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Professor Kang Zhifeng: A Pioneering Figure of Cognitive Interpreting Studies

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Abstract

Prof. Kang Zhifeng, Vice President of Heilongjiang International Studies University, doctoral supervisor at Fudan University, and President of Professional Committee of Translation and Interpreting, has devoted more than three decades to interpreting research and practice. He pioneered the use of EEG, ERP, and eye-tracking technologies in interpreting studies, helping to unveil the cognitive "black box." He has led major national research projects and continuously published widely in SSCI and CSSCI journals. As an experienced practitioner, Prof. Kang has interpreted at over a thousand prestigious international conferences and high-level negotiations across more than 70 countries, fostering a productive synergy between research and practice. He also launched the CSSCI journal *Translation Research and Teaching*, promoted international academic exchange, developed the PTR teacher development model, and authored over 50 textbooks. With solid scholarship and a global forward-looking outlook, he contributes significantly to talent training, innovative disciplinary development, and China's international communication capacity-building.

Keywords

Kang Zhifeng; Cognitive Interpreting Studies; PCTI

1. Introduction

Professor Kang Zhifeng, Vice President of Heilongjiang International Studies University and doctoral supervisor at the College of Foreign Language and Literature, Fudan University, is a pioneer in Chinese interpreting studies. With more than 30 years of engagement in the field of interpreting, Prof. Kang has achieved fruitful results and made a great contribution to building an innovative path for cultivating Chinese interpreting talents. Currently, different cultures communicate more than ever before, and so does interpreting practice and research. In such a new context, Prof. Kang aligns with the demands of the era, focuses on cutting-edge topics, and dedicates himself to the relentless pursuit of higher academic aspirations.

Figure 1. Professor Kang Zhifeng.

2. Academic Journey

In the year of 1989, Prof. Kang was on the faculty of Hebei Normal University, and seven years later, he graduated from Hebei Normal University in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature. In 1999, he earned a master's degree from Fudan University in English Language and Literature and stayed to teach there. Then, he further earned a Ph.D. in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at Fudan University in 2010. During that period, Prof. Kang assumed the position of Associate Professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland, USA, in 2005. After his return in 2006, he continued to teach at Fudan University and attained the rank of Professor in 2014.

Prof. Kang also serves as an expert at Postdoctoral Research Station at the College of Foreign Language and Literature, Fudan University, and holds a number of other important positions: Review Expert for the State Council Academic Degrees Committee, Anonymous Review Expert for National Social Science Fund of China Projects and municipal-level social science projects, Member of the Evaluation Committee for the China Postdoctoral Science Foundation, Anonymous Review Expert for Master's and Doctoral dissertations at the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center of the Ministry of Education, President of the Translation and Interpreting Committee of the China Association for Comparative Studies of English and Chinese, Vice President of the Cognitive Translation Studies Committee of CACSEC, Standing Director of the Educational Linguistics Committee of CACSEC, the Editor-in-Chief of *Translation Research and Teaching*, (CSSCI-source collection and Grade-A collection of Chinese humanities and social sciences), Anonymous Review Expert and Editorial Board Member for three international journals including the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and Translation* published by the Science Publishing Group, as well as eight prestigious domestic foreign language journals, covering fields such as interpreting studies, translation studies and applied linguistics.

Prof. Kang's research focuses mainly on the field of interpreting theory and practice. He has visited many prestigious universities around the world, including Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Georgetown University in the United States; the University of Toronto in Canada; the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom; the West University of Timișoara in Romania and the University of Wrocław in Poland; the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney in Australia; the University of Cape Town in South Africa; the University of Havana in Cuba; the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru; as well as the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Taiwan University, Taiwan Normal University. He has delivered academic lectures at some of these universities.

