

The market's expectations of interpreters in China: A content analysis of job ads for in-house interpreters

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ABSTRACT

Market-needs surveys have been conducted to bridge the market-academia gap by eliciting data from students, trainers, course profiles, graduates, professional translators and interpreters, clients, and employers. Yet surveys of interpreting market needs based on content analysis of job advertisements are rare. The current study aims to investigate interpreting market demands in China, in terms of qualifications, interpreting modes and directions, and competences, as well as the difference in demands between LSPs (language service providers) and non-LSPs. An eleven-step content analysis method was applied to the coding of 400 interpreting job ads for in-house English-Chinese interpreters. The results highlight that the market entry threshold in China is low and that the dominant mode is consecutive interpreting. They also indicate that the market requires interpreters to both interpret and translate into and from English, prefers versatile language users with prior interpreting experience and overseas experience, expects physiological, psychological and interpersonal competences, and demands professional ethics, computer literacy, as well as a background in certain areas of thematic knowledge. Another finding is that LSPs and non-LSPs have different expectations. While LSPs are more demanding in terms of prior interpreting experience and accreditation status, non-LSPs expect more versatile employees.

KEYWORDS

Interpreting market needs, market-academia gap, job advertisements, content analysis, curriculum modification.

1. Introduction

To produce graduates fully prepared for the translation and interpreting (T&I) market, training institutions need to align curriculum with professional realities. Unfortunately, the widening gap between university programmes and market requirements needs to be filled (Durand 2005; Gouadec 2007; Thelen 2016). As early as the 1970s, how to narrow the gap between T&I teaching and fast-changing market demands has been a great concern of trainers (Aderman and Rogers 2000). Since then, it has been a central focus of discussion in the T&I studies literature.

Scholarly efforts have been made from different perspectives. Some scholars attempted to bridge the divide by designing instructional activities, for example, simulations (González-Davies and Enríquez-Raído 2016), projects (Galán-Mañas 2011), field observations (Chang and Wu 2017), internships (Astley and Torres Hostench 2017), or mentorships (Olalla-Soler 2019). Others have touched upon it in terms of assessment: for instance,

the use of professional portfolios in training (Galán-Mañas 2019). If instructional methodologies and assessments are to minimise the academia-market gap, a prerequisite is that they should be based on teaching aims and outcomes that best match labour market needs. According to Kelly’s (2005) curricular design process, curriculum development starts with identifying social and market needs, and then moves on to formulating teaching aims and outcomes, which lays the foundation for designing instructional activities and planning assessment. Therefore, another important direction of scholarly exploration is concerned with identifying, through a comparative lens, what the market needs are and/or if they are incorporated in institutional training.

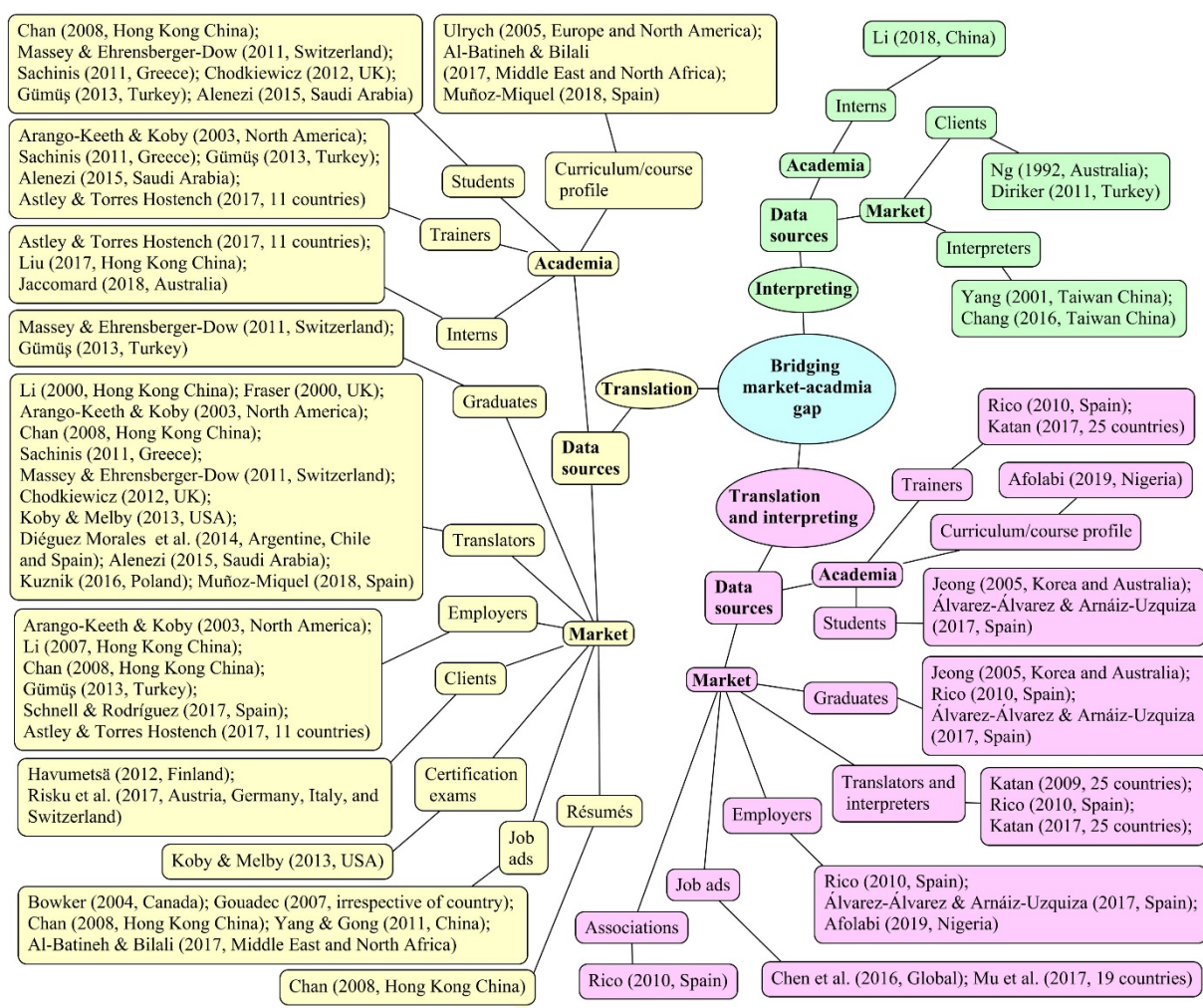


Figure 1. A conceptual map of research on bridging the academia-market gap

As seen in Figure 1, a conceptual map based on the current literature, bridging the academia-market gap is a widely explored topic. Data has been collected from the market (employers, professional translators and interpreters, clients, graduates, certification exams, job ads and résumés)

and academia (curriculum and course profiles, trainers, students and interns) through questionnaires, interviews or content analysis.

So far, job ads have been rarely used in analysing the requirements of the interpreting market. As an important data source, analysis of job ads is a logical starting point to describe the labour market (Kelly 2005) and it can reveal the market reality from a practical perspective. For this reason, Torres Hostench (2010) calls for more surveys of job ads.

In the current survey, the authors will take advantage of online job ads for in-house English-Chinese interpreters as a data source in order to investigate market expectations of interpreters, in terms of qualifications, modes and direction of interpreting, and competences, through content analysis. Additionally, the article will examine if there are differences in demands between LSPs (language service providers) and non-LSPs. The focus will be on the Chinese market. The reasons for such a decision were two-fold. Firstly, China has a large market for interpreting services. With the implementation of the “Go Global” strategy and the “Belt and Road Initiative,” the market demand for interpreting services is increasing significantly. Secondly, China is home to more than 200 translation and interpreting programmes belonging to two tiers, BTI (Bachelor of Translation and Interpreting, four years in duration) and MTI (Master of Translation and Interpreting, two or three years in duration). Different from the European context where efforts have been made to achieve consistency in educational standards and quality as a result of the Bologna Process, the programmes in China are not comparable in terms of recruitment of students, curricular structures, and graduation requirements. Under such circumstances, feedback from the market would inform curricula development and update. Considering the context-specific nature of market demands, the focus of the current survey is on the Chinese market and on interpreting, instead of on the international market and on both translation and interpreting. Given that market demands and the T&I curriculum in China are language-specific, the focus is placed on English-Chinese interpreting. It is hoped that a narrowed focus may provide more targeted guidance for curriculum modification.

