

# Reflections on Establishing the Doctor of Translation and Interpreting Program in Chinese Mainland

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## ABSTRACT

The Doctor of Translation and Interpreting (DTI) program is about to start admission in Chinese Mainland. Although the translation academia welcomes this new development, the development and training effects of DTI will also be greatly affected if the problems that have arisen in the Master program of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) are unsolved. Based on the development of MTI, this paper discusses DTI from the following aspects: 1) the necessity of admission; 2) enrollment targets; 3) training objectives; 4) faculty building; 5) curriculum design; 6) the relationship between theory and practice; 7) graduation thesis and translation achievements; 8) employment channels and positions. The conclusions are as follows: 1) The real needs of the translation market should be taken into consideration when recruiting students; 2) The number of college teachers enrolled to the program on a part-time basis should be well controlled, and the prospective students from the translation industry should be effectively trained; 3) The training objectives should be truly different from those of MTI and are attainable; 4) To properly develop DTI faculty, it is vital to reverse the prejudice of “prioritizing academic work over practice” and to improve teachers’ translation practice capability; 5) The curriculum should contain more practical and applied courses with useless theoretical courses minimized; 6) DTI students should be encouraged to strengthen their translation practice capability; 7) Both graduation thesis and translation achievements are required, which should be strictly supervised by the supervising panel; 8) In terms of employment, most DTI graduates should be willing / encouraged to work in the translation market rather than in universities.

**Keywords:** Doctor of Translation and Interpreting (DTI), Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI), Translation practice capability, Translation market, Translation achievements.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From 2023 onwards, the Doctor of Translation and Interpreting (DTI) program will start admission in Chinese Mainland, where hundreds of universities already offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs in translation. At the postgraduate level, both Master of Translation Studies (MTS) and Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) are on offer. As a professional degree, MTI is popular among students who are interested in learning foreign languages (henceforth represented by English) and taking translation practice. Given the fact that DTI is about to be established and start admission, this conference paper will discuss it from the following aspects with an MTI contrastive approach: 1) the necessity

of admission; 2) enrollment targets; 3) training objectives; 4) faculty building; 5) curriculum design; 6) the relationship between theory and practice; 7) graduation thesis and translation achievements; 8) employment channels and positions.

## 2. THE NECESSITY OF ADMISSION

At present, the main argument for DTI establishment is that students graduating with MTI, MTS and even PhD in Translation Studies are insufficient for the translation market, or more specifically, the language service market (Wang and Li, 2021: 2). But this claim is worth discussing.

First of all, there is no exact definition of the size of China’s language service market. Nor are

there many translation-related jobs, whether in translation companies or in a general enterprise or institution. A qualified translator can work for many years. For example, Ms. Zhang Lu, the interpreter serving the press conference held by the China's State Council every year, is a full-time senior interpreter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. She has served two Chinese Premiers' tenures and may continue with the role. Therefore, the translation market is not as short of people as some scholars have advocated.

Secondly, MTI has been established for many years, with a large number of high-level translation talents emerging. However, it is argued that MTI graduates fail to meet the needs of senior translation positions, such as translation reviewers and senior project managers (Lv, 2020: 57). But this actually violates the law governing things' development, equating educational degrees to one's ability or professional title. Admittedly, under normal circumstances, MTI graduates do not have the adequate ability and experience to work as a senior translator / interpreter or project manager upon graduation, but at least they have a good foundation. They can gradually become competent after working hard for several years. Conversely, how can it be ensured that a PhD student who has studied only a few years more than a master student can be entrusted with such senior posts? If so, doctoral graduates trained in the ivory tower should be able to work directly as associate professors or professors after graduation, which is not the case.

