AN ANALYTICAL DESCRIPTION ON CHINA'S SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The scope of research conducted by Chinese scholars on simultaneous interpreting is continually broadening. Initially, they focused on summarizing personal experiences, then sought theoretical foundations from cognitive psychology, and later integrated information processing theory with the practice of simultaneous interpreting (SI). Research on SI in China is progressively advancing by merging international theories with practical applications. Although China's research in this area began relatively late, it has advanced rapidly over the past two decades. The topics, perspectives, and methodologies are generally aligned with global trends, but gaps remain in terms of scale, impact, depth, precision, scientific rigor, innovation, and standardization compared to international research. By analyzing the research methods used in the referenced studies, this article aims to highlight existing challenges and future directions in this area.

Key words: simultaneous interpreting, research themes, research perspectives, research methods, method, methodology, empirical research, non-empirical research, theoretical research.

Before discussing and evaluating the research methods used in China's simultaneous interpreting (SI) studies, it is important to clarify a key distinction: the difference between method and methodology. These terms are often confused, but they serve different purposes. Method refers to the specific techniques or "ingredients" used in research, while methodology explains the rationale behind choosing a particular "recipe" for conducting the research. Method arises in response to specific needs or goals, while methodology serves to justify and explain the methods chosen for each study. In essence, "method" is the deliberate approach taken to better understand the world, and "methodology" is the underlying logic and philosophical foundation guiding the research. It analyzes the principles, rules, and methods that structure a given field of study. Research methods represent the practical form a research endeavor takes [Fang Shengping 1987: 21].

After comparing and analyzing the collected data, two major types of research in SI studies have been identified: empirical research, and non-empirical or theoretical research. These three research types differ in the following ways:

- **Empirical research** is divided into two approaches:

❖ **Quantitative approach**: This approach uses methods like descriptive analysis, experiments, surveys, observations, corpora, and mixed designs.

❖ **Qualitative approach**: This method involves observation, interviews, case studies, and text analysis.

- **Non-empirical research** involves types such as overviews, experience-based introductions, theoretical speculation,

- **Theoretical research** contains seven parts: argumentation, interpretation, explanation, defining, explanation, induction and deduction.
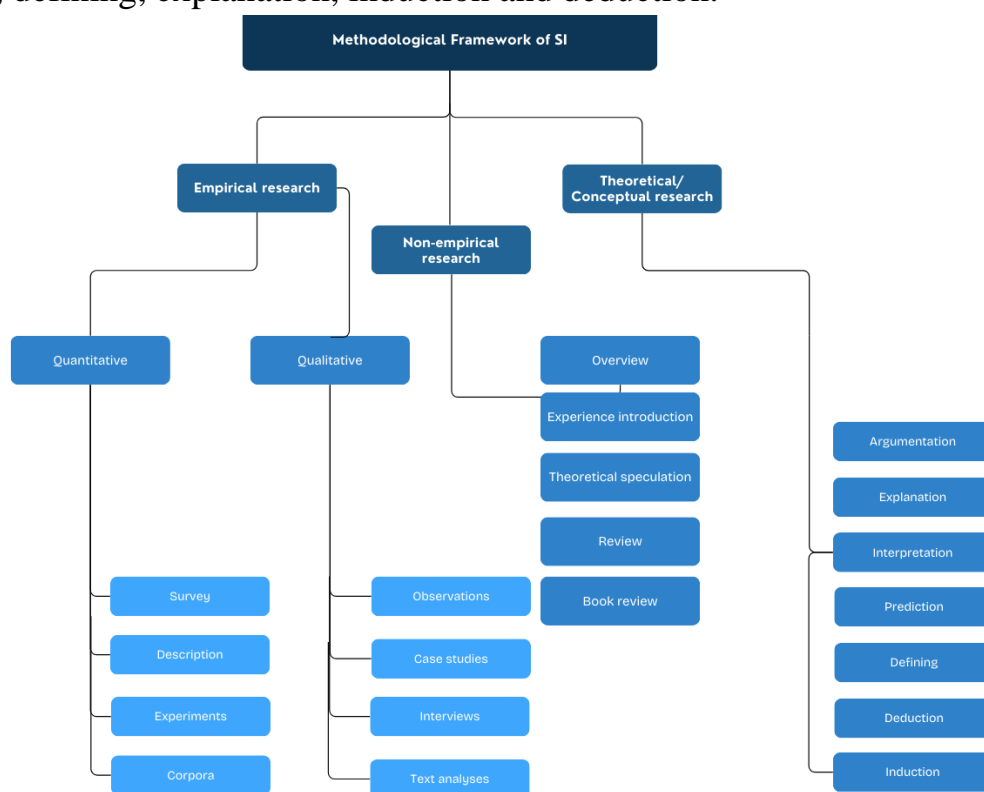
Table 1. Methodological framework of Interpreting Studies