Given the ever-changing nature of the market, surveys on market demands may become obsolete quite quickly and thus timely updating is necessary (Torres Hostench 2010). Based on previous studies on job analysis, the current survey on market demands (qualifications, interpreting modes and direction, and interpreter competences) has implications for curriculum developers, instructors, interpreting students and professional interpreters. First of all, this survey provides market information for curriculum developers and instructors to modify and update their English-Chinese

interpreting curriculum, so as to adapt training to specific needs. Next, the results help English-Chinese interpreting students make more focused preparations for their future, if they want to be professional interpreters. By highlighting the differences in demands between LSPs and non-LSPs, the current study can also help students to make specific preparations, no matter what kind of job positions they want to apply for in future. Moreover, the results may help English-Chinese interpreters identify the required areas of skills and market trends so that they can continue their lifelong learning.

It should be made clear that the authors' stance is not for curriculum developers and instructors to simply incorporate all the findings of the current survey and change their curricula to ensure absolute alignment. Instead, the bulk of a curriculum is supposed to be based on an agreed set of interpreter competences, which can be formulated by consulting instructors who are active interpreters and the literature. Moreover, any changes in the curriculum should be based on results from reliable data analysis of the market in a specific geographical area within which the university is located. Results from job ads analysis, as well as those from analysis of other sources of market needs, should be triangulated so as to provide insights for essential curriculum update, on the condition that the data are from the same or a similar market.

2. A critical review of previous studies

Seven studies have used job ads as a data source to inform T&I education. Table 1 presents a summary of the seven studies, including author, ads type, geographic scope, sources of ads, sample size, and research method.

Interpreting job ads have been rarely used in analysing requirements of the interpreting market. Prior studies, for example, Bowker (2004), Chan (2008), and Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017), have surveyed translation job ads in the Canadian, Hong Kong, and Middle Eastern and North African markets. Mu *et al.* (2017), as well as Chen *et al.* (2016), analysed both translation and interpreting ads. The interpreting job ads were collected from LSPs in 19 countries. Since needs are market-specific, such a wide geographical scope and a lack of a target market focus may limit the value of the findings to curriculum modification. Some of the relevant findings of Mu *et al.* (2017) will be reported and compared with findings of the current study in the results and discussion section.

The methodology of content analysis has not been applied systematically. Although prior studies used content or thematic analysis, there was a lack of detailed reporting on ad corpus design, coding steps and reliability

checking. Such flaws may have affected the validity and reliability of these studies.

Author	Ad type	Geographic scope	Sources	Sample size	Methodology
Bowker (2004)	Translation	Canada	Canadian newspapers; The job bulletin board at the school of T&I, University of Ottawa; Canadian online job sites; Two largest Canadian professional translation associations.	301	Coding steps and reliability checking not reported
Gouadec (2007)	Translation	Not stated	Not stated	120	Corpus design, coding steps and reliability checking not reported.
Chan (2008)	Translation	Hong Kong	JobDB.com; South China Morning Post.	66	Coding steps and reliability checking not reported.
Yang & Gong (2011)	Translation	China	Well-known Chinese LSPs.	Not stated	Coding steps and reliability checking not reported.
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Translation & interpreting	Not stated	Official websites of the world's top 100 LSPs.	416	Coding steps and reliability checking not reported.
Al-Batineh & Bilali (2017)	Translation	The Middle East and North Africa	Three top local online job sites.	50	Coding steps and reliability checking not reported.
Mu <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Project management, interpreting, translation & quality management	19 countries worldwide	Official websites of the world's top 100 LSPs.	671	Reliability checking not reported.

Table 1. A review of studies on T&I job ads analysis

Given the inadequate attention to interpreting job ads and methodological flaws in previous studies, the current study aims to investigate interpreting market demands in China through an eleven-step content analysis method, in terms of interpreter qualifications, interpreting modes and directions, and competences, as well as the difference in demands between LSPs and non-LSPs.

3. Theoretical framework

The job ads were coded against three frameworks which were formulated after reviewing relevant literature on qualifications, interpreting modes and directions, and interpreter competences.

Competence component	Definition
Physiological competence	Adaptability to flexible workplaces and working or travelling abroad, a healthy body to undertake high-intensity assignments (e.g. working an extra shift), and stamina (the physical strength to resist or withstand illness and fatigue) (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Lee 2008; Pöchlacker 2004; Russo 2011; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017).
Psychological competence	Cognitive abilities (memory, attention span, and attention split) and personality traits (including, but not limited to, being responsible, patient, detail-oriented, conscientious, quick-witted, quality-focused, enthusiastic, willing to learn, enterprising, hard-working/industrious, confident, flexible, logical, integral, proactive, creative, open to feedback, mature, extroverted, and obedient, as well as having interest in the job, client awareness, affinity, and the ability to execute tasks, manage time, resist stress, and conduct self-reflection) (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Choi 2003; Feinauer and Lesch 2013; Gile 2009; Gentile <i>et al.</i> 1996; Horváth 2010; Kalina 2002; Kornakov 2000; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Lee 2008; Li 2015; Pöchlacker 2004; Riccardi 2005; Russo 2011; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017; Tiselius 2013).
Interpersonal competence	Teamwork spirit, coordination (skills to dispel tension or conflict in workplaces and to negotiate, etc.), and leadership (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Choi 2003; Feinauer and Lesch 2013; Gentile <i>et al.</i> 1996; Kalina 2002; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Li 2015; Pöchlacker 2004; Riccardi 2005; Russo 2011; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017; Smirnov 1997; Tiselius 2013).
Cross-cultural competence	Detect, understand, manage, and exploit cross-cultural differences for effective communication, including non-verbal communication (facial expression, body language, etc.) and culture-specific strategies (tactics to bridge differences between conventions of two cultures) (see Choi 2003; Feinauer and Lesch 2013; Gentile <i>et al.</i> 1996; Kalina 2002; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Lee 2008; Li 2015; Pöchlacker 2004; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017; Smirnov 1997).
Language competence	Bilingual proficiency in listening, editing, public speaking, reading, and writing, as well as proficiency in a second foreign language and in using English as a tool in communication (oral presentation, negotiation, etc.) (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Choi 2003; Feinauer and Lesch 2013; Gile 2009; Gentile <i>et al.</i> 1996; Kalina 2002; Kornakov 2000; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Lee 2008; Li 2015; Pöchlacker 2004; Riccardi 2005; Russo 2011; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017; Smirnov 1997; Tiselius 2013).
Knowledge competence	World knowledge, subject knowledge (business, medicine, engineering, science and technology, law, etc.), and professional ethics (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Choi 2003; Feinauer and Lesch 2013; Gile 2009; Gentile <i>et al.</i> 1996; Kalina 2002; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Lee 2008; Pöchlacker 2004; Riccardi 2005; Russo 2011; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017; Smirnov 1997; Tiselius 2013).
Transfer competence	Language-specific strategies used to switch numbers, names of people and places, certain syntactic patterns, set phrases, etc. (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Kalina 2002; Russo 2011).
Strategic competence	On-site problem-oriented strategies, including anticipation, repair, compression, generalisation, omission, etc. (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Choi 2003; Gile 2009; Kalina 2002; Kornakov 2000; Li 2015; Pöchlacker 2004; Riccardi 2005; Smirnov 1997).
Instrumental competence	Computer literacy and ability to use resources and tools (search engines, electronic corpora, etc.) (see Albl-Mikasa 2012, 2013; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017).

Table 2. Interpreter competence components

The qualifications framework is based on Doyle (2018) and Liu (2013). It includes the dimensions of degree (Doctoral degree, Master's degree or above, Bachelor's degree), major (language, translation and interpreting,

and others), certification (language proficiency certification and interpreting certification), and experience (overseas experience, prior interpreting experience, prior translation-related experience, other work experience, and prior experience in using English as a working language).

The mode and direction framework rests on the work of Pöchhacker (2004, 2015) and van Doorslaer (2007). Based on the relationship between the source and interpreted speech, the four modes against which the ads were coded include consecutive interpreting (CI), simultaneous interpreting (SI), both CI and SI, and translation. Translation was included to check whether interpreters were required by their employers to translate. The three directions are A-B interpreting, B-A interpreting (retour), and both directions.

