APPLYING THE BLACKBOARD LEARNING SYSTEM TO A MIXED-LANGUAGE INTERPRETER TRAINING COURSE: A TAIWAN CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to investigate the experience of learning of 5 foreign students and 5 Chinese students in 2010 and 6 foreign students and 4 Taiwanese students in 2011 in a Black Board Learning System (BLS) based non-language specific interpreter training course in the graduate school of applied foreign languages at a university in Taiwan, and the instructor’s experience of teaching them. Qualitative research methods were used. The results of the study indicated that the BLS has facilitated interpreter training of foreign students and local students. Training activities should be structured carefully to facilitate digital learning. In terms of materials, the VOA videos and texts proved to be effective in serving as source input for students to interpret into different languages, but videos from TED (www.ted.com) are more relevant for conference interpreter training. This study has significant contribution to the field in that the assessment techniques it developed enabled the trainer to evaluate the interpretation of languages that he did not understand and made it possible to conduct mixed language interpretation training without co-teaching.

Keywords: conference interpreting, foreign students, multiple-assessment methods, non-language-specific interpreter training, peer checking

Introduction

More and more foreign students are coming to Taiwan to study, to learn Chinese, and to learn interpreting, yet no previous studies have investigated their experience of learning. Most of my foreign students had one thing in common-their Chinese was poor and they learned to
interpret in English and their mother languages with the exception of an American student who interpreted in English and Chinese, and a Macau student who interpreted in Chinese, English, and Cantonese. The goal of this study was to investigate the experience of learning of the 5 foreign students and 5 Chinese students in 2010 and 6 foreign students and 4 Chinese students in 2011 in a Black Board Learning System (BLS) based non-language specific interpreter training course in the graduate school of applied foreign languages at a university in Taiwan, and the instructor’s experience of teaching them. Interpreter training is the process of teaching students how to translate orally from one language to another language. In terms of training approaches, in this study (hereafter referred to as both the pilot study and the main study) used the non-language specific interpreter training methods. It is an innovative approach, in which the instructor and students do not share all the working languages. The common working language was English. Students learned to interpret by interpreting the videos of Voice of America and TED.com. They also learned to interpret by role play, playing the roles of the speaker, the interpreter, and the interpretation quality checker. Interpreter training in the existing study is defined as training students of different working languages to interpret in their mother languages and English. The purpose of the course was to familiarize students with interpreter training tasks so that after they have finished taking the course, they can further hone their interpretation skills through self practice. Through practice and preparation, they are expected to be able to perform conference interpretation and liaison interpretation. The goal of the learners is to learn the interpreter training tasks and the procedures of interpreting so that through self training, practice, and preparation, they can interpret in their mother languages and English for their clients in the future.

According to Sandrelli and Hawkins (2006), interpreter training consists of two major components: In the classroom, students practice interpreting under close supervision of the instructor. After class, the students practice the interpretation tasks on their own. Both are important for the students to become proficient in interpreting. Therefore, it is important to have a means for the instructor to store audios, videos, and texts that are accessible to the students; and to enhance interactions among students and the instructor to simulate a situation where the interpreter has to interact with the speakers, the conference organizers, and other individuals involved. The present study proposed an innovative solution: training the foreign students together with local students because in international conferences in Taiwan simultaneous interpretation in multiple languages and relay interpreting quite often occur. This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Can BLS facilitate non-language specific interpreter training? If the answer is positive, how?
2. How to obtain digital training materials without violating copyright law?
3. How to structure training activities to facilitate cooperative learning among foreign and local students.
4. How to evaluate the quality of interpreting of foreign students?
5. How did the students react?

**Literature Review**

When conducting a study in which relevant literature is scarce, related cross-curriculum materials may be reviewed. It is through cross-curriculum that the study objective may be established for students to become self-regulated learners, and this is also the goal that interpretation researchers should strive for (Gile, 2001).