A total of 80 Chinese journal articles with the title "simultaneous interpreting" were indexed on CNKI between April 10, 2003, and June 3, 2023. However, a systematic review of simultaneous interpreting research in China has not yet been conducted. Although empirical studies were significantly fewer than theoretical studies during the early 21st century, a clear trend has emerged: domestic scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of empirical research in SI studies and have begun to adopt these methods. Upon analysis and classification, 25 of the

articles utilized theoretical research methods, representing only 31% of the total. The remaining 49 papers, or 69%, employed empirical research methods.
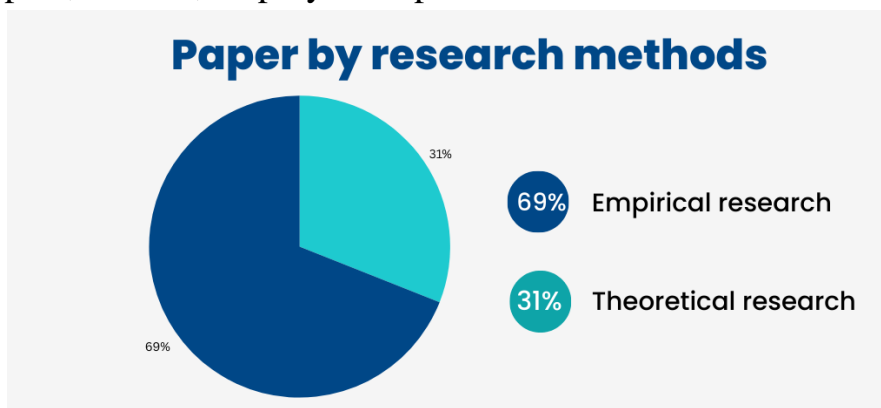
Table 2. Paper by Research Methods

Before 2010, nearly all studies on simultaneous interpreting (SI) in China relied on theoretical research methods or descriptive analyses, often based on the authors' personal experiences. However, since 2010, this situation has gradually improved, with more papers adopting empirical research methods being published in recent years.

Over the past two decades, empirical research has made notable strides in Western interpreting studies, establishing itself as a dominant model. Empirical studies account for an overwhelming 77% of SI research in the West [Gao Bin, Chai Mingjiong 2009: 17]. By contrast, the state of empirical research in China has been less impressive. The reasons for the limited proportion of empirical research in China's SI studies are not difficult to identify. Compared to international research, China's empirical and mixed-method studies have been significantly fewer.
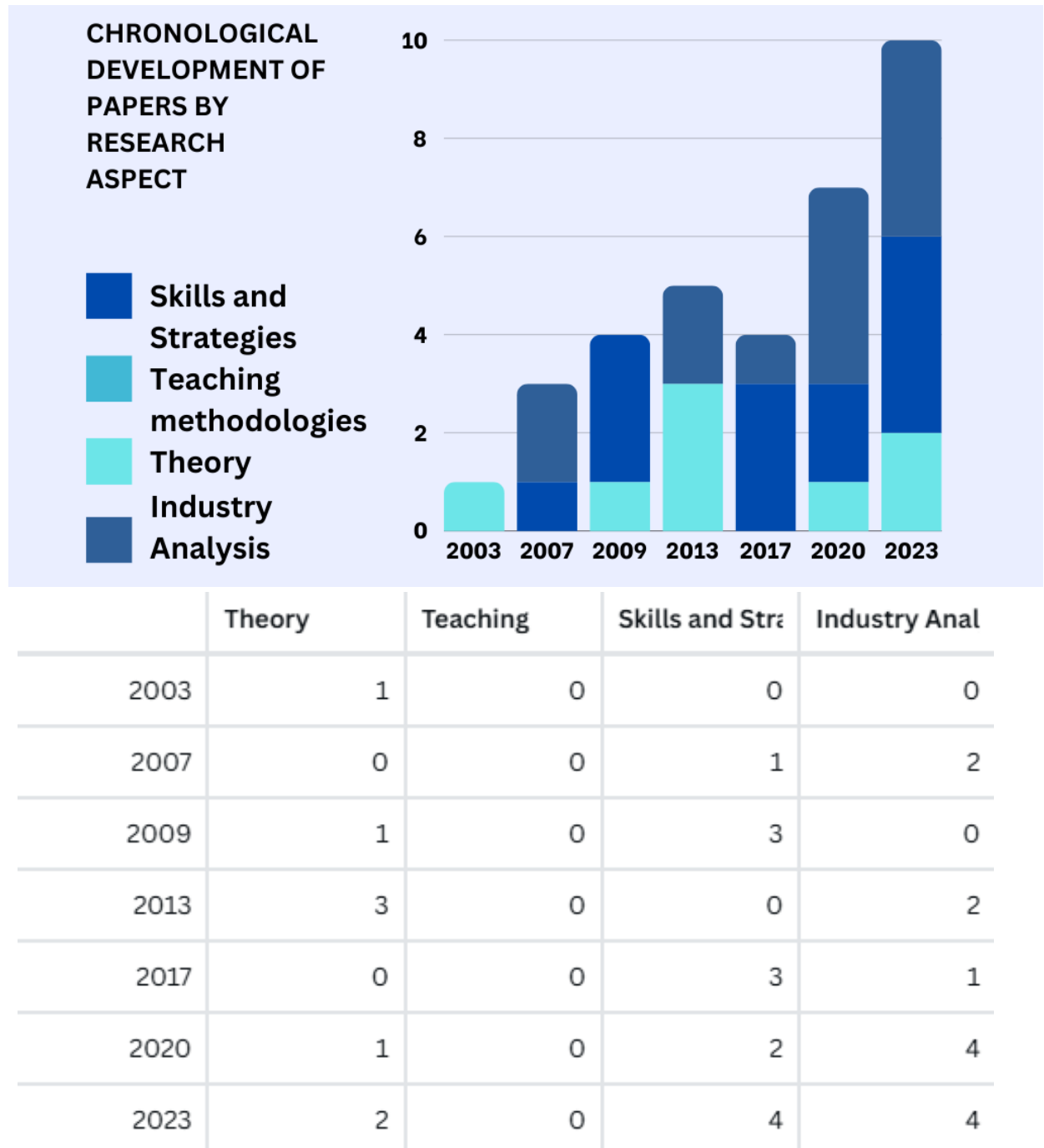
There are several reasons behind the relatively small proportion of empirical research in China's simultaneous interpreting (SI) studies:

