The International Journal for Translation & Interpreting Research

trans-int.org

Pedagogy for the multilingual classroom: interpreting education

Annette Sachtleben
Auckland University of Technology
asachtle@aut.ac.nz

DOI: 10.12807/ti.107202.2015.a04

Abstract: Globalisation has meant that people are moving around the world, and with them their ideas and cultures. New Zealand too is increasingly becoming home to a large number of culturally and linguistically diverse migrants, whilst also attracting international students from a large range of countries. In Auckland, 38.1% of residents were born in other countries (Census, 2013). Thus classes in New Zealand universities are becoming more multicultural and multilingual. This article examines the innovative way the author uses the many languages in the local community as a resource for Interpreting students. The lecturing team aims to develop pedagogically appropriate strategies that make possible three teaching dimensions: firstly, that of the classroom structure itself and the dynamic that develops within it; secondly, the academic requirements for rigour and content assessment; and finally, meeting the professional demands that will be put on the graduates on completion of their course. Research investigating this pedagogical approach, based on a survey of graduates, aims to determine its strengths and weaknesses.

Keywords: Interpreting education; multilingual classroom; collaborative learning.

Introduction

Globalisation has meant that people are moving around the world, and with them their ideas and cultures. Classes in New Zealand universities are becoming more multicultural and multilingual. As Interpreting lecturers we have tried to experiment and innovate to use the many languages in our communities as a resource for our students. We aim to develop multilingual and pedagogically appropriate strategies that make possible three dimensions. Firstly that of the classroom structure, secondly the academic requirements for rigour and content assessment and finally meeting the professional demands put on the graduates.

The main pedagogical principle upon which our teaching practice is based is derived from situated learning. The situated learning theories are based on the work by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Gonzalez Davies (2004). Lave (2012) posited two principles: firstly, knowledge needs to be presented in those settings and situations which normally involve that knowledge, and secondly learning proceeds best through collaboration and interpersonal interaction. Lave and Wenger based their concept of learning on the interaction of three areas of influence: agent, activity and world. Situated learning or situated cognition as described by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) features six core elements: apprenticeship, collaboration, reflection, coaching, multiple practice and articulation. Although the pedagogy we use demonstrates the best qualities of the apprenticeship model (Lave & Wenger, 1991), there is another equally important social principle that influences our classroom practice in the Centre for Interpreting & Translation studies at the Auckland University of Technology – social practice which directly derives from the multilingual classroom itself. Garcia (2011) states that

acknowledging multilingualism in the classroom can equalise the power differentials of majority languages and minority languages, thus providing a means of delivering social justice, and enabling the minority language students to participate actively in the education process. With the pedagogy used social practice directly derives from the multilingual classroom itself and pervades every activity. The approach is initiated by the lecturing team in the organisation of group work, the expectation of collaboration, and the range of assessment tasks requiring reflection. In this way it is the very fabric from which the classroom practice is made.

New Zealand is still an English-medium country, although of course te reo Maori and NZSL are official languages; thus the many ethnic minority groups need empowerment and advocacy, and access to various government agencies. Our multilingual interpreting classes provide a model for this desirable language equality, and the interpreter graduates carry it with them. Garcia acknowledges the history of these concepts, when she writes (2011, 243) "Multilingual pedagogies rely on *social practice;* that is, collaborative social practices in which students try out ideas and actions (Lave & Wenger 1991) and socially construct their learning (Vygotsky, 1978)".

Canagarajah has criticised the monolingual approach to learning as "…a unidirectional acquisition of competence, preventing us from fully understanding the resources multilinguals bring to their texts" (2006, 589). This criticism is relevant for much of the tertiary level education in New Zealand, where all seven universities are English–medium.

Research study

The impetus for this research was to address the question of how interpreting can best be learned in a multilingual learning environment. The use of graduate feedback was seen as a means to complete the perceptions of the teachers, and provide insight into the efficacy of classroom methods when graduates engaged with the profession. This feedback can be categorised as performance feedback, as it is information on how well the pedagogical methods prepared graduates for their work role.

