

The Current Situation of the Listening and Interpreting Abilities of Undergraduates Majoring in Translation at Applied Universities Based on Empirical Research

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How to cite this paper: Shen, S., & Zhang, Y. (2025). The Current Situation of the Listening and Interpreting Abilities of Undergraduates Majoring in Translation at Applied Universities Based on Empirical Research. *Education and Social Work*, 1(3), 66–73. ISSN Print: 3079-515X; ISSN Online: 3079-5168.
<https://doi.org/10.63313/ESW.9035>
Published: 2025-05-08

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Abstract

This study takes the junior-year students majoring in translation at Zhejiang Yuexiu University as the research subjects. With the help of the China Standards of English Language Ability, it conducts an in-depth exploration of the current situation of their listening and translation abilities, and makes a comparison with the research conducted by Mu Lei on college students. The study finds that there are significant differences between junior-year students in applied universities and those in first-class universities in terms of the proportion of improvement in listening and translation abilities, the distribution of ability levels, and other aspects. Based on this, suggestions such as strengthening listening training, optimizing teaching resources, and perfecting the evaluation system are put forward to improve the teaching quality of the translation major in applied universities.

Keywords

Applied University ; Translation Major; Listening and Interpreting Ability; CSE

1. Introduction

In the teaching system of the translation major, the listening and translation ability is one of the key indicators for measuring students' professional attainments. The China Standards of English Language Ability provides a powerful tool for the precise assessment of students' listening and translation abilities. Scholars like Mu Lei have achieved fruitful research results regarding the listening and translation abilities of college students. However, most of their research focuses on first-class universities, with relatively little attention paid to applied universities. As an applied university, Zhejiang Yuexiu University has its own uniqueness in the cultivation of translation majors. Conducting an in-depth study of the listening and translation abilities of junior-year students majoring in translation at this university and comparing the

differences with those of first-class universities is of great significance for optimizing the teaching of the translation major in applied universities and improving the quality of talent cultivation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Mechanism of Listening Comprehension in Interpreting and Cognitive Load

Scholars both at home and abroad have explored the mechanism of listening in interpreting from the perspective of cognitive psychology. Through a simultaneous interpreting experiment, (Bajo 2000) proposed that listening comprehension is a two-way process of information decoding and semantic reconstruction. (Gile's 2021) "Cognitive Load Model" further emphasizes the competitive relationship among the resources for listening comprehension, memory, and output, pointing out that improving listening ability can effectively reduce cognitive load and optimize the quality of interpreting. Subsequent studies have focused on the analysis of listening obstacles and corresponding countermeasures (Hua Liang, Dai Huiping, 2016). However, there is still a controversy regarding the two-way relationship between listening ability and interpreting ability. Some scholars believe that the improvement of listening ability directly promotes interpreting performance, while other studies indicate that there may be a non-linear correlation between the two (Mu Lei et al., 2021), which requires further verification through empirical research.

2.2. Methods and Strategies for Cultivating Listening Ability in Interpreting

Existing research has centered around the definition of listening comprehension ability (Lu Xinzhaohao, 2007; Bao Gang, 1999), note-taking training (Si Yalin, 2013), and multi-dimensional training methods (Vandergrift, 2000; Zhan Cheng, 2022). However, most of these achievements rely on empirical summaries and lack empirical support. A small number of empirical studies based on teaching experiments or competition data (Feng Dandan, 2008; Yang Xue, 2015) are difficult to verify the effectiveness of the training due to the ambiguous evaluation criteria. Although scholars generally incorporate listening training into the curriculum design, there is still a lack of empirical research on the corresponding relationship between listening ability and interpreting ability. A search on CNKI shows that there are only 9 core journal papers whose titles contain both "interpreting" and "listening" at the same time, and there is a scarcity of literature focusing on applied universities.

2.3. The Progress of CSE in the Research of Listening and Interpreting

The release of the CSE has provided a unified framework for the assessment of English language proficiency. Its core research mainly focuses on the diagnosis of listening ability. (Luo Juan, 2023) constructed a five-dimensional cognitive model of listening (comprehension, extraction, synthesis, induction, and inference) based on

the G-DINA model, revealing the weakness of students' reasoning ability. In terms of oral English and interpreting teaching, (Jie Wei et al., 2024) designed oral English tasks and scoring criteria based on the CSE, proving that it can effectively improve students' ability to set goals and conduct self-reflection. In international benchmarking research, (Peng Chuan et al., 2021) verified the corresponding levels of listening skills between the CSE and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), providing a basis for integration with international assessments. In the field of interpreting, the application of the CSE focuses on the validation of the effectiveness of self-assessment scales (Mei Huan, 2020; Chen Jing, 2019) and the research on the rationality of grade classification (Fang Rongjie, 2019; Fu Huihong, 2020). It is worth noting that (Liu Jianda & Han Baocheng, 2017), as well as (Mu Lei et al., 2021), through the CSE, found that the correlation between listening ability and interpreting ability first increases and then decreases as the proficiency level rises, providing a quantitative basis for the improvement of teaching.

