



REVIEW ARTICLE

SIMULATION: A GREAT STRATEGY TO IMPROVE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES IN THE INTERPRETATION CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Interpretation as a job is a very difficult task to develop, to carry it out successfully one must accomplish a series of competences that in a whole will make communication happen, this being the principal aim of the interpretation process. Linguistic competences are fundamental for two reasons: first of all because the interpreter is "someone who knows with complete spontaneity and intuition the languages that he is working with" (Seleskovitch, 1968, p.35), and also because those languages are the ones that serve the interpreter's main purpose: to communicate the message to those listening to him. The use of simulation exercises in the different interpretation classrooms in the English Language major with French as a second language has proven to be very efficient as a strategy to improve students' linguistic competences. This article aims at validate the previous statement by presenting the fitting arguments and some examples of those simulation exercises that have become essential in most interpretation classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Larousse dictionary, an interpreter is the person who orally translates one language into another or who mediates, in a conversation, between people speaking different languages. It is an extremely demanding and complex job that requires exceptional knowledge and expertise of different competences, one of the most important, the linguistic competence. The fundamental purpose of this article is to validate why language skills are essential for interpreters to develop their profession with excellence and how the use of simulation exercises in the various interpretation courses in

English Language Studies with French as second foreign language has demonstrated the effectiveness of this strategy to foster the advancement of students in the English Language major.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This present research was conducted in the University of Holguin, Cuba during the academic courses 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, taking as subject of study the students of the 5th academic year from the English Language major with French as second language. The principal methods to be put into practice were bibliographic review, observation, interviews and surveys.

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Linguistic Competence: The term *linguistic competence* refers to the innate linguistic knowledge that allows a speaker to use and understand a language.

Linguistic helps teachers convey the origins of words and languages, their historical applications, and their modern day relevance. Combined, this approach to teaching language helps students gain a better, more in-depth understanding of their assignments and work product expectations.

As used by Noam Chomsky and other linguists, *linguistic competence* is not an evaluative term. Rather, it refers to the innate linguistic knowledge that allows a person to match sounds and meanings. In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), Chomsky wrote, "We thus make a fundamental distinction between *competence* (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and *performance* (the actual use of language in concrete situations)."

Examples and Observations

"Linguistic competence constitutes knowledge of language, but that knowledge is tacit, implicit. This means that people do not have conscious access to the principles and rules that govern the combination of sounds, words, and sentences; however, they do recognize when those rules and principles have been violated. For example, when a person judges that the sentence *John said that Jane helped himself* is ungrammatical, it is because the person has tacit knowledge of the grammatical principle that reflexive pronouns must refer to a Noun Phrase in the same clause." (Eva M. Fernandez and Helen Smith Cairns, *Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics* Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

Linguistic Competence and Linguistic Performance: "In [Noam] Chomsky's theory, our **linguistic competence** is our unconscious knowledge of *languages* and is similar in some ways to [Ferdinand de] Saussure's concept of language, the organizing principles of a language. What we actually produce as utterances is similar to Saussure's *parole*, and is called linguistic performance. The difference between linguistic competence and linguistic performance can be illustrated by slips of the tongue. Linguistic competence is the system of linguistic knowledge owned by native speakers of a language. It is distinguished from linguistic performance, which is the way a language system is used in communication. Chomsky presented this concept in his elaboration of generative grammar, where it has been broadly adopted and competence is only the language level that is studied.

According to Chomsky, competence is the system language that enables speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language, to distinguish grammatical sentences of ungrammatical sentences. such as 'noble tons of soil' for 'noble sons of toil.' Uttering such a slip doesn't mean that we don't know English but rather that we've simply made a mistake because we were tired, distracted, or whatever. Such 'errors' also aren't evidence that you are (assuming you are a native speaker) a poor English speaker or that you don't know English as well as someone else does. It means that linguistic performance is different from linguistic competence. When we say that someone is a better speaker than someone else (Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, was a terrific orator, much better than you might be), these judgments tell us about performance, not competence. Native speakers of a language, whether they are famous public speakers or not, don't know the language any better than any other speaker in

terms of linguistic competence." (Kristin Denham and Anne Lobeck, *Linguistics for Everyone* Wadsworth, 2010).

