

# Data-driven Study on Interpreting Education Empirical Researches in China\*

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Based on 1,003 articles about empirical research on interpreting teaching from 2002 to 2022 retrieved from China National Knowledge Internet, this paper extracts three main research methods, uncovering common problems in interpreting education and practical teaching suggestions: (1) Corpus-based researches collect numerous audios to study typical mistakes made by interpreting learners, particularly pause and self-repair, and suggest interpreting teaching improve learners' ability to use language chunks and encourage students to interpret smoothly; (2) Questionnaire surveys help understand requirements for professional interpreters and how interpreting teaching meets market demands; (3) Teaching experiments last for one to two semesters, addressing issues like outdated teaching materials and modes, and show how teaching materials and modes integrate modern technology. But empirical researches need to build new corpora, professional interpreters' corpora and address problems that haven't been adequately discussed. This paper is helpful for improving interpreting education in China and other countries and for making clear tasks to be fulfilled in empirical research on interpreting education.

*Keywords:* Chinese interpreting education, empirical research, interpreting learner corpus, questionnaire survey, teaching experiment

## Introduction

In 2006, Chinese Ministry of Education approved the undergraduate translation programs in three universities for the first time. After that, Chinese translation programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels increase much more rapidly than those in any other countries. In 2021, there were 1,002 English undergraduate programs and 316 MTI (Master of Translation and Interpreting) programs, mostly offering courses of interpreting between Chinese and English. The enrollment of MTI increased from 350 in 2008 to over 8,000 in 2021. China Aptitude Test for Translators and Interpreters—CATTI, the most authoritative professional qualification examination for Chinese translation learners at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, has been held twice a year since December 2003. It includes both translation and interpreting. The number of applicants for interpreting aptitude test began to grow significantly in the second half of 2018,

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**\*Fund:** USST Construction Project of English-taught Courses for International Students in 2024; Key Course Construction Project in Universities of Shanghai in 2024; USST Teaching Achievement Award (postgraduate) Cultivation Project in 2024

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reaching 16,455 and increasing to 23,214 in the first half of 2019, and 22,983 in the second half of 2021. These enable China to have a great advantage over universities in other countries in the number of subjects and respondents in empirical studies, thus obtaining advantageous credibility and generality in empirical research. Chinese interpreting educators have been conducting empirical researches in the two decades, some of which uncover the common difficulties occurring in interpreting education and provide suggestions for overcoming them, but some empirical methods have not been effectively used, and some difficulties interpreting learners come across have not been adequately studied.

Chinese researchers put forward some classification standards for empirical research methods of interpreting. Mu (2011) divided the methods of empirical research on interpreting into five categories: corpus-based research, questionnaire survey, literature analysis, observation method, and experimental method. This classification has been widely used until now. The papers analyzed by us are mainly retrieved from CNKI, the most authoritative and comprehensive academic network in China at present. We use literature analysis method to search for and analyze the journal papers, important conference papers, and Master's and Doctoral dissertations posted online from 2002 to 2022 on CKNI, and retrieve the relevant literature adopting the above three research methods respectively. We did a final search on August 26 and added the new publications. On August 26, we entered Chinese keywords “kou yi jiao xue” (interpreting education) and “yu liao ku” (corpus) in CNKI at the same time and retrieved 389 articles (see Figure 1), entered “kou yi jiao xue” (interpreting education) and “wen juan” (questionnaire) and got 184 articles (see Figure 2), entered “kou yi jiao xue” (interpreting teaching) and “shi yan”(experiment), and got 430 articles (see Figure 3). The retrieved articles are altogether 1,003.



Figure 1. 389 articles retrieved from CNKI by using keywords “kou yi jiao xue” (interpreting education) and “yu liao ku” (corpus) on August 26, 2022.



Figure 2. 184 articles retrieved from CNKI by using keywords “kou yi jiao xue” (interpreting education) and “wen juan” (questionnaire) on August 26, 2022.



Figure 3. 430 articles retrieved from CNKI by using keywords “kou yi jiao xue” (interpreting teaching) and “shi yan” (experiment) on August 26, 2022.

