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Deployment of an e-platform for interpreting novices' self-directed learning

Abstract

This paper presents how an e-platform newly deployed for interpreting novices facilitates their self-directed learning and complements classroom learning, and explores their perceived benefits brought by the system. The e-platform adopts a multilevel approach and allows students to select the skills they wish to improve/enhance. "Multilevel" refers to (1) employment of multilevel texts on the same news topic, (2) difficulty progression from bilingual term exercises to spontaneous sight translation and consecutive interpreting tasks, and (3) use of recordings of English in British/ American accents and in other accents. The system can only be accessed on campus. Students have to practice in work booths, jot notes for consecutive interpreting exercises, interpret within specific time limits, and have speeches recorded. Interpreting assessments have been adjusted to reflect part of students' self-directed learning. Students tended to perceive themselves as having higher competence crucial to interpreting after learning with the e-platform, hence high user satisfaction.

1 Introduction

Learning, according to Fisher et al. (2001: 517), can be placed on a continuum with teacher-centeredness at one end, where teachers are perceived as knowledge providers and students as passive recipients of the one-way transmission of knowledge and facts, and self-directedness at the other, which is considered by the American educator Knowles (1975: 18) as a universal disposition differentiating adult learners from children. To help (university) students learn better, Kiraly (2000: 19) argues that empowerment has to take place within the institution itself via "a shift of authority, responsibility and control in the education process from the teacher to the learner..." (Kiraly 2000: 1). Students have to be prepared "to engage in learning activities defined by [...] themselves rather than [merely] by a teacher" (Schmidt 2000: 243). Given prior knowledge of a study focus, self-directed learners plan independently how their self-study should be. They are expected to be the ones taking initiatives to diagnose their learning needs, determine goals, identify resources, select and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles 1975: 18; Grow 1991: 133–136, 1994: 113–114; Knowles et al. 1998; Merriam 2001: 9; Merriam et al. 2007:

107–109; Hiemstra 2013: 24). They undertake an increasingly active role in deciding on learning issues and contents (Fisher et al. 2001: 516), and choosing as well as assessing learning materials (Loyens et al. 2008: 414–419).

Self-directed learning is beneficial to the learner and the institution, hence its popularity over the last decade (Brookfield 2009: 2616). Its rationale respects “Western notions of libertarian individualism” (Brookfield 2009: 2616) as one, if intrinsically motivated, demonstrates active engagement, goal-directed behavior and concerted efforts in learning. Its adoption also works harmoniously with the institution’s cost-cutting plans if students are responsible for and capable of managing their own learning without much assistance of teaching staff.

Online learning is considered effective to promote self-directed learning (Song/Bonk 2016), which bridges the instructional gap when the teacher and learners are separated by physical distance (Huang 2000: 41–42) and allows learning to be “place and time independent” (Vrasidas/McIssac 2000: 105). Information generated/given can also be “customized to learners’ learning styles, profiles, educational interests and academic goals” (Ornstein/Hunkins 1998: 374). Nevertheless, a low level of student satisfaction with the learning experience may contribute to high dropout rates from online courses (Carr 2000: A39); a lack of social interaction with the instructor or peers and poor learner motivation may also constitute important barriers to students’ online learning (Muilenburg/Berge 2005: 29). But these challenges could be tackled by blended learning that integrates e-learning and face-to-face instruction in the classroom, which is useful for enhancing students’ disciplinary knowledge and satisfaction with the comprehensiveness of their learning (Young et al. 2008: 943).

To support the didactics of interpreting, some universities have developed e-learning platforms over the past years, including Masaryk University in Czech Republic (Fictumová 2005: 202–206), the Copenhagen Business School (Gorm Hansen/Shlesinger 2007: 109–111) in Denmark, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poland (Tymczyńska 2009: 148) and Universiti Sains in Malaysia (Ibrahim-González 2011: 224–225). These platforms allow students to decide on the pace, time and steps of their learning, and thus become active and self-regulatory learners (Liaw et al. 2007: 1909). Kruse (2004) finds that such a learning environment maximizes students’ satisfaction and promotes their confidence; Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger (2007: 107) also point out that it has led to dramatic improvements in students’ final exam success rates.

This paper presents how an e-platform, newly established for undergraduates taking the introductory and intermediate interpreting courses offered by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) facilitates their self-directed learning and complements classroom learning, and it explores students’ perceived benefits brought by the system.

2 Interpreting courses for PolyU undergraduates

Interpreting courses are offered to undergraduates majoring and minoring in Chinese and Bilingual Studies (CBS) at PolyU, with a primary aim of developing and increasing their bilingual competence in English and Chinese. The author has been assigned to teach two interpreting courses over the last three years: a compulsory course at introductory level (CBS3802 Introduction to Interpreting) and an elective at intermediate level (CBS3842 Consecutive Interpreting). In the former course, classes are made up of students of different levels of proficiency in English;¹ most students have learned English as L2 whereas some others have English as L3.² This mixed ability problem tends to be less serious in the elective course, which is often given up by the weakest students.

Interpreting courses for PolyU undergraduates demand at least (1) an average level of competence in spoken English and Chinese (Cantonese, L1 of Hong Kong locals, or Mandarin, widely spoken by students from mainland China, Taiwan and Malaysia), (2) certain inter-cultural and common sense, and (3) some improvisation skills. In previous years, weak(er) students did not demonstrate adequate skills, and those who were hardworking showed slow progress in class improvisation and quizzes; they needed extra time and practice outside class for improvement. Strong(er) students, on the other hand, tended to be eager to enhance their interpreting performance: they insisted on finishing all supplementary exercises provided by the instructor. However, they gave up proper practice methods in order to save time and effort, and this eventually led to limited progress.

