

Students' Views on the Use of Film-based *LangPerform* Computer Simulations for Dialogue Interpreting

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Abstract

This article describes the results of the pilot testing phase of the very first *LangPerform* dialogue interpreting (DI) simulations, which replicated authentic communication situations in a Finnish daycare center and consisted of interpreting and sight translation tasks. Five students with German and three with English as their B-language participated in the pilot testing. Afterwards, they were interviewed about their experience and thoughts about the simulations. They were positively surprised by the authenticity of the simulation and regarded the simulation as an excellent additional training method for self-training and self-evaluation. Negative feedback mainly concerned the predetermined time reserved for interpreting, which resulted in there sometimes being long pauses and, on several occasions, not enough time to interpret everything. This also occasionally broke the illusion of authenticity.

Keywords: film-based simulations; dialogue interpreting; public service interpreting; interpreter training; CAIT

Introduction

Today, technology is an integral part of everyday life, and many students entering the universities training interpreters belong to the “digital native” generation. Consequently, there is “increased pressure for systemic structural change in certain educational systems to adapt to the social and technological changes in the wider environment” (Marsh and Martin 2013: 7). At the same time, new tools from other fields, namely from the fields of second-language acquisition (SLA) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL), are available to be adapted for interpreter training, too. This article reports on the application and pilot testing of one such technological tool for public-service interpreter training, the *LangPerform* simulations for dialogue interpreting (DI).

Interpreting pedagogy, CAIT, and CLIL

Interpreting is a complex task involving complex processes that need to be practiced in order to be mastered. Interpreting competence can be defined as consisting of a list of core competencies (Tipton and Furmanek 2016: 8–9; Hale 2007: 179–182), or of three areas: 1) knowledge of how to act, 2) innate personal abilities and characteristics, and 3) skills and subskills that can be practiced and learnt (Kalina 1998: 222–223). In interpreter training, the different competencies, or skills and subskills, are often practiced separately, then combined to include increasingly complex and demanding interpreting tasks. In the training, simulated, authentic, or semi-authentic material is often used: examples include recordings of authentic speeches or “mock conferences” in conference-interpreter training (Kurz 2002) and scripted or spontaneous role-plays in public service-interpreter training and assessment (Wadensjö 2014; Viljanmaa 2015a). Using authentic material in training sessions motivates students and prepares them for future working conditions and environments.

Becoming an interpreter thus requires considerable practice. To increase the amount of practice students receive, many interpreting programs have encouraged students to engage in self-practice as well as peer-practice sessions (e.g., Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger 2007; Gran, Carabelli, and Merlini 2002). For this, interpreting trainers and researchers have developed specific tools and solutions over the years, first in the domain of conference-interpreter training, and later in the domain of public-service interpreting (PSI). The first technological

solutions for computer-assisted interpreter training (CAIT) — *IRIS*, *InterpIT* (Gran, Carabelli, and Merlini 2002), *Interpretations*, and *Black Box* (Sandrelli 2005: 5–16; Sandrelli and de Manuel Jerez 2007: 287–292) — have been followed by other applications and further research into CAIT (Blasco Mayor and Jiménez Ivars 2007; Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger 2007; Tymczyńska 2009; Ibrahim-González 2011; Degueldre and Angelelli 2013). Complete distant learning and online learning courses have been created for PSI to tackle the issue of geographic distances and different learning times (Roberts 2002; Skaaden and Wattne 2009). Most recently, interpreting researchers have engaged with the integration of virtual worlds and 3D virtual learning environments into interpreter education (Sahin 2013; Braun and Slater 2014; Davitti 2015).

The benefits of online learning in interpreter training are the same as for online learning in general. Online learning is not bound by location or time so long as participants have an internet connection and suitable technology. With interactive support systems for online training, the student interpreter can learn and practice interpreting at a distance while following “his/her own pace of improvement” and still obtain assessments from teachers (Gran, Carabelli, and Merlini 2002: 279). Whereas in earlier years, assessment from teachers was obtained by telephone or email (Roberts 2002: 171–172; Gran, Carabelli, and Merlini 2002), nowadays learning platforms like *Moodle* and *Fronter* enable direct messaging and chatting both between peer interpreting students and between students and the trainer. However, as Gran, Carabelli, and Merlini (2002: 279) state, the “quality of the teaching materials and the level and variety of support for independent study depends on the nature and resources of the institution or organisation responsible [...], and the available communications infrastructure.” Since it takes additional resources to develop new tools, it makes sense to take advantage of technological tools and applications already developed in other fields related to interpreting, such as SLA and CLIL.