Besides these, some papers adopt empirical research methods such as eye-tracking and ERP, but due to their small number (see Figure 4), this paper does not include them in the main research methods of interpreting teaching in China.

For the 1,003 papers retrieved, we analyze the empirical methods adopted in them by reading the abstracts or full texts to study the problems identified in interpreting teaching and the teaching suggestions proposed. We excluded non-key journal papers and papers with less than 100 respondents or subjects in empirical researches, selected representative articles, and summarized them. Furthermore, based on one author’s 12-year interpreting teaching experience, we further selected the literature according to whether the problems identified in interpreting teaching are common and whether the teaching suggestions are practical. In this way, 45 papers were singled out, together with four important books, namely Wen and Wang’s (2008) *Parallel Corpus of*

*Chinese EFL Learners*; Mu's (2011) *Methodology of Translation Studies: An Introduction*; Hu's (2011) *Corpus Linguistics Translation Introduction*, chapter 8; and Zhang's (2020) *Corpus-Based Interpreting Studies*. These are the main references in this paper, all of which discuss the interpreting between Chinese and English. In addition, we also noticed the interpreting studies applying experimental instruments in China (Kang, 2016; 2017; Kang & Lian 2020a; 2020b), and some empirical researches on interpreting teaching done in other countries.

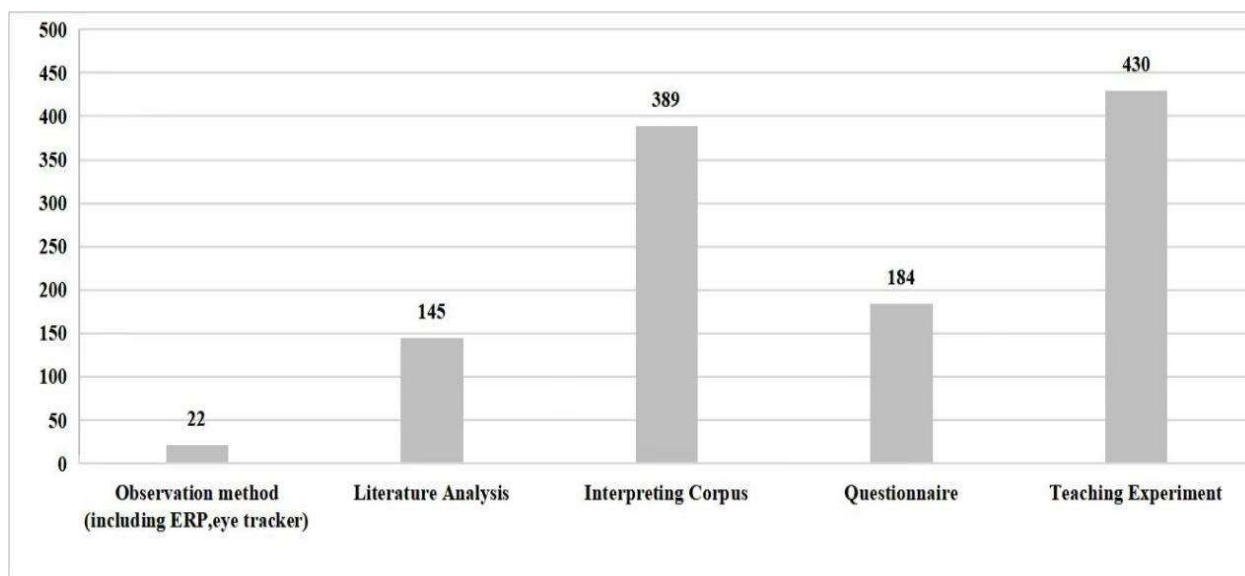


Figure 4. Statistics of empirical researches on interpretation education in China on August 26, 2022.

The following section provides a detailed analysis of the three important empirical research approaches to interpreting teaching in China, in order to single out pressing issues and effective pedagogical suggestions.

### Three Important Methods of Empirical Researches on Interpreting Education in China

#### The Increasing Interpreting Learner Corpus Research

Chinese researchers have been building interpreting corpora of numerous participants in large-scale interpreting contests (such as All China Interpreting Contest, Cross-Strait Interpreting Contest), interpreting certificate examinations and oral examination with interpreting tasks (CATTI, TEM 8 Oral Test), interpreting classroom exercises and tests.