The third framework is interpreter competence which can be divided into nine categories (Table 2). These are defined based on relevant literature (Albi-Mikasa 2012: 74, 2013: 21; Choi 2003: 99; Feinauer and Lesch 2013; Gile 2009: 8; Gentile *et al.* 1996: 66; Horváth 2010: 146; Kalina 2002: 3; Kornakov 2000: 246; Kuznik and Hurtado Albir 2015: 26; Lee 2008: 166; Pöchhacker 2004: 169; Riccardi 2005: 761; Russo 2011: 10; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017: 6; Smirnov 1997: 219; Tiselius 2013: 7).

4. Methodology

Content analysis is a research method used to study any structured or unstructured written communicative materials and consists of 11 procedures (Cohen *et al.* 2011: 563). The 11 steps observed in the current study are as follows.

Step 1: Clarify the research questions. Four research questions (RQs) were formulated:

- RQ 1: *What qualifications do employers look for in in-house English-Chinese interpreters?*
- RQ 2: *What interpreting modes and directions are in demand?*
- RQ 3: *What competences do employers want in in-house interpreters?*
- RQ 4: *In what areas do LSPs and non-LSPs differ in their demands?*

Step 2: Define the data sources. The current survey leveraged job ads posted on online channels in China. Since job ads normally express employers' requirements in a straightforward way (Cullen 2004: 138), examining job descriptions is a key method to understand the status quo in a specific field (Kelly 2005: 23-24). As stated earlier, the researchers targeted job ads that recruit in-house English-Chinese interpreters, partly

because graduates take a favourable attitude toward in-house positions instead of freelancers in China, and partly because a narrowed focus on a specific language pair may generate more targeted results for curriculum development.

Step 3: Carry out sampling. The survey opted for purposive sampling, “a feature of qualitative research” (Cohen *et al.* 2011: 156). In purposive sampling, a researcher hand-picks the samples based on his/her judgements of samples’ representativeness or the presence of the particular features under study.

Job ads were taken from two public sources. One was WeChat official accounts. They were included because they are checked by young people on a daily basis and offer simple interfaces and require no log-in procedures. The other source was six online recruitment websites in China (the WeChat accounts and recruitment websites are listed at the end of the references). To the best of our knowledge, they represent the top job boards in China in terms of service scope and number of job positions advertised.

The time range was from July 2017 to February 2019, which included four hiring seasons in China: March, April, September, and October. All job ads were posted online within this period.

Four hundred job ads, all those available within the time range, were included. This was assumed to be enough to reach theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation refers to a phase of qualitative data analysis where analysis of additional job ads generates no new evidence in terms of conceptual insights or categories (Bloor and Wood 2006: 164). In qualitative research, it is impossible to calculate the saturation point and set a fixed number of samples. If there were ample samples, an iterative approach to job ads collection and analysis would have been a guarantee. However, since the researchers included all available ads, we believe that four hundred would have reached the saturated sample size.

Each ad was saved in a Word file named after the recruitment unit. The following information was recorded: the name of the recruitment unit, job title, responsibilities and requirements. All data were cleaned by a de-duplication process; for example, the same positions advertised across multiple data sources or re-posted in the same source. After data cleaning, 400 ads were included in the corpus, among which 76 were posted by LSPs and 324 by non-LSPs. Figure 2 is a screenshot of a job ad posted by a non-LSP.

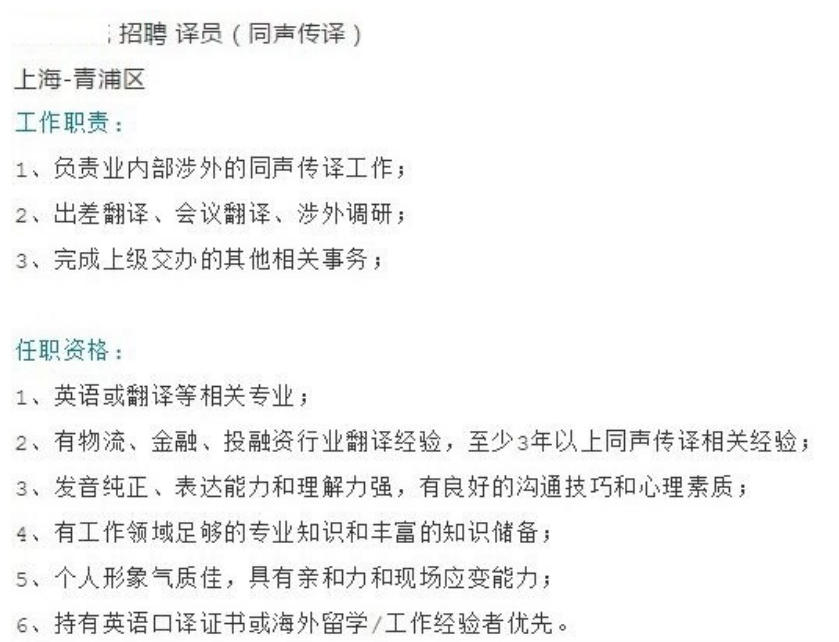


Figure 2. A screenshot of a sample job ad

In this ad, the employer is recruiting an in-house simultaneous interpreter. Three job duties are listed: (1) simultaneous interpreting services; (2) escort and conference interpreting during business travel and meeting; and (3) other tasks assigned by the supervisor. Six qualifications are needed: (1) English or Translation/Interpreting major; (2) translation experience in logistics, finance and investment, and over 3 years of simultaneous interpreting experience; (3) standard pronunciation, proficiency in comprehension and eloquence; good communicative skills and psychological qualities; (4) adequate knowledge of the industry and abundant general knowledge; (5) good personal image, affinity and flexibility; and (6) interpreting certification or experience via an overseas posting or education.

Step 4: Define the context of the generation of the ads. Job ads were submitted by recruiters. To post job openings on recruitment websites, recruiters first registered business accounts, uploaded the electronic trading certificates of their companies and then scanned electronic copies of legal representatives' identity cards. The job openings were displayed after their submissions were approved by the websites. Those posted on WeChat were forwarded from the recruiters and/or online job websites. When recruiters created job openings, they would ensure that the competences and duties sought were listed in the job descriptions. Therefore, the job ads were considered to be authentic and credible.

Step 5: Define the unit of analysis. Each single ad was a unit of analysis. Each one was checked against the codes.

Step 6: Decide on the codes. Specific codes were formulated based on the current literature (see the section on the theoretical framework). Since the codes represent the state of art of current research, the coding system is considered to be valid in terms of its content.

Step 7: Construct the categories. Three independent categories were formulated: qualifications, interpreting modes and directions, and competences (see the previous section on the theoretical framework).

Step 8: Conduct data coding. The three categories of codes were entered into a Microsoft Excel 2007 spreadsheet. Each ad was analysed against the codes. If a given code was present in an ad, "1" was marked; if it was absent, "0" was marked.

Two coders were involved. One was a freelance interpreter and the other was a Translation and Interpreting Studies scholar with experience of using content analysis as a methodology. They independently piloted the coding system by analysing ten randomly selected ads from the dataset to test out the methodology and to check if any codes overlapped. They identified problems and discussed how to make improvements. Three changes were made, with some codes aggregated to avoid overlapping, some revised to avoid ambiguity in wording, and others added (those which frequently emerged in the pilot analysis). Pilot coding helped to standardise the coding scheme and minimised factors that could impact the judgement of the coders. Subsequently, the coders independently analysed a sub-sample of 50 ads (12.5% of the dataset) against the revised coding scheme, based on the assumption that a sample of the coding units (for example, 10% of the dataset) can provide an adequate representation of reliability (Krippendorff 2004).

A reliability estimate was then conducted. Krippendorff's alpha test was used to estimate the inter-coder reliability because it works well for any number of coders, any level of measurement, and any size of sample, compared with other available measures of inter-coder reliability in content analysis (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007: 77). KALPHA.sps, a small add-on software script from Andrew F. Hayes' website, made the test possible in SPSS 16.0. The command was run for each code. The highest alpha (α) value was 1.0 and the lowest one was 0.821, indicating a high inter-coder reliability overall. In the social sciences, 0.80 is seen as the threshold for strong inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff 2004: 242). Such agreement may be attributed to the fact that the codes are of a low-inference nature and are straightforward and easy to code. With a good initial reliability estimate, the complete dataset of ads was then coded.

