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The Application of ChatGPT in Chinese MTI Students' Autonomous Learning

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Abstract
The integration of artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, into educational practices has opened new avenues for autonomous learning, particularly in the context of higher education. This paper aims to explore how ChatGPT can be applied to foster autonomous learning among Chinese Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) students, enhance their translator competence. With the increasing demand for highly competent translators in the digital age, it is crucial to investigate whether AI-driven tools can effectively support MTI students' competence development. This study investigates Chinese MTI students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in autonomous learning, and examines the impact of its integration into MTI curricula on students' autonomous learning and the development of their translator competence. MTI students face unique challenges, including the need for specialized language skills, critical thinking, and self-directed learning to meet academic and professional demands. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data from 175 MTI students across Chinese universities and semi-structured interviews with 20 participants. Results indicate that the application of ChatGPT in Chinese MTI education is still at the initial stage. It is found that ChatGPT facilitates MTI students' autonomous learning by enhancing their translation accuracy, offering instant feedback, and providing extensive practice opportunities. However, limitations such as translation errors in cultural contexts and the potential risk of over-reliance on AI tools are highlighted. The findings suggest that while ChatGPT significantly supports autonomous learning, its integration into MTI curricula requires careful planning, training, ethical guidance and further promotion.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, autonomous learning, ChatGPT in education, Chinese MTI programs, MTI students, pedagogical integration

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Introduction

In recent years, the rapid advancement of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has profoundly impacted all walks of life, including education and the language service industry. AI-powered language models like ChatGPT have demonstrated remarkable capabilities in text generation. In the field of translation, GenAI has revolutionized traditional practices, evolving from statistical machine translation to neural network machine translation, which has significantly improved translation efficiency and quality. As a crucial link in information transmission and cultural exchange, the language service industry is undergoing a paradigm shift, with GenAI reshaping its production models, industry chain, and value chain (Wang, 2024). In Chinese Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) education, GenAI, such as ChatGPT, holds great potential to address long-standing challenges and enriches students' learning experiences, fostering autonomous learning. Therefore, this research attempts to explore the application of ChatGPT in Chinese MTI students' autonomous Learning.

Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programs in the mainland of China have expanded rapidly since their establishment in 2007, aiming to cultivate highly competent translators and interpreters equipped with linguistic proficiency, cultural awareness, and specialized knowledge, bridging the gap between academic language studies and industry needs. By 2022, 316 universities have introduced MTI programs, producing approximately 68,000 graduates (Translators Association of China, 2022). On July 31, 2024, the Academic Degrees Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China approved 55 additional MTI programs and 9 DTI (Doctor of Translation and Interpreting) programs (Academic Degrees Office, 2024). Despite the rapid expansion of Chinese MTI programs, a gap persists between MTI training and industry demands (Mu et al., 2013). Many MTI graduates lack sufficient translator competence, leading them to pursue careers outside the field of translation (Wang & Peng, 2012; Peng, 2017). A nationwide study highlighted key weaknesses, including limited linguistic proficiency, insufficient specialized knowledge, and inadequate hands-on training (Cui et al., 2017).

Technological advancements have influenced curricula, with increasing incorporation of Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools and AI applications. However, many programs still lack adequate training in essential technologies, such as Machine Translation Post-Editing (MTPE) and translation management systems. Chinese MTI students often struggle with challenges such as inadequate self-directed learning, limited access to personalized feedback, and insufficient exposure to real-world translation scenarios. These deficiencies highlight the need for AI-driven tools that can supplement traditional pedagogical methods and enhance MTI students' learning autonomy.

The importance of instrumental competence has already been recognized and underscored by scholars at home and abroad (PACTE, 2003; Tan, 2008; Tao, 2012; Kiraly,2013; Zhao, 2019; Liu, 2020). For instance, Tan (2008) has pointed out, "The translation of political, juridical, technological and commercial texts is expanding so incredibly rapidly in the modern information world that the traditional patterns of translation with hands are no longer able to handle the task efficiently"(Tan, 2008, p.590). Therefore, it is of great significance and necessity to cultivate highly skilled and qualified translators, with a strong emphasis on enhancing instrumental competence to meet the evolving demands of the market.

