

An Overview of Research on Autonomous Learning of Interpreting

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Abstract

Studies on autonomous learning of interpreting have been a tendency in interpreting studies. This article takes a retrospective look at the related previous studies on autonomous learning of interpreting, which cover a wide variety of perspectives, including the construction of theoretical model, strategic competence, self-assessment, and external environment of autonomous learning of interpreting. The previous studies can give important enlightenment to the research and practice of interpreting teaching. Finally, we put forward the limitations and suggestions for future research on autonomous learning of interpreting.

Keywords

Autonomous learning; Interpreting; Research and practice.

1. Introduction

Holec is the first scholar to introduce the concept of “autonomous learning” into foreign language teaching. Holec (1981: 3) defined autonomous learning ability as “the ability to be responsible for their own learning”. Since then, scholars and educators have carried out extensive theoretical and empirical research on the conceptual definition, theoretical basis, influencing factors, pedagogical strategies, empirical outcome of “autonomous learning” and the establishment of autonomous learning center from different perspectives. Related research in China started late, but in the past 10 years, there has also been a research upsurge of “autonomous learning”, and the research perspective also shows a diversified trend.

At the same time, with the increasingly frequent international exchanges and the rapid development of China’s opening to the outside world, the demand for interpreters is growing and the requirements are gradually improving. In recent years, systematic disciplines such as bachelor’s, master’s, and doctor’s degrees in translation have been gradually established in China. Interpretation teaching and research are booming and showing a vigorous development trend.

In view of the extremely high requirements for translation skills and interdisciplinary information storage in interpretation task itself, classroom learning is far from meeting the challenges faced by translators entering the workplace; In addition, the upsurge of “autonomous learning” research at home and abroad has spread across all disciplines, and the voice of technology leading teaching reform is growing. Interpretation students need to learn more professional background knowledge from different media such as the Internet, and collect and sort out information. In this context, learners’ autonomous learning ability of interpretation is related to the improvement of their interpretation skills. Scholars engaged in interpretation teaching at home and abroad have gradually realized that it is of great significance to promote the cultivation of autonomous learning ability of interpretation students step by step. Under such a circumstance, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of “autonomous learning of interpreting” or “interpreting autonomy”, and therefore, previous studies related will be reviewed from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

2. Previous Studies on Theoretical Model of Autonomous Learning of Interpreting

According to Liu (2011), autonomous learners of interpretation have a self-system of interpretation skills. The self-system of interpretation skills obtains skills through continuous dynamic response with the outside world and systematic training behavior, so as to promote its own development. At the same time, the self-system regulates the learning process through self-evaluation, promotes the understanding of static components of self-system such as self-value and self-concept, and promotes its further development. This is a process of circular interaction and mutual promotion. At the same time, when interpreting learners use computers for autonomous training, they are affected by the interaction among learners' self, interpretation autonomous training behavior and computer-supported interpretation autonomous training environment. In the computer-supported interpretation autonomous training environment, interpretation autonomous learners carry out interpretation autonomous training and evaluation by using interpretation autonomous learning resources, so as to promote the development and consolidation of interpretation autonomous learning system. Teachers or self-regulated learners evaluate and manage learners' interpretation self-regulated training by creating environment, setting learning tasks and learning resources, and acting on learning support and management tools, and give scientific learning guidance to help learners improve interpretation skills, so as to promote the development of interpretation self-regulated learners and improve the self-system of interpretation skills.

Horváth (2005) and Liu and Wu (2012) conducted studies with regards to the essential components of autonomous learner of interpreting. According to Horváth (2005), there are four cognitive steps that autonomous learners of interpreting are supposed to take, which include reflection, self-reflection, evaluation and self-evaluation. More importantly, self-motivational thinking should be stimulated. Then, according to Liu and Wu (2012), as autonomous learners of interpreting, they should be fully responsible for their own interpretation learning. Autonomous learners of interpretation should be able to well plan their own interpretation learning and formulate reasonable interpretation learning plans. Autonomous interpretation learners should be able to fully grasp the knowledge of interpretation learning strategies and apply interpretation strategies appropriately when undertaking interpretation tasks. Autonomous interpretation learners should be able to give objective and accurate self-evaluation based on their own learning situation.

