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Dissertation Abstracts

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Dissertation abstracts

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In this section, we feature abstracts of recently completed doctoral or master's theses. If you have recently completed a master's or PhD thesis in this field and would like it to be included, please send an abstract of 200–300 words to citjournaleditor@gmail.com. We urge all academic supervisors to encourage their students to submit abstracts of their completed dissertations for inclusion in the next issue of the journal, in order to help disseminate new research relating to interpreter and translator education.

Multilingual Interpreter Education: Curriculum Design and Evaluation

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Australia, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951) recognizes the importance of providing language services to support the successful settlement of asylum seekers and migrants who don't speak the mainstream language. The quality and availability of interpreting services depends on the availability of suitable educational opportunities for interpreters from the same communities. However, the recruitment, training and testing of interpreters is often problematic in these emerging languages due to the difficulty of locating suitable teachers and assessors, and the financial implications of running courses for specific languages with small numbers of students are prohibitive. The resulting lack of educational opportunity creates a gap in the provision of services and leads to disparate levels of quality in the services that are provided.

This thesis reports on a study that set out to design, trial and evaluate a curriculum model suited to the education of interpreters from emerging and low-demand language communities in Australia. Drawing on constructivist and transformationist models of education, the curriculum model was developed from a reflective and collaborative action research orientation. The interdisciplinary research design draws on interpreting studies, education, evaluation and applied linguistics to inform the design and evaluation processes.

The thesis situates the curriculum within the social, political and professional context of community interpreting in Australia and describes the collaborative processes set up for the design and evaluation of the model. The evolution of the curriculum is tracked through the different design, implementation and evaluation phases where data informed each step in the process. The final curriculum model reflects the needs of key stakeholders (interpreters, employers, educators and professional bodies) and the views of the participants in the study. A new model for an integrated curriculum development and evaluation process is also proposed.

Keywords: interpreter education, curriculum design, curriculum evaluation

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Achieving Understanding Via Interpreter Participation in British Sign Language / English Map Task Dialogues: An Analysis of Repair Sequences Involving Ambiguity and Underspecificity in Signed and Spoken Languages

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Research into the role of the interpreter in dialogue interpreting has so far established that the interpreter participates in the interaction just as much as the two primary participants, particularly in the area of turn-taking. Less has been written about the nature of participation by the interpreter. This thesis has contributed to knowledge through research into the extent and manner of interpreter participation when there are problems due to seeing/hearing, producing or understanding. Such interpreter participation is often described by practitioners as “clarifying”, while Schegloff, Sacks and Jefferson (1977) refer to it as “repair” (1977).

Using a map task to distract participants from their language use, the actions of the interpreter were examined through a conversation analysis lens.

The findings were that the participation by interpreters was for the most part due to what the researcher defines as “ambiguity” and “underspecificity”, and that interpreters were changing stance from “other” to “self”. This action was examined, positing a model “stop – account – act”; responses from the participants when the interpreter changed from “other” to “self” and back were also explored, to see whether clients understood the interpreter’s change of stance.

Understanding is known to be collaboratively achieved in interpreted interactions just as it is in monolingual conversations. The thesis findings strengthen this understanding through empirical research. Interlocutors do not present an absolute meaning in one language which is then reframed in another language. Rather, meanings are differentiated collaboratively through further talk. The thesis findings show that interpreters are tightly constrained in their participation, and that their overriding job of interpreting dictates the reasons for their participation. The interpreter seeks not “what does that mean?” but rather “what do you mean?”

The Role of Subject-Area Knowledge in Consecutive Interpreting

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Theoretical models of interpreting competence emphasize the need for interpreters to have a wide range of knowledge, as they encounter a broad spectrum of subject areas in their work. Nevertheless, there is little empirical evidence to show how existing or acquired domain knowledge contributes to the final interpreting performance. This thesis aimed to address this research gap by investigating the effect of domain knowledge on both the interpreting product and the interpreting process. A consecutive interpreting experiment was designed involving 54 student interpreters from three different programs where consecutive interpreting courses were offered: the three samples. The same experiment was replicated for each of the three samples. In each sample, student interpreters were divided into two groups, and both groups were provided with a list of core terminology for the source speech. In addition, the experimental groups in all three samples received a portfolio of parallel texts pertinent to the subject area and topic of the source speeches. Participants in the experimental groups were able to study these before carrying out the interpreting.

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The hypothesis was that domain knowledge acquired through reading the portfolio would, first, help student interpreters obtain higher scores in interpreting quality assessments, and second, help them apply higher-level interpreting strategies, which are also more likely to be successful in solving interpreting problems. A number of complementary data-collection tools were used in the experiment, including background questionnaires, pretests and posttests, retrospective reports and interviews. The data collected were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. Of these methods, propositional analysis proved to be a very effective tool. The thesis presents the results from the first two samples only, as these are more comparable in nature.

The results confirmed the two hypotheses of the study. First, participants in the experimental groups, who read the portfolio, obtained higher scores in interpreting quality assessments than those in the control groups, who did not read the portfolio. Propositional analysis showed that participants in the experimental groups performed better than those in the control groups especially in reproducing predicates and difficult propositions. This result suggests that participants in both groups did perform well with easy propositions, yet reading the portfolio helped participants in the experimental groups to perform well with difficult propositions. Second, participants in the experimental groups applied a higher proportion of high-level (macro-level) interpreting strategies, which also had a higher success rate than strategies applied by participants in the control groups. In general, the findings of this study suggest that domain knowledge affects student interpreters' processes at the sentence and discourse level instead of at the lexical level.

Key words: domain knowledge, consecutive interpreting, interpreting competence, interpreting quality, interpreting strategy, propositional analysis, experimental study.

Challenges for Telephone Interpreters in New Zealand

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Qianya's Master's of Applied Language Studies thesis examined the perspectives of New Zealand-based telephone interpreters on the challenges they encountered at work. The purpose of this study was to identify problems faced by telephone interpreters in New Zealand and provide possible solutions to address these difficulties through interpreter training and/or ongoing professional development. The study used a mixed-method approach, combining a quantitative online survey ($n = 21$) and qualitative interviews ($n = 9$). The results indicated that the main challenges for telephone interpreters in New Zealand included a lack of information for preparation, the absence of visual messages and the difficulties of communicating with other parties (e.g., using direct/indirect speech, controlling turn-taking, interrupting the speakers, asking for clarification, avoiding side-talk and explaining the interpreter's role). Additional challenges also included work stress, interpreters feeling isolated during interpreting work, the relatively low remuneration and the issues of work-life balance. The participants had developed their own strategies to deal with the above challenges. Most respondents in this research had participated in some form of interpreter training and had thought highly of such programmes. However, as most had undertaken general interpreting training, several respondents suggested it would be better to have training preparing interpreters for telephone interpreting challenges in particular.

The findings suggest that both interpreting education and ongoing professional development are important for telephone interpreters. If telephone interpreting users are educated on how to work with telephone interpreters, communication will be more effective and efficient. It is also recommended that telephone interpreting providers develop a system for collecting feedback from users to help interpreters improve their performance.

Keywords: telephone interpreters, challenges, work stress, feeling isolated