

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

DESIGNING MATERIALS TO ASSIST ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS IN INTERPRETING COURSES

NGO PHUONG ANH* - NGO PHUONG ANH** -

NGUYEN THUY LINH***

ABSTRACT: Translating and interpreting language can be challenging due to time constraints and the highly specialized nature of the information. Taking into account the obstacles faced by university students who are undertaking the Translation and Interpretation module, we have designed a set of supplementary materials to aid their studies. In order to determine the efficacy of the supplementary documents, we conducted a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews accordingly to explore students' overall impression about the materials given. Our results demonstrated that the materials we developed had been relevant and covered the essential areas of knowledge.

KEY WORDS: translation; interpretation; listening skills; material development; material evaluation.

RECEIVED: MARCH 18th, 2022.EDITED: JUNE 5th, 2022.**1. Introduction**

The study was conducted at a school of foreign languages in a university in Vietnam where Translation and Interpretation is a compulsory module. It was aimed to equip students with interpreting skills. Students can enhance short-term memory, practice consecutive listening skills and reinforce basic translation skills through a number of tasks (i.e., analysing and interpreting phrases, functions and sentences from audio sources such as news, conversations, etc.) with a focus on topics relating to social-economic, cultural, political, environmental, mechanical, technological, etc. issues. From our own observation, numerous difficulties arise throughout the module, including student's inability to comprehend the contents of the recording, or to reproduce an accurate translation. As such, students shall benefit from extra practice to sharpen their spontaneous response in English, which we believe are conducive to speedier and more accurate interpretation.

One solution to the students' learning problems is to give them more exposure to the English language used in the respective topics, which can be done through the development of concise, relevant and diverse supplementary documents. After the designing and compilation step, the supplementary materials were implemented in a pilot involving 3rd and 4th year English-majored students who studied Translation and Interpretation. Following the piloting, the materials were evaluated by the students.

The aim of materials evaluation in this study is to find out the appropriateness and effectiveness of the supplementary materials. Besides, the strengths and weaknesses of these materials are also raised in the study through feedback of participants. To address the aims, three research questions were set out as follows: 1.Are the supplementary materials relevant to the learners' needs?; 2.What are the strengths and limitations of the supplementary materials as reported by the learners?

2. Literature review

This section reviews theories which form the foundation of this research, beginning with existing literature of needs analysis, followed by principles for material development as well as criteria for material evaluation. Having considered various theories, Nation's (1993) principles and Hutchinson and Waters's (1987) criteria are used for developing the materials in this study.

(a) Needs analysis

According to Brown (1995), needs analysis is the activity of collecting information of learners in a certain group in order to design a curriculum by course designers. Additionally, Richards and Platt (1992) point out that needs analysis makes reference to the "process of determining the needs for which a learner or a group of learners acquires a language and arranges the needs according to priorities" (p.242). Needs analysis assumes a significant part as a tool for course designers to characterize language skills according to the needs of learners. The needs analysis makes teaching and learning

* Dr; Hanoi University of Science and Technology; Email: Anh.ngophuong@hust.edu.vn

** Hanoi university of Foreign Trade; Email: phuonganhhcorn@gmail.com

*** Hanoi university of Science and Technology; Email: linh.nt026@gmail.com

more explicit and oriented that should be conducted throughout the course with the aim of assessing the suitability of the course for the learner's needs.

(i) Principles for materials development

The supplementary materials in this study were designed based on Nation (1993)'s principles. Firstly, a language course should repeat words as frequently as possible in order to familiarize those words to students. Secondly, the items in a language course should be arranged so that items learned together have a positive effect on one another to avoid interference. Thirdly, learners should have repeated exposure to a variety of contexts that enable them to retrieve and focus on items they want to practice. The fourth principle dictates that a language course should train learners to approach a new language and to monitor and be in control of their learning process in order to become effective and independent learners. More importantly, the learners should show an interest in and be enthusiastic about learning the language, and they should come to value this learning. Lastly, as much time as possible should be dedicated to using and focusing on the language learned.