3. Previous Studies on Strategic Competence in Interpreting

The learning and application of interpretation strategies is one of the direct factors affecting the development of interpreters' ability, and it also restricts the effectiveness of interpretation learners' autonomous learning. Therefore, interpretation strategies are a very important research topic in the field of interpretation autonomous learning. In each interpretation activity, in order to achieve the purpose of interpretation practice and practice, interpreters need to use various interpretation strategies, constantly reflect on and summarize the success or failure of interpretation practice, and judge the application effect of interpretation strategies, so as to improve the quality of the next interpretation activity. Interpretation strategy ability refers to the ability to take methods, skills or actions to solve interpretation problems or improve the effect of interpretation (learning and practice). Interpretation strategies can be divided into metacognitive strategies (planning strategies, monitoring strategies, regulation strategies, etc.) Cognitive strategies (retelling strategy, fine processing strategy, organization strategy, etc.) and resource management strategies (time management strategy, learning environment management strategy, effort management strategy, etc.) (Xu & Mu, 2017).

Metacognitive strategies are very significant components of learner autonomy. In the field of autonomous learning of interpretation, numerous studies have been conducted on meta-cognitive competence of interpretation from various perspectives. Xu and Mu (2017) detailed how to collect the descriptors and quantify the parameters of meta-cognitive strategic competence in interpreting. Through factor analysis, the study reveals that interpreting metacognitive strategy ability can be reflected by four factors, including planning strategy ability, monitoring strategy ability, evaluation strategy ability and remedial strategy ability. The planning strategy ability involves preparation and planning before and during interpretation. The monitoring strategy ability covers understanding, expression, attention and self-awareness monitoring. The evaluation strategy ability is mainly related to the expression of the target language, and the remedial strategy ability is mainly related to on-site remedy and follow-up reflection to improve the interpretation effect.

According to Liang (2020), metacognitive guidance tools encourage the expression of the interpretation learning process, which not only enables us to perceive the development stage of self-regulation in the interpretation learning process; It also promotes the interpretation students to reflect on their attitudes and methods in interpretation learning. Through metacognitive guidance, it can be found that the self-regulation process in "deliberate practice" of interpretation is phased, and is closely related to the individual learners, as well as the learners, content and tasks. The metacognitive guiding principles of "deliberate practice" in interpretation summarized in this study will help to integrate the metacognitive components into the population translation classroom and achieve better interpretation learning results.

Based on the analysis of the composition of simultaneous interpretation ability, Liang and Chai (2017) made a conceptual definition and framework construction of metacognitive ability of simultaneous interpretation, and then designed a metacognitive power scale for simultaneous interpretation. The scale summarizes 43 specific metacognitive abilities related to simultaneous interpretation, including 10 metacognitive knowledge in simultaneous interpretation; There are 24 items of metacognitive monitoring in simultaneous interpretation; There are 9 metacognitive experiences in simultaneous interpretation.

In addition to research on meta-cognitive strategies in interpreting, scholars also pay much attention to other types of strategies involved in interpreting. Zhou and Guo (2014) investigated the use of lexical compensatory strategies in handling lexical difficulties in the Chinese-English interpretation of advanced English majors. Vocabulary compensation strategies can be divided into two categories: conceptual strategies and language strategies. The former refers to solving vocabulary problems by analyzing or replacing target concepts, including comprehensive strategies and analytical strategies. The comprehensive strategy solves the vocabulary problem by replacing the concept as a whole, while the analysis strategy compensates the vocabulary vacancy by analyzing the target concept and extracting the main characteristics of the concept. The second category of vocabulary compensation strategies is language strategies, which express target concepts through language level processing, including grammatical word making, vocabulary reduction and part of speech replacement. It is found that students use various compensation strategies to solve vocabulary problems in interpretation. The use of conceptual strategies is generally higher than language strategies, and comprehensive strategies are higher than analytical strategies. There is a significant correlation between interpretation scores and the use of compensation strategies. The higher the score, the less compensation strategies are used, and the students in the high group are more inclined to use conceptual strategies and comprehensive strategies.

