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Trends and challenges of Chinese-Polish translation and interpretation industry in Poland

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China is Poland's largest Asian trade partner. Increased trade in recent years, combined with a visible growth of interest in Asian cultures, has contributed to the development of the Polish translation industry, especially in the Polish-Chinese language pair. Although the number of sworn translators registered with the Ministry of Justice remains small (16), the dynamic increase in the number of people dealing with regular translations makes similar services more and more available. The article aims to outline the general situation of Chinese translators in Poland. The methodological basis of the article is a survey conducted in August 2018, in which 67 respondents took part, who declared themselves translators in the aforementioned pair of languages. The survey consisted of 17 questions to which one or more answers could be given. Respondents were asked about the most frequently translated content, aids, and materials used at work, as well as the particularly difficult topics. The image that emerges from these data allows an assessment of the maturity of the industry and the prospects for its further development.

Keywords: Polish-Chinese translations, Chinese-Polish sworn translators, Polish translation industry

1. Introduction

Poland was one of the first countries to formally forge diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China and establish an embassy in the capital of the newly proclaimed country. As early as 1950, the Polish Embassy in Beijing was honoured to host Mao Zedong and other top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. The initial contacts between the two states were relatively intense, however, strictly constrained and interfered not only by the Soviet Union's policy, but also internal difficulties, eventually leading to gradual deterioration and even temporary discontinuation. It was not before the political and economic reforms of the last two decades of the past century that a restoration of diplomatic relations between Warsaw and Beijing took place, with both countries reco-

gnizing their reforms and aspirations. The presidents of Poland and China paid mutual visits in 2015 and 2016 respectively, jointly declaring the establishment of strategic partnership between the two nations. Alongside the central level administration, regional governments have also been manifesting their openness towards cooperation. There are currently 13 voivodeships and 24 cities in Poland that have formally entered twinning relationships with the corresponding administrative units in China¹. Recently, almost all large-scale forums and summits held in Poland have been visited by Chinese government and business delegations, a case in point being the last Economic Forum in Krynica or the Congress of SME in Katowice.

The new international cooperation frameworks, including the 17 + 1 Initiative² and the Belt and Road Initiative³ launched by the People's Republic of China, contribute to the rapid growth of trade exchange. Among all train cargo routes connecting the Far East and Europe that have been introduced by the China Railway Express in the last several years, the one starting in Chengdu, the capital of the Sichuan province, and reaching Łódź in Poland ranks first in the total number of courses completed so far. Currently about 6 percent of Polish exports goes to Asia. The leading economic partner in the region is China, holding the status of the Poland's second trade associate in terms of turnover and the second largest in imports. Nevertheless, although the amount of Poland's exports to China is steadily growing, only in 2017 increasing by 21% and reaching 2.3 billion dollars, the value of purchased products exceeds Poland's exports by 12 times. The cargo shipped inwards the Great Wall consists mostly of raw materials or low-processed goods, while the merchandise routed in the opposite direction is, to a large extent, electronic devices and industry equipment⁴. The positive trend of more active attitude towards the expansion on the Chinese market can be observed among Polish enterprises, which are beginning to move beyond simple exports into investments in local production infrastructures or representative offices, the example of which is the trade office of the Port of Gdańsk in Shanghai, opened in November 2018. At the same time, banners of Chinese brands and institutions, like the Bank of China, have higher visibility on the streets of Polish cities.

The intensification of multifaceted relations between Poland and China induces a growing number of Poles to perceive learning Chinese as a way to increase their value on the labour market. Hence, in response to the growing educational needs, more schools and universities offer Sinology majors or language courses. In addition to the

¹ According to data provided by the China International Friendly City Federation (中国国际友好城市联合会 *Zhōngguó Guójì Yǒuhǎo Chéngshì Liánhéhuì*): <http://www.cifca.org.cn/Web/WordGuanXi/Biao.aspx>.

