

Towards Professionalizing Public Service Translators in China: Education and certification

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ABSTRACT

Informed by the traits approach to a profession in sociology, I discuss how public service translators (PSTs) could be professionalized in China. I first contend that Chinese PSTs seem to be at the lower end of a professionalization continuum, when judged from four essential traits of a profession: abstract knowledge, autonomy, authority and altruism. Instead of fighting on all fronts, I propose how education and certification need to be prioritized to help professionalize PSTs. I suggest incorporating a stand-alone PST pathway into the Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programme, whereby course offerings are specifically designed to train PSTs. In addition, I propose to revamp the China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI), by offering add-on testing components to address PST domain speciality. The PST course offerings and add-on test design are explained in detail, with a view to professionalizing PSTs in China, and possibly in other countries and regions which favour a “top down” approach to professionalization.

KEYWORDS: certification, education, professionalization, public service translators

1. Background

Translators and interpreters are entrusted with the responsibilities of removing linguistic obstacles and enhancing communication among people who do not share a common language. In the age of globalization and increased mobility, people-to-people contact has never been so frequent and vibrant. One particular type of contact involves those who live and/or work in a local community, where different languages are spoken. The role of community translators and interpreters, therefore, is to ensure that individuals have equal access to public

information, welfare, and services, regardless of the language(s) they speak, thereby enforcing their rights to “social, economic, and political participation” (Taibi 2011). Specifically, public service translators (PSTs) are responsible for “written translation of mainly informative texts, addressed by authorities or institutions to people who do not understand texts in the language of the text producer” (Niska 2002: 135). The importance of public service translation (PST) is encapsulated in its role of inclusion and empowerment (Taibi 2011).

Despite its crucial contribution to an engaging and inclusive community, PST receives far less recognition from the general public or interest in the literature than other fields of translation and interpreting (T&I). Back in the 1990s, Fraser (1993) pointed out that this might result from the low status associated with PST. After years of fighting for professional status, PSTs have not yet fully attained the status that duly reflects their vital contribution. They are still placed low in the professional hierarchy (Davisons 2000; Fraser 2004: 35).

A similar tale is being told in China. On the one hand, the T&I industry is booming and has developed from strength to strength over the past few years. According to *China Translation Industry Annual Reports* (hereinafter the *Reports*) released by Translators Association of China (TAC), the value generated by the language service industry amounted to 157.6 billion RMB in 2011 (TAC 2012: 9). It is estimated that within the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2011-2015), the industry would be expected to grow at about 15% per annum, with the annual turnover exceeding 260 billion RMB by the end of 2015 (TAC 2012: 10). On the other hand, the benefits, which PSTs reap during this T&I boom, are dismal: they still do not have their representation in the TAC and receive far less academic attention among Chinese researchers. For instance, a search from the existing Chinese publications about community translation and interpreting yielded only 16 hits, with two of them introducing the research status quo in western countries.¹ It would appear that PSTs are still less exposed and

¹ The search was performed in the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (www.cnki.net), with the searched terms “community translation”, “community interpreting”, “public service translation” and “public service interpreting” on 6 January 2015.

represented in the professional body and scholarly inquiry, which stands a stark contrast to the growing communities of expatriates living and/or working in China. A few statistics might help to get a general picture of emerging communities in China. In the 2010 national population census, a total of 593,832 foreigners were registered living and/or working in the Chinese mainland.² At a local level, it is recently reported that Guangzhou, the third largest city in China, is now home to 118,000 expatriates, as of 25 October 2014, among which, 57,000 are of Asian origins, 22,000 are from Europe, 16,000 from Africa, 14,000 from North America, 5,000 from South America and 4,000 from Oceania (Lu 2014). At the spur of favourable policies of encouraging more overseas talents to work, the population of foreigners residing in China is very likely to grow, pointing to an increasing demand of PST.

The discrepancy between the growing demands of PST services and the unexamined professional status of PSTs needs to be addressed. For this reason, I will first examine the status quo of PST from four aspects informed by the traits approach to a profession in sociology (Greenwood 1957; Vallas et al. 2009; Hodson and Sullivan 2011), to establish PST's lack of professional standing. I will then postulate two prioritized measures and explain how the education framework and the certification system could be reformed to better professionalize PSTs in China. It is my hope that this Chinese case study will shed light on the issues that hinder the professionalization of PSTs in other countries and regions in favour of a "top down" approach to professionalization (Neal and Morgan 2000; see also the "summary" subsection below).

