

Plurilingualism and Native-Speaker Norms in Chinese Translation Studies — Ideological Tensions and Prospects for Reconciliation

Yixuan Han

*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada
hhhyx.xxx@gmail.com*

Abstract. Over the past few decades, among language and translation scholars worldwide, this plurilingual perspective on individuals' and communities' on-the-move and ever-dynamic uses of several languages has increasingly gained consolidation. Native-speaker norms that sanction end-speaker authenticity as an inspirational model have dominated translation quality norms, appraisal schema, and teaching frameworks. Their binarism bred chronic ideological tension embedded within China, where translation studies and practices are written within domestic scholarly hegemonics and an increasingly internationalizing language market. This paper investigates where native speaker norms intersect and conflict with plurilingualism in Chinese translation studies under mainstream domestic indexes, Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI), A Guide to the Core Journals of China (GCJC) and foreign journals, Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI). According to qualitative clustering of journal papers from 2021 to 2025, the paper identifies three conflict zones: native norm-biased translation quality appraisal conflicts of translator identity and plurilingual competences and native knowledge, and cultural exchange paradox, where native norms promote and restrict exchange between cultures. To counter such tensions, this paper recommends policies, pedagogical, and professional practices that are more inclusive and language empowering. By situating such solutions in the framework of China's cultural, historical, and market-based translation, this article adds to the growing debate on how the role of translation in the multilingual world should change.

Keywords: Plurilingualism, Native-speaker Norms, Translation Studies, China, Intercultural Communication

1. Introduction

Since the early nineties, plurilingualism has been conceptualized as an adaptive ability to evoke various repertoires of language use to speak fluently and efficiently across various contexts [1]. It questions the presupposition that languages must be acquired along autonomous lines of monolingual practice, instead focusing on complementarity and blurring of various repertoires. At the same time, the dominance of native-speaker requirements continues to exercise strict demands

on linguistic propriety and stylistic authenticity on translation quality, professionalism, and language learning ability. It has generated a lasting split between the openness of the practice of plurilingualism and the gatekeepers' role of the native-speaker norms.

It is not merely a theoretical conflict in translator training, evaluation, and professional development. Plurilingualism can respond to the situations of international communication and provide the possibility of fluid identity constructions, whereas native-speaker norms exclude translators who do not conform to narrowly defined parameters of linguistic authenticity. The tension is especially pronounced in China. The ancient practice of translation, inherited from both Western forms and Confucian concepts of fidelity, has been joined by requirements of a market internationalizing to embed native-speaker norms into teaching, publishing, and practice by profession [2]. The result is that the translators must practice amidst local and abroad-oriented demands, favoring native norms.

Despite the simultaneous existence of the two paradigms, Chinese studies have tended to compartmentalize them apart from one another. Plurilingualism studies have typically centered on the contribution to pedagogy, intercultural competence, or language policy, whilst native-speaker norm studies have typically highlighted the contribution to quality assurance and professional rankings. This compartmentalization has concealed the surface ideological tension once the two cross paths. Additionally, local indexes like the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) and A Guide to the Core Journals of China (GCJC) uphold native norms as standards, whilst globally ranked journals like SSCI and AHCI also continue the tradition.

The current research positions itself in this void by exploring ideological confrontations between monolingual native-speaker standards and plurilingualism in translation studies in China. It argues that challenging prevailing monolingual ideologies and legitimizing plurilingual practices is an initial step in developing translation standards worthy of the 21st-century multilingual challenge. Global and local research challenges the larger debates on how translation needs to develop internationally on a multilingual earth.

2. Methodology

The present study adopts the qualitative methodology to investigate disparities of ideology between native-speaker protocols and plurilingualism in translation studies of Chinese. Based on the discursive and value-encrusted character of the issue, qualitative studies allow for a finer level of examination of argumentation, discourses, and identity construction [1].

The corpus of studies comprised 15 academic articles between 2021 and 2025. Sources were downloaded from CSSCI, GCJC, SSCI, and AHCI. Screening was carried out with keywords of plurilingualism, native-speaker norm(s), and quality of translation, and only articles that mentioned translation pedagogy, testing, or professional identity specifically were shortlisted for inclusion. A total of 9 articles from Chinese journals, 4 articles from English journals, and 2 chapters from books made up the list of sources to give a representative sample of Chinese and overseas sources.

Thematic coding was used to mark common discursive patterns across three themes-native-speakerism legitimization, representations of plurilingual capacity, and crossovers of worldwide translation studies. Two peers whose major is translation and language studies coded separately, and manual comparison showed more than 80% agreement. To further increase rigor, intercoder reliability was calculated with ReCal, with a Cohen's Kappa of 0.83 reported, reflecting substantial agreement. Differences were resolved through negotiation with coders and an associate professor of translation studies to ensure that all categories agreed upon were appropriate. This procedure

enhanced the quality of the coding outcomes and led to the finding of the study regarding the connection of plurilingualism and native-speaker norms in translation research.

