

## A Survey on Basic Translation Textbooks for MTI

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**Supported by** the Double First-class Construction Project of North China Electric Power University (Baoding).

Received 3 September 2019; accepted 29 November 2019  
Published online 26 December 2019

### Abstract

Despite the rapid development of MTI education, current textbooks for Basic Translation course can not meet the teaching objectives proposed in *The Teaching Program Guidelines for MTI* and *The Basic Requirements for MTI*. Textbooks have such problems as insufficient extra-curricular translation practice, lack of scientific guidelines, less consideration of the assistant role of translation training platforms and a big gap between the content of textbooks and that of CATTI Level 2. Considering the teaching objectives and the expectations of language service market, it is suggested that textbooks for Basic Translation course need to provide parallel text materials, increase the amount of extra-curricular training materials, provide scientific guidance for extra-curricular practice and select training materials with similar difficulty of CATTI Level 2.

**Key words:** MTI; Textbooks; Translation teaching; CATTI

Wang, L. Y. (2019). A Survey on Basic Translation Textbooks for MTI. *Canadian Social Science*, 15(12), 46-50. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/11479>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11479>

### INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council approved “Master of Translation and

Interpreting”, or MTI for short, and 15 colleges and universities were authorized for a trial that year. After more than ten years of development, as of May 2019, there have been 253 institutions approved to award MTI degree in China. In a short period of time, MTI was able to achieve such a significant achievement, which is worthy of translation industry’s rejoicing. However, there are potential problems before and after the rapid development, among which the editing and compiling of textbooks is one of them. Textbooks not only cover the teaching content of a major and a course, but also inherit the teaching philosophy, so its status and important role cannot be and should not be underestimated. According to the training program guidelines proposed by the China National Committee for Translation & Interpreting Education (CNCTIE), “Basic Translation” is one of the compulsory courses for students, either in the translation direction or in the interpreting direction. Accordingly, to investigate the current situation and development of the teaching materials for this course has a far-reaching significance for improving the quality of MTI teaching.

### TEACHING OBJECTIVES FOR MTI

One of the first issues to consider when writing textbooks is how to be consistent with the positioning and teaching objectives of the major. Closely related to the objectives of MTI are two documents issued by CNCTIE: *The Teaching Program Guidelines for MTI* (hereinafter referred to as the TPG) and the “*The Basic Requirements for MTI* (hereinafter referred to as BR).

TPG proposes “adopting workplace simulation teaching method through organizing translation practice, group discussions and workshop practice”. One of the classroom teaching requirements for MTI is “project-based teaching, which is expected to introduce professional translation and interpreting tasks into the classroom”. One of the extra-curricular teaching requirements is

“using translation laboratories or computer-assisted translation laboratories to strengthen the realism and practicality of translation and interpreting abilities training”. The most obvious difference between MTI and academic postgraduate education in translation is that the former “emphasizes the development of translation practice ability and the analysis of translation cases, with translation practice running through the entire teaching process, while the latter focuses on the research of translation theories”.

BR proposes that MTI education should “consider the needs and development of translation and interpreting practice, as well as the situation of language service industry in China”. Hereby, it means “the classroom teaching of MTI should be closely integrated with extra-curricular translation and interpreting practice; as extra-curricular practice is an extension and expansion of classroom teaching, it is an important way to cultivate and develop students’ translation ability; practice should be carried out under the guidance of teachers in a purposeful, planned and organized manner”. In order to integrate classroom teaching with extra-curricular practice, students are expected to, under the organization of teachers, perform practice of translation in ... computer-assisted translation laboratories ... and be evaluated by teachers”.

It can be seen that in addition to meeting those requirements issued by the two documents, the MTI education also needs to take into consideration the recruitment expectations of the language service job market. To achieve this goal, MTI students need to understand those expectations of the translation job market. At present, China Accreditation Test for Translator and Interpreters (hereinafter referred to as CATTI) is entrusted by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security to implement a unified, professional translation certification examination across the country. When CNCTIE evaluates the MTI education level of each institute, the pass rate of CATTI level 2 is an important indicator.

