

Enhancement of International Communication Ability in Liaison Interpreting Course

Chuanxia Mo

Foreign Language Department, Guangxi Police College, Nanning, China
553802326@qq.com

Abstract: Interpreting competence is an important part of international communication ability as interpreting is an indispensable part of international communication. Given this, the former determines to a large degree how the latter works. To promote a student's ability to communicate internationally and to enable them to apply what they have learned and put that into practice, the author created and piloted a Liaison Interpreting course. This course added the teaching content of communication studies on top of the established teaching mode of "interpreting topics + skills", conducted moral cultivation of a whole person, and refined the teaching method with interpreting continuation task. To determine the effect, a blended evaluation mode has been used including a peer assessment conducted with 5 teachers, a questionnaire with 30 students, semi-lectured interviews with 10 students randomly. Results showed that the attempt proved to be feasible and effective and that students and instructor's peers generally accepted the teaching reform even though a small number of students remained unclear about their learning objectives and the effect on their learning. The findings of this paper may provide some reference and understanding for the teaching of other interpreting courses.

Keywords: International Communication Ability, Liaison Interpreting, Moral cultivation, Interpreting Continuation Task, Blended Evaluation

1. Introduction

International communication ability is crucial for a nation's soft power and is important for effective international communication. Ability in this regard is generally obtained in cross-cultural activities. The key to interpreting one kind of cross-cultural activity is international communication practice. In this sense, interpreting competence is highly relevant to international communication ability and thus the former will influence, to a large degree, on how the latter works. As such, the enhancement of interpreting competence is indeed significant to international communication and vice versa.

Imperative as the enhancement of international communication ability is, it has not yet been involved in interpreting courses. Teaching practices have been conducted to push forward the adaptation and development of the new teaching mode. Moreover, the result of teaching interpreting courses in higher education cannot meet the demand for international communication talents. At present, interpreting teaching modes in and outside China mainly include the teaching of special topics featuring politics, diplomacy, business, etc., and the teaching of interpreting skills of memory, note-taking, and so on.^[1] These modes are unfit for the new era of prevailing international communication.^[2] Against this backdrop, the author piloted a course on Liaison Interpreting. This course added teaching content of communication studies on top of the established teaching mode of "topics + skills", conducted moral cultivation of a whole person, and refined the teaching method with interpreting continuation task to enhance student's international communication ability in interpreting courses, their sense of professional identity, sense of responsibility, to integrate teaching with moral cultivation and to provide some reference and explanation for the teaching of other interpreting courses.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Communication

Communication shares the Latin root "*communis*", meaning "common" and the Latin word "*communicare*" meaning "to make common to many, share, impart, divide".^[3] From this point of view, communication is the act of information sharing and international communication is that of information

sharing internationally. Besides, as the world we live in is diverse with splendid cultures to be shared, international communication is an indispensable device for cultural exchanges. In a word, it involves information sharing and cultural exchanges.

2.2. Interpreting VS International Communication

The process of international communication, like interpreting, is essentially a process of language transformation and cultural connection. Therefore, the core of international communication competence is the ability to perform language transformation and cultural connection. These two aspects are vitally necessary for teaching interpreting. Harold D. Laswell proposed five elements or five parts of the communication process, namely “who”, “what to say”, “through what channel”, “to whom”, and “What effect does it produce”; that is, the communicator, the message, the medium, the audience, and the effect. Based on the first three elements, the role of the “interpreter” (communicator and media) is expanded, so that it can be encoded again after the first encoding.^[4] The first encoding is to convert the original information into what the general audience accepts and the secondary encoding is to convert information generally acceptable into what can be accepted by the audience from other countries or the rest of the world at large. In short, secondary encoding is about language transformation and cultural connection.^{[5]a} As for teaching interpreting, proper integration of the five elements of communication is of great significance to enhance students’ awareness of international communication, expand their understanding of interpreting activities, develop their professional identity, and cultivate their cross-cultural communication awareness and ability.

The media language used in international communication should be standardized, authentic, and fresh. Once these language symbols are formed, they will quickly spread via modern communication channels and exert a profound impact on the world. In this sense, they are the epitome of the cultural quality and the overall image of a country rather than merely the translation ability and comprehensive quality of the interpreter.^{[5]b} Through the teaching practice, the author found that most students were using the “words + grammar” strategy to learn English and Chinglish; hence, their homework was filled with irregular, inauthentic, and stale language expressions, thus weakening their language conversion ability.

