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Relay Interpreting as a Tool for Conference Interpreting Training

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the pedagogical benefits of experiencing and practicing relay interpreting for conference interpreting trainees. Relay interpreting was defined by Shlesinger (2010) as “the practice of interpreting from one language to another through a third language”. This activity is occasionally featured de facto in the learning experience of conference interpreting trainees, but it has not yet been studied extensively as a deliberate tool for the training of conference interpreters. This article focuses on students’ experience and practice of relay interpreting as part of mini-conferences, a pedagogical activity built into interpreting students’ curriculum. We draw on theories of situated and experiential learning by Lave and Wenger (1991), Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989), Kolb (1984) and Kolb and Kolb (2005). A study was carried out with Heriot-Watt University students on the Honors and Master Conference Interpreting programs. All students experience relay interpreting during weekly simulations of multilingual conferences, in which students may take relay from their peers to interpret into one of their working languages when the speaker’s language is not part of their combination. Alternatively, students may themselves play the part of pivot, defined by Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989, p. 199) as “the interpreters who produced the first version relay those who interpret next”: They know that some of their peers depend upon them to relay the initial message into their working language. Providing and depending upon relay enables students to approach a range of key interpreting skills from a different angle, such as monitoring, as raised by Sawyer (1994) and Gile (2009). Relay interpreting creates a set-up conducive to the learning strategies highlighted by Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (2001), based on active observation of techniques. The mixed-method approach used for this study focuses on students’ perceptions of the activity, as well as of the impact of relay interpreting on their own practice as users and providers of relay.

Keywords: Conference Interpreting training, relay interpreting, multilingual conferences, situated learning.

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1. Introduction and Background

This study proposes to explore the learning benefits that conference interpreting students draw from a practical, first-hand experience of relay interpreting (RI), described by Shlesinger (2010, p. 276) as “the practice of interpreting from one language to another through a third language”. Students are placed in the position of *pivot*, defined as “the interpreter the other booths are listening to and taking relay from” (AIIC, 1999). They also have to depend on their peers’ interpreting for their own practice. This dual experience of relay interpreting, as provider or user, is built into the learning experience of the students at Heriot-Watt University and is one of the tools used to further their conference interpreting skills.

The study focused on a sample of students from the MA (undergraduate) program in translation and conference interpreting and from the MSc (postgraduate masters) program in conference interpreting. It was carried out over a period of 2 years, in order to collect data from as many participants as possible. We wanted to recruit participants from two cohorts of students who had all received a similar training in conference interpreting, following the interpreter training model described by Gile (2009). Students were enrolled either in the final year of the MA in Translation and Conference Interpreting or in the Masters in Conference Interpreting at the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Heriot-Watt University.

Although MA and MSc students have different levels of linguistic and academic competence, both groups are taught the same conference interpreting techniques and theory, and both groups take part in multilingual mock conferences (also described as “mini-conferences”) as part of their training. These sessions are the set-up during which students get to experience relay interpreting as users, but also learn to act as a *pivot*, a role described as “the interpreters who produced the first version relay those who interpret next” by Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989, p. 199) and presented as “using a single language as a relay” by the Directorate General for Interpreting (SCIC, n.d.).

The MA undergraduate program is a 4-year program during which students are progressively introduced to interpreting skills. On this program, students are expected to work from either one or two foreign languages (French, German, Spanish) into English, or bilaterally between British Sign Language (BSL) and English. The MSc program is a postgraduate-level program of study organized around one academic year of teaching (9 months) and the production of a dissertation (3 months). Students on this program of study either work bilaterally or from two foreign languages into English. Languages catered for are Chinese, Arabic, French, German and/or Spanish.

Considering two MA and two MSc cohorts meant that we were able to include BSL in the range of languages engaged in the set-up described, because the first cohort of BSL students reached their final year on the year when the second stage of the data collection took place. In doing so, the experiment provided a set-up in which every student would, at some point, have to be a pure user of interpreting (i.e., a listener who genuinely depends on an interpreter to access the meaning of the initial intervention) or depend on relay to interpret. The cohorts also all included students who were interpreting into their B language (i.e., a language other than their native one, in which they are highly proficient) in the case of students working bilaterally between English and another language, for the benefits of the audience and/or relay use.