1. "Limited training in empirical research": While many scholars in the field have extensive interpreting experience and some also have teaching backgrounds, they often lack formal training in experimental design and the methodologies required for empirical research, particularly those involving multi-disciplinary collaboration.

2. "Insufficient methodological preparation": Conducting empirical research requires a great deal of methodological groundwork, which many researchers are not adequately prepared for, leading to fewer studies employing these methods.

3. "Lack of interdisciplinary cooperation": Empirical research in SI often demands collaboration between experts from different disciplines. However, no established cooperative mechanisms existed in China at the time, making such research challenging to conduct.

A histogram has been created to illustrate the chronological development of published papers each year, providing a clear overview of the current state and trends in the development of SI research in China.

	Theory	Teaching	Skills and Stra	Industry Anal
2003	1	0	0	0
2007	0	0	1	2
2009	1	0	3	0
2013	3	0	0	2
2017	0	0	3	1
2020	1	0	2	4
2023	2	0	4	4

Table 3: Chronological Development of Papers by Research Area

The total number of papers focused on simultaneous interpreting (SI) skills, strategies, and industry analysis in China far exceeds those on SI theory and industry standards. This suggests that Chinese SI research tends to prioritize practical over theoretical aspects, as well as topics related to professional standards and industry development. Several factors contribute to this tendency:

1. "Practice-oriented nature of SI": SI is inherently a practice-focused discipline, requiring interpreters to have substantial hands-on experience. As a result, most experts in the field are better equipped to analyze and provide insights into practical aspects of SI rather than theory.

2. "Economic incentives": SI practice is financially more rewarding than SI research. Therefore, many interpreters prefer focusing on practice rather than dedicating time to theoretical research or exploring issues such as market development and mechanisms to support the profession.

3. "Lack of industry structure": In China, SI is still an emerging industry without a well-developed system of standards, regulations, or supervision. These gaps make it difficult for experts to observe and analyze the industry comprehensively, leading to fewer studies on SI market and industry issues.

Despite the greater focus on SI skills and industry analysis over theory in the past five years, research on SI theory has gained momentum, indicating that domestic experts continue to value its importance, even in the face of challenges.

An analysis of the literature shows that Chinese SI studies heavily rely on Western research. The number of Western papers and books cited far exceeds Chinese ones, and prominent Western authors like Daniel Gile, David Gerver, and Danica Seleskovitch are frequently referenced. Only a limited number of Chinese authors—such as Zhang Weiwei, Liu Heping, and Baogang—are frequently mentioned, though researchers like Gao Bin, Lu Xinchao, and others have contributed to international journals, helping to bring Chinese SI studies to a global audience [Lu Xinchao 2022: 38].

This reliance on Western sources highlights two things: first, domestic scholars place great emphasis on Western achievements in SI research; second, there may be a lack of localized approaches in Chinese SI studies. Western research, with its longer history, accumulated experience, and theoretical depth, is more advanced in many respects [Lu Xinchao, Wang Lidi 2015: 596]. Thus, Chinese scholars often draw from Western theories, particularly in areas like cognitive psychology and neuropsychology, to analyze SI processes. However, a key challenge remains: how to adapt these theories to the Chinese context and make significant advances in China's own SI research.

In summary, Chinese SI research has progressed slowly, beginning with empirical observations, and only gained traction in the early 21st century, about 40 years behind international research. However, in the first two decades of this century, China's SI research has rapidly evolved, keeping pace with international trends in themes, perspectives, and methods. Despite this progress, gaps remain in research

depth, scientific rigor, innovation, and standardization, all of which require further attention and large-scale efforts to address.

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