"Two language users may have the same 'program' for carrying out specific tasks of production and recognition, but differ in their ability to apply it because of exogenous differences (such as short-term memory capacity).

The two are accordingly equally language-competent but not necessarily equally adept at making use of their competence. "The linguistic competence of a human being should accordingly be identified with that individual's internalized 'program' for production and recognition. While many linguists would identify the study of this program with the study of performance rather than competence, it should be clear that this identification is mistaken since we have deliberately abstracted away from any consideration of what happens when a language user actually attempts to put the program to use. A major goal of the psychology of language is to construct a viable hypothesis as to the structure of this program." (Michael B. Kac, *Grammars and Grammaticality*. John Benjamins, 1992). An understanding of linguistics can help a creative writing student develop prose that speaks to the reader's senses and transports them to a different state of reality. In a society in which people communicate more by electronic way this composition, meaning and even true exchange of ideas through the written word can be lacking. Teaching and studying linguistics provides the tools necessary to preserve and advance the art of reading, writing and communication. This is essential in the educational environmental, the workplace and in society.

Simulations as a strategy

Simulations as a strategy to strengthen linguistic competences present a series of advantages, for instance:

- Increase the autonomy and motivation of students
- Develop competences regarding team spirit (life competences)
- Strengthen competences concerning collaboration and cooperation (provides students with the opportunity to do a certain task or solve a problem together)
- Allow students to put into practice new vocabulary and structures
- Permit students freewill of choices and decision making based on their own experience
- Help students to meet the target culture and associate themselves with it
- Dispose of the traditional students-teachers' relationship (in simulations students are their own masters and control their fate)
- Give teachers the possibility of a discrete follow-up of the progress and participation of students.

How Simulations Work: Simulations provide students with an opportunity to practice problem based learning through a specific task, issue, crisis, or problem. An experience or real-life situation is imitated. When the situation or problem is presented, students work together to think of a possible solution and prove that it works or fits in with certain decision criteria. It is important to note that there is no one "right" answer or quick solution (Gredler, 1992). Students are generally assigned roles and are expected to act within that role

or setting regarding the subject matter and issues presented. Students carry out their roles in the simulation according to predetermined behavioral characteristics and descriptions regarding their topic. They become the character in the simulation and experience the “reality” of acting in the situation. It is impossible to know with certainty the outcome of a simulation. It depends on how the learners experience their role and the extent to which they develop it. As such, students take ownership of their roles, have the responsibility for carrying out their assigned activities, and ultimately take responsibility for their own learning. During a simulation, the instructor functions more as a facilitator, helper, and resource person and less as an expert, judge, or tester (Hertel & Millis, 2002). This truly enhances the constructivist learning approach as students garner meaning from their interaction with the environment. Cognitive conflict or “puzzlement” then becomes the stimulus for learning and knowledge evolves through social negotiation and individual understanding (Kirkley & Kirkley, 2005).

Interpretation courses: The discipline Interpretation and Translation is the second most important one in the graduate profile. There a number of tasks involved in the translating profession, generally a translator compiles terminology and information to be used in translations, including technical terms. Hence the importance of delivering high-skilled interpreters and translators. Nowadays language interpretation is known to be the facilitating of oral or sign-language communication, either simultaneously or consecutively, between users of different languages. The process is described by both the words interpreting and interpretation. Being these two modes, simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, the most active in its use. We will address here the latter, since is the one depicted in the syllabus. In consecutive «where we learn the art of analysis» (Seleskovitch, 1968, p.73) the interpreter has the advantage of disposing of certain time to analyze the intervention and interpret after the speaker has done his part, also taking notes has proved to be of great aide to consecutive interpreting as well. Another advantage of consecutive is that there is more interaction between the public and the interpreter than in simultaneous (visual contact, non-verbal communication).