Translation extends beyond linguistic proficiency; it requires lifelong learning (Kiraly, 2013; Tan, 2008) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)(Kang, 2015). Self-directed

learning, industry research, and practical experience are essential for professional growth. For Chinese MTI students, autonomous learning is crucial for enhancing language proficiency and translation skills. However, the traditional Chinese education system emphasizes teacher-centered instruction, where educators are the primary source of knowledge, and students are expected to be passive recipients. This high teacher-dependency culture can impair students' autonomous learning and accountability for their education. Many students may struggle to identify effective learning strategies independently, as they are accustomed to structured guidance and may lack experience in self-directed learning approaches (Gao, 2024). Additionally, the exam-oriented approach prioritizes rote memorization over critical thinking and problem-solving, making it difficult for students to develop autonomy. These challenges highlight the need for innovative tools like ChatGPT to facilitate independent learning and support students in becoming more self-reliant.

Access to learning resources significantly impacts MTI students' autonomy.The integration of technology in education, such as blended learning models, has been shown to promote learner autonomy. Studies have indicated that blended learning can effectively develop autonomous learning skills in translation courses by combining traditional classroom instruction with online components, allowing students to control aspects of their learning pace and environment (Gao, 2024). By integrating technology and fostering independent learning strategies, institutions can better prepare students for professional demands (Kang, 2014).

ChatGPT, an advanced AI language model by OpenAI, has become a transformative tool for autonomous learning in MTI programs. Its multilingual capabilities support self-directed activities, enhancing translation and interpreting skills. A key advantage of ChatGPT is its ability to generate and understand text across languages, enabling MTI students to practice translation, receive instant feedback, and refine linguistic accuracy. This interactive process improves comprehension of complex structures. Additionally, ChatGPT provides customizable prompts, helping students expand domain-specific vocabulary and master intricate sentence constructions through real-time evaluation. The integration of ChatGPT into language learning has been met with positive perceptions among students. A study involving Korean university students revealed that the use of ChatGPT in English language classes led to favorable attitudes, with participants expressing optimism about its potential to enhance language skills (Van Horn, 2024).

The main research objective of this study is to explore how ChatGPT can enhance autonomous learning among Chinese MTI students. It aims to assess the effectiveness of ChatGPT in improving MTI students' translator competence, understanding cultural nuances, and supporting self-directed learning. The study also seeks to identify the challenges MTI students face when using AI tools and examine how these tools can be integrated into existing Chinese MTI programs. Specifically, this study focuses on answering the following research questions:

1. What are Chinese MTI students' perceptions of the benefits of using ChatGPT in their autonomous learning?
2. What challenges do Chinese MTI students encounter when using ChatGPT for autonomous learning?
3. How can ChatGPT be effectively integrated into MTI curricula to optimize its educational potential?

This study holds significant value in advancing the understanding of the role of AI in translation education, particularly within the context of Chinese MTI programs. By focusing on the potential of ChatGPT to support autonomous learning for Chinese MTI students, it contributes

to a growing body of research on AI applications in specialized fields. The findings not only enhance our understanding of how AI can improve translation accuracy and cultural adaptability, but also shed light on the practical challenges and opportunities of integrating AI tools into real-world learning environments. Additionally, this research offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to incorporate AI into translation training programs, thus fostering the development of more effective and adaptable translation professionals. The study addresses ethical concerns, encouraging a balanced approach to AI usage in academic contexts, ensuring that its application promotes integrity and enhances the overall learning experience.

Literature Review

Autonomous Learning in Higher Education

Autonomous learning, often referred to as self-directed learning, is a critical component of higher education, emphasizing students' ability to take initiative in their learning processes. According to Holec (1981), autonomy in learning entails students' capacity to plan, execute, and evaluate their own educational activities. This concept aligns with the constructivist approach, which views learning as an active, self-driven process wherein learners construct knowledge through exploration and reflection (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978).