1. **Non-language-specific interpreter training**

   Little has been studied on non-language-specific interpreter training in academic settings. Most of the previous studies have focused on mixed language interpreter training for refugee community interpreting; medical interpreting; law enforcement or intelligence gathering (by FBI in the United States); or professional interpreters, who wanted to enhance their interpreting skills (Chen 1999). Viaggio (1988), a former UN Chief Interpreter, offered a mixed language interpreter training course to three groups of interpreters, who interpreted into Spanish from Russian, French, and English. Mackintosh (1991) offered a non-language specific interpretation course to working interpreters of different languages to enhance their English skills. Schewda-Nicholson (1994) offered a mental health interpreter training course with five working languages in one class. She has also offered an interpreter training course for the FBI that used eight different working languages in one class. Chen (1999) saw a need for mixed language interpreter training, so he offered a non-language-specific interpretation course at a community college in southwestern United States. Chen (1999) based his study on a pilot study that lasted for more than two years that he had conducted at a university in the same area. The structure of the existing study will mainly be based on Chen’s model.

2. **Computer assisted interpreter training**

   Since the existing study is known to be the first one to investigate the use of the BLS in interpreter training, it is necessary to find out what other researchers have studied on a related field, Computer Assisted Interpreter Training (CAIT). CAIT research consisted mainly of the
following previous studies. In Taiwan, Yang (2002) and her research team built a computer learning website to offer audio and texts for training interpreters of Chinese and six foreign languages. Chang (2006) conducted a study on how using Moodle, an open-source community-based tool for learning, could offer students an online learning community for fostering cooperative learning. According to Sandrelli (2001), a CD ROM was used in liaison interpreter training of English and Italian at a university in the UK. Sandrelli (2003) reported that the Interpretations prototype was created for training students to do simultaneous interpretation by practicing interpreter training tasks. Sandrelli and Hawkins (2006) introduced Black Box 4.0 that could simulate live conferences through campus network. The University of Salamanca (in Spain) in 2004 published a CD ROM with materials for teaching consecutive and simultaneous interpreting in three languages (Jalón et al. 2004). Sandrelli and Hawkins (2006) introduced a Virtual Interpreting Environment (VIE) that offered software that facilitated interpreting in booths. The first Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for interpreter training was launched by the Interpreting Department of the University of Geneva (Sandrelli & Jerez, 2007). The VLE also contained teachers and student learners supporting tools and the Student Tracker (Motta, 2006).

3. Blended learning

In the existing study, I used the Blackboard Academic Suite, which is a course management system (CMS). More and more universities implemented CMSs because of the evolution of educational technology, that promised to bring about higher quality, learner-centered education; and to deliver more independent and active learners (Swinney, 2004).

This existing study focuses on blended learning instead of fully fledged online learning. Colis and Moonen (2001) indicated that blended learning is a mixture of traditional F2F and digital learning in order that learning occurs both in the classroom and online, with the online learning serving as a continuation of F2F learning. According to Coates, James, and Baldwin (2005), the sudden popularity in the use of course management systems (CMSs) has been changing the way the students learn and the way instructors teach. It has been a tendency towards using CMSs in addition to traditional learning modes. Severson (2004) suggested that instructors learning to use technology to plan their teaching must learn to choose appropriate tools, and be trained and supported to assume the new teaching role as a facilitator or coach. The instructor must also think carefully when it comes to pedagogy. Barr and Tagg (1995) posited that there is a paradigm shift toward constructivism in the United States and reported that institutions of higher learning emphasizes more on producing learning and less on providing instruction.
4. Interpreter training approaches

Gile (2001) indicated that up to now there have been no interpreter training theories that are scientifically proved to be effective. However, there are basically two major interpreter training approaches: The sink or swim approach and the task based skill training approach. According to Weber (1984), the sink or swim approach required students to learn interpreting by actually interpreting either consecutively or simultaneously. Viaggio (1988), a former UN chief interpreter, mentioned that he was extremely scared when he was first asked to interpret in an interpreter screening test, so obviously this is not a training method for beginners. The skill training approach was advocated by Lambert (1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c). According to this approach, students are required to practice the following training tasks to develop interpretation skills: active listening, shadowing, oral summary, paraphrasing, aural cloze, multiple tasking… etc. Consecutive interpretation is taught before simultaneous interpretation. I interviewed thorough e-mail instructors of interpretation courses from Xiamen University and Beijing University of Foreign Studies in China, and the University of Bologna at Forli in Italy, and fond out that different interpretation instructors used different approaches based on the two main aforementioned approaches.

