

Original Paper

Factors Influencing Career Choice and Development of Master of Translation and Interpretation (MTI)

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Abstract

Under the background of deepening globalization, the translation industry is experiencing vigorous development. Since 2007, nearly 316 universities nationwide have established Master of Translation and Interpretation (MTI) programs, which have produced a large number of translation professionals for society. However, the overall employment situation is challenging, and it is worth our attention to investigate the real job seeking conditions and quality of MTI graduates, as well as the factors influencing career choices in the field of translation.

Keywords

Career choice, Master of Translation and Interpretation, Influencing factors

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the Master of Translation and Interpretation program in 2007, MTI education has made significant progress. So far, there were 316 institutions offering MTI programs nationwide, with a total enrollment of approximately over 97,000 students (Gao, 2024). Although foreign language institutions remain the main force in cultivating translation talents, less than half of the graduates from translation programs actually engage in translation work, indicating a certain degree of talent loss (Gao, 2024). Meanwhile, the overall employment situation is challenging and the labor market is severely imbalanced. Therefore, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the real career choices and underlying influencing factors of MTI graduates. In this regard, the author conducted a review and comparative analysis of literature to summarize the employment situation and influencing factors of MTI graduates. Currently, China's economy and society have entered a new era and a critical period of upgrading and transformation, with rapidly changing social and environmental conditions. This has brought about new opportunities and challenges for the employment of MTI graduates. Analyzing the employment situation and the factors influencing career choices of MTI graduates can help the talent

market better understand the psychology behind their career choices and assist the graduates in finding the right direction for future employment, thereby laying the foundation for improving the imbalanced labor market.

2. Factors Influencing Career Choice of Master of Translation and Interpretation

2.1 Individual Factors

2.1.1 Professional Knowledge

The professional knowledge mastered by the graduates is the most critical factor influencing their choice of career. The demands of the translation market largely determine whether they opt for a career in translation. Based on information collected from nationwide job postings for translators, while some employers do not explicitly require applicants to have graduated in English, they do specify a requirement for applicants to hold an English proficiency certificate, implying a preference for candidates with a bachelor's degree in English. Additionally, a minority of recruiting units in fields such as finance, economics, accounting, medicine, engineering, and electrical industries explicitly require candidates to have relevant academic backgrounds or solid knowledge in related fields. This suggests that among applicants to such units, Master's graduates in translation who majored in fields other than English at the undergraduate level, or non-English majors with strong English skills, hold advantageous positions. Regarding the certificates required by employers, most do not have specific requirements. Among those that do, candidates are typically asked to hold certificates such as the China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters(CATTI), Test for English Majors-Band 8 (TEM-8), College English Test-6(CET-6), or achieve specified scores in overseas English proficiency tests such as IELTS or TOEFL. Government agencies, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises particularly emphasize the need for candidates to hold TEM-8 or CATTI Level 1 or 2 translation or interpretation certificates. Private companies like Baidu, Tencent, Alibaba, Huawei, and NetEase have more lenient requirements for English-related certificates, typically requiring candidates to possess either a TEM-8 certificate, CATTI Level 2 certificate, a score of 7 or higher in IELTS, or 100 or higher in TOEFL (Xu, 2022).

In addition to basic English proficiency and translation skills, employers generally place a high demand on bilingual abilities, such as "excellent English reading and writing skills," "solid Chinese and English language proficiency," and "strong Chinese language organizational and expressive abilities." These requirements are sometimes prioritized over practical translation skills. Apart from translation work, some employers also expect candidates to take on responsibilities such as proofreading and editing, business communication, writing meeting summaries, and drafting documents or technical writing in the future, indicating that bilingual skills are not only fundamental to translation ability but also crucial for fulfilling other job duties (Gao, 2024).

Beyond explicit abilities like language proficiency and translation expertise, market demand also highly values implicit skills such as technical and tool proficiency, as well as soft skills. With

advancements in technologies like neural network machine translation and ChatGPT, proficiency in general computer literacy is explicitly required by nearly one-third of recruiting units. A considerable number of language service providers also require proficiency in software such as CAD, Photoshop, and Visio (Gao, 2024).

Furthermore, soft skills constitute an important part of a translator's professional competence, with work attitude, communication skills, teamwork awareness, and physical and mental qualities particularly valued by employers. These skills play a positive role in enhancing competitive advantage in the workplace (Hubscher-Davidson, 2021).

Possessing these foundational abilities serves as a gateway for MTI graduates to enter the translation industry. Without these translation-related competencies, MTI graduates may find it challenging to compete in the translation industry and lack the confidence to undertake translation tasks, whether on a part-time or full-time basis.

