
RESEARCH ARTICLE

New Opportunities for Translation Studies and Practice in the Context of the COVID-19 Era

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ABSTRACT

This Article's purpose is to reveal the new research areas provided by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which translation training, translation history, cultural studies and other fields are included. The COVID-19 epidemic has brought profound change to the world's order, culture, communication and globalization. Every part of the world is doing its best to recover from the damage caused by the epidemic, and translation studies could play a role that is as important as natural science studies and practice, which provide a medical cure for the epidemic: they promote multilateral understanding worldwide, increase the sharing and dissemination of information fighting against the epidemic, also would effectively ensure translation activities and training with the help of modern technology. Although it is impossible to have the directions deeply dug in this article due to the limitation of the length, it sheds light on these possible areas so that those who are interested can pursue them. The source of these directions came from the author's analysis of selected works conducted by trusted researchers around the world.

KEYWORDS

Translation Studies; COVID-19 Epidemic; Global Governance

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest challenges human beings have ever encountered, as well as to the academic community. Such challenge is most visibly manifested in the natural science disciplines, such as the development of drugs and vaccines to detect and combat the virus, trace the epidemic via the spatial and temporal aspects, also interrupt its transmission through various technological means. However, this may lead to an overemphasis on the role of the natural sciences in the fight against the epidemic and the problems it generates.

In fact, the impact of the disciplines of social sciences on the fight against the epidemic cannot be ignored. Take translation studies and practice as an example. The act of translation is essentially an act of communication, and it is only through proper communication that people from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities can truly achieve tolerance and understanding of each other. According to WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the key to combating the epidemic lies in "the international community's ability to work together at the national and international levels in the fight against it (the COVID-19 pandemic). (The Xinhua News Agency, 2022) Although the epidemic has limited the communication of people between different parts of the world to the greatest extent, people are still able to communicate and share information to the greatest extent with the help of various forms of translation and interpretation. This helps to share advanced experience in fighting the epidemic widely, and at a deeper level, it allows the broadcast of positive information to win the mainstream discourse, effectively defusing the anti-intellectual tendencies and mistrust that are prevalent in the world today. These problems cannot be solved by natural science research alone; only social science studies can provide the methods. The epidemic has likewise had a huge impact on education, which will affect the training of translators and interpreters, who will play an unprecedented role in this era in which communication is not an easy story.

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Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the important role played by translation practice and research in this pandemic in order to inspire translators and interpreters to take responsibility for communicating with the international society and new directions for translation researchers to probe into.

2. Present Situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In early January 2020, the media revealed (SOHU, 2020) that a case of "pneumonia of unknown origin" had been reported in Wuhan, Hubei, China. As the outbreak worsened and spread nationwide, the Chinese government had no choice but to "press the pause button" of the city on January 23 to treat patients. This situation lasted until April 8 of that year. Since then, the epidemic has entered an era of "overall stable and outbreak sporadically and locally" (Tencent, 2021). At the same time, epidemics began in Italy and Iran, and some countries, such as the United States and India, even saw multiple recurrences of the epidemic. The epidemic has had a profound impact on human life.

The pandemic has lasted for about three years, causing the shutdown of people and goods traveling around the world momentarily. So far, there are over 80 thousand confirmed cases, with more than 1 million death (GAVI, 2022). Despite the loss of life, the world's economy also suffered from visible damage. One important point is that people and goods were no longer free to travel, and communication became inconvenient. The difficulty was enhanced since people with different backgrounds, and cultural sources could no longer meet face to face. The world is trying its best to get back to normal after three years, and the United States pioneered declaring its "farewell" to the pandemic, despite doubts against it, and there are 400 people die because of the pandemic daily on average (BBC, 2022), and countries like China still highlights their people's life and health in the first place, which means the strict measures will continue to be followed. That means different rules must be followed in all parts of the world, and the barrier of language will make communication an even harder task. A good aspect is that there are countless language service providers and researchers devoted themselves to bringing people together, accelerating the recovery of economic activities while reaching other good effects, say repelling rumours and political prejudices, as well as bringing quality-ensured education to online courses, especially the cultivation of translators and interpreters in this case.

