

Institution: University of Surrey		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Transforming intercultural learning and AI technologies through a language led approach		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Doris Dippold	Senior Lecturer in Intercultural Communication	September 2008 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: March 2019 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The dynamics of interpersonal conversation are frequently undervalued factors in intercultural communication training and commercial communication tools. While most intercultural training approaches rely on national stereotypes and outwardly visible features of culture, Dr Doris Dippold's <i>FutureLearn</i> Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) focuses on the linguistic dimension. Impact has been realised through the use of these concepts to underpin the design and delivery of intercultural training curricula by intercultural coaches. Professionals working across linguistic and cultural boundaries have used the MOOC's reflection and planning tools to change their intercultural understanding and effectiveness. Dippold's language-led approach has also been used by a technology company to enhance the design of a digital sales chatbot by optimising its prompt:response patterns.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research underpinning the impact described here challenges prevailing ideas in the field of intercultural communication and business communication which do not sufficiently acknowledge the dynamic nature of communication. It draws on ideas and concepts from interactional sociolinguistics and English as a <i>lingua franca</i>.</p> <p>Strand 1: Language in Higher Education (HE)</p> <p>This strand of research focuses on language in linguistically and culturally diverse university classrooms and issues of oracy (speaking) in higher education. Dippold's research used interviews with first-year students to investigate the role of language in mediating group interaction and in developing practices which allow flexible thinking and the challenging of stereotypes. This research concluded that all students and staff – international and home – should be taught language strategies to accommodate and negotiate meaning [R1]. At a macro-level, HE institutions should avoid focusing on the linguistic deficiencies of non-native speakers to encourage more inclusive language use and to foster/facilitate effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries [R2]. In addition, Dippold's research also compared feedback practices in an Accounting and an English for Academic Purposes classroom. The research revealed that differences in these practices can be explained by disciplinary orientations on one hand, and on the other by tutors' varying perspectives on how explicitly feedback needs to be provided to be effective in a classroom environment characterised by the linguistic diversity of its students [R3]. In addition, it showed how tutors can master interactional challenges in the linguistically diverse classroom through reflection [R4]. Dippold concluded that all members of the classroom community, including tutors, home and international students, need to be equipped with</p>		

the skills for using language as a tool for learning and teaching in an international educational environment [R3].

Drawing on these insights, Dippold also investigated policy and practice in supporting teachers and students to develop these skills and identified a severe need for support centred on language and the dynamics of interpersonal communication in learning and teaching contexts. These findings led to the development of an experiential intercultural training model which places language, and reflection on the nuances of individual language use at the centre of developing intercultural competences [R5]. Originally intended for beneficiaries in higher education (tutors and students), Dippold used this model to develop a *Futurelearn* MOOC for a wider group of professionals working in linguistically and culturally diverse environments. The course, entitled "Communicating with Diverse Audiences", does not rely on national stereotypes like standard intercultural training initiatives and empowers individuals to improve their communication skills through reflection aided by audio- and video-recordings.

Strand 2: The language of chatbots

In this innovation project, which also stems from Dippold's expertise in communicative interaction, Dippold and Lynden (then School of Psychology, Surrey, now Open University), supported an industrial partner, Account Management Online Limited (AMO) – a company that deploys a bot in a range of commercial and service settings – to optimise the language of the bot's service exchanges. The aim was to allow the bot to sustain longer dialogues, encourage completion of the exchange, prevent feelings of constraints and interrogation and make the bot pleasant to interact with.

Much of the research in the field of interactions between humans and computers focuses on investigating how discrete variables influence and change individual behaviour and on individuals' subjective understanding of features of interaction. Dippold and Lynden used a micro-analytical approach drawing on concepts from applied linguistics and social psychology to show how nuances of language use can make users feel better aligned with the machine, and how these features can enhance trust and thus increase the chance of a service interaction leading to a sale or a successful lead [R6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Dippold, D., Bridges, S., Eccles, S., Mullen, E. (2019). Taking ELF off the shelf: Developing HE students' speaking skills through a focus on English as a lingua franca. *Linguistics and Education* 54. DOI: [10.1016/j.linged.2019.100761](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2019.100761) [8 quotations, SCIMAGO Q1 Journal]

