

REAL-TIME EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETING IN STATISTICS

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The issue of language in education has been a contentious issue in most developing countries. This is due to the critical role that language and communication play in the learning process. In order to offer second language learners the opportunity to learn in their language of choice, a project has been launched to promote multilingualism at a South African university. The institution offers real-time educational interpreting (in the form of simultaneous whisper interpreting between Afrikaans and English) to statistics students in various undergraduate years of study. This offers an additional advantage that lecturers are also able to communicate in their home language. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate educational interpretation from the student and the lecturer's perspectives as well as provide a brief overview of the technology employed.

The real-time interpreting service was used for a second year mathematical statistics course, which included lectures, computer demonstrations, and tutorials, either individually or in groups. The class consisted of 51 students, where 39 were first language Afrikaans students, ten first language English students and two from other first languages. At the end of the semester all students (including those who did not use the interpreting service) were asked to complete a feedback form.

Interpreting is done in either computer labs or traditional lecture halls, without requiring any alterations. The interpreters provide the required equipment at the venue. Students choose between a headset covering only one ear (to still be able to hear the lecturer) or a headset covering both ears. During the lecture the interpreter sit in the front row and speaks into a sensitive microphone, soft enough to be inaudible to the lecturer. Less than 10% of the students who did not make use of the service, indicated in the feedback that they could hear the interpreter's whisper. Despite this, these students were either neutral or positive about the service. Complaints concerning the technology were negligible.

The feedback on the overall concept was overwhelmingly positive. More than 88% of all students indicated that they prefer that the lecture is presented in the lecturer's mother tongue. Approximately 49% of students prefer the interpreting service, 37% were neutral on whether or not it should be used. The 14% of students who prefer switching between both languages, indicated in the comments that they want to know the statistical terminology in both languages.

From the student feedback, our experience and the experiences of our colleagues, both at Stellenbosch and other South African universities, our main findings are as follows:

1. The use of real-time educational interpreting is an effective and desirable way of dealing with the problem of accommodating a second language group in statistics courses, and should be implemented if funding is available.
2. The interpreters should be qualified professionals in *interpreting*, not in the knowledge of the subject matter. Interpreters are able to deliver a quality product and use the correct terminology if the lecturers provide them with the relevant material by the date specified by the interpreting service.
3. The main deterrent for using the service is the students' fear that the interpreters will not use the correct terminology. The lecturer should assure students of the professionalism of the interpreters in this regard.
4. The lecturer is advised to state key terminology in both languages during lectures, since some students want to learn both sets of terminology.