As mentioned above, the student’s ability to communicate in a cross-language and cross-culture context matters and will have great impact on the communication effect. In international communication, the sender encodes information with symbols of one culture, while the receiver decodes with symbols of another culture. Cultural symbols used by the sender and receiver vary and thus misunderstanding and misinterpreting are inevitable in the process of both encoding and decoding.^[6] The author learned from the teaching practice that students lacked an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture and thus they tended to translate Chinese culture without a second thought about foreign culture. They took it for granted to interpret according to the literal meaning of the original text, making it impossible for Chinese culture to be better connected with the culture of the target language. This is a testimony to their insufficient culture conversion capability. A case in point is when some students introduced the dish “Mayi Shangshu”, they interpreted it as “ants climbing the tree”. They did not consider the cultural psychology of English-speaking audiences and did not know how to transform cultural images between two cultures. Therefore, the students’ insufficient international communication ability needs to be improved as early as possible.

3. Research Design

In this teaching reform practice, the author first refined the teaching mode, method, and content of the Liaison Interpreting Course. To check the effect of the teaching practice, SPSS 26.0 was used to analyze the scoring by the teacher’s peers, questionnaires and interviews by student participants and by a director of an enterprise where several students completed their internship. Based on previous teaching practice, the author strove to do research on the reliability and feasibility of the teaching of international communication in interpreting courses. The participants, teaching practices, and ways of evaluation are introduced in the following part.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 60 college students from two classes who majored in English Translation. They were sophomores and took courses related to international communication like Cross-cultural Communication in their freshmen year. They were to some extent aware of the necessity of international

communication and were able to transform information about daily life from English to Chinese and vice versa but did not excel in conveying cultural content.

The objective of Liaison Interpreting was to cultivate the students' liaison-escort interpreting ability. After one semester, the students were expected to be able to communicate fluently and correctly according to the setting given and to use international communication technologies to promote their competence. Their delivery should be standardized, native, and fresh for effortless international communication.

The author divided the two classes into one experiment class and one control class and taught each using different methods.

3.2. Teaching Practices

The two classes chosen were close to each other in academic performance. The control class was taught with the established mode of "interpreting topics + skills" and the experiment class was taught as follows:

3.2.1. The Teaching Mode: Integrating Language and Cultural Transformation into "Topics + Skills" and using International Communication Technologies

To make the language symbols of international communication standardized, native, and appropriate, contrastive studies on Chinese and English are of vital importance. Students know first the language features and basic rules of the two languages and then know how to transform between them. One way to check students' interpreting effect and efficiency is self-assessment to compare their delivery with the references and learn something in the process.

To enhance students' awareness of the necessity of international communication in interpreting, teaching contents pertinent to cultural exchanges across the globe were added and mainly consisted of two parts: cultural taboos and basic rules of cultural connection and conversion. To be precise, the method of "problem exploring" was exploited to make interpreting settings for the class. Throughout the process, students were encouraged and guided to explore why and how problems like misunderstandings in cultural communication occur. This is how students can enhance their sense of cultural communication.

To enrich students' background information and strengthen their interpreting skills, a comparative teaching method was used. Students were encouraged to tell the pros and cons of two interpreting versions. After that, the instructor replayed the whole interpreting process to students, and during the process skills used were easier for students to understand and imitate.

To check students' efficiency in language and culture transformation, students were taught to use foreign media platforms such as YouTube or Tik Tok to complete interpreting tasks. And the tasks generally and mainly focused on field interpreting under specific scenarios. When students completed the tasks, they needed to record and upload the recording onto the platforms for feedback.

3.2.2. Teaching Method: Integrating Continuation Task

The teaching process of the experimental class was constructed by the interpreting continuation task which was carried out in three stages: before class, during class, and after class. The whole teaching process was student-centered. Professor Wang Mingchu put it best when he said "continuation" in short is the incongruity between "understanding" and "output", and when this gap is leveled, a coordination effect is thereby created to improve the effect of output, that is, the effect of learning. In other words, the theory is set to recreate the interpreting task based on imitation.^[7] As such, the premise of "continuation" is there as a reference for imitation, and the reference given by teachers to students in interpreting activities can be language expression, language conversion skills, cultural knowledge, cultural connection skills, know-how about communication media or platforms, etc. The teaching process featuring interpreting continuation tasks is as follows.