² Also known as „17 + 1 Cooperation” (17+1合作 *17+1 Hézuò*), is a cooperation framework between seventeen (sixteen before the recent accession of Greece) Central and Eastern European countries and China, proposed in 2012 by the then PRC Prime Minister Wen Jiabao.

³ The Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路 *Yī Dài Yī Lù*), also known as “Silk Road Economic Belt” (丝绸之路经济带 *Sīchóu zhī Lù Jīngjì Dài*), is a broad development strategy adopted by the PRC government, focused on transportation infrastructure investments across Europe, Asia and Africa.

⁴ The data included in this paragraph comes from the presentation made by Ms. Anna Sawiak, the representative of the Polish Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Technology, during the Second Economic Railway Forum in Kraków, 12 September 2018.

long-established Chinese studies in Warsaw and Poznań, the latter of which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary last year, Sinology-oriented programmes emerged also in Toruń, Łódź, Kraków, Gdańsk, Lublin and Bydgoszcz. A similar tendency can be seen in China where, apart from Peking University, Polish studies have relatively recently appeared in Guangzhou, Chengdu, Harbin and several other university centres. A significant part of graduates of such courses find employment in the ever-expanding translation and interpretation⁵ industry, one of the indispensable elements for the proper development of Polish-Chinese relations.

According to the official statistics published by the Polish Ministry of Justice, there are 16 sworn translators currently working in Poland, most of whom, i.e. 11 persons, are affiliated with Masovian Voivodeship. Eight of them received their qualifications more than ten years ago and the most recent one in 2015⁶. The steady increase in the trade between Poland and China, as well as the growing interest in Asian culture in Poland, are reflected by the growing demand for high-quality Chinese-Polish language services, which cannot be met by the state-recognized professionals only. One of several WeChat groups⁷ dedicated to such services, established under the Polish name *Tłumaczenia – Polska i Chiny* ‘Translations – Poland and China, currently associates 451 members⁸. This number, in addition to linguistic, social and cultural determinants demanding a separate in-depth study, shows that the acquisition of English as *lingua franca* is considerably limited and far from fulfilling the need for communication between the two countries and their citizens. Most of the Chinese-Polish translators are independent experts who work on the basis of fee-for-task agreements, contracts for specific tasks or are self-employed. The aim of the study was to present the overall profile of the Chinese-Polish translators in Poland, as well as to outline problems and possible opportunities for the development of the Chinese-Polish translation industry in the future.

2. Recent translation studies, theoretical and practical approaches

Studies on translation have almost as long history as written literature. In China’s scholarly tradition, one of the earliest attempts to describe translation activity dates back to Tang dynasty (唐朝 *Tángcháo*, 618-907), specifically to Jia Gongyan (贾公彦, 7th century), an imperial scholar, and his commentaries to the *Rites of Zhou* (周礼 *Zhōu lǐ*). In the last decades, extensive studies in the field have been published, such as M. Baker and K. Malmkjær’s (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (1998). Among Polish publications, one can find such works as U. Dąbmska-Prokop (ed.)

⁵ In the following parts of the article, the term “translation” is used in the context of both written translation and oral interpretation.

⁶ Source: <https://bip.ms.gov.pl/pl/rejstry-i-ewidencje/tlumacze-przysiegli/lista-tlumaczy-przysieglych/search.html?Language=30>.

⁷ WeChat group (微信群 *Wēixìn qún*) is a form of limited access public forum functioning within the most popular and multifunctional social platform application for mobile devices WeChat (微信 *Wēixìn*).

⁸ As of 27 September 2019.

Small Encyclopedia of Translation Studies (2000). Individuals planning to start a career in translating, or already experienced professionals who want to improve their knowledge and practical techniques, might be interested in sets of exercises proposed in J. Florczak's *Simultaneous and consecutive interpreting: Theory and practice* (2013). While the above-mentioned study takes the Polish-French language pair as a basis for the training of language skills, all presented examples are easily adapted to the needs of translators of other languages. Still, the challenges regarding studies oriented exclusively towards Polish-Chinese translation largely remain. Besides descriptive and/or educational works on Chinese language, intended for Polish readers, like E. Zajdler's *Modern Chinese Grammar: Syntax and Semantics* (2005) or W. Szkudlarczyk-Brkić's *Academic textbook for learning Chinese* (2012), as well as studies on the Polish language available in China, including Li's pioneering work *The Polish Language* (1988), so far no one presented a comprehensive research dedicated to characteristics, specific problems, work conditions and the overall situation of the market of translations between the two discussed languages. The purpose of this paper – to provide a preliminary insight into the broader subject – seems therefore well justified.

