

Reconsidering Interpreter Training Models in Light of Divergent Contexts: a Euro-Chinese Perspective

Jie Liu

School of Foreign Languages, National Huaqiao University, China

j.l.liu@uu.nl

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For the past 50 years, the 'Paris School'-inspired interpreter training model, based on work done at the *École Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs* (ESIT) and endorsed by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), has been the dominant model for the training of interpreters in the West. Many of the world's leading interpreting training programmes have been inspired by and owe their success to the Paris School training model. It is undoubtedly that the ESIT/AIIC approach has been truly influential in the training of interpreters. However, it must also be acknowledged that these training models were produced with a Western context and with Western social, economic and cultural conditions in mind. Yet over the past 20 to 30 years, the world has

seen many socio-economic changes—with the economic centre of gravity beginning to shift from the ‘old’ developed North America and Western Europe to new centres in the world and in East Asia in particular. With that in mind, few studies have considered whether the ESIT/AIIC model of interpreting training is the optimum choice or even still relevant in ‘developing’¹ or ‘emerging’ economy environments such as Brazil, India, and China with very different kinds of demand driven by their involvement in international markets (Gile 2006; Mu and Wang 2011). Such rapid and intense changes in the structure of global economic relations might require a reconsideration of some of the standard ‘one-size-fits-all’ interpreting frameworks currently used. Indeed, rather than being universally applicable, interpreting models influenced by the likes of the Paris School might actually require reconsideration in the light of a more nuanced reappraisal of the importance of context.

The reappraisal of such interpreting models in this thesis takes as its focus contextual conditions in China—one of the largest developing economies in the world. A major argument put forward is that interpreter training should not be shaped by universal laws and methods, but should be more receptive to very context-specific conditions, thus retaining an element of flexibility. Effective interpreter training models should be shaped by both the contextual demand for skills (which are informed by economic organization and the opportunities offered in such an economy), and the contextual supply of skills available. These points are put forward in this thesis through an explicit focus on conditions in China, where the diversified interpreting market (quite different from that in Europe), different institutional foundations for interpreting, and generally lower levels of proficiency in students’ ‘B’ languages, which challenge the wider feasibility of the Paris-School influenced training models.

The thesis critiques the application of theoretical interpreter training models in the abstract, and it suggests that all models, however theoretically informed, must be flexible and fluid enough to account for divergent social, economic, and cultural contexts. To that end, the thesis follows a number of logical steps. First, the development of interpreting training models over the past 60 years is traced with particular focus on the core principles and application of the key 'European' models such as the ESIT/AIIC and their embedded European context. The discussion also introduces some 'home-grown' Chinese interpreting models such as the XiaDa and the GDUFs which are representative of the models in use in China. An emphasis is placed upon how important and influential these models have been to the discipline. In the second part, the focus turns to the issue of context. In part A, the relevant dimensions of 'context' for interpreting are explained, focusing on the 'micro-linguistic'; the 'teaching-learning process'; and the 'macro-historical' context. The situation in China is considered with respect to these three contextual dimensions. In the third section, the principles and application of the ESIT/AIIC and the XiaDa models of interpreting training are assessed in light of the specific conditions present in modern-day China. It is demonstrated that even if these interpreting models clearly have strengths, they are nonetheless problematic when applied to such unfamiliar or 'alien' environments. In fact, the specific conditions in China call for a different approach, which should be geared towards tackling the delicate relationship between 'anxiety' and 'empowerment' in the interpreting education classroom. In the final parts of this thesis, a number of suggestions and possible solutions to better educate the target 'middle-layer' group of consecutive interpreters are provided, as well as a contextual model for interpreting education.

NOTES

1. The term 'developing' is taken from the International Human Development Index, 1980-2014 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/>), and is distinct from those 'developed' or 'underdeveloped' countries.