2. Four essential traits of a profession

The studies of professions, professionalism and professionalization find their roots in sociology. Unlike the layman understanding of a profession as any paid occupation, in sociological terms, a profession is defined as "a high-status, knowledge-based occupation

² In the Chinese mainland, population census is conducted every 10 years. The 2010 Population Census is the sixth and the latest of its kind. The figure is cited from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm> (accessed 6 January 2015).

characterized by (1) abstract, specialized knowledge, (2) autonomy, (3) authority over clients and subordinate occupational groups, and (4) a certain degree of altruism” (Hodson and Sullivan 2011: 260). Accordingly, professionalization is defined as “the effort by an occupational group to raise its collective standing by taking on the characteristics of a profession” (Hodson and Sullivan 2011: 272). This approach is theorized as the traits approach, or traits theory in sociology. One disadvantage of the traits approach, however, is the difficulty of deciding on a finite number of essential constituents a profession should have. For instance, in the original definition by Flexner, six traits were included:

Professions involve intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; they derive their raw material from science and learning; this material they work up to a practical and definite end; they possess an educationally communicable technique; they tend to self-organization; they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation (1915/2001: 156).

In 1957, Greenwood contended that a profession has the following five attributes: systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and a culture. Following the same vein, after examining a list of 14 possible traits, Millerson summarized six essential features of a profession which had been most frequently endorsed by researchers:

- (a) a profession involves a skill based on theoretical knowledge
- (b) the skill requires training and education
- (c) the professional must demonstrate competence by passing a test
- (d) integrity is maintained by adherence to a code of conduct
- (e) the service is for the public good
- (f) the profession is organized (1964: 4).

The modern sociological interpretation further reduces this list into four essential traits, which have been mentioned at the beginning of this section. These four traits are found to be universally present in any profession and they are the four important indicators to guide our understanding of how far an occupation is away from its fully professionalized end-state (that

is, professionalism). Therefore, applying the traits approach to sketch the PST's professional landscape would help us understand what traits or indicators we have secured and then prioritize what needs to be done, given limited financial and logistic resources in the current austerity climate.

In fact, the traits approach was adopted to examine the professional status of translators and interpreters almost two decades ago. For instance, Tseng (1992: 43) proposed his much quoted professionalization model of interpreters and highlighted two major benchmarks of interpreters' professionalization, that is, "the establishment of professional associations and the attainment of accreditation and legal protection" (1992: 88). These two benchmarks could be respectively mapped onto the two features in the traits approach: autonomy and abstract knowledge. Another application of the traits approach was found in Witter-Merithew and Johnson's survey of the professional status of sign language interpreters in United States (2004). The researchers compared the standing of sign language interpreters against the nine traits: systematic theory, authority, credentials, induction, code of ethics, compensation, continuing professional development, community sanction and culture. Most recently, Dam and Zethsen (2012) surveyed translators' perceptions of their professional status through four parameters: "(1) remuneration, (2) education and expertise, (3) power and influence, and (4) visibility and fame". Although the researchers did not explicitly flag the traits approach, the way that they used four features to distinguish professionals from non-professionals was tantamount to the application of the approach (Wadensjö 2007: 2).

Given the insightful perspective from the traits approach, I am going to examine the professional status of PSTs in China from the four quintessential aspects. Building on this, I will discuss the rationale of prioritizing two particular measures to help Chinese PSTs attain the much needed professional status.

3. PSTs in China

In this section, I will examine to what extent PSTs are professionalized (or not) in China, from four characteristic hallmarks of a profession, namely abstract and specialized knowledge, autonomy, authority and altruism.

Abstract and specialized knowledge

An established profession is usually based on specialized knowledge, known by only a few (Hodson and Sullivan 2011: 260). Do translators and interpreters work on the basis of specialized knowledge? As practitioners ourselves, most of us would endorse “the particular, the specialized/special or specific skills and competences that make a translator or interpreter a professional” (Katan 2011: 71), but the general public might disagree. They hold the presumption that anyone who has studied languages could automatically become a translator/interpreter (Gouadec 2007: 129; Dam and Zethsen 2014: 202). This misconception is also quite popular in China, as reflected from a survey conducted among sixty translators/interpreters in Shanghai and Taipei (Setton and Guo 2011: 105).

