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## Curriculum Design of Interpreting Trainings for Undergraduates

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### Introduction

Teaching interpreting at an undergraduate level has long been discussed and debated since young undergraduate students are thought to lack the competence, professionalism, language skills and experience necessary for effective interpretation. Yet, in the real-world, interpreting for companies at internal business conventions is a job that is often undertaken only by staff who have received undergraduate training. Additionally, owing to multiple career choices and high demands for talents with foreign language skills, undergraduate students studying translating and interpreting may not work as professionals in the future whilst simultaneously being required by their bosses to translate and/or interpret in addition to their daily work. They, thus, need to learn language related skills that are not limited only to translating and interpreting (T&I).

After identifying the gap between interpreting training in academia and the demands of the industry in order to systematically develop students' competencies/intelligence for their future professional careers, this study proposes Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (2002) into its curriculum design. The curriculum focuses on sight translation and consecutive interpreting on various topics with the assistance of online media including recorded speeches from TED ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) and YouTube. In addition to presenting the authentic interpreting experiences of T&I classes, one of the instructor's escort assignments to the US in 2019 with a trade delegation of soybean food was also utilized in accordance with the project's goals to teach students interpreting skills as well as developing their eight intelligences: visual-spatial intelligence, linguistic-verbal intelligence, logistical-mathematical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalistic intelligence.

In addition to introduction of eight competencies to students, this study through a cycle of "Experience Sharing, Introduction to Discourse Genres, Building an English-Chinese Bilingual Corpus via the Cornell Method, Reflection, and Discussion" to enable students to become life-long learners.

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## Literature Review

More and more graduate institutes of translation and interpreting studies have been set up in Taiwan, but according to the List of Colleges and Universities of the Ministry of Education, in Taiwan in 2020 School Year only two related undergraduate programs were set up. On the other hand, although Taiwan's 2010 translation and interpreting market report found that translation and interpreting programs in Taiwan focus mostly on practical skills, the holistic approach to translation teaching to enhance students' problem solving abilities was suggested by Tan (2008) while Lee (2007) proposed that the focus should be on language, skills, and knowledge training in undergraduate translation and interpreting programs.

This indicates that there is still a heated debate on whether interpreting courses will be offered at an undergraduate level. However, that does not mean the demand for translation and interpreting in the Taiwanese market is low. As the study of Lin *et al.* (2016) has indicated, more than 60% of governmental agencies in Taiwan require interpreting and translation services while in an interview on job competencies in the pandemic era, the HR Director of Taiwan's famous online job bank 104 (<https://www.104.com.tw/jobs/main/>), Lee Wen-Chung, pointed out that nowadays when there are more people looking for fewer jobs, foreign language competencies are the key to improving self-competitiveness (Kuo, 2020).

Rubrecht (2005) proposed ten concepts for prospective T&I students to understand before enrolling in a university translation or interpreting class by stating "students shall not expect to become proficient at T&I while still at university." In this digital and globalization era, students with foreign language majors or/and translation and interpreting majors have more career options to work for merely language required/related fields. According to posts posted on Taiwan's job bank 1111 ([www.1111.com.tw](http://www.1111.com.tw)), employees with bilingual or even trilingual capabilities are also often requested by their bosses to either translate or/and interpret between languages in various fields even they just received T&I training at undergraduate level. In summary, in undergraduate T&I classes students shall be taught languages, T&I skills, general and professional knowledge, work ethics, and problem-solving abilities. More importantly, they shall be given opportunities to develop and explore their potentials further.

Furthermore, various field translators and interpreters who have observed the big changes within the translation industry made by artificial intelligence (AI) technology over the past decades, (Online Translation Days, 2020; Tirosh, 2020) as well as the MIT-IBM Watson AI Lab have reminded us of the importance of cooperation with others as well as language and communication abilities if robots are to be prevented from replacing humans in the near future.

Different strengths or aptitudes for careers in addition to knowledge and skills shall therefore be taught in T&I courses for students to meet the demands of employers who look for creative workers with problem solving skills, empathy, good communication and collaborating abilities. Gardner's theory of Multiple Competencies are (agreement) thought to help cultivate talent and diversify the potential development of students (Zobisch, Platine, & Swanson (2015).