Dong et al. (2019) sorted out the names and definitions of 22 commonly used strategies for consecutive interpretation, and divided the 22 strategies into three categories according to the degree of recommendation of interpretation teachers for each strategy: recommended strategy (Class A: preparing, transformation, visualization, compression, explicitation, taking advantage

of cohesive and coherent devices in the source language, anticipation, addition, reproduction, addition, reproduction, adaptation, personal association and involvement), recommended cautious strategy (class B: approximation, using formulaic expressions, inferencing, informing the client of an interpreting problem, not repairing information unless it is critical, offering an optional translation in a parallel structure, stalling, skipping) and not recommended strategy (Class C: substituting, word-for-word translation, guessing). Based on this theoretical framework, Li and Dong (2020) investigated the anxiety and the use of interpretation strategies of 66 interpretation students at the beginning and end of the first academic year of interpretation training, and explored the impact of anxiety on the acquisition of interpretation strategies.

4. Previous Studies on Self-assessment in Interpreting

Self-assessment ability is an essential element of autonomous learning ability. Self-assessment is an effective way to know oneself and promote development. This method can accurately reflect whether students have effectively participated in the specific cognitive process, and test whether the implemented method can effectively promote learning. Cai (2002) believes that self-assessment under the guidance of correct skill awareness is a very effective training accelerator. Sandrelli (2005) believes that improving the ability of evaluation and self-evaluation is very important for student translators. The development of information technology has promoted the positive progress of interpretation and self-evaluation research. Sandrelli et al. (2006) found that CAIT tool has great advantages in carrying out interpretation self-assessment through the application research of different versions of CAIT (computer-aided interpretation training) tool black box.

Through the methods of questionnaire, content analysis and comparative analysis, Liu (2021) studies how to apply the online interpretation training platform to support students' interpretation self-evaluation. The results of the questionnaire show that computer-assisted interpretation self-evaluation can improve students' interpretation self-evaluation ability. Secondly, conceptual tools can help students understand the evaluation criteria and the distance between themselves and the criteria. Its greatest function is to help students prepare for self-assessment; The second is to help deepen the understanding of the specific operation methods of interpretation evaluation. Strategic tools can help students gain alternative experience and improve their interpretation self-evaluation ability. Procedural tools can help students experience every step of the interpretation self-evaluation process, effectively perceive and understand the standard rules of interpretation evaluation, and improve the ability of interpretation self-evaluation. The results of students' self-evaluation analysis show that the contents of students' self-evaluation of computer-assisted interpretation are reflected in the aspects of interpretation self-efficacy, interpretation skill cognition, interpretation strategy application and psychological control. Teachers' feedback on students' self-evaluation can guide students to carry out self-evaluation correctly, actively promote the development of students' interpretation self-evaluation ability, and promote the construction and development of interpretation ability system.

5. Previous Studies on External Environment for Autonomous Learning of Interpreting

Interpretation autonomous learning is not carried out in a vacuum. Interpretation autonomous learning depends on a positive and harmonious external environment. Therefore, many scholars have carried out research on the environment of interpretation autonomous learning and put forward many effective countermeasures to optimize the learning environment.

On the basis of absorbing the ideas of autonomous learning and constructivist learning environment, Liu (2010) creates a computer-aided interpretation autonomous learning environment. Taking the interpretation learners and their interpretation skills as the core, it mainly includes six elements: learning resources, problems, cases, social background, learning tools and conversation; Promote the use of interpretation resources and the solution of interpretation skills through Scaffolding Strategy; Through cases, typical problems and background knowledge, supplemented by coaching strategies, learners' interpretation knowledge extension and skills improvement are promoted; Through the tools of interpretation on demand, recording and evaluation, the modeling strategy is implemented to improve learners' comprehensive interpretation skills. According to the design idea and practice, the interactive interpretation autonomous learning environment mainly includes five modules: user information module, exercise module (problems and cases), web recording module (sessions and tools), learning evaluation module (tools and sessions) and learning resources (resources and background).

