

I. A summary report

The project “Students as Co-teachers in Language Learning Studios”, led by Zhiyan Guo and Alexandra Kulikova, the Language Centre, School of Modern Languages and Cultures.

This IATL-funded project achieved the aims to enhance SMLC and PAIS UG language degree students’ learning experience in both their linguistic skills and cultural understanding of China and Russia. It provided student teachers- Warwick's international students, native speakers in Chinese or Russian- with experience of using their inside knowledge of the language and culture to support students learning it as a foreign language. Students developed their employability skills and their intercultural competence while improving linguistic skills fundamental to their language proficiency. In the challenging period with the Covid-19, the participants engaged with their peers actively from different departments and countries during the weekly sessions which were beneficial to both their overall well-being and to their language learning as a very helpful complement particularly for areas of linguistic difficulty such as tonal pronunciation in Chinese and grammar in Russian. The project provided a timely support to classroom teaching and increased foreign language students’ interaction with native speakers. In the longer term, using native speaking resources among undergraduates can become crucial to international learning on campus, fostering a mutually beneficial learning community for home and international students. The project has proven to be a good opportunity to initiate new developments for the future learning community at Warwick.

This IATL-funded project supported the running of the following events.

- Speaking club (Chinese and Russian):
Students of Chinese or Russian have their weekly meeting with native speakers of Chinese or Russian who are students from other departments of Warwick and who acted as co-teachers. These two student groups exchanged linguistic and cultural insights with each other. They co-created the support schemes with help of the Subject leaders of Chinese and Russian, and run the session between themselves each week.
- Chinese New Year Virtual Celebration:
Over 40 performers in 18 programmes with the audience of nearly 100 from both degree and optional students of Chinese, from both undergraduates to postgraduates, including doctoral students and members of staff. The video recordings of the selected performances are listed in the link here: [Chinese Culture Celebration \(warwick.ac.uk\)](https://www.warwick.ac.uk/chinese-culture-celebration)
- The 1st Chinese Reading and Interpreting Competition in SMLC:
The Competition involved students of Chinese at three years to participate in the activities of reading passages in Chinese characters and interpreting them into English within 5 minutes, with fluency and accuracy being the main criteria. As another opportunity to apply their knowledge outside the classroom, both student teachers (Warwick undergraduates and postgraduates) and students of Chinese in SMLC enjoyed their first experience in the event. The student teachers experienced

being a teacher and an assessor/judge for a competition for the first time and find it very rewarding and eye-opening to see how well students learning Chinese as a foreign language has progressed in their learning journey between 6 months and nearly 4 years. More details about the event is here: [Chinese Reading and Interpreting Competition \(warwick.ac.uk\)](#)

- The 1st Russian Poetry reading and Role-play Competition:

At the end of the Speaking club project students were invited to participate in the Russian poetry reading and Role-play competition. For poetry reading competition students had to select a poem and record a creative video. Creativity, fluency and pronunciation were the main criteria for the judges to select the best video. Role-play competition involved work in pairs; students had to write a script for their role-play and perform it in the video. Originality and complexity were the main criteria for the judges to select the best video. Russian tutors and students co-teachers acted as judges in the competition. Here is one example of role-play: [Students of Russian at Warwick university - How to ask directions in Moscow? - YouTube](#)

II. Feedback from co-teachers and students of Chinese and Russian

The participants enjoyed the speaking clubs in Russian and Chinese and benefitted linguistically and culturally from the events. The following are some extracts from their evaluation:

Evaluation from student teachers

One Chinese speaking postgraduate in Warwick commented on the Chinese speaking club:

“In the first two classes, the students were still a bit shy and reserved, but at the end of the session, I and the students had made friends with each other, and they appeared to be more open and willing to ask questions. We conversed in a light-hearted atmosphere, and our conversation had triggered their strong interest in Chinese culture, and they were able to ask whatever they were interested to know without any pressure in this peer-to-peer mode, and this, I believe, was one of the purposes of organizing this club. Moreover, my identity as a native Chinese speaker opened up students’ view of the authentic China, and of the daily life of the ordinary Chinese people, which they may have no channel to get form elsewhere. It was also helpful for students to communicate with native speakers, which could help them put the knowledge they obtained from class into practice, sharpen their Chinese speaking skills, and prepare them for their visiting to China in the future. Taking these factors into consideration, it can be concluded that the result of the reading/speaking club is very fruitful”.

One Russian speaking postgraduate in Warwick commented on the Russian speaking club:

“Firstly, as the Speaking Club took place online, it was an incredible opportunity to get more experience with digital teaching tools. While the knowledge of the tools themselves is important, what I found especially valuable was getting a better feel of online interaction dynamics. The experience helped me learn about keeping the momentum going in the discussion and making sure that everyone is engaged in the conversation.

Secondly, this experience was especially valuable for learning about the best ways to give feedback. Learning a new language is challenging and facilitating this process to make sure the students stay motivated is a delicate process. Here, the project curator’s advice about ways to give feedback without discouraging the students was especially insightful. While my speciality is not language teaching, I believe that the knowledge acquired during this experience can be translated to other teaching and facilitating I will do in the future”.