This anyone-can-do-it mindset is ever more pervasive among those who request PST services. Given this layman presumption, “public institutions still readily consent and resort to the user’s family or friends or to NGO volunteers, who very often lack an optimal communicative competence in one of the interaction languages and/or appropriate training in the field of [public service translation]” (Valero-Garcés and Taibi 2004). This observation also applies in China, where those in need of PST services usually solicit them from their friends, relatives or colleagues, not from PST professionals. For instance, in a recent survey conducted among 42 expatriates in China, as many as 83.33% of them confessed that they asked their friends to help out with their procedures in public settings, although their friends’ Chinese proficiency was not satisfactory (Deng and Wen 2012). Because of this low public recognition of abstract or specialized knowledge held by PSTs, I surmise that PSTs have a low professional status in China.

Autonomy

“Autonomy means that the members of the profession alone decide *who* is qualified to perform their work and *how* this work should be performed.” (Vallas et al. 2009: 150, original emphasis) More specifically, professionals are expected to make their own judgement, subject their performance to peer review, and are supervised by other members of the profession (ibid).

In China, PSTs, if hired, are able to make their own translation choices, although client feedback is also factored into the revision of the translation. Yet there are very few peer reviews (if any) in the market, because of the absence of a disciplinary board or a quality-assurance system on the part of service providers. For instance, in the organizational structure of TAC, the only nation-wide translation/interpreting industry association in China, there is no agency to deal with quality disputes. Even worse, among the 10 sub-committees in TAC, none of them specifically advances the interests of PSTs.³ Activities organized by TAC mainly involve academic activities, training, translation contests, and journal publication, although the past few years have seen the proactive involvement of TAC in lobbying the legislative body to pass laws to protect and improve the standing of translators and interpreters. These gestures are general in nature, without addressing the precise needs of PSTs. To compound the problem, it appears that PSTs (and their clients) are loosely connected and yet to be marshalled up to form a PST association or a sub-committee within the existing TAC organizational structure. As a consequence, the interests of PSTs and their clients are at stake, because there is no association to function as a watch-dog to exercise autonomous and rigorous discipline in the market.

³ For the detailed information about TAC organizational structure, see http://www.tac-online.org.cn/en/tran/2009-10/12/content_3180549.htm (accessed 6 January 2015).

Authority over clients and subordinate occupational groups

In established professions, “professionals can expect compliance with their orders from clients and subordinate groups” (Hodson and Sullivan 2011: 263). In China, translators and interpreters as a whole are exercising mixed authority over their clients. For instance, some clients treat interpreters as “slaves”, while others treat them as “masters” (Setton and Guo 2011: 106). Similarly, PSTs receive varying degrees of trust from their clients. In general, if PSTs are employees affiliated with an agency (for example, an in-house translation department in a hospital), they tend to be trusted by clients (Zhan and Yan 2013); if PSTs are hired as *ad hoc*, clients might be suspicious of their quality. Therefore, it is safe to say that PSTs in China have not secured complete authority over their clients.

In the second sense of authority, PSTs do not have any subordinate occupational groups to control over. To put it crudely, PSTs are actually the subordinate occupational group, rather than the dominant one. As salary is an indicator of occupational prestige in the translation industry (Dam and Zethsen 2012) as it is the case in other industries (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne 2008), the position of the PSTs in the occupational hierarchy could be evidenced by the remuneration as compared with other translation services. Upon checking the translation fee quoted in the notary offices in Guangzhou and Shanghai (the third and second largest cities in China), I find that document translation is quoted at 50 RMB per 1,000 Chinese characters in Guangzhou (Guangzhou Notary Office 2014) and 60 RMB per 1,000 Chinese characters in Shanghai (Shanghai Oriental Notary Public Office 2014). Chinese literary translators, allegedly struggling to make a living from the practice, are usually paid at 70-90 RMB per 1,000 Chinese characters, while business translation gets relatively higher pay.⁴ This seems to show that PST is at the lowest end of the translation remuneration hierarchy. Compounding this is the recent high-profile media exposure of interpreters working for the press conferences during the NPC (National People’s Congress) and CPPCC (Chinese

⁴ For a detailed report of how literary translators struggle to make ends meet in China, please refer to http://www.tac-online.org.cn/ch/tran/2013-11/11/content_6448110.htm (accessed 6 January 2015).