In order to assess the students' receptive view of these teaching methods, we conducted a survey of recent graduates, asking them to evaluate each of the various teaching strategies and tools that we use. The research instrument in this study was a survey employing both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. In 2013 all Interpreting graduates were surveyed as to their perceptions of the benefits of the teaching techniques used in their classes. Students were asked to respond anonymously, and send their responses to the programme administrator and not their lecturer. The participation rate was 52 % (n=12). Additional data was from unsolicited graduate feedback in the form of emails, triangulated by the ability to find work, and some employers' comments. With the small number of survey participants, care has been taken to acknowledge their subjective viewpoint, and where possible findings have been illustrated by participant quotes. Using the participants' own words is an attempt to strengthen the face validity and credibility of the research, and ensures that data interpretation remains directly linked to the participants.

The research aim was to use the insights gained by first evaluating and coding the data, and then applying the insights thus gained to make improvements to both the classroom pedagogy itself and also to performance feedback processes for future use.

The survey (see appendix 1) took each classroom activity in turn and asked the participant to evaluate it for effectiveness on a 4-point Likert scale. 'NA' for *not applicable*, or 'NU' for *never used* were also provided as options.

Space was made available for additional comments. The first 3 questions related to whether or not the participant had a language peer in the class, in the local community or online. The following 6 questions were about different teaching and learning tasks, while the next question sought detail about purposeful communication with other speakers of the same language. The final question requested an overarching general evaluation. The choice of question was made for ease and speed of response, to facilitate busy people taking the time to fill out the survey.

The survey did not address the philosophical approach of situated learning. If the graduates had not felt comfortable with this approach, it would have manifested in the evaluation of and comments about the teaching and learning tasks which put the pedagogical principle into practice.

Pedagogical principle into practice

We are not able to use bilingual classroom practice, as our classes are small and students have a variety of languages other than English (LOTEs). Therefore a multilingual collaborative approach has replaced it, so that students work with language peers for formative feedback, and to investigate and share resources. Elders in the ethnic communities are seen as a resource to provide or comment on correct levels of register and formal terminology, since many students have not had the necessary life experience to have developed their language knowledge of domains in the public arena. Bilingual legal professionals and medical practitioners now resident and working in New Zealand are also asked to check terminology if so requested by some students who cannot find the online resources they need. In some instances when the language is quite uncommon, the student may Skype or email relatives in another country for the necessary formative assistance. These resources from outside the classroom are then shared within it, when that is possible.

The interface between the classroom and the community is guided. Students are asked to compile their own glossaries, and for the advanced specialisation classes (Health Interpreting, Legal Interpreting) the students are required to undertake observation journals of practising interpreters working in those areas. The guidelines for these journals are quite specific, and one area is to comment on the discourse used, i.e. terminology, register, politeness strategies or lack thereof, and cross-cultural impact. For each course the students are expected to find their own solutions for any sentences that cause difficulty in the weekly practice tasks provided by the pre-recorded semi-authentic English recordings. These solutions may be sought from language peers (in class or online), online resources, or elders and professionals in the community. The result is that the students develop their own resources, and become independent – the benefits have been commented on by the graduates once they are working as professionals, as they report continuing to use these methods.

The pre-recorded semi-authentic English recordings are the core of students' interpreting development. As the same text is used by each LOTE speaker, the level of difficulty is standard throughout the class. It is noticeable, during the practice in the computer labs, that Samoan students need more time to complete interpreting a section of health-based English. This is because the language has very few specific equivalent medical terms, and a quick explanation may be needed. Similarly when the legal tasks are being worked on, students from cultures not using the Westminster legal system may need more time to explain a term as it may not be possible to simply use an equivalent LOTE term.

To implement the learning tasks and to provide the learning resources we find necessary, the Auckland University of Technology has chosen the Blackboard Learning Management System for all online learning. It is a course management system which provides a range of features, and allows a multi-dimensional approach in the provision of learning content, as well as a range of student responses. For example pre-recorded dialogues are available through Blackboard Collaborate Voice Presentation, which allows for a subsequent posting of the recorded interpretation of the dialogue. Further comments about the interpretation can be posted by the lecturer or another student, usually a language peer. Some of the features used for the online interpreting classes, but also for the blended learning of classroom-taught courses, are audio chat, live lecture recordings, Voice Board, Voice Presentations and Voice Podcasts.