The input task was given as the premise of the "continuation" task before class. The instructor provided references before class, and students needed to read the textbook and parallel texts for information related to the interpreting task. The main task at this stage is to accumulate language expressions and cultural background information. First, the instructor asked students to preview the professional terminology and vocabulary of the textbook and learn standardized, authentic, and fresh terms, then organized them to make a Chinese-English vocabulary entry list after each class. Second, the instructor asked students to watch videos or parallel texts related to the topic and think about questions of morality (the form of which can be seen above).

Output and re-creation tasks took place during the class when students completed interpreting tasks by imitating. To put it in detail, students could imitate the use of the words, phrases, sentence patterns, and whatever else they learned before the class to complete interpreting tasks. At this stage, students were asked to imitate skills of language conversion and culture connection and they also needed to: (1) make a plan for video shooting. The teacher set up different interpreting scenarios under the same topic and distributed them to different groups by lottery. After that, students were divided into several groups with three in a group and made a plan for the division of labor within a limited time according to the scenario selected; (2) scenario exercise: students switched roles in groups of three to conduct interpreting simulation practices.

After-school tasks centered around consolidation and promotion. Consolidation is a stage in a lesson where a topic or new information is enforced. Students were asked to test out new skills, language, or knowledge they have gained through the course of the lesson or overall topic.^[8] In this sense, the consolidation mainly focused on checking students' international communication capability by asking them to use international communication platforms. To fulfill the consolidation task, students needed to improve their delivery, their language expression, and culture transformation in particular and re-shoot the videos and upload them to the WeChat group for teachers' and students' re-evaluation. The promotion task was designated to encourage students whose career goals were related to interpreting to participate in interpreting practices and competitions. They were also suggested to "tell stories at home and abroad well", record their storytelling, and upload the recordings to platforms such as YouTube, and Facebook. After that, they were recommended to take screenshots of the page view, comments, and other data from these platforms. This was how they could check their international communication ability in interpreting based on the feedback obtained from these platforms.

3.2.3. Whole-person Cultivation Through Moral Cultivation

"Cultivation of a whole person" is an overwhelming teaching idea in China nowadays. It refers to the cultivation of a person who can develop in all respects including the cultivation of the mind, the emotion, and the spirit. It aims to enhance a person's ability to survive in modern society. It encourages the teacher to respect a student's initiative and interest to better tap his or her potential. With this, the author respects the student's independent learning and tries to create environment to encourage students to learn by themselves. What's more, the author hopes to shape the student's major identity and sense of social responsibilities.

Charles stated that teaching under the theory of Fostering a Better Tomorrow: Cultivation of the Whole Student would focus on unleashing students' potential and cultivating their sense of values rather than merely funneling them into the expected standards the community has predetermined for them. And an improved synergistic society would continue to occur as the spiritual needs of every individualized student were met. And one way to this end was the cultivation of students' cultural identity.^[9]

Lu Ji believed that education of whole-person cultivation expected more students who constantly explored the value, significance, idea, and purpose of human existence and sought spiritual and ideological transcendence than those who strove for better material "well-being".^[10]

It can be seen from above that personal education focuses on students' development of a sense of values, mentality, and potential. To put it specifically in the teaching of Liaison Interpreting, the cultivation practices should be conducted from three aspects of major identity, sense of social responsibilities, and Chinese cultures worth passing on from generation to generation and values that are entailed in typical Chinese culture. The process was done by problem-exploring where one case in point was as follows.

- (1) Why are interpreters said to be the main force in international communication?
- (2) Why are interpreters responsible for promoting international communication?
- (3) How can interpreters promote the international dissemination of Chinese food culture?

The first question was set to strengthen students' professional identity. It was designed to enable students to learn more about the importance of their major, spurring them to more enthusiasm for professional learning. The second question was to strengthen students' awareness of social responsibility. Students were more eager to learn after they knew they had their duties to serve in international communication and some of them even formed clearer career planning after in-depth thinking about this question. The third question was formed to guide students to deepen their understanding of and love for local culture, and with this, they were more willing to work for efficient international communication.