3. Clarification of concepts and continued discussion

To conduct in-depth analysis of the contradictions and interactions between plurilingualism and native-speaker norms in Chinese translation practices, this section first clarifies the core connotations of the two core concepts-plurilingualism and native-speaker norms. This study then further explores the specific manifestations, essential attributes and potential controversies of their tension.

3.1. Plurilingualism

Adaptive, context-specific use of two or more languages is referred to as plurilingualism, a sociolinguistic term commonly used in language teaching and translation studies. It differs from multilingualism in that it emphasizes the integrated rather than the parallel use of languages, with speakers drawing on all their linguistic resources to communicate effectively [3]. The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) legislatively recognizes plurilingual competence as a specific skill in intercultural communication, stressing that languages are not distinct systems but part of a general repertoire.

In translation studies, the notion repositions us regarding translator competence, instead of defining ability as proficiency in two separate, standardized languages, source and target. Plurilingualism appreciates using hybrid texts, code switching, and translanguageing to reach communicative objectives. For example, Chinese Mandarin to Cantonese to English translators can apply cultural information in all three to create a translation more likely to be understood by the target community than a translation created by a translator under rigid monolingual constraints.

3.2. Native-speaker norms

Native speaker norms are standards of style and language derived from ideal monolingual native speaker performance. In translation, they are standards of cultural appropriateness, idiomaticity, and grammatical adequacy [4]. Deeply anchored in translation world evaluation standards, certification requirements, and client expectations, their implicit assumption is that a better imitation of the native shape of the target language is better.

Native-speaker standards have uncontested dominance in China's translation industry. Native-English origin translators, by and large, are the employer of choice for headline titles, and professional school career evaluation criteria often set up excellence as the ability to produce native-sounding translations. Journal referees in even the academic publishing environment will, sometimes, reject translation/translated abstracts that fail to meet native-speaker standards, even as content attains communicative competence for readership in target communities.

3.3. Key points of tension and controversy

The tension between Plurilingualism and Native-Speaker Norms in Chinese translation practices generates a variety of manifestations of the conflict, which are not homogeneous. Still, there are variations in the form of a common conflict. These yearnings help determine how translators, clients, and institutions negotiate quality, identity, and cross-cultural interactions.

First, functional adequacy in translation quality assessment is often compromised by the pursuit of native-speaker style. In certain Chinese commercial translations, for example, a product description functionally adequate for readers of Chinese domestic English might also be reformulated to rid it of Chinese English features in an attempt to conform to American stylistic conventions. Plurilingualism would find such features as legitimate local adaptations, while native-speaker conventions judge them as errors.

Secondly, the professional legitimacy of translators is frequently contingent upon the degree of deviation from native-speaker linguistic forms. In native-speaker criteria, professional identity becomes linked to native-speaker profile alienation [5]. In plurilingual settings, translators, particularly translators whose linguistic self is any hybrid of influence, cannot be expected to muster that same degree of recognition. In China, persuasion is advanced through an economic value attributed to native-speaking foreign expertise, favored for high-tier editing or quality control jobs.

Finally, while native-speaker standards facilitate cross-cultural communication, they inherently carry the risk of suppressing source-culture elements. Since their observance leads to higher-order intelligibility in globally dispersed environments, it will surely suppress those culture-based elements addressed to a source culture [6]. The conditions to preserve plurilingualism are to enforce them despite passing the conditions of mastering the target language. This is even more true in the Context of Chinese media/literature translation, wherein conservation of signification that may have been lost due to domestication by translation can be realized through culture-based words/vocabulary preservation.

What is controversial about the confrontation between plurilingualism and the norm of the native speaking language is usually not a technical problem, but rather a more philosophical one, the conflict of power, authenticity and cultural legitimacy of translation [1]. It has a long history, and is reflected in the training of translators, the practice of translation in institutions and the personal perception of translation as a vocation. It belongs to China's modern linguistic and cultural life spheres.

4. Certain ideological tension expressions

The chapter summarizes the main ideological conflicts in Chinese translation studies. It considers the prejudice of the evaluation towards the standards of the native speakers, the identity crisis of translators, and such a problem as cultural communication, whose peculiar feature is the conflict between global intelligibility and national specificity. All these contradictions together show the constraints and adaptations that define the translation practice in China.

