

# An Investigation on English Major's Anxiety in Interpreting: Current Situation, Causes and Measures

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## Abstract

Since the 21st century, with the continuous development of reform and opening up, China's demand for high-quality interpreters has been increasing. According to the survey, interpreting anxiety is one of the important factors that affects the quality of interpretation. Therefore, this paper investigates the interpreting anxiety of English majors in Chinese universities through a questionnaire, analyzes the present situation and causes of this group's anxiety, and sums up the corresponding measures to deal with it. The suggestions for English majors made in this paper include: (1) Build up self-confidence and deal with external evaluation correctly; (2) Learn the skills of listening, memorizing, translating and speaking seriously, especially paying attention to memorizing and translating; (3) Study cross-cultural knowledge, (4) Improve their English level and strengthen the basic knowledge of English learning, (5) Improve the level of interest in interpretation.

## Keywords

Interpreting anxiety; Current situation; Causes; Measures.

## 1. Introduction

In 21 century, despite the complex international situation and the impact of the Covid-19, China still actively promotes the joint construction of "Belt and Road" and deepens the opening-up policy. Therefore, the country's demand for high-quality interpreters is also rising. In order to meet this demand, many colleges and universities have set up interpretation courses for English majors, but only adding interpretation courses can not improve the quality of interpreters. In my study and investigation, I find that anxiety is one of the most important factors affecting the quality of interpreters, so I investigate the interpreting anxiety of English majors in various universities in China.

## 2. Research Background

Chiang (2006) first separated interpreting anxiety from general anxiety and foreign language anxiety in second language acquisition, and defined interpreting anxiety as a kind of anxiety influenced by both situation and language skills. He studied the scope and degree of interpreting anxiety of 327 college interpreting learners with the designed anxiety scale, and found that 79% of them had interpreting anxiety. [1]

Based on interviews with college interpreting learners in Taiwan, Chiang (2006) found that the sources of interpreting anxiety include the speaker, the audience, the interpreter, interpreting tasks and classroom process.[1] Gong Longsheng (2006) proposed to divide factors into "Controllable" internal factors and "Uncontrollable" external factors. Internal factors are from interpreters themselves and external factors include unpredictable factors affecting the normal interpretation process.[3] Kang Zhifeng (2011), based on a survey of college non-English majors studying in interpretation as an elective course, systematically classifies the factors of interpreting anxiety into two categories: extralingual factors and intralingual factors.[2] In the

study of interpreting anxiety, Gong Longsheng (2006) put forward the following countermeasures from psychological perspective: interpreters should build up the confidence of the listening level in the process of interpreting and should not hold the thought of perfectionism.[3]

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1. Research Methodology**

This paper adopts the questionnaire survey and data analysis. According to the purpose of this study and the characteristics of the research object, I designed the questionnaire referring to previous questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four parts, educational background survey, anxiety level survey, anxiety cause survey and interpreting level survey.

#### **3.2. Research Subject**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the interpreting anxiety of English majors in Chinese universities, and the target group is English majors in Chinese Universities. Since then, a total of 140 valid questionnaires were collected.

### **4. Analysis on Questionnaire Results**

#### **4.1. Analysis on the Current Situation of English Majors' Anxiety in Interpreting**

##### **4.1.1. Most English Majors who Study Interpretation Have Interpreting Anxiety**

Of the 140 questionnaires, 130 report that they had interpretation anxiety, of which 59.23% report moderate anxiety and 21.54% report mild anxiety, 19.23% report that they had severe anxiety. It can be concluded that anxiety in interpretation is a common phenomenon. And overall, most of the students surveyed were in a moderate state of interpretation anxiety.

##### **4.1.2. Interpretation Anxiety Affects the Majority of students Who Have Interpretation Anxiety**

Of the 130 people who reported their anxiety in 140 questionnaires, 13.08% reported that their anxiety had no effect on their interpretation, 13.08% reported only a positive effect and 26.15% only a negative effect, 47.69 per cent reflected both negative and positive impacts. Therefore, it can be concluded that anxiety in interpretation has a certain impact on most students who have anxiety in interpretation, and the influence of anxiety in interpretation on student translators can't be simply characterized as positive or negative-- it is quite common for the same student to have both.