CLIL offers valuable insights and concrete tools and applications for interpreter training. The core idea and essence of CLIL is that it forms “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content *and* language” (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010: 1; Marsh and Martin 2013: 1). This core idea of CLIL—the combination of content and language—would seem naturally adaptable to interpreter training. First, many interpreting students today need to improve their proficiency in their second language (L2) at the beginning of their training (Blasco Mayor 2015; Zannirato 2008: 21).

Second, student interpreters, especially students in PSI, also need to familiarize themselves with many new areas (PSI settings ranging from day care and schools to hospitals, doctor's surgeries, and social service and unemployment offices, for example). While the dual approach in CLIL technological tools and applications consists of learning content and language, one could argue that in interpreter training, the dual approach consists of practicing the core components of actual interpreting competence and learning information about specific PSI settings, including their standard procedures and specific vocabulary.

The *LangPerform* simulation system for SLA and CLIL

The *LangPerform* simulation system was originally developed by K. Haataja in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) for SLA testing and evaluation. The idea behind the *LangPerform* simulation system is to combine real-life situations and tasks that require interaction through a film and story in which a language learner participates by listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Haataja 2010: 188–189). The simulation system follows the ideas of other interactive technologies used in the field of language learning (e.g., Peterson 2016; Grosbois 2016). The *LangPerform* system integrates film-based computer simulations with a web-based lab for practicing, testing, documenting, and evaluating oral and written foreign-language skills. It is based on four online steps: 1) the creation of a learner-specific language acquisition profile, 2) participation in the actual simulation, 3) self-assessment based on one's own recorded performance, and 4) external assessment by a teacher, other external expert, or peer. All four steps take place in an online learning environment called the *LangPerformLab* (Haataja 2016: 1–10). All *LangPerform* simulations have a coherent storyline embedded in the second-language culture and consist of oral and written tasks that have been designed for specific learner profiles. The simulations replicate authentic communication situations in different settings, making use of the core idea of CLIL. The system automatically records all oral and written material that the learner creates during the simulation. After completing the simulation, students can listen, see, and evaluate their own performance, and the teacher has the opportunity to review, compare, and evaluate the learner's performance in the lab.

The benefit of the *LangPerform* concept is that it brings an authentic real-life environment (situated learning) to the screen, giving the learner the opportunity to practice language skills

in simulated—yet authentic—language-use encounters. Although the authenticity of the simulated communicative situations is one strength of *LangPerform*, there are also weaknesses. The content and the character’s utterances in the simulations are predetermined: they are written as a manuscript and filmed in advance. The simulation user cannot ask questions of the speaker or get a “real” reply. Neither is it possible for the simulation user to use non-verbal language—such as gestures or mimicking—to communicate. *LangPerform* simulations could therefore be best described as “semi-authentic” and “semi-interactive” (Wewer 2013: 81). Nevertheless, the fixed manuscript has value: the simulation stays the same for every participant, which offers new possibilities for research validity and enables fair and equal testing settings for groups of students (Tuuna-Kyllönen 2011: 62–63; cf. Wadensjö 1999).

Since the creation of the *LangPerform* software tool, tailor-made simulations have been produced for different projects in both national and international contexts (*INNOCLiG* 2016; *CLiLiG Finland* 2016; PROFICOM 2016). The simulations have been tested in schools and teacher training (Haataja 2009). For several years, this was done under the auspices of the Research Unit for Languages in Education (RULE) at the University of Tampere.¹ In terms of research into usability, several master’s degree theses have been produced at Finnish universities on *LangPerform* simulations (Hasan 2011; Helminen 2014; Tuuna-Kyllönen 2011; Ilkankoski 2012). Wewer’s doctoral dissertation on *LangPerform* (2014) focused on analyzing the usability of *LangPerform* simulations for CLIL evaluations. Her results (2014: 177–178) show that it takes some time to get used to a new assessment system and adopt a new technology (simulation as an assessment method was new to all the students tested). However, the results indicate that *LangPerform* computer simulations are perceived as an appropriate alternative assessment method in CLIL (Wewer 2014: 185–187). Overall, the pupils’ comments were very positive and they mostly viewed the computer simulations as fun, exciting, and revealing (188–191).

LangPerform simulations for DI: Content and structure of the pilot simulations

¹ Currently, the *LangPerform* concept and the instruments provided through the *LangPerformLab* are the copyright of Crealang Research & Innovation, a Finnish company specialized in supporting language education and training through research-based concepts, innovations, and technology solutions (www.crealang.com). Information about user rights of *LangPerform* simulations etc. can be obtained from Crealang.