The instructor arranged to talk with every student for at least five minutes after each quiz (except the final quiz at the end of the semester), pointing out their strengths and major weaknesses, and advising them on what to do for improvement/enhancement, including (1) what types of text to pick for sight translation exercises if one's general vocabulary is limited, (2) what kinds of recordings to use for listening, shadowing and consecutive interpreting (CI) exercises (depending on each student's English abilities), (3) what videos to watch for gist getting or for improvisation practice, (4) how long pauses should last for CI practice, (5) how many times for one to listen to a recording so as to enhance their CI performance, (6) what aspect for one to pay attention to when the recording is played for the first/second time, and (7) how many

¹ Students of the Broad Discipline of Language, Culture and Communication (BDLCC), based on their academic performance and study interest, are required to choose a Major to further develop themselves at the end of their Year-1 studies. Two Majors are offered by this Broad Discipline, namely BA(Hons) in Chinese and Bilingual Studies (BACBS) and BA(Hons) in English Studies for the Professions (BAESP). The numbers of strong students in both programmes are similar, but students who are very weak at English seldom select the English Major. In other words, the problem of mixed English abilities is not uncommon in BACBS' compulsory courses.

² Local (Hong Kong) students have Cantonese as L1 and English as L2. Some students from mainland China may have their dialect as L1, Mandarin as L2 and English as L3; the Mandarin-speaking international students (e. g. from South Korea) of the BACBS programme have also learned English as L3.

exercises to do before taking a quiz. They were reminded to record their practice from time to time so that they could evaluate their own performance. From leisurely talks with students after class, however, the instructor got to know that for their home practice, they rarely recorded their speeches, seldom jotted notes or even allowed pauses for CI exercises, and they tended to use only materials in which they were interested for practice. For example, most students simply picked short stories and avoided articles/recordings regarding current affairs owing to their lack of “political interest” and news sense.

After these one-to-one consultations, most students tended to make some progress in the semester-end assessment (assessment plans in Tables 6 and 7 in Section 3.3.2), which was around a 10-or-so percentage decrease in misuse of tenses, whereas some weak/weakest students would probably show no progress at all. However, most students with progress at the end of the introductory course would just go back to their original levels during the first quarter/half of the intermediate-level CI elective. Regardless of their interpreting competence, if students spend time practicing but fail to employ appropriate methods, their learning can hardly be effective.

Given limited time for class exercises and the fact that the instructor could do very little supervising students' after-class practice, it was necessary to develop appropriate complementary online resources for self-paced practice to foster student autonomy.

3 E-platform: Self-study design

During the one-to-one consultations, the instructor asked students to practice improvisation and interpreting skills with parallel bilingual texts from short stories and news magazines, subtitles in TV dramas (not on specialized fields) and current affair programmes, and Internet videos like TED Talk. They were also asked to compile their own bilingual glossaries, encouraged to examine and evaluate their interpreted versions recorded, and to form study groups for daily/weekly interpreting practice. However, owing to students' lack of “political interest” and news sense, their choices of materials became limited; because of their hectic schedules, they tried to simplify the way of practicing interpreting and could achieve limited progress in the end.

Reviewing previous cohorts' backgrounds and performance in classes and quizzes, the instructor attempted to cope with two problems: (1) weak(er) students could not master basic skills, and (2) students generally did not practice in an effective way. Therefore, an e-platform was designed as a new intervention, which serves as a self-directed learning tool allowing students at all levels to learn and practice at their own pace outside class.

To address the first concern, the e-platform adopts a multilevel approach (Section 3.1) and so students can select the knowledge and skills they wish to cultivate and improve/enhance. To solve the second problem, students' access to the e-platform is confined to the university's language laboratories for interpreting classes (Section 3.2).

The design and setup of the e-platform addresses specific intended learning outcomes of the two undergraduate interpreting courses (Section 3.3.1). To encourage students to use the system, the instructor has adjusted the assessment plans for the two courses to reflect part of their self-directed learning (Section 3.3.2); students are guided to assess their performance based on the course rubric (Section 3.3.3). In other words, deployment of the e-platform is expected to complement classroom learning.

3.1 Multilevel design

This section presents three senses of “multilevel design”, content-wise (Section 3.1.1), task-wise (Section 3.1.2) and accent-wise (Section 3.1.3), followed by a brief conclusion (Section 3.1.4).

3.1.1 Multilevel design content-wise

A challenging or controversial topic is presented in more than one level of English difficulty or subject complexity (Table 1). The e-platform will come up with 95 English news passages in the middle of 2019, when the project period ends; among the 65 available as of January 2018, more than 50 of them are multilevel texts. For instance, there are two passages on toxic compounds in hairy crab samples taken by Hong Kong’s Centre for Food Safety written at two levels of English difficulty in terms of syntactic structure, and two others on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea demonstrating two levels of subject complexity. The use of multilevel texts may help close the performance gaps for students with different ability levels (Mannis 2002; Chambers 2005; Cornford 2012: 3).

News passage	Nature	Political/Constitutional, economic, social, military, health...	
	Area	Hong Kong (domestic)	Outside Hong Kong: Asia, Europe, Australasia, North America, etc.
Level of complexity (<i>Difficulty progression</i>)		2–3 levels of English difficulty (in terms of lexical choices and syntactic structures) / subject complexity	

Table 1: Difficulty progression (in terms of content)

3.1.2 Multilevel design task-wise

The e-platform features three types of tasks for student choices based on their learning needs and goals: (1) sight translation (ST) of terms/expressions, (2) spontaneous sight translation (SST) of passages, and (3) consecutive interpreting (CI).

Students may start with the warm-up task, that is, sight-translating an on-screen news term/expression within a time limit (12 seconds for each); a reference version will be displayed when time is up. If students need less than the specific time, they can click on the “Display Answer” button for checking. Those terms/expressions include

names of important personalities and organizations plus crucial and/or technical expressions of a particular news topic.