People's Political Consultative Conference) sessions. The news coverage draws public attention to conference interpreters and enables them to obtain social recognition. The financial rewards and social standing both perpetuate the occupational hierarchy, where conference interpreters sit atop, business and literary translators are sandwiched in the middle, and PSTs stuck at the bottom.

Hodson and Sullivan (2011: 264) elucidated that “authority is derived from mastery of the body of specialized knowledge”. The T&I hierarchy in China (and possibly in many other countries as well) somehow results from the layman perception that the jobs of conference interpreters are more difficult (e.g. cognitively engaging) than those of translators and other types of interpreters. Besides, the high-profile visibility of conference interpreters, who are sitting next to the national leaders, adds to the halo effect, thereby glorifying conference interpreters. But as de Pedro Ricoy (2010: 110) notes, “public service interpreters work under more challenging and arduous conditions and that they serve a social function that is as important and, in some cases, more pressing than that of conference interpreters.” This should also apply to PSTs, who are expected to deal with “the implicit function of the documents”, “mixture of styles” (Fraser 1999: 194) and various terminologies and legalese. Many terminologies are compact in meaning and even culturally-loaded, which defy readily available equivalents. With this, I am trying to argue that in terms of specialized knowledge *per se*, PST is not at all inferior to other modes or fields of translation or interpretation. Unfortunately, because it is not economically rewarding and perceived as less esoteric, PST is stuck at the lower end of the professional continuum.

Altruism

True professionals are, to a lesser or greater extent, altruists and “should put their clients’ interests ahead of their own” (Vallas et al. 2009: 152). This professional attribute is epitomized by a code of ethics, stipulating the credentials of practitioners, procedures of solving disputes, and suggested amount of community services. In some highly

professionalized occupations, the “code of ethics may even require its members to do work for which they are not paid” (Vallas et al. 2009: 153). A case in point is the suggested minimum of 50 hours of pro bono publico per year by American Bar Association (ABA, 2013). The proclaimed and demonstrated altruism of a profession is beneficial to the degree of autonomy. Indeed, when clients trust that professionals will act in the interests of clients, they are willing to entrust professionals with “exclusive jurisdiction and authority” (Vallas et al. 2009: 152), hence a higher degree of autonomy on the part of professionals.

By examining the existing documents that approximate a code of ethics or norms in China (for instance, Code of ethics for Translation Service Industry [TAC, 2005]), it is hard to find credentials mandated to safeguard the access to practice. There is also little information about the procedures of resolving disputes and no altruistic statements to gain the public trust. The representation of PST in these three aspects is non-existent, as these primary documents address translation and interpreting ethical issues in broad strokes, without giving due attention to the finer-grained market segments.

Summary

As contended in the traits approach, the extent to which an occupation is professionalized is largely dependent upon the traits it possesses (Hodson and Sullivan 2011: 272). The previous examination, therefore, seems to show that PSTs in China are still in Phase I of Tseng’s professionalization model, namely “market disorder” (1992), where no restrictive barriers are erected to guard off unqualified practitioners. In addition, the representation of PST in the national translators’ body or in the code of ethics is minimal, again signalling that PSTs are positioned at the lower end of a professionalization continuum.

It is, therefore, of pivotal importance to consider what could be done to professionalize PSTs in China. More professionalized PSTs will definitely help with an inclusive society, where expatriates are eased into new working and/or living communities. In the sociological

theorizing of professionalization, Wilensky (1964) outlined five stages of professionalization and a number of indicative events for an occupation to achieve fully professionalized status. Subsequent comparative studies show that the sequential stages of professionalization may differ greatly from one country to another. For instance, Neal and Morgan (2000) compared the professionalization process in UK and Germany, and concluded that the UK approach has been “bottom up”, while the German one has been “top down”. The major differences between the two are as follows: (1) In the “top down” approach, education and profession are largely regulated by the state, while the “bottom up” approach adopts association-led regulations; (2) The “bottom up” approach is the “spontaneous professionalization”, and the “top down” one is the “state-sanctioned professionalization” (Neal and Morgan 2000: 20-21).