The most important of all the online resources we provide for learning are semi-authentic *audio tasks* posted online, and these are used in the appropriate context for every interpreting class. They are pre-recorded, and are often in the form of relevant dialogues, so that consecutive interpreting can be practised and individual glossaries built up for specialist terms. Students can access these recordings from anywhere and at any time. The tasks, ranging in length from three to eleven minutes, have multiple uses: note-taking practice, shadowing, paraphrasing, and most importantly interpreting. Students can then post their interpreting recording online into the same 'space' for feedback, which can be posted either as a voice comment or a written one. An extension of this in more advanced courses requires not only a language peer to provide formative feedback, but provide actual recorded LOTE texts for the language peer to interpret. When working as a triad, the additional student provides feedback on the Interpreting and the translated text. The task uses Blackboard Voice Presentation. However in some classes there is no language peer. Therefore another method of providing LOTE texts for the students is to keep the work of better students, after having received their agreement to do so, particularly in less-common languages in Auckland, e.g. Vietnamese, Rohingya or Thai. This enables lecturers to use these recordings as exemplars, enabling students speaking those languages in later occurrences of the same course to compare their own interpreting performance to that of skilled language peers. The more advanced courses provide audio tasks to practise interpreting in simultaneous mode, and there is a conference booth installed in one computer laboratory to enhance authenticity and prepare the students for their professional life.

To further the collaborative approach, wikis or discussion fora are used. Discussions (either online or in the classroom) focussed on learning content or problem solving tasks ensure that certain areas are thoroughly understood. The online discussion forum requires all students to contribute to a fortnightly task in the same wiki so that all responses can be read and evaluated. This is a good way to allow for the revision of terminology and professional principles. Both collaborative group work and cooperative learning are building blocks of social practice, according to Garcia (2011). Articulation of concepts is another aid to learning and retaining knowledge, which is an additional advantage of using collaboration as a pedagogical strategy.

Reflection is an imperative for conscious and independent learning. Thus our students write reflective journals for three courses: one on the development of their pragmatic understanding, and the other two on their observations of Interpreters working in the Courts, and in medical settings. These reflective observation journals are also a compulsory part of the assessment schedule.

A lot of our students have already experienced the processes followed by public agencies and government services, for instance by being asked to act as ad-hoc interpreters while helping out family and friends in immigration,

tenancy, education as well as health and legal situations. Sharing these experiences in the classroom means that the curriculum content touches on their own real-life issues, and can be seen as highly relevant. Garcia and Flores (2012) refer to this as maximum identity investment. Thus the training of our translators and interpreters is embedded in the real-life situations of their future work on behalf of their communities.

Students engage in simulated real-life interpreting practice in a number of ways, all of which ensure formative feedback is both given and received. This is a characteristic of the apprenticeship model. These activities also allow the students to develop the skills needed to pathway into the community of professional practitioners. Unfortunately, not all student interpreters have language peers available to them in the classroom setting, either due to illness, absence, or because a student is the only one speaking their particular language. In order to ensure that all students receive language specific formative feedback on their interpreting performance, they are advised to find a community member who can provide such feedback. We see it as fundamental to the success of the multilingual approach that students not only receive formative feedback by members of the language community, but also have their final summative assessments marked by a professional interpreter of that language.

Results and Discussion

The conclusions endorsed the methodology we use. The most favoured online strategy was the group work, even when this was not with a specific language peer group. Indeed, the online English task-based discussion forum (wikis) used for both classroom and online students was noted as being particularly helpful. This is a unifying task in terms of classroom management, and additionally students without a language peer feel supported in this way: "English only, but it was fantastic to have the online wikis." One respondent wrote, "I rarely engaged in online discussion on the wiki, but I believe it could be effective." Why the person rarely participated is not known. Many of the students are mature-age people, and we have observed that they are busy supporting a family and/or attending to responsibilities in the LOTE community, and simply have insufficient time to reflect or do more than fulfil the academic requirements and meet the deadlines. Therefore at the time of the enrolment interviews, applicants are cautioned about the need for personal study time. In particular, mature-age members of Pasifika communities are advised to find someone to whom they can delegate their pastoral responsibilities for their period of study.

In the classroom the most favoured strategy was pair work, with all respondents finding it very or quite effective. One respondent noted, "It was great to have a classmate to work with who had the same passion with what we were learning – it depends if you get the right person to be paired with." This has effected a change in classroom management, as it was a prompt to allow students to choose their own peer. This would seem to be only practicable when there are more than 2 speakers of the same language in a class. However, as positive affect is so important in maintaining motivation, it may be more important to let students self-select any study peer.