In the context of MTI education, autonomous learning is particularly vital due to the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of translation and interpreting studies. MTI students are expected to develop advanced linguistic skills, cultural competence, and critical thinking abilities, often through self-directed practice. However, as Chen and Lin (2020) noted, fostering autonomy in translation education is challenging due to the lack of personalized resources and feedback mechanisms. While traditional tools such as glossaries and translation software provide some support, they often fall short in addressing individual learning needs or offering interactive and context-sensitive feedback.

The Role of Technology in Autonomous Learning

Technological advancements have significantly transformed the landscape of autonomous learning, offering students new opportunities to access resources and engage in self-directed study. Research by Lai and Gu (2011) highlighted the role of digital tools in facilitating language learning, particularly through features such as instant feedback, interactive exercises, and personalized content delivery. Online platforms, language-learning apps, and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools have become integral to the learning process for translation and interpreting students. Among these technologies, AI-driven tools have gained prominence for their ability to simulate real-world scenarios and provide tailored learning experiences.

Previous Studies on the Application of ChatGPT in Translation Education

ChatGPT, an advanced AI language model developed by OpenAI, marks a paradigm shift in AI-driven educational support. Built on the GPT architecture, it processes and generates human-like text, enabling versatile applications in pedagogy.

Exsisting studies have shown that AI chatbots can assist students in setting learning goals (Hew, et al., 2023) and assessing their L2 (the second language) vocabulary level (Jeon, 2021), which is conducive to promoting self-directed learning. Students with self-directed learning awareness and abilities can independently complete learning tasks and achieve educational

objectives, demonstrating high levels of self-exploratory, self-selective, self-constructive, and self-creative capacities. ChatGPT, with its exceptional intelligent response capabilities, multi-turn dialogue proficiency, and knowledge-driven content generation skills, can effectively foster students' autonomous learning and strengthen their academic self-governance (Zhou, 2023). As Zhou (2023) has pointed out, ChatGPT is a novel natural language processing machine learning model with powerful content generation capabilities. It has the potential to transform traditional translation teaching models by effectively supporting personalized instruction, fostering students' autonomous learning, reshaping teacher-student relationships, innovating teaching management models, driving changes in knowledge production methods, and expanding research opportunities in translation education. Zhou (2023) also analyzed the potential risks of applying ChatGPT in translation teaching, such as undermining learning autonomy, distorting teacher-student relationships, compromising academic integrity, posing threats to knowledge security, and raising ethical and ideological concerns. To address these challenges and fully harness the potential of ChatGPT in translation teaching, it is essential to innovate teaching models, reform teaching processes, enhance students' autonomous learning abilities, strengthen education on translation ethics and ideological risks, and improve the digital literacy of both teachers and students.

In translation education, ChatGPT offers unique advantages. It allows students to experiment with different translation techniques, compare linguistic structures, and refine their work based on AI-generated suggestions. Furthermore, its capability to understand and process context enables users to explore cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions, key aspects of professional translation. Preliminary research by Zhang et al. (2023) indicate that ChatGPT enhances students' engagement in self-directed learning by offering a flexible, interactive platform for practice. However, the study also notes limitations, such as occasional inaccuracies in translation and the lack of domain-specific knowledge.

Rasul et al. (2023) explored the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in higher education based on the Constructivist Learning Theory. This study highlighted five key advantages: facilitating adaptive learning, providing personalized feedback, supporting research and data analysis, automating administrative tasks, and enhancing assessment design. However, it also identified five major challenges: academic integrity concerns, reliability issues, limitations in evaluating graduate skill sets and learning outcomes, and risks of bias and misinformation. The authors emphasized the need for educators and students to use ChatGPT with caution, ensuring ethical, reliable, and effective application in academia.

Previous Studies on the Application of ChatGPT in Translation Practice

To better understand how ChatGPT can be used in translation practice, some of the previous studies are reviewed as follows, which examined its applications and effects.

Wen and Tian (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of ChatGPT in translating political documents, using the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as its corpus. The translations made by ChatGPT have been compared with those from Google Translate, Youdao Translate, and DeepL Translate. First, the study employed two automatic evaluation metrics, BLEU and TER, to quantify translation quality. Additionally, a human evaluation process was incorporated to provide a more comprehensive assessment of its performance. The results have indicated that ChatGPT demonstrates certain advantages over the other three translation tools. However, the model still exhibited significant limitations in handling ideological content, complex sentence structures, culturally loaded terms, implicit metaphors, and overall translation accuracy.