3. Methods

The methodological base for the research was an online survey created as a Google Form document⁹. The authors found this method the most effective and far reaching, especially considering that no official associations of Polish-Chinese translators or related institutions, which might serve as a survey distribution channel, have been established so far. The questionnaire was distributed mainly through Facebook and WeChat applications on the various forums of Chinese-Polish translators, as well as through institutions specializing in Sinological studies, such as the Chair of Oriental Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The survey was anonymous and concerned the educational background, experience and working practices of Chinese-Polish translators. Pilot research was conducted between June and August 2016. The final survey was submitted in August 2018 to 67 respondents. The acquired data were analyzed using statistical processing software SPSS.

The online survey consisted of 17 questions, with both single-choice and multiple-choice answers. The first part of the survey concerned demographics, i.e.:

- Age;
- Sex;
- Educational background.

Apart from that, respondents were also asked about their experience and issues related to the work of a Chinese-Polish translator, e.g.:

- Length of their work life;
- Form of employment;
- Frequent types of translations;

⁹ Survey is available at: <tiny.cc/yfjndz>.

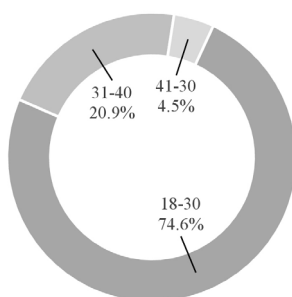
- Employers;
- Main problems encountered in the workplace.

In some cases, those surveyed could choose the option “other”. This type of feedback was taken into consideration if it exceeded 1% of all answers.

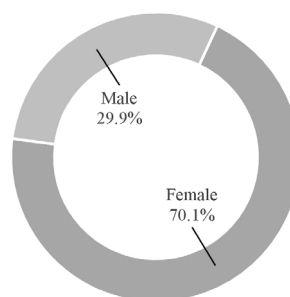
4. Demographics

The first part of the survey was aimed at acquiring the baseline demographics: age (Graph 1), sex (Graph 2) and educational background (Graphs 3 & 4). All the respondents were between 18 and 50 years old, with the majority under 30 (74.6%) and one fifth in the subsequent range – aged 31-40 (20.9%). Only 4.5% of those surveyed were aged over 40. While the data may have been influenced by the media chosen for the distribution of the survey, they may also suggest that the number of Chinese-Polish translators is steadily growing in response to the increased accessibility of Chinese studies and language courses.

There was gender imbalance among, with only one third of them male, which reflects the popular belief in Poland that most of the students who specialize in linguistics are female. This stereotype is supported by statistical data. According to the information published by the Polish Central Statistical Office, in the academic year 2016/2017 linguistics or literature courses were dominated by women (almost 82%), in Far Eastern studies, for example, approximately 85% of the students were women¹⁰.



Graph 1: Age of respondents

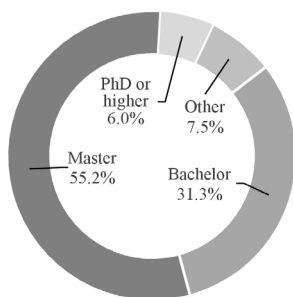


Graph 2: Sex of respondents

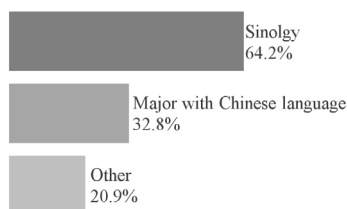
¹⁰ The statistical data for the academic year 2017/2018 are still fragmentary. Source: <<https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/szkolnictwo-wyzsze-w-roku-akademickim-20162017-dane-wstepne,8,4.html>>.