Step 9: Undertake data analysis. Data analysis focused on counting the frequency of each code, which generated a frequency list of market demands.

Step 10: Report results. Based on data analysis, market demands in terms of qualifications, modes and directions, competences, as well as differences in demands between LSPs and non-LSPs, were summarised (see the following section on results and discussion).

Step 11: Make speculative inferences. Based on the results, speculative inferences were made in order to provide insights related to curriculum modification (see the last section conclusions, implications and limitations).

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Qualifications

This section presents results on the qualifications employers look for in interpreters.

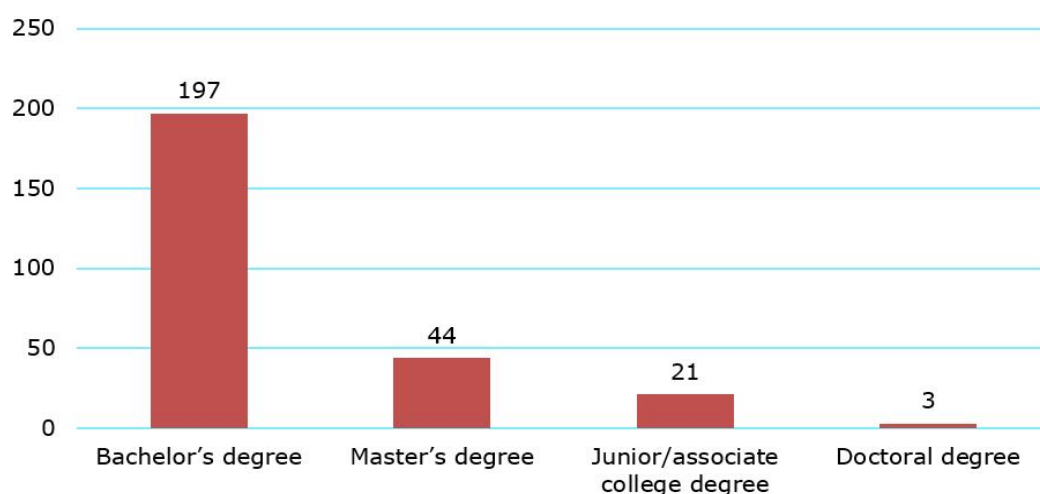


Figure 3. Degrees preferred by employers

One of the key findings is that a higher-level academic degree is not desired by interpreter employers in China. As displayed in Figure 3, the required educational degrees ranked by frequency are Bachelor's degree, 49% (197), Master's degree, 11% (44), and Doctorate, 1% (3), respectively. According to Mu *et al.* (2017) and Pym *et al.* (2016), the threshold level of education in the international market for interpreters and translators is also a Bachelor's degree. One possible reason is that employers know little of the academic system, even though over 200 universities in China offer

translation and interpreting programmes at the graduate level. They may consider undergraduate education sufficient to produce a qualified interpreter. In other words, if there is an ideal undergraduate candidate, why bother paying higher salaries to hire a graduate candidate?

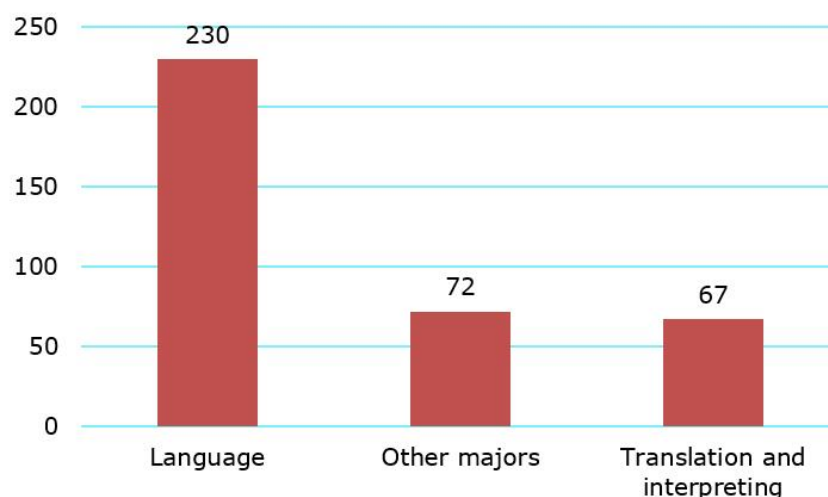


Figure 4. Majors desired by employers

Language is the dominant major sought by Chinese employers. 58% (230) of the ads expect candidates to have majored in language, followed by other majors (72/18%), and then translation and interpreting (67/17%) (Figure 4). This, combined with a high frequency of mentioning listening (162/41%) and speaking (299/75%) as competences (see Figure 12), indicates that Chinese employers tend to believe that interpreting is a matter of listening and speaking, due to limited communication with academia and inadequate knowledge of the profession. While this result is different from Mu *et al.* (2017), who found that the majority of global employers seek candidates majoring in interpreting, it is consistent with research on the international translation market, in which translation training is not required among candidates (Pym *et al.* 2016). “Other majors” ranks at second place. This may be because language majors are not considered competent in settings requiring specialised knowledge (e.g. construction, engineering, and law). This is consistent with what is discussed subsequently in the competence section, which shows that thematic knowledge is much sought after by employers.

Certified status is not a sought-after qualification in China. There are three interpreting certificates in China, specifically, CATTI certificate (China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters), Shanghai Interpreting Certificate, and Xiada Interpreting Certificate. If no requirements on certificate were made, we believe certified status is not a sought-after

qualification. As presented in Figure 5, interpreting certification was required by only 20% (80) of employers, and language proficiency certification was sought after by 42% (169) of them. This means that only 20% of employers were recruiting certified interpreters. This, combined with a high demand for language majors instead of interpreting, indicates either that employers have limited knowledge of interpreting as a profession or that they are not concerned about interpreters' certified status. This differs from the international market findings, in which the majority of employers prefer candidates with certificates (Mu *et al.* 2017). Certification is evidence that an interpreter has an agreed-upon level of expertise to provide an acceptable interpreting service and that employers can protect clients' interests by allowing certified rather than uncertified interpreters to enter the profession (Witter-Merithew and Johnson 2004). It is considered more important than completion of interpreting training in an academic programme, since the latter does not qualify all graduates as holders of certificates. The low certification requirement indicates a low standard for market entry in China and the lack of a guarantee of quality interpreting service. Such market disorder, a term coined by Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2004), requires regulation, because it may harm the image of the interpreting profession and operate against the clients' interest. Such a phenomenon also exists in Malaysia, where certification is ignored and the market entry standard is low (Ibrahim 2007).

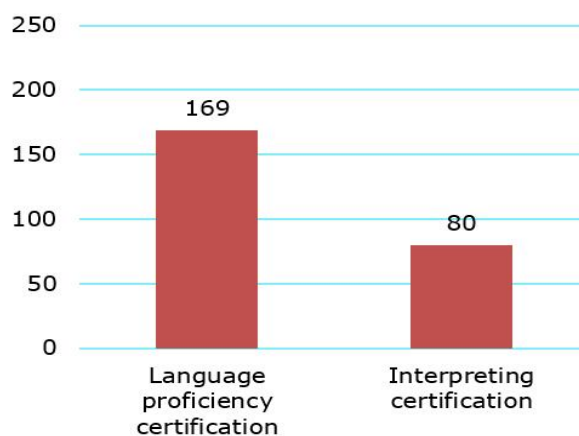


Figure 5. In-demand certifications

Prior experience is considered essential. The top three areas of experience are prior interpreting experience (200/50%), other work experience (116/29%), and overseas experience (103/26%) (Figure 6). This agrees with Mu *et al.* (2017), who noted that 72% of global job ads require prior interpreting experience. Such a requirement reflects recruiters' reluctance to provide extra training for novice interpreters. As reported in the previous section, employers do not have high expectations regarding candidates'

academic qualifications, interpreting training background or certified status. It can be concluded that professional experience has more market value than academic qualifications, which is consistent with the claim of Pym *et al.* (2016) regarding the global translation market. It makes sense to recruit interpreters with prior interpreting experience. However, it is paradoxical when this demand is observed alongside low requirements relating to academic qualifications, institutional training and certified status. Undergraduates with no interpreting training background or certificates should find it hard to commence work as interpreters and thus have little experience. If they do have experience, that indicates a low standard of entry into the profession and is a sign of market disorder. This reveals that interpreting as a profession, and its basic skills, is not well understood by employers in China. The importance of overseas experience may be related to domestic enterprises' expansion of their overseas footprint spurred by the Belt and Road Initiative.