Creating the DI simulations

In 2013–2014, the *LangPerform* concept was adapted for DI, and the first two sets of DI simulations were drafted, written, produced, and finally integrated into the *LangPerformLab* (Viljanmaa 2014; 2017). One of the most crucial elements in making the new DI simulations was addressing interpreting-related issues properly. This meant, for example, calculating enough time for interpreting between utterances and simultaneously maintaining authentic communication. The production was more complicated than previous *LangPerform* simulations, because unlike simulations for SLA and CLIL usage, the DI simulations did not include written tasks that could be shot in a single take. Apart from one sight translation task per simulation, the task was to interpret a dialogue. For the dialogue, the actors' utterances had to be filmed, and a time frame inserted for the student to interpret. In these "interpreting" breaks between their utterances, the actors either stared at the camera—pretending to be listening to the imagined interpretation—or did something else that was considered natural (checking their notes, for example). This meant long shooting days for the whole crew (for more detailed information on the creative process, see Viljanmaa 2014, 2017).

Structure and plot of the DI simulations

The two DI simulation sets both consist of three parts. The duration of each part is approximately 30 minutes. One simulation set is designed for practicing interpreting dialogue between Finnish and English, and the other between Finnish and German. Both are set in the early-education field (day care), a domain of public-service interpreting that has not yet received much attention in research, even though the educational domain represents a public-service interpreting and translation area that steadily employs public-service interpreters in many European countries, including Finland. One exception to this lack of research on interpreted parent-teacher communication is the work of Davitti (2013), and Davitti and Pasquandrea (2016). (For more detailed information on the research and practice of interpreting in educational settings, see also Tipton and Furmanek 2016: 165–202.)

The main theme in the DI simulations is a parent-teacher meeting between a kindergarten teacher and a non-Finnish-speaking parent, a common PSI situation in Finland. The meeting

takes place in a day care center in Tampere. With the help of an interpreter (i.e., the student doing the simulation), the two parties discuss items related to the wellbeing of the child and the cooperation between the parent and day care staff.² In the first part of the simulation, the student interpreter arrives. The user interface (UI) instructs the student interpreter to ask for the contact person (a name given to the student on the screen in advance), who they will meet directly. The actual meeting starts when the parent arrives, and it begins with general issues about daily life in the day care center and remarks about the behavior and wellbeing of the child. In the second part of the simulation, the parent and teacher jointly draft an early-education plan for the child (done for every child in Finnish day care). In the third part, they go through the child's personal integration plan and discuss items related to learning Finnish as a second language, among others (tutoring in Finnish as a second language is offered to all children with a mother tongue other than Finnish or Swedish). Upon completion of the third part, the student interpreter is instructed to say goodbye, after which the camera (i.e., the student interpreter) leaves the room.

Even though the basic structure of the simulation is the same in both language versions, the plot, characters, and narratives differ. However, in both simulations there are some underlying misunderstandings between the characters or different expectations towards the meeting, but the interpreting student is not told about them in advance, nor are they raised in the meeting explicitly. It is up to the student to recognize them and interpret accordingly.

User interface of DI simulations

All instructions for the student interpreter appear in a bar at the top of the screen. After every utterance, the student interpreter sees the instruction "Interpret," after which a time bar at the bottom of the screen appears, showing the time left for interpreting. The utterances vary in length, and sometimes note-taking is needed. The time allowed for interpreting was calculated and filmed in advance. The target was to have the same amount of time available for interpreting an utterance as it took for the source-language speaker to say the utterance. The opportunity to click a "continue" button was inserted for some longer utterances, since it

² In Finland, day care centers usually hire a professional public-service interpreter for parent-teacher meetings involving a non-Finnish-speaking parent. They book the interpreter either through a municipal interpreting service center or a privately-owned agency; both have in-house and freelance interpreters.

was estimated that some students might be quicker than others. Clicking the continue button enables the student to proceed with the dialogue immediately, instead of waiting for the time to elapse. However, inserting this possibility required specific shooting arrangements and was therefore used sparingly. During the time reserved for interpretation, the addressee looks directly at the camera—that is, they face the student interpreter directly. Only the interpretation made within the allocated time is recorded. When speaking, the speakers usually face each other. In addition to the interpreting, all three parts of the simulation have a sight translation task that is embedded in the actual communicative situation: part 1 features an informational letter to the parents, part 2 includes the summary of the early-education plan, and part 3 includes selected items from the child's personal integration plan. Before each sight translation task, the student is instructed to give a sight translation of the text shown on the screen.