Thirdly, according to the studies on where MTI graduates get employed over the past decade, only a small number of students choose to work in translation companies (Cui, 2017: 74). In Chinese Mainland, translation companies are mostly private services. But here, it is public institutions that are the most popular among graduates, while private ones often fail to attract and retain talents due to their unattractive remuneration package and poor stability. Not to mention MTI graduates, even undergraduate students majoring in translation do not like to choose translation companies. Meanwhile, translation jobs offered by enterprises, especially the public ones, are limited. (Zhang, 2022: 67). Besides, as English has become the largest foreign language in China, all college students are basically required to learn English. Many majors are taught in a bilingual manner, and the demand for translation is not as great as it was 20 years ago. A job candidate who knows both his major and English is far more cost-effective than one who only knows the language. Now that MTI

graduates do not have a strong desire to work in the translation industry, how can the well-trained DTI graduates be expected to devote themselves to it?

Recently, there is also a claim that the establishment of DTI is to balance the proportion of academic degrees. As one study shows, in the language service sector, only 6% of the employees have a PhD (Lv, 2020: 56). If this is what people concern, then there are not a few vocations such as cooks, drivers, takeout men, hairdressers and so on who seldom have a high degree. In view of this, the significance of running DTI deserves a careful investigation. Even if a necessity is there, admission must be tailored to the needs of enterprises. Just as some scholars have posited, DTI graduates do not need to find jobs for themselves after graduation, but get employed directly in the enterprises where they have received training. (Mu, Liu, 2022: 24). In this way, DTI is alike to vocational training where excellent students in a workshop can get hired by their trainer upon graduation. However, this reverts to the question: is there such a huge sustainable market for translators and interpreters?

### 3. ENROLLMENT OF STUDENTS

It is suggested by some that the students to be enrolled are divided into three categories: experienced employees in the translation industry, personnel skilled in translation technology research and development, and teachers teaching translation courses in colleges and universities (Huang, 2022: 20).

Firstly, there exists a contradiction around the recruitment of the first type of people, since many experts argue that experienced employees in the industry be recruited as off-campus supervisors for DTI (ibid.). It would be embarrassing to have experienced professionals here at campus, some being students and others being supervisors (who may even be the colleagues of the former). Moreover, as studies have indicated, many college teachers themselves do not have practical translation experience or capability (Zheng and Chai, 2022: 112). Then how will they be competent to supervise those talents who specialize in practical translation?

Secondly, the second source of students is personnel engaged in translation technology research and development, who have been handling machine translation and / or translation software for a long time. At present, few foreign language

schools in China can provide such in-depth doctoral research environment. It is suggested that researchers from other departments can be invited to form a synergistic group of tutors for DTI students (Fu and Mu, 2021: 104). But the problems here are clear: to begin with, despite an interdisciplinary cooperation, the science and engineering departments may have more say in software development, with the role of foreign language supervisors being marginalized. Besides, it is impossible for colleges to carry out interdisciplinary work only after qualified students are enrolled. But if the personnel, hardware, software and technology are not put in place before enrollment, how can DTI students be effectively trained?

The recruitment of the third type of personnel is likely to become a springboard for teachers to improve their academic qualifications. In today's colleges and universities in Chinese Mainland, the majority of young teachers who are new to work hold a doctor's degree, which has become the bottom threshold. Teachers who do not have a PhD are either from average colleges or being older teachers. These two types of teachers are not ideal candidates for DTI: either their background is not strong, or their age is too old with limited energy. Therefore, for them, a doctorate is just to help improve their academic qualifications. If so, it would be against the original objective of setting up DTI.

#### 4. TRAINING OBJECTIVES

It is argued by some scholars that the DTI program is aimed at training five types of talents: senior translators and interpreters, management talents (CEOs for language service enterprises), translation technology R&D talents, teaching talents (trainers at the tertiary level) and research talents (language service policy research and consultation). In this way, DTI graduates are expected to acquire such "five abilities" (as T&I practitioners, managers, researchers, trainers and consultants). (Wang and Li, 2021: 4). However, some of these objectives have already been achieved at the MTI stage, while others cannot be achieved only through obtaining the highest degree from universities.