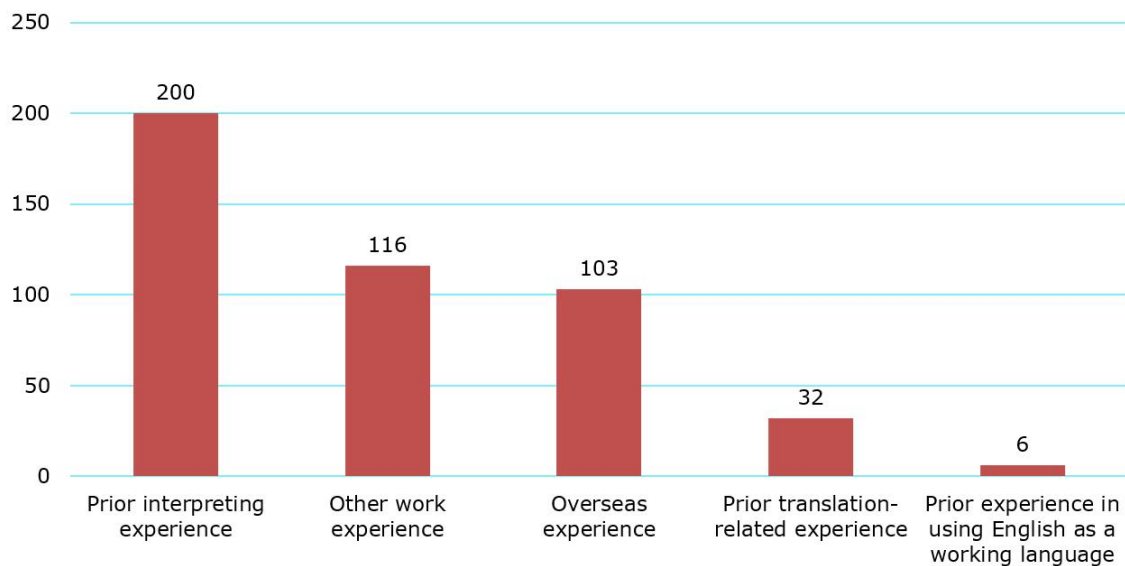


Figure 6. Areas of experience in demand

5.2. Modes and interpreting direction

The results presented below address the research question concerning the most in-demand interpreting modes and directions.

Candidates for interpreting posts are expected to perform consecutive interpreting and translation more often than simultaneous interpreting. The majority of ads (300/75%) include the task of consecutive interpreting, which is followed by translation (181/45%), simultaneous interpreting (34/9%), and both CI and SI (33/8%) (Figure 7). This is consistent with the claim that consecutive interpreting is the dominant mode in the Chinese

market (Pan *et al.* 2009). The demand for translation reveals employers' expectations for a versatile candidate which avoids the cost of hiring a separate translator.

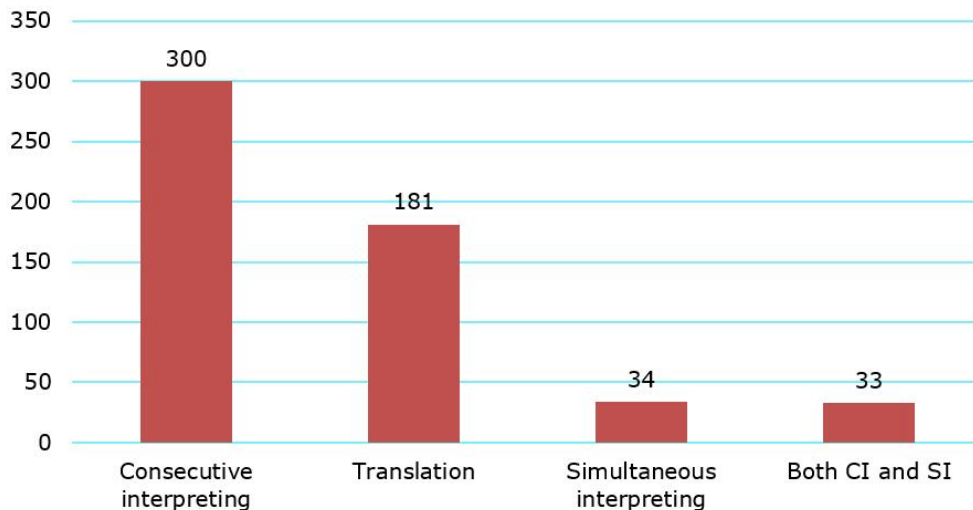


Figure 7. Interpreting modes in demand

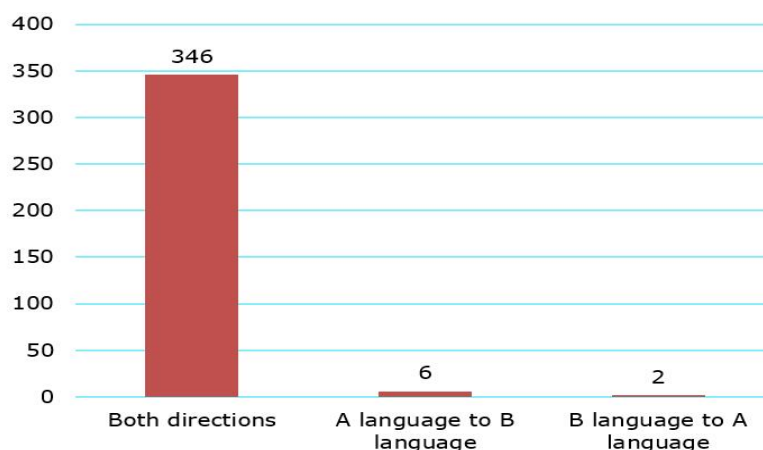


Figure 8. Interpreting directions desired

In China, 87% (346) of the ads require interpreting into and out of English (Figure 8). One reason is related to the working mode. Since the dominant mode is consecutive interpreting and consecutive interpreters are almost always bi-directional, interpreting into and out of English is in demand. This is different from simultaneous interpreters, who often tend to interpret into their A language. Another reason is related to whether one of the working languages is a language of limited diffusion. Different from the international tradition of interpreting only into the A language, Chinese interpreters are almost always asked to interpret both ways (Wang and Mu 2009). This is also the case in Japan and Korea (Kondo 2005; Lim 2003). According to Mu *et al.* (2017), interpreting into the B language is a common requirement for

interpreting between English and less frequently used languages in the international market. It is understandable that Chinese interpreters are frequently asked to retour into English, given that there are relatively few native speakers of English who have acquired Chinese as a working language.

5.3. Competences

In this section, the results are discussed in relation to the competences employers want in interpreters. Demands connected to six competence components will be presented. Others in the coding framework, such as cross-cultural competence, strategic competence, and transfer competence, will not be discussed, because only a few ads mentioned them (9, 6, and 1 ads, respectively). This may be partly attributed to the fact that the employers, most of whom are non-LSPs, are not familiar with the specific interpreting skills, and partly attributed to the fact that such competences are process-oriented and less observable, and that some of them, like transfer competence, are skills which employers take for granted.