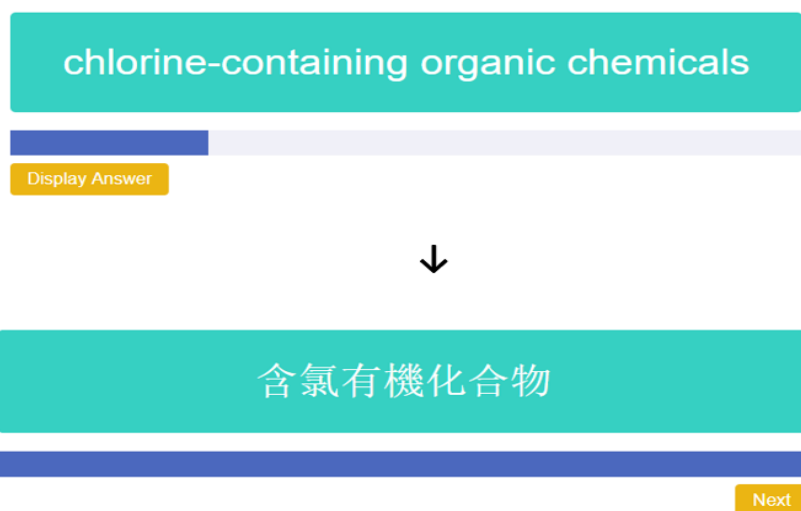


Figure 1: Screenshot of the sight translation task for terms/expressions

For example, an English term “chlorine-containing organic chemicals” is on-screen for students’ sight translation (Figure 1). Its Chinese version is “含氯有機化合物”.

Students can choose the practice direction based on their needs/bilingual competence levels: English-to-Chinese (EC), Chinese-to-English (CE), and EC&CE (random). There are two Chinese versions: one in traditional characters (for local and Taiwanese students) and one in simplified characters (for students from China).

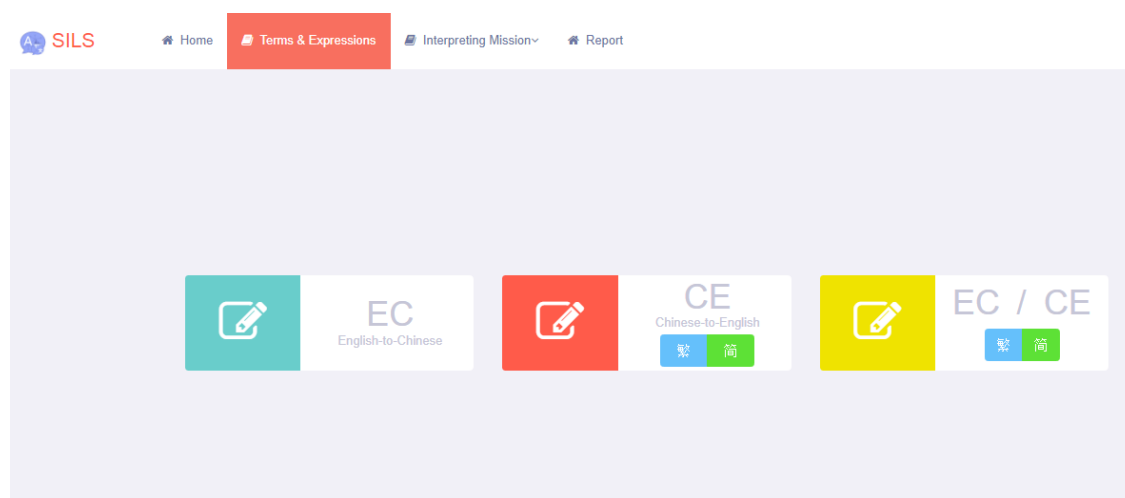


Figure 2: Screenshot of the sight translation direction page for student choices

On average, each news passage consists of around 30 bilingual terms/expressions. Two multilevel texts, for example, on the same topic cover about 60 terms/expressions. They are presented in random order for students' practicing any of the two multilevel texts.

At a higher level of difficulty is spontaneous sight translation (SST) of the news passages. It is different from normal sight translation practice in class, which allows students to read the whole text and understand the context before interpreting. For SST, each passage is split into 8–12 chunks. After viewing a chunk on the screen, students have to interpret it within a time limit, that is to say 20–25 seconds for a challenging chunk and 15 seconds for a less challenging one. Passages are translated into Chinese, hence the possibility to do exercises in two directions: English-to-Chinese (traditional/ simplified) and Chinese-to-English. Figure 3 shows one of the ten chunks of an English passage for students' interpreting within a time limit. The glossary for the exercise is shown on the right.

The screenshot displays a web-based interface for a spontaneous sight translation exercise. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Home, Terms & Expressions, Interpreting Mission (highlighted in red), and Report. A user profile icon is visible on the right. The main content area has a teal header with the title "MTR safety in question after firebomb attack (EC)". Below the header, a news passage is shown: "A firebomb was hurled on a packed MTR train approaching Tsim Sha Tsui station during the evening rush hours on February 10. Soon smoke filled the compartment and spread to other carriages. The assault has left 19 people, including 60-year-old Cheung Kam-fai, the attacker himself injured." Below the passage, there is a blue "Next" button and a red timer indicating "19 second(s) left". A large grey rectangular area is intended for the student's interpretation. To the right of the passage, a "Glossary" table lists eight terms with their Chinese equivalents.

Glossary	
1 paint thinner	塗料稀釋劑
2 liquefied petroleum gas	液化石油氣
3 diagnosed with delusional disorder	被診斷出患有妄想症
4 closed-circuit TV (CCTV) cameras	閉路電視
5 lawmaker Michael Tien Puk-sun	田北辰議員
6 chairman of Legislative Council's Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways	立法會鐵路事宜小組委員會主席
7 former chairman of the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation	九廣鐵路公司前主席
8 MTR company's Chief of Operating, Francis Li Shing-kee	港鐵公司車務營運主管李聖基

Figure 3: Screenshot of a spontaneous sight translation exercise

SST is employed in an attempt to increase the time pressure facing students and thus their speed for interpreting; this worked in my trial run in CBS3842 Consecutive Interpreting in the autumn semester of 2016/17.

