

Digital Storytelling in Interpreter Training

Sandra Ribeiro

ISCAP (Portugal)
sribeiro@iscap.ipp.pt

Abstract

Digital Storytelling (DS) allows people to construct narratives by combining multiple media including images (e.g. photos, graphics), voice, music, video, transitions, titles, and movement.

In educational settings, the type of digital stories that prevails is the personal narrative. In fact, the reflection involved in the crafting process, whether it is writing, the selection of images, photographs, music or video clips, transpires the storyteller's personal perspective, enriching and creating depth to the final story, as each layer mirrors the creator's own self – a story with personal meaning.

We propose to present a case study that describes how DS was implemented in interpreter training course at ISCAP-IPP in Portugal.

Our study demonstrate that DS is capable of integrating different literacies and language skills, as it combines multimedia researching, production and presentation skills with more traditional activities like writing and oral production skills, thus ideal to integrate interpreter training courses. Furthermore, the creation process, which implies the search for and selection of material, such as images, photos and soundtrack, also confronts students with copyright issues on the Web. The narrative function allows students to tell a story with their own voice, in a controlled environment. They are able to record and edit their stories as often as they want before finally presenting them to their teachers and colleagues, thus being able to improve their work until it is to their liking. Moreover, as digital stories may be uploaded onto the Web, students may be confronted with positive or negative feedback to their final stories. In sum, the creation process of digital stories encourages students to engage in deeper reflection on their learning, their identities and, consequently on their own behavior on various levels.

1. Interpreter training

Interpreting, seen as "the oral transfer of messages between speakers of different languages" is, according to Pistillo [1], "one of the oldest of human activities".

The interpreter listens to what the speaker is saying, has to quickly understand its meaning and then almost immediately utter this orally into the language known by the listener. The emphasis in interpreting is on promptness and the fact that it cannot be repeated, nor revised.

Although interpreting may seem to be an instinctive shift from one language to another, interpreting is, in fact, a complex process which comprises three overlapping phases defined by Elamin [2] as: "auditory perception" of what is spoken and the immediate grasp of its meaning, the "dissociation of the meaning from the verbal form", and finally an immediate and understandable "expression" of the meaning in the target language. In this process, the first (comprehension) and the final (production) phases are considered the most important ones, while the second phase serves as a link between the two.

Due to the need for clarity and complete command of the target language, interpreters are incentivized to work into their native language. Textual competence in this language is essential as the interpreter

must be able to produce coherent and cohesive texts and not isolated sentences or fragments. Furthermore, speaking skills are vital, as the delivered speech should be expressed confidently and convincingly.

"It appears that the interpreter's voice and self-assured delivery have a confidence-inspiring effect. Conversely, beginning interpreters with a somewhat hesitant voice are often mistrusted by delegates, however faithful and clear the informational content of their speech" [3, p. 33].

In sum, and corroborating with Kurz [4], interpreting is a "high-skill information processing activity composed of interdependent subskills".

Aware of the complexity inherent to interpreting, over the past 45 years many publications have addressed issue concerning interpreter training [see 5]. Despite the amount of articles on specific types of exercises and other suggestions for interpreter training [3, 4 and 6 for example], no methodological guidance is given as interpreter-training literature is, in essence, based on individual experience. As Giles [7] states, the responsibility to make the "appropriate decisions" regarding interpreter training is placed on the teachers.

Considering Education to be about giving students voice, exchanging ideas with others, and building knowledge [8], within an engaging, student-centred context, it is our belief interpreter-training activities should incorporate learner's intention, action and reflection.

2. Digital Storytelling

The term Digital Storytelling (DS), literally, means using computer-based tools that allow for the digital manipulation of content – audio, text or images – to tell stories.

DS began in California in the 1970s through the work of a small group of theatre performers. Their idea was to empower individuals and communities by teaching them the skills and how to manipulate the tools needed to create their own digital stories, giving them voice [9].

DS, as originally conceived by its founders, implies a 2–3-minute personal story told with the use of graphics, audio, and video. It includes many, if not all, of the following seven elements: Point (of View); Dramatic Question; Emotional Content; Voice; Soundtrack; Economy; and Pacing.

Literature review on DS reveals studies in various contexts, from business and religion to community and education. As to the latter, there are several studies that link DS with reflection in different grade levels, both in formal and in informal settings [10-12].

The reflexive process involved in the crafting process of the digital stories, whether it is writing, the voiceover, the selection of images, photographs, music or video clips, transpires the storyteller's personal perspective, enriching and creating depth to the final story, as each layer symbolizes a part of the creator's own self.

3. Interpreter training at ISCAP

The case study that follows describes how DS was implemented in an interpreter-training course at ISCAP-IPP (Institute of Accounting and Administration of Oporto) in Portugal.

ISCAP's Master's program in Specialized Translation and Interpreting began in the 2007/2008 academic year. Its curricula design as to the Interpreting component of the Program seeks a pragmatic understanding of Conference Interpreting, Remote and Teleconference Interpreting (RTI) and Liaison Interpreting, focusing on intensive practice.