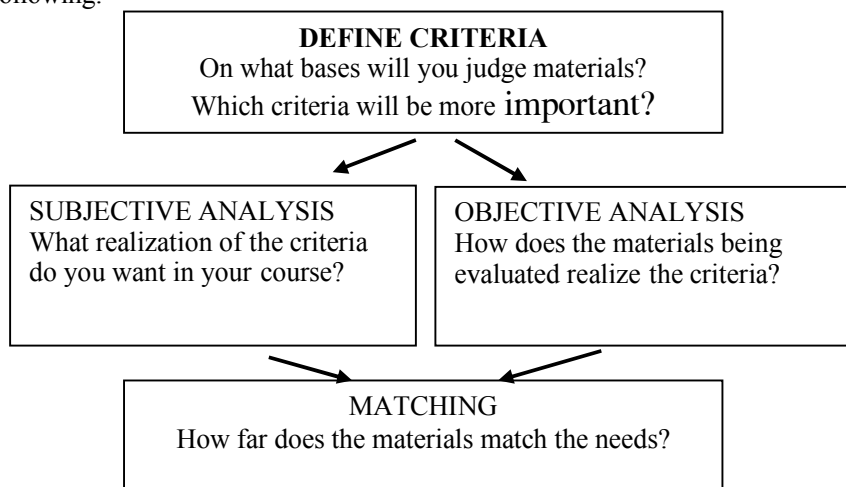
(ii) Materials evaluation

- Purpose of materials evaluation:

Material evaluation can be defined as the process of comparing and contrasting with the previous materials. There are a wide range of reasons for evaluating the materials. According to Cunningsworth (1995), teachers can adopt the materials after evaluating its strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, materials evaluation can help designers determine whether it should be used in the future and how it needs to be revised for the times [Robinson, 1991].

- Criteria for material evaluation by Hutchinson and Waters (1987)

A model for the assessment of linguistic instructing materials is offered by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as following:



The given diagram shows a step by step procedure of evaluating materials. Firstly, it forms some certain criteria fitting the aims of the study based on the context. The next step is to analyze data subjectively and objectively. Some requirements to assess the materials are analyzed to give out the subjective review. On the other hand, the researcher selects some criteria to check the materials out biasedly. The assessment process ends with the matching section. The comparison of two analyses is done with the aim of working out the needs.

Criteria offered by Hutchinson and Waters (1987):

Audience: A few inquiries identified with data about the learners like their age, sex, ethnicity, education or job profession, language foundation, and hobbies are made and delivered.

Objective: the purpose of the materials is to assist students with building up certain language abilities and work or to improve the language in general. In any language course, it is important to inspect whether the materials can fulfill the points and the goals of the course or not.

Content: it might be composed of several items such as language depiction, language point, macro-abilities and their ratio, micro-skills, categories, subject matter areas, topics, arrangement through the course, arrangement within the course unit, content series, content series within the course unit, and so on in order to examine whether these aforementioned things in the materials are able to fulfil demands which are set up from the examination of the students' requirements and the course's objective.

Methodology: it alludes to learning speculations on which the course is based, the perspectives to or the assumptions for the students about learning English, sort of activities and tasks, instructing and learning strategies utilized, instructing helps, teaching direction required and the adaptability of the materials to suit in various educating settings.

3. Methodology

In this section, the researchers discuss the methodology that guides this study. Initially, research questions will be presented, followed by the research approach. Subsequently, there will be a brief description of the target population and sampling method preparation before collecting data will also be detailed with the construction of the materials. Another focus is data collection procedure and data analysis.

3.1. Research approach

In this research, the mixed-methods approach is used as an effective research approach to extract information from many aspects. This approach is used to generalize results from a sample to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon [Tashakkori & Teddie, 1998].