Gardner (2002) believed that people have a unique blend of capabilities and skills, intelligences, and a full range of abilities and capabilities that can be developed for us to interact with the world, necessary for all type of learners. He proposed eight types of intelligences: verbal-linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, visual intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalistic intelligence.

For T&I students, verbal-linguistic intelligence allows them to improve their verbal skills and comprehension of sounds, meanings, and rhythms of words; logical-mathematical intelligence gives them the ability to work with numbers in translation and interpreting since numbers are often tied with monetary values. Spatial-visual intelligence helps them to perceive and visualize information by transforming abstract concepts into concrete ones while bodily-kinesthetic intelligence gives them the physical strength to perform highly demanding T&I work skillfully. Musical intelligence, like verbal-intelligence, allows students to create, communicate, and understand the meanings of different sounds. Interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence allow students to identify their own feelings and emotions and know others' desires, feelings, and intentions in order to maintain trustful and lasting relationships with clients. Naturalistic intelligence enables students to identify, classify and manipulate elements in the environment (Gardner, 2002; Lazear, 2003; Zobisch, Platine, & Swanson, 2015).

Furthermore, interpreting exercises are the main activities in the classroom, according to several researchers on conference interpreter training. They indicated that most interpreting training programs mainly apply a teacher-centered approach as expert-trainers judge and judge students' performance at classes and give professional guidance (Gile, 2005; Hartley, Mason, Peng, & Perze, 2003; Wang, 2015). Tomlinson (1998) also pointed out the global prevalence of the three-step model of T&I teaching and learning; namely, presentation, practice, and production. Apparently, to respond to highly demanding T&I jobs in the real world, self-directed learning is required for students to diagnose their ability to learn and obtain knowledge, skills, and personal and professional growth and to enable them to become habitual life-long learners. Wang in his study on the gap between interpreting classrooms and real-world interpreting identified the problem of "lack of authenticity in course materials and classroom activities (2015)."

## **Research Method**

### *Research Motivation*

In the summer of 2019, a researcher took an escort interpreting assignment in the US by accompanying a delegation of soybean foods. In that assignment, the researcher encountered work scenarios that require not only professional T&I skills and field knowledge but also the eight intelligences proposed by Gardner. The researcher served as an escort interpreter to interpret for companies, farm visits, scenic tours, meetings, and business negotiation at a trade show. Additionally, the research also required that he be able to assist in the arrangements of transportation, meals and accommodation, finding locations,

and shopping to attend to the specific needs of delegation members. Teaching only T&I skills and knowledge for undergraduate T&I was not sufficient, so the researcher decided to carry out and implement the T&I curriculum design in order to improve students' competences/intelligences.

### *Eight Intelligences in the Escort Interpreting Assignment*

The researcher taught students to utilize spatial-visual intelligence to perceive and visualize information by transforming abstract concepts into concrete ones when introducing exotic foods on a menu and at unique scenic sites in the US, and by giving assistance in location finding. With bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, the researcher was able to complete the 14-day escort assignment working from early mornings and late nights skillfully. T&I students were taught about health and diet and the importance of sports to one's health. Musical intelligence helped the researcher to communicate and understand the meanings of different types of sounds in different working environments such as offices, farms, scenic sites, trading house, buses, and tourist ferry boats. Interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence allowed the researcher to identify her own feelings and emotions and also to know the desires, feelings, and intentions of her clients in order to successfully complete the assignment. Naturalistic intelligence enabled the researcher to identify, classify and manipulate elements of her environment which played an important role in this particular assignment which included many trips to rural areas in the central west part of the US where many of the world's main production sites of soybeans are.

Thus, to initiate the initiative of self-directed learning based on the specific interpreting assignment experiences of the researcher, this research proposes to develop students' T&I skills, professional knowledge, and eight intelligences via the methodology of "Experience Sharing, Introduction of Discourse Genre, Building English-Chinese Bilingual Corpus via Cornell Method, Reflection, and Discussion". In doing so, the aim is to nurture and develop students in consecutive 36-week Chinese-English sight translation and interpreting courses, in two semesters, for undergraduates.

### *Experience Sharing*

To present authenticity in both course materials and classroom activities, the researcher shared her interpreting assignment on the US soybean delegation via posts and videos posted on Facebook, as well as relevant news clips of the delegation visit. With image presentation and storytelling containing detailed dates and times, both the researcher and the students witnessed the whole process of the interpreting assignment again in person.

