

Report on the

Edinburgh Interpreting Research Summer School (EIRSS)

Heriot-Watt University, 24–28 June 2013

<http://www.sml.hw.ac.uk/departments/languages-intercultural-studies/edinburgh-interpreting-research-summer-school.htm>

Alenka Morel

PhD Student, Department of Translation Studies

Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

alenka.morel@gmail.com

First research summer school of its kind

The news about Edinburgh Interpreting Research Summer School (EIRSS) immediately got my interest – it seemed for the first time that a summer school on interpreting research alone was to be organised, and the assumption proved right. Whereas many other summer schools focus on translation studies in general and only briefly include interpreting, usually conference interpreting, EIRSS focused especially on interpreting research, including it all: conference, public service and sign language interpreting.

EIRSS was held at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh from 24 to 28 June 2013, organised by Dr Raquel de Pedro Ricoy and Dr Katerina Strani from the Languages and Intercultural Studies (LINCS). 28 participants from 13 countries came from different backgrounds as practitioners, budding researchers – mostly doctoral students – and established scholars, representing thereby a diverse audience for seminars and providing for a broad thought exchange. All that was managed by a whole team of world-renowned interpreting researchers – it was an honour to meet in person the authors of often key bibliographical references. In addition, we had the opportunity to observe and be involved in communication facilitated by both American and British Sign Language interpreters. Experiencing sign language interpreting (SLI) in this context undoubtedly enriched the lessons of EIRSS, especially when both teams were at work (simultaneously!).

Ahead of the full week of seminars, lectures and presentations, scheduled from 9.30 to 17.30 in four 90-minute slots with corresponding breaks, the participants were recommended to study some materials in advance and to prepare a poster presentation on their own research, which was due on the last day.

The last week of June started with a warm welcome by the organisers, Dr Raquel de Pedro and Dr Katerina Strani, introducing the idea behind EIRSS and its so-far unique orientation towards interpreting research, bringing together such a varied group of participants.

Focal point: Methodology

EIRSS continued full steam with Professor Claudia Angelelli's extended seminar on "Research

Design". The three-part seminar introduced work on research design from scratch. Asking the participants to think about their own research interests and hence directing the thoughts of applying the lesson to one's own work, Professor Angelelli first guided us from questions on the area of interest to the research topic. It is vital to pinpoint these questions and answers from the beginning, as it is the research question that defines not only the literature review, but first and foremost the research methods. Illustrating this with her metaphor: have you ever even considered first taking a fork, but then eating chips? Consequently, methodology was introduced, speaking of qualitative, quantitative and interdisciplinary approach, the participants and the researcher's role. Afterwards a more hands-on approach followed with a discussion on critical reading and its transposition into writing.

Methodology was one of the cores of EIRSS, so a whole range of methodological issues was opened throughout the week. Professor Jemina Napier encouraged us with her seminar on "Qualitative Research" to ask general questions with complex answers and to look at the details. It was stressed that while it might be possible that outcomes be applied to other contexts, qualitative research is first and foremost a study and interpretation of one sample that cannot be freely generalised. We examined the practical issues of various research techniques, such as interviews, focus groups, data analysis and case studies, and Professor Napier illustrated them with examples from her extensive practice. In the end, we were cautioned about the main principles regarding methodology: reliability, validity and evidentiary inadequacy – allowing the same results by repetition, measuring the supposed categories and being aware of the evidence.

Stressing the importance of triangulation and applying the "Mixed Methods Research" approach, Professor Napier responded to our wish to hear more about survey-based research within this seminar, so this topic was dealt with in detail: from survey design, content and different question types to sampling and data analysis.

In the seminar on "Quantitative Experimental Research", she covered different aspects of formally measurable data, using descriptive and inferential statistics, and especially how they can be applied in interpreting research. Paying attention to the basic principles of sound experimental design, we looked at different types of experiments, its stages and typical research designs.

Visually comparing a straight road to a jungle path, Dr Svenja Wurm introduced us to "Ethnographic Methods" and prompted us to consider them whenever research interest includes the context. Through immersion and first-hand experience, context is viewed from a range of perspectives, and as opposed to data collection, data generation is applied. Using a combination of methods ethnography benefits from a flexible, inductive research design. In the end, the researcher's responsibility was discussed and the participants were enquired to try out a mini ethnographic task and also stimulated to think about our own research approach.

Dr Marion Winters gave an outline of "Corpus-based Research" and how to use corpora not only in translation but also in interpreting studies. She briefly presented everything from the basics and the tools to pointing at the issues of corpus design.

