

# Football Translation as a Profession in China

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**Abstract.** This paper sets out the theoretical and methodological framework for the research on football translation from the perspective of the sociology of profession in multilingual football clubs in China, aiming to guide the Chinese football translators in their professional development, thus enriching the theories of sociology of professions and profession of translation.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, football has earned much popularity in China not only for its prestigious status but also for its realistic representations of political and social issues, racial and minority awareness (Anchimbe 2008). Accordingly, the Chinese government has also started to attach importance to football. However, due to the poor management and supervision, as well as a lack of national football talent, the football industry in China has remained in poor shape. Against this background, hopes have been pinned on foreign coaches and players to help develop Chinese football. It was reported on 22 January 2017 that sixteen football clubs in the Chinese Super League (“CSL”) have hired foreign coaches, and 70 foreign football players would take part in the 2017CSL. As a result, an increasing number of football clubs in China have been forced to create a multilingual working environment. Correspondingly, professional football translators have emerged in China to act as bridges between players and coaches, players and referrals, fans and players, players and media, and so on. It is recognized that football translators play essential roles in the Chinese football industry although their intellectual products are exponentially augmenting. However, concerning the extant studies on the football industry, scholars have drawn much attention to football language. This type of scholarly activity has described/analyzed on the myriads of texts, such as the analysis of written reports and spoken commentary. While the trend of studying football has shifted to the linguistic context of the multilingual working environment, football translators as social actors have been studied by sociologists, so the systematic study of industrial workers will help us to understand the industry as a whole better.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Football and languages

Several studies have previously been undertaken on football in connection with linguistics. There is an impressive body of scholarship on football language, especially with regard to football reporting and commentary by different media (for instance, Brandt 1983, Muller 2004, Chovanec 2005, Radek 2014), and with regard to the embedment of metaphors in football language (for instance, Buchauer 2004, Vierkant 2008, Mariza 2009). Some studies have dealt with football terminology (for instance, Schmidt 1998, Marcin 2008, Taborek 2012) or football grammar (for instance, Walker 2008). These works have made significant contributions to linguistic analyses, but it should be noted that few other languages than English have been studied.

### 2.2 Football translation and society

Sociolinguistic research on interaction and communication in football clubs has also been well developed. Dignel (1976) pointed out some language and speaking issues in the handball team. Fiedler (2005) studied communication patterns between coaches and players in basketball teams from

the perspective of coaches. Schiling (2001) focused on the ways of communication with football players in amateur clubs. Kellermann (2006) performed a survey on language situations and the attitudes of coaches, managers, players towards different language communication in Dutch football clubs based on telephone interviews and post questionnaires. The Innsbruck Football Research Group (2008) analyzed communication strategies in multilingual international football clubs. It found that translators may cause problems due to inadequate knowledge of football and that even capable translators cannot make communication within the team perfectly. Chovanec (2009) focused on the methodology of fieldwork applied in multilingual football clubs. The findings indicate that respondents generally prefer interviews over questionnaires. This study also found that many players encounter linguistic problems in multilingual working environments and that even though they do not have communication problems in informal groups, they still may rely on translators to ensure communication is smooth.

In the domain of translation studies, much emphasis has been given to analysis and comparison of translators' ideas, their translation styles and the roles translators play in or to research on a specific translator, which lacks a broader range of interdisciplinary research methods (Wei 2014). Studies on translation sociology have explored the professional translators' activities in the context of social change, and explains interactions between translators' behavior and translation norms (Liu 2015). Sergey (2014) focuses on the professionalization process of translation, describing the cultivation of translators' ability, practitioner's qualification and certification, professional ethics, the use of translation tools, translator training, translation project management, translator legal status and so on. Zhong (2015) reviews the development of Chinese domestic research on professional translation in terms of quantity, perspectives, subjects, and methods based on 32 doctoral dissertations written between 2000 and 2013. This study finds that almost 80% of the dissertations focused on conferencing interpreting, while community interpreting, medicine, law, business and other interpreting occasions, including football, have not been studied by doctoral students.

Based on this preliminary review, football translators have gained more academic attention from linguists and translators than from sociologists, and football language and communication has been the main field of research. Indeed, the international development of the football industry will benefit from a more subtle understanding of those professionally engaged in it. Only if the industry understands its key resources, can it be nurtured and used to the best effect (Bennett, 2006). As mentioned above, football translators can make a difference in the success of multilingual football clubs. Hence, we must gain a better understanding of their social histories and experiences, including their educational backgrounds, employment histories, current employment situations, and plans.

### **3. Processual theory of profession**

Different from other social theories which focus on social structure and functions, workplace interaction, or the relationship between lawyers and politics, Sida Liu (2013) developed the processual theory which conceptualizes the profession as a social process, including diagnostic struggle, boundary work, migration and exchange between individuals and state and its changes over time and space. This theory is characterized by starting from micro-level interactions between actors and then seeks to derive the macro-level social structure of the profession from analysis of the micro-level interactions. Therefore, the processual theory of profession also applies to the professional development of football translators and the effect of their performance on football players, coaches in China.

