

# Study on the Influence of Irrational Factors on the Chinese-English Translation Process of Translation Majors: Taking Panzhihua University as an Example

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## Abstract:

**Background:** With the rise and rapid popularity of machine translation, the job prospects of translation students as translators have come under great attack. The ability of translators is not only related to their systematic knowledge reserves such as professional knowledge, translation theory, bilingual cultural knowledge, etc., but also affected by irrational factors including translation motivation, emotion, and persistence. As the main force in the future translation industry, students majored in translation need to do extensive translation practice during the school. However, few researches have focused on the influence of irrational factors on the Chinese-English translation process.

**Materials and Methods:** This study takes Panzhihua University as an example, interviews 20 translation students, and codes the interview data.

**Results:** The results show that: 1) The participants' intrinsic motivation has stronger effect on the translation process than their extrinsic motivation; 2) The senior students experience lower level of negative emotions and have stronger self-emotion regulation ability than junior students; 3) The vast majority of students show strong persistence in the Chinese-English translation practice.

**Conclusion:** The research has significant implications for enhancing the translation competence of translation majors.

**Key Word:** Translation majors; Chinese-English translation practice; Irrational factors

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## I. Introduction

In recent years, the rise and rapid popularity of machine translation has greatly influenced the career development of translation majors. On the one hand, the market is faced with a huge surplus of translation majors, but on the other, there's a shortage of talents with strong translation competence and rich experience. Accordingly, the changes of the times and the market bring unprecedented challenges and opportunities to the translation majors. To meet the needs of the job market, the translation majors should not only strengthen their hard power, but also enhance their soft power in translation activities. A number of researchers therefore have affirmed the crucial role of translators' qualities in the translation process, and conducted in-depth research on the quality of translators. For instance, Tao Jie claimed that translators should have good command of English and Chinese, acquire extensive knowledge, and grasp translation theory and skills,<sup>1</sup> while Zhangsun Furong mentioned that a translator should possess such abilities as high-order thinking ability, solid language skills, extensive ideographic knowledge, keen ability to perceive and discriminate, a spirit of dedication, rich practical experience and serious attitude.<sup>2</sup> Based on CATI exam, Tang Yue further discussed that a translator should have bilingual ability, cultural quality, political awareness and the ability to be familiar with using dictionaries and software, good professional ethics and work style, internal qualities such as knowledge reserves that keep pace with the times.<sup>3</sup> Different from other researchers, Huo Xiaomei focused on the role of translator's motivation, emotion and persistence in translation activities.<sup>4</sup> She enunciated that negative emotions like tension, anxiety, depression, anger, etc. could narrow the translators' perceptions and slow down the speed of thinking, which was not conducive to the smooth progress of translation. In contrast, pleasant and moderate tension emotions could increase concentration, and promote the translation quality. The studies conducted abroad had similar findings to those among Chinese Translation majors. Shangarffam & Abolsabaonce explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and translation. They studied 90 senior male and female students majored in English translation and tested the participants with the Translation Conversion Test and the

Luwenbaang Emotional Intelligence Test. The results showed that there was no significant relationship between the translator's emotional intelligence level and translation quality.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Mohamed proposed that the translator's language and cultural knowledge, the choice of translation strategies would have an important impact on the translation quality.<sup>6</sup> Shojaee & Sahrage conducted a research among the Iranian students and found that the translation quality in translation workshops and tests was related to students' risk-taking characteristics (desire to do something, success or failure regardless of the outcome).<sup>7</sup>

The survey on the existing literature shows that most studies focus on the importance of language knowledge and translation skills, while few efforts have addressed the influence of irrational factors on the translation process. This study therefore tries to bridge the gap by exploring the irrational factors affecting the Chinese-English translation process of translation majors at Panzhuhua University, and provide corresponding suggestions. The present study might be insightful for English teachers who have been committed to promoting students' translation process and cultivating high-quality talents for the translation industry.

## **II. Irrational Factors**

In this section, it mainly introduces the definition of irrational factors, and outlines other researchers' exploration of irrational factors in translation activities or other learning such as English learning.

### **Definition of Irrational Factors:**

Irrational factors is defined as the instinctive consciousness of one's psychological structure and the illogical thinking forms that appear in the process of cognition. The former is actually a kind of spiritual power, which penetrates into the subject's cognition and practice, with strong subjectivity and initiative, including people's emotion, persistence, motivation, etc.; the latter is about the unconsciousness. The cognitive ability, including intuition, fantasy, imagination, inspiration, epiphany, etc., has contingency, uncertainty and illogicality, but it can be used to quickly obtain truth knowledge.<sup>8</sup> In the present study, irrational factors are related to motivation, emotion and persistence.