In the English Language Major with French as a Second foreign language we teach different types of interpretation in the several subjects within the Interpretation-Translation discipline in the different academic years starting in third year: consecutive, inverse, consecutive bilateral, sight translation. The use of simulation exercises has proved their effectiveness for improving the different competences and sub-competences, particularly the linguistic one. Students experience a reproduction of the reality, which is objective. They also gain the opportunity to familiarize with complex situations alike the ones they shall face in the exercise of their profession and more recently in their professional training in cultural events, tourism facilities, international events that have its regular space in the province and other work environments where they must put into practice their interpretation and communication skills

Developing A Simulation: Simulations were developed and planned based on the objectives of the learning activities. Once the objectives were known and established, the scope of the

simulation was defined. What question were going to be answered, what do the members planned to accomplish? Students were prepared for the simulation by identifying critical concepts, skills, or content that are important for them to know before and during the simulation. The role of each of the participants was identified and assigned. All of this due to the importance of students having a good understanding of who they are during the simulation, what they will be doing, and what was expected of them. An overview of the situation was provided as well as an introduction to the simulation. Once the exercise was completed, a debriefing was also necessary to fully assess and go through what happened during the simulation and ascertain student comments and reactions to the experience. Simulation issues, processes, and outcomes can were linked to course concepts and learning objectives.

General learning objectives commonly achieved through simulations include:

- Improved student awareness of a topic or subject
- Real-world and practical application of course concepts
- Enhanced analytical ability to resolve issues and problems in the subject matter
- Increased exposure to complex real-life experiences

When developing simulations criteria should be established for grading attendance and participation as well as deliverables such as reports. Rules also need to be established for how students will interact with each other, how they will interact with the teacher, and whether outside resources or research is allowed during the simulation (Hertel & Millis, 2002).

Example of a simulation exercise

Subject: Bilateral Interpretation

Academic Year: Fifth

Number of students to develop the exercise: five

Type of exercise: Interview in a press conference

President Donald Trump sat down for an interview Thursday morning with four reporters from The Wall Street Journal: Rebecca Ballhaus, Michael C. Bender, Peter Nicholas and Louise Radnofsky. White House attendees included Communications Director Hope Hicks, Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Director of the National Economic Council Gary Cohn.

The first student plays the part of donald Trump, and four other students play the part of the four reporters from the Wall Street Journal, and the rest of the students will rotate as interpreters in such a way that everyone participates in the activity. This type of exercises has been put into practice in the different interpretation courses that are developed in the major. The results are satisfactory since students show to be more motivated towards the discipline and their language, decision-making, collaborative skills have increased.

Conclusión

An increasing number of experts in cognitive psychology believe that simulation is one of the fundamental mental activities of the human mind. Actively engaging in student-

student or instructor-student conversations needed to conduct a simulation. Instructional simulations by their very nature cannot be passive learning. Students are active participants in selecting parameter values, anticipating outcomes, and formulating new questions to ask. Transferring knowledge to new problems and situations. A well done simulation is constructed to include an extension to a new problem or new set of parameters that requires students to extend what they have learned in an earlier context. Understanding and refining their own thought processes.

A well done simulation includes a strong reflection summary that requires students to think about how and why they behaved as they did during the simulation. The main objective of education is not only to lead students to give up their naive theories and replace them with scientific theories, but also to train them in the use of rational methods for simulation that will enable them to successfully confront new situations and problems. In order to have simulation exercises working correctly, they must be introduced at the right time in the course, using the right teaching strategy (guided discovery, checking of certain properties, checking validity limits, exploration of some difficult aspects, etc.) and with the right objectives (overcoming a theoretical difficulty, etc.). Simulation leads students to put their knowledge into practice and to develop various skills, through scenarios related to the content of the teaching. They create a context simulating the professional environment where they will work at the end of their training. This type of exercise has aroused great interest among students and the results are satisfactory.

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