

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: **The University of Hong Kong (HKU)**

Unit of Assessment (UoA): **UoA 30, Chinese Language and Literature**

Title of case study: **Applied Linguistics Research Leads to Creation of Vital Resources for Chinese-English Interpretation and Translation in Hong Kong and Beyond**

(1) Summary of the impact

Research on Chinese-English bilingual courtroom interpretation in Hong Kong led to the development of the mobile application *Newssary*, an innovative electronic Chinese-English bilingual glossary, and the informative website *Resources for Interpreting*. These have become vital resources for professional interpreters and translators for whom speed, accuracy and grasp of linguistic nuance are essential. Since its launch in 2015, the website has received over 170,000 page visits and the *Newssary* app has been downloaded by over 17,500 users around the world since its official release in September 2017. Both the website and app have applications beyond the courtroom. Together they provide an unprecedented, award-winning and frequently updated bilingual reference tool, which is distinguished by its contextualisation of terms in current affairs and its timely translations of trending words and expressions. The tool benefits the work of local interpreters and translators and is used as a resource by thousands of students, teachers, and other professionals in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and beyond.

(2) Underpinning research

Dr. Eva Ng Nga Shan joined the University of Hong Kong in 1997. This project is a product of years of scholarly expertise on the part of Ng, whose research is largely focused on legal translation and judicial interpreting within the particular context of Hong Kong's bilingual courtrooms. While 90 percent of the Hong Kong population is Cantonese-speaking Chinese, English remains the dominant language of the High Court. Courtroom interpreters thus have a significant role to play in how justice is administered to the majority of the population. In 2008, Ng successfully obtained the High Court's rare approval to access audio recordings of court proceedings for academic purposes. Her access to these authentic, interpreter-mediated criminal trials has informed her subsequent research, culminating in her most recent book-length study, *Common Law in an Uncommon Courtroom: Judicial Interpreting in Hong Kong* [3.1]. The legal terminology extracted from the court proceedings has also contributed to the expansion of the bilingual English-Chinese glossary she has developed and constitutes a major part of the "law and public order" category.

Ng's extensive research on courtroom interpretation and legal translation underpins the impact in a number of important ways. Her examination of the history of Chinese-English legal interpretation and translation in Hong Kong has contributed to her identification of a critical need for improved resources to support the work of interpreters in the region [3.1, 3.2]. Her research highlights the power of the interpreter and the relationship between linguistic competencies and social inequalities, and aims to mitigate the negative effects of interpreter error and linguistic hierarchies. Ng's research also demonstrates that inaccuracies in interpretation, especially as manifested in the form of omissions or distortions, often occur when interpreters fail to properly identify the equivalent of a term in the target language, which explains the importance of bilingual glossary compilation [3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6]. Her knowledge of the dynamics of courtroom interpretation and her expertise in Chinese-English bilingual translation have informed her development of more effective tools for professionals in the field.

Ng's scholarship on interpretation and translation extends to the healthcare setting. She is the co-author of the textbook, *Introduction to Healthcare for Chinese-speaking Interpreters and Translators* (2016). This work overlaps with her research interest in legal interpretation and translation, for medical terminology is often deployed in trials. Medical terms are included in the "public health" category of the online bilingual glossary. Accuracy in interpreting is of vital importance in these settings, where mistakes can have critical consequences. Ng was the Convenor

of the *First International Conference on Legal and Healthcare Interpreting* at HKU in February 2017, where she presented her research on interpretation in court cases involving medical evidence given by non-native English-speaking local witnesses. Selected papers from this conference will be published in a forthcoming book.

(3) References to the research

3.1 Ng, E. *Common Law in an Uncommon Courtroom: Judicial Interpreting in Hong Kong*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2018. (226 pages)

3.2 Ng, E. “Do They Understand? English Trials Heard by Chinese Jurors in the Hong Kong Courtroom.” *Language and Law/Linguagem e Direito* 3.2 (2016): 172–191.

3.3 Ng, E. “Interpreter Intervention and Participant Roles in Witness Examination.” *International Journal of Interpreter Education* 8.1 (2016): 23–39.

3.4 Ng, E. *Introduction to Healthcare for Chinese-speaking Interpreters and Translators*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2016. (Co-authored with Ineke Crezee, 412 pages)

3.5 Ng, E. “Judges’ Intervention in Witness Examination as a Cause of Omissions in Interpretation in the Hong Kong Courtroom.” *International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law*, 22(2) (2015): 203–227.

3.6 Ng, E. “Garment, or Upper-garment? A Matter of Interpretation?” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law (Revue internationale de sémiotique juridique)* 26.3 (2013): 597–613.

