

The multilingual approach to interpreter training as a solution

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Bologna process and the economic situation have brought about important reductions in translator and interpreter training: curtailing personnel and diminishing the variety of courses, and we believe that we are neither the only university nor the only country facing these challenges. That is why we shall present the current situation of interpreter training at the University of Turku, Finland. In the spring of 2016 our interpreter training unit organized an interpreter multilingual workshop for the first time, based on the structure of the translator training workshops at the MA level that have been implemented since last spring. Our paper intends to determine how the multilingual approach in interpreting is working. In the planning of the workshop, we had to consider various issues such as the target group, the market for which we are training the students, the languages involved, form, content, the ratio of lectures and exercises, interpreting modes, self-evaluation, technology (ICT), students' and teachers' expectations and of the teachers, terminology, grade awarding (unification of standards), evaluation possibilities, equipment for the recording of speeches and the performance of interpreters for self-evaluation, feedback as a means of fostering students' self-assessment and interdisciplinary input, all based on a theoretical framework provided by the leading scholars in the field. We intend to analyse the first impressions of the advantages we are achieving and the disadvantages we may encounter in future editions of the multilingual interpreting workshops.

Keywords: interpreter training, multilingual approach, curricula of interpreting courses, conference interpreting.

1. Introduction

The world is experiencing the turmoil of changes. Few countries and regions are immune to the problems of unemployment and economic downturn. Thus, change is inevitable.

As a consequence of the global financial crisis of 2008, the speed of change has accelerated. In addition, the economic situation in Finland seems to have worsened in recent years, reaching all sectors of the Finnish society. It does have severe effects on the educational system, including universities. In the last 12 years at our university we have seen a reduction of around 75 % in the number of courses in interpreting taught in the German department (Tulkkausopintokokonaisuus, 2003; 2013-2014), while in the Spanish department no interpreting course has been included in the curriculum for 13 years (Österlund, 2015). In addition to the downsizing of undergraduate courses, the post-graduate course in conference

interpreting (EMCI – European Masters in Conference Interpreting) has disappeared completely.

Furthermore, with the reforms at the University of Turku that started in autumn 2014, there are no interpreting courses at all for the BA degree, and at the MA level students only have the possibility of taking from one (Spanish and Italian) to three courses (English, French, German) in interpreting.

We intend to present and support our solution of the multilingual approach, so the University of Turku *goes multilingual*.

2. Good times of interpreting in Turku

Finland joined the EU in 1995 and the University of Turku started to provide more support by hiring more teachers of interpreting and admitting more students (Sunnari, 2006).

The EMCI (European Masters in Conference Interpreting) at Turku was implemented from 1995 to 2009. It was a post-graduate course after an MA, with the duration of one academic year, full-time, rendering an equivalent of 60 ECTS, with visits to interpreting institutions in Brussels. The interpreter training was a joint venture of the members of the staff of translation and interpreting studies at the University of Turku and conference interpreters working at the EU institutions (EMCI, 1999; Mäkinen, 2015).

3. The forces from beyond

The forces from beyond that we mention here refer to the Bologna process, implemented by the EU, and budget restrictions from the Finnish government.

The Bologna Declaration was a document signed in Bologna in 1999 by 29 education ministers representing European countries. The main goal of the process outlined in the Declaration was the establishment of a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with a view to improving competitiveness in relation to other regions (OPH, 2015).

The initial reaction to the Bologna Process by Finnish universities in general was fairly negative, but through the years it has become more positive as Finnish universities have been reforming the degree structure in order to maintain a strong position within the European Higher Education Area. In 2005, the two-cycle degree system was adopted by Finnish universities (*ibid.*). For the translation – and especially, interpreting programmes at the University of Turku – this meant in practice that the Golden Age of interpreting was over, as the number of courses was reduced, and courses were moved to the second cycle, i.e. the MA level. In effect, most of the courses in cultural competence for translators and interpreters, such as intercultural communication, which were an inherent part of the programmes, were eliminated between 2005 and 2014, although a few continued, and one (in the German language) was reintroduced in 2014 to the BA cycle, but it is not directly related to translation and interpreting.

The new credit system was developed by merging several courses so that they should be assigned a minimum of 5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credit points each.

With globalization, there is tension between the traditional core competences in language teaching and learning at university level, and the demand for key qualifications such as team work, problem-solving, soft skills and time management (Hess-Lüttich, 2014).

Another important change after the implementation of the Bologna Process has been the change in the status of the universities since the beginning of 2010 which resulted in a decrease in state-funding and an increase in private funding (Finlex, 1997; Finlex, 2010).