In terms of training advanced-level translators and interpreters, it is already posited in the MTI training objectives that MTI graduates will be highly applicable and high-profile T&I practitioners (Wei and Cao, 2021: 58). How much room will be

there for further enhancement of such professional skills at the doctoral stage? It would be more of a worthy investment for MTI graduates to improve their practical ability in the market than working behind closed doors in the ivory tower for another three to four years. Moreover, many scholars have pointed out that with the enrollment expansion of the MTI program, many schools do not have competent teachers who have rich practice experience. Nor is there a clear-cut distinction between theoretical modules and practical ones. The prospective practitioners are still trained as research students (ibid.: 60). Now that the MTI objectives have flopped out, so the DTI is expected to help achieve them? As a matter of fact, some high-end jobs in translation, such as simultaneous interpretation, have high restrictions for age and physical fitness. With a good foundation, MTI graduates' early entry into the market will enable them to take the lead and improve their professional ability to adapt to market demand. By contrast, studying on campus, be it through practicums or various exams and contests, can only be regarded as simulation at most. Therefore, training quality T&I professionals should be done at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, not at the doctoral level.

On the other hand, management and consultation expertise demand years of experience soaked in the industry and cannot be simply fostered by doing some readings at school. Let's take a look at MBA and DBA. These two programs can help students achieve their corresponding goals, because they do not limit the region, type and industry of enterprises. Schools can always invite industry leaders to give lectures. Some professors also run enterprises themselves, and as managers of enterprises, they can share their experiences. In contrast, the so-called translation industry, at least now in Chinese Mainland, is still a relatively small market, with few well-known large-sized enterprises. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that schools can invite senior representatives from the sector to teach PhD-level management and inquiry skills. And as for college teachers, as put by many experts, grudge translation themselves (Huang, 2022: 19), let alone translation services, or provide any senior management expertise. In the final analysis, how can one expect doctoral students, professors and other university faculties to be keen on an industry that even MTI graduates are unwilling to engage in?

## 5. FACULTY BUILDING

It is widely remarked that teachers engaged in T&I training lack practical translation experience, a basic understanding of the operation of the translation sector and the awareness of fostering students' professionalism (Kong and Huang, 2022: 108). In the final analysis, this problem stems from teachers' ignorance of the translation industry, indirectly indicating that the language service industry is not as flourishing as some experts may perceive. That also explains why MTI graduates, doctoral students and T&I trainers are not willing to engage in the industry. Nevertheless, Chinese Mainland remains bent on setting up the DTI program. Some experts suggest that a joint training module be established between the industry and academia. However, judging from other similar professional doctorates, most of such programs' sponsors, trainers and degree awarding institutions are still colleges and universities.

Therefore, the biggest obstacle to running DTI is the problem with teachers. Currently, as some experts have posited, the solution lies in eliminating the academic circle's contempt for the professional world. Instead, university trainers should take the initiative to reach out for the industry, establishing more partnerships and joint training bases (eg. Wang and Li, 2021: 6). Through such synergistic projects, both young teachers and doctoral students can be trained. The qualified talents first trained out can gain the opportunities to work in the universities so as to provide a more stable and adequate faculty for subsequent training of DTI students. In addition, since it is necessary to develop MTI and DTI into practice-oriented majors, the professional titles, performances and the annual evaluation of university teachers should be actively shifted from academic to practical. If the focus remains on academic research, projects, papers and fund, it would be difficult to motivate young and middle-aged teachers to engage in translation practice.

## 6. CURRICULUM DESIGN

As is put in some studies, seen from the dissertations by MTI graduates, theoretical research takes a lion's share. Meanwhile, there are excessive theoretical courses in the current curriculum while translation practicums especially those from Chinese to English, are too few (Huang, 2022: 19). It can be said that this is a common problem for MTI majors running in Chinese Mainland. There

are not enough college teachers who are able and willing to engage in translation practice, but it is those people who often offer core compulsory courses to graduate students. It can be imagined that most of the courses are theoretical or related to the narrow research direction of those professors. Admittedly, there are a few young and middle-aged teachers who are interested in translation practice. Because of this, their classes are more popular among MTI students. Be it teachers or students, their translation practical capability can be judged easily through their translation quality. Therefore, MTI translation practice courses are much more popular than theoretical ones.