Research Method

1. Data collection and analysis

In the existing study I used the grounded theory research methods to collect the following data: (1) my reflections on the selection and management process of the videos, texts, and other materials on the BLS; (2) the results of the synchronous and non-synchronous discussions; (3) my observation notes; (4) interviews and student feedback that student participants offered throughout the semester; (5) and video recordings of the students’ interpretation at the end of the semester. To enhance reliability, I used multiple data collection methods. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the grounded theory approach favors the use of multiple data sources relating to the same phenomenon. Data analysis for each case involved creating concepts by coding which “... represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualied, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), there are three types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In this study the data, as mentioned previously, were coded through
open coding by taking apart, scrutinizing, comparing, and sorting the data into categories. After open coding, the data were coded through axial coding by getting the data back together in a new way. Finally, the data were coded through selected coding by choosing the central categories, methodologically relating to other categories, adding categories that require further refinement as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

2. Participants

In the interpretation course in 2010, participants of this study consisted of the instructor and ten students (two males and eight females). Five were local students and five were foreign students. Like other mixed language interpreting classes, the experience of learning interpreting and working languages were diverse among the students. All the Chinese students could speak Mandarin Chinese and English fluently. One Chinese student had learned interpreting for two years. Another Chinese student had learned interpreting for one and a half year. Eight students had learned interpreting for one semester. None of the students had formal interpreting experience. The foreign students consisted of one French, two Buryat persons (Russians), one Macauian, and one Spanish. The two Buryat students speak Russian and the Buryat language. They can also speak some Mongolian and Mandarin Chinese. The Spanish student can also speak Chinese, English, and Cantonese (the language she uses at home in Spain) fluently. The Macau student can also speak Chinese and Cantonese excellently. English was the common working language in this study. A total of nine working languages (Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, English, Spanish, Cantonese, Spanish, French, Buryat language, and Russian) were used in this class. In the study in 2011, participants consisted of six foreign students and four local students. They were all females. Among them there were two Indonesian students, four Russian students (two were from the course in 2010), and four Chinese students (one was from the course in 2010). Russian, Indonesian, English, the Buryat language, and Mandarin Chinese were used in this class. I served as teacher-researcher-participant in the study. I have been teaching conference interpreting and working as a free lance interpreter since 1993.

3. Research site

The research was conducted in an interpreter training laboratory in a university of science and technology in Taiwan. This lab is equipped with an online server, computers, and microphones for the instructor and 24 students. There are two sound-proof booths for simultaneous interpreter training. Both students and the instructor have access to the BLS online. It is a paperless class because all the course materials, including videos, text files, PowerPoint
files, etc. were uploaded to the BLS. At the beginning of the semester, the students were trained to become familiar with the BLS. The course materials were used in the classroom and were also available for the students to download for self-practice after class. Students were encouraged to participate in synchronous and non-synchronous discussions in the forum which is part of the BLS. All the functions of the BLS were fully explored and used in the existing study.

The Implementation of the BLS Based Non-language Specific Interpreter Training Course

1. The BLS has facilitated interpreter training of foreign students and local students

   The BLS has facilitated interpreter training of foreign students and local students because BLS turned the class into a paperless class. All the videos, or links of the videos, were posted on the BLS for students to practice interpreting. They could also post the results of their self-training. Students could learn anywhere, anytime. They could discuss with their classmates by posting messages in the discussion forum or communicating synchronously. Finally, students responded by saying that the course was useful and fun. After completing this course, one Russian student interpreted for a group of Russian business people at a conference in New York. She proved that non-language-specific interpreter training by using the BLS is feasible and suggested to turn it into a conference interpretation class.