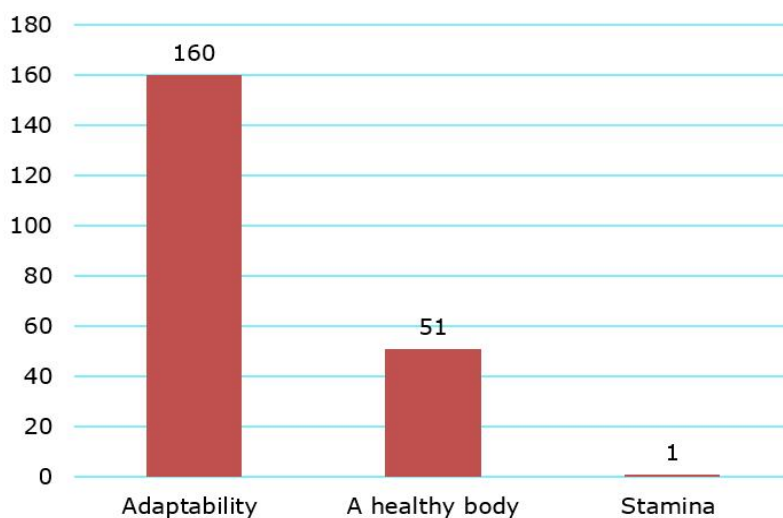


Figure 9. Physiological competence

Of the three physiological competences, adaptability is listed in 40% (160) of all ads, and a healthy body in 13% (51) of them (Figure 9). It reveals that the Chinese market expects interpreters to adapt themselves to different workplaces and subjects, and have a healthy body to handle heavy workloads or to be able to work any shift. This confirms Russo’s (2011) claim, which concludes that adaptability is one of the expected aptitudes for interpreters. This is different from expectations found in the international market. Mu *et al.* (2017) found that nearly half of the interpreters being hired could stay at home, providing telephone or video conference

interpreting services. This is because, as can be seen from some of the ads, many employers recruiting interpreters in China are outsourcing and have overseas businesses — e.g. overseas project inspection, business negotiation, and project implementation. Therefore, they require interpreters to go on business trips or to work overseas.

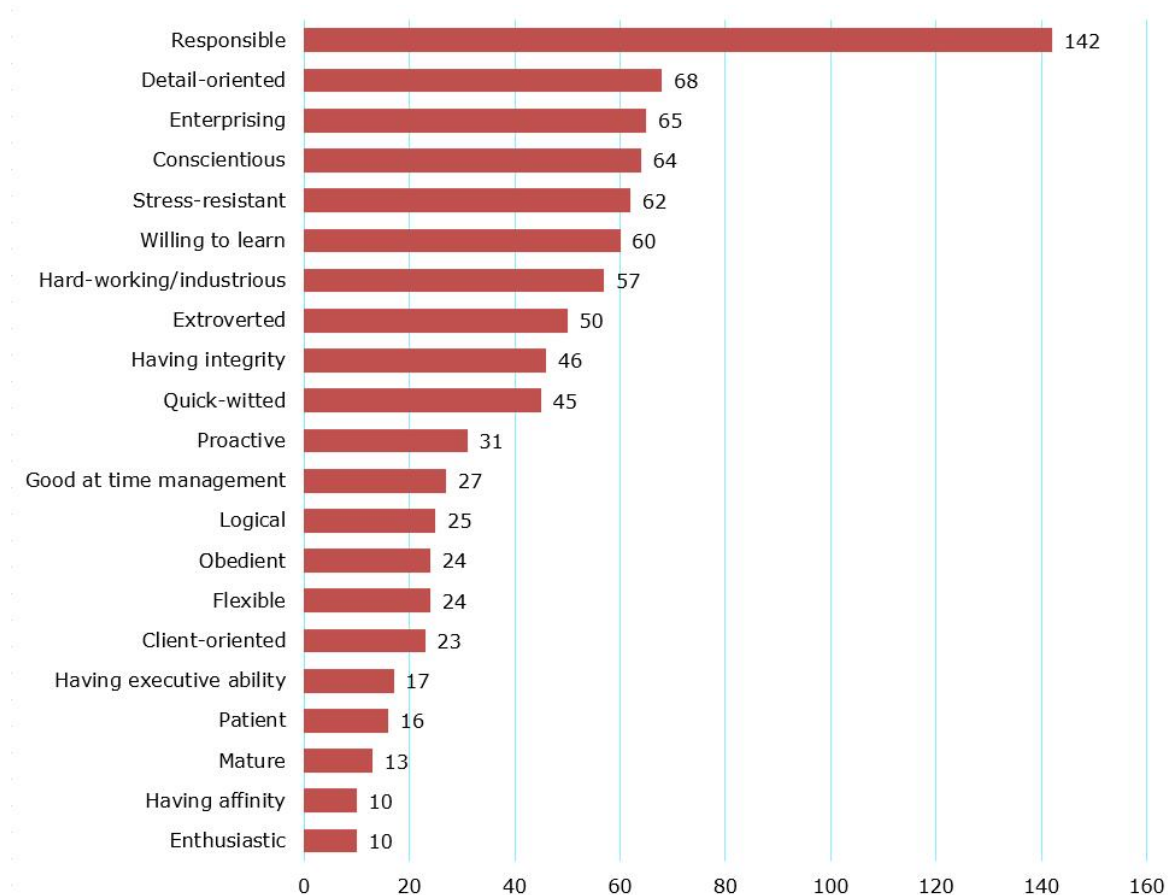


Figure 10. Psychological competence

The most sought-after psychological competence components are presented in Figure 10. They include being responsible (142/36%), detail-oriented (68/17%), enterprising (65/16%), conscientious (64/16%), stress-resistant (62/16%), willing to learn (60/15%), hard-working/industrious (57/14%), extroverted (50/13%), having integrity (46/12%), being quick-witted (45/11%), proactive (31/8%), good at time management (27/7%), logical (25/6%), flexible (24/6%), obedient (24/6%), and having client awareness (23/6%). This is similar to the demands found in the international market, where the most-desired traits are flexibility, client awareness, and integrity, as well as being detail-oriented, proactive, and enthusiastic (Mu *et al.* 2017). Some traits, for example, being responsible and conscientious, are aptitudes for candidates in a wide range of posts, while others like willingness to learn and resistance

to stress are expected aptitudes which are more commonly desired among interpreters (Russo 2001). Willingness to learn is important partly because interpreters need to acquire new knowledge to deal with speeches and dialogues in specialised areas, and partly because they need to adapt to changes in work brought about by constant progress in technology. The capacity to manage stress is a prerequisite for interpreters because it influences their use of coping strategies and resources (Bontempo and Napier 2011).

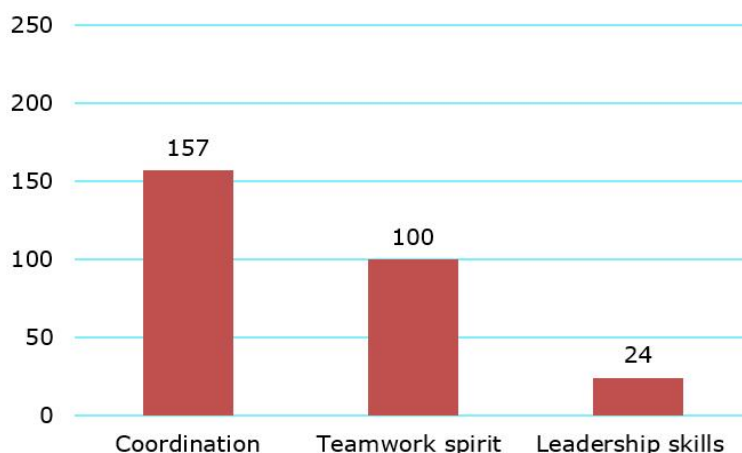


Figure 11. Interpersonal competence

Interpersonal competence is important. Coordination is mentioned in 39% (157) of the ads, teamwork spirit in 25% (100), and leadership, 6% (24) (Figure 11). This result is similar to the requirements in international ads where almost one half demand that the candidates be good team players (Mu *et al.* 2017). According to Russo (2011), teamwork and diplomacy are aptitudes desired by recruiters of interpreters. This result is also parallel with the finding that the dominant mode applicants are expected to perform is consecutive interpreting, in which interpreters are highly visible and need to interact face-to-face with the task participants, serving as message converters and cultural clarifiers. Therefore, they are expected to be good team players and to coordinate between both parties involved.

Language proficiency is strongly emphasised. Basic skills, such as speaking (299/75%), listening (162/41%), writing (129/32%), and reading (66/17%), are highlighted (Figure 12). Language competence should be considered important because it is the key prerequisite of interpreting competence, and employers expect candidates to use English to communicate (making presentations and negotiating with clients), which is mentioned by 32% (127) of the ads. However, the result if combined with findings in the previous section that employers are not distinguishing

between language and interpreting majors and between language and interpreting certifications are another piece of evidence indicating that employers have limited knowledge of the interpreting profession and mistakenly equate eloquent foreign language speakers with interpreters.