I hypothesized that the use of SST would increase students' speed for consecutive interpreting, and so picked 2 topics – Ice Bucket Challenge and physical exercise – for experimentation. I listened to the recordings of the students from the 2015/16 and 2016/17 cohorts and compared their general performance (Table 2).

2015/16: "control group"	2016/17: "experimental group"
<u>Activities for a 3-hour class</u> CI (EC) exercise no. 1 + CI (EC) exercise no. 2 + CI (CE) exercise no. 1 <i>(All on the same topic, e. g. Ice Bucket Challenge)</i>	<u>Activities for a 3-hour class</u> SST (EC) exercise no. 1 [use of the transcript of CI (EC) exercise no. 1] + CI (EC) exercise no. 2 + CI (CE) exercise no. 1 <i>(All on the same topic, e. g. Ice Bucket Challenge)</i>

Table 2: An informal pilot study: effects of spontaneous sight translation

I observed that after the SST task, students tended to interpret most of the chunks of the second English-to-Chinese exercise (that is, CI-EC exercise no. 2) two to three seconds faster than did most students of the 2015/16 class. The study was not conducted in most neutral setting and many secondary variables were involved. Nevertheless, the positive results seem to suggest that spontaneous sight translation serves as a helpful scaffolding tool for students' consecutive interpreting (CI).

The most challenging task is CI. English, Cantonese and Mandarin recordings are made of all the news passages and their renditions, hence availability of three directions for students' options: English-to-Cantonese/Mandarin, Cantonese-to-English and Mandarin-to-English. The same set of time limits for SST exercises applies to CI exercises. This is important as the instructor could hardly strictly apply time limits in a varied ability class.

Task type	Warm-up: sight translation (ST) of terms/expressions	Spontaneous sight translation (SST) of passages	Consecutive interpreting (CI)
Direction	English-to-Chinese (EC); Chinese-to-English (CE; Chinese in traditional/simplified characters); EC/CE (random)	EC; CE, with Chinese in traditional/simplified characters	English-to-Cantonese/Mandarin; Cantonese-to-English; Mandarin-to-English
Difficulty progression	--->---->---->----->----->----->----->----->		

Table 3: Difficulty progression (in terms of task nature)

3.1.3 Multilevel design accent-wise

Around half of the English recordings for CI practice are in British or American accents and the remaining in other accents (Table 4). The latter may pose more uncertainty to students.

Accent of English (all students' L2/L3)	Relatively standard (British/American); recordings by native speakers of English	Others, e. g. Russian, Nepalese, German and Sri Lankan; recordings by non-native speakers of English
<i>Difficulty progression</i>	--->----->----->----->----->----->----->	

Table 4: Difficulty progression (in terms of accents)

In class the instructor tended to use English audio-visual materials in British and American accents. During one-to-one consultations and casual conversations with the instructor, students from previous cohorts had expressed their strong preference for videos featuring a “standard” BBC or CNN accent, and their experience of a high level of stress when listening to recordings in strong(er) accents by non-native speakers of English, such as Sri Lankan and Indian. This e-platform makes different accents available to cater to the learning needs and goals of different student users.

3.1.4 Conclusion

There is not a practice formula to ensure success. Students may decide on learning materials and devise their own learning strategies to strive for their goals. They may start from relatively easy passages/tasks/accents at earlier stages and later on proceed to more challenging ones. They may also begin/keep working with the exercises/tasks of their highest interest or for their most urgent learning needs.

3.2 Accessible only from PolyU

Students, undoubtedly, wish handy learning materials were accessible everywhere through the Internet. However, a large part of previous cohorts told the author that they had gradually given up proper consecutive interpreting practice methods when working on supplementary exercises uploaded to the University Portal (myPolyU): in order to save time and effort, they did shadowing instead or interpreted spontaneously without note taking as they listened to an English recording on the train; they did not even check the transcript to see if they had understood the original text correctly. This lowered the quality of their CI practice and performance, sapped their energy and morale, and ended up wasting their precious time.

The e-platform can only be accessed in PolyU's language laboratories for interpreting classes. Students have to do exercises in booths, with their speeches recorded when in practice. They work with time pressure as a time limit is set for every chunk in each text (for SST)/recording (for CI). They are required to jot notes for CI exercises

and upload image files of their notes to the system if they wish to receive an email with a written version in the target language of the exercise they have just done for their reference. Students, finally, practice in the way expected by the instructor.

Although not “place independent”, the system is relatively “time independent” as it can be used in five language laboratories, which open from 8:30am to 10pm on weekdays and Saturdays.

3.3 Complementary to classroom learning

Deployment of the e-platform complements classroom learning for the two interpreting courses (CBS3802 and CBS3842) via three ways: (1) it addresses specific intended learning outcomes, (2) it engages students in self-learning with the slightly-adjusted assessment plans, and (3) it offers students chances to assess their performance based on the course rubric.

3.3.1 Intended learning outcomes

Upon completing a PolyU course, students are expected to be able to achieve a list of its Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Table 5 demonstrates how the design of the e-platform addresses specific ILOs of the two interpreting courses.

