Relay Interpreting with iPads in Higher Education

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Abstract

Relay or indirect interpreting is one of the interpreting modes where the message is conveyed from the source language to the target language via the medium of a third one. In other words, the interpreter does not listen to the speaker but to another interpreter. Relay interpreting is common at large conferences and during official sessions in, for example, the European Parliament.
In interpreter training, the equipment accessibility is one of the keys to success. However, not all universities have enough quality equipment to cover all the training needs at all times. Moreover, it may not be flexible enough to facilitate tasks designed by the teacher. In such cases, using iPads may be just the solution.
At the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, we succeeded in developing a way of iPad implementation in relay simultaneous interpreting practice that received positive feedback from both teachers and students. iPads gave us the needed flexibility. There are of course other benefits to using iPads, such as, for example, the price. In comparison to simultaneous interpretation equipment, iPads are much cheaper. Furthermore, they are portable, which means they can be moved from classroom to classroom, and easy to use. And finally, they can accommodate multiple trainings seminars at different language departments throughout the semester/year.
Our solution is based on a set of instructions and steps that have to be followed in a particular order to ensure success of the exercise. They involve setting up "a scene", ensuring a Wi-Fi connection, adjusting audio volume and using a video player and an audio recording application. Two iPads and two sets of headphones are necessary for a pair of students working together. The number of students practicing at the same time is limited only by the number of iPads. The recordings made during the practice can be used later in the seminar e-learning course where self-evaluation, peer evaluation, teacher feedback and self-reflection take place.

1. Introduction

Relay or indirect interpreting is one of the interpreting modes where the message is conveyed from the source language to the target language via the medium of a third one [1]. In other words, the interpreter does not listen to the speaker but to another interpreter. Relay interpreting is common at large conferences and during official sessions in, for example, the European Parliament.

In interpreter training, the equipment accessibility is one of the keys to success. However, not all universities have enough quality equipment to cover all the training needs at all times. Moreover, it may not be flexible enough to facilitate tasks designed by the teacher. In such cases, using iPads may be just the solution.

2. The solution

At the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, we succeeded in developing a way of iPad implementation in relay simultaneous interpreting practice that received positive feedback from both teachers and students. iPads gave us the needed flexibility. There are of course other benefits to using iPads, such as, for example, the price. In comparison to simultaneous interpretation equipment, iPads are much cheaper. Furthermore, they are portable, which means they can be moved from classroom to classroom, and easy to use. And finally, they can accommodate multiple training seminars at different language departments throughout the semester/year.

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3. Application of the solution

The solution that we have devised upon the Romance Languages and Literatures Department request requires several steps, which are described below, to be followed in the particular order. It can be applied whenever and wherever the relay simultaneous interpreting is to be practiced.

3.1 Preparation

First, we made sure the required number of devices (iPads mini) was fully charged and did not have any personal content or records of activity from previous users. Second, we installed Recordings [2], an audio

recording application, and switched off sleep mode on iPads. Students were asked in advance to bring their own headphones. We prepared a few extra headsets as well. And third, the teacher picked the videos with target language speakers to be used during the seminar and added the links to the seminar e-learning course. Each pair of students required one video for one round of practice. Two eLearning Office staff members needed to be present during the whole seminar to give instructions, to provide technical support, to give out and collect the devices and to act as a stand-in should an odd number of students come to the seminar that day so that everyone could practice.

3.2 Instructions at the beginning of the practice

Students were explained the concept of relay simultaneous interpreting and the way they were going to practice it that day. Then, they were instructed to work in pairs and sit as far from other pairs as possible. We distributed the iPads, explained the basics of iPad use to students who needed it as well as how to connect to the Internet. One student from each pair was asked to plug in their headphones and to go to our LMS website where they were supposed to log in and find the list of videos provided by the teacher. The videos were tagged with numbers. Each pair was supposed to pick a different video for the first round of the exercise in order to prevent overhearing other pair's interpretation of the same video. Once they have chosen and opened the video, the student with headphones was asked to play a few seconds of the video in order to adjust the volume on the device. When the volume was set, the video was to be rewound back to its beginning. Students were instructed to hold the iPads in such as way as to insure that they both were able to see the integrated speakers. The task of the student with the headphones was to interpret from the target language to their mother tongue.

The other student from each pair was asked to launch the audio recording application and was shown how to set the mp3 format for the recording, how to turn up the volume to the maximum level, how to start and stop recording and how to hold the device so its integrated microphone was pointing towards both students. The pairs were asked to make a short recording to make sure the voices of both students were recorded with a sufficient quality. This student was supposed to listen to their peer and interpret from the mother tongue back to the target language.

There was an odd number of students present that day so one of the eLearning Office members joined one of the students and assumed the role of the second student, which meant interpreting to any foreign language they knew (in this case, English).

