Where language programs are small, faculty are often forced to offer courses that enroll students of varying skill levels. This paper presents translation as a strategy to manage multiple skill levels while maintaining student interest and achieving learning goals.

Translation tasks provide students opportunities to increase their formal accuracy, understand the differences in which L1 and L2 achieve the same communicative goals, and constantly think about the linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages resulting in a better understanding of the L2 (Hasegawa 2012). The present case study explored how translation can also help achieve language learning goals in a mixed ability classroom by allowing students with lower proficiency in speaking, listening or writing the target language to gain some confidence and acquire research skills to find answers, ultimately motivating students to continue studying Japanese. This case study focused on Japanese-to-English translation but incorporated a final class project, in which students collectively translated the university’s webpage into Japanese for prospective Japanese students, as well as the final Japanese-to-English translation project. The course was comprised of 5 students who were in the same Japanese class at a small liberal arts college but had completed varying levels of courses in Japanese (1 at the 200 level, 3 at the 300 level, 1 at the 400 level).

In addition, pre-and post-semester surveys were conducted. The survey asked about the students’ experience in translation and what they think is a good translation. Preliminary results suggest that students’ impressions of translation included the target audience at the end of the semester, which was absent at the beginning of the semester. Some students also felt they learned more about English, and some showed more sensitivity to what is considered “equivalent.” This case study suggests that translation, when focused on Japanese-to-English translation and used authentic materials (university webpage), is a successful strategy for achieving learning goals in a small mixed ability language classroom.