Based on the needs of teachers and learners, Liu (2017) developed a system of interpretation online teaching and autonomous training. The purpose of interpretation online teaching and autonomous training system is not only to support teachers' classroom or online teaching, but also to meet students' after-school autonomous knowledge learning and interpretation skill training. At the same time, it can effectively monitor the autonomous learning and training process and provide personalized feedback to learners, so as to promote students' active learning process and the development of interpretation ability system. The ecological interpretation teaching and autonomous training system has four users: teachers, students, general visitors and managers, of which teachers and students are the main users of the system. Teachers' functional modules mainly include information announcement, lesson preparation, interpretation teaching, homework, student management and interactive communication. Students' functional modules mainly include personal information management, homework, declarative knowledge (such as interpretation theory and interpretation skills) learning, procedural knowledge (interpretation skills) training, learning management and interactive communication. The system designs the interaction of human-computer interface according to the principle of user demand center and perceived comfort; Follow the principles of "meaningful interaction" and "enhancing the sense of cognitive existence" to design the interaction between people and content; Abide by the principle of promoting users' sense of social existence and teaching existence, and design the teacher-student and student-student interactions.

Liu (2010) attempts to explore an effective form of integrating interpretation courses, interpretation teaching and ICT (information and communication technology) - the construction and practice of interpretation learning website. Learner oriented interpretation autonomous learning website is a kind of virtual learning environment. It includes four modules: user information module, exercise module, web recording module and learning evaluation module. The user information module mainly records the basic information of students and teachers, such as students' learning files and grades. The exercise module includes a large number of interpretation training materials for interpretation skills, such as consecutive interpretation skills (real-time memory, understanding skills, speech type analysis, pre translation preparation, interpretation notes, etc.) and simultaneous interpretation skills (expression or repetition skills, binaural division of labor and energy distribution, prediction skills, etc.), as well as interpretation theme materials common in various interpretation occasions. The web recording module realizes web real-time recording by embedding controls on the web page, and the generated recording files are saved on the streaming media server in real time. Students cannot delete the learning records on the server or change the learning files, so as to control students' interpretation practice. The learning evaluation module is the self-

evaluation of students' own recordings and the examination, evaluation and feedback of teachers' interpretation recordings. When the score weighted value exceeds the promotion standard, the system will automatically upgrade the training level.

The development of interpretation autonomous learning must be supported by a large number of interpretation learning corpus. In the information technology environment, the sources of interpreting learning corpus are very rich, such as Internet, television, radio, newspapers and so on. But at the same time, learners also face many difficulties in choosing interpretation learning corpus. The establishment of interpretation autonomous learning corpus is an effective way to solve the above problems. The creation path of interpretation autonomous learning corpus generally includes template design, corpus collection, corpus processing and integration. Taking a domestic key university as a case, Deng & Gu (2017) discusses the creation and application of interpretation autonomous learning corpus based on its interpretation training platform. The research shows that the creation of interpretation autonomous learning corpus helps to provide learners with corpus resources with rich themes, diversified media, convenient retrieval and flexible application, and plays an important role in improving their awareness, strategies and effects of autonomous learning. Deng (2018) further systematically expounds the concept and background of interpretation teaching corpus, research overview, name discrimination, creation process and application, in order to provide reference for the construction, research and application of interpretation teaching corpus in China.

6. Conclusion

Previous studies on autonomous learning of interpreting have greatly expanded the scope of research in the field of interpreting, which can give important enlightenment to the teaching practice of interpreting in China and other parts of the world. After a retrospective look at the previous related studies, we can obviously find that scholars and educators mainly focus on the construction of theoretical model, strategic competence, self-assessment, and external environment of autonomous learning of interpreting. In spite of the fruitful research, we can see that there are still many deficiencies in the research of autonomous learning of interpreting. For example, up to now, there has been no scale of autonomous learning ability of interpreting developed for teacher assessment, peer assessment or self-assessment. Besides, it is still not very clear what factors can affect the development of autonomous learning ability of interpreting and their influence mechanism and paths are unknown. More importantly, we still have a long way to go before finding effective teaching strategies to promote students' autonomous learning ability of interpreting. All in all, it is hoped that through the literature review of autonomous learning of interpreting, more scholars and educators will pay attention to the research and practice of autonomous learning of interpreting.

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