One Russian speaking undergraduate in Warwick commented on the Russian speaking club:

“It opened opportunities for me of applying my theoretical background in International Relations into practice and as well it allowed me to adopt the experience of my colleagues and to learn new ways of teaching through the continuous feedback with the students that I had an opportunity to teach. Again, I would like to thank the University of Warwick team for providing me with this amazing opportunity”

One Chinese speaking undergraduate in Warwick commented on the Chinese speaking club:

“It’s been a good time having this opportunity to talk to students learning the first language of my hometown, especially under this special circumstance.

The speaking hub was also an intercultural exchange. It’s interesting that the course materials introduced various Chinese cultures, that even natives can get fun facts in other cities. There was one piece of material about Xiangsheng, a show like stand-up between 2 comedians. ... I have also introduced the dialects in different regions of China. As the capital city and the most international city, Beijing and Shanghai are the most representative. Introducing dialects is a way of introducing some smaller but also characteristic cities besides them, like Sichuan or Jiangsu.”

Evaluation from students of Russian and Chinese

1st year student of Russian in SMLC commented on the speaking club and Role-play competition:

"I found the Russian Speaking Club sessions both very useful and interesting. We got the chance to learn more about Russian culture outside of classes, which I found truly exciting. We could talk more in-depth about topics that we asked about and our teachers gave wonderful, engaging presentations.

While I enjoyed these presentations about Russian culture the most, grammar practice sessions especially closer to the exams were definitely useful. Practicing speaking with our teachers, and also just hearing their pronunciation were a huge help in preparing for the exams. I found the competition at the end enjoyable too, I loved planning and recording our role-play.

An intermediate year student of Russian in SMLC commented on the speaking club:

"I found my participation in the Russian speaking project very useful, especially in helping me with pronunciation and in acquiring new, modern Russian vocabulary. I learnt about modern Russian pop culture, as well as about the political environment in Russia, and I learnt how to express myself better, and in a more fluent way, in Russian. The highlight for me was discussing the social media sites that young Russian people like to use, as well as the music they like to listen to, and what Russian people do on nights out!

A first year student of Chinese in SMLC commented on the Chinese speaking club:

"The speaking club definitely helped me with my pronunciation as my speaking teacher would go over some of the harder words and correct me when my tones were off. my teacher would often do presentations on different cultural aspects such as the geography of China and festivals which really helped to broaden my knowledge of China".

An intermediate year student of Chinese in SMLC commented on the Chinese speaking club:

"Despite having not been able to partake in the full duration of the speaking club due to other commitments, I thoroughly enjoyed the exchanges that I had during the speaking club. My partner was exceptionally patient which made me feel very at ease in the virtual environment, one in which I can sometimes feel a little nervous. Following our exchange, I saw an increase in my participation in class due to a boost in confidence prompted by the feedback and encouragement of my partner.

Learning about other peoples' cultures and perspectives is always what interests me the most in conversations with native speakers of the foreign languages that I'm learning. For me, this is the most important and valuable part of the conversations, whilst your oral ability naturally improves alongside your participation. I enjoyed our conversations

to such an extent that we exchanged contact details and we talk every now and again outside of class, particularly to exchange advice for our courses and travels abroad”.

A final year student of Chinese comment on the 1st Chinese Reading and Interpreting Competition:

“.....the competition was a very interesting and unique experience. It was also a useful insight into the time pressure of interpreting which I certainly found difficult!

While I am used to seeing interpreting all the time at events and on television it had never occurred to me until the competition how difficult it would be to not only quickly translate what is being said but to also deliver an interpretation in a cogent manner. While the competition was challenging in the sense that am certainly not used to having to read and translate so quickly, it was nevertheless a fun experience and it’s a shame that as I am graduating this year, I will not have the opportunity to participate in it again.

I also think it was a great idea to have sessions to work on the texts with a co-teacher (without the time pressure!) after the competition. While I did not take part in the Speaking Club this year, I believe this was a good reflection of it and I regret having not taken part previously. While we have amazing teachers in the Chinese department, it is certainly a different experience to be able to communicate/practice with and be helped by other students our age/in the same situation as us. If there is one thing that I think could be improved is that I think it may be good to receive some critical feedback on our delivery and interpretation.

Lastly, I would just like to mention that this was a great way to connect with the department outside of classes, even more so during these times when we cannot meet up in person”.

III. Dissemination

Zhiyan Guo and Alexandra Kulikova delivered a staff development session titled ‘online speaking club in Chinese and Russian’ at the Language Centre Teaching Forum at 1-4pm on 23 June, 2021.

Zhiyan Guo’s presentation titled ‘Connectivity of Inside and Outside the Classroom During the Pandemic’ was well received at the 18th International Conference on Teaching and Learning Chinese in Higher Education organised by the British Chinese Language Teaching Society (BCLTS) and the Confucius Institute of University of Bangor, on the theme of ‘Teaching Chinese as an international language in the time of Covid: opportunities, innovations and development’(online, 5-7th July, 2021).

Many thanks to IATL for the funding support to enable the achievements made above.