The quantitative method would be the most appropriate approach as it tends to put emphasis on description, explanation or analysis of trending [Creswell, 2012]. Besides, this approach included the reliability and objectivity of the analyzed data, as the data was quantified and the result would be presented statistically [Qualitative and Quantitative Research", 2012; Queiros, Faria & Almerida, 2017]. Therefore, this method is valuable for analyzing learner feedback and evaluating the effectiveness of these supplementary materials.

However, the researchers found that the quantitative research did not provide detailed participant responses owing to the lack of research-participant interaction, which might be an obstacle for the researcher to explain clearly and thoroughly the results of the study [Kelley, Brown & Sitzia, 2003]. Therefore, the consideration of further qualitative approach is essential for deeply analyzing the research findings.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), qualitative methods are often used for the purpose of collecting and analyzing non-statistic data through in-depth interviews and observations. This method directed researchers to focus on collecting data related to participants' nature and experiences, in particular, this method allowing them to "extract" the feelings and thoughts of the participants instead of the numbers listed on the paper.

3.2. Population and sampling

The participants of the research include all students who have experienced the Translation and Interpretation module at the school of foreign languages. As they have studied this subject, they would be credible informants of the research, since they should be aware of their own needs of a means (in this case, the supplementary materials) to improve their skills and background knowledge regarding this field.

With the evaluation of the materials set forth as objectives of this research, the effectiveness of the website in supporting the students' study of Interpretation in particular and the features of the materials were developed based on the general opinions of all the students who have learnt this subject, the researcher has chosen simple random sampling as the technique to conduct the survey.

With this sampling, the population would have an equal chance to be chosen (Visser et al., 2013), meaning that all the students having studied this subject were welcomed to experience the supplementary materials then share their ideas and opinions about the materials by completing questionnaire surveys. This helped the researcher to get all of the possible ideas to have an overall look at the potential of the materials. In addition, this sampling will help the researcher avoid biases, an important issue in the research process [Alvi, 2016].

3.3. Preparation before data collection process: Development of the supplementary materials

Since this study is intended to get learners' feedback on the supplementary materials, it is a prerequisite requirement that the materials have to be developed before collecting data. The features and content in the materials are designed in tandem with the rules mentioned in the literature review, which means that the researchers have based on those rules to find the suitable learning resources, thereby designing the exercises and activities that interest learners in the interpreting practice.

- Syllabus:

According to Morrow (2004), an over structure will frequently be gotten from the syllabus given or recommended by the Ministry of Education or by some international body or by the institution. herefore, this tentative syllabus below is designed based on that of the TI module taught at the school. This syllabus also adds some new types of exercises with the aim of helping learners enjoy the subject in the most effective way. This section is designed based on Nation's (1993) principle, which means that the course is needed to show learners how the learning process will unfold which makes learners become more active and effective in their learning.

- Topics:

It can be noticeable that the whole syllabus cover four main topics, namely sociocultural issues, environment, economy and technology, all of which is presented in the Translation and Interpretation module at the school, creating a close approach to learners, especially the third-year and fourth-year students. Besides, topics and types of exercises are clearly arranged, creating a positive influence on learners that is developed in line with the principle of Nation (1993) for course development. In addition, the researchers also designed the learning instruction part to guide learners, thereby they can easily follow and use the material in the most convenient way. Besides, the materials are closely linked to the learner's needs, time and available resources as well as language items, skills and strategies.

- Main types of exercises

Listening comprehension activities are designed with the aim of creating excitement for learners. The sources of this section is taken from some academic websites such as *English listening skills practice* or *Listening - Upper intermediate by British Council*, etc., boosting the listening comprehension skills for learners with a variety of tasks. In terms of *Cloze listening* and *Dictogloss exercises*, the researchers take advantage of some reliable sources like *Voice of America (VOA)*, *Voice of Vietnamese (VOV)* or some official channels on Youtube. Accordingly, these recordings are edited by an application named *Audacity*. Regarding the *Consecutive listening* section, the exercises are developed with detailed parts like glossary or suggested interpretations.