2. Videos from Voice of America and TED.COM are both copyright free so they can be freely downloaded to the BLS

   VOA videos and texts are public domains, so they may be downloaded free of charge with the exception of some videos that belong to other news agencies. It is very important that the materials uploaded to the BLS are copyright free. Toward the end of the study we also used speeches from TED.COM which are more relevant to conference interpreting and are also copyright free. Videos and texts in Chinese and English provided by Formosa TV (http://englishnews.ftv.com.tw/) enabled students to learn to interpret local news. Each week, students interpreted important and interesting news stories of the week. This site is unique in that each video came with a Chinese text and translation in English, but they were all slightly different in content so students could only refer to the bilingual texts, instead of reading the texts aloud word by word, when interpreting the videos.
3. Training activities were structured carefully to facilitate cooperative learning among foreign students and local students

Through relay interpreting, foreign students and local students learned interpreting cooperatively. For instance, when a Russian student spoke in Russian, another Russian student would be asked to interpret from Russian into English for an Indonesian to interpret into Indonesian and for a Chinese student to interpret into Chinese. The same training method can be used for every working language used in this course. Speakers of the same native language may be asked to do peer-check to verify if the interpretation of his/her language peer is correct. In every conference, interpreters have to interpret presentations or speeches that they can prepare in advance and also interpret those that they can not prepare in advance because there is no material for them to prepare. Therefore, in this course the training activities included not only those that students could prepare in advance, but also those that required students to interpret with little or no preparation.

4. Assessing the quality of the interpreting of foreign students by multiple-techniques

I used the following multiple-techniques to assess the interpretation of the students who interpreted into a language that I could not understand.

Observing Paralinguistic Cues and Using Multiple-techniques. When foreign students were interpreting, I looked for paralinguistic cues, e.g. hesitations, long pauses, stopping interpreting completely, etc. and decided what other assessment techniques to use to check the accuracy of their interpretation.

Summarizing. When a foreign student interpreted into her mother language, I asked her to summarize in English what she had interpreted in order to assess the accuracy and completeness of her interpretation. By doing so, I could find out if she had interpreted correctly or completely. This strategy was especially useful when I wanted to find out if the French student had interpreted correctly because he was the only French speaker in the classroom. This technique was limited in that sometimes an interpreter could not remember everything that he had interpreted because he had to concentrate on interpreting all the time. In addition, the translation errors may be too difficult for him to identify.

Self-critique. After interpreting, the student was asked to comment if she had done a good job of interpreting. This technique was especially useful when I served as a speaker and had to concentrate on speaking for students to interpret into their mother languages.
Relay Interpreting. Relay interpreting means that when a speaker is speaking in language 1, one interpreter interprets from language 1 to language 2, and another interpreter interprets (relay) from language 2 to language 3.

Spot Checking. After a foreign student finishes interpreting, I ask her to interpret certain expression that is in the context of the source language into her mother language for me. After that, I then ask her what that expression means in English.

Back-interpreting. Back interpreting means that when one speaker is speaking in language 1, interpreter A interprets it into language 2. Interpreter B listens to interpreter A and interprets from language 2 back into language 1 consecutively or simultaneously.

5. Warm-up exercises

Short to medium consecutive interpreting of talks, on topics related to current events (e.g. the most serious dust storm in Taiwan) delivered by students for the other students to take turns interpreting into different languages, was performed at the beginning of each class session to serve as a warm-up exercise to prepare students for interpreting videos from VOA or other foreign language sources.

6. Interpreting VOA videos and then summarizing

This task can be divided into two kinds: Each student is assigned to perform short to medium consecutive interpretation, depending on the student’s interpretation ability, with several videos in the classroom. After the student has completed interpreting, she/he summarizes it in English for the other students to interpret into their mother languages. In addition to interpreting the VOA videos, foreign students were also required to interpret videos in their mother languages that they had downloaded from the Internet.

7. Each video was played first for all the students to shadow

For students to get familiar with an English video, before it was interpreted by a student, it as played thoroughly once for all the students to do shadowing. Students took turns shadowing by listening to the video and turning on the microphone and speaking.

8. Interpreting in the booth

In order for the students to develop the ability to interpret simultaneously, I set out a rule to always have one student interpreting simultaneously in the Chinese booth and to have a foreign student interpret simultaneously in the foreign language booth. Thus, students took turns serving
as simultaneous interpreters; each interpreting for 10 minutes at a time.