#### **4.2. Analysis on the Causes of Interpreting Anxiety**

##### **4.2.1. Low Self-confidence is the Most Important Psychological Factor for Interpreting Anxiety.**

Among those who expressed anxiety about interpreting, 75.38% of the respondents believed that the psychological factor of their anxiety was "I don't believe in myself". I believes that one of the reasons why translators are not confident in themselves lies in their doubts about their own interpretation ability and their fear of the difficulty of interpretation itself. Meanwhile, 53.85 percent of the respondents said they were afraid of public interpretation and 60.77 percent said they were afraid of negative comments. These psychological factors are related to the characteristics of interpretation activities. Interpretation activities are generally conducted in public places and at the time of interpretation, students worry that their teachers and classmates will laugh at them or make negative comments about their interpretation, which will lead to anxiety.

#### 4.2.2. Introverted People are More Anxious in Interpreting

First of all, I investigate the personality of the respondents, setting two questions: "Are you introvert or an extrovert?" and "Are you easy to be anxious?". Those who choose they are introvert, serious anxiety accounting for 19.1% , moderate anxiety for 61.8% and mild anxiety for 19.1%. While those who choose they are extrovert, serious anxiety accounted for 19.51%, moderate anxiety for 53.66% , mild anxiety for 26.83% . Although the degree of anxiety of introverts is not much different from that of extroverts because the tendency of the whole group is to have anxiety in interpreting, it can be seen that extroverts have a relatively low level of anxiety in interpreting.

#### 4.2.3. Memorizing and Translating are More Likely to Cause Anxiety in the Cognitive Process of Interpretation

Based on the research results of several scholars, I divides the cognitive process of interpretation into four stages: listening, memorizing, translating and speaking. And I let the respondents rank the English anxiety level of the four processes in order to explore quantitatively the effects of these four processes on the interpreting anxiety. The most anxious one is 4, and the least anxious one is 1. Thus it is possible to find the main source of anxiety of student interpreters. The results are: memorizing: 2.51, translating: 2.5, listening: 2.42, speaking: 2.37.

I found that according to the survey of English majors, memorizing and translating are the most likely to cause anxiety, followed by speaking and listening. The author believes that this is because in the process of interpretation, listening and speaking are the input and output processes respectively, while memorizing and translating are the processing processes of interpretation. The processing time is shorter than the input and output processes, while the volume of information to be processed is larger. So students are more likely to worry about the smooth progress of the two processes.

#### 4.2.4. More Students are Anxious in the Interpretation Examination, and the Degree of Anxiety is Higher

I investigate the situation in which English majors have anxiety about interpretation and the situation in which they have anxiety about interpretation. The results show that the most common place in which students express anxiety about interpretation is the interpretation test, about 69.23% of the respondents indicated that they would experience anxiety in interpreting test, followed by interpreting competition, interpreting practice, interpreting class, and other situations. The author thinks that, as a student, his most important thing is his studies, so when he takes an interpretation test, he will increase his anxiety because he is worried about the grade of the test. Also the student is in a kind of tense competitive state in the interpretation competition, therefore it's easy to produce the anxious mood. The reason for the lack of feedback on interpretation practice, I surmises, is that students are still at the undergraduate stage and have little opportunity to participate in real interpretation activities.