3.3 During the practice

As the exercise started, the teacher began moving around from pair to pair listening and making notes. The other eLearning Office member was available for technical support during the whole practice. When the first videos were over, students exchanged their roles and their devices and were instructed to make a test recording again, open another video from the list (if the pair previously used the second video, they picked the first one this time), adjust the volume and plug in their headphones. We additionally checked that headphones were not plugged into the iPads used for recording. It was also important to ensure that the odd student formed a pair with another peer and, thus, exchanged their role too, while another student formed a pair with the eLearning Office member, who maintained their second student role because they did not know the target language. When everything was set up, the second round of the exercise took place.

3.4 At the end of the practice

While collecting the devices, the eLearning Office members were renaming the recordings on each iPad so that each of them had the video number and the names of students who used it for recording. Once they left, the seminar could go on.

3.5 After the lesson

One of the eLearning Office members uploaded the recordings to one of the Office cloud storages so that they could be trimmed and adjusted for the sound quality (original recordings turned out to be of satisfactory quality even though no external microphones were used; thus, this step is optional). When the recordings were processed, we, upon the teacher's instructions, sent each student their recording by email so that they could listen to it again, rename it according to the instructions and upload it to the Workshop module in the designated section of the seminar e-learning course in faculty LMS (Moodle). Then, they filled out an auto-evaluation form. When all students did so, they were anonymously assigned one of their peers' recordings for peer-evaluation phase and for teacher's feedback in the Workshop module.

4. Feedback from the teacher and students

We asked the teacher and students who were present that day for their feedback on the technical support provided. They were asked to express their feelings and opinions by answering following questions:

4.1 Do you think that the use of iPads for this exercise affected your performance during the interpretation?

Students' view

Yes, I do. The use of the device affected me in a positive way, actually. We could not practice simultaneous interpreting in the booths very often during the semester so we practiced simply in the classroom with practically no equipment but for a computer on which we listened to the speaker. The thing is, when there is no actual need to maintain inner discipline and stop interpreting saying "*Oh, this one I just do not know (smile)*" or "*OK, I am officially lost. Can we rewind that (smile)?*", it is much easier to do so. However, when your interpreting is being recorded and, in addition to that, you know you can not stop interpreting because the other interpreter's work depends on you, it somehow forces you to continue no matter what and do your best. It was true real time interpreting in almost real life settings.

Teacher's view

Yes, I do. Students performed better. I think they were less nervous because they were not being looked at by other students while interpreting. I would say it is a good way to start and let them gain certain amount of confidence. Later, we can proceed to the settings where they are being looked at in order to build up even more confidence.

4.2 How would you evaluate practicing simultaneous interpreting in booths as opposed to iPads?

Students' view

Well, booths represent real settings since it is the equipment commonly used during big conferences and other events. On the other hand, the fact that we could use the recordings later, which is something that is rather difficult to do when using the booths, for self-evaluation and evaluation of performances of others made the iPads a better choice in my opinion.

Teacher's view

I love the fact that with iPads all the students can be active at the same time, not just some of them, as would have been the case with the limited number of booths at our disposal. Their mobility is also very convenient because I do not feel restricted by the need to book a room with booths anymore. I know I will be able to practice with students no matter the classroom.

4.3 Do you think there are any downsides to using iPads for this type of interpreting practice?

Students' view

Even though there were only eight of us attending the seminar that day, it was still possible to hear other pairs practicing because the classroom was relatively small, only for 20 people or so. At first it was a bit distracting, especially when you were the one interpreting what you heard from the person who was listening to the speaker, which meant you did not have any headphones on. But I got used to it over time. We were told it is quite common that there is more than one interpreter in the same booth interpreting to/from different languages, so I approached it as training for such situations in the future.

Teacher's view

No, I cannot recall any. Luckily for me, the eLearning Office took care of all the technical stuff. I simply requested their assistance a few days before the seminar. They were there present for the whole duration of the seminar, and all students could participate in the exercise even though there was an odd number of them. Afterwards they processed the recordings and sent them to students so that they could work with them in the e-learning course. Everything was quite effortless for my part. The only concern I had was about the noise level but it turned out we could view it as something that made the setting more realistic since there is bound to be a certain amount of noise and distractions present in real life situation. I was actually pleasantly surprised with the quality of the recordings.

5. Conclusion

When there is not enough quality equipment to cover all the training needs at all times or it may not be flexible enough to facilitate tasks designed by the teacher, such as relay interpreting practice, iPads might be just the solution. Presented concept and procedure proved itself as working well at our faculty. Since the first time, our eLearning Office has recorded a few requests for this kind of assistance, also from teachers of other languages within the department.

References

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/what-is-conference-interpreting/relay/index_en.htm [15.9.2015].

[2] https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/recordings/id492995106?mt=8 [15.9.2015].