Aldawsari (2024) conducted a study examining advancements in AI-driven machine translation, particularly in translating Arabic colloquial expressions. By comparing Bing AI Chat with traditional machine translation tools such as Google Translate and Bing Translator, the research evaluated improvements in translation accuracy. Using the same Arabic test dataset from At-tall's (2019) thesis, the study found that while Google Translate and Bing Translator had shown limited progress, Bing AI Chat significantly outperformed them. The findings underscored the potential of Large Language Models in handling non-standard Arabic expressions more effectively, offering interpretations and contextual insights.

Alosaimi (2024) explored the ability of ChatGPT to translate separable phrasal verbs, which are challenging for translators due to the separation of their components. He emphasized the need to evaluate this tool for specific translation issues, aiming to determine how accurately and clearly ChatGPT can translate these verbs. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study analyzed the accuracy and clarity of translations made by ChatGPT, revealing that human intervention is still required for accuracy, though the tool provides clear translations.

In summary, previous studies highlighted both the potential and limitations of ChatGPT in translation practice, suggesting that while it can assist with certain tasks, human oversight remains essential for ensuring translation quality.

Research Gap

As reviewed above, despite rapid advancements in AI and its increasing use in education and translation practice, research on its application in MTI programs remains limited. Most studies focus on general language learning or undergraduate education, with little attention given to the specific needs of MTI students. While previous research highlighted the potential of AI in improving language proficiency, few studies have explored its impact on specialized skills like translation accuracy and cultural adaptability—core competences for MTI students. Another critical gap is the lack of empirical research on Chinese MTI students' perceptions and experiences with AI tools like ChatGPT, particularly in autonomous learning contexts. Furthermore, ethical concerns, such as over-reliance on AI and academic integrity, have not been fully addressed in MTI education. This study attempts to fill these gaps by analyzing how ChatGPT supports autonomous learning for Chinese MTI students, exploring both its applications and associated challenges. It provides insights into the implications of AI in translation education and paves the way for future research.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the application of ChatGPT in autonomous learning among Chinese MTI students. The mixed-methods design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research questions by integrating statistical analysis of survey data with nuanced insights from participant interviews.

Participants

This study involves 175 MTI students from different universities in China, representing diverse academic and regional backgrounds. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had prior experience using ChatGPT for academic purposes.

Additionally, 20 students from the survey group were invited to participate in in-depth semi-structured interviews to provide qualitative data.

Participants were divided into two groups based on their frequency of ChatGPT usage:

- ***Frequent Users*:** Students who use ChatGPT regularly (at least twice a week) for learning and practice.
- ***Occasional Users***: Students who use ChatGPT less frequently (less than twice a week).

This classification helps to distinguish between those who actively integrate ChatGPT into their learning process and those who use it sporadically. By making this distinction, the study aims to explore whether different usage frequencies lead to varying perceptions, benefits, and challenges in autonomous learning. This categorization also allows for a more nuanced analysis of the effectiveness of ChatGPT in MTI education, identifying potential gaps in adoption and areas for improvement.

Research Instruments

Survey

A structured online survey was conducted to collect quantitative data on MTI students' usage patterns, perceived benefits, and challenges of using ChatGPT. The survey consisted of three sections:

Demographic Information: Gender, age, university, specialization (translation or interpreting).

Usage Patterns: Frequency of ChatGPT usage, types of activities (e.g., translation exercises, vocabulary building, interpreting practice).

Perceptions and Challenges: The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'), to assess participants' perceptions, experiences, ease of use, and challenges such as accuracy issues and ethical concerns.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants to explore their experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT for autonomous learning. The interview questions focused on:

- How ChatGPT supports MTI students' translation practices?
- Specific examples of successful and unsuccessful applications.
- Challenges and ethical considerations encountered during usage.