Course	ILOs to be addressed (Course syllabus)	E-platform as a self-directed learning tool
CBS3802 Introduction to Interpreting (compulsory)	Be able to perform interpreting tasks on topics from general areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● News stories are used to cover various daily life topics ● Scaffolding design: the warm-up sight translation task of terms/expressions, multilevel interpreting exercises, on-screen glossary and translation references
CBS3842 Consecutive Interpreting (Intermediate; elective)	(a) Master the basic skills (e. g. improvisation skills and sight translation) and strategies essential to CI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scaffolding design: multilevel interpreting exercises
	(b) Recognize the specific requirements of an interpreting task (c) Make adequate preparation for a CI task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students to be confined to practice in work booths ● Students to perform interpreting tasks under time pressure (time limits set for SST and CI contents) ● Students to upload images of notes taken for CI practice for a reference version

Table 5: Alignment between interpreting courses' ILOs and e-platform's design

3.3.2 Assessment plans

The instructor has made some adjustments to the two courses' assessments. Tables 6 and 7 show the assessment tasks for 2016/17 and 2017/18, the e-platform's launching year. The 2017/18 plans have been adjusted to reflect part of students' self-directed learning.

CBS3802 is a 13-week introductory course, which is compulsory for all Year-2 BACBS students. The only difference between two years' assessment plans is removal of Week 10's figure interpreting quiz for students' self-directed learning records for their after-class practice of spontaneous sight translation in 2017/18. Students have to listen back to their recordings and evaluate their interpreting performance based on the written reference version and the course rubric prepared by the instructor, and list their strengths and weaknesses.

CBS3802 Introduction to Interpreting					
The 2016/17-Spring semester assessment plan			Assessment plan for 2017/18-Spring semester		
Wk	Assessment task	%	Wk	Assessment task	%
4	Quiz 1 ● Active listening (10 %) ● Sight translation (10 %)	20 %	4	Quiz 1 ● Active listening (10 %) ● Sight translation (10 %)	20 %
7	Midterm Quiz: sight translation ● English-to-Chinese (15 %) ● Chinese-to-English (15 %)	30 %	7	Midterm Quiz: sight translation ● English-to-Chinese (15 %) ● Chinese-to-English (15 %)	30 %
10	Quiz 2: figure interpreting ● Consecutive interpreting (EC)	10 %	8–11	<i>Outside class: spontaneous sight translation</i> ● EC x 2 (5 %) ● CE x 2 (5 %) ● <i>Self-directed learning records to be submitted in Week 13</i>	10 %
13	Final Quiz: CI ● English-to-Cantonese/Mandarin (20 %) ● Cantonese/Mandarin-to-English (20 %)	40 %	13	Final Quiz: CI ● English-to-Cantonese/Mandarin (20 %) ● Cantonese/Mandarin-to-English (20 %)	40 %

Table 6: The 2016/17 and 2017/18 assessment plans for CBS3802

Some class arrangements have to be made to familiarize students with the e-platform: (1) In Week 1, the instructor demonstrates to students the use of the e-platform and encourages them to do the warm-up sight translation task of terms/expressions outside class. (2) In Weeks 7 and 8, after students know sight translation better, the instructor picks two spontaneous sight translation tasks (one EC exercise and one CE exercise) from the e-platform for class practice. (3) From Week 8 to Week 11, students have to work on at least four spontaneous sight translation tasks (two for each direction), taken from the e-platform, outside class and fill out self-directed learning records, which account for 10 % of students' total marks.

CBS3842 is an intermediate-level elective. The mere difference between two years' assessment plans is 10 % gone from Midterm Quiz to a newly-added assessment task in 2017/18: students' self-directed learning records for their after-class SST and/or CI practice of e-platform materials.

CBS3842 Consecutive Interpreting (CI)					
The 2016/17-Autumn semester assessment plan			Assessment plan for 2017/18-Autumn semester		
Wk	Assessment task	%	Wk	Assessment task	%
8	Midterm Quiz: consecutive interpreting (lower-intermediate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EC (20 %) ● CE (20 %) 	40 %	8	Midterm Quiz: consecutive interpreting (lower-intermediate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EC (15 %) ● CE (15 %) 	30 %
13	Final Quiz: CI (intermediate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EC (20 %) ● CE (20 %) 	40 %	13	Final Quiz: CI (intermediate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EC (20 %) ● CE (20 %) 	40 %
7/11	Assignment: news glossary compiling (individual) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students divided into 2 batches: one batch to submit their work in Week 7, another batch in Week 11 	10 %	7/11	Assignment: news glossary compiling (individual) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students divided into 2 batches: one batch to submit their work in Week 7, another batch in Week 11 	10 %
8–13	Continuous assessment: class improvisations and recordings	10 %	8–13	Continuous assessment: class improvisations and recordings	10 %
-			13	Self-directed learning records (individual) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Each student has to finish at least 5 e-platform's SST &/ CI exercises 	10 %

Table 7: The 2016/17 and 2017/18 assessment plans for CBS3842

3.3.3 Course rubric for interpreting assessment

To be in line with the requirement of “Use of rubrics in major assessment tasks (revised in August 2016)” by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) of PolyU, the instructor developed one for the interpreting courses (Table 8). The rubric was first used in the academic year 2017/18 to evaluate students’ performance in quizzes, and posted on Blackboard for students’ information since Week 1, so that they knew the assessment criteria.

Students are instructed to assess the quality of their own interpretations during their self-directed learning practice based on the same rubric. The 10 % is not for their interpreting quality but for assessing quality – people who follow the scoring guide and assess their performance honestly would score high.