The examination syllabus of CATTI Level 2 reads: “English-Chinese translation speed is 500-600 words per hour, Chinese-English speed of 300-400 Chinese characters per hour”. The content of the test includes: English-Chinese translation about 900 words, and Chinese-English translation about 600 Chinese characters. The total test time is 3 hours. A natural conclusion can be drawn that no matter whether it is English-to-Chinese or Chinese-to-English translation, CATTI Level 2 takes the upper limit of speed as the assessment standard.

English-Chinese translation section of each examination paper includes two essays. From the ten examination papers from 2014 to 2018 (2 tests in one year), 16 of the 20 essays are originally selected from foreign newspapers, magazines with high credibility and strong authority, or even from television news reports broadcast on authoritative media. Ten essays are selected

from one newspaper—*The New York Times*. The themes cover a wide range, including: humanities, economics, science and technology, geography, history, education, society and so on. Chinese-English translation section of each paper also contains two essays. Most of the 20 essays in the ten examinations are selected from authoritative governmental media in China, leaders’ speeches, white papers, etc. Media essays are mainly selected from: State Council Information Office, People’s Daily Online, Xinhuanet, China News Network, China Reporting Network. The themes are mostly concerned with hot issues that occurred in the past one or two years, as well as topics closely related to the national economy and people’s livelihood, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, public opinions on the Internet, food security, carbon emissions, mineral resources, and the development of the western region. Speeches include those by President Xi Jinping (4), Premier Li Keqiang (4), Yang Jiechi (1), and Zhang Gaoli (1). Three white papers are: *China’s Mineral Resources Policy*, *China’s Traditional Chinese Medicine* and *Tibet’s Development and Progress*.

Taking comprehensive consideration of TPG, BR, examination syllabus of CATTI Level 2 and the examination content in the past five years, the following four training objectives related to the development of translation practice ability have been extracted: 1) Attention should be paid to training students’ translation practice ability by combining classroom teaching and extra-curricular practice; 2) Teachers should reasonably arrange the extra-curricular practice expected to be completed by MTI students; 3) The extra-curricular practice should make full use of the laboratory translation training platforms; 4) the difficulty, length and themes of MTI training materials need to adapt to the CATTI Level 2.

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## THE CURRENT SITUATION OF MTI TEXTBOOKS

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There are so many textbooks on translation and interpretation that it is impossible to survey all of them. One of the key criteria for selecting materials for this survey is whether the textbooks target at MTI students. Those targeting at the academic research students are excluded in the scope of this survey for the time being, because of the essentially different teaching objectives designed for academic research students and MTI students. Another criterion is whether the focus is on translation practice. TPG and BR have repeatedly made clear that the objective of MTI is to cultivate translation talents with practical abilities. Textbooks without clear indication of its targeted audience can also be included in the current survey on the condition that it emphasizes to develop readers’ translation practice abilities. The third criterion is whether it is suitable for the Basic Translation

course. According to TPG, it is a compulsory and basic course for MTI students. Textbooks suitable only for specialized courses in translation or interpretation are not included in this survey. The corresponding textbooks for MTI Basic Translation course have been found by inputting the keywords “basic translation”, “translation”, “English-to-Chinese”, or “Chinese-to-English” in the National Library and Dangdang, China’s largest online book store. Four types of textbooks have been picked out. See Table 1 for details. Among them, *A Concise*

*Course of Translation* and *English-Chinese Translation Practice* are textbooks purposefully written for MTI students. The former claims even more clearly in its introduction that it is written for the Basic Translation course. Although the two editions of Dr. Lin Chaolun do not indicate whether they target at MTI students, they have been selected for this survey because they emphasize translation practice, and their degree of difficulty is suitable for MTI students.

