Professional development needs for interpreters and translation as a course in secondary schools

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Introduction
The problem of communication for speakers of Indigenous languages in Australian courts has long been recognised (Liberman 1981; Cooke 1998). The need for competent court interpreters has been emphasised in many discussions in recent years and particularly at the first Language and the Law Conference in Darwin in 2012.

At the current time there are few opportunities in the Northern Territory for interpreters of Indigenous languages to gain the training that they need to become fully competent professionals. Most interpreters of Indigenous languages work at the paraprofessional level and none are trained as specialist legal interpreters. Existing agencies and courses have not been able to give students a thorough grounding in language comparison and translation practice necessary for court interpreting.

This project is an outcome of discussions that were held at the National Interpreters workshop in June 2015. The workshop was facilitated by the National Accreditation Authority for Translating and Interpreting (NAATI) and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) with the assistance of the Commonwealth. Translation training in Northern Territory secondary schools was one of the proposals which was put forward at the workshop. This proposal was discussed further at the Language and the Law 2 Conference in Darwin in August 2015 as part of the presentation on forensic linguistics by Charles Darwin University. In this report I make the case for teaching translation as a secondary school subject.

Human rights and interpreting
The need and right to an interpreter are part of Australia’s International Human Rights obligations which are found in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. The right upon arrest to be informed in a language that one understands of the reasons for their arrest and any charges laid against them, the right to communicate with counsel, the right to the free assistance of an interpreter if one cannot understand or speak the language used in court in criminal proceedings.
Defendants have the right to equality before courts and tribunals and the right to the equal protection of the law. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007* recognises rights for first peoples to maintain their languages, including rights for Indigenous peoples to understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings.

**The complexity of translation**

The problems of literal translation have long been recognised by the courts. While it is often assumed by monolinguals that texts may be translated exactly, Armstrong (2005) explains how difficult this is in reality. Long periods of training are required to train interpreters and translators adequately so that they are able to translate the meaning from the source language to the target language. The process of becoming a competent interpreter can take many years, even for a person who is already bilingual. Part of the problem has been lack of confidence through a lack of training and experience in court work. Training in language comparison and learning the skill of translating needs to be taught explicitly and thoroughly so that the learner is able to recognise word meanings, metaphors, idioms and other complex constructions in the source language and to translate them accurately into the target language. As Laster and Taylor (1994) say of interpreters that it is ‘timely and advisable to abandon the conception of them as interpreting conduits.’ Instead, interpreters should be treated as professionals and as experts. Recognition of the difficulty and responsibility of their role involves better training and support of interpreters through a lengthy and intensive period of training.

**A recent case of failure in translation**

The amount of time required to train interpreters and translators has often been underestimated by those who engage interpreters as shown by recent court cases such as the Gibson Case, *The State of Western Australia -v-GIBSON [2014] WASC 240*. The case against Gibson failed because the Western Australian Police failed to use an interpreter to interpret the Police Caution to the prisoner in a language which he could understand.

There were also difficulties in the translation of the police record of interview. The videotape was translated in a hurried way by an interpreter who was not trained as a translator. In addition the translator was a speaker of Pitjantjatjara, a language which is significantly different from Pintupi, the language of the defendant. While the legal issues were ultimately decided by the court, the communication issues have not been adequately dealt with and the failures in the system will occur
again unless there is a significant improvement in the professionalism of interpreters. Retrials are costly and involve lengthy proceedings which could have been avoided if the Prosecution had engaged the services of an interpreter.

**Building on existing capacities**

Many speakers of Aboriginal languages in schools are already able to translate between their own languages and English. As they are already bilingual, trilingual or multilingual, they have a ‘comparative advantage’ in linguistic awareness over English monolinguals for interpreting and translating jobs. Translation training would enhance build on their existing capacity and further develop their skills and employability in the language sector. Comparing languages and determining how particular words, phrases and sentences can be translated would enhance understanding of learner’s own languages and would also lead to an enhanced understanding of English. Early training in language comparison would facilitate employment pathways in the language industry.

There has been significant language work in the Northern Territory in recent decades. The Bilingual Programs and Language and Culture programs have taught Aboriginal languages at primary schools in the Northern Territory since the 1970s. Many Indigenous language speakers have been trained through Batchelor Institute and the Education Department. The Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) has published Aboriginal language dictionaries and Picture Dictionaries in twelve languages and there is a large amount of written material available in the languages of Central Australia. In addition, there have been efforts made to train Indigenous language speakers in translation. The Certificate in Translation course was developed by the Australian Society of Indigenous Languages (AuSIL) which has trained a number of adults as translators in the Northern Territory.

**Career pathways in the language industry**

There are significant opportunities for employment in the language sector for which training in translation is critical. In 2015 there are approximately 60,000 people speaking an Indigenous language at home. Over 36,000 hours of interpreting occur annually, nearly 50% by NAATI accredited paraprofessionals. There is a vibrant Indigenous broadcasting sector of around $21 million. Language centres funding is around $10 million.

Translation training can lead to a number of career options as interpreters, translators, language teachers, classroom teachers, health workers, art centre workers and cultural advisers. The ‘Language Industry’ consists of people who work in Language Centres, Aboriginal Interpreter Service,
the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), Alice Springs Hospital, Centrelink and a large number of other Aboriginal organisations in Central Australia for which the ability to interpret is critical.

**Prospects**

The opportunity to create a translation course for delivery in 2016 has been explored by the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Alice Springs Languages Centre. The course would extend the existing work that has been done in teaching the Arrernte language in schools and would teach translation through the learner’s existing knowledge of Arrernte and other Central Australian languages.

**Conclusion**

A translation course would support Aboriginal languages and lead to Language Development and the use of Aboriginal languages more widely. It would respect and support the learner’s use of their home language and build their confidence in translating and interpreting. A translation course would also potentially lead to employment opportunities and the development of employment pathways in the language industry.

**References**