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Multilingual mock conferences are introduced as part of the training to enable students to work together rather than solely by dual-language combination, and they give students an opportunity to experience a situation close to the reality of professional multilingual meetings. Mini-conferences for MA students take place during the course of Semester 1 and at the start of Semester 2, because these students have already followed training in consecutive and liaison interpreting in their second year of studies and receive an intensive training in simultaneous interpreting at the very start of Semester 1 of their final year. Some MA students have also followed additional training in their penultimate year, spent abroad (Year 3 of the MA). MSc students have their series of mini-conferences in Semester 2, because some students' first introduction to conference interpreting techniques is at the start of the 1-year program (the MSc program runs from September to September). These sessions bring together all the students registered on the same program, regardless of their language combinations—students usually have two active languages (A and B language) or one active language (A language) and two passive languages (C languages) as defined by AIIC—and a multilingual mock debate is staged over a period of 2 to 3 hours, around a particular aspect of current affairs such as environmental concerns, immigration, healthcare provision or new technologies. At MA level, mock conferences are led by members of staff who select current affairs topics consistent with the curriculum covered in other classes. At MSc level, only the first session is led by staff; students then take on all roles (mini-conference chair, speakers, interpreters, etc.) and select a theme themselves, drawing from their awareness of current affairs. In these mini-conferences, students encounter for the first time a genuine audience, as well as an authentic interpreting community of practice. This study focuses most specifically on a unique aspect of this experiential learning activity: relay interpreting.

These sessions simulate a multilingual conference where presenters may use different languages not understood by all; therefore, interpreters are needed to bridge the linguistic gap and facilitate communication among participants. Student interpreters do not necessarily understand all languages used as part of the mock conference, so they need to rely on a pivot interpreter. On these occasions, pivot interpreters relay utterances by presenters into a language understood by the other interpreters present. When a speech is delivered in Chinese, for instance, the students working from Chinese into English know that their fellow interpreting students in the booths are depending on their interpreting to provide relay, so that the non-Chinese users may in turn interpret the initial speech into other languages such as French, German, Spanish, Arabic or BSL. Students carry out the interpreting required to enable communication, in consecutive and simultaneous modes.

Neither student work during mini-conferences nor the practice of relay as part of these sessions are formally assessed: students receive purely formative assessment during the debriefing session which follows the mock conference, including feedback on how they performed when depending on a pivot or acting as a pivot. Formative assessment for pivot provision also comes from peer feedback, because students who used a peer as pivot can provide valuable insight on the performance. Summative assessment for both programs of study is carried out on individual performances as part of the exam diet, in which students work directly from their working languages, not from relay. Therefore, relay interpreting is used as a pedagogical tool to further their conference interpreting skills, but students are not assessed on this practice.

2. Theoretical Framework

The experience is part of the formative learning experience, and the sessions were designed with situated learning in mind, following Kolb's idea: "Knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner" (1984, p. 27). The purpose of these mini-conferences is to create the experience of this community of practice described by Lave and Wenger (1991), a key element to the learning process, and relay interpreting is very much part of professional practice. Students experience a genuine multilingual event, in which they can observe the dynamics of interpreter-mediated communication, as well as engage with the professional practice required to enable communication.

This set-up creates a context favorable to another dimension of situated learning stressed by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989): the autonomous and collaborative phase. This kind of tasks leads learners to a stage in which "students no longer behave as students, but as practitioners, and develop their conceptual understanding through



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social interaction and collaboration in the culture of the domain, not of the school” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 40). It is also consistent with the need for an apprenticeship model, highlighted by Sachtleben (2015) in her research on the multilingual classroom, and aims at addressing students’ need to approach their interpreting practice in an analytical and reflexive way (Bontempo & Napier, 2007; Winston, 2005) by creating a situation where their performance is crucial to the learning activity. In fact, the quality of the pivot’s interpreted rendition is fundamental; if it is of poor quality, communication will break down. The key aspect of this activity, which is the focus of this article, is the “process of collective reflection—with multiple and reciprocal feedback—involving all those taking part in the taught sessions”, described by Perez and Wilson (2011, p. 251) in the context of public service interpreter training. Because not all students speak all the languages involved in this situated learning experience, all of them are providers and/or users of RI. This set-up serves a dual purpose: First, students become active users of their peers’ performances, thus observing interpreting in a critical way. Second, students also practice with the awareness that their peers depend upon their performance to work, so they replicate the type of activity they observed by swapping roles. This creates a significant shift from the standard bilingual conference interpreting classroom set-up, in which all participants understand the working languages used, rendering the learning context more distant from professional practice. Although this parameter is rarely formulated explicitly in studies on conference interpreting pedagogy, it often underpins teaching strategies, such as that described by Gile (1999).