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted online via WeChat. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, to identify key patterns and themes. A coding process was employed, involving initial open coding, categorization of recurring concepts, and thematic refinement to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) were used to summarize students' usage patterns and perceptions. Inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, were conducted to identify significant differences between frequent and occasional users regarding perceived effectiveness and challenges.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in participants' responses. Key themes identified included the role of ChatGPT in enhancing translation accuracy, its potential for cultural learning, and challenges such as over-reliance and ethical concerns.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research principles, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and data confidentiality. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. All survey and interview responses were anonymized to protect participants' identities. The study also addressed potential ethical concerns related to the use of ChatGPT, such as plagiarism and over-reliance, by including questions on these topics in both the survey and interviews.

Results

Demographic Information of the Participants by Questionnaire I:

In the first stage of this research, the online questionnaire platform https://www.wjx.cn/ was used to collect the quantitative data conveniently and efficiently. 175 participants filled the questionnaire online.

Table 1. *The demographic information of the participants in the survey*

Options	Sub-total	Percentage
MTI students in Grade One	124	70.86%
MTI students in Grade Two	46	26.29%
MTI students in Grade Three	5	2.86%
The number of valid responses	175	

The study sample consisted of 175 MTI students from different universities in the mainland of China. To ensure a diverse representation, universities were chosen from various regions across China, including East China Normal University, South China Agricultural University, Southwest University, China University of Geosciences (Wuhan), Changsha University of Science and Technology, Lanzhou University of Science and Technology, etc. Participants were recruited from both first, second and third-year MTI students, allowing for comparisons across different stages of the MTI program (See Table 1). The final sample consisted of 48 male MTI students (27.43%) and 127 female MTI students (72.57%), as shown in Figure One. Of these respondents who use ChatGPT for autonomous learning, 20 students were selected for in-depth interviews based on their survey responses.

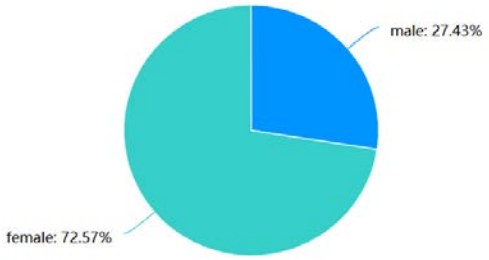


Figure 1. Gender of the participants in the survey

As indicated in Figure Two, 49.71% of the 175 respondents perceived that their instrumental sub-competence in translation is general, some participants evaluated that their instrumental sub-competence was not competent (22.29%) or not at all competent (4%).

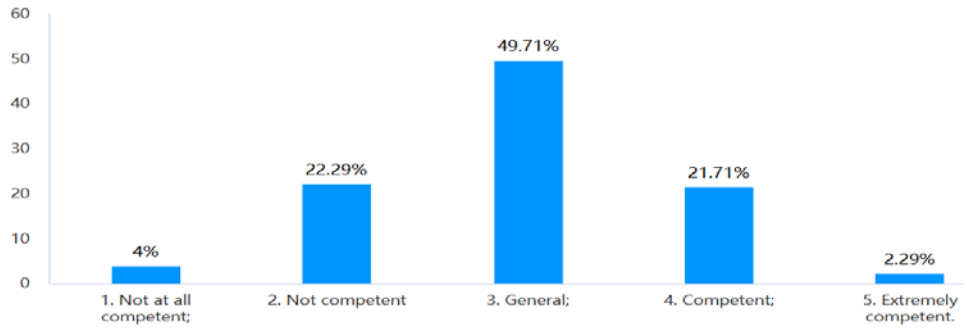


Figure 2. Respondents' self-assessment of instrumental sub-competence in translation

As for the data collected by *Questionnaire 1*, statistical analyses were made by Excel, which have shown that the translation tools used by Chinese MTI students include Trados, Deepl, Chatgpt, Memoq, Youdao, Google translation, Yicat, Corpus, Baidu translation, SDL Multiterm, Online Dictionary, Jinshanciba, etc., with Trados the most popular one currently (See Figure 3). Among the 175 participants, only a small proportion of Chinese MTI students (11.4%) use ChatGPT in their autonomous learning.