Among the problems of interpreting learners, disfluency is discussed most, which is mainly manifested as pause, self-repair, and repetition. The first two have attracted the attention of many scholars, while repetition remains to be studied. Based on large sample data, scholars try to find out the reasons why interpreting learners often pause, so as to guide interpreting teaching to reduce pauses in interpreting. After studying 109 interpreting samples in PACCEL, Wang, D. F. Li, and L. Q. Li (2019) found that teachers of interpreting should foster students' habits of using language chunks, by involving repeated practices of bilingual vocabularies and requiring students to master a large number of idioms, phrases, and fixed collocations, especially the content word phrase structure, so as to establish an automatic connection between the source and the target language chunks and improve the fluency of interpreting output. In addition, teachers should encourage and urge students to interpret bravely without pausing. Based on our teaching experience, we believe that cultivating students' bilingual chunks

using ability and encouraging students to develop the habit of interpreting without hesitation are very effective methods to reduce pauses in students' interpreting. Another manifestation of disfluency is self-repair, which has also received attention from scholars. By analyzing 100 samples of Chinese-English interpreting corpus of about 60,000 words, Dai (2011) found that male students tended to use significantly more phoneme correction and deletion techniques than their female counterparts, while female students used significantly more lexical and grammatical correction. Dai suggested that teachers should pay attention to the different language preferences of male and female students in interpreting teaching, and encourage them to give full play to their own advantages and learn from each other.

For the problems related to faithfulness, output speed, and pressure in interpreting, some scholars have done corpus researches and agreed that fostering the ability to use chunks is an effective solution. Li (2016) studied 927 interpreting samples in PACCEL and analyzed prefabricated chunks frequently used. Li finds that prefabricated chunks are helpful for improving the communicative competence of interpreting and relieving the cognitive processing pressure in target language coding.

### **Questionnaire Surveys Study Interfaces of Interpreting Education with Market Demand**

China has a large number of professional interpreters from different regions and a large number of interpreting students from different types of universities, which enables Chinese questionnaire researchers to select respondents covering large areas geographically. Many scholars use province or city as the scope of questionnaire survey, such as Shandong (Yang & Ding, 2013), Shanghai (Wang, 2009), Beijing (Lu, 2020), etc. Others involve many provinces, cities, and regions, for example, Z. Li and D. F. Li (2019) distributed questionnaires to Chinese interpreters and obtained a total of 647 responses from 32 provinces, cities, autonomous regions, municipalities, special administrative regions, and Taiwan region and oversea areas.

Some scholars conduct questionnaire surveys on professional interpreters and interpreting learners, in order to put forward teaching suggestions on how to meet market demands, principally increasing characteristic professional interpreting courses to satisfy local market needs. Through a questionnaire survey of 120 people, including undergraduate translation students and translation practitioners, Yang and Ding (2013) pointed out that according to the needs of the translation market in region Shandong province, the proportion of professional interpreting courses, such as engineering, technology, and mechanics, should be increased accordingly. After conducting a questionnaire survey of 132 people, including professional interpreters and students, Zhang (2006) gained a further insight into the relationship between memory and interpreting, and understood the attitudes of interpreters towards their memory skills. Zhang (2008) conducted a questionnaire survey on interpreters and interpreting users at seven international seminars held in Beijing from 2006 to 2007, and obtained 118 valid questionnaires. Based on this, he pointed out that the awareness of customer service in interpreting teaching should be strengthened, so that students can fully understand the service function of interpreting. On conference interpreters' self-identification of their professional roles, Zhang (2013) conducted a questionnaire survey on 135 conference interpreters, who often participate in international conferences. He found that interpreters' self-identification directly affected their translation strategies and self-evaluations of interpreting effects. Through doing literature review, expert consultation, and a questionnaire survey of 243 professional interpreters, Lu, D. F. Li, and L. Q. Li (2019) found that at present, Chinese universities generally believed that skills were the core of teaching, often ignoring the fundamental role of language proficiency (especially foreign language proficiency). The three authors defined five categories and 36 elements that constitute the competencies of