In addition to constituting an experiential learning practice, the RI dimension of mini-conferences also creates a peer-learning situation following concepts highlighted by Hara (2009) and Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (2001), as well as a context favorable to peer support (Boud et al., 2001). In this study, we explored more specifically the learning benefits of a situation in which students “share the status as fellow learners and they are accepted as such” (Boud et al., 2001 p. 4). We explore Boud et al.’s view that “reciprocal peer learning emphasizes students’ simultaneous learning and contributing to other students’ learning” (p. 4) applied to conference interpreting training, looking at the particular learning set-up of multilingual mock conferences in which RI takes place. Such an experience creates a situation of collaborative learning as “constructed both individually and in society” (González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016), and reinforces the “pre-specialisation” and “professional skills” that need to be embedded in the curriculum at the latter stage of students’ training (González-Davies, 2004).

Finally, the medium of RI, defined by Shlesinger (2010) as “the practice of interpreting from one language to another through a third language”, is also used to lead students to reflect upon professional practice, in particular on what constitutes good quality simultaneous interpreting, by approaching the question from the perspective of the pivot. This reflexive dimension is built into the debriefing session which takes place at the end of each mini-conference, during which staff provide formative feedback but also invite students to reflect on the challenges and good practice encountered and to provide specific peer feedback.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions underpinning this study were as follows: How do students perceive RI? and How does RI affect students’ focus and learning experience?

The hypotheses considered at the start of this study were:

- RI is a valuable training tool for trainee conference interpreters, and
- RI raises awareness of the professional community of practice.

Our purpose was to assess the learning outcomes of this collaborative learning experience for conference interpreting students and the extent to which it can enhance their own individual learning process. The outcome can be used to better inform curriculum design and students’ preparation for such situated learning experiences.



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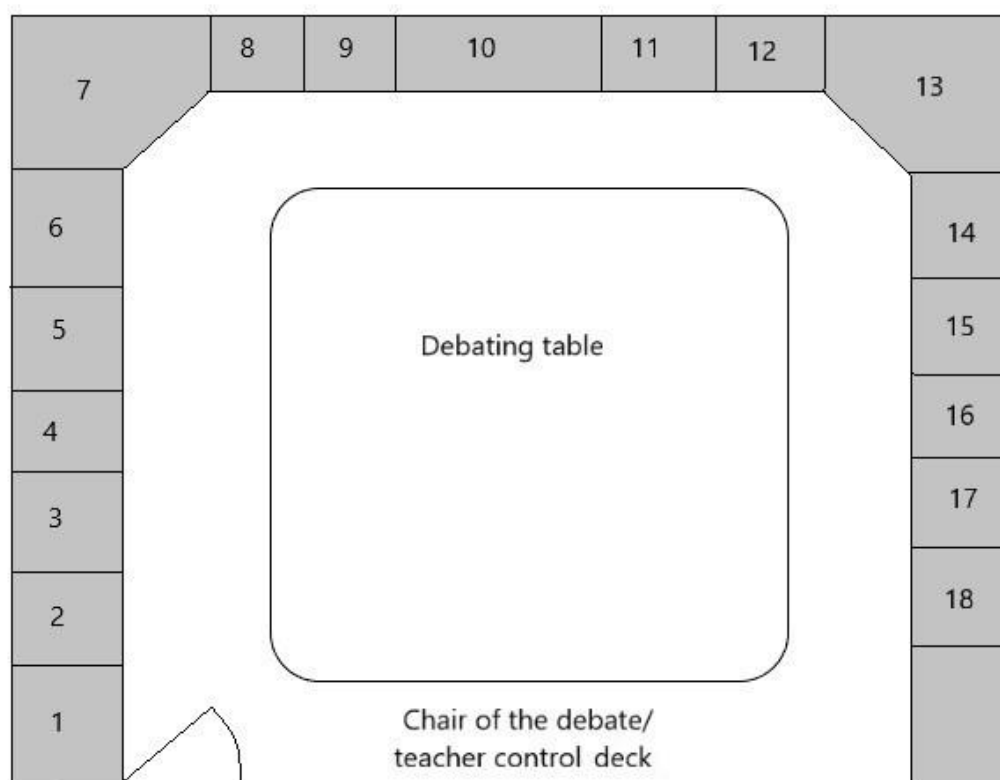
3.2. Sample of participants

All students involved in the study had already taken part in at least five mini-conference sessions when data were collected, so they had all used or provided relay before taking part in the study.