Drawing on the work of Wilensky (1964), Tseng (1992), Neal and Morgan (2000), and Ju (2009), I contend that PSTs need to go through six stages to secure professional status in the Chinese context, where the “top down” approach is favoured. Table 1 shows these indicative events and the corresponding check of the current professional standing of Chinese PSTs, which is classified on a three-point scale (from low to moderate and to high).

Table 1: Professional standing of PSTs in China.

Sequential stages of professionalization	Professional standing of PSTs in China
The occupation becomes a full-time one.	Moderate: over half of PSTs are estimated to work part time.
Academic degrees are conferred to meet training demands.	Moderate: PST courses are offered or embedded in other courses of the degree programmes (see sections below). Stand-alone PST degree programmes are not yet popular.
Certification is enforced.	Low: PST certification is not yet available.
Professional associations are	Low: national PST professional association is

established.	non-existent.
Licensure is mandated by state laws.	Low: state licensure is not mandatory to practice PST
Codes of ethics are formally established and enforced.	Low: there is no formal PST-specific code of ethics.

Upon checking the six stages of professionalization, it appears that PSTs in China still have a long way to go, before they can claim fully professionalized status. It would be ideal if we had all the resources to concert institutional efforts on PST professionalization. However, in the present climate of austerity, it would be a better idea to improve on the existing infrastructure, rather than fighting the battle on all fronts. I am keenly aware of the importance of professional associations, functioning as a lobbyist and mediator to help raise the profile of practitioners. For instance, the Professional Interpreters' Alliance (UK) was founded in 2009 to fight against "exploitation of the profession by commercial intermediaries and the outsourcing of interpreting services within the public sector" (Professional Interpreters' Alliance 2013). In this case, the association lobbies for the "criticism and improvement of the working conditions of translators and interpreters" (Pym 2014: 474). However, the professionalization process in China is similar to that in Germany (not in UK). That is, China tends to adopt a "top down" (state-sanctioned) approach to professionalize an occupation in that the education and certification of practitioners are highly regulated by the state. This is different from the "bottom up" approach, where practitioners would spontaneously form an association to advance their interests, introduce qualifying examinations and lobby for legal protection (Neal and Morgan 2000). The industrial associations in China are less powerful. This could be evidenced by the fact that "[m]embership of professional associations is not popular" among Chinese translators (Setton and Guo 2011: 113). For instance, as of August 2014, only about 2,000 active members are registered in TAC,⁵ in contrast to American Translators Association with about 11,000 members (ATA 2015). The situation is

⁵ The number of TAC members was calculated based on the name list published in the TAC website [http://www.tac-online.org.cn/ch/tran/2009-09/29/content_3166418.htm] (accessed on 6 January 2015).

compounded by the hybrid nature of TAC, which serves both academic and industrial purposes. Its busy agenda crowds out the due attention given to different market segments, especially to PST. That is why I think education and certification wield more power than TAC does, as the education infrastructure and certification system have wider coverage (see the next two sections) and are administratively more malleable. In what follows, I will discuss the status quo of education and certification in China, and then proffer some suggestions to stage a more prominent presence of PST in these two aspects.

4. Education

As professionalism is built upon specialized knowledge, education is of pivotal importance in the process of professionalization. Training provided in educational institutions would guarantee that future professionals are properly trained to deliver desirable products or services to clients. As Greere (2010: 795) notes, “University-based training as well as training offered by professional bodies is crucial for enhancing the composition of the translation market and ensuring an appropriate degree of professionalization.” Indeed, in Wilensky’s study, in four out of the six established professions, “university training schools appear on the scene before national professional associations do” (1964: 144). Therefore, I would argue that the first reasonable step to professionalize PST is to offer PST degree programmes in Chinese universities.

In fact, autonomous translation and interpreting degree programmes have proliferated in China over the past few years. Before 2006, translation and interpreting programmes were offered in language and culture departments, where translation and interpreting were mere pathways for English majors in the Bachelor of Arts (BA) structure. In 2006, BTI (Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting) degree was approved by the Academic Degree Commission of the State Council. Until 2015, a total of 196 universities have been qualified to confer BTI degrees. A similar development was paralleled by the MTI (Master of Translation and Interpreting) degree programmes. Upon approval in 2007, MTI degree programmes have been

run in 206 universities, offering professional training in six language combinations (Chinese/English, Chinese/French, Chinese/Russian, Chinese/Japanese, Chinese/Korean, and Chinese/German). At the time of writing, it is reported that 14,693 BTI students and 20,257 MTI students are being trained in these universities (Zhong 2014).