**Table 1**  
**Survey List of Textbooks for MTI Basic Translation Course (2007-2019)**

No.	Title	Author	Press	Publishing Time
1	A Concise Course of Translation	He Gangqiang	Foreign Language Teaching and Researching Press	2009.3
2	Field Translation (From English to Chinese)	Lin Chaolun	Foreign Language Teaching and Researching Press	2011.10
3	Field Translation (From Chinese to English)	Lin Chaolun	Foreign Language Teaching and Researching Press	2014.1
4	English-Chinese Translation Practice	Fang Xing	Wuhan University Press	2016.6

## PROBLEMS OF CURRENT TEXTBOOKS

At present, due to historical and practical reasons, most of the MTI teachers received traditional teaching education on translatology, which mainly involves abstract translation theories. So they are facing a serious and prominent problem—how to transform themselves from a teacher teaching abstract translational theories to one skilled at teaching translation practice. At the same time, most teachers in China prefer to use officially published textbooks because of various institutional rules issued by their universities. In this case, the quality of teaching materials plays an important role in ensuring MTI teaching quality. Whether teachers can implement the objectives proposed by TPG and BR, and whether their teaching contents and methods can meet the needs of the future job market in the language service industry, these are important and abstract principles to evaluate MTI teaching materials.

Compared with the comparatively abstract principles, the four teaching objectives (mentioned at the end of part 2) extracted from TPG and BR can be regarded as practical indicators to evaluate whether the textbook can meet the needs of MTI teaching. Based on these indicators, we can find the following shortcomings of the current textbooks.

First, insufficient extra-curricular translation practice. All four selected textbooks are provided with a certain amount of practical translation exercises. There are extra-curricular exercises in each section of *A Concise Course of Translation*, *Field Translation (From English to Chinese)* and *Field Translation (From Chinese to English)*, but the total amount of exercises in each section is more or less the same with that of the translation examples used to explain and analyze the translation methods in the the same section. Contrast to the three textbooks, each chapter of *English-Chinese Translation Practice* contains

four to five sections and one of them is purposefully dedicated to translation practice, while the rest is the analysis of translation methods. The practical exercises are comprised of two to three short essays. In total, the amount of practical exercises for the entire book is far less than the examples used for teaching purposes. Although it is difficult to find a criterion for measuring the adequacy of practice, teachers and experts in the language service industry generally acknowledge that only through a large number of translation practices can translation quality be improved. When the amount of extra-curricular practice is less than or equal to the amount of examples for classroom teaching purposes, obviously, it neither fulfil the teaching objectives of MTI education, nor does it meet the basic expectations of professional translators in the job market.

Second, lack of scientific guidelines. Limited amount of translation exercises provided by current textbooks lead students to find practicing materials by themselves to reach the graduation requirements for MTI students, that is, 150,000 words/characters translation practice. None of the four textbooks mention which standards should be followed and how to reasonably find suitable materials for their current translation level.

Third, less consideration of the assistant role of translation training platforms. On one hand, in response to the teaching objectives of MTI, manufacturers in China have launched a number of translation training platforms, such as the LSCAT translation training platform. On the other hand, professional translators also rely on various translation softwares in their work. Therefore, a profound understanding of the differences between machine translation and human translation, and high proficiency in post-translation editing skills will greatly improve translators’ work efficiency. In addition to providing abundant translation materials, the

translation training platforms also play an important role in helping students to efficiently complete post-editing work on the basis of recognizing the differences between machine translation and human translation. However, none of the four textbooks keep up with the current development trend in the translation job market, and still focus only on human translation, ignoring the function of machine translation.

Finally, a big gap between the content of textbooks and that of CATTI Level 2. The materials of CATTI are relatively complete texts. Of the four textbooks, *English-Chinese Translation Practice* is the only one which selects discourses rather than sentences or paragraphs. Although the genres of the practice materials of the current textbooks include both artistic and scientific ones, and the style is more formal, most of the materials are relatively outdated and do not keep pace with the development of the times. Except for the chapters on news translation methods, few materials are selected from the latest foreign newspapers or magazines. Additionally, these textbooks rarely choose government documents or speeches by leaders as Chinese-English translation practicing materials.

## THE NECESSITY OF TEXTBOOK RESEARCH

It has been 13 years since MTI was authorized, but textbooks suitable for the Basic Translation course can meet neither the teaching objectives of improving MTI students' translation ability, nor the expectations of the job market for professional translators.