Grade	Criteria		
	1. Accuracy (60 %)	2. Fluency (incl. grammar) (30 %)	3. Style (10 %)
A+/A	<p>Excellent (54.0–60.0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identifiable problems of comprehension • Original message has been conveyed completely to TT audience • No (unnecessary) omissions or additions to information 	<p>Excellent (27.0–30.0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives a feeling that the TT needs no improvement from grammatical points though one or two natural failings might be observed • Native-like fluency in grammar 	<p>Excellent (9.0–10.0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register precisely and sensitively captured • Sophisticated awareness of the cultural context • A sophisticated command of TT lexis, syntax, and register
B+/B	<p>Good (45.0–53.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtually no problems of comprehension except with the most highly specialized vocabulary with no influence on TT audience's understanding • Some partial omissions and additions 	<p>Good (22.5–26.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains advanced proficiency in grammar • Some grammatical problems but with no influence on message 	<p>Good (7.5–8.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fair degree of sensitivity to register and cultural context • TT lexis, syntax, and register are appropriate
C+/C	<p>Satisfactory (36.0–44.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information is conveyed to TT audience with some difficulty due to the interpreter's misunderstanding of some parts of original message • Apparent omissions and additions 	<p>Satisfactory (18.0–22.4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some awkward grammatical usage in TL and literality of rendering but not impeding sense in a significant manner • Some grammatical problems are apparent and have negative effects on communication 	<p>Satisfactory (6.0–7.4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sustained attention to register and cultural context • TT lexis, syntax, and register are not always appropriate
D+/D	<p>Marginal (30.0–35.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of poor expressions of ideas • A number of serious problems in 	<p>Marginal (15.0–17.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clumsy TL • A number of nonsensical grammatical 	<p>Marginal (5.0–5.9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scant attention to register and cultural context • Serious shortcomings

Grade	Criteria		
	1. Accuracy (60 %)	2. Fluency (incl. grammar) (30 %)	3. Style (10 %)
	<i>understanding ST interferes with communication of original message</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Difficult to understand TT</i> 	<i>usages in TL</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Unnatural sounding</i> 	<i>in the use of appropriate lexis, syntax, and register</i>
F	Poor (0–29.9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Numerous &/ Severe problems interfere greatly with communication of original message</i> • <i>TT audience cannot understand what original writer was trying to say</i> 	Poor (0–14.9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Knowledge of TL grammar is inadequate</i> • <i>Severe grammatical problems interfere greatly with message</i> 	Poor (0–4.9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No appreciable understanding of register and cultural context</i> • <i>No concept of register or sentence variety</i>

Table 8: Rubric for CBS3802 and CBS3842 (adapted from Zakian et al. 2012)

4 Student's feedback

The e-platform was first launched in the autumn semester of Academic Year 2017/18 and open to 28 students taking the intermediate-level elective of Consecutive Interpreting (CBS3842).³ A total of 35 English passages with their Chinese renditions, 105 recordings (with 35 in English, 35 others in Cantonese and the remaining 35 in Mandarin), and more than 1,000 terms/expression were available for students' outside class practice.⁴

Students were familiar with the instructor and her teaching methods as they finished the introductory course (CBS3802) in the spring semester of the previous academic year. The instructor spent some time in Week 2 (toward the end of the add-drop period) and Week 4 demonstrating to them features and operation of the e-platform, and explaining purposes and use of self-directed learning records. Students were excited about the establishment of the system but nervous of self-assessment since part of the exercises were considered being much more challenging than classroom learning materials.

³ The system is currently open to around 60 students of CBS3802 "Introduction to Interpreting" in the spring semester.

⁴ Another batch of 30 English passages with Chinese translations, around 1,000 bilingual terms/expressions and recordings in English, Cantonese and Mandarin were available in the system by the end of the 2018 summer, and one more batch consisting of 30 English passages and relevant materials would be ready by the end of the 2019 summer.

The first batch of e-platform users came in a relatively small number, but user habits and feedback could serve as our good inputs on how to improve the system further and perhaps fine-tune the classroom teaching. The researcher tracked user activity records to get to know the time and frequency of the e-platform in use (Section 4.1). To explore students' perceived helpfulness of the e-platform as a self-directed learning tool, students were also asked to fill out a brief questionnaire anonymously after Final Quiz in Week 13 (Section 4.2).

4.1 User Activity Records

User activity records (Figure 4) show student numbers (that is, "Net ID") and details of exercises students did, including task type (i.e., "Mission"), interpreting direction (i.e. "Category"), news nature (i.e. "Type"), (geographical) region, news heading, interpreting date (i.e. "Create DT"), duration of each interpreting task (i.e. "Time Spend"), and note uploading status (i.e. "Uploaded Note Image (for CI)").