Despite the fully-fledged generalist degree programmes for translation and interpreting, systematic training has not been available for community-based translation/interpreting. The observation by Taibi (2011) that “specialized training in PST is either nonexistent or of limited scope” is particularly true in China. PST is usually embedded in other generalist translation courses, such as Administrative Document Translation and Medical Translation. PST, as a stand-alone pathway, is not yet popular. One exception is the MTI programmes offered by Shanghai International Studies University (SISU). MTI for Public / Business Service is an option for students to choose, along with other pathways such as MI in Conference Interpreting, MI in Liaison Interpreting, MT in Transwriting and MT in Legal Translation (SISU 2012). This might be the exception to prove the rule.

Without a proper degree programme, the training of PSTs is poorly-structured and inadequate. Students are sparsely exposed to the intricate dynamics among actors in a public service setting. When they leave the training institute, they are not yet prepared to cope with the demanding PST tasks. Therefore, I propose a stand-alone pathway added to the existing MTI framework. The existing MTI infrastructure requires students to complete 30-credit coursework, plus 2-credit internship within two academic years. Among them, 12 credits are mandatory and identical for all MTI pathways. The courses in this category include: Politics Theories (3 credits), Chinese Language and Culture (3 credits), Introduction to Translation (2 credits), Basic Translation (2 credits), and Basic Interpreting (2 credits). For the remaining 18 credits, they are more pathway-specific and each training institute could offer different combinations of courses at their own discretion. In Table 2, I lay out one possible design for the PST-specific MT (Master of Translation) programme.

Table 2: A possible combination of courses for PST MT programme.

Courses	Course types	Semester	Credits
Basic Public Service Translation Skills	Compulsory	1	2
Advanced Public Service Translation Skills		2	2
Professional and Ethical Skills		1	2
Terminology Management		2	2
Public Service Translation (Legal)	Selective (students choose 5 courses from this category)	1 or 2	2
Public Service Translation (Health)		1 or 2	2
Public Service Translation (Welfare)		1 or 2	2
Public Service Translation (Education)		1 or 2	2
Public Service Translation (Administrative Services)		1 or 2	2
Translation Theories and Public Service Translation		1 or 2	2
Stylistics and Public Service Translation		1 or 2	2
Computer-assisted Translation		1 or 2	2
PST Internship	Practice	3	2

As can be seen, these courses are designed to train students to harness the linguistic, procedural, managerial, technical skills and knowledge, with particular relevance to PST. In addition to this, I suggest that the internship placement (which is mandated in the MTI programmes) should also be domain-specific. For instance, PST-pathway students could work as paraprofessionals in a public service setting, such as hospitals or administrative service centres. Internship of this kind is comparable to the paralegals and paramedics in the professions of lawyers and doctors. To make it more logistically plausible, training institutes may schedule internship in the academic timetable (for example, a space of four weeks between semesters) and seek partnership with government agencies. Upon the approval of

agencies, interns are present in one public service setting (that is, a police station, a courtroom, a hospital ward, etc.) and observe how PST services are offered and delivered. This expert-apprentice internship arrangement not only benefits students who are mentored by a practicing translator, but also help promote a positive image of PST as a structured professional career, from paraprofessionals to semi-professionals and finally to professionals.

5. Certification

Although education plays an important role in developing students' PST competence and getting them socialized into market norms, education alone does not suffice to professionalize PSTs. "[W]hat is also required is national recognition of their [. . .] skills by means of an accreditation procedure" (Roberts 1997: 24). To this end, China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI) comes into the picture, and in the following sections, I will first describe the status quo of CATTI and then focus on how revamping CATTI would exert a positive impact on professionalizing PSTs.