Deci and Ryan divided foreign language learning motivation into two types: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to taking action to achieve some instrumental purpose, while the intrinsic motivation refers to the behavior that is driven by interest, pleasure and satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> In the context of English learning, the intrinsic motivation of English majors includes: exams, competitions, postgraduate entrance exams, homework, and hope to find a good job in the future. The intrinsic motivation is to be interested in the language itself or the cultural customs of the country where the language is spoken.

Emotion is specifically manifested in people's psychological feelings and emotional experience such as joy, anger, sorrow and joy.<sup>10</sup> Emotion can be positive or negative. Positive emotions, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, empathy, curiosity, pleasure and devotion, etc. can create psychological states conducive to learning, and help learners to develop their potential and improve the learning effect. On the contrary, negative emotions such as anxiety, tension, shyness, doubt, depression, disappointment, disgust, etc. will seriously hinder the normal development of learning potential and affect the improvement of learning effect. Positive emotions make people feel good, active in association, quick thinking and rich imagination, which can improve the efficiency of people's study and work.<sup>11</sup>

Persistence refers to the mental state of conscious and continuous effort to achieve certain purpose. It is the spiritual personality that constantly overcomes difficulties in order to achieve lofty ideals and goals. Learners with persistence tend to overcome the interference of internal and external unfavorable factors; resolutely implement previous plans; overcome bad habits and negative emotions such as laziness; make full use of time for learning; correctly deal with temporary failures and successes in the learning process; have high self-awareness. But learners without persistence are often urged or even forced to learn by external factors; easy to indulge themselves; waste time; unable to withstand the blow of failure; easy to shake, no persistence; lack of self-awareness.<sup>11</sup>

### **The influence of irrational factors on learning:**

Based on grounded theory, Hu Sang studied the volunteer translators in the TED Translators Program and found that the participants exhibited different motivations.<sup>12</sup> Most of the participants engaged in the program owing to intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Bye et al. studied and compared the affective and motivational components of academic life among traditional and nontraditional undergraduates.<sup>13</sup> They found interest and age were significant predictors of intrinsic motivation, and both interest and intrinsic motivation significantly predicted positive emotions.

Zhang Qizhi, taking English majors as samples, explored the relationship between students' emotions and learning. The results showed that there was a significant correlation between English majors' academic emotions and their English academic performance.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, most English majors experienced positive emotions, and boys felt more positive emotions than girls. In addition, the academic emotions varied in different

grades of English majors. Triarisanti and Purnawarman used Likert scale to investigate students' final exam scores of language and art appreciation. The results showed that interest and motivation had a significant impact on their learning outcomes.<sup>15</sup> They also suggested that high level of interest and motivation determined the success of learning outcomes, especially in the subject of language and arts appreciation. Moreover, Olha conducted a study on the emotional intelligence of 155 professional translators, and proved that there was a significant positive correlation between the translator's emotional regulation and the professional experience of translation as well as age.<sup>16</sup>

With respect to the role of persistence, Sheng Hongyong found that both final scores and comprehensive evaluation were strongly correlated to students' persistence, and learning psychology.<sup>17</sup> This finding was similar to the research of Wu Lili, who indicated that students with high level of persistence showed a positive trend in their learning psychology.<sup>18</sup>

### **III. Material And Methods**

In this section, it mainly introduces research design, including research method, participants, data collection and data analysis.

#### **Research Design**

##### **Research Method:**

Qualitative research method was employed in the present study, because this method attached great importance to the perspective of the research participants and could generate comprehensive and deep understanding about their perceptions. Qualitative research focused on the detailed description and analysis of problems and phenomena at the micro level. Hence, this method allowed the researchers to select a smaller number of samples, which enabled them to focus more on the investigations to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of irrational factors in translation students' Chinese-English translation practice.

Compared with structured interview and open-ended interviews, semi-structured interview allowed the researchers to take control over the interview, and they could actively participate the interview. The researchers could prepare the interview outline in advance and asked the interviewee questions based on their research design. Moreover, the interviewer could flexibly adjust the procedure and content of the interview according to the specific situation of the interview.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, this study chose semi-structured interviews. Through interviews, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee could be drawn closer, which helped the interviewee to express his/her true inner thoughts, and the researcher only needed to follow a rough outline of the interview that had been listed in advance. In informal interviews, necessary adjustments could be made flexibly according to the actual situation during the interview, which would help the interviewer to induce the interviewee to provide important information related to this research.