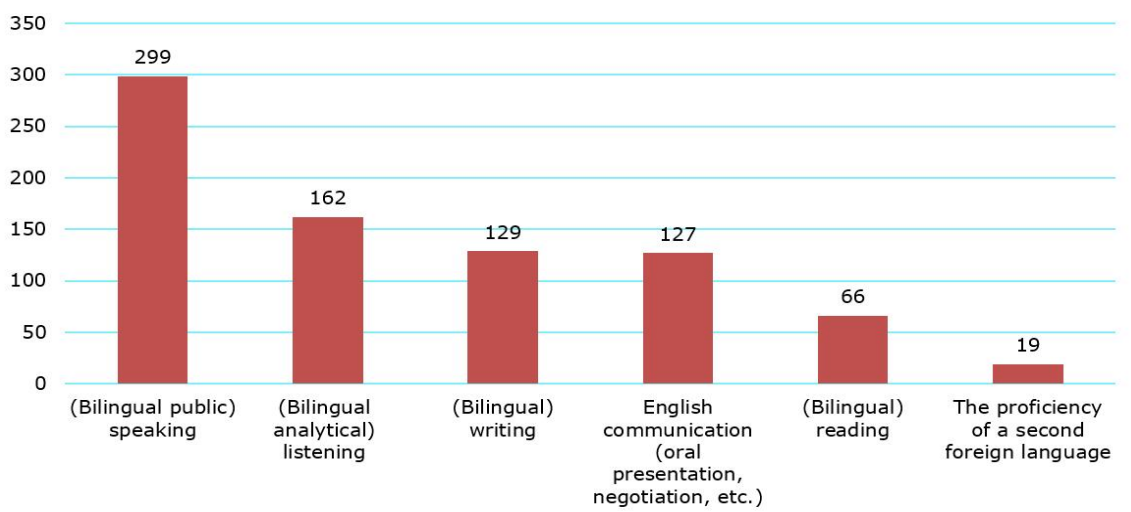


Figure 12. Language competence

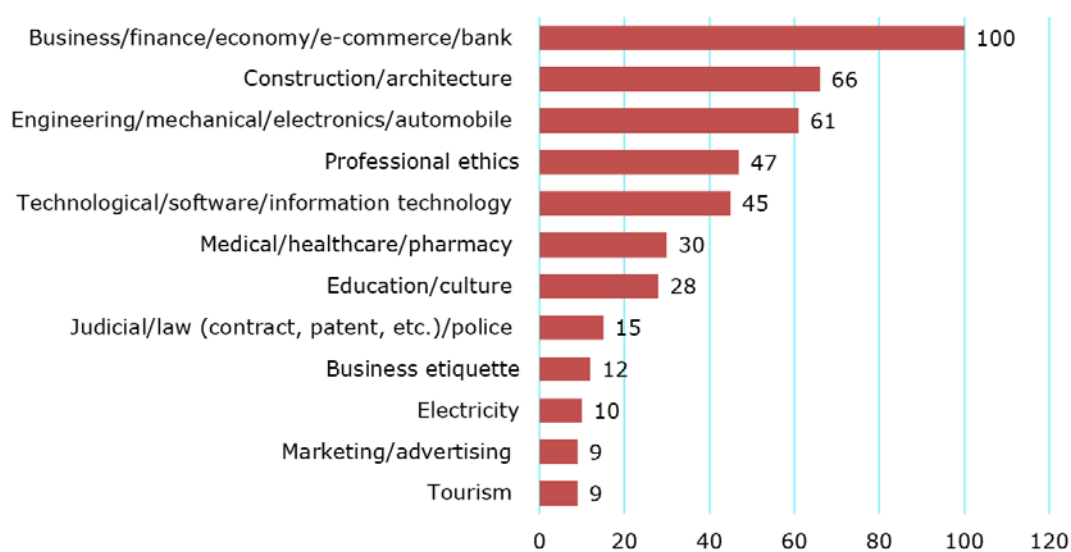


Figure 13. Knowledge competence

Thematic knowledge is underscored in the Chinese market. As presented in Figure 13, the top areas of thematic knowledge that employers expect applicants to have include business and financing (100/25%), construction and architecture (66/17%), engineering and the automotive industry (61/15%), technology and software (45/11%), medicine and health (30/8%), education and culture (28/7%), and law (15/4%). The knowledge profile required in the international market is slightly different. According to

Mu *et al.* (2017), the top three specialised areas are medicine, law, and business. The difference between the domestic and international market can be explained by the difference in social context. In China, the Go Out policy and the Belt and Road Initiative are being implemented, and thus many state-owned or private enterprises are looking overseas for business opportunities, while others are undertaking infrastructure projects overseas. Therefore, business and construction rank as the top two requirements in the Chinese market. Not surprisingly, business etiquette (12/3%) is also valued by employers. It is a paradox that employers do not have high expectations about candidates' academic qualifications and certified status on the one hand, and yet they expect specialised interpreting on the other. Without a background of institutional training and certification at an acceptable level of interpreting, clients' needs cannot be guaranteed to be met. As mentioned previously, such a paradox reveals again that employers do not have sufficient knowledge of the interpreting profession.

Professional ethics is another key point emphasised by employers in the Chinese market. 12% (47) of the ads underscore that the candidates should possess professional ethics (Figure 13), consistent with Mu *et al.* (2017), who state that over one half of the international ads mention the importance of professional ethics.

As for instrumental competence, 17% (67) of the ads mention computer literacy. This agrees with the findings of Mu *et al.* (2017), in which over one half of their international ads demand the same competence. Therefore, computer literacy is valued by both domestic and international employers. It also supports Durand's (2005) claim that the market expects interpreters to acquire and maintain computer literacy.

5.4. Differences in demands between LSPs and non-LSPs

This section presents the results relating to the difference in demands between LSPs and non-LSPs.

Of the 400 ads, 76 were posted by LSPs, and 324 by non-LSPs. A comparison of the percentage of each code (since the base number is different, frequency is not directly comparable) reveals that LSPs have different demands from non-LSPs.

LSPs are more demanding than non-LSPs in terms of prior interpreting experience. 67% of LSPs require candidates to have prior interpreting experience, while only 46% of non-LSPs have the same requirement (Figure 14). This may be because LSPs have higher expectations regarding candidates' interpreting performance.

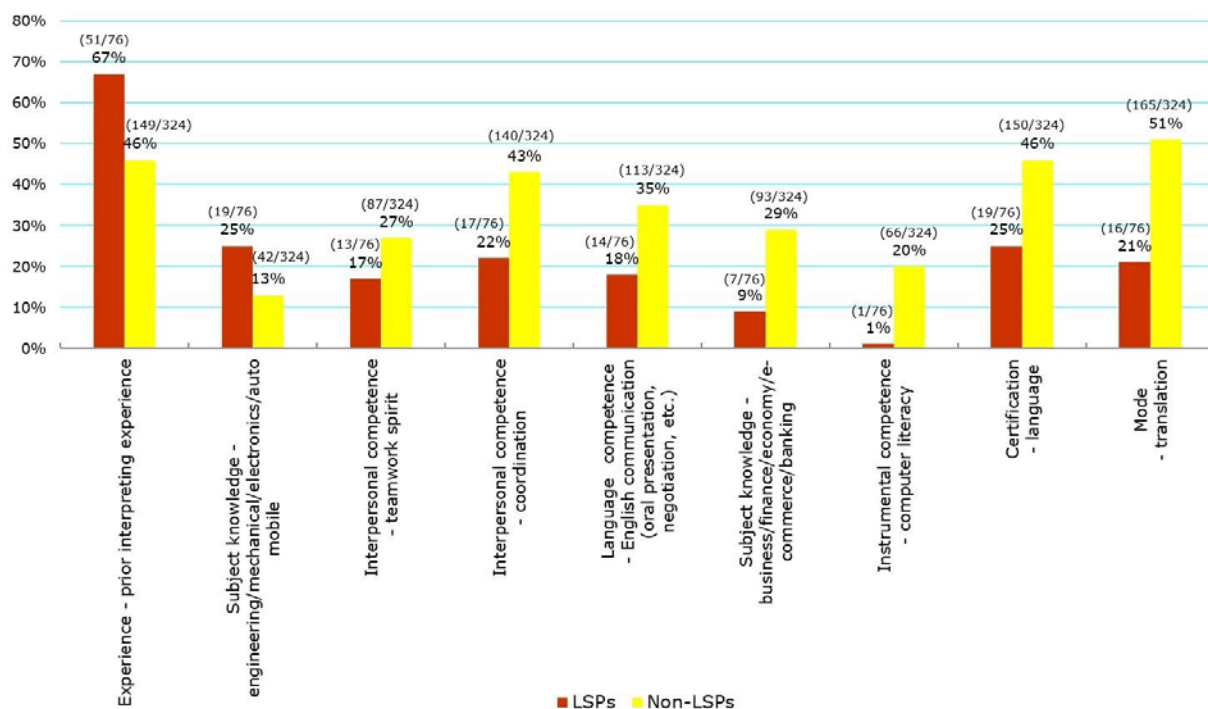


Figure 14. Differences in demands between LSPs and non-LSPs

Non-LSPs are more demanding in terms of teamwork spirit (27% versus 17%), coordination (43% versus 22%), English communication (presentations, negotiation, etc.) (35% versus 18%), and computer literacy (20% versus 1%), compared with LSPs. Additionally, more non-LSPs, about 51%, also require interpreters to translate, compared with their LSP counterparts, of whom only 21% have this requirement. This suggests that non-LSPs’ requirements of interpreters are different from LSPs and that they expect more versatile employees.