2.1.2 Employment Concepts

The concept of employment refers to an individual's viewpoints and attitudes towards choosing a career and work. It is influenced by various factors, and each person's inclination towards employment varies greatly, including personal values, expectations about employment, job preferences, negative psychological factors, and others. Traditional employment views often held that securing a position in national institutions or similar stable careers was ideal, but contemporary employment concepts require a reinterpretation. Today, employment is seen as obtaining legitimate income through one's own intelligence and labor, thereby serving society and achieving personal development (Li, 2020). This shift has diversified career choices for many graduates with Master's degrees in Translation and Interpretation (MTI).

2.2 *External Environmental Factors*

2.2.1 Social Factors

With the booming translation market, numerous translation companies have emerged. Some of these companies, in a bid to attract clients, relentlessly lower prices to secure business opportunities. The resulting price wars have triggered vicious competition that not only severely impacts translation quality but also risks damaging the reputation of these companies. Moreover, it becomes challenging to ensure that translators receive fair compensation (Chen, 2020). Chen Shunyi points out that overall quality in China's translation service market is low. The industry's development has not taken a healthy trajectory. The ongoing market chaos caused by low-price competition and inadequate product quality control is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. Many MTI students feel disheartened by the gap between their expectations and the market reality. Consequently, when contemplating changes in their career plans, they experience anxiety and uncertainty about pursuing a career in the translation industry (Chen, 2020).

2.2.2 Family Factors

Family is also a significant factor influencing the employment choices of MTI graduates, including

factors such as family economic conditions, location, parents' education level, and professions. For ordinary families, parents generally have limited knowledge of societal employment information and often prefer their children to pursue traditional professions like doctors or teachers. They initially expect their children to secure ideal jobs, and if those expectations are not met, both parties experience considerable pressure. In contrast, families with abundant social resources encourage students to be independent and self-reliant, avoiding excessive dependence on family resources, fostering personal capabilities through practical work experience, and cultivating innovative spirits (Li, 2024).

2.3 School Factors

2.3.1 Education Quality and Reputation

As early as 2008, Qian Mingxia and others utilized the theory of grey systems and employed grey relational analysis to identify the main influencing factors of university graduates' employment. Through the establishment of a grey relational analysis model, they ranked these factors. The study revealed that the brand of the university is a limiting factor in the employment of university graduates (Qian, 2008). Li Feng and others believe that the social status and influence of high-level universities determine higher starting points for their students' employment. This is because "Project 985" universities provide more educational support, leading to greater self-investment and higher comprehensive abilities among their students (Li, 2012). Mu Lei studied the current status of MTI education development in the Economic Ministry's 2018 Education and Employment Report. Murray found that the average employment rate for MTI students from 2014 to 2018 was 95%. The employment rate for MTI students from medical and military colleges was 100%, while the rate for normal colleges was the lowest. Although the average employment rate is 95%, which is a very high figure, only 59.5% of MTI students work in language services after graduation. Despite the large number of people, the proportions of MTI graduates from comprehensive universities, scientific and technological universities, and language universities who work in language services are relatively low (Mu, 2020). In addition, Feng Pengcheng found that the results of the three-year MTI training program and the two-year training program were significantly different. For students in the three-year MTI program, they have ample time to explore and plan their careers, potentially resulting in clearer and more reasonable career goals and increased self-efficacy in employment. In addition to career planning, they also have more time to accumulate practical experience through internships, which can help them establish competitiveness in the job market and protect them from feeling inadequate during job searches (Feng, 2022).

2.3.2 Employment Services and Support

Insufficient employment support and psychological support are also two factors contributing to career anxiety among MTI students. Strengthening employment guidance and support for MTI students can help them avoid aimless job searches and thereby improve employment outcomes (Deng, 2020). Many translation master's graduates feel pressure due to lack of family employment support, anxiety about handling job interviews, and distress from missing job information and opportunities (Feng, 2022).

Many universities are now expanding job opportunities through multiple channels and enhancing the quality of employment services through various means.

3. Comprehensive Literature Analysis

3.1 Influence of Individual Factors on Career Choices of Translation Master's Graduates

A survey on the employment outcomes of Master of Translation (MTI) graduates from Xi'an International Studies University revealed that multiple respondents felt that their translation skills and basic language abilities were insufficient. Additionally, the two-year MTI program had caused them to gradually lose passion and interest in the translation industry, which differed significantly from their ideal career aspirations. One respondent mentioned: "The two years of study and training have given me a clear understanding of my abilities. I still find myself lacking in translation and language skills. I believe I am not qualified to be a translator. Therefore, I now have a clearer understanding of my capabilities and a more precise career plan." (Li, 2020).

A similar survey conducted among MTI graduates in Henan Province showed that out of 306 interviewed graduates, 268 were employed in jobs unrelated to translation, while only 38 were engaged in translation-related work. This indicates a significant deviation between their employment positions and their field of study. Among the 268 graduates working in non-translation fields, the majority were employed in education, with salaries ranging from medium to upper-medium levels. However, an investigation into the compensation for translation work revealed that most translators earn between 50 to 100 RMB per thousand Chinese characters translated (both for Chinese-to-English and English-to-Chinese translations). These figures indicate relatively low income for translators, leading to low job satisfaction, lower happiness indices, and a lack of fulfillment (Cao, 2019). Follow-up interviews found that, compared to securing a job they love with lower pay, more students preferred jobs that offer higher and more stable incomes. Personal career values play a significant role in their career choices.