##### **Participants:**

The purpose of this research is to explore the influence of irrational factors in Chinese-English translation practice by translation majors. Therefore, the present study took translation majors of Panzhihua University as an example. The interviewees were composed of translation majors from different grades. Three girls and two boys were randomly selected from each grade, and the total number of interviews was 20, including 12 girls and 8 boys. It was stipulated that freshmen and sophomores were lower grade students, and juniors and seniors were senior grade students. Table 1 showed the basic information of the participants.

**Table 1:** Information of participants

Grade	Gender	
	Girls	Boys
Freshmen ~ Senior year	G#1~G#3	B#4~B#5
Senior grade	G#6~G#8	B#9~B#10
Lower grade	G#11~G#13	B#14~B#15
	G#16~G#18	B#19~B#20

##### **Data Collection :**

With the permission of the interviewees, the interview was recorded by audio recording. The researchers asked questions according to the interview outline prepared in advance. After the interviews were completed, the records were converted into transcripts. The researchers then read the original materials carefully, got familiar with the content of the materials, and pondered the meaning and relationship among them. There were two key points of reading: to understand the data from the perspective of the respondent and looked for possible meanings in the original data.

**Data Analysis:**

The data were analyzed and coded using a grounded theory approach. First of all, “open coding” (primary coding) was adopted. Open coding referred to the analysis process of analyzing all the data in the material, discovering and defining the concepts and attributes implied in the data.<sup>20</sup> The process of open coding was similar to a funnel. At the beginning, the scope of registration was relatively wide, and the content of the data was registered word by word, and then the scope was continuously narrowed until the code number reached saturation.<sup>21</sup> The specific method was that the researchers carefully read the material and carefully considered the relevant narratives related to the research topic. During the initial micro-analysis, all the interviewees’ data should be registered for the primary concept without reservation. The data must be registered very carefully so as not to miss any important information.

Secondly, “axial coding” (secondary coding) was carried out, which was the disaggregation of core themes during qualitative data analysis. Axial coding in Grounded Theory was the process of relating codes (categories and concepts) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking. The basic framework of generic relationships was understood according to Strauss and Corbin, who proposed a “coding paradigm” should be used to incorporate categories related to (1) the phenomenon under study, (2) the conditions related to that phenomenon (context conditions, intervening-structural-conditions or causal conditions), (3) the actions and interactional strategies directed at managing or handling the phenomenon and (4) the consequences of the actions/interactions related to the phenomenon.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, “selective coding” was used to discover core categories. The main purpose was the process of generalizing and refining the categories after systematic analysis of all discovered concept categories. The core category of a study represented the subject of the study, and should be dominant compared to other categories. In other words, it could connect all categories, form a statement of connections between relational concepts, and form a complete explanatory framework. It might cover most of the research results within a relatively broad theoretical scope, just like the pulling line of a fishnet, which could string all other categories into a whole, and play the role of “the outline”.<sup>21</sup>

## IV. Results And Discussion

**Motivation**

**Table 1: Code of Motivation**

Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding	Frequency
Motivation	Intrinsic motivation	enjoy /like the translation process	9
		improve translation skills and knowledge	5
		accumulate vocabulary and expression of phrases and sentences	2
		have interest in cross culture	11
		make English expression more authentic	3
	Extrinsic motivation	pass TEM-4, TEM-8 and other translation qualification exams	2
		want to be a translator	3
		help to find a job	1
		win scholarships	2
		help to graduate	1
		pass the final exam	3

The table above showed that the participants had stronger intrinsic motivation of translation (the frequency of 30) than extrinsic motivation (the frequency of 12). It indicated that in the translation process, students were more driven by their internal needs than by the instrumental needs (external needs).

The major motivations of translation students to practice Chinese-English translation were: improving themselves, increasing vocabulary, wanting to be a translator, gaining sense of accomplishment, accumulating authentic expressions, passing grades, getting scholarships, etc. This finding suggested that translation students, while holding intrinsic motivation, also expected to get rewards and other extrinsic motivations, but in general, students’ intrinsic motivation was stronger than extrinsic motivation, which was similar to the results of Hu Sang,<sup>12</sup> and the research of Ji Yan and Wang Yashuang<sup>22</sup>: the function of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation could be inconsistent. In the present study, the finding could be evidenced from the responses of the participants. For instance, G#12, when asked whether she was interested in Chinese-English translation practice, she answered that she liked it very much, and she really wanted to improve herself. G#18 mentioned that she wanted to improve herself, and also hoped that her hard work could get a good grade and win a scholarship. According to the interview, the researchers found that most of the students were inclined to improve themselves when they practiced Chinese-English translation, and the external rewards were more regarded as by-products of their self-improvement. In addition, there’s no correlation between motivation and the location of students’

home. This was inconsistent with the viewpoint of Kuang Yaping, who believed that the study motivation of urban college students was stronger than that of rural college students.<sup>23</sup> This inconsistency might be explained by the fact that the family conditions of the rural students were improved a lot and in the meanwhile, the students could access a multitude of free learning resources from internet.