A mismatch

CATTI was initiated as the nation-wide certification examination in 2003. To date, it is still the highest profile T&I accreditation examination in China, as it is organized and administered by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the China Foreign Language Publishing Administration. Over the past decade, CATTI has gained its influence and popularity, as it incorporated more language combinations and levels of certification. Between 2003 and 2005, only three language combinations were available: English/Chinese, Japanese/Chinese and French/Chinese. From 2006 onwards, four more language combinations have been included: Arabic/Chinese, German/Chinese, Russian/Chinese and Spanish/Chinese.⁶ Before May 2012, only two levels were available for certification, Level

⁶ Although it is true that a large number of regional varieties of Chinese languages are spoken across China, the official language is Mandarin (or *putonghua*). Therefore, in the CATTI system, the accreditation in Chinese is exclusive to Mandarin. In addition, CATTI now provides seven language combinations based on the consideration of the market demand. Accreditation in other non-European languages is not available, because

III and Level II, while Level I, more as a title than a credential, was conferred based on applicants' merits of experience and translation. However, since May 2012, Level I has been made available as a testing component in the CATTI system.

Despite its availability and recent expansion, CATTI is seldom used as a credentialing threshold to guard off uncertified (or unqualified) translation practitioners in the Chinese market. This is evidenced by the following figures. According to the *Reports*, by the end of 2011, there were 1.19 million full-time employees working in the language service industry. Among them, 0.64 million, or 53.8%, were translators and/or interpreters (TAC 2012: 10). In the meantime, from 2003 to 2014, around 35,000 out of 0.34 million test-takers were accredited (TAC 2014). It is possible that a practitioner may be accredited twice, when he or she took Level III first and then Level II. So the figure could not be directly translated as 35,000 certified practitioners. But setting this disclaimer aside, let us assume that there were indeed 35,000 certified practitioners, as opposed to 0.64 million full-time translators and/or interpreters. This means that in the most optimistic scenario, only 5.41% of translators/interpreters in the Chinese market are certified by CATTI.

If the annual growth rate of certified examinees remains unchanged, which is 25.36%, by the end of 2015, we would have roughly 56,000 certified translators/interpreters in the market. In the *Reports*, it is estimated that by the end of 2015, over 2 million employees would work for the language service industry in China (TAC 2012: 10). Assuming that the percentage of translators/interpreters stands stably at 53.8%, we would have over 1 million translators/interpreters by 2015. Still, the CATTI-certified practitioners would only account for a mere 5.6%.

Two reasons for the low percentage of CATTI-certified practitioners are entertained. First, it might be due to its low market-value or employability-value. As China's language service

there is a very small demand in the T&I market.

market is generally in the “market-disorder” phase, no licensure is required to practice translation or interpreting. Employers hire “professionals” largely based on word of mouth and their previous working experience. Taking myself as an example, I was certified in 2007 as a Level II CATTI interpreter. Over the past seven years, on only two occasions (out of approximately 180), I was asked to produce a CATTI credential if I happened to have one. Interestingly, I did not get either of these two jobs, because my resume was less impressive than those of other candidates who had more working experience, though not certified by CATTI. In the PST market, the situation is even more discouraging. Lowest bidders usually stand a better chance to be hired, because clients do not know how to properly tender a translation service. The second reason for the low presence of CATTI in the market might be due to its generic certification scheme. Arguably, translation services at the turn of millennium have become more specialized and segmented. A generic certification could hardly function as a one-size-fits-all credential to all translation tasks. If an agency wants to hire a translator to translate a legal document or a notarized marriage license, CATTI would not be of much help in informing the agency how good the translator is. In light of this, CATTI needs to be revamped to better reflect and address the different market demands.

Reforming CATTI

As Pym, Grin, Sfreddo and Chan (2012: 89) note, “recent years have seen many countries revamp their own translator certification systems”, because the speciality of skill set has not been fully represented. Similarly, CATTI is currently a generic certification test, with two testing components for each level, a 120-minute general test and a 180-minute practical test, the former focusing on examinees’ linguistic competence and the latter translation competence. Part One and Part Two of Table 3 explain the existing design of the two testing components. Only those who pass two components will be certified. The pass cut-off score is not fixed, but deliberated and released after each individual examination, which produces an annual pass rate of about 10%.

Table 3: The existing and proposed design of CATTI (for English/Chinese translation).