The experts of Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC) have foreseen the importance of translation practice, and research could contribute to the global community. Their insightful views, together with other researchers' works, suggest that translators, as well as researchers, could contribute to the fight in multiple ways: in the aspect of practice, multi-modal translation and corpus application and construction will enhance the competence of translation quality, new techniques and methods applied will cultivate better language service providers, and translation practice provided rich material for translation researchers in multiple fields, like translation history and trans-disciplinary studies. Translators and researchers gained not only new directions from this pandemic but might also be inspired by these new opportunities and developed their new fields to contribute their talents.

3. New Opportunities Appeared in the Field of Translation Practice

The epidemic forced those events which were used to rely on language services to be held online instead of offline, and the demand for translators and interpreters' modern technology operation skills will be higher than ever before. Also, translating online provides the possibility to demonstrate the translated work to the clients and viewers from the Target Language. By such means, translation (works) could better its aim of not only having the Source Language text being transferred into the Target Language one but also help the two cultures, minds and their people communicate better, though the language service providers must be careful to the tools they are using. Here three possible hot-spots in the future are summarized for readers.

3.1 The Potential of Corpus of its Application in Facilitating Translation

Corpus is a type of powerful translation tool that will make translation exponentially more efficient. Some data (McCulloch, 2020) show that translators involved in volunteer translations against the epidemic have already produced as much translated language material in less than six months as Wikipedia did in nineteen years or Google Translate in fourteen years, a side effect of the enormous potential of translation research in times of epidemics. If properly sorted out into a corpus, which would definitely enhance the efficiency of the translation of pandemic-related information — for example, enhance the output efficiency in the medical and related fields. (Tan, 2020)

By analyzing these language materials, too, we can also probe into the discourse and power relations as well as the ideological struggles behind them. However, these will be discussed in the later sections since we are describing the aspect of translation practice rather than research.

3.2 Multi-modal Translation and Importance of Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) and Cautions of It

One important type of activity where language services are greatly needed is those international exhibitions. Thanks to the soaring epidemic, events such as international conventions and museum exhibitions are also moving online more and more. "*Imaging*

Online Exhibition in the Pandemic: A Translational Perspective" points out that while offline exhibitions are popular, only with appropriate language services (for example, translation) can visitors from the Target Language (culture and environment) truly experience the joy of cross-cultural communication. Many museums have already helped foreign visitors realize the "immersive experience" of cross-cultural communication by providing a multi-modal translation of "introductory translated texts + audiovisual services" (Song, 2021:252-254). This aspect necessarily requires greater attention from researchers, as online exhibitions, with the help of the Internet, can achieve much faster dissemination and impact than traditional exhibitions. The impact on the grade of the event itself, the reputation of the event organizer and the city (region) where it is held maybe even more profound if problematic translated works are presented (Liang & Guo, 2020).

4. Changes Brought to Translators` and Interpreters` Training by the Pandemic

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a profound impact on human life. In China, for example, the vast majority of schools are completely adopted online teaching mode for the first half of the 2020 semester, with a significant reduction in transportation schedules. Also, as the virus has mutated so many times (and counting), it will be so difficult to get credible answers to key questions such as when the epidemic will end and when an effective drug will be available. And education, therefore, still has a long way to go before it returns to its ordinary track as it was before the year 2019. Therefore the use of modern communication tools for remote communication (in fields like education and so on) has become quite important. Modern instant communication tools allow translators to multiply their work output, while the new working environment allows translation teaching, theory and practice to encounter new problems in the process of communication. With the development of the epidemic situation, the application of new technologies, and the emergence and resolution of new translation problems, researchers can use certain criteria as a reference for dividing the timeline of this stage of translation history. Based on (and not limited to) the above-mentioned factors, the field in which scholars can work will thus be broadened.