Moreover, 46% of non-LSPs list language certificates as one of the preferred qualifications rather than interpreting certificates, while only 25% of LSPs do so. 24% of LSPs require interpreting certificates, while only 19% of non-LSPs do so. These differences indicate that non-LSPs are less strict regarding the accreditation status of interpreters.

To test if the observed differences are significant between the two categorical variables, namely, employer type (1 = LSPs, 2 = non-LSPs) and their demands in certain competence or qualifications (0 = absence, 1 = presence), Chi square tests were run. Eight of the nine *p* values were less than .05 (.001, .009, .001, .006, .000, .000, .001, and .000), indicating a significant relationship. Although non-LSPs are more demanding in teamwork spirit than LSPs, the difference did not reach statistical significance (*p*= .077).

6. Conclusions, implications and limitations

The current survey has identified the market demands relating to interpreters in terms of qualifications, modes and directions, and competences. Although technology and the market keep moving forward, and thus it is hard for even a state-of-the-art curriculum to match the market reality, the findings here may be treated as a reference concerning curriculum updating. Moreover, they can be used by students as a guide to preparing themselves for better employability.

Results suggest that the standard for market entry is low because employers often recruit undergraduates without professional training or certification. This contributes to market disorder and affects the development of the interpreting profession. As a response, collaboration among all stakeholders, including professional associations, training institutions, employers and government agencies, is essential. Such collaboration is also proposed by Mikkelsen (2013) and Ibrahim (2007). Government agencies, professional associations and employers should cooperate to set and enforce regulations that require the employment of only certified interpreters, which standardises market entry prerequisites. This could potentially not only solve the problem of market disorder, but also improve employers' low recognition of academic degrees resulting from the over-supply of academic degrees to the market (Chan 2008). Equally important, professional associations and training institutions should promote the interpreting profession by educating the public about the importance of the profession and its certification, and thus enhance interpreters' status and increase employers' awareness of the profession. Training institutions should establish contact with potential employers by inviting the latter to serve as consultants during curriculum renewal and as members of graduation examination juries.

Evidence indicates that prior interpreting experience and overseas experience are sought after by employers. Beginners without relevant experience may be excluded from the market. Therefore, to improve graduates' marketability, training institutions should provide them with the desired areas of experience. They may consider launching exchange programmes with their counterparts in other countries, and establishing connections with prospective employers and professional associations who can provide teaching assistance by serving as part-time instructors and by offering more placement or internship opportunities. Although internship is part of the curriculum in China, opportunities are not abundant (see Li 2018).

The current findings show that the dominant mode of interpreting is consecutive interpreting and that often interpreters are also required to translate. Therefore, those skills specific to consecutive interpreting, such as note-taking skills, memory training, and knowledge of the dynamics of intercultural communication and the visible roles of interpreters, should be strengthened among trainees. In addition, translation courses may be offered as optional or compulsory courses for interpreting students.

The findings suggest that interpreters are required to interpret both out of and into English. The English proficiency of Chinese T&I students is not as good as their European counterparts, due to a limited use of English in everyday life in China and the dramatic difference between English and Chinese. T&I students in China learn English as a foreign language, different from European universities in which more T&I students are bilingual or multilingual than their Chinese counterparts, the result of a more diverse multilingual environment. As a response, separate courses on language enhancement and interpreting into the B language should be provided to improve trainees' market readiness.

The results also suggest that employers expect certain physiological, psychological and interpersonal competences to be present. As claimed by Bontempo and Napier (2011), personality traits are relevant for occupational performance. The current study reveals that adaptability, responsibility, attention to detail, conscientiousness, stress resistance, willingness to learn, time management, coordination, and team spirit are those most desired by employers. Therefore, they should be considered during screening examinations. When screening is not feasible, instructors should incorporate teaching of these competences into instructional activities.

The current study found that interpreters are expected to be versatile language users (in public speaking, oral presentations, negotiation, etc.). They are also expected to have thematic knowledge (business and finance, construction and architecture, engineering and the automotive industry, technology and software, etc.). Therefore, besides interpreting courses, other courses, such as public speaking, business negotiation, introduction to economics, business interpreting, technological interpreting, and automotive industry translation, should be offered as either compulsory or elective courses.

Another finding is that employers expect interpreters to have professional ethics and computer literacy. Therefore, ethical training and computer skills should be incorporated in the curriculum. Though ethics is rarely taught as a separate course, questions like the interpreter's role in and impact on

cross-cultural communication, respect for individual privacy, and protection of confidentiality, should be reflected on throughout all practice sessions in interpreting courses, as emphasised by Donovan (2011). Moreover, trainers should focus on helping students in acquiring and maintaining computer skills while teaching preparation and information search skills. Currently, computer skills are usually not part of interpreting courses in China.

The results suggest that LSPs and non-LSPs have different expectations. LSPs are more demanding in terms of prior interpreting experience. By contrast, non-LSPs have higher expectations regarding interpersonal competence (team spirit and coordination), versatility in English use (oral presentation and negotiation), and instrumental competence (computer literacy). Non-LSPs are less demanding in terms of certification (language proficiency certificates are acceptable), but are more likely to require interpreters to work additionally as ad-hoc translators. Understanding such differences is helpful for trainees, in order to make their learning more targeted, if they know what their ideal workplaces are.

Finally, a comparison between the current study and that of Mu *et al.* (2017) indicates that the Chinese market and the international market have both similarities and differences. While the two markets are similar in terms of their demands for interpreters' qualifications (degree and experience), the dominant interpreting mode and direction (two-way consecutive interpreting), and as regards some competences (psychological, interpersonal, and knowledge competence), they differ in others (academic major, certification and physiological competence). Therefore, market needs are to some extent geographically specific. Training programmes need to take this into account before surveying market needs so that the findings can be more targeted.

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings as presented in this research. One is that the ads were analysed in terms of the listed desired qualities and competences instead of the actual ones successfully met by candidates, thus representing the ideal qualities that employers search for, rather than those they actually find in the interpreters they hire. Moreover, some interpreting jobs may remain unfilled due to a lack of qualified candidates. A successful candidate may have higher or lower qualifications than the desired ones. Another aspect is that this study's coverage of the Chinese interpreting job market is not exhaustive, since only ads from public sources were represented in the ad sample pool. For pragmatic reasons, it is not possible to be exhaustive in ad collection, partly because not all interpreting jobs are advertised publicly (e.g. jobs may be filled through internal promotions within organisations).

Lastly, caution should be taken when generalising the current findings because they are limited to in-house English-Chinese interpreting positions.

In conclusion, given the ever-changing nature of market needs resulting from constant shifts in technology, the economy and social policy, stakeholders' knowledge of market demands needs constant updating (Torres Hostench 2010; Aula. Int. 2005). Therefore, a growing corpus of descriptive studies of interpreting market needs and their relationship to curriculum renewal is desired for the future.

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Recruitment websites

- **Zhilian.** i.zhaopin.com.
- **51job.** www.51job.com.
- **Bosshipin.** www.zhipin.com.
- **Liepin.** c.liepin.com.
- **AnyTranz.** anytranz.com.
- **58tongcheng.** bj.58.com.

WeChat accounts

(No links available. They can be obtained by searching their account names in WeChat)

- 华南翻译市场
- Timespace 翻译全球
- 译匠
- 外语任意门
- 外语和外派就业信息

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