A total of 43 students completed the questionnaires (22 for the first cohort, 21 for the second), out of which 24 were Masters students and 19 were Honors. Thirty-two students (14 MSc and 18 Honors students) volunteered to take part in the interviews over the two academic years. All language combinations were represented in both the questionnaires and interviews, thus creating a representative sample.

3.3. Set-up of mini-conference sessions

A purpose-designed conference interpreting laboratory was used for the mini-conferences (see diagram in Figure 1). The room is organized around a debating table equipped with microphones and headsets, enabling participants to address the rest of the audience or to listen to a relevant booth if they require interpreting to understand other participants' interventions. Booths (represented in grey on the diagram below) are located around the room, providing interpreters with a full or partial view of the proceedings. There are 19 booths in total, three of which are double booths.



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Figure 1: Typical setup of room for mini-conference practice.

During mini-conferences, students were most commonly working in one of four double booths (Booths 1, 7, 10 or 13) or in one of the single booths (all remaining booths). Each session was organized in such a way that all students spent half of the time in a booth and the other half around the debating table, acting as delegates, real users of interpreting and participants in the discussions.

3.4. Data collection

A mixed-method approach was used to collect the data: quantitative, with questionnaires that were made available, on paper and online, to reach out to as many students as possible; and qualitative, with interviews where students had the chance to answer open questions and explain their views in depth.

The questionnaires followed Sachtleben's (2015) model, adopting a series of statements which participants were asked to rate from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), to make it fairly easy and quick for students to engage with this study. Participants were asked to react to three statements on the actual practice of RI and to two statements focused on the professional side of conference interpreting.

To complement these questionnaires and "put the responsibility for and ownership of the data much more firmly into respondent's hands" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 392), in-depth interviews were carried out, using open-ended questions. The interview invited participants to express their reflections on their understanding of the practice of relay, on their experience as relay users or providers, on the impact of this specific situation on their perceived performance and learning experience, and on the impact of RI on communication, based on what they had observed. Interviews were filmed, with the students' consent, capturing both verbal responses and visual expressions or gestures which might be used to highlight meaning.

3.5. Data analysis

A themed-analysis approach was adopted to identify recurring elements. These findings are organized around two questions: What was the impact of RI on the learning experience of trainee interpreters, and what were trainees' perceptions of this specific practice, with professional training in mind. Participants who had completed the questionnaire were invited to take part in interviews on a voluntary basis, so as to revisit the themes and provide more in-depth reflection on the practice of relay interpreting.

4. Findings

4.1. Research Question 1

Participants were first asked to react to a statement focusing on the impact of RI on trainee interpreters' experience. As stated before, trainee interpreters usually have a dual responsibility when interpreting during mini-conferences. Bearing in mind the aforementioned AIIC (1999) definition of a pivot, trainees were asked to react to the statement "Being a relay interpreter user has helped me understand what I need to focus on in my simultaneous interpreting". As AIIC (1999) outlines:

When you are a pivot, all the principles of quality interpreting apply, of course, and a good pivot is, first and foremost, a good interpreter. However, the pivot must also make a



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special effort to interpret with the needs of colleagues in mind, and to be maximally clear and helpful. (p. 628)

4.2. Survey findings

Bearing this in mind, trainee interpreters were asked to react to the statement: “Being a relay interpreter user has helped me understand what I need to focus on in simultaneous interpreting delivery.” The aim of this question was to observe whether participants consciously connected the practice of RI with the professional delivery one expects of a professional conference interpreter.

Table 1: Response to “Being a relay interpreter user has helped me understand what I need to focus on in simultaneous interpreting delivery” (n = 43).