However, in order to allow for a deep understanding of questions revolving around interpreting, besides intensive remote interpreting practice, students are invited to explore the notions of communication pragmatics, perception in virtual environments, and semiotics as well as its history and evolution [13].

4. DS in interpreter training: a case study

Considering the above-mentioned framework, 15 master's students enrolled in the RTI course were asked to participate in an research, where the focus was (1) to address Elamin's [2] third phase in interpreting, and (2) to address the visual dilemma often referred to in RTI, from a content-creator's perspective. As such, the objectives were: to improve students' speaking skills and apply strategies for overcoming doubts and linguistic weaknesses; to exercise speech fluency; and to select images, pondering pragmatics and semiotics.

Digital storytelling activities took place in a computer lab and began with a Story Circle, as proposed by Lambert [9] but with some adaptations. Instead of sitting in a group circle, students sat at their computers and were asked to audio record all they said from that point on.

The first exercise was for students to answer the question: Who are you? They were given two minutes to speak freely. After this short exercise, students were once again asked the same question but key words and expressions were placed on the board at regular intervals. The students had to incorporate these into their answer nevertheless maintaining a coherent and cohesive discourse. The end result was a 10-minute speech, which ended with Tell me a story.

After the Story Circle, students were asked to consider the story they had just told and to organize it into a 2-minute voiceover for their digital story. Special attention was to be given to delivery issues such as tone of voice and pacing, as these are crucial elements in digital stories. This was the first step in the DS creation process.

Students were then asked to consider the visual aspects of their story and what they wanted to transmit. Students worked collaboratively in order to understand if their interpretation of certain images/pictures were that of their colleagues. The visual composition of the stories proved to be time-consuming as many group and whole-class discussions arose.

After having all the elements for the story, students were given time and one-to-one support on assembling and editing their final story. Students that finished first were asked to help colleagues who showed more difficulties in manipulating video editing software¹.

When finished, some students shared their stories with one or two colleagues, but the final dissemination of the stories did not occur.

4.1 Results

In order to understand learners' perspective on DS and its creation process, the students were asked to reflect on the activities carried out with detailed comments. Furthermore, during class activities, the teacher registered observation notes.

All 15 students acknowledged that they enjoyed participating in the activities proposed. They also referred that they were not expecting to carry out such activities in the RTI course, however by the end of the three days, all were able to relate the various steps in the creation process with the school's interpreter training philosophy.

¹ Microsoft's Movie Maker

One third of the students (5 out of 15) mentioned time as a negative factor, in various perspectives. The work was carried out in class, which was scheduled from 21h30 to 23h. These students were part-time students that came to class after a full day's work and initially these students didn't see the relevance of the work, as there was no interpreting involved. After, they felt that the class time available was insufficient for the work they wanted to carry out. Curiously, these same students expressed some dissatisfaction as to the final story saying they did what was possible, not what they wanted to do, given the time constraints.

The remaining students were overall satisfied with the process they carried out, with the final result and their learning experience, which curiously they referred to have been on two levels: on an academic level and on a personal level.

Academically, students recognized the need to manipulate new ICT-related tools, such as voice recording software, image software and video editing software. This allowed them to maintain a creator's perspective and thus produced deeper understanding as to details that influence the final outcome, such as, for example: condensing information and finding the essence of the story; the need for a clear, well-paced speech. Furthermore, while working with images and music soundtrack, digital literacy issues, such as Internet copyright, were discussed.

On a personal level, students stated that the theme proposed for the digital stories implied an inner reflection. As one student states: *"Because even if we did not create a very personal digital story, such as mine, we must reflect on who we were when we began and who we are now and the role ISCAP had in that growth."*

Throughout the creation process in class, students constantly commented on their own progress and on their colleagues'. These comments shed light on essential aspects such as: awareness of their tone of voice - *"I don't understand what I said. I was nervous and spoke too fast. I have to repeat everything"*-, semiotics - *"That was not what I intended to transmit. She didn't understand. Maybe it was the order of the pictures"*-, among other aspects.

As to the Story Dissemination phase, students were reluctant to share stories. They claimed they were *"embarrassing"*, *"politically incorrect"*, *"too personal"*, *"show too much"*, and *"not professional"*. In fact, as one student puts it, the final story *"reveals a part of me I do not want to show many people"*. As such, the stories were not disclosed in order to respect students' wishes.

5. Conclusion

Our study demonstrates that DS is capable of integrating different literacies and language skills, as it combines multimedia researching, production and presentation skills with more traditional activities like writing and oral production skills, thus ideal to integrate interpreter training courses. Furthermore, the creation process, which implies the search for and selection of material, such as images, photos and soundtrack, also confronts students with copyright issues on the Web. The narrative function allows students to tell a story with their own voice, in a controlled environment. They are able to record and edit their stories as often as they want before finally presenting them to their teachers and colleagues, thus being able to improve their work until it is to their liking. Moreover, as digital stories may be uploaded onto the Web, students may be confronted with positive or negative feedback to their final stories. In sum, the creation process of digital stories encourages students to engage in deeper reflection on their learning, their identities and, consequently on their own behaviour on various levels.

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