4.1. Standards of translation quality evaluation

Quality evaluation is founded on standards that favor those of the native speakers. Age-old standards such as idiomatic conciseness, grammatical suitability, and stylistic panache tend to be a transcription of native speaker standards, such as Anglo-American or European linguistic standards. Such standards would privilege native-sounding control as the ultimate high standard, and devalue all forms of expression within the plurilingual repertoires of translators. Consequently, evaluation processes would automatically devalue translations that preserve the source language's cultural or linguistic elements, regardless of whether such choices are best for cultural fidelity and communicative suitability.

The preference of this native standard coincides with plurilingual strategies, over standardization of linguistic diversity, intercultural compromise, common sense, and monolithic linguistic standard

adherence. Unlike native-speaker-based testing, standardization and presumed superiority in foreign markets, this also stands in a position to confine the range of tolerable translation practice. To illustrate, examiners may deduct against translators the relatively non-standard expressions acceptable in local listener expectations but not in standard English usage.

4.2. Translator identity dilemmas

For Chinese translators, identity construction is a plurilingual competence negotiation with the perceived authority of native speakers. The profession idealizes native command and produces a hierarchy in which target language native speaker translators, usually English, are taken as more credible or sellable. This brings about professional incongruity amongst Chinese translators as they are believed to be the second-best linguistically, even after having a bicultural capacity [7]. This continues to be a backstage identity issue, in which translators are tasked with self-perception and identity crisis issues in the business.

The hierarchy also becomes conflated with self-perception. The translators who received their education in native-speaker-oriented systems can accept that they are not good enough in their native language, despite their professional achievements. This may be at the cost of confidence, may result in the inhibition of creativity and may lead to over-compliance with prescriptive norms. The clients and the translators may underestimate plurilingual competence, permitting minor code switching and cultural flexibility.

4.3. The cultural communication paradox

Cross-cultural communication has a paradox related to conformity to norms of native speakers that is relevant in the process of global interactions of China. Conformity can bring international intelligibility and thus help bring about the desired professionalization of Chinese translation abroad. This creates another dimension of the identity problem of the translator: to be on the one hand between the international fame and on the other the international authenticity. Writing in standard and idiomatic English makes translated texts more accessible to non-Chinese culture audiences and, by extension, to business negotiation, academic cooperation, and diplomatic communication.

4.4. Synthesis

Intrinsic speaker demands are sellable and simple quality measurements, yet can lose innovative answers and annihilate translator assurance and culture. Plurilingual interventions, in their turn, give rise to adaptive, culture-infused translation practice, which may be repressed in specific settings as monolingual rules of rightness outline professionalism. With the introduction of translation as an international positioning resource and intercultural communication tool being implemented in China, the above manifestations should be the key to further comprehensive and contextually sensitive practice.

5. Underlying causes of the tensions

The emphasis on native-speaker norms has long precedents in Chinese translation history, linguistic ideologies, and cultural policy. From the late Qing and the early Republican period, Western ideals established translation into symbols of modernity, encoding native-like fluency as the supreme standard. Confucian ideals of text faithfulness and later socialist-era standardization cemented the

emphasis. With the post-reform period, English mastery has become a synonym of professionalism, fixing the native-speaker as the final icon of translation authority [8].

5.1. Historical and cultural factors

China's prioritization of native-speaker norms in the translation industry is closely embedded in its translation history, linguistic ideologies, and cultural policies. In China, translation has ever been conceptualized as a matter of language and political and artistic activity. During the late Qing and early Republican periods, translation was subject to the dominating influence of Western models, which were regarded as the norms of modernity and intellectual advancement [9]. This produced an intense fascination with real Western language practice, the basis of the longstanding relationship between competence in the native speech and competence in translation.

This overemphasis is also due to Chinese linguistic ideologies. Classical Chinese translation studies focused on faithfulness and purity of style, and were inspired by Confucian ideals of textual faithfulness and language standardization in the socialist period. More than this, cultural politics, especially in the wake of socialist market reform after the 20th century, have skewed their favour towards mastery of the English language as an international interactional language, and, by proxy, equate a native-like command of the English language with professionalism.

5.2. Internal translation industry systems and market forces

In addition to cultural and point of origin factors, quality incentives in the Chinese home translation industry still compel native-speaker quality-control and employment biases in the institutional marketplace and public marketplace favour native speakers [10]. Translation and localization job advertisements will specify that the minimum qualification is native fluency, and highly credentialed non-natives will be disqualified, no matter their cultural background or content specialization.

Meanwhile, specific market segments, including community interpreting or localization to the domestic market, have started to question these set standards in favour of cultural flexibility, speed, and low-cost efficiency over loyalty to native paradigms. One more confounding variable, however, is the international sourcing of translation. To respond to the demand by clients that the native output production should be offered, Chinese agencies subcontract labour to foreign companies to create structural impediments to the plurilingual translators in the local market. This will make markets more appealing, but will validate that linguistic competences are closer to native speakers than to higher-order bilingual or plurilingual skills.