Response	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Strongly agree	41.86	18
Partially agree	41.86	18
Neither agree nor disagree	11.67	5
Partially disagree	2.32	1
Strongly disagree	2.32	1

Over eighty-three percent of students strongly or partially agreed that the experience contributed to them gaining a better understanding of how to improve their delivery, a point on which interpreting trainers often focus: In his handbook for interpreting students, Gillies (2013) starts his chapters on consecutive and on simultaneous interpreting with “delivery,”. The codependency created by the knowledge that a fellow interpreter is listening and using your performance as a source is clearly considered to add to the students’ learning process, as one of the participants stated during the interview:

Having the pressure often helps me to improve. Often you can tell the people are listening to you because they turn around and stare, which occasionally can be off-putting at the beginning when someone is listening, but I really think it helps you to improve your performance. For example, if someone is listening, I really try to finish off my sentences, which I should be doing anyway, but if you don’t think they are listening, it’s very easy just to leave it, so I try to finish off my sentences. (Participant 5)

Students are faced with RI for the first time during these mini-conferences, so this practice is new to them. They have described it as overwhelming and somewhat frustrating at first, but thrilling, exciting and useful as they progress further into their training. When asked about their first impressions after being a user of RI, participants highlighted the challenge represented by this practice. They felt it had an impact on their usual decalage; they had



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to rely on peers and the quality of the relay might vary. It also required added focus to ensure that the content remained coherent and clear.

4.3. Research Question 2

Participants were invited to reflect on the impact RI can have in terms of communication and professional practice, using two opposing statements: “Relay interpreting facilitates communication” and “Relay interpreting hinders communication”. Although other factors affect interpreting performance, for the purpose of this study, students were invited to reflect on this specific practice. By presenting them with two statements similar in form but opposite in content, the aim was to make students consider this activity critically. And indeed, answers for each question are not the exact opposite: This formulation led participants to think more critically on the learning benefits of such a practice.

Table 2: Responses to “Relay interpreting facilitates communication” and “Relay interpreting hinders communication” (n = 43).

Response	Relay interpreting facilitates communication		Relay interpreting hinders communication	
	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Strongly agree	32.56	14	0	0
Partially agree	30.23	13	27.9	12
Neither agree nor disagree	30.23	13	32.56	14
Partially disagree	4.65	2	18.6	8
Strongly disagree	2.33	1	20.94	9

As stated by Giambagli (1993), RI is increasingly used both on the private market and in international institutions, despite the existing argument for “pure booths” (in which interpreters work solely into their native language), to address financial and practical considerations. As a result, it is legitimate to consider whether relay may impede communication. A range of issues may lead to the detrimental impact of relay on the quality of interpreting: lack of understanding of the message on the part of the relay interpreter, technological issues like the mishandling of interpreting consoles, and poor delivery by the relay interpreter, among others.

In fact, as shown in Table 2, more than 60% of participants agreed that RI facilitates communication. However, when asked to react to the statement “Relay interpreting hinders communication”, only 27.9% agreed (partially or strongly). This led to interesting reflections on the practice during the interviews. Participant 7 explained, “Sometimes, if you get a poor relay, then it hinders the quality of your interpretation and you might have to second-guess the original intent of the speech, but overall I think it facilitates it”. This point was reinforced by Participant 32, who stated, “It depends on the quality of the interpreter. If the interpreter is good,



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there can hardly be any difference. When the interpreter is not brilliant, then it can hinder interpreting”. These observations mirror what Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) stressed: Depending upon a pivot puts the interpreter in a situation of dependency, and the challenge can be heightened when the pivot is working into a B language. As Participant 13 stated, “I don’t think the message is as clear and concise if they aren’t native speakers, if they are not too comfy in that language, they stick too close to their A language”. These reflections on the part of students highlight how using relay led them to reflect more critically on their peers’ performance and on strategies to cope when interpreting from a partial or unclear source.

Participants were then invited to reflect on another crucial dimension of professional practice: the quality of interpreting into a B language. This question was motivated the presence of a number of nonnative speakers in the group of participants involved in the study, which meant that interpreters acting as pivot were occasionally working into their B language. Because the use of pivot (including working into their B language) in professional booths is increasing, scholars and professionals alike are considering the issue (e.g., Doempke, 2002). It was therefore relevant to lead students to reflect on the matter and its impact on RI. They were asked to react to the statement “Interpreting into the foreign language means a decrease in quality”. There was no clear consensus on the question amongst participants.

Table 3: Response to “Interpreting into the foreign language means a decrease in quality” (n = 43).

