

Evolution of Interpreters' (Code of) Ethics in China's Mainland after 1949

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Why this topic?

- Still lacking focused, in-depth study in China with only a few papers published or presented (Ren, 2010, 2016; Li 2013, 2015, 2016; Xiang & Zheng, 2015)
- Still not part of the “formal knowledge” (Freidson, 1986) of most of the interpreter training programs



- This study purports to examine the evolution of interpreters' understanding and practice of (code of) ethics and its interaction with the making of a profession (or “field” in Bourdieusian term) in China's mainland after 1949 from both a sociological and a historical perspective, with Bourdieu's theory of practice as an analytical tool, literature and document study and interview as research methods.



- It uses the five (near-) universal ethical principles in interpreting – fidelity, neutrality, competence, integrity and confidentiality - summed up by Setton & Brunč (2015) from Bancroft (2005) as benchmarks to see how these principles were understood, (not) observed by interpreting practitioners or practisearchers in different historical periods, and how these concepts have evolved with the professionalization process of T&I in China.



A historical study

- Phase I: from the founding of the PRC in 1949 to the formulation of the policy of reform and opening-up in 1978
- Phase II: from the adoption of the policy of reform and opening-up in 1979 to the launch of institutionalized education of professional translators and interpreters in 2007
- Phase III: from the 2008 Beijing Olympics when language service industry started to gain momentum to now, when the term “language services” seems to have encompassed the term “T/I services”



A sociological study

Bourdieu's sociological lens

- Field: a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions; a relatively autonomous social microcosms with its own specific laws and logics (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992)
- Interpreting: an autonomous field or not?



A sociological study

Bourdieu's sociological lens

- Habitus: a system of dispositions, a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination. (Bourdieu, 1977)
- Interpreters' habitus



A sociological study

Bourdieu's sociological lens

- Capital: “accumulated labor” and can present itself in three fundamental forms: economic, cultural and social capital; each may function as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986)
- Interpreters' capital



Phase I: 1949-1978

“After the signing of the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship* on Feb. 24th last year, many comrades from the Soviet Union came to China to assist China’s economic and cultural development, and a number of government organizations, institutions and factories all had teams of newly recruited interpreters assuming the function of bridges.” (Yu, 1951:16)

Phase I: 1949-1978

Exercise Materials for Interpreting Classes (1957) explains in the Introduction several common settings of interpreting: 1) diplomatic meetings; 2) ceremonial occasions; 3) symposiums or seminars (academic); 4) interviews; 5) everyday life (exchanging greetings, attending dinner, sightseeing, site visits, going to cinemas, etc.

Phase I: 1949-1978

A Handbook of English Conversation: For the Use of Interpreters explains in the Preface that this book was **compiled in 1955** and originally used as an interpreting textbook for the English Department of BFSU; “it was prepared for restricted publication **at the urgent request of various institutions.**” (1957: 1)

Integrity & Competence

- Interpreters should “have an honest attitude”, must “seize opportunity to improve interpreting skills”, and be well-informed in subject knowledge. (Yu, 1951)
- “The most essential (for interpreters) is to admit what you know as well as what you don’t know and should in no way pretend to know when you don’t.” (Tang & Chen, 1951)



(Non)neutrality

- An interpreter should undertake the responsibilities of a publicist and fulfill the duty of disseminating information about China among foreign friends (Yu, 1951)
- Among all the skills required of an interpreter, “the grasp of politics is the most important”; and that interpreters should not worry about their own “face”, but should instead protect “the face of the people and the country”.(Tang & Chen,1951)

(Non)neutrality

Interpreting is not a “purely technical job” and that an interpreter should not be a “neutral machine.” The primary qualification of an interpreter is his or her “command of politics.” An interpreter must be a “staunch, proletariat soldier with clear-cut stance”...otherwise they will have problem in understanding the words spoken by us and our friends, or us and our enemies” (Tang & Zhou, 1958:323)

Fidelity

- “Translation for foreign affairs is heavily political, thus Premier Zhou Enlai requested that such translations be ‘complete, accurate, smooth, and easy to understand’. His ‘complete and accurate’ did not equate to dotting i’s and crossing t’s. Rather, his view was that only with a thorough grasp for the speech (or document) at hand could a translation be done well. One of my interpreting predecessors told a story that left a deep impression on me. In 1952 the Foreign Ministry organized a film screening for foreign diplomatic envoys stationed in China. The Premier himself selected *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* and had his secretary phone the Translation Office with the instruction that the film’s name should not be directly translated. Instead, he recommended it be translated as ‘China’s Romeo and Juliet’.” (Y. Shi, 2013:47)

Fidelity

- When people speaking two different languages are talking to one another, misunderstanding between them may occur. At this moment, the interpreter, assuming the responsibility of a bridge, should act as a mediator, deleting the part that may touch off displeasure or toning it down so as to avoid fierce argument. (Yu, 1951: 16)

A diachronic study from a sociological lens

- **What**
 - competence and integrity
 - fidelity?
 - confidentiality?
 - neutrality?
- **Why**
 - not an autonomous field
 - interpreting vs. politics
 - interpreters' cultural capital
 - interpreters' habitus

Phase II (1979-2007)

