (2) 母语水平是否与译入外语的能力存在相关关系？
- (3) 母语水平对译入外语能力的影响在不同英语口语水平者中是否存在差异？

为回答以上研究问题，笔者进行了实证研究，分别测试了 14 位英语专业口译方向研究生的汉语笔试水平（包括汉语理解能力和表达能力）、汉语口语水平，英语口语水平，英汉口译和汉英口译。实验数据统计分析显示，母语水平与译入母语和译入外语的能力均呈正相关。在英语口语高分组中，母语水平与译入外语能力的正相关性比在英语口语低分组中更加显著。

本文首次通过实验数据量化分析，对口译学习者的母语能力、外语能力进行了详实的测验，并将语言能力与口译能力进行相关分析，该实验结果验证了母语水平对口译能力的影响，从而确认了口译教学中关注提高母语水平的必要性。

关键词： 母语水平； 口译能力； 量化分析

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Motivation

In the research on interpreting directionality, the question of whether interpreting is better from language A (first language) to language B (second language,) or from B to A is highly debated issue. Though a consensus can hardly be reached for the time being, it is agreed that unbalanced language proficiency in L1 and L2 results in considerable differences between interpreting into one's A and B languages.

However, in terms of unbalanced language proficiency, attention has been given proportionately to L2. A number of researchers have reported on the importance of L2 improvement in interpreting training. Seleskovitch (1978) provided suggestions on how to improve second/foreign language proficiency and how to enhance the B language for student interpreters. Le Feal Dejean (1998) asserted that since interpreters admit that they are more likely to make mistakes in the B language, more efforts should be put into its enhancement. Donovan (2002) claimed that even for experienced interpreters with more-balanced bilingual ability, enhancing the B language is a must. So far, however, far too little attention has been paid to the A language or native language proficiency.^①

Ploughing through the literature on interpreting studies, there has been little discussion about native language proficiency. Furthermore, in the areas of second language acquisition and translation, which share a lot of similarities with interpreting, the topic of native language is also little mentioned compared with second language or foreign language. Native language is a neglected component in interpreting research and training. However, native language proficiency proves to be a good predictor of L2 proficiency, academic achievement and occupational attainment in later life (Guglielmi, 2008). Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the role of native language proficiency in interpreting.

^① This dissertation does not distinguish between native and first language, or between foreign language and second language.

1.2 Significance of the Research

Most studies on language component of interpreting competence have only focused on language B rather than language A, both of which, however, are key aspects in interpreting competence. The paper sets the aim of examining the significance of native language proficiency in interpreting training and research.

Firstly, interpreting students' native language proficiency does not meet the requirements on the language component of interpreting competence. 74% interpreting students claimed that they encountered more difficulties in searching for equivalence in their mother tongue when working into A language (Bartłomiejczyk, 2004). The finding goes contrary to the common view held not only by lay people, but also some interpreting students and practitioners that native language is not a concern in interpreting. Thus, native language enhancement is necessary in building interpreting competence.

Secondly, native language proficiency can contribute to interpreting competence as a facilitator of L2 improvement. Admittedly, as language B is weaker in unbalanced bilingual interpreters and thus its enhancement requires more attention and effort. However, based on Common Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis, L1 facilitates L2 proficiency and attainment via common cognitive/academic language proficiency. In other word, the improvement of L1, in fact, enhance L2 as well.

Thirdly, the present study on the relationship between native language proficiency and interpreting competence would hopefully shed light on the learning process and pedagogical implications for interpreting training. Previously, language enhancement courses are mostly restricted to language B in interpreting training in the Chinese context. However, if a positive correlation between native language proficiency and interpreting competence is verified in the study, native language enhancement proves to be necessary in interpreting curriculum as well.

1.3 Research Purposes

The present study has two purposes. First, it aims to examine to what extent native language ability contributes to B-A consecutive interpreting. Though the topic remains undiscussed in interpreting studies, research has been carried out in translation that identified a significant role played by L1 in B-A translation. Si Guo (思果, 2001) asserted that people who cannot write well in Chinese had better not learn translation.

Yang Shizhuo (杨士焯, 2012) stressed the importance of Chinese writing skills in translation by proposing the concept of English-Chinese translational writing. He asserted that translation is creative writing rather than mere transfer from English to Chinese. Since the importance of native language proficiency has been identified in B-A translation, it is reasonable to ask whether it applies to interpreting as well. This paper argues that it is necessary to study the role of native language proficiency in B-A interpreting. Therefore, an experiment is designed where students' native language proficiency and B-A interpreting competence are tested. By conducting a regression analysis between the two variables, the study expects to explore the relationship between native language proficiency and B-A interpreting competence. In addition, the study examines which aspect of native language proficiency, oral Chinese, expression or comprehension, contributes more to B-A interpreting.

The second purpose is to see to what extent native language proficiency affects A-B interpreting. Previous studies of A-B interpreting have not specially dealt with native language proficiency. Worse still, even in the area of translation, few research has been carried out to explore contribution of native language in A-B. It is reasonable to understand lack of attention to the role of native language in A-B interpreting, as language B is obviously weaker in unbalanced bilingual interpreters and thus requires more attention and more effort to enhance. What is more, it has been taken for granted that interpreters' native language proficiency has already met requirements and thus language A enhancement is not necessary. However, language competence required in interpreting is far more demanding than daily use. Theoretically, it poses much higher requirements on interpreter's contextual and restructuring ability(陈菁, 2002). Practically, many students find native language challenging in B-A interpreting (Bartlomiejczyk, 2004). Therefore, the present research also takes a look at the role of native language proficiency in A-B interpreting.

The following questions are addressed in this thesis:

- (1) Is there a relationship between native language proficiency and B-A interpreting competence?
- (2) Is there a relationship between native language proficiency and A-B interpreting competence?
- (3) For interpreting students with different English speaking proficiency levels, is there any difference in terms of the influence of native language proficiency on A-

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