3.2 The Impact of External Environmental Factors on the Career Choices of Master's in Translation Graduates

Based on the employment data of translation graduates in the "2016 China Language Service Industry Development Report" and the "National MTI Education and Employment Survey Report," the survey results on the career development space in the language service industry in the "2016 China Language Service Industry Development Report" show low recognition of the language service industry. Most practitioners in the language service industry do not consider their work to be high-income jobs, and career development space is limited. According to the "National MTI Education and Employment Survey Report," 32% of surveyed MTI graduates did not find suitable translation-related job positions when looking for work; 21% indicated that the translation industry is chaotic, with most translation companies being small in scale and offering poor benefits; 16% of respondents believe that considering the long term, the career development of full-time translators is limited; 11% find the work of full-time

translators boring and unappealing; 4% of graduates think that the challenges of full-time translation are significant, life is irregular, and income is heavily influenced by company performance, leading them to be unwilling to choose translation-related work after graduation (Ruan, 1992).

In a survey on the causes of career anxiety among MTI students, regarding the job market aspect, all seven students interviewed from Beijing Foreign Studies University expressed anxiety about the fierce competition in the job market. They all mentioned feeling anxious due to limited job openings available for MTI graduates and increasing competition from graduates of other majors. Six students expressed concerns about the long-term prospects of full-time translation or interpretation careers. The same number of students also worried about the income potential in these roles. Four students voiced concerns about the advancements in translation technology. Additionally, four students felt anxious because they perceived higher job market demands compared to previous times. Lastly, four students expressed frustration over potentially having to change or lower their employment standards (Feng, 2022).

The results show that most graduates consider the employment prospects of the translation major to be unfavorable. On one hand, they worry about their insufficient translation skills and fear they cannot handle high-level translation work. On the other hand, due to the current market situation where most translation companies are unregulated, small in scale, and mainly private enterprises, the development prospects and employment environment are unsatisfactory, leading to uncertainty about whether to choose the translation industry in the future. The translation industry, once thriving, has now become a "sunset industry." The instability and bleak development prospects of the translation industry make MTI graduates cautious about choosing it as a career.

On July 24, 2021, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Students in Compulsory Education" ("Double Reduction" policy). This policy imposes unprecedented regulations on off-campus training institutions, with strict requirements in areas such as license approval, listing financing, daily operations, personnel, prepayment, and advertising, and sets clear goals for reducing burdens effectively for students and parents within one year and achieving significant burden reduction within three years. From July 2021 to June 2022, supporting policy documents for the "Double Reduction" policy were successively introduced. In September 2023, the state promulgated the "Interim Administrative Measures for Administrative Penalty in Off-Campus Training," clearly defining illegal acts and legal responsibilities in off-campus training and proposing to protect compliance while combating violations. On February 8, 2024, the Ministry of Education publicly solicited opinions on the "Regulations on the Management of Off-Campus Training," effectively combining existing policies such as the "Double Reduction" and local practices, with further clarification of the bottom-line requirements. The continuously improving national policies on off-campus training have also affected the market for extracurricular training classes, leading to the closure of more and more training institutions. MTI graduates are increasingly

skeptical about choosing jobs in educational institutions after graduation.

3.3 The Impact of School Factors on the Career Choices of Master's in Translation Graduates

In the employment survey results of translation graduates from Xian International Studies University, two students aspiring to become translators indicated that their two years of training had given them a deep understanding of translation work. They had mastered scientific translation methods and accumulated extensive practice, which made them more confident in becoming translators. Even for those who did not prioritize becoming translators, the training was a reason they did not completely reject this career path. Although they might not be fully competent at the moment, they would still consider appropriate translation-related job opportunities, whether full-time or part-time, because they had learned the translation methods and believed that through practice, they could become competent in this work. A survey respondent from Xi'an International Studies University said, "I think the translation practice methods we learned at school are very useful, which gives me some confidence in becoming a translator. Even if I am currently at the bottom of the pyramid in the translation industry, by mastering these methods, I can continuously climb up through accumulated practical experience" (Li, 2020).

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the above literature, we can conclude that among the factors influencing the career choices of Master's in Translation graduates, individual factors play the most critical role. Without certain translation skills, MTI students almost do not consider the translation industry when making career choices. Similarly, without a certain level of English proficiency, MTI graduates would not consider careers related to English. External factors and school factors also have some influence on career choices. The development of the translation market and the salaries of translators are directly linked to the career choices of translation graduates, with graduates favoring more stable or higher-paying jobs. School factors also influence graduates' choices to some extent. Different training methods across schools result in varying levels of competence among MTI students, and the job opportunities provided by schools are often the first employment platforms that translation graduates encounter.

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