Net ID	Mission	Category	Type	Region	Heading	Create DT	Time Spend	Uploaded
15032947d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Sports	Hong Kong (Domestic)	香港首次在(維港)海濱舉辦電動方程式賽車	11/29/2017 10:32	194 second(s)	Note Image
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	English To Chinese	Social	Hong Kong (Domestic)	MTR safety in question after firebomb attack	11/28/2017 18:24	120 second(s)	
15088447d	Consecutive Interpreting	Cantonese To English	Constitutional/Political		中國在二十國集團峰會上給予日本冷遇	11/28/2017 17:25	219 second(s)	Display
15088447d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Constitutional/Political		China gives Japan the cold shoulder at the G20	11/28/2017 17:15	189 second(s)	Display
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	Cantonese To English	Social / Health		食物安全中心指貴大龍蝦等賣商	11/28/2017 17:03	154 second(s)	
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	Cantonese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social		南韓檢方表示朴槿惠和閹密串通	11/28/2017 16:57	30 second(s)	
15067024d	Consecutive Interpreting	Putonghua To English	Constitutional/Political		脱欧对英国的影响	11/28/2017 16:34	174 second(s)	Display
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Sports	Hong Kong (Domestic)	曹皇如如何由最懶變成最強的小伙子	11/28/2017 16:05	178 second(s)	
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political	Europe	脱欧對英國的影響	11/28/2017 15:50	184 second(s)	
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political	Europe	脱欧對英國的影響	11/28/2017 15:45	174 second(s)	
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Social		MTR safety in question after firebomb attack	11/28/2017 15:15	159 second(s)	
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Social		Eddie Chu unwilling to back down despite de	11/28/2017 14:55	163 second(s)	
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political	Europe	英國兩年內退出歐盟	11/28/2017 14:52	169 second(s)	
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political	Europe	英國兩年內退出歐盟	11/28/2017 14:48	167 second(s)	
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	Cantonese To English	Social		特首梁振英為押後橫洲項目擔責	11/28/2017 14:47	179 second(s)	
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	Cantonese To English	Constitutional/Political		英國兩年內退出歐盟	11/28/2017 14:40	201 second(s)	
14088172d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Constitutional/Political / Social		Rebel legislators take extraordinary oaths	11/28/2017 14:31	166 second(s)	
16029166d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	English To Chinese	Constitutional/Political / Social	Transnational News	A crisis of white identity (1)	11/28/2017 14:02	27 second(s)	
15089062d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Transnational News	白人身份認同危機(二)	11/28/2017 10:41	233 second(s)	
15089062d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Asia	敦促臺灣同性婚姻立法	11/28/2017 10:24	177 second(s)	
15089062d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Transnational News	白人身份認同危機(二)	11/28/2017 9:45	237 second(s)	
15089062d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Transnational News	白人身份認同危機(一)	11/28/2017 9:40	202 second(s)	
15089062d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Transnational News	白人身份認同危機(一)	11/28/2017 9:36	200 second(s)	
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political	Asia	伊斯蘭國恐怖組織「首次直接威脅」中國	11/27/2017 22:02	168 second(s)	
15089062d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	English To Chinese	Social / Health	Hong Kong (Domestic)	Toxic compounds in hairy crab samples excee	11/27/2017 21:59	188 second(s)	
15086147d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	English To Chinese	Social	Hong Kong (Domestic)	MTR safety in question after firebomb attack	11/27/2017 21:58	159 second(s)	
15067024d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political	Asia	伊斯蘭國恐怖組織「首次直接威脅」中國	11/27/2017 21:57	162 second(s)	
15086147d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	English To Chinese	Sports	Hong Kong (Domestic)	Wonder Kid Rex Tso's 21st straight and wonde	11/27/2017 21:54	196 second(s)	
15089062d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Sports		How Rex Tso turned from the laziest to the to	11/27/2017 21:45	168 second(s)	Display
15084365d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Transnational News	白人身份認同危機(一)	11/27/2017 21:45	213 second(s)	
15086147d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Sports		Wonder Kid Rex Tso's 21st straight and wonde	11/27/2017 21:42	196 second(s)	Display
15084365d	Spontaneous Sight Translation	Chinese To English	Constitutional/Political / Social	Hong Kong (Domestic)	泛民躍躍欲試，參戰選舉委員會	11/27/2017 21:40	219 second(s)	
15084365d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Constitutional/Political		Britain is leaving the European Union in two y	11/27/2017 21:32	176 second(s)	Display
15086147d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Constitutional/Political / Social		Opponents demonstrate against Asia's first se	11/27/2017 20:52	150 second(s)	Display
15086147d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Constitutional/Political / Social		Urge for same-sex marriage legislation in Taiw	11/27/2017 20:35	166 second(s)	Display
15086147d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Social		60-year-old man charged with arson after leav	11/27/2017 20:26	148 second(s)	Display
15086147d	Consecutive Interpreting	English To Chinese	Social		MTR safety in question after firebomb attack	11/27/2017 20:19	170 second(s)	Display

Figure 4: Screenshot of part of the user activity record

Tables 9 and 10 throw some light on students' use of the system throughout the semester. In 2017/18, Midterm Quiz was held in Week 8. Students tended to start doing the exercises outside class for two consecutive weeks before the Quiz (i.e. Weeks 7 and 8). They seemed more eager than before to engage themselves in such online learning starting from Week 11. This might be caused by their need to submit

self-directed learning records and to practice for the Final Quiz in Week 13. Another reason could be that they found the system helpful to increase part of their competence for interpreting. The class was instructed so that each of them had to work on at least five SST and/or CI exercises; the minimum number of exercises done by those 28 students was 140. However, they finally completed 246 exercises, or 8.8 per person on average. All students finished at least five exercises, actually ranging from 5 to 38, and the standard deviation is 6.6.

Deployment of the e-platform facilitated self-directed learning after students were motivated. Such learning would be more successful if students played an active role in directing themselves to learn without being extrinsically affected.

Teaching Week	Number of exercises done	Number of students working on e-platform exercises (SST &/ CI)
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
4	5	1
5	0	0
6	0	0
7	9	2
8	15	5
9	5	2
10	5	2
11	29	8
12	121	20
13	57	9
TOTAL	246	-

Table 9: E-platform in use throughout the semester

The instructor set spontaneous sight translation exercises as scaffolds for consecutive interpreting tasks. Students seemed to agree with this rationale. According to system records (Table 10), students practiced CI more often than SST, but that was not a landslide difference: the ratio was 148:98. They worked on the English-to-Chinese direction more frequently than another. In fact, many of them made use of multilevel texts – they inclined to practice SST on EC with an easier text before attempting CI on Cantonese/Mandarin-to-English with a more challenging one on the same topic.

Consecutive interpreting (CI)			Spontaneous sight translation (SST)	
Direction		No.	No.	Direction
EC		85	58	EC
CE	Cantonese-E	57	40	Chinese-E
	Mandarin-E	6		
Total		148	98	Total
		246		

Table 10: Number of exercises done by students: task and direction comparison

Other parts of the records also suggested that students tended to pick political/constitutional news for practice: 130 exercises of the 246 were political in nature, such as voting issues in Hong Kong and the United States, and Park Geun-hye's stepping down as South Korean president. This was out of the instructor's expectation as political issues were evaded by previous cohorts.

4.2 Questionnaire

To explore students' perceptions of the e-platform, this class of 28 students was asked to fill out a brief questionnaire anonymously after Final Quiz. The response rate was 100 %.

