

DISTANCE LEARNING & TEACHING: promising potential or nightmare?

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Overview

- types of distance learning
 - synchronous
 - asynchronous
 - mixed models
- benefits and challenges for language teaching
- necessary modifications
- examples from the shared course initiative Dutch class
- language learning activities suitable for non-face-to-face classrooms
- questions & discussion

Types of distance learning

- synchronous
 - e.g. Columbia, Cornell and Yale shared course initiative
 - technology: videoconferencing, webinars, (video) chat, virtual worlds
- asynchronous
 - e.g. correspondence courses, recorded lectures, MOOCs
<http://www.uclouvain.be/504361.html>
 - technology: e-mail, audio/video recordings, course & web content management systems
- mixed models: blended learning, hybrid learning
 - e.g. flipped classroom

Language learning & distance learning

benefits

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

challenges

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

Adapting to a distance learning environment

- think of a specific distance learning format for a language class (synchronous, asynchronous, mixed model)
- what would be necessary in terms of equipment, software and other technology?
- in what way would you need to adapt your teaching?
- in what way would you need to adapt your teaching materials?

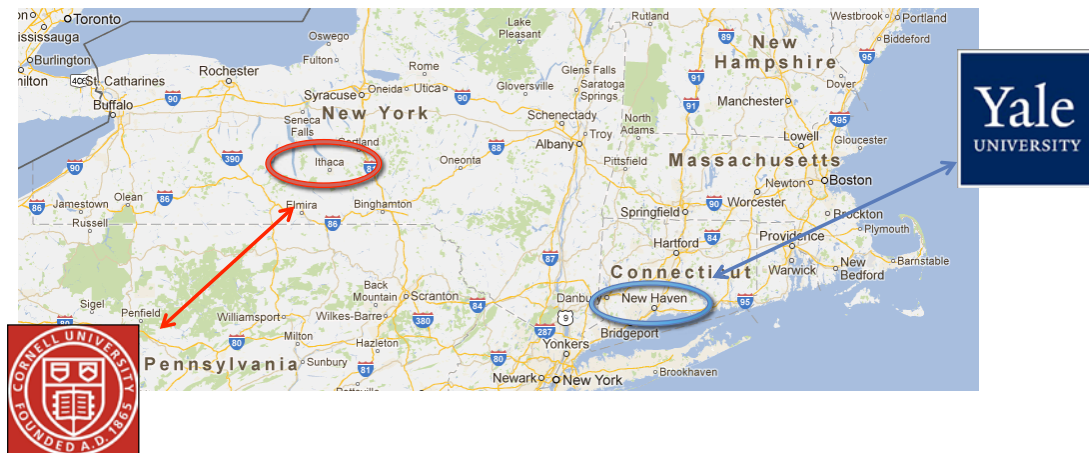
Dutch distance learning project

Dutch Distance Learning Project Fall 2011/ Spring 2012

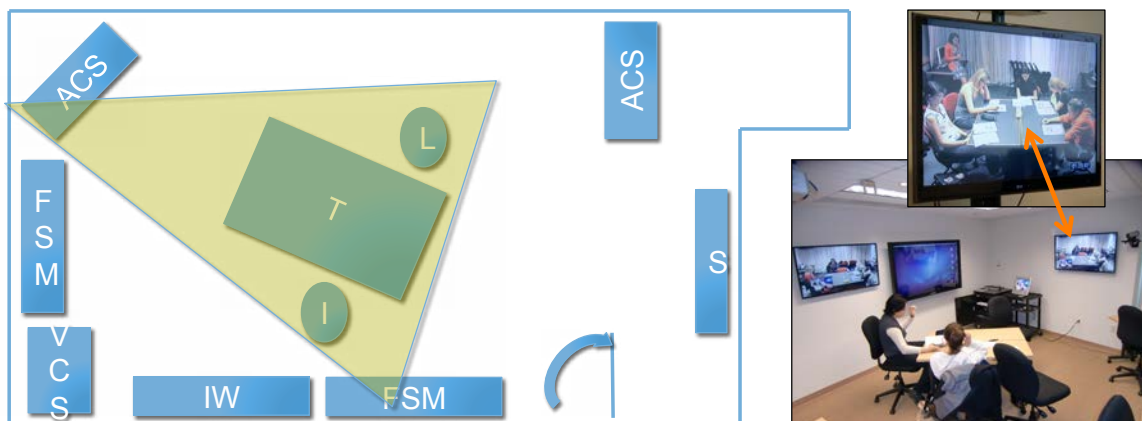
- pilot group of 5/3 Cornell students and 1 Yale student
- students come to classrooms on both campuses at designated class times
- specially equipped classrooms are connected by a video conferencing system and workstations
- support: instructor @Yale, student-assistant @Cornell, language technology specialist @Yale
- all students and the instructor can see each other at all times

Yale & Cornell University

- How do you connect two classrooms which are physically at a 400 kilometer distance?