Figure 3. The translation tools Chinese MTI students use

Patterns of ChatGPT Usage Among MTI Students

In the second stage of this research, 20 respondents took the in-depth interviews. The interviews revealed diverse usage patterns of ChatGPT among the participants:

- *Frequency of Usage*: Approximately 55% of students reported using ChatGPT regularly

(two or more times per week), while 45% used it occasionally.

- *Types of Activities*: Students primarily used ChatGPT for:
  - Translation Practice (95%): To translate complex texts, refine phrasing, and improve fluency.
  - Vocabulary Building (40%): To expand lexical resources and learn contextual usage of words.
  - Cultural Learning (25%): Understanding idiomatic expressions and culturally specific references.

Frequent users noted greater confidence in their translation accuracy and fluency, while occasional users tended to use ChatGPT for specific, time-limited tasks.

Perceived Benefits of ChatGPT

MTI students identified several key benefits of using ChatGPT for autonomous learning:

Instant Feedback: 95% of the respondents agreed that ChatGPT provided immediate feedback, which helped them identify errors and improve accuracy in real-time.

Personalized Learning: 65% of the respondents appreciated the adaptability of ChatGPT, noting that they could tailor prompts to their specific learning needs, such as practicing industry-specific terminology.

Flexibility and Accessibility: The availability of ChatGPT at any time and location allowed students to engage in self-directed practice without reliance on external resources.

These benefits were echoed in the interviews. For example, some participants remarked as follows:

> *"ChatGPT is like a personal tutor. I can practice translations whenever I want, and it points out things I might not notice on my own." (IR1)*

> *"ChatGPT provides instant feedback on my translations, which helps me identify errors immediately and correct them on my own." (IR3)*

> *"I use ChatGPT to compare multiple translation options, and it helps me find the most natural expression in the target language." (IR6)*

> *"It's like having a 24/7 tutor. Whenever I have a question about a term or phrase, ChatGPT gives me an explanation right away." (IR8)*

> *"Sometimes I struggle with sentence structures in English, but ChatGPT provides grammatical corrections and alternative sentence patterns." (IR9)*

> *"It saves me a lot of time when looking up words or checking grammar, so I can focus more on improving my translation strategies." (IR10)*

> *"Using ChatGPT has improved my confidence in translation because I can test different versions before submitting my final work." (IR14)*

> *"I feel that ChatGPT expands my vocabulary range by suggesting synonyms and collocations that I wouldn't normally think of." (IR15)*

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Challenges and Limitations

Despite its advantages, MTI students encountered notable challenges when using ChatGPT:

Accuracy Issues: 55% of the respondents reported occasional inaccuracies, particularly in handling culturally nuanced or domain-specific translations.

Over-Reliance on AI: 40% of the respondents expressed concerns that frequent use of ChatGPT might lead to a reduction in critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills.

Ethical Concerns: 35% of the participants raised concerns about the potential for plagiarism and misuse, particularly in academic settings.

As some interviewees observed:

> *"Sometimes, I feel like I rely too much on ChatGPT, and I forget to critically evaluate the translation it provides." (IR2)*
>
> *"Sometimes, ChatGPT gives me incorrect or outdated information, so I have to double-check its suggestions." (IR5)*
>
> *"It doesn't always understand the cultural context of a translation, which can lead to unnatural or misleading outputs." (IR7)*
>
> *"I've noticed that ChatGPT struggles with idioms and nuanced language, which requires me to manually refine its suggestions." (IR8)*
>
> *"If I rely too much on ChatGPT, I might stop thinking critically about my translations, which is dangerous for my learning process." (IR9)*
>
> *"Sometimes, ChatGPT overcomplicates simple sentences, making translations unnecessarily complex and less readable." (IR11)*
>
> *"It doesn't always distinguish between different regional variations of English, which can lead to inconsistencies in my translations." (IR12)*
>
> *"While ChatGPT helps with grammar, it doesn't teach me the deeper logic behind language rules, which I still need to study on my own." (IR13)*

Discussion

This study explored the application of ChatGPT in fostering autonomous learning among Chinese MTI students, addressing its benefits, challenges, and implications for translation education. The discussion below answers the research questions and compares the findings with previous studies.