Selected Grant Funding

Grant Title: Jury Comprehension: English Trials by Chinese Jurors

Research Grants Council (RGC) Early Career Scheme (ECS) Grant, 2017–2020, HK\$377,056.

Ng was the PI for two HKU Teaching and Development Grants totalling HK\$353,049 in 2014 and 2016 (with the Faculty of Law) to work on recordings of criminal trials from Hong Kong’s High Court. She was awarded four HKU Knowledge Exchange (KE) grants totalling over HK\$350,000 (2014–2018). The app was developed with the University’s Technology-Enriched Learning Initiative. Ng received the HKU Teaching Innovation Award (2017), Faculty of Arts KE Award (2016) and Faculty of Arts Research Award (2018). In 2018, Ng was awarded HK\$400,000 by the Equal Opportunity Commission for the project “A Study on Potential Model for Accreditation & Regulation of Interpreters and Translators in Ethnic Minority Languages in Hong Kong.”

(4) Details of the impact

Ng’s research, which investigates the significant role played by interpreters in legal and healthcare settings through their delivery of accurate interpretation, led her to identify the need for a new kind of interpreting tool. As a result, she has developed two innovative and interconnected technological resources: the *Resources for Interpreting* website and *Newssary* mobile app. Unparalleled by any other website or app of a similar nature, these dynamic resources are constantly updated and refreshed with the most cutting-edge content from current world affairs, and include both Traditional and Simplified Chinese translations of English terms or vice versa. New terms, including buzzwords, slang, and idioms are added to the database to keep up with the natural evolution of language and with the times. Both the website and app fill an important void in terms of available resources for interpreters and for many people from other sectors of the community. They are updated on a weekly basis and include expressions trending in the news. Unlike other web resources that usually offer only out-of-context translations, the terms are always contextualised in current affairs, thereby better informing users about the language usage while enhancing their understanding of the world. They have impacted on the work of professional interpreters and translators across different fields in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and diasporic Chinese-speaking communities around the globe. They have had further beneficial effects on the local community by facilitating bilingual competencies and language learning in both professional and educational contexts, thereby working to mitigate linguistic inequalities.

***Resources for Interpreting* Website and *Newssary* Mobile Application**

Ng launched the website *Resources for Interpreting* (<http://www.interpreting.hku.hk/>) in June 2015, since which time it has received over 170,000 page visits [5.1]. The site was designed as a web-based resource for the practice, teaching, and research of interpreting. Its hallmark is a bilingual Chinese-English online glossary of terms culled from current affairs pertaining to the legal and medical fields as well as other industries. It contains online training resources and information on ethical practices for professional interpreters, references to books and journal articles, and links to conferences and seminars on interpreting and short courses for continuing education.

In response to public demand and a desire to engage a wider audience, Ng subsequently developed the website's glossary into a free mobile application called *Newssary* ("news" + "glossary") for both iOS and Android devices. Like the website's online glossary, *Newssary* currently features over 9,000 terms. These are offered in a contextualised way, updated on a weekly basis and divided into convenient categories that facilitate more specialised uses. *Newssary* has been downloaded by over 17,500 users around the world since it was officially released to the public on September 24, 2017. With respect to transnational reach, approximately 50% of iOS users are from Hong Kong, with the remaining 50% from Mainland China, the United States, Taiwan, the UK, Japan, Australia, Canada, Macau, Singapore, New Zealand, France, Germany, and Malaysia [5.1]. Feedback from a survey conducted on the app (n=230) shows that over 92% of users feel it has had a beneficial impact on their work and 95% rate it as either 'good' or 'very good', reflecting extremely high rates of efficacy and utility. Results of the survey have indicated that 60% of respondents are professionals in different fields (translators, interpreters, educators, media and communications workers, legal and healthcare professionals, financial practitioners, civil servants, engineers, etc.), while 40% of respondents are primary, secondary or university students. Respondents praised the app for giving context to its English-Chinese translations: "I can update my own vocabulary, at the same time I know the trends of the world by this app" [5.2]. Both the diversity evidenced in user demographics and the overwhelmingly positive responses to the app reflect its broad social applicability and significance.

Resources for Interpreting and *Newssary* have received significant coverage in the local media and have been featured in Mingpao News, AM730, Sing Tao Daily, Mingpao Weekly, East Week Magazine, Epochtimes, and on RTHK Radio 3, as well as in Mingshengpao in Toronto. NowTV interviewed Ng about *Newssary* for its programme Tech Biz, which was aired in January 2018. Explaining the value of the new app, a Mingpao journalist wrote in September 2017 soon after the launch of *Newssary*: "New terms appear in the news at an alarming rate. [...] Good that I got to know about this *Newssary* app a few days ago. With over 7,000 terms culled from current affairs, a search for a term and its translation in English is just one click away" [5.3]. In July 2019, *Newssary* was recognised with the Top 10 2018 Healthy Mobile Phone / Tablet Apps Award by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Office for Film, Newspaper and Article Administration (OFNAA). Co-organisers of the Award include the Education Bureau, the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, the Hong Kong Internet Service Providers Association and Radio Television Hong Kong. A total of 257 apps were nominated for the Award and 16,000 members of the public cast their votes. Past recipients include the BBC, NASA, and TED [5.3].