3.4. Data collection procedure

Stage 1: Inviting the population to use the supplementary materials

The researchers made an invitation to the third-year and fourth-year students of the university under research to use the supplementary materials by sending them a Google Drive link. They were able to access all the materials including audio files and documents. After two weeks of experience, the researchers would conduct a survey.

Stage 2: Designing questionnaire survey and interview question

Questionnaire and interview questions in this study are designed based on the thesis of Mai, Thi Huong Lan (2018) due its matching aims.

The research designed a questionnaire survey with three sections including background information, evaluation of supplementary materials and suggestions. Each part contains different statements with likert scale rating from 1 to 5 in which 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - partly agree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree for evaluating the opinion about the supplementary materials. At the end of the questionnaire, an open-ended question was included to get further opinions of the participants.

There are 11 open-ended questions that are drawn to deeply get learner's opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the supplementary materials. Besides, some recommendations are concluded through two last questions.

Stage 3: Conducting the survey

Having experienced the supplementary materials, the participants are asked to complete the questionnaire survey which was conducted via Google Form.

7 participants were randomly chosen to take part in in-depth interviews which take around 7 minutes each person. They are all third-year students who have been studying Translation and Interpretation 1 and 2. Therefore, the collected responses would be highly realistic and reliable.

3.5. Data analysis

After having obtained all the necessary data from the participants, the researchers analyzed data through the use of SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences) regarding questionnaire surveys. In terms of interview analysis, the researchers transcribed it from recordings to text and summed up all the outstanding features reported.

4. Research findings

This section presents the findings by analysing the questionnaire results from students. The questionnaire comprises 8 questions, divided into three sections. The first section is about students' background information, the second concerns the evaluation of the supplementary materials. The final section attempts to gauge the suggestions on how to improve the materials.

- *Students' motivation to do the supplementary materials*: The aim of this question is to find out the reason behind students' decision to do the assigned materials. Evidently, the majority of students did the exercises because they want to improve their scores in the module and to expand their listening skills for future career prospects. Only a minority stated that they were interested in the module.

- *Students' overall impression about the materials*: From the results, students generally have a favorable opinion regarding the materials given. The results also indicate that "Improvements in interpretation sub-skills" was the most agreed item. Students also claimed that the materials helped them practice consecutive listening in an effective way.

- *Students' opinions about the topics covered in the materials*: Overall, students all concur that the topics are diverse, updated and logically arranged. It seems not all students think the language focus provided can be applied in everyday situations.

- *Students' opinions about the usefulness of the materials*

Topic	Students' evaluation				
	Very useful	Useful	Normal	Not very useful	Unuseful
Social cultural issues	30%	66%	4%	x	x
Environment	30.3%	52.5%	17.20%	x	x
Economics	36.4%	51.5%	11.10%	1%	x
Technology	39.4%	52.5%	7.10%	1%	x

Students' evaluation of the materials' usefulness

The majority of the surveyed students found all topics useful. Exercises related to socio cultural issues received the most support (66%). Technology recorded the most varied responses with a remarkable 39.4% found this topic "very useful" while around 8% had a low opinion about the content of this topic. More than half of the students found the topics Economics and Environment useful. Over 10% were indifferent about these two topics and 1% found the knowledge from the Economics topics not very useful.

- *Students' opinions about the grammar & vocabulary elements of the materials* : For the most part, students all appreciated the practicality and the range of the vocabulary and grammar supplied.

- *Students' opinions about the exercises and activities in the materials*: Students were most satisfied with the diversity of the tasks given, as well as the clarity in the instructions for these tasks. Opinions vary regarding whether the exercises are interesting.

- *Students' opinions of the difficulty of the activities/ exercises in the materials*



The overall impression from students is that the exercises are difficult, 57.6% of the surveyed students thought so, and 15.2% thought they were “very difficult”. A minority of 11.1% did not have any problems with the tasks and 16.2% were indifferent. Listening comprehension and consecutive listening practice were considered the two most difficult tasks by the students, while cloze listening was seen as the most straightforward.