The questionnaire mainly adopted a 5-point Likert scale. Likert scales are effective to find out how people react to a new product (Survey Monkey 2018). Besides, PolyU students are used to assessing the quality of teaching and courses with the university's student feedback questionnaire (SFQ), which employs a 5-point scale. E-platform users were told to assess their perceived effectiveness of the e-platform setup and features in achieving specified intended learning outcomes of the course (Table 11), in enhancing their knowledge/abilities/performance (Table 12), and in complementing their classroom learning (Table 13). They were also invited to give open-ended comments on their experience working with the system.

Course	E-platform features	ILOs	Ineffective-Neutral-Effective					Scale
			1	2	3	4	5	
CBS 3842	- Scaffolding design: multilevel exercises, tasks & accents	(a) Master basic skills & strategies essential to CI	1	0	8	15	4	No. of students
	- Students to be confined to practice in work booths - Students to perform interpreting tasks under time pressure - Students to upload images of notes taken for CI to be uploaded for a reference version	(b) Recognize specific requirements of an interpreting task (c) Make adequate preparation for a CI task	1	1	7	16	3	

Table 11: Student perceptions: E-platform setup and features achieving specific ILOs?

Students tended to agree that the e-platform design achieved specific intended learning outcomes of the intermediate-level CI course: the same 19 students of the 28 considered the e-platform effective in facilitating them to master basic skills and strategies essential to CI, recognizing specific requirements of an interpreting task, and making adequate preparation for a CI task.

Knowledge/Abilities/Performance	Ineffective-----Neutral-----Effective					Scale
	1	2	3	4	5	
(a) Textual &/ contextual knowledge	0	0	5	20	3	No. of students
(b) Bilingual abilities, e. g. vocabulary	0	0	4	20	4	
(c) Listening competence (e. g. English recordings in different accents)	0	0	6	15	7	
(d) ST comprehension abilities (for both SST & CI)	0	1	7	12	8	
(e) Note-taking abilities (e. g. briefer notes, quicker note taking, to the point)	1	5	8	11	3	
(f) Performance of TT reproduction: → accuracy and fluency of delivery	0	2	8	15	3	
(g) Capabilities of dealing with challenges	0	1	5	18	4	
(h) Capabilities of assessing your own work (e. g. rubric, audio files and reference versions)	0	0	8	16	4	

Table 12: Student perceptions: E-platform setup and features enhancing competence?

Most students seemed to think that their competence of various areas increased with the use of the system. The areas that are worth particular attention of the researcher are (e) note-taking abilities and (f) performance of TT reproduction (i. e. accuracy and fluency of delivery). Some suggested more guidelines on note taking and interpreting based on the brief notes although these had been covered in the introductory course (CBS3802). Nevertheless, the researcher agrees that improvement should be made to the system if it is aimed to serve as an effective self-directed learning tool for interpreting, and that more effort should be made in note-taking training in future classroom teaching.

Do you think e-platform design and exercises complement your classroom learning?					
Scale	Strongly disagree -----Neutral-----Strongly agree				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. of students	0	0	4	18	6

Table 13: Student perceptions: E-platform complementing classroom learning?

Deployment of the e-platform, perceived by students, was effective in complementing their learning in the classroom. The researcher hopes this could help to intrinsically motivate future cohorts to practice interpreting with the system.

Last but not least, students gave constructive suggestions to further support the multilevel design of the system: (1) to give an option to play the whole text once/twice before a CI task or just doing the exercise directly, (2) to classify all the news passages/recordings into different levels of difficulty based on a set of criteria, for their easier reference, and (3) to provide scaffolds for note taking.

5 Conclusions

The e-platform is effective in addressing the instructor's concern about interpreting novices' mixed abilities and their ineffective practice without close supervision. Deployment of the system allows students to decide – based on their needs and goals – on contents for learning, devise practice strategies and evaluate performance with the course rubric.

To increase learner motivation, the instructor demonstrated the use of the e-platform in class, and more importantly, adjusted interpreting assessments to reflect part of their self-directed learning. Students were familiar with task designs and work booth equipment for self-directed learning, which they used in class. There was adequate interaction between students and the instructor: students attended the interpreting class once per week, and felt comfortable to ask questions when confused with instruction. A project assistant was also arranged to email them references and deal with any technical problems. E-learning and face-to-face instruction in the classroom were integrated to a certain extent; this blended learning approach facilitated students' self-directed learning.

The launch of this e-platform could be considered a success with high user satisfaction. Users tended to perceive themselves as having higher competence necessary for interpreting after such self-directed learning.

Previous cohorts were asked to conduct news research and each student had to compile a bilingual glossary for one news topic. This cohort was exposed to many more topics as the e-platform features bilingual terms/expressions and multilevel passages on different news stories, and system records show students had an inclination to practice easier text/tasks before attempting more challenging ones on the same topic. This may explain students' perceived increase in their textual &/ contextual knowledge, bilingual abilities, ST comprehension abilities, note-taking abilities and performance of TT reproduction.

Besides, to take care of students with mixed English abilities, the instructor employed recordings in British or American accents for most EC practice in class and rarely imposed a tight time limit on the tasks. A strength of the system is the availability of English recordings in other accents, e. g. Russian, German and Sri Lankan, and the setting of time limits for all interpreting tasks. Most students agreed that their listening comprehension and capabilities of dealing with challenges improved/enhanced via self-directed learning.

Instructing students to evaluate their e-platform performance according to the course rubric was a new assessment task. This encouraged them to examine their work closely, allowed them to better understand assessment criteria, and enhance their (self-)assessing capabilities. Students' constructive feedback on the system will be seriously considered and improvements will be made to the system in the hope of increasing future users' intrinsic motivation and creating a more useful and rewarding experience for them.

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