5. General characteristic

The vast majority of those surveyed have acquired tertiary education (92.5%). More than half (55.2%) graduated from the Master program, and approximately one third are the holders of a bachelor's degree (31.3%). Translators with the best (doctoral, postdoctoral degree and higher) and the most limited educational background constitute the smallest numbers of respondents (6% and 7.5% respectively). Most of the respondents specialize in Sinology (64.2%) and/or other majors providing Chinese language courses (32.8%). About one in five Chinese-Polish translators (20.9%) completed studies with no relation to the Chinese language.

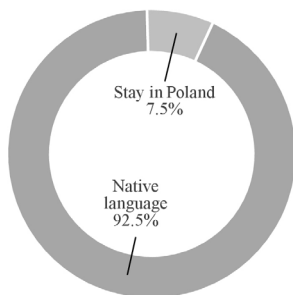


Graph 3: Education of respondents

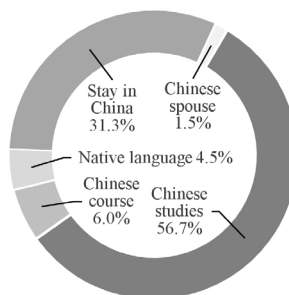


Graph 4: Specializations of respondents

The proficiency in Polish and Chinese language can be attributed to significantly varied sources (Graph 5 & 6). Polish is the native language to most of the respondents (92.5%), who acquired Chinese language competence mostly through education: Chinese studies (56.7%) and related courses (6%) or a stay in China (31.3%). Chinese is the mother tongue of only 4.5% of those surveyed.

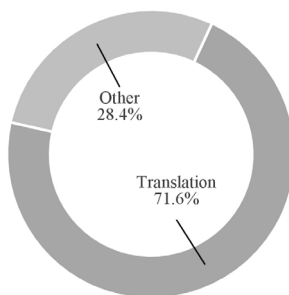


Graph 5: Source of proficiency in Polish

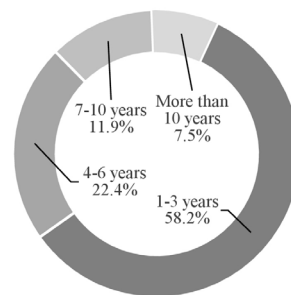


Graph 6: Source of proficiency in Chinese

While translation constitutes the main source of revenue for the majority of respondents (71.6%), their professional careers may be described as relatively short. More than half of respondents' working life falls between 1-3 years (58.2%), and the longer the practice, the fewer the respondents: approximately one fifth of those surveyed have professional translation experience of 4 to 6 years, and for one in ten their experience is between 7 and 10 years. Only 7.5% in the analysed group have more than 10 years of experience. The working life of the translators may be influenced by their form of employment, which is mainly a contract of mandate or a task-specific contract (almost 60%). About 19% of respondents are hired based on the employment contract, and a similar number (16.4%) are self-employed.



Graph 7: Main revenue source

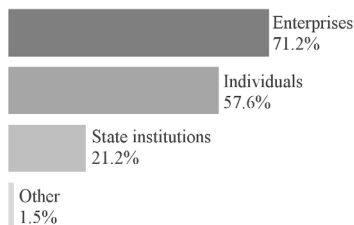


Graph 8: Career duration

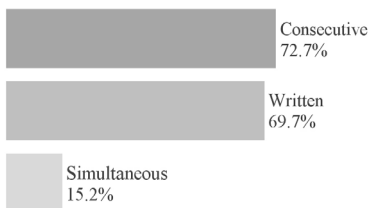
The observations stemming from the above-outlined profile of a statistical translator would be incomplete without data corresponding to the characteristics of the other indispensable party, namely, the client. Most recipients of translation services are enterprises and individuals, and 71.2% and 57.6% of those engaged in the discussed sector receive orders from the former and latter group respectively. Only 21.2% of translators have experience in working for institutions, and even fewer of them cooperate with other kinds of entities. Regarding the character of tasks entrusted by the already categorized clients, as many as 72.7% of service providers perform consecutive translations, slightly fewer, i.e. 69.7%, carry out written translations. Simultaneous translations, involving the highest fees, but also requiring excellent language skills and specialized training, can be found in portfolios of 15.2% of the respondents. Among different forms of the received orders, 60.6% of translators deal with technical topics, while respectively 34.8% and 18.2% of the surveyed work with official and literary contents. As the Graph 12 shows, other matters appear only sporadically.



