Moving from the Language Lab to the Interpreting Booth: Student Perceptions

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Abstract
The training of student interpreters usually takes place in a language laboratory, a room equipped with computer workstations where teachers can allow students to practice by themselves using audio and video material. However, some students train to become simultaneous interpreters, and their real-life working environment is the interpreting booth. Given the fact that the working environment of the interpreting booth differs from the language laboratory, it is important to explore whether training in a language laboratory alone is sufficient to enable student interpreters to perform their tasks well in an interpreting booth. This research examines student interpreters’ perceptions of their experience performing simultaneous interpreting in an interpreting booth for the first time, following their training in a language laboratory. The data collected focuses on the feedback from the student interpreters on their performance in the interpreting booth, and their frame of mind as they worked in the booth for the first time. Through analysing the data, it is possible to determine whether students perceive that they maintain a similar attitude when moving from the language laboratory to the interpreting booth. The findings show that the student interpreters encountered problems relating to stress, confidence and issues relating to the booth environment, which highlights the need for booth training.

Keywords
laboratory, booth, perception, autonomy, stress, confidence, authentic, interpreter training

1. Introduction
With the rapid development of computer technology, interpreting training is no longer confined to a traditional language laboratory and the use of a cassette and recorder for audio-based practice. Multimedia laboratories that employ audio, video and web-based technologies are now widely used for training interpreters. Such a teaching and learning setting provides student interpreters with greater autonomy, flexibility and convenience (Hansen & Shlesinger 2007; Lim 2007; Sandrelli 2002). The shift in interpreter training from the traditional language laboratory to the multimedia laboratory enables student interpreters to have more realistic training. With the availability of video, student interpreters are able to have visual practice during interpreting tasks. In real life, interpreters have to observe the speaker, listen to the speech, and carry out the interpreting task at the same time. Therefore, video-based interpreting training is essential to help students practise the necessary coordination between visual observation, listening and speaking (Lim 2012).
Entering the twenty-first century, computer technology has become more commonly used in interpreter training. However, is training in a multimedia laboratory alone sufficient to enable students to perform simultaneous interpreting tasks in an interpreting booth?

In the past few decades, many research studies have focused on the psycholinguistic, linguistic and cognitive aspects of interpreting (Gile 1997; Hatim & Mason 1997; Moser-Mercer 2000; Pöchhacker & Shlesinger 2007; Setton 1999; Poyatos 1987). Some have focused on training aspects (Gile 2009; Moser-Mercer 2008; Seleskovitch & Lederer 1989; Seleskovitch 1999), while some more recent studies have focused on computer-assisted interpreting training (Ko & Chen 2011; Pöchhacker 2007; Sandrelli & Jesús de Manuel 2007). However, there have to date been few research studies on the effectiveness of training in a multimedia laboratory. This paper seeks to investigate the performance of student interpreters in an interpreting booth, based on their perceptions of carrying out their first simultaneous interpreting task in a booth. The resulting data reveal that the performance of student interpreters may be affected by differences in their working environment, and therefore indicate the importance for trainers of integrating booth practice into simultaneous interpreting training.

2. Multimedia laboratory versus interpreting booth

2.1. Learning in the multimedia laboratory

A multimedia laboratory for interpreting training consists of a teacher station and student workstations. The teacher station has a control panel for monitoring the visual and audio status of each student workstation. As shown in Figure 1, the control panel is connected to the teacher’s station, and allows the trainer to broadcast the audio or screen of the teacher’s computer to the class, or to monitor the activities performed by each student by displaying their screens or listening to their recordings. Each student workstation consists of a headset and microphone, with recording software installed in the computer.