In terms of academic projects, Prof. Kang has presided over two national-ranking research projects (the 2021 National Social Science Fund of China Program A Study on Interpreting Cognitive Flexibility and Interpreting Effectiveness of Chinese University Students Based on Modern Technologies (Grant No. 21BYY007); and the 2015 NSSFC Program A Study on Interpreting Efficiency-Enhancing Strategies of Chinese University Students Based on ERP (Grant No. 15BYY011)), as well as more than 10 provincial and ministerial-level research projects.

Prof. Kang has published more than 150 Chinese and English academic monographs and journal papers in a range of publications, including international journals such as *Babel*, *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* and *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, as well as domestic and foreign CSSCI and SSCI core journals like *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, *Translation Research and Teaching*, *Foreign Languages in China*, *Foreign Language Education*, *Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice*, *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, *Foreign Languages Research*, *Foreign Language World* and *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*.

Prof. Kang has also visited more than 60 countries. He provided over one thousand sessions of simultaneous interpretation, negotiation interpretation, and liaison & escort interpretation for dozens of domestic institutions as well as overseas clients from countries including but not limited to the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland and Australia.

In addition, the Committee of Translation and Interpreting Studies, with Prof. Kang as its president, was founded in 2017. Its mission is defined as follows: To uphold the principle of 'intellectual diversity, free expressions and debate among different schools of thought', unite professionals across the nation who are committed to the research and teaching of translation, interpreting and cognition, promote academic exchanges and the communication of research findings in translation studies, popularize scientific knowledge of translation, and contribute to the construction of socialist material and cultural-ethical progress.

To date, the Committee has organized eight annual conferences, twelve large-scale international conferences, and three high-end seminars in numerous cities at home and abroad, including Shanghai, Ningbo, Hangzhou, Zhengzhou,

Dalian, Hohhot, Hong Kong, Hokkaido, Singapore, California, Cambridge, Katowice, and so on. The committee-sponsored CSSCI journal *Translation Research and Teaching* was launched in 2018. Rooted in the international academic frontier, the journal attaches equal importance to theoretical and applied research. It selects original and cutting-edge papers in translation studies, interpreting studies, cognitive translation studies, and cognitive interpreting studies, catering to the needs of the new era of cognitive development in translation and interpreting. With eighteen issues published to date, the journal has yielded fruitful achievements and remarkable results.

3. Pioneering Figure of Cognitive Interpreting Studies

3.1 Theoretical Construction

For a long time, interpreting studies have undertaken a journey without a clear academic positioning, remaining subordinate to the fields of linguistics and translation studies. Since 2000, Prof. Kang has shifted his focus to this field. After accumulating over a decade of experience in interpreting practice and teaching, he recognized that the interpreting process is fundamentally a complex cognitive operation. As the primary agents responsible for interpreting practice, interpreters' cognitive behaviors directly determine whether the process of interpreting can be successfully produced. While cognitive behavior research traditionally falls within the realm of psychology, interpreting practice is in fact a systematic and strategic process of discourse information processing. This process involves cognitive mechanisms and the associated cognitive action patterns that accompany them. In other words, interpreting is not merely an instantaneous language conversion activity, but rather a cognitive mental process that involves intricate cognitive operations. Early interpretation studies mainly focused on summarizing experiences from professional interpreters and researching interpretation techniques. These studies remain comparatively superficial, primarily aiming at teaching applications. They are no longer sufficient to explain the deep cognitive mechanisms behind interpretation.

In his research, Prof. Kang found that domestic and international interdisciplinary research on interpreting and cognitive psychology remains in its early stages. To promote domestic interpreting research to the forefront of international scholarship, Prof. Kang proposed the concept of Cognitive Psychology of Interpreting (CPI) in 2014. He holds that interpreting is by no means a simple process of language conversion from the source language to the target language, but an intricate, multilayered, and multimodal psychological process, which involves not only expertise and skills across multiple fields, but also the complex psychological activities of the interpreters. For this reason, CPI, as a specialized terminology in interpreting studies, emerged as interpreting studies and cognitive psychology evolved. Prof. Kang hopes that in an era of interdisciplinary research, CPI can inspire more valuable contributions, so as to arouse domestic interpreting researchers' attention to the field of psychological cognition studies (Kang, 2014).