Self-evaluation is performed separately for each of the three parts with a separate self-evaluation application in the *LangPerformLab*. To enable this, the parts have been further divided into small sections that are assessed as a group. The self-assessment takes place according to predetermined criteria (accuracy of content, accuracy of conveying the speaker's intention, fluency, idiomatic quality, prosody) on a scale of 1–5. In the self-evaluation tool in the online lab, the student interpreter first listens to his or her interpreting performance. On the screen, they see the transcript of the equivalent original utterance in the source language at the same time as the recording of their interpreting is played. The student interpreter can also watch the respective section of the video on the same screen (for more information, see Viljanmaa 2014).

Pilot testing the *LangPerform* DI simulations

The following sections outline information on the procedure, data, and participants of the pilot testing phase of the *LangPerform* DI simulations.

Procedure and data

In the spring of 2014, an invitation for interpreting students to participate in the testing of a new interpreting simulation for English and German was sent out to the translation and

interpreting student mailing list of the Master's Studies for Multilingual Communication and Translation Studies at the University of Tampere. A total of five interpreting students for the German-Finnish language pair and three for the English-Finnish language pair contacted the author. Individual testing and interview dates were agreed with each of them. The testing and interviews of the first part of the German simulation took place in March 2014, and those for the first part of the English simulation took place in May 2014.

All eight student interpreters received their own identification for the *LangPerformLab* in advance, and they were free to create an individual language profile if they wanted³. The students wore a headset with a microphone and performed the simulation while sitting alone in a quiet room at the University of Tampere. They had received written information in advance about the topic of the simulation (parent-teacher meeting at a day care center, the drafting of a child's early-education plan). Before they started the simulation, they were instructed to follow the instructions appearing in the upper bar on the screen. In addition, they were told that the simulation could not be paused once it had started. Furthermore, the use of the continue button was explained to them. Once the students had done the first part of the simulation, they were instructed on how to listen to and evaluate their own interpreting performance in the *LangPerformLab*. The students were interviewed about their experience and thoughts about this new training concept only after they had completed the online self-evaluation.

For each student, the semi-structured interview started with a question about her first impressions of the simulation experience. Only after that did the interviewer ask about the student's background in interpreting—that is, how many and which interpreting courses she had taken. The interview continued with questions about the suitability and functionality of the time frame reserved for interpreting (too short/too long/just right), the student's impression of her performance before and after self-evaluation (listening to and evaluating her own performance), the authenticity and immersion versus the artificiality of the simulation, the usability of the user interface, usage of the self-evaluation tool, the credibility of the simulation characters and their communicative intentions, the suitability of simulation for interpreter training, the skills and topics that could be practiced with a simulation, and the student's interest in practicing with this kind of simulation in the future. In addition to these

³ Individual identification codes are needed to access the simulations in the *LangPerformLab*.

topics, the difficulty level of the simulation, note-taking during the simulation, and the sight translation task were also discussed.

All interviews were recorded. Unfortunately, an interview with one interpreter was, however, not recorded completely due to battery failure, and although the author took notes from the interview, for validity reasons that particular interview is not included in the data presented here. The data thus consists of the interviews with four interpreting students in the German-Finnish language pair (student interpreters G1, G2, G3, and G4) and three interpreting students in the English-Finnish language pair (student interpreters E5, E6, and E7). All students were interviewed immediately after they had finished the self-evaluation except for G1, who was interviewed two days after she had done the test and self-evaluation. The interviews lasted between 12 and 27 minutes and were conducted in Finnish.

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and saved in a separate document. Together with the original audio files, this written document was then used to create a summary of the results. For the summary, each student's answers were first considered individually. The answers and comments were divided into sections according to the topic they concerned. This was done because most of the students did not refer just to the question topic in their answers; they sometimes referred to the topic later in the interview or before the question was posed. The summary was written directly in English based on the Finnish answers. The individual summaries were then arranged by topic, and the students' answers for each topic were analyzed for emerging views.

Background of participants

Data was obtained from a total of four interpreting students for the German-Finnish language pair and three for the English-Finnish language pair, who all participated in the pilot testing of the DI simulations. All participants are female and have Finnish as their first language (A-language), and German/English as their second language (B-language).

The first student interpreter, G1, had the most interpreting experience of all the interviewees. She had completed almost all obligatory and voluntary interpreting courses offered at the University of Tampere at the bachelor's and master's level, totaling more than 35 credits

(ECTS). However, she had not done any interpreting for a year and felt a little rusty. Student interpreter G2 had started taking master's-level interpreting courses and had already completed the Community Interpreting course, in which she had practiced a similar parent-teacher meeting. She was currently taking Simultaneous Interpreting I and Consecutive Interpreting I, so she felt comfortable interpreting. Like G2, G3 was also currently taking an interpreting course (Consecutive Interpreting I) and had already completed the first course on simultaneous interpreting at the master's level. G4 had already completed four master's-level interpreting courses, totaling 20 credits.