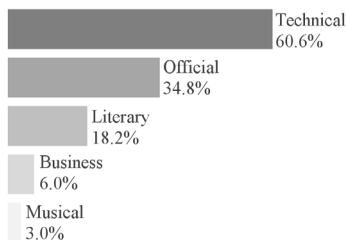
Graph 9: Form of employment



Graph 10: Types of clients

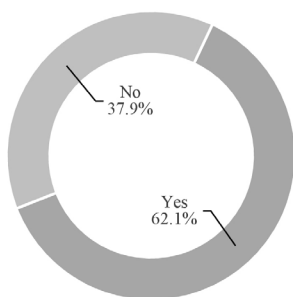


Graph 11: Types of translations

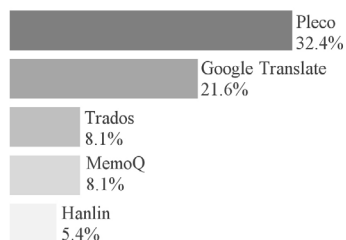


Graph 12: Topics of translations

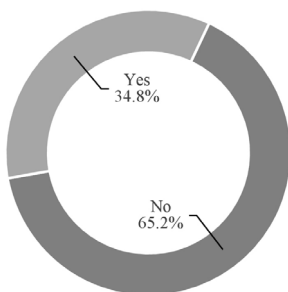
Another important indicator of the contemporary condition and ongoing development of the industry can be deduced from the analysis of the most common computer-assisted translation solutions used by the surveyed, as well as from daily work problems reported in the survey. Although electronic tools are in use among 62.1% of the interviewees, these tools, however, are mostly inexpensive or free applications and dictionaries, including Pleco and Google Translate. Only a few respondents declared using advanced programs, such as Trados. The considerably low level of professionalization of services manifests itself in another important aspect – the predominant lack of proofreading in the translation process. Texts whose accuracy has not been verified by qualified, mother-tongue proof-readers are provided by 65.2% of translators. According to Graph 17, the quality of translations may be also affected by the deficiencies of linguistic material and insufficient educational background. Such issues were reported in the respective proportions of 43.9% and 38.8%. The surveyed pointed out several more problems, inter alia, 28.8% of them found themselves to be insufficiently supported by clients, while 19.7% experienced payment delays.



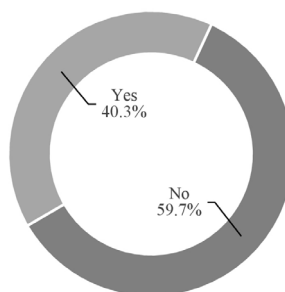
Graph 13: Use of electronic tools



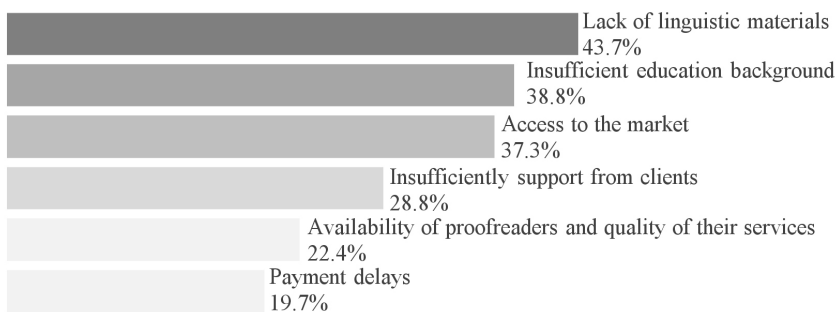
Graph 14: Types of electronic tools



Graph 15: Use of proof-reader services



Graph 16: Teaching Chinese



Graph 17: Problems encountered by translators

6. Cross-references

In the last part of the presented research the relationship between different variables has been evaluated in the form of Chi-square test for independence. The results, along with their Chi-square and p values¹¹, are as follows:

