

## Case Study 6

### Using e-translation with newly arrived Polish pupils

BS Catholic Secondary School has traditionally had a population of around 20% BME pupils. The school has no specialist support staff to support pupils learning English as an additional language and until very recently had not been claiming any EMAG funding. The BME pupils are from a range of ethnic backgrounds and most are fluent in English. There is a small number of African heritage pupils who have been learning English for about a year. Monitoring of pupil performance suggests that BME pupils' performance is in-line with national expectations.

Since January 2006 the school has admitted 30 newly arrived pupils, of which 27 are from Poland. I have been working with the school to help them set up systems of support for the pupils and staff.

I wanted to explore opportunities for using web-based translation services. Unfortunately I was unable to find any dictionaries for the any of the languages spoken by the African heritage pupils other than very simple non-searchable ones. These languages include Igbo, Ndebele (Nigeria), Tswana (Malawi) and Sesoto (South African).

For the Polish pupils there is a much better choice of web-based dictionaries, translating at word and sentence level. One of the better free ones is at [www.tenar.tpi.pl/](http://www.tenar.tpi.pl/)

This dictionary includes an image search (Google) and also sound files giving the pupil the opportunity to listen to the translated word in English. So for example if you entered the word 'house' in to the search, the results gave a range of photos of different types of houses enabling discussion around the types of house that fitted with the context – e.g. bungalow, flat etc. and also the range of words and their meanings. However the filter used at the secondary school blocked the images. Another reliable but often slow on-line dictionary is at [www.poltran.com](http://www.poltran.com)

I spent several days with a Year 7 class with two newly arrived Polish pupils and examined opportunities in the different classrooms for pupils to use on-line dictionaries. Both pupils had paper based dictionaries with them but did not automatically get them out of their bags ready for the start of the lesson and had to be prompted to do this. The pupils were given a list of key vocabulary (in English) for the lesson in only one lesson that I observed. Unfortunately it was only in the minority of classrooms that there was access to an internet linked computer that was available for the pupil to use for on-line translation.

It became apparent straight away that if pupils were to be encouraged to use on-line dictionaries during mainstream lessons there would need to be discussion and agreement with staff at whole school level. Having one or two pupils working at a computer whilst the teacher was talking created lots of potential 'issues' for the teachers and their concerns would need to be addressed.

I was only able to use a web-based dictionary in one lesson and that was an ICT lesson where the pupils were constructing flow diagrams for a control program. Being unfamiliar with planning and supporting pupils learning English as an additional language the subject teacher did not provide me with any information

about the lesson either before or during the lesson. This meant I had to listen to the teacher as she talked to the class and use my judgement about which words to translate

I found the best way to access the dictionary was by using the pc that was next to the one the pupils were using then quickly typing in any English words that the class teacher used that seemed particularly pertinent. However overall this proved to be rather distracting during the main teaching part of the lesson for the pupil who had to switch from listening to the teacher, then listening to me, then turning to the computer to look up the word. By the time this had been done the teacher had moved on and we had missed a small chunk of her input. During the independent task we were able to use translation more successfully but I felt that the pupil felt rather hindered by the interruptions: he was very anxious to be seen to be coping with the lesson in line with the rest of his classmates.

On a separate occasion I managed to find out before the lesson what the 'key words' for the lesson were going to be and translated them into Polish prior to the lesson by cutting and pasting them into a word document. Needless to say this was time consuming but over time I hope to build up some collections of words that can then be used by other staff. However I still needed to check out these words with a Polish member of our EMA team and few schools would have access to this level of expertise.

The reality of using a web-based dictionary in mainstream lessons in the context of this secondary school is one beset by problems:

- Access to computers for the pupils to use is a major barrier.
- It is very unlikely that a newly arrived pupils with very little knowledge of English would be able to use e-translation in a mainstream lesson without intensive support by an extra adult
- Pupils with a developing use of English find it easier to use the technology independently but the lesson would still need to be carefully planned by the subject teacher so that the pupil would know which words/phrases were key to the lesson objectives and therefore 'worthy' of translation
- Even where there is an adult to support the pupil 1:1 problems arise from the fact that the adult will have very limited understanding of the L1 and will find it difficult to confirm that the translation given by the translator is appropriate for the context of the lesson.
- Compared to my experiences of using e-translation in a withdrawal session the benefits of in-class support were less obvious. In order to make in-class e-translation effective there needs to be joint planning between subject and specialist EAL staff, including the identification of a pc or laptop for the pupil to use
- There are opportunities for an additional adult (teacher or teaching assistant) to use e-translation to prepare key words for the pupil prior to the lesson. Although time consuming and potentially problematic this approach does signal to the pupils that the staff at the school recognise their bilingual talents and are working hard to include them in the lesson.