The student interpreters from the English section had significantly less experience with master's-level interpreting courses compared to their peers in the German section. Student interpreter E5 had completed the obligatory bachelor's-level interpreting course on dialogue interpreting (5 credits) and a 5-credit course on interpreting theory at the master's level. E6 had completed only the bachelor's-level dialogue interpreting course. She had interpreted for informally for friends in the past, but she had not spoken much English recently. Finally, E7 had just started master's-level interpreting courses and had already completed Simultaneous Interpreting I. Thus, the student interpreters from the English section had clearly less academic experience, but their L2 proficiency was much better than that of their peers with German as their L2 (students with English as a B language come to university with a higher initial proficiency). This may have had a balancing effect on the outcomes of the two groups.

Results of pilot testing: selected topics

Selected topics from the data are presented below. Due to limited space, the following topic selection was made: first impression of the simulation, perspectives on the simulation system itself, and the students' impressions of their own performance before and after self-evaluation.

First impression

Two topics were foremost in the student interpreters' minds after the simulation experience: 1) the difficulty of adjusting to the time frame and the pressure of delivering an interpretation within a fixed time period, and 2) the authenticity of the simulation.

Several students felt the limited time frame affected their performance. This was especially the first reaction of the German student interpreters, and could possibly be linked to L2 proficiency. For example, G1 reported a shock that the time bar was visible on the screen at all times, displaying how little time was left for interpreting. G2 also felt that the time bar had probably made her struggle, even with the easier parts. G3 felt anxious as to whether she had enough time to say everything, and G4 considered the simulation a good practice method, but said it should be changed so the interpreter can decide on the timing.

Surprise about the authenticity of the simulation was the first reaction of E5, E7, G2, and E6. The simulation felt much more real than they had imagined. Consequently, they considered the simulation an excellent way to practice PSI. For example, E7's first impression was that despite the presence of the screen and time bar, which obviously do not exist in real-life situations, the idea, the speakers, and the dialogue felt realistic, and she got the impression that this could be an authentic situation. G2 thought the situation felt real, even though there were pauses between utterances. She said she sought eye contact with the characters onscreen, because they looked directly into the camera while waiting for her interpretation. E5 stated that the feeling she got when being looked directly in the eye so intensely made her want to do her best.

E6 also noted the user interface. She reported that it was a little difficult to follow the instructions in the upper bar initially, especially at the beginning when she had to introduce herself as the interpreter. She said that she had to familiarize herself with the concept first, because it was odd: she is not used to reading instructions in one place while being watched at the same time by somebody on the screen. It was not difficult, she said, but it was intriguing because she was not used to it. Overall, the first impressions are linked to the novelty of the system: earlier film simulations have not been considered very authentic (the surprise effect) and the user interface with a diminishing time bar was something completely new, too (initial shock).

Perspectives on the system

Three topics are presented in more depth below regarding the student interpreters' experiences of using the *LangPerform* system: time frame, authenticity, and user interface.

Time frame reserved for interpreting

All student interpreters reported that the time frame did not always fit the time they needed for interpreting. For example, G2 felt that there were some odd places where there was too much time—for example, 4 seconds for “Okay, das hört sich gut an.” (*Okay, that sounds good.*)—but on many occasions the time was too short. When there was not enough time, the end of the sentence was not recorded because the time bar was already at zero, which G2 noticed only afterwards during the self-evaluation. Too long a time frame was not considered problematic. For example, G4 said that she was not irritated by the simulation characters staring at her during the pause (when waiting for the remaining time to elapse), because they were “not real” people. G1 wasn't disturbed that the time reserved for interpreting was sometimes too long, but felt more disturbed when there was insufficient time to interpret.

The students approached and experienced, in their view, this restricted time frame in different ways. Their strategies ranged from continuing to interpret even though the next speaker had already started speaking (G2) or simply leaving a sentence unfinished (E5) (which obviously would not be an ideal solution in real life), to speaking at a quicker pace and summarizing content. For example, G4 first felt that there was not always enough time, but then adapted to interpreting at a quicker pace, which resulted in her sometimes having too much time again: when she got used to the fast tempo, she interpreted quickly and afterwards realized she could have said things in a different, and perhaps more idiomatic, manner.

E6 and E7, on the other hand, chose a summarizing strategy. E6 stated that it helps to know that there is not enough time to say everything in detail, because the need to summarize is clear. Even then, there were a few places where she did not manage to interpret everything. Nevertheless, being a fast speaker, there were more places where she had more time than she needed. E7 was also generally aware of the time situation and finished before the time ran out by focusing on essential information and summarizing content. She said this strategy came naturally.