Response	Percentage of respondents	Number of respondents
Strongly agree	4.65	2
Partially agree	39.53	17
Neither nor agree nor disagree	32.56	14
Partially disagree	20.94	9
Strongly disagree	2.32	1

Only 44.18% of participants agreed with this statement while 32.56% remained undecided and 23.26% disagreed altogether. So even though a message reaches the second interpreter through a pivot, less than half of the participants considered that this necessarily meant that elements were lost in translation.

4.4. Interview findings

The matter was explored further during the interviews when participants were asked: “How would you say that interpreting from a “native relay” (i.e., a relay in the native language of the interpreter) differs from a relay provided by someone working into their foreign language?” Based on existing works (e.g., Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989), one would expect students to find working from a pivot who interprets into a B language more challenging than one who works into their A language. We were surprised to discover that several students took the opposite stance, considering that working into their B language was better because they have a larger understanding of the source speech and deliver the meaning in simple terms into their B language, and going as far as suggesting that taking relay from an interpreter working into their B language may in some cases be easier. Participant 2 said, “Sometimes nonnatives make sentences simpler but you get all the info that is perfectly right, if



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the nonnative speaker is very clear and sentences are simpler”. Participant 27 expanded on this idea by saying, “Sometimes it is very good, even when it is not done by a native speaker, because the pace is slower and because of that, they go straight to the point and use less complicated vocabulary”. Backing this argument, another student reflected:

If you interpret into your native tongue, you have a broader vocabulary. That can be a good and a bad thing because you have all the words but you can't figure out which one would be best. Sometimes in your foreign tongue, you just have certain words and it is better to come up with them, because you don't have five synonyms at hand, and into the foreign tongue you may interpret in simpler terms and you may break down the sentence structure and try to construct it in an easier way for your listener. (Participant 23)

These observations, based on ease of use for the pivot and pivot user, contradict Seleskovitch and Lederer's (1989, p. 205) statement that: “The form given to the speech by the pivot working into his B language is necessarily inferior to that of the original”, arguing not on the quality of the language but on the clarity and coherence of the message. It is worth noting, however, that the Participant 23 nuanced their answer, adding, “A strong accent can counter-effect the perceived benefits of a pivot working into his B language”.

However, as shown in Table 3, views were divided. Participant 11 also expressed concerns regarding interpreting into a B language: “Delivery is more stressed into the foreign tongue, they are having to think about what they are reformulating”. Some participants did believe that working into their native tongue is “generally better” (Participants 8, 30 and 31). Working into their A language enabled them to focus on “making the message make sense” (Participant 9), and because they were working into their strongest language, they felt that they generally managed to convey the meaning more clearly. According to Participant 26, “Working into your own language, it flows a lot better, the meaning and sense come across a lot better, it is just generally a better message that you are getting”. Yet there is the issue of comprehension, a matter possibly more significant for less experienced trainees: “Into your native language you provide a smoother, flowed interpretation and that is better for the listener. But you have to understand the original message; you miss nuances” (Participant 28).

One comment shifts the focus to interpreting skills rather than linguistic skills. In the view of Participant 5, “the most important is how good the interpreter is, more than the language”. This point was also stressed by Participant 11, who noted that the quality of the relay is not just down to the quality of the pivot's B language, it “depends on the interpreter” who provides the relay. It therefore appears that, according to participants in this study, taking relay from somebody working into their B language is not necessarily problematic: The clarity of the utterance is more significant than the type of language (A or B) into which the pivot works.

To conclude the interviews, students were asked if the experience of relay had enabled them to consolidate and further their conference interpreting training. All respondents agreed that they had been able to draw lessons from the practice of RI and had applied them to their own interpreting training process. Students stated that they benefited greatly from working with their peers rather than alongside them. One interviewee felt that providing relay encouraged them to perform at their very best:

I know I should always be at my top best performance, but when I am providing relay, it makes me more aware that people are listening, so I try to make it as clear as possible. Maybe I prioritize clarity over content sometimes, and when I am depending on others, some interpreters can be very good, but when they are not so good, sometimes your performance suffers. (Participant 14)

One further comment explores this idea: “[RI] has made me more aware of finishing [my sentences even though it's something I knew [I should do]”. The same participant went on to explain that the added pressure of knowing that someone may be using them as pivot actually encouraged them to continue, when they may have given up in a classroom setting. This point was confirmed by another interviewee:

You are aware that someone is relying on you, so it pushed me a lot more to make sure what I was saying was clear, even though sometimes I did not understand what I was



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listening to, so that it was clear enough for the next person to interpret it into their own language. (Participant 22)

Students proceeded to name a range of skills on which they focused more significantly following the experience of RI: handling decalage, managing gaps, maintaining consistency of delivery and pace, tone, stamina, quality of expression in their A or B language, but also anticipation and preparation. All these elements are an inherent part of conference interpreting training receive, but the experience of relay enhances students' awareness of such skills.