So what courses should be offered at the DTI stage? This paper argues that, first of all, it is necessary to integrate the practical advantages of the university itself, as well as identifying the areas of cooperation between schools and departments. For example, Wuhan University of Technology, where the author works, is a university with materials science as its flagship discipline. If DTI is set up here, it will naturally give full play to materials science to train DTI students for such high-end fields. The excellent young and middle-aged team of T&I practitioners from the School of Foreign Languages, together with the specialists from the School of Materials and those in the industry, form an ideal tutorial team for DTI students. The three parties, integrating their own strengths, can offer practical courses for doctoral students, who can move freely between the three training units for supervision. Therefore, the curriculum design can be adapted to the applicants' needs. And it will also be subject to updates to meet the needs of the industry.

## 7. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The relationship between translation theory and practice can be said to be paradoxically both interdependent and mutually exclusive. Since the beginning of translation, people have been reflecting on the relationship between theory and practice. Through translation, we can sum up various translation skills, find out the similarities and differences between the two languages, and deal with translation difficulties. Such strategies through reflection are further refined into theories. Therefore, it can be said that translation practice has never been isolated from theory. Conversely, theorizing cannot be separated from translation practice either, otherwise it would become a tree

without roots. Nevertheless, a growing number of translation scholars nowadays do not engage in translation practice themselves. Instead, they would rather comment on the works of others with the help of theories. However, just as gourmets do not cook food themselves and football commentators do not play football themselves, such translation evaluation has been criticized by professional translators from the very beginning, and these translators often do not care about the theoretical research conducted by scholars. This mutual exclusion further affects the employment choices of MTI graduates.

However, professional translators who are really dedicated to the industry argue that translation skills can only be acquired through intensive practice and the so-called blue-sky theory cannot guide practice in specific situations. They even openly challenge scholars, interrogating them how many translation works they have done and how many conferences they have interpreted for. Perhaps provoked by such challenges, many scholars in colleges and universities are now keen to publish translation works. Given that they need to coordinate research and teaching, do those university scholars have time to translate monographs? We only know that there are many MTI students under their supervision. Often under the pretext of enabling the young to practice translation, those students are forced to translate any tasks assigned by their supervisors. It is through such outsourcing, those scholars increase their publication of translation works where they sign their own names (not the students'). Subjected to a disadvantageous group that is under the control of their supervisors, those students dare not disclose the truth that the books are actually translated by them. But meanwhile, those supervisors (scholars) are able to flaunt to the industry that they have published translated works, and even applied for scholarly prizes with them.

Fundamentally speaking, be it the MTI program prevalent in Chinese Mainland or the DTI to be run from next year on, such programs are aimed at an all-win result. With the establishment of DTI, colleges and universities will gain popularity, supervisors will gain free-of-pay employees, and students will gain a top-level degree. However, few people care about how translation theory and practice will develop. Since the beginning of the 21st century, no new translation theory has been put forward, and the technical breakthrough in translation practice has little to do with the contributions from universities. If the contradiction

between the two is not solved, DTI will eventually follow the suit of MTI.

## 8. GRADUATION THESIS OR TRANSLATION ACHIEVEMENTS

There still exists a controversy in the academic circle about whether DTI graduation assessment should adopt graduation thesis or translation achievements. Some scholars believe that the published translated works can be regarded as graduation achievements. Others believe that, in addition to this, DTI graduates need to make theoretical evaluation on their translation, write corresponding reports and participate in an oral defense (Mu and Liu, 2022: 26).

Currently, the MTI program takes the form of the latter, but most students' so-called translation achievements are non-commissioned translation exercises, without anybody else to proofread and check the quality of these translations. The so-called theoretical interpretation follows almost the same format. With the help of some commonplace theories, an MTI thesis illustrates and analyzes some difficulties in the process of translation. Most papers adopt one of the two templates: one for interpreting practice report and the other for translation practice report. Even after a decade, those practice reports still use the same template. There is nothing new in content or form. It seems that the school, supervisors and students have reached a tacit relationship. With such MTI training module copied to DTI, the training effect is imaginable.

Besides, the publication of translation works, whether attached with a theoretical evaluation report or not, cannot prove how excellent the DTI students are. To begin with, it is relatively easy for professional translators and college teachers to translate and publish monographs if they take up the DTI program. It is especially simple for the latter, who can assign and outsource the translation task to their MTI students. For them, the theoretical evaluation report is no more than an expanded version of the MTI practice report, without any concrete breakthroughs in theoretical innovation and depth.