Authenticity of simulation

In terms of the authenticity of the simulation, the student interpreters can be roughly classified into three groups according to their experience of authenticity. The first group's members—G2 and E5—found it easy to immerse themselves in the simulation and to start communicating with the people on screen. For example, G2 said she focused mostly on the interpreting: it was an *interpreting assignment* for her. E5 said she forgot completely it was a simulation. She reported nodding to the mother and looking her in the eye.

The second group consists of G1, G3, and E7, who remembered the simulation being a practice session most of the time, but also experienced glimpses of authenticity when the timing (time frame) was right. For example, G3 said the simulation felt *real* in those places where the timing functioned well. Sometimes she felt that one of the characters was staring at her for too long before the next turn began, but overall, the simulation felt surprisingly real. E7's mixed experience with the authenticity of the situation was also linked to the timing. She reported that when there was time left, she started to think about what the next response might be and whether she had interpreted correctly. For her, it was impossible to forget that it was a pre-recorded simulation. However, she said that there was also an instance where she started to explain to the mother about where to find waterproof trousers for Matt (the child in the scenario), and it felt nice that the mother then took her pen and started to write down what E7 had said, because she had just thought herself that this was something Matt's mother should write down. This was an instance where the impression of being in an authentic situation was created and strengthened. In addition to the non-optimal timing, other features can affect the sense of authenticity. In the case of G1, the authenticity was broken by the simulation's introductory music. G1 said that the music at the beginning (when the interpreter walks to the day care center and enters the building) made her laugh, because it reminded her of a Finnish comedy show, but once the interpreting started, she simply focused on interpreting.

Finally, the third group consisted of G4 and E6, who were distracted by the simulation user interface (UI) and were constantly aware they were doing a simulation. G4 thought the simulation itself was realistic, but there was no interaction from her side, because she kept looking at the time bar only, and she did not look at the people. E6 could not forget about the

time bar either. She reported that she would need some time to get used to the simulation and its UI. She said the beginning of the simulation with the instructions was difficult, but later the simulation felt authentic. The characters were human and understandable, but at no point did E6 forget she was engaged in a simulation. She could concentrate on the task at hand, but thought the time bar was perhaps the most disturbing part. Ironically, E6 especially loved the beginning (which G1 had laughed at), where the interpreter was walking to the day care building; she thought this was surprisingly authentic. This shows how differently individuals experience the same elements in a given situation.

User interface (UI)

In the interviews, the students were also asked about the *LangPerform* DI user interface's usability and usefulness, and the areas requiring improvement. The students' comments highlighted different aspects that they considered important. They can be summarized as follows:

The *LangPerform Lab* is easy to start to use, although some felt it would be helpful to have more instructions before the simulation or a short introductory video about how it works in advance. It might take time before some students get accustomed to the UI, although others cope almost immediately (cf. Wewer 2014: 177–178).

Secondly, most students think *LangPerform Lab*'s self-evaluation tool functions well and is easy to use. Having the script visible when listening to one's own interpreting audio was considered very helpful by all students. For example, E7 said that having scripts made self-evaluation much easier and quicker (compared to listening to simultaneous recordings without the script). This was echoed by G1, who considered it beneficial because one does not necessarily feel like watching the video again during the evaluation. E6 thought the evaluation criteria were a little difficult, and would have profited from additional explanation. Another option would have been to go through the criteria with the participants in advance to ensure that everyone understood them in the same way. E6 nevertheless thought it was good to have separate criteria; it helps the student focus on certain aspects when self-evaluating. E7 liked the self-evaluation solution too, although she pointed out that students get more feedback when practicing in class sessions.

Thirdly, the preset time frame causes problems and it should be reconsidered whether the user should be able to choose how much time is needed for interpreting. For example, G1 suggested that a “continue” option could be inserted after each interpreting utterance, and G4 repeatedly mentioned that the time frame should be something that the interpreter can decide. G3 also suggested that the time frame could be better matched, although she felt it was probably something students would get used to with practice. On the other hand, to improve the simulations, E7 first suggested longer time frames, but then reflected that the authenticity would perhaps suffer if the student could take as much time as needed: time pressure makes the situation more authentic.