6. Paradoxes in the Chinese context and their solution

The policy-pedagogical-professional dilemma of ideological conflict between native-speaker standards and plurilingualism among the Chinese translation fraternity needs effective multi-level solutions at policy, pedagogy, and professional levels. The methodical maturation of each layer would assist in reducing the struggle between rival belief systems at the authority and authenticity levels and raise diversity and translation quality.

6.1. Policy responses

A policy can establish national translation proficiency standards according to which plurilingual competence is synonymous with the competence of a native speaker. It would require a disposition

toward this myopia that native speaker-hood is the exclusive model of competent command of languages. Instead, indicators of intercultural brokerage, situation-specific fidelity, and practical efficiency can be described through professional norms [11]. The other policy intervention is to create pathways of accreditation for plurilingual translators. Although the native-like competency is preferred in the current licensing and testing paradigms, policy may establish standalone individual certification paths that effectively test translators to practice within a chain of language and culture systems. These are bespoke exams, portfolio evaluations, and professional development courses on a regular cycle. These routes will accredit plurilingual translators as professionals with exceptional skills and not as non-native overrides. For example, the bilingualism policy structure of Canada and the European Union's accrediting translation systems have already identified plurilingual competence with native fluency, which shows that it is both realistic and successful to enact such reforms.

6.2. Educational measures

One teaching approach is to embed plurilingualism within translation courses. Translation practice can include explicit cross-linguistic awareness, identity negotiation, and cultural placement instruction. For instance, coursework can be of a comparative translation nature where students reflexively analyze ways supporting divergent repertoires of languages contribute to meaning-making instead of valorizing standard native-speaker solutions only [12]. Students could thereby grow comfortable with plurilingual practices and problematize assumptions of linguistic purism.

A second pedagogical initiative is educating teachers to instruct beyond native-speaker norms. Most Chinese translation school teachers were educated in native-speaker-based approaches [13]. Teachers can be educated to incorporate plurilingual practice, recognize various linguistic repertoires, and carry out an apprenticeship towards embracing their translinguaging potential through hosting seminars for teacher training and professional development workshops. In itself, curricula change at that level will be superficial without teacher reform. European universities have adopted parallel practices, where translinguaging is woven into assignments, and South American settings, where plurilingual teaching facilitates intercultural understanding.

6.3. Professional cooperation model

One early step in professional collaboration is mobilizing cooperative teams of plurilingual and native translators. On this template, all translators share complementary areas of strength: target-level native fluency with idiomatic taste comes from native speakers, and intercultural depth and source-text sensitivity come from plurilingual translators. Institutionalizing this group-based arrangement at the project or agency level guarantees authenticity and inclusivity. A second approach is creating cross-institutional open spaces for debate amongst practitioners, policymakers, and scholars. These open spaces could be an annual conference, a web forum discussion, or a working group in which all sides have standard translation norms and agree to reform together [14]. Universities and translation administrations, for example, can respond together to hosting workshops in which they can discuss tensions between native-speaker and plurilingual approaches openly. Cooperation can become part of professional action by doing this, with emergent tensions dealt with cooperatively, rather than competitively. Similar models exist in Japan and South Korea, where translation firms usually match domestic plurilingual translators with local editors to moderate between intercultural sensibility and linguistic proficiency.

7. Conclusion

To address this question, this research considered the multifaceted connection between the norms of a native speaker and plurilingualism in the Chinese translation market due to the theoretical and practical causes of this contradiction. It began by identifying the area of controversy in translation in general, how the native-speaker philosophies affected the quality of translations in the past, and on the assumptions of the translator's professionalism. There was also commentary on forms of these currents of ideology that were given, for instance, methods of evaluating a quality in the translation of a work, ideologies of identity crisis, that is, the identity of the plurilingual translator who must choose between their own plurilingual capability and the ideological competence that they wish to manifest and the ideological competence which they are thought to have developed out of translation practices; and the apparent duality of native standards as facilitators and impediments to effective intercultural communication.

By addressing the ways to go forward, the research provided the three-step proposal: to include plurilingual issues in the translation training, to reform the quality rubrics used to measure the achievement in terms of the functional adequacy rather than the monolingual norms, and to establish the professional cultures attending to the communicative success equally to linguistic competence. Related policy changes of inclusive linguistic structures and sensitization programs were equally pointed out as structural blocks to change staying power. Finally, they are not asking about the ideology-adaptation of either to the other, but a trade-off of the ideology above to be discussed to a single system that would capture the particular language and demands of international interaction by China [15]. It would complement the professional translation practice in China and prove to be a fairer and culture-sensitive example of international translation studies.

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