## **4. Football translation in China**

### **4.1 The status quo of the football industry in China**

With the implementation of the overall concept of reform and development of Chinese football in Jan. 26, 2015, it defines short-term, middle-term and long-term goals of Chinese football respectively. It is quoted from China Football Association 2020 Action Plan that 30 million Chinese secondary and

primary students and 30 million social citizens are expected to participate in football activities, and there will be 70,000 football sites; two or three professional football clubs are ranked as top ones in Asian, even is famous in the world. A hierarchical amateur football system in 50 cities and an amateur football cup system in 100 cities will be established. The Chinese government will invest 670 million RMB as a financial budget for Chinese football activities in 2017. Since the reform of Chinese football in 2015, great changes have made during past two years. Chinese Football Association became an independent corporate which is not affiliated to the State Sports General Administration anymore in February 2016. After January 10, 2016, the Chinese Football Association no longer approved the transfer of the club across the registered association. "Taking roots "of the club will help the cultivation of football culture and build football clubs of century history in China. In July 2015, the Ministry of Education and other six departments accelerated the development of campus football as an important initiative and a total of 8627 schools, 38 campuses were selected as football pilot counties. At present, there are a total of 16,186 national, provincial, city and county campus football schools. (Beijing) Sports Communication Co., Ltd. spent 8 billion RMB to shoot the full-media copyright of CSL for the next five years, which took a crucial step towards the professional development of football activities in China. At the same time, coaches, referees training have been strengthened, a football department was set up in Chengdu Institute of Physical Education in July 2015, and the Chinese Football Association formed eight permanent national teams to strengthen the echelon construction of national team. Furthermore, all this will be a solid foundation for us, struggling to achieve the goal of the world's top teams in 2030.

China's football has made excellent achievements in Asia since the reform of professional football in the early 1990s, but because of the poor organizational management system and weak regulation and supervision as well as the lack of talent, the sports performance failed to meet fans' satisfaction and the football industry was in a disordered state. In order to solve these problems, the employment of foreign coaches might work. It is said that the advanced training approach from foreign coaches might bring hope to Chinese football. Actually, as early as in 1954, China invited the first foreign coach named Joseph in Hungary, his men's players include Nian Weisi, Zeng Xuelin, Zhang Honggen and other Chinese football veterans, most of them have become the coach of the national team. Then, from 1992 till now, 9 foreign coaches from Italy, France, Spain, Germany, UK, etc. have been invited to China to be the coaches of national team. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that in recent years, the number of Chinese local coaches has shrunk. According to statistics, before November 19, 2016, among 16 football clubs, twelve football clubs in the Super League has hired foreign coaches. Since the professionalism of Chinese football in 1994, some football clubs have also introduced some foreign players to aid who to some extent can promote the level of our league. It is reported that in the first 10 years of the 21st century, China's professional league has introduced hundreds of foreign aids. According to the players' list, there are 70 foreign aids who took part in 2017CSL.

## **4.2 Football translators in China**

It is evident from the above statistics that more and more professional football clubs in China are characterized by a multilingual working environment due to the evolvement of multinational football players and coaches. In this sense, football translators are needed to help them communicate in their daily life, and prior to the matches or in the process of matches and after the matches which make communication more effectively. Chinese Football Association has equipped translators for the foreign coaches such as Schlapner, Horton, Milu, Ali Han, Kelao Chen, Dukovic, Folado, Camacho, Blazevic, Perrin and Lippi. It is reported that the translator for national football team will get a salary of 400,000 RMB or so, in addition to winning bonuses, they get a higher salary than the average simultaneous interpreters do, but they take the risk of leaving job along with the resignation of the foreign coaches. After that, they will find a new job to live on. So here is one question: is there any correlation between the employment of coaches and that of translators? It has been reported that some of them have been officials, coaches, team leaders, teachers, and bosses or even been football players and hit the goal. For example, Former national football translator Xie Qiang for coach Horton has been a president of New East school in Tianjian branch. Cai Jingyuan, the former translator for Coco

Vicky, now is the professional football player and has made an excellent performance on the pitch. So it seems that most of them have different profession routines and plans. Why and what contribute this difference?

Football translators play a significant role in the multilingual working environment. However, it is not easy for Chinese football clubs to find a good translator. From the perspective of Camacho, the 26th coach of Chinese national football team, the translators in China are not as capable as Mourinho, who is proficient in eight languages and has been a translator for Robert William Robson since 1992. Because they are required to both have a good command of football knowledge and language. In Chinese football history, there are some famous translators. Such as Xie Qiang, Li Liangshi who deserve much praise from their coaches and fans, but some of them are considered as poor translators, such as Zhou Yi, to result in the bad performance of Camacho. Here may raise an issue what factor and criteria to be a good translator? It is a necessity to have a research on these translators. Nevertheless, some biases still exist. Most of studies on translation profession have been devoted much effort to well-known translators. Little research on football translators' work and lives has been covered. Second, due to the unique linguistic performance of football language, many pieces of research on football language have been emphasized. Little importance has been attached to football translators from the perspective of sociology of professions. In recent years the profession of translation all around the world has reached an unprecedented level. Thus, it is might of great theoretical and practical significance to have a study on football translators.

## 5. Summary

In general, future research on football translators is hoped to provide guidance for Chinese football translators in their professional development, thus enriching the theories of sociology of professions and profession of translation. Moreover, it has also practical implications for the development of Chinese football clubs. Furthermore, the study of football translators may supplement and contribute to the theories of football linguistics.

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