simultaneous interpreters, and graded them. Language competence is the most important, followed by knowledge, interpreting skills and professionalism, and traits and metacognitive ability are the least important. Three authors emphasized that their findings could not only be used as a standard for admission interview, teaching arrangement, and graduation examination of simultaneous interpreting teaching institutions, but also provide a reference for the design of simultaneous interpreting ability evaluation and vocational admission system. There are also some master's theses that focus on the interface between interpreting teaching and interpreting market. By focusing on the market needs of Heilongjiang province and how to prepare MTI graduates for the interpreting market, Lyu (2017) distributed a questionnaire to 186 translators and interpreters, analyzing the gap between industry needs in Heilongjiang province and the current abilities of interpreters. She suggested that interpreters should not only master computer operation skills, Office software, and computer-aided translation software, but also have a high sense of responsibility and confidentiality. Lin (2014) conducted a questionnaire survey among 168 second-year MTI students and Zhang (2019) surveyed 129 postgraduate students majoring in interpreting, investigating the connection between the training of interpreters and the needs of language service industry.

In addition, the question asked most in questionnaire surveys on professional interpreters is their technical ability. Based on survey results, scholars suggest that in the process of interpreting teaching, attention should be paid to cultivating learners' relevant technical abilities, which play an important role in interpreting preparation, interpreting, and post-interpreting stages. Studying 457 valid questionnaires returned from 29 provinces and cities across China, Wang, Z. Li, and D. F. Li (2018) found the problems commonly seen among interpreters at present include unclear recognition of identity, poor understanding of technical concepts, and low technical ability. Therefore, they proposed that interpreting teaching should focus on the cultivation of students' relevant technical abilities.

Some scholars conduct questionnaire surveys on interpreting teachers and students, and propose new interpreting teaching modes, such as face-to-face teaching blended with production-oriented flipped teaching mode or strengthening interpreters' ability by adjusting the curriculum. In the light of production-oriented approach, Hou (2019) conducted a questionnaire survey on postgraduate students majoring in interpreting in a university in Beijing and received 111 valid questionnaires, hoping to know the feedback of students. According to the survey results, the study found that the current English-Chinese consecutive interpreting exercises can basically stimulate students' learning enthusiasm.

Other scholars have conducted questionnaire surveys on other topics, such as students' expectation from interpreting teachers and foreign language anxiety, etc. Pan (2017) conducted a questionnaire survey on 180 postgraduate students in BFSU. By analyzing the differences between different types of students in terms of teacher role expectations, they understand the expectations of first-year and second-year postgraduates from interpreting teachers. Li (2018) selected 631 undergraduate and postgraduate students from three different types of universities in China, and used questionnaires and interviews as research tools to test the reliability and validity of "Foreign Language Anxiety Scale" and "Affecting Variables of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale". Finally, that paper suggests that universities should reasonably offer English courses to raise students' cross cultural awareness, so as to reduce foreign language anxiety and promote second language acquisition to certain extent, and finally promote students' all-round development. It can be seen that these questionnaire surveys for interpreting teachers and students not only have a large number of respondents, but also cover a variety of topics, in the hope of raising the interpreting talent training to a higher level.

### Teaching Experiments Exploring Effective Teaching Environments and Methods

China is also paying more and more attention to the construction and innovation of interpreting classroom teaching mode. The number of interpreting students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in China is increasing rapidly, so the number of subjects in teaching experiments is more than that in other countries. In addition, the experimental period in China is generally longer. In Bale's (2015) teaching experiment at the University of Surrey, however, there were only 27 participants and the experiment lasted for only six weeks; in Ko and Chen's (2011) experiment on online education, there were only 16 participants, including a teacher and an assistant, which means only 14 students participated in the experiment, and the experiment lasted for only six hours. Yenkimaleki and Van Heuven (2016; 2017; 2018) explored the role of raising rhythmic awareness in improving the quality of interpreting through empirical studies on English-Persian interpreting teaching. Their empirical study had 36 subjects and a 12-hour experimental cycle in 2016; 24 subjects and a 12-hour cycle in 2017; and 30 subjects and a 36-hour experimental cycle in 2018, which are much smaller in number and shorter in cycle compared with those in China.