3.3. Ways of Evaluation

To find out the effectiveness and feasibility of the teaching practices, an evaluation of the teaching effect was conducted from four dimensions: an evaluation by the teacher's peers, a questionnaire and an interview with students, an evaluation of interpreting competitions attended by students, and an interview with a director from an enterprise where several students finished their internship.

3.3.1. Peer Assessment

Content analysis is a research method that objectively, systematically, and quantitatively describes the content of communication. ^[11] In interpreting activities, the delivery is the content of the communication and thus can be analyzed. One way to analyze students' interpreting delivery is through evaluation by the teacher's peers.

To check students' ability for language and cultural transformation, the instructor referred to Han Chao's (2015) "Analytical Evaluation Scale" ^[12]. The "interpreting quality" in the scale includes two aspects: "language transformation" and "cultural transformation". The score is divided into four levels: the first level: 1-2 points; the second level: 3-4 points; the third level: 5-6 points; the fourth level: 7-8 points. The two classes' interpreting performances were scored by the instructor's five peers in two rounds of tests before and after the teaching reform, and SPSS 26.0 was used to analyze the differences.

3.3.2. Questionnaire and Interviews

A questionnaire was analyzed from 30 students in the experimental class to objectively measure the effect of teaching reform. Based on the observation notes of the instructor and the evaluation data of the instructor's peers, the "Questionnaire on the Teaching of Liaison Interpreting for Enhancing Students' International Communication Ability" was created, validated, and further improved through discussion with the instructor's peers. The questionnaire consists of ten questions based on the Likert five-level scale (1. Completely Agree; 2. Generally Agree; 3. Uncertain; 4. Disagree; 5. Completely Disagree). It was made by the "Questionnaire Star", a data analysis app in China and distributed through the QQ group on June 15, 2021. In addition, to further understand students' feelings about the course, ten students in the experimental class were interviewed randomly.

After the questionnaire, qualitative data was collected from interviews with ten students randomly selected from the experimental class and they were asked three open-ended questions. The questions were about the teaching mode of "topics + skills + international communication"; the teaching method of interpreting continuation tasks and the effect of the teaching reform.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Scoring by Instructor's Peers

The Kendall concordance coefficient was used to test the reliability of teachers' scores in the two dimensions of language and cultural transformation. The results showed that in the pre-test stage, the Kendall coefficients of the two classes were 0.557, 0.778 and 0.564, 0.772 respectively ($0 < W_a < 1$); P values were 0.012, 0.015, and 0.035, 0.027 ($p < 0.05$). In the post-test stage, Kendall coefficients were 0.524, 0.827 and 0.566, 0.816 ($0 < W_a < 1$) respectively; P values were 0.010, 0.013, and 0.028, 0.026 ($p < 0.05$), and the reliability among raters was good.

SPSS 26.0 was used to conduct a normality test on the differences in students' language and cultural conversion ability before and after the scoring by the teachers. The differences were subject to a normality test. Therefore, a paired sample t-test was further conducted on the scoring data to test the differences between the two classes in language transformation ability (LTA) and cultural transformation ability (CTA). The results are as follows:

Table 1: Differences of LTA in the Experimental Class

Variables	T	p	D
Teacher1	-5.524	0.012	-2.464
Teacher2	-8.683	0.010	-4.333
Teacher3	-9.898	0.00	-5
Teacher4	-6.151	0.012	-2.933
Teacher5	-10.084	0.00	-4.333

Table 2: Differences of LTA in the Control Class

Variables	T	p	D
Teacher1	-2.520	0.026	-1.120
Teacher2	-3.561	0.019	-1.568
Teacher3	-2.876	0.027	-2.135
Teacher4	-3.312	0.027	-2.762
Teacher5	-5.085	0.013	-2.436

Table 3: Differences of CTA in the Experimental Class

Variables	T	p	D
Teacher1	-5.524	0.012	-1.934
Teacher2	-8.683	0.010	-3.334
Teacher3	-9.898	0.00	-2.534
Teacher4	-6.151	0.012	-3.667
Teacher5	-10.084	0.00	-3.667

Table 4: Differences of CTA in the Control Class

Variables	T	p	D
Teacher1	-2.434	0.025	-0.87
Teacher2	-3.665	0.023	-1.987
Teacher3	-3.878	0.021	-2.135
Teacher4	-3.386	0.023	-0.82
Teacher5	-3.989	0.022	-0.68

The data above shows that the language and cultural transformation ability of students in the two classes have been improved after the teaching of integrating language and cultural transformation.