### Emotion

**Table 2: Code of Emotion**

Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding	Frequency
Emotion	Positive emotion	feeling happy	4
		feeling enjoyed	8
		feeling interesting	4
		feeling proud	2
		feeling accomplished	4
		become immersed in the process and more focused	1
	Negative emotion	very afraid	2
		feel very useless and sad	2
		more resistance to this process	1
		doubt their ability	1
		produce a sense of boredom	1
		feel anxious	2

The code of emotion showed that the participants reached the consensus that they were influenced by their emotions in the Chinese-English translation process. Specifically, the researchers found that participants' perceptions of emotion seemed to be related to grades and gender. Those at lower grade were more vulnerable to negative emotions than the seniors. The seniors therefor exhibited stronger ability to regulate their emotions in the translation process. Besides, boys were more positive than the girls in the process. This finding was in good agreement with the research of Olha, which indicated that the translator's emotional regulation had a significant positive correlation with the age of the translator,<sup>16</sup> but was contrary to the research of Fu Zhihai, which showed that the freshmen were less anxious than the seniors.<sup>24</sup> Their findings were further supported by the research of Guan Yuanhui and Wang Lihua, who suggested that the academic optimism index of the lower grades was significantly higher than that of the upper grades.<sup>25</sup> In the present study, the following examples could be quoted. When G#1 described her negative feelings, she explained that because she was new in the college, she was homesick, and couldn't concentrate on the study. In contrast, B#19 experienced that he was in his senior year and kept practicing translation practice. He had gained some translation skills and knowledge, and he usually chose the translation texts based on his abilities. So he felt good in the translation process and was able to cope with the difficulties in the translation process.

### Persistence

**Table 3: Code of persistence**

Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding	Frequency
Persistence	Strong persistence	will try to overcome difficulties	15
		will persist	15
		will think for myself before asking for help	2
		will practice after class	10
	Weak persistence	don't take the initiative to practice unless the teacher assigns the practice	1
		use translation software directly	5

The code of persistence (Table 3) showed that most participants had strong persistence in Chinese-English translation process, because 42 references were coded as strong persistence, but only 6 were coded as weak persistence. Besides, they suggested that they would work hard to overcome difficulties and persevere when encountered with difficulties in the translation process. Interestingly, no matter what their motivation was and what state their emotional state was, the participants agreed that they would strive to overcome the difficulties encountered in Chinese-English translation practice activities. The strong persistence of the participants was the same as the finding of Sheng Hongyong<sup>17</sup> and Wu Lili<sup>18</sup>, who found that there was a significant positive correlation between grades and persistence. In the interviews, it could be found that, as young, energetic and ambitious students, even though they would encounter many difficulties in the process of learning, most of them showed the spirit of perseverance. For example, G#12 thought it was normal to encounter difficulties, and temporary setbacks were also common, but she could actively adjust herself and engage in learning activities.

## V. Conclusion

The present study conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 students majoring in translation at Panzhihua University to explore the irrational factors affecting their Chinese-English translation process. After coding and analyzing the interview data, the researchers might draw the following conclusions.

1. Translation majors, despite their intrinsic motivation, also expected to get rewards and other extrinsic motivations. However, students' intrinsic motivation was generally stronger than extrinsic motivation. At the same time, the location of their home was not making a difference in the motivation.

2. With respect to the influence of emotions, the boys were more positive than the girls in the translation process. Additionally, the students at higher grades were less emotional than those at lower grades and were more likely to regulate their emotions in the translation process.

3. For all the participants with different motivations and emotional states, they showed strong persistence and were willing to adopt different methods to cope with the difficulties in the translation process.

These findings were insightful for the translation majors and English teachers. For students, when they practiced Chinese-English translation, they should give priority to their internal motivation and supplement their extrinsic motivation, and maintain a positive emotional state to overcome difficulties. They should also keep practicing. For teachers, they should adopt appropriate teaching methods to cultivate students' intrinsic motivation, help students overcome difficulties in the learning process, and create an enjoyable learning environment for them.

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