First and foremost, the number of textbooks needs to be increased. Currently, there are only four books, among which Lin Chaolun's textbooks are divided into two: English to Chinese and Chinese to English. In fact, there are only three types of textbooks. Compared with such textbooks as legal translation, scientific translation, and literary translation, the number of textbooks compiled for Basic Translation course is too small. This reflects that only a small number of scholars are engaged in the study of MTI teaching materials.

Then, the method of how to process the information flow in original and target texts needs scientific guidance. Existing textbooks tend to focus more on the skills of translating separate sentences, rather than the method of processing the information flow in both original and target texts. Lin Chaolun, based on his translation experience for many years, shares with readers his unique methods of how to process the complicated information flow. It is more suitable for the actual level of MTI students, because they have undergone a certain amount of translation training in the undergraduate stage, and they are more proficient in the conversion of English and Chinese sentences. However, they still need to receive scientific

training on how to process the complex information flow.

Finally, there is an urgent need of textbooks combining classroom teaching and scientific guidance of extra-curricular training. Most of the MTI education system covers a 2-year learning. One of the two years is reserved for students to complete an internship in a translation company, that is, there is only 1 year for them to attend classes. In this short period of time, they have to quickly and efficiently improve their translation ability. Classroom teaching cannot be the only way for students to reach the MTI education objectives as well as the expectations of future job market. Plenty of practices are inescapable. If the training materials are close to CATTI, students will have a greater chance to find an ideal internship and adapt to the future job market.

## SUGGESTIONS ON TEXTBOOK COMPILATION

BR proposes that MTI graduate students should have five basic abilities: language ability, translation ability, intercultural communication ability, encyclopedic knowledge acquisition ability, and team collaboration ability. In order to cultivate these five abilities of students, and at the same time, take the current situation of textbooks into consideration, here are some suggestions for the compilation of textbooks for the Basic Translation course.

First, providing parallel text materials. Translators are responsible for obtaining information from the original text and transmitting the information in the target language. Mastery of the lexical and syntactical rules of the mother tongue and the foreign language, and a good bilingual sense are the most basic requirements for professional translators. In addition, qualified translators should master stylistic knowledge. Textbooks attaching importance to cultivate students' bilingual textual ability and bilingual genre ability can help students acquire stylistic knowledge. Providing students with parallel texts can help students perceive and analyze stylistic features, guide them make appropriate preparations before translation, and bring students' translations closer to the requirements of specific styles.

In addition, increasing the amount of extra-curricular training materials. The ratio of extra-curricular exercises and teaching examples in the existing four textbooks is between 0.8-1.5, far from enough to meet the requirements for training qualified translators. If what teachers do is to teach translation examples in the classroom, it is difficult to improve students' bilingual conversion ability. Students need to complete a lot of practical training exercises after class. When writing textbooks for Basic Translation course, it is recommended to increase the ratio of practical training exercises to examples used for classroom teaching. The ideal ratio may be between 6-8, which



may help students master the bilingual conversion skills efficiently through a large number of translation practice.

Next, providing scientific guidance for extra-curricular practice. Students' translation quality varies from person to person. Students with lower translation quality need to improve their basic translation skills, for instance bilingual conversion skills of sentences. Students with a higher level of translation quality may need to shorten the time of basic skills training and increase the practice of developing genre senses and selecting appropriate translation strategies. However, due to lack of experience, it is difficult for students themselves to judge which type of training materials is more suitable for basic bilingual conversion skills training, and which is more suitable for developing other translation abilities. Therefore, it is the teachers or authors of textbooks that are expected to classify training materials and provide scientific guidance for students.

Finally, selecting training materials with similar difficulty of CATTI Level 2. The pass rate of CATTI Level 2 is one of the important indicators to evaluate the quality of MTI education. However, there is a certain

gap between the current textbooks and CATTI Level 2 in terms of themes, difficulty, length, etc. Authors should take CATTI Level 2 as a benchmark and emphasize the timeliness when selecting training materials.

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