9. Foreign students interpreted videos in their mother languages into English

In addition to interpreting VOA videos, foreign students were also required to interpret videos in their mother languages into English, which served as input for the other students to interpret into different languages. Whenever a student interpreted into a language other than English, she was required to do whispered interpreting for her language peer to interpret into English by speaking to the microphone.

10. The final exam

In the final examination, each student was required to interpret simultaneously a video for ten minutes. On the day of the test, they took turns standing in front of a video camera and interpreting without referring to a transcript. Their interpretation was recorded for detail evaluation. They were evaluated based on (1) the difficulty of the source language; (2) the direction of interpretation (students who interpreted into English would earn a better grade); and (3) the quality of interpretation. I had no problems evaluating the interpretation of the Chinese students. However, foreign students had to interpret into English and turn in a copy of the transcript in both their mother language and English translation for me to assess. I would check the foreign students’ interpretation into English against the English translation in the script. However, I could only rely on peer check and self-check by foreign students to find out if the source text, in their mother language, has been translated into English correctly.

Results and Discussion

To collect data about students’ reactions, I asked them to fill out a form with questions about their experience of learning interpreting in this course in the pilot study, and I asked students to post their feedback in the folder titled “Feedback, comments, and Suggestions about this Course” in the main study. I followed up by asking them to answer some questions I had about their answers. The feedback was categorized in the following manner: (1) student satisfaction, (2) student feedback about the course materials, (3) student feedback about the teaching methods, (4) student feedback about testing, (5) students’ general remarks, and (6) why the attrition was so high? (7) How did the BLS facilitated non-language specific interpreter training?
1. Student satisfaction in this course

All the students were satisfied with the course, but most students believed that if the instructor could speak all the working languages of all the students, the students would learn more efficiently. Eight students believed that they would learn more efficiently if the instructor and their classmates could speak all the working languages of all the students. However, two students (one Russian student and the Cantonese student) believed that they didn’t think so. After using speech videos from TED.COM, students all agreed that to be used for conference interpreter training, they are more relevant than VOA news, but VOA videos are more interesting.

2. Learning materials

VOA videos are not relevant to conference interpreting because the speakers in VOA videos speak too fast, but they will help students learn news interpreting and interpreting in general. A Chinese student who had interpreted for a DJ competition said that she didn’t believe that interpreting VOA videos was relevant to conference interpreting because the speakers in VOA videos speak faster than normal talks. However, most of the students commented that despite the differences between VOA videos and conference interpreting, they had all learned interpreting. One Chinese student in the main study commented, “More diversified materials should be used that cover a wider variety of topics.” One Russian student in the main study commented, “Instead of only news, the course materials should cover movies, speeches, business news, tourism English, etc..” Students unanimously agreed that the materials for the interpretation classes in the future should consist of both VOA videos and speech videos from TED.COM.

3. Teaching methods

Interpreting free talks is not relevant to conference interpreting. When asked about their comments to whether interpreting free talks, provided by the instructor or students, are relevant to conference interpreting, the Chinese student who had interpreted for a DJ competition said that interpreting free talks is not relevant to conference interpreting because in conference interpreting, the speakers speak much faster and words used at conferences are more specialized. However, another Chinese student commented that giving free talks enabled him to enhance his English speaking ability.

Back interpreting is useful but tiresome. When asked about back interpreting used as an evaluating task in this course, one Chinese student said that back interpreting is challenging. Another Chinese student said that it is an interesting task. A Russian student said that it is a good
way to check whether the student understands what she is talking about when interpreting. Another Russian student said, “Back interpreting is very useful because after that activity, you may be aware of the accuracy of (your partner’s) translation.” However, in the main study, a Russian student said, “… back-interpreting is sometimes tiresome. One can easily lose interest.” A Chinese student in the main study commented, “For the back translation activity, even though we can learn the skill of paraphrasing, we can also lose our interests quickly. Besides, it can take too much time to interpret just one video.”

Peer-checking is useful and it would be better if every student has a peer. When asked about their reactions to peer-checking as an evaluation task, the French student commented that it would help if someone could check if his French translation was correct. One Chinese student said that peer-checking was useful. One Russian student said that it [peer-checking] was a good way to check each other’s interpretation. Another Russian student said that peer-checking is like self-checking but by another person, so you have a different way to know if you have interpreted correctly.