5. Discussion

Based on participants' own words and perceptions, having to both provide relay and depend on peers can make students more focused on improving their interpreting skills and performance. As pure users of simultaneous interpreting in this setting (in the sense that they had no access to the meaning of the original speech), students were able to critically observe their peers' performance. The regular practice of this critical observation enabled them to apply what they had noted to their own practice in turn: They became more acutely aware of the importance of providing coherent, complete and intelligible interpreting. Such behavior contributes to creating a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The feed provided by interpreting students when they are in the booths is not just a mere class practice anymore; it actually becomes essential, because multilingual communication cannot work without reliable interpreting. Students saw this dimension of challenge, which mirrors the situation in professional booths (Giambagli, 1993), as highly motivating and valuable, despite the added pressure. It made their practice much more authentic and meaningful than in a standard single language combination classroom setting, as highlighted by Participant 19: "You feel that people need to listen to you, so you need to keep going like in a professional setting, because it's hard to get that across in classes, but in a mini-conference people need to listen to you". This statement confirms the benefits of peer-supported work in a multilingual classroom (Sachtleben, 2015), and overcomes one of the issues Sachtleben highlights, because the setting means that students must pair up with different peers depending on the language used, thus fostering a deeper and more inclusive cooperation.

Relay interpreting also leads students to reflect more on their own performance:

As an interpreter, it is hard because you kind of see the thought process of the person you are interpreting from, so when you hear them say something that does not sound right in English, your initial thought is, you think, 'oh wait, I would say something like that too'. Therefore, it can be a good way to try and note your own faults and improve in that way. (Participant 29)

This response acknowledges the benefits of co-participation and the significance of being part of a community of practice (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991, on legitimate peripheral participation); it directly informs this respondent's self-analysis and ultimately their own professional practice. It also addresses the need to develop good monitoring skills for interpreting practice (Sawyer, 1994). The collaborative nature of the exercise, during which all students were at one point a source or a user of relay, made them particularly attentive and empathetic towards their colleagues.

Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 93) established that "there are strong goals for learning because learners, as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned". The situated learning experience described in this article, achieved this, as illustrated by the comment of a participant, who subsequently started to reflect upon what constitutes good interpreting in the light of a relay situation:

By understanding how difficult it can be to provide relay, you try to make the language you are working into as accessible and easy to use as possible rather than word choices. That has affected my way of interpreting in terms of making the message as clear as



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possible. When you are working from relay, you don't want a flowery and convoluted language. You just want a clear, calm delivery so that you can work with this and that has affected how I try and deliver my interpreting. (Participant 13)

Peripheral participation and practice has, in this case, led the student to question what constitutes good quality interpreting, thus starting the reflexive stage of the situated learning approach, which is further explored in the Translation and Interpreting studies lectures and tutorials followed by MA (undergraduate) and MSc (postgraduate masters) students.

Another crucial benefit of this experience was its impact on motivation and peer emulation, as illustrated for instance by this comment:

When I listen to my colleagues, if they are well spoken or they enunciate well, it encourages me to continue with that same emphasis in my speech production so I can learn from my peers, and it is nice to see what level everyone is working at [...] Listening to my peers really pushes me along. (Participant 27)

It also appears to have fostered more active peer support: As part of the experiment, students were encouraged, but not required, to pair up (one student around the table with one student in a booth) and give each other feedback. Students saw clear benefits to the exercise and followed through. Participant 21 noted, "I find it helpful to get feedback from people listening to me, so I learnt a lot about the way I speak".