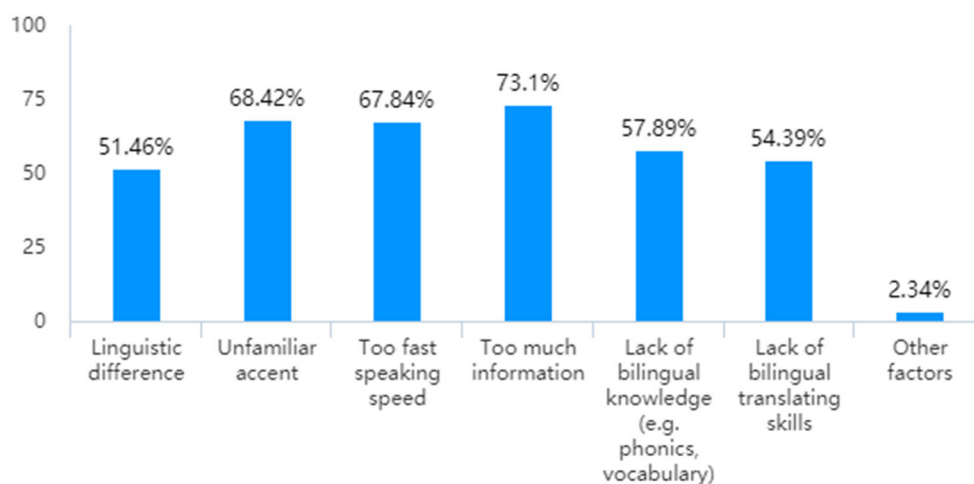
I let investigators rank the four situations according to the degree of anxiety they bring to them, of which the most anxious was 4, the last thing you need to worry about is 1. The results are: test:2.72, competition:2.63, class:2.39, practice:2.09. I think the reason why the interpretation test brings the greatest degree of anxiety to students is similar to the above-mentioned reasons, that is, the main task of students in school is to study, so the most concerned question is whether they can pass the course examination, therefore, the interpretation test will have a great impact on their psychology. It is also due to the fact that student interpreters are most often faced with interpretation classes and examinations, sometimes faced with competitions, and seldom have the opportunity to participate in interpretation practice, therefore, it is difficult to feel the interpretation anxiety under the interpretation practice .

#### 4.2.5. The Lack of Cross-cultural Knowledge will Aggravate the Formation of Interpreting Anxiety

In a sense, interpretation is actually a cross-cultural activity. In the survey, 74.62% of the respondents said that learning foreign culture can reduce their anxiety about interpreting. The author believes that in the process of interpreting, the translator sometimes has to consider not only the lexical syntax and so on, but also the cultural background. Sometimes the cultural expressions of the exporter, such as slang, idioms, etc. , may not be well understood by the translator, resulting in anxiety. At the same time, the translator's anxiety is also caused by the lack of cultural background of the target language, which makes the translator can not understand the translated content well, and sometimes even causes mistranslation. Therefore, in my opinion, it is necessary for English undergraduates to develop Western culture curriculum, and the students should strengthen their study of the cultural background of the target country before the interpretation task.

#### 4.2.6. The Influence of Language Factors on Interpreting Anxiety

First, the author lists several common factors related to language that cause anxiety in interpretation, such as differences in language itself, differences in accent and so on, in order to investigate common language factors that cause anxiety in interpretation, the results are shown in the graph below. For English majors, too much information, unfamiliar accents and speaking too fast are reflected the most, especially too much information, nearly 73.08% of the respondents said that too much information will make them anxious.

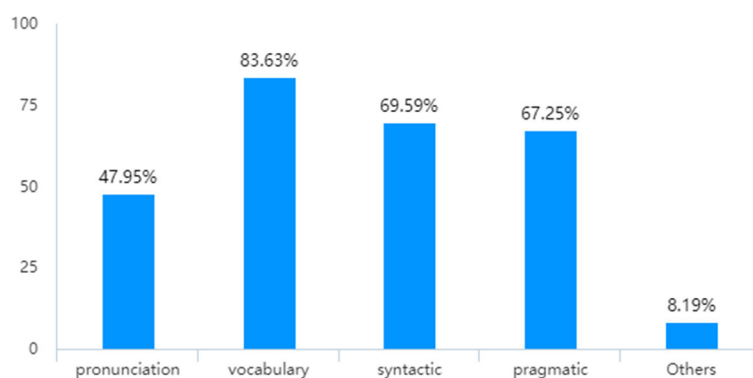


**Figure 1.** Proportion of various language factors causing anxiety reported by respondents

When the amount of information is too large, the information that the students have to deal with is beyond their cognitive ability, and it is easy to lead to confusion in the process of interpretation, which brings the translator a great psychological burden. Or the translator in the processing of information, in order to remember and translate and say a lot of information in a short time, mental tension, fear that they will miss information or can not follow and lead to anxiety. In addition, unfamiliar accents and speaking too fast will make the translator to understand the source language barriers, which makes the translator in a state of anxiety.