Spot-checking can help foreign students to check the progress they have made. When asked about their reactions to spot-checking, a Russian student commented that it is an interesting activity. A Chinese student said that spot-checking can help foreign students to check the progress they have made.

Relay-interpreting can become confusing. When the students were asked about their reactions to relay-interpreting used as an evaluation task, the Macao student said that it is a good warm up exercise. A Russian student said that it is very interesting just to have a chance to hear different languages. However, several students in the main study commented that they did not like relay-interpreting. One student said, “I do not like relay-interpreting because it became quite confusing especially when three students worked together [or talking at the same time].”

Self-critique helps students make progress, correct mistakes, and try harder. When the students were asked about their reactions to self-critique, the Macau student said, “Self-critique is a way of self assessment which is good and inspiring.” One Russian student said, “Self-critique is a useful task because it helps you to make progress, to correct mistakes, and to try harder.”

Interpreting simultaneously in the booth is like interpreting at a real conference. All the students agreed that there should always be a student interpreting in the booth in class. When the students were asked about the rule that there should always be someone interpreting in the booth, a Chinese student said “It is good because it gives everyone an opportunity to practice.” Another Chinese student said, “Even though I’ve gotten used to interpreting in the booth, I still can’t catch every word. It is good to always have someone interpreting in the booth because we can not only practice interpreting, but also learn from each others’ interpretation. Therefore, it is important and
helpful to us.” The French student said that it is a good idea (to always have a student interpreting in the booth). A Russian student said, “Interpreting in the booth makes me feel more confident. The reason is that you can focus on yourself only and on interpreting simultaneously. And there is nobody around you so you become happier.” The Macau student said, “Interpreting in the booth is productive and useful.” A Chinese student said, “This is a splendid rule for the class.” A Russian student said, “Even if I can’t understand all that was said in Chinese, I’m trying to interpret it.” One Russian student in the main study commented, “I love interpreting in the booth which makes me concentrate more and train my interpreting ability comparing with interpreting just in the classroom.” Another Russian student commented, “I really like working in the booth because this activity is more like working in a real situation. It gave me a good chance to train myself, to get familiar with possible future situations, and to realize what skills need to be improved”.

The teacher should provide more feedback. In order to foster creativity and avoid frustrating students, I tried to correct students as little as possible. Almost all students wanted the instructor to provide more feedback. For instance, one student in the main study commented, “It would be better if we could have more feedback from the instructor”. However, a Russian student said, “The specific feature of this course is that students seldom get corrections from the teacher. This has its own advantages as well as disadvantages. But in general, I like this kind of method, because it doesn’t put a lot of pressure on the students. However, I think some amount of control is needed”. A Chinese student commented, “I believe it would be better if each student could have received Professor Chen’s suggestions every time after the practice.”

News interpreting should be taught. One Chinese student in the main study commented, “The instructor should play a short video of the latest news several times each class session and require students to write down the summary. If the students experience difficulties, the instructor can teach those expressions that the students failed to understand. In this way, students can lean summarizing and enhance their vocabulary.” She said, “Each video played in class should not be too long.” Another student said, “I suggest that before watching some videos like news, which is much more difficult for us, the professor could provide related texts or news articles for us to read or do sight translation to have a basic idea about the news. Thus, it will be beneficial for us to do interpreting after watching the video.”

A field trip should be arranged. One Chinese student in the main study commented, “The instructor should organize field trips to visit translation agencies or conferences where interpreters are working.” Another Chinese student said, “Maybe we can try to arrange a time to visit an interpretation company or to have a chance to see how professional interpreters work (at a conference).”
Movies about interpreting should be played in the classroom to show how interpreters interpret. One Chinese student commented “The instructor should play movies about interpreting and ask students to provide feedback after watching them”.

Videos in Chinese should be played for Chinese students to interpret. One Chinese student in the main study commented, “We always interpreted what our classmates had said in Chinese instead of interpreting Chinese videos. If we could interpret Chinese videos, then we would have more chances to learn how to take notes for Chinese videos.”