This feedback, "it depends if you get the right person to be paired with", offered a clear view that pair work or small-group work functions best when all participants are equally active. This can be positively influenced by having a percentage of the grades reflect the level of participation, as is now done in two of the advanced specialist courses.

The second most favoured strategy was the observation of professionals working in the field, whether this was by direct courtroom/ health professional observation or through the medium of videos. One student wrote, "[This observation meant that I] had an idea of what is expected in the job and also learnt how to put into practice the theories that I learnt in the classroom." Only two respondents had not observed professionals working specifically in their LOTE, but had otherwise observed professional interpreters at work.

Websites were regularly used for further research and for online dictionaries. One student reported using the internet not just to broaden knowledge, but to find equivalents for CSIs (*culturally specific items*) (Aixela, 1996). Another reason was to find equivalent documents in different languages to ensure appropriate terminology was learned. The use of relevant websites was evaluated as being very effective by half of the respondents. Such sites were not only seen as "… an up-to-date reference guide', but were also used for "…keeping up with changes especially with slang, and also the changing technology. Being advanced interpreting students [we] need to know such changes to be able to comprehend what is expected when we join the workforce." The online wikis often had posts about a new and useful website that a student had found and recommended generally, or specifically to students of the same LOTE.

All but two of the graduates said they consulted friends in their LOTE community, with the same number reporting that they consulted LOTE interpreters or LOTE professionals. All respondents reported having a language peer in the community if not in class.

Two thirds of the respondents reported the teaching strategies to be 'very effective', with most of the remainder finding them to be 'quite effective'. The one graduate who did not work with a language peer or with the LOTE community found the strategies only 'somewhat effective'. This highlights the fact that in all learning, effectiveness depends on how diligent the students themselves are, and one of the graduates also made this point: "However, I do feel that the effectiveness is also based on how proactive the students are."

Table 1. Results of graduate survey

	Very effective	**Quite effective**	**Somewhat effective**	**Not effective**	**NA**	**NU**
Triad work in classroom or computer lab	2	1	1		2	4
Pair work in classroom or computer lab	4	3	1			2
Observation of professionals (real life or video)	7	2				
Online wikis/ Discussion forum	3	1	2			1
Use of relevant websites	6	2				1
*Consulting your LOTE community	7 consulted LOTE professionals 5 consulted family 4 consulted friends					
Overall, how effective did you find the teaching strategies?	7	2			1	

Note: Some students did not answer all questions.
* More than one group of people could be consulted.

One graduate commented that computer literacy was essential for this type of classroom work ("Difficult for people who are not computer literate."). The university does provide student support, but we find that fellow students who are computer savvy generally help out those who are not when working side-by-side in the computer laboratories. This comment has resulted in a request to the Centre for Learning & Teaching for increased assistance to support lecturers, and an effort to inform the Student IT Helpdesk about the particular IT needs of interpreting students when working alone and not in the teacher-assisted computer laboratories. As the technology platforms are being constantly upgraded, and software programs change, there is an ongoing and very real concern that something that functioned perfectly in one semester might no longer be functional the next. We can only check, respond to student's requests for help, and hope any inconveniences will be minor. However, the overall positive response to the questions relating to the use of online resources and tools is supported by the work of Skaane and Wattne (2009) who found that the cyber-learning environment facilitated interactivity and student co-operation.

The fact that not one graduate offered any negative criticism, or made alternative suggestions, or even found a part of the classroom work not helpful, has demonstrated that the pedagogical strategies we use are whole-heartedly endorsed by the students. We had not anticipated such a positive response. Although we fine-tune the teaching methods and adapt to the classroom dynamic which varies from year to year, we feel affirmed in our approach.

Graduate employment is high, and some students start working for LanguageLine, a telephone interpreting service, when they are in their final semester before graduation. The respective District Health Boards, Ministry of Justice agencies and the New Zealand Police (Auckland Office) receive a list of graduates each year, with the graduates' language and contact details. Employer comment is always positive, and oftentimes requests come to us for interpreters that we have trained working in a particular LOTE. This networking between the Auckland University of Technology Centre for Interpreting & Translation and the various agencies that employ interpreters ensures that the needs of the real world are being met. The professional body, the New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters, allows full membership to our graduates who have averaged a B grade or higher throughout their undergraduate study.

Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the question of how interpreting can best be learned in a multilingual classroom. The use of graduate feedback was used to complement the perceptions of the teachers, and evaluate teaching-method efficacy for graduates as they started work as professional interpreters. Overall the survey results confirmed that our pedagogical approach in the multilingual classes is effective.