RQ One: What are Chinese MTI students' perceptions of the benefits of using ChatGPT in their autonomous learning?

The findings indicate that ChatGPT significantly enhances autonomous learning by offering instant feedback, enabling personalized and flexible practice, and serving as a supplementary resource for mastering complex language tasks. The results align with previous studies that emphasized the importance of AI-driven tools in supporting learner autonomy by providing adaptive learning experiences and real-time assistance. Privious research on computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools has similarly highlighted their role in developing students'

problem-solving abilities and translation strategies (Zhou, 2023; Rasul, 2023). ChatGPT extends these benefits by integrating natural language processing capabilities, allowing students to refine their translation and interpreting skills more independently.

RQ Two: What challenges do Chinese MTI students encounter when using ChatGPT for autonomous learning?

Though ChatGPT offers great potential in enhancing the learning experience for MTI students, some challenges still remain, including occasional inaccuracies, the risk of over-reliance on AI, and ethical concerns related to plagiarism and academic integrity. These findings are consistent with previous research on AI-assisted learning (Zhou, 2023; Rasul, 2023; Wen & Tian, 2024), which warns against excessive dependence on technology that may undermine critical thinking and decision-making skills. Additionally, studies on CAT tools and AI-assisted translation have raised concerns about machine-generated errors, requiring students to develop strong post-editing skills to ensure translation accuracy. The ethical challenges highlighted in this study, particularly those regarding plagiarism, echo broader discussions on academic integrity in AI-assisted education, reinforcing the need for institutional policies and ethical guidelines. To better understand the practical implications of these challenges, it is necessary to examine them in more detail.

Occasional Inaccuracies and Lack of Reliability in the Outputs

One of the most significant challenges faced by MTI students when using ChatGPT is its occasional lack of accuracy and reliability. While the tool excels at generating fluent translations, it sometimes struggles with nuanced or complex tasks, such as translating culturally sensitive expressions or specialized technical terminology. This issue is particularly problematic for MTI students, who are expected to master the intricacies of both language and culture to produce high-quality translations and interpretations. For example, several participants in the study noted that ChatGPT often provided literal translations that ignored contextual meaning. A student reported:

"When I asked ChatGPT to translate a poem, it captured the surface meaning but missed the emotional tone and cultural connotations, which are critical in literary translation." (IR14)

These inaccuracies highlight the importance of teaching students to critically evaluate and revise AI-generated outputs rather than relying on them as definitive solutions.

Over-Reliance and Reduced Critical Thinking

Another challenge observed was the tendency for some MTI students to become overly reliant on ChatGPT, potentially undermining their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Autonomous learning requires students to actively engage with content, analyze problems, and make informed decisions. However, the convenience of ChatGPT may discourage students from developing these essential skills.

Several interviewees expressed concerns about this issue. One participant remarked:

"Sometimes, I find myself using ChatGPT to check every sentence instead of thinking through the problem myself. I worry that this habit might weaken my critical thinking over time." (IR3)

This challenge underscores the need for educators to guide students in using ChatGPT as a complementary resource rather than a replacement for their own judgment and creativity.

Ethical Concerns and Academic Integrity

The use of ChatGPT also raises important ethical concerns, particularly in academic contexts. Some MTI students admitted that they had used ChatGPT to complete assignments or generate ideas without fully understanding the material. This raises questions about academic integrity and the potential for plagiarism.

Moreover, as ChatGPT becomes increasingly accessible, there is a risk that students may misuse the tool to bypass the learning process, relying solely on AI-generated outputs instead of engaging in meaningful practice. Addressing these ethical issues requires clear institutional guidelines and policies on the appropriate use of AI tools in education.

RQ Three: How can ChatGPT be effectively integrated into MTI curricula to optimize its educational potential?