Students learned a lot from other students’ PPT presentations. One Chinese student in the main study said, “From watching other students’ PPT presentations, I learned a lot of information about interpreting.”

Learning different modes of interpreting in the same course is better than learning them separately. “From this course, I could practice different kinds of interpreting (SI, CI, shadowing, sight translation, brain-storming) in the same session, which my previous school did not offer.” Commented a student who had learned interpreting in her undergraduate program in another university, where sight translation, consecutive interpretation, and simultaneous interpretation were taught separately in different semesters. However, students wanted to learn training tasks systematically so that they could practice them after class.

CI note taking taught in this course is very useful. One Chinese student in the main study, who had taken an interpretation course in another university (but the teacher back then did not teach systematically how to take notes) commented, “During this semester we did a lot of note-taking, and had a lot of training on note-taking techniques, which were very useful for all of us. I didn’t know how to take notes correctly in my undergraduate program in another school, but now I found myself more confident in doing it.”

4. Testing

In the main study, a Russian student commented, “The testing session helped us to improve our speaking, listening, and of course interpreting skills.” A Chinese student commented “When interpreting, the student should be asked to look at the video on the screen instead of the camera.” Another Chinese student in the main study commented, “I think the final test was quite stressful with a camera putting right in front of you. And I think the approach of interpreting, either in SI or CI, either from language A to language B or from language B to A language should be regulated so that the standard of the evaluation would be consistent”. From the perspectives of testing, this may be true, but from the perspectives of student empowerment, it warrants further investigation.
5. Students’ general remarks

When asked to give other comments, in the pilot study, one Chinese student said, “This is a very practical and useful class that will enhance students’ interpreting skills for sure.” A Russian student said, “I like this course because only this course gave me an opportunity to speak in English at all.” However, some foreign students expressed their concerns about their foreign accents. One Chinese student said that he had difficulties interpreting the French student’s English because his French accent was too strong. The French student also commented, “(When interpreting) I’ll try to interpret as correctly as I can, but I mostly use synonyms. Does it matter so much that I have a French accent? Some people understand me very well. Some people don’t. It depends.” The Spanish student and the French student both indicated that it would be better if they had a partner who could speak their languages to monitor their interpretation. So obviously, it would be better if there are at least two students of each working language so that they can check each other’s interpretation. Finally one Russian student commented that speaking in the classroom for others to interpret and interpreting from Russian into English provided the only opportunity for her to enhance her English speaking skills. The other foreign students all agreed that this course was the only one in this school where the instructor would correct their English pronunciation and grammar errors when they spoke.

6. Why was the attrition so high?

By the main study in 2011, the French student and four Chinese students had dropped the course. I was surprised by the high attrition, interviewed the students to find out why so many students had dropped the class, and was given the following answers: (1) Students commented that they did not have enough opportunities to interpret on the podium. They believed that interpreting on the podium is different from interpreting with their microphones on their seats and that they wanted to have more opportunities to interpret on the podium. (2) They had to take other courses to earn enough credits for graduation. (3) Students’ written feedback indicated that it was chaotic sometimes when many languages were spoken at the same time during relay interpreting. To avoid disrupting the class, I also avoided correcting students’ English pronunciation if the errors derived from accent variations due to language differences, but I still corrected their errors if they derived from obvious mispronunciation. In responding to student feedback, I encouraged students to interpret on the podium as often as possible and explained to them that relay interpreting can sometimes be “chaotic” and that is what happens at an international conference and they have to learn to get used to it. Two students in the main study had learned interpreting
before, so they brought in the ideas that instead of receiving only task based training (e.g. reading aloud, shadowing, sight translation, brain storming, paraphrasing, etc.), students should also learn to interpret on different topics. Therefore, instead of limiting the learning materials to VOA videos and local news videos, I built a new public folder in the discussion board that allowed students to post videos on a wide variety of topics for students to practice interpreting.

7. How did the BLS facilitated non-language specific interpreter training?

The BLS was used in this course in the following ways to facilitate interpreter training:

*To serve as a platform for training materials:* Videos from Voice of America were downloaded, stored on the BLS, and were used for most of the study. Some TED talks were used toward the end of the main study. In the classroom, the instructor played the video from the BLS and paused after one to two sentences each time for the student (who had been designated to interpret for the day) to interpret consecutively. After that the student summarized the video orally for the other students to interpret into different languages. Students were encouraged to preview the videos.