Test components	Test tasks	Test items
1. General Test (120-minute written test)	Vocabulary Selection	20 multiple choices
	Vocabulary Replacement	20 multiple choices
	Error Correction	20 multiple choices
	Reading Comprehension	30 multiple choices
	Cloze Test	20 multiple choices
2. Practical Test (180-minute written test)	English-Chinese Translation	Two paragraphs or one passage of about 600 words
	Chinese-English Translation	One passage of about 400 words
3.1 Add-on Test 1 (law and administration) (180-minute written test)	PST code of ethics	4 case scenarios featuring professional conflicts
	English-Chinese Translation	One passage of about 600 words
	Chinese-English Translation	One passage of about 400 words
3.2 Add-on Test 2 (medicine / healthcare) (180-minute written test)	Ditto	Ditto
3.3 Add-on Test 3 (economics) (180-minute written test)	Ditto	Ditto
3.4 Add-on Test 4 (technology) (180-minute written test)	Ditto	Ditto

To better test and certify domain-specific translation competence, I propose add-on components to be integrated into the existing CATTI system. I am inspired by the examinations of certifying sworn translators in Finland, where examinees are required to take two translation tasks, one about law and administration, the other could be selected from

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“economics, technology and medicine” (Salmi and Penttilä 2013: 121). Similar testing procedures could be incorporated into the CATTI tests. While retaining the general and practical components, a third 180-minute written test could be made available (see Part Three of Table 3), where examinees could choose translation tasks specialized in law/administration, medicine/healthcare, economics or technology. Only if examinees pass all the three components will they get a certificate specifying the Level and Speciality. If they fail the third component but pass the first two, they could still get a generic certificate specifying the corresponding pass level. Examinees are required to pass the generic tests before they are eligible for the add-on test(s).

In terms of test tasks, I proffer three tasks to better reflect the PST professional practice in the market. Unlike some certification tests, where the knowledge of professional codes of conduct is tested (NAATI 2014; Salmi and Penttilä 2013: 120), the ability to address ethical issues is not covered in CATTI. Because of this, I suggest including PST ethical issues as one part of the add-on component. The format could be similar to that of NAATI, where examinees are allowed to choose two from the three questions on the ‘Ethics of the Profession’ (NATTI, 2014). For the remaining test tasks, examinees are required to translate one specialized text from English to Chinese and another one from Chinese to English, the length of which is the same as those in the Practical Test Component. The only difference is that texts in add-on tests are of specific register, terminologies and jargons.

One might be sceptical of reforming CATTI, because the employment of PSTs is not yet contingent upon credentialing. However, to professionalize PSTs, the certification reform could not wait until the law of mandatory certification is passed. In Ju’s revision of Tseng’s professionalization model, certification is actually one step ahead of licensure (2009). If a certification system is not robust enough to exercise its gate-keeping role, there is little bargaining power to convince legal authorities to grant mandatory licensure to practice PST.

6. Conclusion

Informed by the “traits theory” of professions and professionalization in sociology, I have examined the professional standing of Chinese PSTs from the four hallmark characteristics of the abstract knowledge, autonomy, authority and altruism. Based on this, I contend that PSTs in China are fighting an uphill battle to attain the professional status, despite their important contribution to a more inclusive community. To professionalize PSTs, I suggest prioritizing education degree programmes and certification system as two important measures, considering that the overarching frameworks are already in place and this would also conform to the “top down” approach to professionalization in China.

In Wilensky’s article, he aptly observes that not every occupation could be fully professionalized (1964). Could translators/interpreters as a whole attain full professionalization? Furmanek, after analyzing the status quo of interpreters, projects that they would be fully professionalized, as she notes that “2020s and 2030s may bring to fruition the missing elements from the final stage of the professionalization continuum” (2013). How about PSTs in China? Frankly, I am not as optimistic as Furmanek is, because PSTs are now situated at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy and require considerable effort to fight for their professional status. If everything is left unchecked, the professionalization of PSTs in China would be remotely possible in 2020s or 2030s. This delay in professionalization would discourage expatriates from working and/or living in China, as they might be disintitled to the equal access to public services by the language barrier. Consequently, China would be a less preferred choice of working or living for overseas talents, thereby impeding its technological, economic, and social progress. This would be a dire price we have to pay, if no PST education or certification reforms are taken now.

Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by the Innovative School Project in Higher Education of Guangdong, China (GWTP-LH-2015-02).

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