The study reveals that the adoption of ChatGPT in Chinese MTI education is still in its initial stage, with only a small proportion of Chinese MTI students actively using it for autonomous learning. However, its integration represents a paradigm shift in how students engage with translation training. Previous research has demonstrated that AI-powered tools can improve efficiency and accuracy in translation tasks (Zhou, 2023; Rasul, 2023; Wen &Tian, 2024), but their full potential depends on effective pedagogical integration. This study supports those findings, suggesting that ChatGPT should be incorporated strategically into MTI curricula, complementing rather than replacing traditional learning methods. Similar to past research emphasizing the role of instructors in guiding AI use, this study underscores the necessity of educator training to ensure that MTI students develop a balanced approach to AI-assisted learning.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to a specific group of MTI students in the mainland of China, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study primarily relied on self-perceived data, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies. Third, the research focused on short-term observations, without assessing the long-term impact of ChatGPT on autonomous learning. Additionally, the rapid evolution of AI tools like ChatGPT may lead to changing outcomes over time, which current data may not fully capture.

Recommendations

For Educators

Promoting Critical Evaluation Skills: Educators should encourage students to critically analyze the outputs of ChatGPT, comparing them with human translations and refining them as necessary. Assignments and classroom activities should emphasize the role of human judgment and creativity in translation.

Balancing AI with Traditional Methods: While ChatGPT can support autonomous learning, it should not replace traditional pedagogical methods, such as peer review, group discussions, and manual translation exercises. Educators should design blended learning approaches that incorporate both AI tools and human interaction.

Training Students in AI Literacy: Institutions should offer workshops and training sessions to help students understand how to use ChatGPT effectively, emphasizing its capabilities, limitations, and ethical considerations.

For Institutions

Developing Ethical Guidelines: Clear policies on the appropriate use of ChatGPT in academic settings are essential. These guidelines should address issues such as plagiarism, transparency in AI-assisted work, and the importance of acknowledging AI-generated contributions.

Enhancing Access to AI Tools: Institutions should provide equal access to AI technologies like ChatGPT, ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, can benefit from these resources. Subsidized access or institutional licenses could help bridge the digital divide.

Integrating AI into Curricula: MTI programs should formally incorporate ChatGPT and similar tools into their curricula, with specific courses or modules focused on AI-assisted translation and interpreting. This integration should be accompanied by assessments that evaluate MTI students' ability to use AI effectively.

For Researchers

Conducting Longitudinal Studies: Future research should explore the long-term impact of ChatGPT on MTI students' skills development and professional readiness. Such studies could examine how sustained use of AI tools influences critical thinking, creativity, and ethical decision-making.

Investigating Novice Users: Further research is needed to understand the experiences of MTI students who are new to AI tools, identifying barriers to adoption and strategies for effective onboarding.

Exploring Comparative Effectiveness: Researchers should compare ChatGPT with other AI tools and traditional learning methods to determine its relative effectiveness in various aspects of MTI education, such as translation accuracy, interpreting performance, and cultural learning.

Conclusion

This study explores the role of ChatGPT in fostering autonomous learning among Chinese MTI students, examining its benefits, challenges, and implications for translation education. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews, the research provides valuable insights into how ChatGPT supports MTI students in developing their translation and interpreting skills.

Key findings indicate that ChatGPT significantly enhances autonomous learning by providing instant feedback, enabling personalized and flexible practice, and serving as a supplementary resource for mastering complex language tasks. These advantages help address persistent challenges in MTI education, such as limited access to personalized guidance and the need for continuous self-directed practice. However, the study also highlights key challenges, including occasional inaccuracies, the risk of over-reliance on AI, and ethical concerns related to plagiarism and academic integrity. These findings emphasize the need for a thoughtful and

balanced integration of ChatGPT into MTI curricula, ensuring that it complements rather than replaces traditional learning methods.

The research further reveals that the adoption of ChatGPT in Chinese MTI programs is still in its early stages, with only a small proportion of MTI students using it for autonomous learning. Nonetheless, its integration marks a paradigm shift in MTI students' self-directed learning. As AI technology continues to evolve, its role in translation education is expected to expand, offering new opportunities to enhance learning outcomes.

In conclusion, while ChatGPT has the potential to transform MTI education, its successful implementation requires careful planning, educator training, and institutional policies that promote ethical and effective use. By addressing these considerations, educational institutions can leverage the potential of AI to better prepare MTI students for the demands of the professional translation and interpreting industry.

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