[R2] Dippold D., Bridges, S., Eccles, S., Mullen, E. (2018). Developing the global graduate: how first year university students narrate their experiences of culture. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 19 (4), 313-327. DOI: [10.1080/14708477.2018.1526939](https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2018.1526939) [3 quotations, SCIMAGO Q1 Journal]

[R3] Dippold D (2014). "That's wrong": Repair and Rapport in Culturally Diverse Higher Education Classrooms. *The Modern Language Journal* 98 (1), 402-416. DOI: [10.1111/j.1540-4781.2014.12061.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2014.12061.x) [14 quotations, SCIMAGO Q1 Journal]

[R4] Dippold D (2013). Interaction for learning in the Anglophone university classroom: Mastering interactional challenges through reflective practice. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning* 7 (1), A14-A25. <https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/248/161> [peer-reviewed, 6 quotations]

[R5] Dippold D (2015). *Classroom Interaction: The Internationalised Anglophone University*. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: [978-1-137-44359-5](https://doi.org/978-1-137-44359-5) [26 quotations]

[R6] Dippold, D., Lynden, J., Shrubsall, R., Ingram, R. (2020). A turn to language: How interactional sociolinguistics informs the redesign of prompt:response chatbot turns. *Discourse, Context and Media* 37. DOI: [10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100432](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100432) [SCIMAGO Q1 Journal]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research outlined in Section 2 has led to three strands of impact, all of which draw on Dippold's language-led approach which perceives of communication as a dynamic and negotiated phenomenon.

1. Enhancing intercultural understanding and effectiveness of professionals

Dippold's experiential training model, implemented in the *Futurelearn* MOOC "Communicating with Diverse Audiences", has enhanced the intercultural understanding and effectiveness of professionals in a wide range of fields, including most prominently Business, Consulting and Management, the Public Sector, and Teaching and Education [S1]. The MOOC implements Dippold's experiential approach using role-plays education materials that inspire reflection on the nuances of individual language use. It has had a global reach, having been joined by approximately 7,080 individuals in 153 countries, including many developing nations [S2]. For its public launch in January 2020, the course was selected by the British Council for its 'Study UK' campaign and it also featured in the new campaign starting in October 2020.

The MOOC has received reviews of an average of 4.7/5, with no ratings under 4 to date (8/10/2020). In the *Futurelearn* course survey [S3], more than 90% of participants said that they had acquired new skills or knowledge by taking the course and approximately 60 percent of respondents reported that they had applied what they had learned, or had passed on what they had learned, to others. The course has also generated income for the University through certificate sales of approximately £1,068 up to 31 October 2020.

Participants' commenting on the 'impact on practice' survey [S1] and on learning steps within the course [S4] said that role-play examples and reflection tools, had allowed them to develop strategies for communicating more effectively with speakers from a wide range of cultural and professional backgrounds and enabled them to make informed decisions about their communication practices: ***"I am planning to use the self-evaluation and planning tool to develop my communication skills at work and with others"*** [S1].

Participants also describe how the course had encouraged them to reflect on their own language use, how it enabled them to plan more effective communicative strategies and how it inspired them to critically evaluate processes in the interest of fairness and equality. For example, one learner said that the course would help them to design a fairer interview process: ***"I work for a crafts charity [...]. I find it difficult to interview non-native speakers as the other panellists don't seem to want to listen or adapt their language to them [...]. We could have missed out on some great Makers because of the language barrier, I think this course will make me a better interviewer in those cases but now I just need the confidence to speak up. I will be bringing the tools with me and reflecting on our interview process."*** [S1]

2. Influencing the design and delivery of intercultural training curricula

Dippold's approach, conveyed through the MOOC and a Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR) workshop in London in March 2019 which was attended by more than 20 participants with a background in intercultural training / coaching and English Language teaching [S5], has influenced the design and delivery of intercultural training curricula. For example, intercultural trainer Jo Bloxham, an attendee at the SIETAR workshop, began incorporating some of the materials into training sessions delivered to her clients to support them in reflecting on what helps and hinders communication. She has so far deployed the materials with approximately 120 participants. Dippold's work provided Bloxham with the evidence base for a shift from essentialist approaches, which are perceived with growing discomfort by some teachers, towards language-based approaches to intercultural communication [S6a]. Similarly, language coach Ana Sanchez (Madrid) used Dippold's MOOC to provide the theoretical underpinning for

her teaching approach. She found that her enabling focus on 'fluency and communicative efficiency' was well-supported by the MOOC [S6b].