Therefore, although this paper prefers the assessment model of "translation plus theoretical evaluation report", it is sincerely hoped that schools, doctoral supervisors, double-blind reviewers should not be perfunctory but take seriously the quality of the DTI students' translation works. They should

make sure that the doctoral students have completed both the translation and report on their own, and their reports have achieved the doctoral level in terms of theoretical originality. Conversely, if we still follow the current training module of MTI tacitly and transfer it to DTI, the employment prospects for BTI, MTI and DTI will be even worse, leading to more fierce vicious competition and the devaluation of academic degrees. It will then bring about not only a waste of social resources, but also a series of social problems, such as increasing unemployment, economic stagnation, and low fertility and so on.

## 9. EMPLOYMENT CHANNELS AND POSITIONS

After all, the ivory tower only needs to take on board academic research, without considering the practical social problems, but as an individual student, those issues cannot be overlooked. The three current employment channels for DTI pointed out by scholars are: college T&I trainers, senior T&I managers, and senior translation technology R&D engineers. As for the fourth outlet: advanced-level translators and interpreters, even the experts can hardly convince themselves. At the time of enrollment, students are already required to present high-level translation capability, such as holding the highest-level translation certification issued by the Chinese Mainland. Therefore, how can those DTI students still attain higher translation aptitude during their doctoral studies, an aptitude that even cannot be attained by their teachers? As a matter of fact, many translation and interpreting tasks require young people, who can learn and improve by doing the work. By contrast, one becomes older and less energetic after finishing DTI studies, with their translation capability impaired. This factor also deserves our thinking when it comes to the establishment of DTI.

In the other three employment directions, college teachers may become the mainstream. This is because most MTI graduates now work as teachers at primary and secondary schools. Therefore, DTI graduates, especially those from famous universities, may work in colleges and universities. And as mentioned above, many DTI students themselves are in-service college teachers, and they only pursue the program to improve their academic background. In this sense, this direction seems to be the only one where schools of foreign languages can do an adequate job.

As for the other two outlets, senior T&I managers and technical R&D personnel, they depend on the ability and attitude of the schools. Firstly, a synergistic group of foreign language experts, technical experts and industry seniors may offer the ad-hoc expertise for DTI students. Secondly, it is vital for schools to get rid of the slackness often found in MTI training. Instead, they should with the training objectives in mind, do everything possible to help students expand their employability rather than meaninglessly exacerbate the involution of the entire translation industry. It is high time to think clearly why an industry that cannot even win the favor of undergraduate and postgraduate students will be persuaded into recruiting doctoral students.

## 10. CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, judging from the status quo of the translation market in Chinese Mainland, starting the DTI program really needs to be careful. To begin with, investigations need to be done to make clear the real demand for DTI graduates in the industry. If even BTI and MTI graduates are unwilling to engage in the translation industry, how are DTI students expected to engage? Secondly, stringent requirements for faculty building should be put in place. Program coordinators must make it clear whether their school has the corresponding teachers and supervisors, whether their training goals are attainable and whether the faculties take a serious attitude towards the training work. In addition, can the coursework and graduation assessment rubrics of DTI exceed those of MTI in quality? DTI cannot be simply equated to a larger-sized MTI program (Zheng and Chai, 2022: 113). Schools must take translation practice seriously, strengthen communication and cooperation with the industry, and select students more from the industry (not primarily universities) who are willing to go back to the industry after graduation. DTI faculties should improve their translation practice competence, without equating the practical ability with academic research. The DTI program can only be rolled out after these key issues are addressed. And while going for pilot running, timely program assessment is also required for continuous improvement. Here, it is regrettable to review the formalities that MTI program evaluation has gone through. The evaluators basically give all schools approval without finding out real problems. If this practice extends to the DTI program, the consequences are predictable. In a word, what matters most to ensure the smooth running of DTI

is to take a serious attitude. Without it, the training objectives would be difficult to achieve.

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