An effect test was performed to examine whether there was a significant difference between the two classes. The test results show that the language transformation ability and cultural transformation ability of the experimental class is significantly better than those of the control class. The effect size of the five teachers' scoring on language transformation ability in the experimental class and the control class are as follows respectively: Cohen's $D=1.4, 2.2, 2.6, 1.7, 2.6$; Cohen's $D=0.3, 0.4, 0.2, 0.5, 0.3$. The effect size on cultural transformation ability: Cohen's $s=1.2, 1.5, 2.0, 0.9, 2.1$; Cohen's $s=0.2, 0.3, 0.4, 0.4, 0.3$.

To learn about students' proficiency in using media platforms for international communication, the author collected students' screenshots of the data on their interpreting videos posted on these platforms, including the page view, comments, likes, and dislikes. It was found that page views and the number of comments and comments in foreign languages, in particular, saw a fractional gain and the comments were mostly positive. It is thus clear that students were more proficient in using these platforms.

4.1.2. Questionnaire to and Interviews with Students

4.1.2.1. Questionnaire to Students

A total of 30 valid questionnaires were collected, and the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were tested by SPSS 26.0. The Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.952, indicating that the questionnaire was of high reliability. The validity test data showed that the main factor loading capacity was between 0.556 - 0.870, reflecting that the questionnaire had good construct validity. SPSS 26.0 was used for descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data, and the content of the interview was analyzed. The findings are as follows:

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics of Students' (n=30) Evaluation of Liaison Interpreting Teaching for Better International Communication

Item	Mean	STD
1. The tasks given by the teacher before class were clear and the materials were organized	1.500	0.575
2. The task planning fully respected students' initiative	1.257	0.399
3. Students were given more opportunities to practice interpreting	1.400	0.498
4. The training method of continuation interpreting tasks was easy to operate and effective	1.563	0.615
5. I have become use to the learning mode of field interpreting practice + consolidation and promotion	1.555	0.595
6. I am more aware of international communication	2.167	1.117
7. My delivery has become more standardized, native, and fresh	1.76	0.774
8. My improved delivery reflects my progress in cultural transformation	1.933	0.907
9. I learn better through media platforms for international communication	1.400	0.498
10. I better understood the learning objectives and have a new appreciation of interpreting	1.267	0.450

More than 50% of the students "Completely Agreed" and "Generally Agreed" with the above 10

items, and they 100% agreed with items 4, 7, and 8. However, 50% of the total said they were uncertain or disagreed with the learning mode of field interpreting practice + consolidation and promotion.

4.1.2.2. Interviews with Students

The author interviewed ten students in the experimental class and found that they thought highly of the teaching model of “international communication + topics + skills”. That has greatly boosted teachers’ confidence in teaching reform and laid the foundation for teaching effectiveness. Most students agreed with the necessity of reform of the teaching mode, teaching content, and teaching method to improve international communication ability. They also believed that the application of interpreting continuation tasks made the course easier to understand, and thus the learning effect was obvious. However, four students said that they could follow the teacher in the class but encountered many problems with language and cultural transformation when completing the consolidation task after class. Overall, ten students agreed that the improved teaching contents and methods could better ignite students’ learning enthusiasm and motivation, encouraging students to constantly overcome challenges to obtain new knowledge. Eight students noted that the new teaching model could do better to coordinate between their independent learning and team learning, and that the task arrangement model in which teachers assigned topics where they were not given any learning materials could promote their independent learning. Two students thought that when the teacher did not give them any learning materials, they were unable to choose suitable learning materials for themselves revealed that a small number of students were unable to search for information themselves. The results showed that students failed to obtain information using multimedia, not to mention their capacity to conduct international communication using technology. Six students mentioned that they improved their understanding of their learning objectives using their teaching to enhance international communication ability and their ability to perform language and cultural transformation improved. However, four students were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning as they were uncertain about their ability to perform language transformation, especially cultural transformation. They could not follow the learning mode and their learning motivation was not sustainable.