3. Research Design

- This study explores two questions: 1) At what level of the "Scale" are the listening and interpreting abilities of the junior and senior students majoring in translation at applied undergraduate institutions? 2) Will there be any changes in their ability levels after one year of teaching in listening, speaking, and interpreting courses?
- In terms of questionnaire design, this study fully draws on the research paradigm of scholar Mu Lei and constructs the measurement tool by adopting the classic form of the Likert five-point scale. As a widely used measurement method in the field of social sciences, the Likert five-point scale can effectively quantify the subjective feelings such as the attitudes and cognitions of the respondents, ensuring the measurability and analytical value of the data. At the same time, this study guides students to conduct self-assessments of their listening and interpreting levels based on the scientific framework of the CSE. As an authoritative standard for English proficiency assessment in China, the CSE provides a systematic, standardized, and universal reference system for students' self-assessments, making students' evaluations of their own English abilities more objective and accurate, thus ensuring the reliability and validity of the research data.
- This study designs the CSE self-assessment scale for listening ability and the self-assessment scale for interpreting ability as online questionnaires on the survey platform "Wenjuanxing". Through semi-structured interviews, it examines the difficulties encountered by the respondents in their interpreting and listening learning. The main part of the questionnaire is the self-assessment of the respondents' abilities, which adopts the form of a Likert five-point scale. The options include: 1 – "Completely unable to do it", 2 – "Barely able to do it", 3 –

“Basically able to do it”, 4 – “Able to do it fairly well”, 5 – “Completely able to do it”.

- The survey subjects are junior students majoring in translation at Zhejiang Yuexiu University, who are used as the research sample. A total of 259 questionnaires were distributed, and 122 valid questionnaires were collected.

4. Results Analysis

The reliability tests of the students’ listening and translation proficiency, the improvement situation of students’ listening and translation proficiency (questionnaire) and the test subjects are 0.807 and 0.926 respectively; both are greater than 0.8. This indicates that the scale has good reliability and the test results are stable. The validity coefficients are 0.785 and 0.905 respectively. Since both validity coefficients are greater than 0.7, it shows that the two questionnaires have good reliability, the measurement results are stable and can effectively reflect the research content. At the same time, the questionnaires can well distinguish the test subject groups with different characteristics, and their measurement results have high reliability and validity, indicating that there is a strong correlation between the self-assessment results of the questionnaires and the actual situation, which reflects that the questionnaires have good practical value.

4.1. Analysis of the Improvement in Listening Ability

This study, based on the CSE framework, conducts a quantitative analysis of the improvement in the listening ability of junior students (N = 102) from basic to advanced listening tasks. The results are as follows:

1) Basic Listening Ability: 73.54% of the students believed that they had made progress (including “some progress” and above) in the ability to “identify words and execute instructions”, among which 18.63% achieved “significant progress”. However, 8.82% of the students still reported “no progress”, indicating that some students have bottlenecks in the automated processing of high-frequency words. And 62.75% of the students made progress in “obtaining basic information such as people and time”, and 15.69% achieved “remarkable improvement”. However, 31.37% of them were still at the stage of “slight progress”, reflecting that the speed and accuracy of information extraction need to be further strengthened.

2) Advanced Listening Ability: 45.1% of the students achieved “significant/remarkable improvement” in the task of “identifying logical relationships (such as transitions)”, which is significantly higher than the proportion of 30.57% of “basically mastered” in the initial questionnaire ($P < 0.05$). This result is partially consistent with the conclusion of “weak reasoning ability” in Luo Juan’s (2023) listening cognitive model. Only 30.39% of the students achieved advanced breakthroughs in “understanding professional lectures and organizing frameworks”, and 45.1% were still at the stage of “slight progress”, which confirms Gile’s (2009) cognitive load theory - the superposition of technical terms and long passage information is likely

to lead to resource competition.

4.2. Analysis of the Improvement in Interpreting Ability

The improvement in interpreting ability shows significant task dependence, which is specifically manifested as follows:

- 1) Basic Interpreting Tasks: 58.82% of the students have improved their abilities in scenarios such as “welcoming and seeing off guests, and accompanying for shopping”. However, 38.24% of them have only made “slight progress”, indicating insufficient application of communication strategies and the need to strengthen context adaptation training.
- 2) Advanced Interpreting Tasks: 61.76% of the students have improved their abilities in “foreign affairs meetings and long passage translation”, but 33.33% of them have only made “slight progress”, highlighting the insufficiency of the grade connection in the CSE (for example, the compliance rate of “accurately translating complex logics” required by Level 7 of the CSE is only 22.55%). Only 30.4% of the students are able to “accurately translate the content in unfamiliar fields”, which is highly related to the theory of “difficulty in domain knowledge transfer” proposed by (Cerezo, 2017).