In addition, students eagerly embraced DI simulations as a good *additional* practice method. However, other forms of practice sessions (e.g., in-class) are still needed for practicing core competencies, such as coordinating talk and turn-taking, asking for clarification, and understanding and correcting mistakes made by the student interpreter. For example, G4 considered the simulation a good additional practice method, but said that one cannot practice interpreting with this tool alone, because the simulation expects the interpreter to interpret everything correctly—there are no misinterpretations and the communication is always smooth—but in practice sessions in class, the misinterpretations become visible. Furthermore, E5 stressed that one downside of the simulation UI is that issues like seating arrangements, turn-taking, and interrupting the speaker cannot be addressed. These would need to be dealt with in class, she argued. In addition, students receive more detailed feedback during in-class practice, especially on nonverbal elements. In terms of the benefits of the simulation practice, G4 said that the participant is not so nervous during interpreting, because there is nobody physically present. G2, on the other hand, said she would have interpreted in a more relaxed manner if she had done it for herself only, but knowing that the interpretation was going to be recorded (even if only for self-evaluation) made her concentrate more.

Finally, student interpreters considered DI simulations motivating because they can show them authentic settings and prepare them for interpreting assignments in specific PSI contexts. For example, E7 said that one benefit of the simulation is that one can create student interest with it, because the simulation places the student *in situ* to see the context of these parent-teacher meetings. E6 felt the manuscripts based on real-life situations give the simulations added value compared to class practice, where the scenario is usually improvised

with people the participants already know (teachers and peers). She also thought the simulations would be a good way to prepare for interpreting in specific contexts. An additional bonus with simulations is the fact that with their help, students can listen to new speakers (instead of a known trainer and peers), and thus encounter new accents and dialects, too. Related to this, G4 suggested having more than two speakers in the simulation.

Own performance: self-evaluation

Many students changed their opinion about their own performance after the self-evaluation. Interestingly, a number changed their opinion for the better. For example, G3 was initially not happy with her performance. After listening to her own performance, however, she changed her mind: some parts had gone better than she thought. , but she also noticed a grave mistake: She had interpreted something the wrong way around. However, she did recognize one significant mistake during self-evaluation: rather than indicating that one character comes to daycare every morning before breakfast, she instead rendered this idea as the character would not be there before breakfast every morning. G3 had wondered what was meant by Anna's mother during this part of the simulation, since the character had stated this information in a rather complex way, and the self-evaluation provided a chance to reflect on this aspect. Another interpreter, G2, had initially thought the simulation went well, but prior to the self evaluation, she thought she would feel very critical of her own performance. However, the self-evaluation led her to believe the performance was not as bad as she originally expected.

E5 said she felt a little awkward at first, but that the simulation had gone better than expected. She thought it might be wise to have a teacher check the self-evaluation a few times, because she suspected many interpreting students tend to be too self-critical and harsh on themselves. This fear might perhaps be a cultural issue, but it is a very common phenomenon with interpreting students at the home university of the author, and it needs to be addressed when self-evaluation is carried out. In the pilot group, E6, for example, was very critical of her own performance. She said she was annoyed that she mixed up languages—she started with the wrong language and did not apologize—mainly because she did not recognize the scenario as being a real situation. According to E6, she interpreted the main content, but she made many small additions too and also mangled some of the sayings. She lacked two core vocabulary

terms and was not satisfied with her English pronunciation, but overall still thought it went rather well. The self-evaluation did not change E6's impression of her own performance, but it did give her more information about it.

When drafting the simulations and the self-evaluation content, the author had feared that a word-for-word script visible onscreen could lead students to compare the individual words of the original utterance with their interpretation during evaluation. However, none of the participants did so. Instead, the interviewees completed the self-evaluation by focusing on conveying (or not conveying) the message content. Having the script visible was explicitly mentioned as being helpful: It aided the students in comparing their interpretation with the meaning of the original utterance and assisted them in detecting minor or major errors in content transfer. Despite the common evaluation criteria, students highlighted different elements in their self-evaluation. For example, E7, who in general was happy with her performance, noticed inconsistent word usage ("kindergarten" and "day care"), non-satisfactory translations of a single word, and changes in her voice quality in the beginning during self-evaluation: She wondered if she tried to imitate the voice of the speaker, who had a deep voice. G4, on the other hand, noticed she had said something that she initially thought she had not said: At one point, she had had to explain something in other words because of lacking vocabulary and had accidentally translated the utterance in a very impolite way. Interpreting is a complex task, and student interpreters are not always able to monitor their performance throughout the situation. Having recordings of their interpreting performance can be enlightening to students and can help them understand the existence of unprofessional prosody or wording in their interpreting, which can come across as unnecessarily impolite or reveal the interpreter's attitude towards the client (cf. Viljanmaa 2015b).