"Embracing Digital Teaching and Learning: Innovation Upon COVID-19 in Higher Education" is actually a review of the research findings of more than twenty papers related to online teaching and learning during the epidemic, focusing on the experiences and results of research on online teaching and learning in terms of application selection, pedagogy application, assignment of homework, assessment methods, and general teaching behaviors such as student-teacher communication, etc. It was found that distance education platforms such as online software and mobile phone applications are generally effective in ensuring teaching progress and improving the efficiency of learning resource sharing; together with the video conferencing functions of major conference software used in teaching, students and teachers can communicate with each other as if they were "face-to-face" and students can socialize with each other. This has the effect of "almost completely restoring the offline, face-to-face teaching situation" (Yan, 2021:312). For researchers in translation teaching, this suggests that what is of concern between epidemics is not the shift in teaching practice from offline to online alone, relying on web and platform software. Online teaching objectively allows teachers and students to achieve the same effect as if they were taught offline, and some classic problems in face-to-face teaching will also appear in a new form: for example, in terms of general teaching practices, how to solve students' difficulty in concentrating during learning (Mi, 2021), lack of interaction in class and difficulty in monitoring learning progress, etc., are all need to be studied in depth and tackled by scholars. Deeper into the aspect of teaching translation majors, this involves the exploration of core teaching concepts. For translation and interpretation education and translation research theory education, although the teaching forms, methods and assessment modes have changed, what kinds of competencies are cultivated in the growth process of translators/translation researchers that remain the same? What are the objective rules in the process that need attention? These are the decisive factors to ensure the quality of teaching (Zhang & Ding, 2021), which are worth exploring by researchers.

5. Translation Researchers` New Hot Spots for Researching

So far, translation studies have transcended themselves from merely the SL-TL text comparison (with the aim of "seeking the most equivalent Target Text") to cultural aspects, that is, from translated work to the discovery of "hidden secrets" of translators themselves, cultural and historical reasons that determine the translated text, ideology and power relations, as well as literature studies of figure images and so on. (Liang & Zhang, 2022) In this section, several new research directions inspired by the pandemic are suggested for researchers who are interested in their reference.

5.1 Ideology, Power Relations and Translation

In the face of an epidemic that has caught the world off guard, there is an urgent need to understand what the pathogen is that is causing the outbreak. Where did it originate? How will it develop in the future? Accordingly, a variety of discourses about the epidemic were formed. While there is insight, there seems to be a "sea" of rumours, complaints, catharsis, and even vilification that attracts more attention; people are swept up in it, have trouble finding the real information they need, and can be harmed if they are not careful. Take, for example, an article which examines the official discourse on the epidemic in Brazil: the paper points out that the Brazilian government, represented by then President Bossonaro, deliberately concealed the severity of the epidemic in statements issued at the beginning of the epidemic, calling it only "a mild dose of flu" or "a little cold". This contributed to the cavalier attitude of the population toward the epidemic and eventually led to the pandemic in Brazil. In contrast, private translators

and professional groups (e.g., translation companies and other language service providers) volunteered to collect the available professional information existed on the epidemic from around the world, collaborate with official agencies, and translate this information into national languages for people around the world to avoid misinformation that could have caused the epidemic to become more costly worldwide (Jiang, 2021:232). In addition, some scholars have compiled and analyzed the huge corpus generated by the translation of epidemic information, revealing the diachronic pattern of U.S. news coverage of China in relation to the epidemic (Liu, 2021).

5.2 Diction, Image Creating and International Relations

While the rhetorical dismissiveness of some countries regarding the epidemic has been mentioned earlier, some other world powers have repeatedly released rather irresponsible official statements, accusing other countries of strict epidemic prevention measures and even labeling some countries as the "birthplace of the virus" in order to divert the discontent of their populations from the ineffectiveness of their governments in fighting the epidemic by means of such measures that reflect anti-intellectualism (Lowe & Barber, 2021:197). This, like the misinformation about the epidemic that proliferates on the Internet, is essentially a struggle for discursive power, reflecting "ideological positions and conflicts embedded in different forms of discourse in new ways" (Corbett, 2021:216). The worst expectations of different governments and populations are the "source" and "amplifier" of this discursive struggle, as argued in "Global Economics, Politics and Public Health Responses: US-China Rivalry and Its Implications for the Post-Pandemic World" (Zhao et al., 2021:12). While the epidemic has brought about a "reverse globalization" of communication, it has not blocked the remote and immediate communication made possible by translation. At the practical level, translation can ensure smooth and friendly communication among people around the world; with the help of theoretical research, translation can help stigmatized countries reclaim their right to speak for themselves and, to a certain extent, promote mutual understanding between citizens of both countries, thus minimizing the occurrence of vicious conflicts.