- *The findings related to suggestions for materials improvement (topics, types of tasks, audio quality, etc.):* Suggestions from the questionnaire and the interview can be summarized as follows

+ *Topics:* 1/Include more technical and specialized topics reflective of THE SCHOOL’s curriculum (e.g: mechanics/ electronics/ telecommunications); 2/Add more general topics (e.g: traffic, law, literature, science fiction) to diversify listeners’ knowledge; 3/Include topic-related reading passages to activate background knowledge;

+ *Vocabulary & Grammar:* Feature more technical terms and specialized vocabulary; Add practice exercises to revise words & phrases;

+ *Exercise:* Tasks should be arranged according to difficulty so that students can improve their levels in a more systematic way; Include more tasks in the dictogloss section; Diversify tasks in the Cloze listening section; Increase the difficulty of the Gap-filling exercises (phrases & collocations instead of one-word gaps); The content in the Dictogloss section should come from more sources (TED Talks);

+ *Audio:* Audio playback speed should be faster to resemble real-life situations; Improve audio quality; Revise the audio files to achieve consistency in speed and quality;

- *Others:* Correct grammar & vocabulary errors in sample translations.

5. Conclusion

The results from questionnaire and interview analysis have shed lights on the answers to the research questions, i.e., they are relevant to the students’ needs, and some strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvements are given. According to the data gathered, the supplementary materials succeed in aiding students in preparation for the Translation and Interpretation module. The highlight of the materials is the 4 topics (Environment, Economics, Sociocultural issues, Technology). Participants found the information from these topics useful, relevant and up-to-date, and they claimed that their knowledge was expanded after doing the exercises in the materials. The vocabulary & grammar provided also help students enhance their interpretation skills, although only slightly. Students benefited from a wide range of tasks with clear instructions, but they thought that listening extracts need to come from more sources. Most students considered the tasks difficult and encountered some challenges in the dictogloss and consecutive listening practice. This gives rise to a need to adjust the tasks in these respective sections so that they are more suitable for the proficiency of the students.

In light of the results, it can be seen that the students find the supplementary materials useful and suitable to their learning needs. Through the findings, our group also realized that there exist several limitations to our study. First, as the participants have pointed out, the number of topics fell short of the syllabus’s requirements, thus necessitating an expansion of a more diverse range of topics with a special focus on those unique to the students (mechanics and information technology). Secondly, the mode of

delivery was outdated, as the listening files were written on a CD while it is more optimal to launch and manage all of the data in an online platform. In the end, our research team hopes that the material can be of use to the students who need them, and can gain not only vocabulary and grammar knowledge, but also practical skills from it.

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Xây dựng tài liệu tự học dịch nói cho sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh

Tóm tắt: Việc dịch và biên dịch ngôn ngữ thường gặp nhiều khó khăn do hạn chế về thời gian và tính chất chuyên môn hóa cao của thông tin. Sau khi xem xét đến những trở ngại mà sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh bậc đại học phải đối mặt khi học phần Biên dịch và Phiên dịch, chúng tôi đã xây dựng một bộ tài liệu bổ sung để hỗ trợ việc học của họ. Để xác định hiệu quả của các tài liệu bổ sung, chúng tôi đã tiến hành khảo sát bằng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn sâu sau đó để khám phá cảm nhận chung của học sinh về các tài liệu được cung cấp. Kết quả của chúng tôi cho thấy rằng các tài liệu chúng tôi phát triển là phù hợp với mục tiêu học phân và nhu cầu của sinh viên; tài liệu cũng bao gồm các lĩnh vực kiến thức thiết yếu.

Từ khóa: dịch; biên dịch; các kỹ năng nghe; đánh giá tài liệu; thiết kế tài liệu.