In addition, the author finds that 52.13% of the respondents report that their lack of bilingual knowledge is one of the causes of interpreting anxiety. The results are shown below. The author finds that the lack of vocabulary is one of the main causes of interpreting anxiety, and about 82.31% of the interviewees report that they have anxiety when their vocabulary is insufficient. The author holds that interpretation, unlike translation, does not require very fine sentence

structure and diction, but requires the translator to transform the content from one language to another concisely and precisely in a short time, the pursuit of linguistic accuracy. However, when the translator does not know the words, he can not consult the dictionary like the translator, so the lack of vocabulary to some extent seriously affects the accuracy and completeness of the target language output by the translator, the effect of interpretation deviates from its essence. The second is pragmatics and syntax, which to some extent affect the accuracy of the students' output or their understanding of the source language.



**Figure 2.** Proportion of anxiety-causing bilingual knowledge reported by respondents

#### 4.2.7. The Anxiety of the Group with Insufficient Learning Motivation is Higher

I analyze the motivation of the interviewees to learn interpreting and divides it into five grades. The most adequate motivation is "I love interpreting and want to be a professional interpreter", and the most inadequate is, "I don't like interpreting, I'm just forced to learn." Most of them are "I like English, and I want to improve my English by studying interpretation". I think this may be because the survey group is English majors, not professional interpreters, therefore, most of the idea to improve their English ability to learn interpretation.

Then I discuss the influence of motivation on interpreting anxiety. I find that 95.83% of the "I don't like interpreting, but I am forced to study" group said that they have anxiety in interpreting, of which 26.09% say they have severe anxiety, 65.22 percent say they have moderate anxiety and 8.7 percent say they have mild anxiety. In contrast, 93.75 percent of the "I love interpreting and want to be a professional interpreter" group say they were anxious about interpreting, with only 26.67 percent reporting severe anxiety, 40 percent reporting moderate anxiety and 33.33 percent reporting mild anxiety. It is obvious that students with high learning motivation have relatively low anxiety level in interpreting.

## 5. An Analysis on Corresponding Measures of Anxiety in Interpreting

Through the analysis of the causes of anxiety in interpretation, the author summarizes the following measures, hoping to help reduce the negative effects of anxiety in interpretation. First of all, the author thinks that students should build up self-confidence, deal with external evaluation rationally and lighten their psychological burden, which can alleviate the negative effects of anxiety in interpreting to some extent.

Second, the translator should carefully practice the four parts of interpretation, listening, memorizing, translating and speaking, especially memorizing and translating, so as to improve his proficiency in these two aspects. At the same time, the translator should pay attention to the study of cross-cultural knowledge. Only when the knowledge and cultural background are mastered, can the source language be transformed into the target language more smoothly, so as not to cause anxiety in interpretation. The most important thing is to learn the language, although objectively speaking, the translator can not change the amount of information, the

accent, the speed of speech and so on, but translators can enhance their bilingual knowledge and bilingual transfer skills, especially pay attention to strengthen their own grasp of some basic English knowledge, such as careful memorization of words, in particular, some proper nouns and polysemous words; cognitive learning grammar, to understand the structure of the sentence; translation into the target language to be accurate wording and so on. Only by doing so, can we have a good command of interpreting, and the negative influence of interpreting anxiety will be weakened. The last point is to improve the interest in interpretation, sufficient motivation to learn.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the results of a questionnaire survey conducted among English majors in China, this paper explores the causes of their anxiety in interpreting, some suggestions and suggestions are put forward to eliminate the negative effects of anxiety in interpretation. Interpreting anxiety is a common problem among college English majors in China. Although it plays a positive role in some cases, its negative impact on interpreting effect should not be underestimated. On the whole, the study of interpreting anxiety in China has not reached a high level at present, and it remains to be studied more deeply and accurately.

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