Brussels finally stopped financing the EMCI in 2009 (Mäkinen, 2015) and due to the university reforms of 2010 (Finlex, 2010), funding was reduced further. The university reforms and funding in Finland were implemented to facilitate operation in an international environment by enabling universities to diversify their funding base, compete for international research funding, cooperate with foreign universities and research institutes, and allocate resources to top-level research and their strategic focus areas (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2012), in line with the neoliberal view that universities are capitalist entities which should be economically viable in order to be trustworthy, and that all studies have to focus on employability (Nixon & Samalavicius, 2016; Lill, 2016).

4. Theoretical background for our workshop

Students need to be trained, within a secure surrounding, to prepare themselves for being evaluated. By learning from a native speaker who has been working in the field (Adam & Gross-Dinter, 2012) in both directions within the language pair, and completing exercises which are simulated but are as authentic as possible, students receive an important amount of knowledge and constant feedback as well as increased self-awareness, raising perceptions of the different specializations within the profession, including the new contexts of work, and of customers' expectations (Ziegler, 2012).

Trainees should constantly develop, as progress is part of the process of professionalization. Interpreting is not about being a machine, but it is a holistic approach, consisting of certain competences which need to be in the background and then are to be developed in order to reach professionalism (Herbert, 1952; Hietanen, 1993; Moser-Mercer et al., 1997), including:

- Interpreting technique (<German Dolmetschtechnik) - efficient note-taking, use of the voice and breathing, use of microphone and headsets, the visible (consecutive) and invisible (simultaneous) poker face, etc.
- Role and behavior of the interpreter - eye-contact, presentation of the message, interactional rules, clarifying the situation to the participants, atmosphere of the interpreting situation, physical condition (having slept well, not ill or stressed, etc.) (Hietanen, 1993).

- Preparation - a good preparation for quality interpreting or quality output entails groundwork with, among other aspects, parallel texts, terminology, research on background, terminology, etc. (Ziegler, 2012), information retrieval and management – i.e. research in various sources of information and the use of tools for managing it (Berber, 2010).
- Language adequacy - register, grammatical and syntactic correctness, coherence, cohesion, etc.
- Cultural competences - eye-contact, politeness, turn-taking, interactional strategies, knowledge such as of the topic in question, world knowledge, intertextuality, etc.
- Labor market, including three main contexts: 1) conference (consecutive and simultaneous), 2) contact (business, trade, public service, cultural – theatre, cinema, TV, radio – and tourism), and 3) legal (police, immigration, court, customs, armed forces, and border services (Berber & Grundström, 2015).

The main employers are the EU, other international institutions or organizations (NATO, UN, etc.), and national organizations. Other opportunities in the labor market are international business conferences, political and diplomatic negotiations within international organizations or with, and within, transnational corporations, academic conferences, press conferences as well as bilateral negotiations in state visits. For the EU and other European and world institutions, it is important to make students aware that directionality is only into the mother tongue, while for the national market both directions are important (Ziegler, 2014).

Thus, we should ensure that students have both the theoretical background as well as the practical competences in order to be ready to enter the labor market (Schmitt, 2009). There are three multilingual interpreting courses: one introductory course (Interpreting Basics) and two workshops at Turku University. The first workshop is the one presented here, and then students have the option of taking the second workshop in order to gain a thorough understanding of full professionalism before they enter the labor market. At the time at which this paper was written, only the introductory course and the first workshop had taken place; the second workshop is still in preparation.

5. Elaborating curricula for interpreting courses

Kalina (2000) discussed the following interpreting competences as a basis for teaching interpreting: 1. strategic text processing, 2) goal-oriented strategies, 3) comprehension strategies, 4) text-production strategies, and 5) self-monitoring of one's production. We have taken her ideas and completed the list with other, more up-to-date, needs and skills of the interpreting trainee that we and other researchers (NNI, 2016) have identified recently as follows:

- 1) use of ICT in interpreting;
- 2) awareness of the importance of intercultural communication;
- 3) awareness of the relationship between client and interpreter;

- 4) adapting to subjects and contexts where interpreting occurs today (for example multimedia presentations);
- 5) practical knowledge of the labor market;
- 6) networking (clients, associations, social media such as blogs and discussion lists);
- 7) ethical behavior;
- 8) research and information retrieval and management skills;
- 9) affective skills (empathy, tact and diplomacy, curiosity, teamwork, flexibility and adaptability, initiative, calm under pressure);
- 10) knowledge and continuous development of the basics of an interpreter (excellent knowledge of [a] foreign language[s], full command of the mother tongue, good public speaking, sense of initiative, picking up new ideas quickly, perseverance, analytical skills, general knowledge and interest in current affairs);
- 11) entrepreneurship.