Feedback from Interpreters, Translators and Other Professionals

One retired Senior Court Interpreter, who is currently a part-time Registered Interpreter/Translator of the Judiciary and Civil Service Bureau in Hong Kong, states that the glossary is "particularly useful as it provides a rich resource of terminology" that "enhances the efficiency of [his] work," and finds "it hard to imagine [him]self working without [it]." A list of endorsements made available on the website includes that of the Chief Simultaneous Interpreter for the HKSAR, who states that "as a conference interpreter of over 20 years, I am excited to see that there is finally a local online platform dedicated to interpreting" [5.4]. A freelance simultaneous interpreter in Hong Kong writes

that *Newssary* is “particularly useful for simultaneous interpretation, which requires speedy rendition of spoken words,” adding that it is “quicker to look up terms on *Newssary* than on Google [...] if the terms were in the news” [5.5]. The Deputy Director of Language Services of the State Courts of Singapore, Daniel Ang, was part of a Singaporean Government delegation that expressly asked to meet with Ng to discuss her glossary app in 2017. Ang, who is also the President of the Singapore Interpreters’ and Translators’ Union, was impressed by *Newssary* and has recommended it to students, educators, researchers, and practitioners [5.6].

The website and the mobile application have been used in other professional sectors, thereby extending its reach. For an Official Languages Officer of the HKSAR Government, *Newssary* helps fill in the gaps produced by the government’s own electronic glossary, which is only updated every one to three months, making it difficult to “find terms that [have] only come out recently and have not been ‘formally’ translated.” An Executive Officer working for the District Council adds that part of her job involves writing minutes for transport meetings: “Some of the terms are quite technical, e.g. ‘bus route rationalization’ and ‘brownfield site’. This app can definitely facilitate my work and save my time because I can easily look up the words that I need in the app” [5.7]. The former Executive Director and Head of Global Banking and Markets at Hang Seng Bank lauded *Resources for Interpreting*, calling it “one of the most updated websites I have experienced for vocabulary in finance” [5.8]. A Senior Scientific Officer at the Hong Kong Observatory makes use of the app in his work: “The *Newssary* App is a very handy tool which provides up-to-date terminology in a wide range of topics. It facilitates my work, which requires a lot of writing, e.g. press release, blog, educational article, etc. I recommended this App to my colleagues and they also found it very useful” [5.9].

***Newssary* as Accessible E-Learning Tool for Bilingual Competencies**

Newssary has had an impact on students, educators, and language learners as a result of the way this portable electronic glossary functions as an effective and free E-learning tool for the promotion of Chinese-English bilingual competencies. Users can create and share their own customised lists, receive notifications of the latest glossary entries, and test their bilingual competence with a daily word challenge game. The Vice-Principal of Ying Wa College asserts that *Newssary* “is extremely useful when students work on argumentative essays or do discussion related to social issues,” not only providing them with “dynamic English-Chinese translation but also their sources from authentic texts found in the media” [5.10]. The teacher of senior English classes at Sing Yin Secondary School asks his students to use *Newssary* to construct their own personalised glossaries. This leads them to develop “a higher sensitivity in the choice of expressions in writing and this will in turn enhance [...] the accuracy and clarity of expression.” He further asserts that *Newssary* serves “the whole education sector and the general public in bilingual competence enhancement” [5.10]. By promoting English-Chinese bilingualism in a form that highlights socially and politically relevant current events, Ng’s resources aim to improve young people’s access to higher education and future opportunities, and contribute to their knowledge and awareness of the world.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Statistics for website activity and for *Newssary* downloads.
- 5.2 Results of *Newssary* feedback questionnaire.
- 5.3 Copies of media coverage.
- 5.4 Quoted on *Resources for Interpreting*: <http://www.interpreting.hku.hk/endorsements/>
- 5.5 Statement from a freelance simultaneous interpreter.
- 5.6 Statement from the President of the Singapore Interpreters’ and Translators’ Union.
- 5.7 Statements from HKSAR and District Council users.
- 5.8 Statement from the former Executive Director and Head of Global Banking, Hang Seng Bank.
- 5.9 Statement from the Senior Scientific Officer at the HK Observatory.
- 5.10 Statements from Secondary School teachers.