4.2. Discussion

It can be seen from the above that obvious progress has been made in students’ performance from teaching reform. The updated teaching model and teaching method enabled students to choose their learning materials according to their experiences. As such, they were more intuitively concerned about their study. They were encouraged to create their own learning goals to improve; thus, they have a sense of ownership and a sense of responsibility in their individual learning.^[13] When designing tasks, the teacher offered a specific topic but no supporting source or reference material by considering the needs of students’ autonomous learning. The teacher added the teaching content of language and cultural transformation and adopted a task-based teaching method on top of continuation interpreting. The teacher respected the evaluation and comments made by her peers and students. The teacher guided students to complete interpreting practices and identified specific problems in the standardization, authenticity, and freshness of language transformation, as well as the differences between Chinese and English cultural images in the process of cultural transformation.

It can be seen from the survey that the teaching conducted both online and offline, before and after class, was conducive to students’ learning. They were enabled to make full use of online and offline resources, and promote independent learning using communication technologies. With this, students were more independent, individualized, well-targeted, motivated, and eager to learn. This was how they were guided to construct their learning capacity.

Due to the limited time of this teaching reform, the teaching mode, content, method, and process have not yet been reconstructed repeatedly, so there are still some problems to be settled. There are still a small number of students who could not understand the teacher’s intention of adding information about international communication. Their learning objectives were not clear, and their learning initiative and learning effectiveness were compromised. For extracurricular learning tasks, 50% of the students could not decide or disagreed to stick to self-learning of knowledge about international communication. It is necessary for the teacher to constantly adjust the content and the format of after-school tasks to form a more reasonable task arrangement. In terms of independent evaluation of learning effectiveness, 36.67% of the students could not decide whether the words used in the interpreting were more accurate, whether or not the cultural factors conveyed in their delivery were more authentic, whether or not they knew how to evaluate interpreting performance, and whether or not their ability to self-detect learning effectiveness was insufficient. Therefore, it is imperative to further guide students to better their independent learning

and self-learning evaluation.

5. Conclusion

The current interpreting teaching mode cannot meet the needs of economic and social development, nor can it render students to form a clear understanding of the position of interpreting, as well as failure to cultivate interpreters with international communication ability to meet the needs of the post. The integration of interpreting studies and communication studies is the key to training international communication talent. As interpreting is the most important international communication activity. Since the construction of a country's international communication capacity requires interpreting talent, priority must be given to cultivating intercultural communication ability and interpreting ability.

References

- [1] Binhua W. (2019) *Conceptualizing Interpreting as Communicative Mediation— “is interpreting cognitive processing of skills?”*. *Foreign Language Education*, 78–83.
- [2] Dan J. (2020). *A Study of Deep Approach in Foreign Language Teaching*. *Foreign Language Research*, 79–85.
- [3] Mark A. (1995). *International Power and International Communication*. Macmillian Press LTD.
- [4] Harold L. (1948). *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*. *Communication in Society*, 215-228.
- [5] Chen M. L. (2006). *International Communication: A course book*. Beijing University Press.
- [6] Guang S. J. (2004). *International Communication*. Beijing University Press.
- [7] Mingchu W. (2018). *Continuation translation task—a good way to improve translation ability*. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 36-39.
- [8] Twinkl Teaching, A. (n. d.). *What is Consolidate Learning?* Retrieved October 30, 2022, <https://www.twinkl.com.cn/teaching-wiki/consolidate-learning>.
- [9] Charles R., (2005). *Fostering a Better Tomorrow: Cultivation of the Whole Student*. R626 *Instructional Strategies and Tactics*, Indiana University.
- [10] Ji L. (2007). *Transcendence — on ill adaptation of education*. *Hua Dong Normal University Journal*, 65-69.
- [11] Bernard B. (1952). *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. The Free Press.
- [12] Han C. (2015). *Investigating rater severity/leniency in interpreting performance testing*. *Interpreting*, 255-283.
- [13] Gong Y. F. & Luo S. Q. (2003). *Language Teaching: a task-based approach*. People's Education Press.