Professionalism is the aim of all the training, as the sooner the concept is instilled into the students' minds, the better they understand and value the concept as a part of their lives, thus contributing to higher standards of professionalism and quality interpretation (AIIC, 2012).

6. The course

The Multilingual Interpreting Workshop I course is open to all the students at the MA level. The only pre-requisite is having completed the Interpreting Basics course, which comprises 14 hours of lectures and 14 hours of exercises. No aptitude test is needed for either course; both courses are worth 5 ECTS each.

Taking into account all the needs of an interpreting trainee and considering that we are to train students not only in techniques of interpreting but also to raise their awareness of the profession (WFU, 2016), we have prepared a curriculum for this first multilingual interpreting workshop along two main lines: theoretical aspects and practice.

The teaching of the theoretical components covers: presentations by the teachers in class, and readings and videos as homework assignments, while practice consists of: exercises in consecutive interpreting and the basics of simultaneous interpreting in class, as well as visits to institutions where there are interpreting services such as the police, or attending talks on interpreting in special circumstances, such as the prevailing refugee situation.

The characteristics of the group. We have a group of 13 highly-motivated students specializing in four languages: English (4), German (3), French (2) and Spanish (4). The group atmosphere is relaxed, cooperative, and friendly. Altogether, five languages are used in class, so managing this is important and the teachers involved are one native Finnish teacher and native teachers of French, German, and Spanish. Most of the students are native Finnish speakers with proficiency in at least two B languages, one of them being English, although they

concentrate on the B language that they enrolled in. They are allowed, however, to participate in some of the exercises in another language.

The course is held in Finnish, with occasional presentations in English, and subsequent practice in each of the languages involved. That means, in practice, that the theoretical aspects are taught to all the students as a group in Finnish mostly but a number of topics are also taught in English. Then the practical aspects are taught in two different classrooms: one specifically for conference interpreting, with booths, and the other one – a language lab. Students of two languages work with their respective teachers in a classroom, and we alternate classrooms so that they all have a chance to practice conference interpreting. Each teacher has material prepared in her own language to be interpreted into Finnish, and when the students have practiced enough to produce a fluent interpretation, they start working with relay back into Finnish. With this system, students can practice $B \rightarrow A / A \rightarrow B$ interpreting and relay, and they can obtain feedback from their peers and from two different teachers.

The theoretical aspects covered in the first workshop were: note-taking, contact and legal interpreting characteristics, ethical behavior, intercultural communication, collaboration between interpreters and speakers, quality in interpreting, information retrieval and management. These were reviewed more in depth during the second half of this first workshop.

Consecutive interpreting, which the students had already done in the Interpreting Basics course, was practiced during the first three sessions. Then the basics of simultaneous were taught in the fourth session, with shadowing. In the fifth session the students started simultaneous interpreting, and after some practice, relay was introduced.

Each session concentrated on one of the topics for which the students had to do some reading, including: tourism, immigration and asylum, Nordic cooperation, European Council, UNESCO world heritage sites, gender equality, environmental issues, economy and labor market, and development aid.

The final evaluation was administered through a portfolio the students had to prepare.

6. Results

Comparing the theoretical background with the actual development of the course, Table 1 represents the elements of theory applied during the workshop and the extent to which it happened:

Table 1: Theory vs. practice

Theory	Practice
1. Constant feedback	To a limited extent
2. Self-awareness	To a certain extent
3. Specializations within the profession	To a certain extent
4. Authenticity	Only in the last two sessions
5. Interpreting technique	To a certain extent
6. Role and behavior of the interpreter	To a certain extent
7. Preparation	Mostly
8. Language adequacy	Mostly
9. Cultural competences	Mostly

10. Labor market	To a certain extent
11. Text processing	None
12. Goal-oriented strategies	To a limited extent
13. Comprehension strategies	None
14. Text-production strategies	None
15. The use of ICT in interpreting	Mostly
16. Relationship between client and interpreter	To a certain extent
17. Contexts and subjects of interpreting	To a limited extent
18. Networking	To a certain extent
19. Ethical behavior	Mostly
20. Information retrieval and management	Mostly
21. Affective skills	To a limited extent
22. Basics of an interpreter	Mostly
23. Entrepreneurship	None

In Table 1 we have indicated with different colors the extent to which elements of theory were dealt with in the course. In red, we have marked those that were not dealt with at all, or very little, during the first workshop discussed in this paper. In yellow – those elements that were dealt with but not completely, which means that they still need to be reinforced in the second course to be administered in the future; in orange – those aspects that were dealt with slightly more thoroughly than those marked in yellow, but would need to be tackled more; and in light green – those aspects that were dealt with fairly thoroughly in class, but would still need to be practiced. As can be observed, no elements of theory were worked through completely, both in theory and practice, and the second workshop will need to complement the first one in this respect.