3.2 Disciplinary Development

An interpreter cannot engage in interpreting practice without the underpinning of cognition, and the generation of interpreting output is even more contingent on it. Cognition plays an indispensable role throughout the entire interpreting process. An accurate cognition facilitates the smooth delivery of high-quality interpreting output, whereas imprecise cognition leads to subpar output or even obstructs the production of interpreting output altogether. Therefore, dealing with the cognitive black box dilemma of interpreting practice is an urgent task. It is exactly for this reason that Prof. Kang, aligning with the evolving trends in interpreting research, proposed the concept of Cognitive Interpreting Studies (CIS), which is the inevitable outcome of interdisciplinary research spanning interpreting studies, cognitive psychology, brain science, neuroscience, and so on (Kang, 2018).

From a cognitive perspective, the theory of CIS integrates theoretical research in cognitive psychology, such as perception, attention, memory, language, judgment, and decision-making, with interpreters' practical experience. It conducts cognitive psychological research on professional and student interpreters during interpreting practice, testing, and research, and examines cognitive processes in interpreting information input, memory, information processing, expression, evaluation, and so on.

Research on the cognitive processes of interpreting represents an emerging trend in interpreting studies. It is not only the product of the integration of communicative and cognitive processes, but also the result of the convergence between cognitive science and interpreting studies (Kang & Xu, 2020). By adhering to a research approach that combines theoretical system construction with the theorization of interpreting practice experience, Prof. Kang published his book *Cognitive Interpreting Studies* in 2020, thereby establishing the disciplinary status of the theory of

Cognitive Interpreting Studies. If CPI has laid the psychological foundation for Cognitive Interpreting Studies, then the emergence of CIS marks two major paradigm shifts in interpreting studies: the cognitive turn and the empirical turn (Kang, 2020).

In terms of the research object, the cognitive process of interpreting is a psychological process characterized by complexity and dynamic changes, which embodies the active involvement of perceptual and emotional factors of the interpreting subject, as well as the reflective processes of metacognition and metaemotion. In terms of the research approach, research in Cognitive Interpreting Studies is striving to achieve an empirical turn through its in-depth integration with science and technology.

The establishment and consolidation of Cognitive Interpreting Studies as an academic discipline signifies a shift in China's interpreting studies from focusing on internal linguistic factors to the cognitive processes within the interpreters. This marks a journey from empirical summaries, skill introductions, and feature categorizations to the theorization of interpreting practice. At the forefront of global interpreting studies, it will lead both theoretical and practical studies in China's interpreting field.

With the rapid development of interpreting studies, the existing definitions of translation have lagged behind the times. Combining the traditions of interpreting theory research in China with the trend of the times, Prof. Kang proposed another new concept: Embodied-Cognitive Interpreting Studies (ECIS) (Kang, 2025a).

Currently, people are increasingly recognizing that an interpreter's body, senses, movements, experiences, and interactions with the environment play a crucial role in sense-making under the influence of cognitive science. Interpreting is an activity that involves perceiving the source language, understanding the context, exploring discourse meaning, and considering multifaceted factors, including but not limited to emotions and cultural backgrounds (Kang, 2025b).

To highlight the embodied nature of interpreting studies, Prof. Kang proposed the theory of ECIS, aiming to further advance the development of the CIS theory. The introduction of ECIS not only challenges traditional interpreting theories but also emphasizes the interpreter's agency in the process of interpreting activities, offering new insights for the development of interpreting studies and practical teaching in China.