Focal point: Current Approaches

Together with methodology, current approaches to interpreting research were in the heart of the summer school, and we welcomed talks on contemporary studies from the subfields of interpreting. However, that we should not exceedingly distinguish between different fields of interpreting was the initial idea of Professor Graham Turner's lecture on the "Current Approaches to Research in Sign Language Interpreting". In real life after all, interpreters are rarely working in one field only; sign language interpreting especially is the pioneer due to a stable population, although it is often overlooked, which led to a lively discussion on heritage signing, second-language signers and the influence of spoken language on sign language.

Guest Professor Danile Gile concluded the first day with a lecture on "Current Approaches to Research in Conference Interpreting". He linked the beginnings of interpreting research with its developments and recent trends, while constantly dropping thought-provoking questions and advice for new research, like the role of replications and series, understanding theoretical grounds and the significance of reflection.

The current approaches to research in public service interpreting were left to the lecture by another guest Professor, Cecilia Wadensjö. With interest we listened to a talk on "The Shaping of Gorbachov: on framing and interpreter-mediated interaction", with the help of which Professor Wadensjö presented conversation analysis, its application and research findings.

Various practicalities

In addition to the core topics, we could benefit from seminars on other significant parts of interpreting research. Catherine Ure broadened the perspective on literature search, which is the basis of a successful literature review. A systematic approach to literature search as an iterative process was presented, from finding resources to evaluating them and finally organising and recording it. Ure stressed the need to keeping up to date, warned of internet and proposed some reference management resources to help with the whole process, such as EndNote(Web) and RefWorks, while the participants reported on their experiences with note-taking software like Evernote, OneNote, Scrivener and PaperdApp.

Since "No research is an island", as Dr Katerina Strani fittingly introduced her seminar, writing a literature review is the starting point of every research writing to offer the wider picture first and contextualise the next piece in the jigsaw. Dr Strani pointed to the difference between a literature review for a PhD or an academic paper, presented the stages and structuring of a review. Taking notes, critical reading and writing were discussed and examples analysed to show differences between legitimate paraphrases, summarisations, etc., in order to show through a review the awareness of the field.

And how to get more people to read (and find first) your writings? Linda Kerr informed us about "Maximising the Impact of your Research Publications". Not only raising awareness

about different types of impact, but also of different channels available to us was what she emphasized in this seminar.

As research is often an inherent part of greater plans, Professors Isabelle Perez, Christine Wilson and Ursula Böser shared their experiences with “EU-Funded Research Projects – Case Studies”. After shortly presenting some projects, very valuable information on the practical aspects were discussed, especially regarding the application process, such as the time and support necessary for success, the research scope and the financial side.

Meanwhile, we were also reminded of empowering research: Professor Graham Turner used his seminar “Working with industry and communities” to encourage us to ask ourselves how to bring a meaningful contribution to others. Three points were put forward: firstly, treating people as human beings and not mere objects, secondly, addressing the issues of subjects, relating them thus to the real world, thereby bringing a contribution to the society, and finally sharing knowledge, also by finding new ways of expressing ideas.

Exchange of ideas

Our ideas continuously had the chance to come forward as the debate was always open to participants: to add own experiences and collect the knowledge under question. Moreover, all seminars supplied such an abundance of topics that discussions in class were constantly continued during breaks and in the evenings. But the last day in particular was reserved for participants’ presentations and everyone attending used a chance to showcase their work: a variety of topics was spoken about, some of the research already well established, other still in its early stages or considered about. I think I can speak for all by saying that we could benefit immensely from feedback by the experts who took time and energy to listen closely, make suggestions, to give advice and encouragement.

All in all, Edinburgh Interpreting Research Summer School proved a total success to my mind and an asset to the field of interpreting studies research, especially for young scholars still finding our way through the network of interpreting studies.

Personal benefits

For myself, I know that I have gained so much, and more from EIRSS. From the theoretical point of view, I could review my current knowledge, while it opened my eyes to some new horizons, cleared some points and found more depth in others. In terms of practical application, I benefited greatly from discussing my work, getting feedback and listening to thoughts both from the professors as well as from colleagues from a neutral, uninvolved position. This gave me valuable suggestions for the remaining work and helped me to re-focus my research, all of which I am deeply grateful for. Last but not least, participation at the EIRSS meant meeting both renowned academics and young colleagues from the field, tying new bonds and realising afresh how rich the interpreting studies really are and how we can all make our contribution to its field.