Not all students focused solely on the challenges presented by RI. Several comments from participants reinforce Lave and Wenger's (1991) view that "learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind", as summarized by Hanks (1991, p.15). Participant 19 stated that "[RI is] quite useful because by the time the message gets to you, it is concise, all the extra bits have been cut out, usually quite well formed". The practice of RI over several weeks during mini-conferences also helped students take stock of their own progression:

[RI was] quite difficult at the beginning when we were not as comfortable and it was strange to listen to broken up sentences but as time went on, it was easier to then translate them into another language because the person had summed up what other people were saying in quite good English so it was quite concise and seemed to flow nicely. (Participant 22)

RI also enables students to engage with the cognitive apprenticeship model described by Brown et al. (1989, p. 40), as students "must recognize and resolve the ill-defined problems that issue out of authentic activity". This genuine setting leads students to fully engage with the professional practice they are aiming for; as Participant 16 stated, "Knowing that other people were relying upon your interpretation shows you how essential communication is". Such an experiment addresses the limits of a classroom set-up, where the lecturer cannot be listening to each student at all times, and where each user (lecturer or fellow student) has a full understanding of both languages.

The experience of RI also leads students to reflect upon a key debate in the profession, that of the quality of interpreting into A and B languages, as considered by Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) and by AIIC (1970, 1991). Interestingly, students do in fact appear to follow the same reasoning as Giambagli (1993), who concluded:

The initial condition must be first and foremost that the ideas constituting the core of the message be formulated in an absolutely perfectly clear way; since relay is, all things considered, a linguistic filter, complex structures, flowery language, extravagant formulations, sentences left on hold, blanks or uncertainty in the tone are not acceptable (p. 83; authors' translation).

This also reflects the conclusions of Gile (2005) on directionality: Historically, it was believed in "Western" interpreting circles that interpreting into an A language was the best professional practice, but Gile noted that views are changing, or at least that the practice of working into one's B language is being considered and that evidence shows it is not necessarily detrimental to the quality of the output. Students' views in the current study may have been divided, but having approached the issue from the perspective of a relay user or provider led them to consider the functional dimension of RI. Their training in RI led them to reflect on the issue of communication,



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over the concept of near-perfect interpreting, and this reflective process mirrors emerging scholarly views on the matter.

However, this study focused on two cohorts, providing a sample of only 43 participants in total, and benefits were recorded solely from the students' perspectives. Further data collection across other cohorts and specific performance analysis is needed to establish whether the use of RI as part of the training process consistently and significantly improves students' actual interpreting performance.

6. Conclusions

This study, carried out over 2 years with two cohorts of MA and Masters students training as conference interpreters, highlights a number of valuable aspects of the practice of RI as part of the learning process. As initially anticipated, there were clear learning benefits: Using a situated learning experience requires students to cooperate actively to co-construct learning, leading to a heightened awareness of good professional practice and strategies. The results confirm findings from Perez and Wilson's (2011) study on public service interpreting training strategies: "During the training they [students] have to learn not only from immersion in authentic professional situations followed by self-reflection/analysis, but also from a process of collective reflection—with multiple and reciprocal feedback—involving all those taking part in the taught sessions" (p. 251).

The practice of RI also led students to consider the quality of interpreting when working into one's B language, the challenges it presents, and, ultimately, what constitutes a good quality simultaneous interpreting performance. Students learn how to formulate the message in the target language with two types of users in mind: the audience, so direct, pure users, but also colleagues who are listening to their interpreting to take relay and interpret the message for further pure users in the audience who have a different mother tongue.

The weekly multilingual mini-conferences also led students to engage more actively and systematically in peer feedback on top of the de facto cooperation inherent to the practice of RI. A number of students noted that practicing relay from or for peers who had a different language combination, and with whom they would not otherwise have cooperated, reminded them that they were all trainee interpreters, each experiencing challenges. The benefits of this collegial dimension in terms of motivation would be worth exploring further so as to analyze the benefits of actively becoming part of a community of practice. Further studies are needed to establish the actual interpreting performance improvement when trainee interpreters are aware that they are being used as pivot, and the actual impact of taking relay from a pivot working into their A or B language.

Integrating the practice of RI, as used by professional interpreters in multilingual conferences into the training of conference interpreters has a notable and positive impact on their learning process, and further situated learning experiences can be derived from this model to foster a better understanding of professional practice and performance in training programs. This study opens new avenues of research to expand on RI in conference interpreting training settings, such as using RI to consolidate students' confidence and the quality of students' interpreting into their B language following the experience of using a pivot.

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