### *Introduction to Discourse Genres*

Contemporary theories of rhetoric defined genre as "typical rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (cited by Collin, 2012) and for T&I students, discourse genres, thus, provides an efficient way to identify speech situations and rhetorical actions and strate-

gies of speakers, with the aim to deliver faithful and satisfactory interpreting performances. Thus, discourse genres appear in self-introductions, and company profiles. Product launches, meals, accommodation and transportation arrangements, guided tours, and ceremonies with a focus on the eight intelligences were introduced in the T&I courses, in addition to skills and field knowledge.

In the genre of self-introduction, for example, instructions on effective and impressive self-introduction were given to students via interactive comparisons. Students then took part in activities such as “giving a visual cue” and “introducing themselves in one sentence,” which enabled them to practice both introduction and interpreting skills. Sentences such as “let me introduce myself to you, I am...” used in self-introduction or “let me introduce Dr. Wu to you,” or the famous line of Dr. Seuss: “Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind” were analyzed and learned. By studying online speeches about self-introduction, for example, students can from time to time expand their sentences used for certain genres according to their needs and do not need to solely depend on instructors to offer them materials.

## **Building an English-Chinese Bilingual Corpus via the Cornell Method**

Students in the T&I courses were taught to build their English-Chinese Bilingual Corpus via preparation, vocabulary and terminology enhancement, and professional knowledge growth before interpreting practices from either a text (sight translation) or an authentic/recorded speech (consecutive interpreting). As suggested and proved by scholars and scientists (Wu, 2016), the Cornell Method, devised in the 1940s by Walter Pauk, a professor at Cornell University, is a more efficient and easier approach on taking notes and reviewing.

Steps to prepare the Corpus via the Cornell Method included an activity in which three columns were made on a worksheet. Target vocabulary was then listed by the students in the left-hand column, and source vocabulary was listed in the middle column. In the right-hand column, students could write sentences/quotations that were studied in each genre taught in the T&I courses. Meanwhile, students could add related words, phrases, and/or sentences in all columns. As the Corpus grows, it acts like a living organism. Words are then sorted in alphabetical order. When translating/interpreting, students can easily use this as a reference.

For example, when studying the genre of cuisines via the Cornell Method, students learned different types of breakfasts served in hotels including American, Japanese, Continental, and English breakfasts. In addition to Chinese translation, students could include unique dishes of each type of breakfast such as Haggis and Nado, or egg dishes such as over-easy or sunny side up fried eggs, boiled eggs, scrambled eggs, poached eggs, omelets, Eggs Benedict, Onsen Tamago (hot spring eggs), balut (fertilized duck egg), and Turkish eggs. They could also put down famous quotes about breakfast such as “Breakfast without orange juice is like a day without sunshine,” “When you have bacon and eggs for breakfast, the chicken makes a contribution, the pig makes a commitment,” and “Ea-

ting breakfast like a king.” Students learn how to read menus and make orders and select content according to their needs, importance and relevance to their interpreting practices. Accordingly, they also expand their knowledge and develop eight intelligences.

To interpret in the genre of guided tours within the authentic T&I field, students were requested to sight translate a leaflet about Taiwan’s famous traditional pastry, pineapple cake. During the practice, students learned the history, stories, and expressive terms and phrases used to introduce this valuable commodity since the production value of soybeans stood at over 40 billion U.S. dollars in 2017 (Statista, 2020).

## Reflection

Reflection, serious thought or consideration, is a process in which we think and explore an issue of concern which is triggered by an experience (Walker, 2014). Reflective journals, a helpful learning tool for a range of subjects, are often used. As medical staff, both doctors and nurses can improve their decision-making abilities by studying their own and others’ reflection records, just as students through their learning can also grow and improve with reflective journal writing. Additionally, journal writing is beneficial to both students and instructors.

Journal writing enables students to become active learners and place more onus on the students’ active engagement and self-directed learning. When writing a reflective journal, students have the chance to express their feelings and reflect on what they have experienced and learned in class. In turn, they are able to develop new opinions and perspectives, learn new materials and form new conclusions. With journal writing, students can also practice their writing skills and train their creative and reflective thinking (Stevens & Cooper, 2009).