Thus, of the 23 traits mentioned, five (red) are yet to be presented, or have been presented very scantily. Four (yellow) have also been dealt with but only to a limited extent. Seven (orange) have been presented slightly more but need to be further reinforced. Finally, seven elements (light green) have been mostly dealt with and discussed in class, although practice is still needed.

It is important to note that in spite of the limited time and resources, we have been able to achieve and cover most of the main theoretical points contemplated. It is noticeable that most of the theoretical background needs to be presented clearly in class, not only through readings, so that the students can assimilate the complete picture of the profession. There has to be a progression and repetition in how skills and competences are introduced to the students, because of the complexity of the interpreting profession (Pöchhacker, 1994; Kalina, 2000; Adam & Gross-Dinter, 2012; Moser-Mercer et al., 1997). Thus, we have to work on these elements not on a single presentation basis, but repeatedly so that students can assimilate the essence of each of them. This is something that has to be taken into account for the planning of the second workshop and further editions of both workshops.

There are a number of elements of training that we would like to focus on more. Firstly, preparation should be worked on more thoroughly, since it is the basis for quality performance, as recent studies (Díaz-Galaz, Padilla & Bajo, 2015) have shown.

On the other hand, a sound methodological knowledge and the ability to work with it in new environments are essential for the professionalization of the students (Eisenreich, 2014).

We should also stress that self-awareness covers both self-assessment – “the ability to be a realistic judge of one’s own performance” (Cornell, 2015: unpaginated) – and self-efficacy, which is a set of “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance” (Bandura, cited in Jiménez, Pinazo & Ruiz, 2014: 167).

Entrepreneurship also needs to be raised, as interpreter trainees have to realize that interpreting itself is only half of their job; getting an assignment, dealing with the customer, and handling the job constitute the other significant half (Albl-Mikasa, 2014).

7. Conclusions

The main purpose of having a multilingual workshop of interpreting was to save money by reducing the workload on the teachers, as teachers would be working together, therefore combining synergies, to be more successful and productive. Actually, the workload for the teachers increased as we had to have several planning meetings before the course, plus other meetings during the course itself to continue the planning for the sessions.

The course seems to be of great interest to the students and to the teachers as well, and we all have a clear idea that this was only the first experiment, that we need to develop through practice. However, at the same time we all have experienced certain obstacles:

The most significant obstacle would be the insufficient schedule. There is definitely not enough practice for the students, no time for discussing the theoretical material they are given on the platform every week, little time for individual feedback, and very limited time for discussing world affairs for their general knowledge.

Furthermore, the premises are rather limited for the group, as there are five booths for thirteen students.

Based on our experience and observations, our suggestions for the course based on the theoretical recommendations of interpreter training would be:

- balancing conference interpreting and other types of interpreting: since we teach both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, we cannot base the entire course only on conference interpreting, but also contact and legal interpreting should be practiced to open the possibilities in both national and international labor markets;
- longer sessions: in order to be able to cover practice and discussion of important issues as well as feedback, the sessions should be longer, of 3 hours at a time at least;
- more individual feedback: students are most interested in this aspect, of great value for their development and professionalization;
- peer-assessment: to learn to accept constructive criticism within a group both from their peers and their teachers, and to learn to work in public and with their client, as well as to learn to argue in favor of their own decisions;
- self-assessment: recording the performances from the beginning for the students for self-assessment, as well as ask them to include in their portfolio their own analysis of their performances;
- world knowledge: current affairs should be reviewed in every session in individual languages so that the students can develop not only their world knowledge, but their vocabulary in their language pair;
- authenticity: the authentic aspect should be included in the sense of giving a “real” background for each practice, such as in what context the interpreting would take place, what the audience would be, the type of venue where it can take place;

- portfolio: besides revising it and giving feedback to the students about it, analyze and implement their comments in future courses.

After this review of our actions, we can be ready for future courses and we may then effectively reduce the workload on the teachers and save money, as well as take advantage of the combination of synergies created in this workshop.

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