This is directly related to one of the basic skills of translation practice, "diction": if people read newspapers and magazines that reflect in the text that it is the citizens who "infected" others with the virus, rather than by the virus, they will feel guilty that "I may be the source of the infection, I have committed a crime" and will be reluctant to be tested or treated voluntarily, which will undoubtedly greatly reduce the efficiency of epidemic prevention and control. This will undoubtedly greatly reduce the efficiency of epidemic prevention and control and deepen people's distrust of the government (Lowe & Barber, 2021:191-192). The COVID-19 epidemic is highly contagious and can easily cause widespread outbreaks of infection without strict epidemic prevention measures, resulting in significant loss of life and property. If a country takes strict preventive measures but is stigmatized in the international media as "restricting freedom," this will greatly affect the international community's assessment of the epidemic situation and defensive measures and will have serious consequences, even with the availability of highly effective drugs that may be difficult to save. In addition to the information itself and high-performance communication tools, the language in which the information is disseminated is also important in order for scientific information about the epidemic to circulate effectively around the world, and translation plays an irreplaceable role in this regard.

The period of the COVID-19 epidemic is now considered by some researchers as an important new era in the literary narrative, just like the plague in Italy in the 14th century and the German occupation of France during World War II; people were left traumatized by the epidemic, and helping each other would become one of the major themes that literature intended to represent (Barber, 2021). The epidemic attacked human society in a comprehensive and rapid manner, and no one could be left alone while others suffered from it. In such a context, people expect to see more empathetic and purposeful advertising products (Lim, 2021:348-350). Faced with such a translation market, translators, whether engaged in literary translation or commercial translation of advertisements and promotional materials, need to deepen their grasp of discourse trends through continuous learning, take the pulse of clients' needs, and respond to translation tasks with appropriate strategies.

5.3 A New Period of Translation History

Clara Foz (2006) emphasizes the importance of dividing timelines in the study of translation history, and the COVID-19 period (for translation studies), as a new and important historical stage in translation studies, also necessitates the division of timelines. "Translating Against COVID-19 in the Chinese Context: A Multi-agent, Multimedia and Multilingual Endeavor", for the first time, divide translation practices under the epidemic into "grassroots volunteer group interventions", "professional translation team language services" and "state translation agencies" (Jiang, 2021:231-236). The fact that the epidemic is not yet over and the increasing number, efficiency, and model of language (translation) services teams associated with the epidemic implies that there is potential to be explored later in terms of delineating the phases of translation history during the epidemic. All in all, the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic presents not only a challenge for translation practice and teaching but also, at the same time, a rather valuable opportunity to broaden the horizons of translation research in related fields.

6. Conclusion

This research reveals the news areas of translation studies that emerged from the COVID-19 epidemic and are introduced in the sequence of translation practice, teaching and instruction, descriptive studies and translation history. The epidemic has caused

offline activities, including education, conventions, and negotiations, to move online globally, and for translation teaching, practice, and research, this shift represents much more than just the use of remote communication tools. As an important historical phase, a timeline of the translation history during the epidemic has begun to be delineated. When the massive translation corpus generated during the epidemic is systematically organized and analyzed, it can help translators improve their translation efficiency and help researchers identify the deeper factors in the formation of the translation phenomenon with the help of analysis. For teachers, it may be more difficult to solve problems when teaching face-to-face through a screen. Understanding these elements can help researchers expand their horizons and grasp a whole new area of research. It is still far from the point when the epidemic will finally come over all over the world. However, the COVID-19 epidemic era will eventually become an absolutely unavoidable and important period for translation research. The new features of people's working life in this period have not only greatly broadened the working field and enriched the working methods of translation research but also had profound effects on maintaining the results of the fight against the epidemic, promoting the trend of globalization, constructing the national image and even safeguarding national interests. With this short article can, researchers and language service providers realize the importance of this historical stage for translation studies as a discipline and find new research directions to contribute to the effective fight against epidemics, the protection of human health and safety, and the promotion of economic development and mutual understanding among countries around the world, as a humanities and social discipline. The limitation of this research is that due to the limitation of article-length, all can be done to shed light on these new areas only without discussion in-depth. But as these new hot-spots of translation practice and research inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic are introduced to readers, they might be inspired to pick a few of them to continue their own research(es).

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