It has taken merely a decade for the cognitive research in interpreting studies from conceptualization to disciplinary establishment. Its emergence is by no means accidental. This is a clear indication of Prof. Kang's distinctive mindset of upholding fundamental principles while pursuing innovations. He has succeeded in theorizing experience, scientizing skills-based research, driving cognitive research in interpreting further toward the goals of standardization, systematization, and cutting-edge advancement, and endowing it with a benchmarking awareness aligned with the internationalization of interpreting studies.

3.3 Mutual Promotion of Teaching and Research

Beyond being a distinguished scholar, Prof. Kang is also an excellent teacher. He offers *English Interpreting* to undergraduates, building their foundational skills. For postgraduates, he teaches *Interpreting Theory and Practice*, helping them integrate theory with practice. For doctoral students, he delivers *Cognitive Interpreting Studies* to foster academic innovation capabilities. This progressive course system meets students' developmental needs at each stage and reflects a philosophy of integrating cognitive science into interpreting.

When it comes to nurturing talents, Prof. Kang maintains a perfect balance of academic rigor and open-minded inclusiveness. In teaching students, he excels at integrating practical cases into the classroom and promoting students' competence through scientific interactive approaches. In research supervision, he encourages students to explore uncharted areas and supports their participation in various research projects. He has nurtured a large number of interpreting talents who possess both solid theoretical grounding and strong practical capabilities. Many of them have grown into senior interpreters and backbone teachers at universities, actively working in the field of interpreting.

Prof. Kang also attaches great importance to textbook development. The textbooks he has compiled, such as *A Casebook of Interpreting Practice in E-C and C-E* and *An Advanced Book of Interpretation* have been adopted by numerous universities nationwide. Integrating cutting-edge theories in interpreting studies with a wealth of practical skills and case analyses, these textbooks have become benchmark resources for interpreting teaching.

In response to the transformation of science and technology, Prof. Kang has proactively promoted reforms in interpreting education. While always upholding respect for students' autonomy and creativity, he has introduced new research equipment and technologies such as eye-tracking and ERP into the classroom. Prof. Kang advocates designing personalized training programs based on students' cognitive characteristics and linguistic proficiency (Kang &

Lian, 2020). This student-oriented educational philosophy aligns with his academic research on embodiment, reflecting the inherent unity of Prof. Kang's academic spirit and educational beliefs.

Furthermore, Prof. Kang has dedicated over three decades to education and proposed the distinctive Practice-Teaching-Research (PTR) teacher development model. He holds that foreign language teachers shall focus on the integrated development of three core competencies: practical capabilities, teaching skills, and research capacities (Kang & Shi, 2020). This PTR model not only highlights the significance of interpreting practice and enriches the teaching content of disciplines such as interpreting studies, interpreting cognitive psychology, and cognitive interpreting studies, but also broadens the horizons of interpreting studies. It charts the course for the professional practice of both vocational and student interpreters in China, as well as the interpreting instruction for undergraduates, postgraduates, and doctoral students, and the research endeavors of interpreting scholars. Through classes and lectures delivered at universities across the country, Prof. Kang has promoted this model nationwide, providing valuable insights for the development of foreign language teacher teams in China.

4. Conclusion

With over three decades of research and teaching, Prof. Kang has pioneered an independent system of cognitive interpreting studies. As an interpreting researcher, he has devoted himself to rigorous scholarship, striving to break through the black box dilemma of cognition. As an interpreting practitioner, he has actively built bridges for dialogue between the East and the West. As an interpreting educator, he has nurtured talents with his solid pedagogical competence.

Interpreting is not only an art of language, but also a science of cognition. It serves both as a tool for communication and, more importantly, as a bridge for cultural exchanges. I firmly believes that in this era of globalization and technological transformation, Prof. Kang as a pathfinder in cognitive interpreting studies, a bridge-builder for East-West communication, and a mentor in interpreting education, will continue to boost academic innovation to facilitate the national capacity for international communication, cultivate more interdisciplinary talents through educational practice, and contribute Chinese wisdom and strength to civilizational dialogue and global cooperation.

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