The research aim was to use the results to make improvements to the classroom methodology and to refine performance feedback processes for future use. Self-selection of a study peer (or two peers in small-group work) was an immediate change that was made. Comments on some problems using the required IT has resulted in a list of computer software requirements for homework tasks, and a list of troubleshooting advice posted on the class website.

The feedback received ("it depends if you get the right person to be paired with") presented a clear view from the graduates that pair work or small-group work functions best when all participants are equally active. This was a problem already noted by lecturers, and given its subsequent affirmation,

we have taken steps to incentivise students' engagement in discussion tasks by having a percentage of the grades reflect the level of participation.

The aim to refine feedback processes for future use has resulted in two changes. Firstly the graduates will be sent a survey in the week after final exams. It is anticipated that there will be a higher response rate when links to the class are still strong. Another refinement on performance feedback processes is to include some small group interviews where participants are invited to suggest the themes for discussion. These themes will then be part of the survey.

The results of the current survey show the pedagogical strategies we use are whole-heartedly endorsed by the students. The resultant competent and confident graduates are able to find work easily, and feel able to meet the professional challenges that they encounter.

References

Brown, J., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher 18*(1), 32-42.

Canagarajah, A. (2006). Toward a writing pedagogy of shuttling between languages: Learning from multilingual writers. *College English, 6*(6), 589-604.

Gonzalez Davies, M. (2004). *Multiple voices in the translation classroom*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: John Benjamins

Garcia, O. (2011). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. West Sussex, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

Garcia, O., & Flores, N. (2012). Multilingual pedagogies. In M. Martin-Jones, A. Blackledge & A. Creese (Eds.), *the Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (pp. 232-246).

Lave, J. (2012). Apprenticeship in critical ethnographic practices. *American Anthropologist 114*(4), 707-708. Wiley Online Library. DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1352.2012.01276.x

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Skaane, H., & Wattne, M. (2009). Teaching Interpreting in Cyberspace: The Answer to All Our Prayers? In R. de Pedro Ricoy, I. A. Perez & C W. A. Wilson (Eds.) *Interpreting and Translating in Public Service Settings: Policy, Practice, Pedagogy* (pp. 74-88). Manchester , UK and New York, USA: St. Jerome.

Wenger, E. (c2007). Communities of practice. A brief introduction. *Communities of practice*. Retrieved 18/06/2012from http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Appendix 1

Lecturers did not work with you on your LOTE: instead, we used a number of teaching strategies.
Please assess these strategies in terms of their effectiveness in your development as an independent, self-reliant professional Interpreter. Thank you very much for your time.

1. Did you work with a language peer? ❑ Yes ❑ No
   If not, what was the reason? _____
2. Did you have a language peer in the community? ❑ Yes ❑ No
3. Did you have a language peer online? ❑ Yes ❑ No

How useful/effective did you find the following teaching strategies? **Please use the numbers below to assess the usefulness/effectiveness of these strategies, or: write N.A. if Not applicable or N.U. if Never used:**

1 Very effective	2 Quite effective	3 Somewhat effective	4 Not effective

4. Work in the classroom or computer lab in groups of three people (triads):
*Any comments:*_____

5. Pair work in the classroom or computer lab:
Any comments:_____

6. Observation of professionals in general(on video/real life):
*Any comments:*_____

7. Observation of professionals working in your LOTE:
Any comments:_____

8. Use of language-specific online wikis (online discussion forums):
Any comments:_____

9. Use of relevant websites:

Reason for using these websites: _____

10. Consulting within your LOTE-speaking community. Please tick whichever is applicable:

- ❑ Did not consult anyone in my LOTE community
- ❑ Consulted LOTE interpreters Assessment (1,2,3 or 4):_____
- ❑ Consulted professionals (e.g. retired doctors) Assessment (1,2,3 or 4):_____
- ❑ Consulted family members Assessment (1,2,3 or 4):_____
- ❑ Consulted friends Assessment (1,2,3 or 4):_____
- ❑ Other (please specify) _____ Assessment (1,2,3 or 4):_____

Overall, how effective did you find the various teaching strategies used:

❑ Very effective ❑ Quite effective ❑ Somewhat effective ❑ Not effective

***Approved by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on* 4/03/2013, AUTEC Reference number 13/14.**