Teachers and intercultural trainers and coaches participating in the MOOC praised the value of the reflective approach and the education materials featured within the course, such as the tools aiding planning of interactions for teaching and coaching practice. For example, one participant commented that ***"I have suggested improvements to our cultural understanding training so will put forward new ideas created from this course whilst developing the replacement course. Step back from awareness, have an action plan for how to do this in general etc"*** [S1].

John Twitchin, Director of the influential BBC 'Crosstalk' series [CROSSTALK. John Twitchin (Director), BBC 1979], which in 1979 first discussed issues in interracial relationships from a communication perspective, has confirmed that Dippold's work has added an important new angle to a language-led approach to intercultural communication, inciting reflection on the status of different varieties of English and of how personal language use may contribute to (in)equality [S7].

Based on her research and expertise in intercultural communication training, Doris was invited to speak as an expert at a House of Lords roundtable on 'Language skills and intercultural understanding for UK businesses working with China'. Dippold argued that learning a language to a level which allows for fluent communication is not realistic in all circumstances and should thus be replaced with training for communication through English as a *lingua franca* which includes awareness of individual communicative practices and their consequences. The advice was heard by several influential professionals and policymakers, including the Chinese Embassy, the Department of International Trade, the China-Britain Business Council and Industry representatives, including HSBC and Eversheds [S8].

3. Enhancing the design of a digital sales chatbot

In the summer of 2019, Dippold was invited by local SME AMO (Account Management Online Limited) to support them in enhancing the design of their AI driven, automated marketing chatbot to improve customer engagement, enjoyment and trust. In collaboration with Lynden, a psychologist, Dippold developed a new analytical approach drawing on interactional sociolinguistics to derive recommendations for new prompt:response patterns.

AMO used these recommendations to implement product design changes to their commercial chatbot by authoring new prompt:response turns which optimise customer trust and engagement, confirming that ***"critical to the dialogue management strategy is the use of face and politeness theory that was introduced to us during our collaboration"*** [S9]. In addition, Dippold and Lynden's recommendations have informed the redesign of AMO's chatbot interface which now allows user-initiated questions and clarification requests. These design changes represent a significant step-change compared to competitor technologies. In addition, this work has subsequently also supported a successful application for new investment funding from Innovate UK (£300,000) with the help of the ***"refined conversation patterns presented in our application."*** [S9]

AMO's new bot, which uses the design changes to conversation patterns proposed by Dippold and Lynden, has been deployed to other companies, including a packaging solutions company and the SETSquared partnership. The SETSquared Operations and Relationship Manager has reported that the deployment of an effective bot has been successful in qualifying out investors and/or companies who do not fit the investment club's criteria, saving vital time in the process [S10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [S1]** Qualitative responses to the researcher's 'Impact on practice' survey linked to the MOOC, inquiring into professionals' and teachers'/coaches' knowledge and skills gains as a result of taking the course. (PDF)
- [S2]** MOOC geographical reach: Map indicating the geographical reach of MOOC participants by stated country of residence upon enrolment. (PDF)
- [S3]** Quantitative and qualitative responses to the generic FutureLearn end of course survey. (PDF)
- [S4]** MOOC Discussion forums: learner impact statements (Retrieved 08 October 2020) (PDF)
- [S5]** List of participants who attended the SIETAR workshop on 20 March 2019, including contact details (CONFIDENTIAL) (PDF)
- [S6]** Intercultural trainer testimonials:
(a) Testimonial letter from Jo Bloxham, Kynfolk Ltd (PDF)
(b) Testimonial letter from Ana M Sánchez A, ACE HUB. The Language Coaching Studio (PDF)
- [S7]** Testimonial letter from John Twitchin, Director of the Centre for Intercultural Development, former senior producer of BBC documentary Crosstalk. (PDF)
- [S8]** Invitation to the roundtable discussion on issues related to the role of language skills and inter-cultural understanding for UK business when working with global partners. 29 October 2018. (PDF)
- [S9]** Testimonial letter from Rob Shrubsall, Director, Co-Founder and CTO, AMO (PDF)
- [S10]** Testimonial by Lottie Watson, Operations and Relationship Manager, SET Squared (PDF)