Some scholars put forward suggestions on compiling interpreting textbooks according to practical needs. After doing teaching experiments on 132 English majors, Zhang and Wang (2015) suggested that, besides ensuring interpreting materials reflect current heatedly discussed topics, interpreting teaching materials should emphasize humanistic spirit and language quality, particularly enhancing students' ability of syntactic conversion and textual organization. In order to promote students' interpreting level and enable them to meet market demands, Pan (2021) conducted a teaching experiment with 114 students majoring in hotel management in 2017 in Shanghai Business School. He points out that in terms of hotel management and commerce English teaching, audio and video materials with fast speaking speed and various accents should be selected for classroom teaching.

After doing teaching experiments, domestic researchers consistently suggest that interpreting teaching fully integrate modern technology, particularly multimedia, and multi-modal, three-dimensional, and virtual reality technology. It means that interpreting teaching environment should imitate the real situation in which interpreting takes place. Scholars propose various specific teaching models, such as multimedia teaching (Xiong & Luo 2006), ecological interpreting teaching (Ren, 2012), all-encompassing interpreting teaching (Kang, 2012), innovative teaching model of interpreting based on modal theory (Chen, 2011), etc.

### Conclusion

Despite the achievements analyzed in this paper, empirical studies still have a lot of tasks to fulfill, particularly in the following aspects.

Firstly, although China has the largest number of interpreting learners in the world, there are not as many empirical research papers based on large samples as we expect (the number of relevant key journal papers with at least 100 respondents or subjects is only 45), which shows that the large sample of Chinese interpreting learners has not been fully utilized, and there is still room for empirical research on interpreting. Empirical studies by Chinese scholars using experimental instruments such as ERP, eye-tracking devices are still relatively few. At present, these instrument-aided studies, mainly conducted by Kang (2016; 2017), Kang and Lian (2020a; 2020b) from Fudan University in recent years, have not yet taken advantage of the large number of Chinese interpreting learners. In contrast, the application of interdisciplinary empirical research methods such as ERP in the foreign interpreting teaching researches started earlier (in the late 1960s), and key journals are still publishing such



researches. *Interpreting* published such an article in Issue 1, 2022, entitled “When two languages are competing: An ERP study of sentence processing in expert and novice interpreters”. Fortunately, China has attached importance to neuroscience in project applications in recent years. Hopefully, Chinese researchers will use more modern experimental instruments to investigate the large sample of interpreting learners.

Secondly, the three main empirical researches themselves need to be improved.

In terms of corpus-based interpreting studies, there are few researches based on self-built corpus. In the literature studied in this paper, only two scholars’ researches are based on self-built corpus, while others conduct researches by using PACCEL built by Wen and Wang (2008). The interpreting test data in PACCEL were recorded from 2003 to 2007, which is 17 years away from now and may not reflect what current interpreting learners are like. So, corpus-based interpreting study needs to build new corpus to investigate what problems are existing and need to be dealt with now. In addition, the authors find that interpreting corpora are mostly of interpreting learners, analyzing learners’ various inadequacies, while professional interpreters’ interpreting videos, even if some are available, are generally scattered on websites, without being processed and included into a corpus. So, professional interpreters’ corpora are expected to be built for supplementing textbooks and enabling students in classrooms to see how professional interpreters deal with various difficulties. This is surely a welcome reform of interpreting teaching materials and teaching modes.

Questionnaire surveys are mostly on professional interpreters and interpreting students, while there are few surveys on interpreting teachers, for example, what qualities teachers think are vital for students to become good interpreters.

In teaching experiments, a large number of key journal papers propose using corpus in interpreting teaching, but there is no corpus of professional interpreters available by far.

This paper is designed to make clear the achievements in empirical researches on interpreting education in China and hopefully, the achievements will be drawn on by interpreting educators at home and abroad, thus further improve interpreting education. During the process, we find some methods are scarcely used and some issues in interpreting education are left understudied, so as to highlight future tasks for empirical researches on interpreting education.

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