- Correlation between age and the translation as the main source of income of a translator ($p = 0.94$);
 - Correlation between age and the form of employment ($p = 0.324$);
 - Correlation between types of translations and the level of education ($p = 0.00$);
 - Correlation between types of translation and learned specialty ($p = 00$);
 - Correlation between types of translation and length of work life of a translator ($p = 0.32$);
 - Correlation between topics of translation and learned specialty ($p = 0.001$);
 - Correlation between tools used by a translator and topics of translation ($p = 0.001$);
 - Correlation between tools used by a translator and translation as their main source of income ($p = 0.211$);
 - Correlation between tools used by a translator and length of work life of a translator ($p = 0.486$);
 - Correlation between use of proofreading and topics of translation ($p = 0.148$);
 - Correlation between use of proofreading and translation as the main source of income of a translator ($p = 0.157$);
 - Correlation between use of proofreading and length of work life of a translator ($p = 0.1$);
 - Correlation between problems encountered by a translator and their form of employment ($p = 0.689$);
 - Correlation between problems encountered by a translator and different kinds of employers ($p = 0.00$);
 - Correlation between teaching Chinese and the age of the translator ($p = 0.688$).

7. Conclusions

The overall picture emerging from the analysis of the data gathered through the survey shows the community of Chinese-Polish translators in Poland as internally diversified, with its members considerably dependent on individual factors. The results of the performed Chi-square tests suggest only a few associations between issues examined in the survey. The most prominent one concerns the close correlation of, respectively, types and contents of services provided by the respondents with their educational background, including learned specialties. The survey hence allows to conclude that graduates from Sinological or Chinese-oriented studies form the most numerous and versatile group on the analyzed market. Another correlation has been noted regarding the use of professional tools according to different topics of performed translations. While the level of the

¹¹ Relevant $p < 0.05$.

actual implementation of such tools remains considerably limited, more demanding topics seem, to some extent, to enhance the adoption of more advanced applications. Among the few declared users of Trados and MemoQ, everyone reports to be mainly engaged in technical and/or professional areas. The last instance of correlation exposed through the Chi-square method was the one between problems encountered by translators and different kinds of their employers. In comparison with other variables, the aspect of customers' characteristics is, therefore, apparently crucial for the smooth provision of services. State institutions appear as the most reliable group of clients in terms of timely payments. Enterprises and individuals, besides financial aspects, raise more complaints on insufficient support, including the provision of documentation and other translation materials. The aforementioned correlations are, however, outnumbered by mutually uncorrelated variables, e.g. age and the main source of income, age and the form of employment, implemented tools and the main source of income, types of performed translations and the length of translation career. Furthermore, the length of translation career reveals no connections with implemented tools, nor usage of proofreading, which in turn does not interact with topics of translation, as well as main source of income. The nature of the problems reported by the respondents has no correlation with forms of employment, while the aspect of age seems irrelevant in the context of teaching Chinese.

In addition to the above observations, two general conclusions emerge from the characteristics of translators, their employers and received tasks. Among various contents of performed services, technical topics appear with by far the highest ratio. Thus, the recent trends in cooperation between Poland and China, especially increased exchange of goods, already outlined in the introduction, are also reflected by tendencies found in the surveyed market. The majority of respondents deal with industrial specifications, product descriptions, assembly line designs, equipment offers, etc. The technical profile is not, however, accompanied by a noticeable growth in the use of professional translation tools. This fact shows that the Chinese-Polish translation industry, like in the case of relatively recent intensification of relationships between the two nations, is still in an early stage of rapid development and strives for more maturity within its structure.

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