

Chapter 4

Conceptualizing and Operationalizing a Formative Assessment Model for English–Chinese Consecutive Interpreting: A Case Study in an Undergraduate Interpreting Course

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ABSTRACT

Formative assessment has been increasingly used by interpreter trainers and educators to promote student learning. Different forms of formative assessment have been practiced and reported in interpreting literature. However, a critical review of current practices reported in literature suggests that a longitudinally designed formative assessment model that harnesses the synergistic potential of self, peer, and teacher assessment seems to be lacking. This chapter therefore aims to provide a detailed account of how an inclusive formative assessment model was conceptualized and operationalized for an undergraduate-level English-Chinese consecutive interpreting course and how students and the teacher perceived the assessment model. Based on the students' evaluation and the teacher's reflection, the chapter highlights good practices that contribute to effective formative assessment, discusses potential problems, proposes possible solutions, and suggests future trends in implementing and researching formative assessment in interpreter training and education.

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INTRODUCTION

Testing and assessment play an important role in interpreter education. Previous literature has documented how potential candidates for a given interpreting program could be tested and selected in an admission test (e.g., Russo, 2014); how formative assessment could be conducted to diagnose strengths and weaknesses of student interpreters (e.g., Lee, 2016), as well as how trainees could be tested so as to exit a program (e.g., Sawyer 2004) and be certified as junior professional interpreters (e.g., Han & Slatyer, 2016). To some extent, admission testing functions as a gate-keeping mechanism for interpreting programs, while exit testing aims to ascertain the achievement of trainee interpreters and evaluate their job readiness for the interpreting market. Both testing practices serve a regulatory purpose, controlling accessibility to either educational resources or the interpreting market. Contrary to admission and exit testing, formative assessment is intended to provide feedback on students' performance to improve and accelerate learning (Sadler, 1998). Over the years, the value of formative assessment has been increasingly recognized by interpreter trainers and educators, and different forms of formative assessment have thus been trialled in interpreter training programs. For instance, self-assessment is generally believed to help student interpreters develop reflective thinking and foster learner autonomy (Witter-Merithew, Taylor, & Johnson, 2001). As such, many interpreting researchers regard self-assessment as an integral part in interpreter education (Iaroslavski, 2011; Sandrelli, 2015). Peer assessment is also valued as an important form of formative assessment and is practiced in interpreting courses (Lee, 2016; Lim, 2013). Despite the growing recognition and practice of formative assessment in the interpreting classroom, it seems that few researchers have attempted to design a formative assessment model that is inclusive of self, peer and teacher assessment (see otherwise Fowler, 2007), that is implemented on a regular basis throughout an academic semester, and that is subject to both students' and teacher's evaluation. Against this background, the present chapter aims to provide a detailed account of how a formative assessment model was conceptualized and operationalized for an undergraduate-level English-Chinese consecutive interpreting course, and how students and the teacher perceived the assessment model.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This section provides a brief theoretical review of formative assessment. It is based on the literature of higher education. Particularly, definitions of formative assessment are provided, its key characteristics highlighted, and implementation strategies discussed. In the 1960s, Scriven (1967) first used the term "formative evaluation", but its usage was primarily related to the improvement of curriculum. It was Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971) that first used "formative evaluation" in connection with promoting student learning through assessment. Bell and Cowie (2001, p. 537) define formative assessment as "the process used by teachers and students to recognise and respond to student learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning." Bell and Cowie's definition brings to the fore five characteristics of formative assessment that set it apart from other types of assessment (e.g., summative assessment). The first characteristic is that formative assessment is an on-going and progressive process, not a one-off and static activity. In this sense, (planned or unplanned) formative assessment needs to be carried out longitudinally over an extended period of time. Secondly, formative assessment happens during the process of learning, not *before* or *after* learning. This characteristic distinguishes formative assessment from placement assessment (conducted before actual learning) and summative assessment (conducted at

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