- For an occupation to become a profession, it needs to gain “control over the determination of the substance of work.”(Freidson,1970)
- Professionalization means to achieve autonomy and control of the terms of work.(Wilding,1982)
- Generally there are two major types of control a full-fledged profession can exercise: internal control and external control. (Larson, 1977; Wilding, 1982; Abbot, 1988; Tseng, 1992)



Phase II (1979-2007)

- The first UN translator and interpreter training program launched at BFSU in 1979.
- Danica Seleskovitch's *L'interprète dans les conférences internationales, problèmes de langage et de communication* translated into Chinese in 1979
- Jean Herbert's *Manuel de L'interprete* translated into Chinese in 1982.
- Translators Association of China established in 1982.
- *Chinese Translators Journal* in 1983.
- *Language and Translation* (prioritizing T&I involving minority languages) in 1985
- *Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal* in 1988

Phase II (1979-2007)

- A number of interpreting accreditation tests developed in China: SIA in 1995, NAETI in 2001, EIC in 2002, and CATTI in 2003.
- The first national symposium on interpreting held at Xiamen University in 1996, and since then a biennial event.
- *Specification for translation service – Part 2: Interpretation* (National standard) released in 2006.

Phase II (1979-2007)

- The first master thesis in 1997.
- The first doctoral dissertation in 2000.
- Three universities approved by MOE to experiment on BTI in 2006.
- 15 universities allowed to pilot professional degrees of MTI in 2007.

No formal knowledge of ethics taught at college

- “I checked with Professor Zhang Zailiang, head of the UN Training Course for many years. He and I both remember that there was no special course on interpreter ethics at the time. We were always reminded to be studious, conscientious and to take responsibility for our work, but that was pretty general, not directed at interpreting specifically. There was no handbook about either booth etiquette, collegiality or confidentiality. We learnt it all when we went to work, by watching other booths and interpreters and using common sense. The Foreign Ministry also did not give any directions about interpreting in an international environment. No one told us about confidentiality of speeches before they were given.” (X. Shi’s email dated 12-27, 2016 in response to my web interview)

No formal knowledge of ethics taught at college

- “There was no such a course in my session, nor do I think there was one in other sessions...” (C. Li, a trainee of the last session and now a professor at BFSU responded my web interview in his email dated Oct. 6, 2017)

Mentioning of professional ethics in literature

- Observing strict confidentiality, providing satisfactory services and not seeking personal gains. (Nan, 1987)
- No fabrication, no deletion and revision at will, not overshadowing the host, being punctual and well-informed. (Wu, 2001)
- Confidentiality, impartiality, accurate translation, not commenting on any speaker, not accepting tasks beyond one's capability, demonstrating fine professionalism. (Zhong, 2001)
- Neutrality, confidentiality, punctuality, good advance preparation, observing dress code, objective evaluation of one's own capability, recognition and proper handling of interpreting difficulty. (Chen, 2003)
- Introduction of code of ethics from other countries and international organizations (Wu, 2001; Zhong, 2001; Liu, LD, 2006; Liu, SY, 2006; Wang & Wang, 2007)

Specification for translation service

- Part 2: Interpretation

- 4.6
- Process Control of Interpreting Service:
Sufficient preparation before interpreting, accurate translation, clear expression, respect for customs and professional ethics during interpreting, and listening to (and responding to, if necessary) feedback after interpreting;
- 4.7
- Confidentiality

Fidelity

- Interpreting should emphasize more on substance rather than on form or style; interpreters should accurately convey the speaker's implied meaning and the achieve the social function of language so as to facilitate the smooth communication of the two sides .
(Wen and Yang, 2003)
- Interpreting quality is a relative and multidimensional term and faithfulness is constitutive of the accuracy and completeness of the information as well as the acceptability of the target text.
(Wang & Wang, 2007)
- The transferability of the source text, acceptability of the target text and understandability of the audience all need to be taken into account when evaluating the quality and effect of interpreting.
(Lv, 2007)

A diachronic study from a sociological lens

- **What**

- continued emphasis on competence and integrity
- fidelity not taken at face value
- more mentioning of confidentiality
- more emphasis on neutrality

- **Why**

- stronger cultural capital convertible to economic, social and symbolic capital
- interpreters' habitus
- interpreting gradually developing into a relatively autonomous field with more internal and external control, but with grey areas remained

Phase III (2008-now)

Emergence of the language service industry which encompasses T&I industry

- FIT XVIII World Congress held at Shanghai in 2008.
- the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008
- 2010 China International Conference on Language Service Industry



Phase III (2008-now)

Report on the Development of China's Language Services 2012:

- Language services include translation and interpreting services, localization services, R&D of language technology and supporting tools, translator & interpreter training, multilingual information consultation, etc.



Key features of the language service industry

- Language service industry is characterized by marketization, commercialization and global competition. Service providers need to have continuous projects and reasonable profits to sustain their development. Clients are suppliers of these projects and know best the objectives and requirement of their own. Only when clients are satisfied, can service providers secure cash flow and profits. If clients are dissatisfied, service providers may lose their project as well as their clients, resulting in deficit or even close-down. This feature of “language services” decides that any language service providers have to set as their standard providing satisfactory service to their clients and must be **client-centered**. (Wang et al, 2013: 60)

While the development of language service industry certainly expands the spheres of T/I services, in what way would the client-centeredness of the industry affect translators' and interpreters' perception of such notions as fidelity, integrity, neutrality, etc., and then influence their ethical decisions?

An inconclusive conclusion...

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Thank you!

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