5. Discussion

This article discusses the current situation of students’ abilities, the improvement status, the implications for teaching, as well as the prospects.

5.1. Analysis of the Improvement in Interpreting Ability

- 1) This small-scale survey was conducted among junior and senior students of Zhejiang Yuexiu University, focusing on students’ English listening and interpreting proficiency. The results reveal the unique current situation of students’ abilities in these two aspects.
- 2) In terms of interpreting ability, the interpreting abilities of the subjects mainly concentrate on Levels 4 to 6 of the self-assessment scale. Further analysis shows that there is a gap of about one level in the interpreting abilities between junior and senior students. This may be related to the curriculum progress and the number of practical opportunities of students in different grades. Compared with junior students, senior students have experienced more professional courses and may have participated in more interpreting practice activities, thus achieving a certain degree of improvement in interpreting ability, which reflects the differences in the accumulation of interpreting skills among students as they progress through different learning stages.
- 3) Regarding listening ability, students’ listening abilities are concentrated on Levels 5 to 6, and there is no obvious difference in listening ability between the two grades. This may imply that during the college English listening teaching process, from the junior to the senior year, the differential impacts of teaching contents, methods and

other factors on the improvement of students' listening ability are not significant. It may also indicate that in these two grade ranges, the listening training materials and training intensity that students are exposed to are relatively similar, resulting in a relatively stable development state of students' listening ability, without obvious ability gradient changes due to the increase in grade.

5.2. Analysis of the Situation of Students' Ability Improvement

1) This survey focused on junior students of Zhejiang Yuexiu University. The results showed that students have made certain improvements in both English listening and interpreting abilities. In terms of basic listening ability, most students have made significant progress in identifying vocabulary and phrases, obtaining basic information when listening to simple discourse, with a relatively high proportion of "slight improvement" and "certain improvement". This is attributed to the effective implementation of basic listening training in the audio-visual-oral courses, such as dialogue and passage listening exercises, which enable students to become more proficient in understanding common vocabulary and simple sentence patterns. Regarding complex listening ability, although the improvement is relatively small, some students have achieved "significant improvement" or "remarkable improvement" in understanding professional lectures and evaluating viewpoints and stances. This reflects the positive impact of the gradually increasing professional content and in-depth discussions in the courses on students' abilities.

2) In terms of interpreting ability, most students have improved in basic tasks such as liaison interpreting for familiar topics, indicating that basic interpreting training in the courses, such as simulated scenario dialogue translation, helps students accumulate common expressions and improve their reaction speed. However, in complex interpreting tasks, such as interpreting speeches with fast speech rates and large amounts of information, the improvement effect is not ideal, with only 6.86% of students achieving "significant improvement". This may be because complex interpreting tasks place extremely high demands on students' language reserves, reaction speed, and breadth of knowledge, and there is still room for improvement in the intensity and difficulty of relevant training in the current courses.

5.3. Implications for Teaching

Based on the results of this survey, the curriculum settings should be further optimized in teaching. For basic ability training, the difficulty and diversity of the training can be appropriately increased to consolidate the progress made by students. For example, in listening training, more materials with diverse accents and rich contents can be introduced; in interpreting training, the scope and depth of common topics can be expanded. Regarding the cultivation of complex abilities, the training intensity should be increased and teaching methods should be enriched. For instance, methods such as real-scene simulation, case analysis, and group cooperation can be adopted to improve students' abilities to handle complex tasks. At the same

time, teachers should formulate personalized teaching plans according to the actual improvement situations of students to meet the learning needs of different students.

5.4. Limitations and Prospects of the Research

This study only selected junior students from Zhejiang Yuexiu University as the sample. The limitation of the sample may lead to the limited generalizability of the results. In future research, the sample scope can be expanded to cover students from different regions and institutions at different levels, so as to obtain more representative conclusions. In addition, this study only examined the impact of one semester's curriculum learning on students' abilities. Follow-up research can conduct long-term follow-up surveys to deeply explore the continuous development of students' abilities. It is also possible to further study the impact of different teaching methods and curriculum contents on the improvement of students' listening and interpreting abilities, so as to provide more scientific and accurate guidance for teaching practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Zhang, for her invaluable guidance and support throughout this research. Her insightful suggestions and patient corrections have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. My heartfelt thanks also go to my family, who have always been there for me, providing emotional and moral support during the challenging times. My special thanks to my friends, who helped me collect data and provided valuable feedbacks.

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