Discussion and future work

Overall, the pilot testing group's response to the *LangPerform* simulations was very positive. Despite their different backgrounds and impressions, the participants offered similar feedback. As all seven student interpreters are digital natives, it is not surprising that they welcomed the simulations as a useful additional practice method to complement in-class practice (cf. Tymczyńska 2009). Training without the pressure of being listened to or being evaluated by a trainer was seen as more relaxing and fun when compared to in-class practice

(cf. Viljanmaa 2015a). This approach of training without pressure should perhaps be used more in interpreter training. As students show a positive approach towards using online tools, it might also be pedagogically worthwhile to have students do some simulations more than once while focusing on different aspects each time: For example, the first attempt could focus on comprehension, the second could focus on idiomatic expression and clear pronunciation in L2, the third could focus on intonation and finishing sentences, the fourth could focus on eliminating filled pauses, etc. Idiomatic expressions and PSI setting-specific vocabulary and phraseology could be practiced at the same time. Another possibility would be to evaluate how well students can prepare for a given assignment by giving them the topic of the meeting in advance (e.g., a parent meeting in daycare), then evaluating how well they have researched the relevant vocabulary and content.

All the interviewees reported struggling with the predetermined time frame reserved for interpreting and the diminishing time bar. Most of the interviewees anticipated they would get used to the time bar with practice, and this ceased to be an issue for some during the first simulation. Nevertheless, some student interpreters suggested making the time frame dependent on the interpreter. However, having an open time frame might decrease the authenticity of the simulations. Nevertheless, alternative solutions for the time frame issue should be found when further developing the *LangPerform* simulations for DI. This centers on keeping the authentic feeling of pressure and the awareness of listeners waiting for the interpretation while better matching interpreting times to the actual performance of the student. As noted by Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger (2007), if student interpreters have the opportunity to pause the original utterance for interpretation whenever they wish to do so, they will end up with utterances of different lengths. Clearly, the students have different preferences (and skills) for how long a talk or utterance can be remembered and interpreted. On the other hand, this will change along with training when the student's note-taking skills improve. In the *LangPerform* simulations, allowing the interpreter to choose the time might reduce the authenticity and the need to concentrate fully on the simulation, as noted by E7. An average interpreting time can be calculated, and it could possibly be realized in the shooting and editing of the simulation. Yet the question remains as to how to solve questions of individual differences concerning timing and speaking tempo. The inclusion of more than two speakers in the simulation is also an idea worth developing further.

Summing up, the biggest weakness of the *LangPerform* DI simulations is that they have been pre-filmed and therefore do not react to the student interpreter's actions. The script continues in a logical manner, even if the student makes a grave mistake. This means that, as such, the simulations cannot substitute for in-class training or other training where people communicate with each other in real time. Those sessions are needed in order for the student interpreter to practice, for example, the interpersonal and coordinating skills needed in interpreting, but also to notice what happens if they interpret something wrong. However, what the *LangPerform* simulations can do is give the interpreting student an opportunity to be immersed in a specific PSI setting and experience how the participants act in these situations and what kind of phrases and vocabulary are used. Having been in a similar situation before and having some idea of what to expect from the situation makes it easier for the student to accept and prepare for real-life assignments.

In future, other possibilities that could be explored with *LangPerform* simulations include looking at which skills could be best practiced with pre-filmed simulations in general, for example, note-taking, L2 listening comprehension (cf. Blasco Mayor 2015), prosody and voice usage of the student interpreter (Viljanmaa 2015b), and quick reaction skills. From the trainer's perspective, the simulations could also be useful in evaluating the above skills in student interpreters, because the simulated situation would be exactly the same for every student, and the effect of situational factors could be eliminated (cf. Wadensjö 2014). The possibility of controlling variables is also an advantage from a research perspective (Braun 2014: 10), and this is currently being used by the author when investigating interpersonal listening skills of student interpreters (Viljanmaa 2015c).

The students' views strongly encourage the design and production of new simulations for other public-service interpreting (PSI) settings in order to provide PSI students with more situated learning and practice contexts. Also, the adaption of *LangPerform* simulations to replicate remote interpreting settings should be considered. However, as is so often the case, resources are the limiting factor. There are always costs involved: Scripting the simulation is only the first part of the process, and additional costs arise from the shooting location and the cast and crew. Editing and integrating the filmed material into the *LangPerformLab* and transcribing the scripts for the self-evaluation tool from the actual video material involves many working hours, too. Clearly, creating (semi-)authentic practice materials demands resources. However, based on the experience of the first seven pilot testers, it is worthwhile.

As E5 stated, the feeling one gets when being looked directly in the eye makes one want to do one's best. Indeed, as G3 states towards the end of her interview:

I wish we'd have had more of these, because they *are* so good! It is so much more motivating to do something like this that is really meant for practicing interpreting rather than searching for YouTube videos and practicing with them!
(G3: 2014)

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