*For posting assignments for peer feedback:* Students who were designated to interpret in the classroom was required to post the scripts and translation of the video on the discussion board of the BLS at least three days in advance for the other students to read and make comments.

*For showing evidence of self-training:* Students were encouraged to interpret videos or sight translate articles and post the links of them together with bilingual glossaries in their personal folders in the discussion board of the BLS to show evidence of self-training. Students were required to keep a learning journal to document their learning procedures.

*For posting course feedback:* Toward the end of the semester, students posted their feedback in their folders to comment on the following topics relevant to this course: (1) training approaches; (2) course materials; (3) testing; (4) assessment; and (5) other comments. Some of their comments became material for this study. The BLS was employed throughout the course turning the class into a paperless classroom. The advantage is that students can access the course anywhere and anytime. The disadvantage is that when the computer is down, no videos can be played and either the instructor has to speak for students to take turns interpreting or students have to take turns talking about any topic for the other students to interpret into different languages.
Conclusion

This study has explored the learning experience of the students and the teacher in a non-language specific interpretation course in a graduate school of applied foreign languages at a university in Taiwan. The study results indicated that there is a need for mixed-language interpreter training and this type of training is feasible when language specific interpreter training of students in so many languages is unavailable. The study also found a solution to the problem of assessing the quality of interpretation of students whose native languages the instructor doesn’t understand by using multiple assessment techniques. It also went without team teaching. Traditionally, team-teaching was required by hiring speakers of different working languages as teaching assistants, which is not feasible in a university because, for instance, the university could only hire one instructor to teach the course involved in this study. Although the students did not express concerns about the instructor’s ability to assess the accuracy of foreign students’ interpretations, from the study it became obvious that for non-language specific interpreter training to be successful, multiple-assessment methods should be used. Despite the fact that almost all of the students had only learned interpreting for one semester, all the students agreed that students should take turns interpreting simultaneously for ten minutes each in the booth. The students even used a timer to remind the student in the booth when her time was up. Due to copyright, most of the time, only VOA videos and texts, and speeches and talks generated by the instructor and students were used; in addition, foreign students interpreted videos in their languages into English. For conference interpreter training, speech videos from TED, which are also copyright free, are more relevant. For videos and texts from a local English TV channel, only the URL of the site was provided due to copyright concerns. In addition, I also encouraged students to post the links of videos on a wide variety of topics and languages to reflect the nature of conference interpretation, to encourage topic based interpreter training, and to expand students’ general knowledge. The Russian student who took the course for two semesters reported that she had interpreted successfully for a group of Russian business people at a conference in the United States and asked me to use speeches from TED talks in a non-language specific conference interpretation course. NIT for conference interpreter training is a topic that warrants further investigation.
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Applying the Blackboard Learning System to a Mixed-language Interpreter Training Course


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運用黑板課程管理系統於混合語言口譯教學—臺灣個案研究

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摘 要

本論文旨在探討 2010 年三位外國學生和五位本地生，與 2011 年三位外國學生和四位本地學生在臺灣一所科技大學應用外語系研究所上 Blackboard Learning System (BLS) 爲媒介的混合語言口譯課的學習經驗，與教師的教學經驗。使用質的研究方法，研究結果顯示 BLS 促進本地生和外國學生的口譯學習，Voice of America 上的影音資料是理想的教材，但如果是要教授會議口譯，則應使用 TED (www.ted.com) 上的演講影音資料。外國學生口譯時應使用多樣的評量方式，每一種語言至少要有兩位學生，才能相互指正與翻譯。上課時必須有學生在口譯間輪流口譯，以便學習同步口譯。應使用多元的材料當作訓練教材，必須多多給予學生上台口譯的機會。本研究的貢獻在於研發多種評量方法並用，使教師得以評量其聽不懂的外國學生的口譯而不需協同教學。

關鍵字：會議口譯、外國學生、多樣評量方法、混合語言口譯訓練、同傳評量