Reflective journals for classes are beneficial to instructors, too. As indicated by Stevens & Cooper (2009), a journal writing assignment correlates to the students’ participation in class since students are encouraged to do more reading and participate in class discussions. Mills (2008) found that journal writing helps instructors to understand which concepts are understood by students and which concepts need to be reexamined, and instructors can then guide and focus their students’ learning, emphasize important concepts from the lectures, and motivate students to develop their critical thinking skills further.

As Walker (2014) suggests, there is no absolute definition of journal writing since various types of journal writing are employed and accordingly, in the relevant literature, journal writing is described very differently. In both sight translation and consecutive interpreting classes, students practiced T&I skills after reading a written text or hearing an authentic or recorded speech, and their practices were also filmed. This study then required students to write their reflective journals weekly after each sight translation and consecutive interpreting class. Students were told to write down their thoughts and classroom experiences, personal growth process, and any interactions and communications with their instructor. They could summarize what they had learned and describe their learning experiences and goals. They could also share with the instructor their observa-

tions and interactions with their peer students. They were welcomed to offer the instructor suggestions about teaching, but no specific topics were assigned to students for journal writing and students had the freedom to decide the format and length of journal writing. For the journal writing assignment, students could write in either Chinese or English. Some pictures were even drawn on journals. In the following week after they submitted their reflective journal, the instructor would discuss some of the comments, questions, and suggestions raised in the students' reflective journals.

Feedback collected from students in their journal writing include:

"Interpreting is complicated and difficult, but I found it interesting."

"I used to be bad with numbers, but number interpreting has improved my ability to respond quickly."

"I learned how to interact with the audience when serving as a master of ceremony - and I know how to hold the audience's interest."

"We were taught to use symbols instead of words for note-taking. It is difficult to express meanings with diagrams, but with the help of imagination, I can now do better."

"Logic reasoning and brain storming via discourse analysis helped me a lot not only for interpreting but also in life."

"Visualization gives me pictures of information and with that skill, I can memorize information."

"On stage, I am still nervous but I think I have improved and have more confidence after learning so much in this school year."

According to the students' journals, the journal writing used in this research proved to be effective. For a class of over 40 students, it is a challenge for the instructor to talk to students "indirectly" and "privately." The instructor found it easier to monitor the students' learning and make relevant adjustments accordingly. Students were encouraged to verbalize their thoughts and share their feelings.

## Discussions

As indicated by Biggs (1999), learning through discussions has long been thought as a fundamental part of good teaching and learning (Biggs, 1999). Discussions in this research include two sessions: before and after in-class translation and interpreting activities. Before each sight translation and consecutive interpreting practice, the instructor discussed with students about background of each assignment, the previous experiences of the instructor, and the relevant T&I skills related to genres in order to guide students to build and use their bilingual Chinese-English corpus. Discussions were initiated through brain storming, experience sharing, and conversation. Students did not only receive instructions from the instructor, but instead had the freedom to direct discussions and share their different perspectives.

After the students went on the stage and practiced, T&I skills and onstage confidence were discussed and suggestions for improvement were offered via either free discussions, dialogues between peers and the instructor, written comments given by peers, and feedback from the instructor. Students could write down their thoughts and questions,

general or specific, in their journals. Understanding, analyses, and utilizing T&I skills were facilitated via all sorts of discussions. Structured questions, and topics at the heart of discussions were explored such as “What other tasks are needed during the preparation process,” “How can local idioms be appropriately translated into Chinese or English?” “How do you feel about the interpreting performance?” “How can we change translation/interpreting performance from good to great?” and “Are you satisfied with the interpreting performance? Why and why not?” Through discussions, students were helped with their development and improvement of collaboration, creativity, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities.

### *Research Limits and Suggestions*

More samples and follow-up studies are needed for a more complete understanding about the effectiveness of the curriculum design of interpreting training for undergraduates. For an 18-week course taught mainly by one instructor in classes, researchers need to engage in more difficult tasks to explore necessary competencies/intelligences for undergraduate T&I students, in order to meet the job market demands of today and tomorrow within the limited time of a one-semester course. This research is a qualitative one and quantitative studies in this field are also suggested for future research in this field.

## **Conclusion**

The whole research project on the curriculum design of interpreting training helps to offer a solution to the long debated question regarding teaching interpreting for undergraduates and prepares students to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow by developing and improving their eight intelligences. Students were also taught to engage in direct learning on their own. Learning T&I skills, professional knowledge, and the eight competencies therefore becomes a life-long goal and habit for students.

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