Classroom at Yale University



VCS: Videoconferencing System
FSM: Far Site Monitor (Cornell)
IW: Interactive Whiteboard
ACS: Adobe Connect Workstation
I: Instructor
L: Learners
T: Table
S: Projection Screen

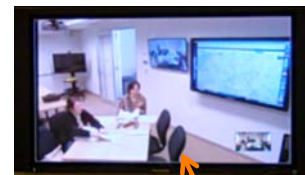
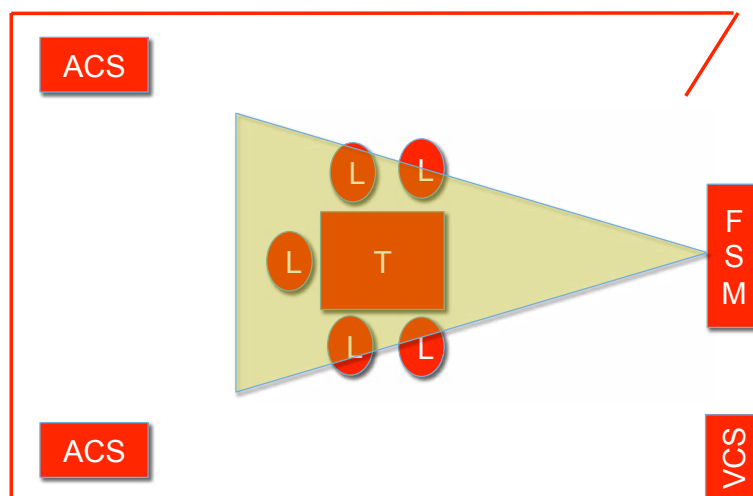


Technology at Yale University



- Tandberg MXP 95 videoconferencing codec
- Audio-Technica boundary microphone
- 65" Samsung Touch Screen (interactive whiteboard)
- 2x 45" LED Display (far site view)
- 17" LED Display (view of image being sent)
- 2 computer workstations (Adobe Connect)

Classroom at Cornell University



VCS: Videoconferencing System
FSM: Far Site Monitor (Yale)
ACS: Adobe Connect Workstation

L: Learners
T: Table



Technology at Cornell University



- Polycom HD8000XLP
- 2 Polycom Eagle Eye Remote Control Cameras
- Polycom Omnidirectional Ceiling Microphone Array
- Crestron Control Panel
- 50" Plasma Display
- 2 Apple iMac Workstations (Adobe Connect)

New teaching situation

How do we ensure that good teaching principles are upheld?

Especially:

- students feel safe and comfortable in class, feel they are part of the same environment and have similar classroom experiences
- student speaking time is maximized by engaging all the students in meaningful, communicative and engaging activities
- classroom activities are stimulating and require interaction between all the students
- instructor is available for private feedback to all students

Classroom design

Two main components:



video-conferencing
technology

for classroom activities



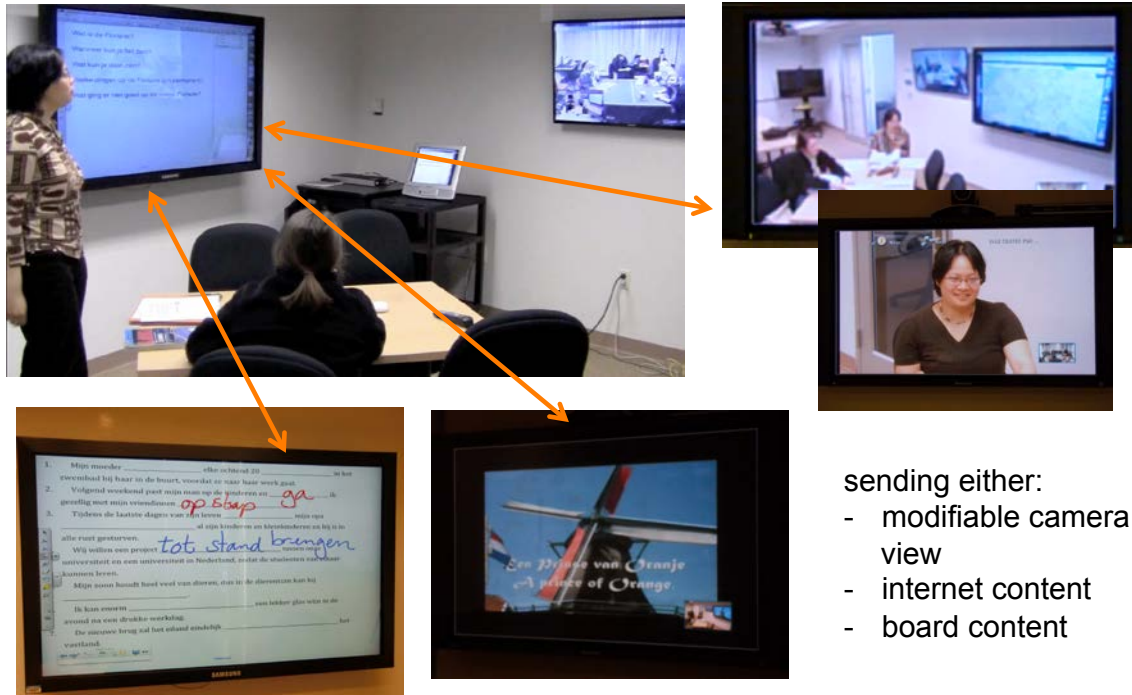
web-conferencing
technology

for group / pair work

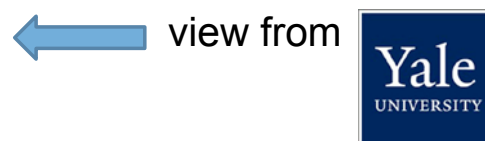
Videoconferencing

- ensures everyone sees each other most of the time
- best possible video & audio quality
- instructor controls sent output (adjustable camera views, interactive white board: handwritten text, internet pages, video)
- students have access to exactly the same material at the same time which creates a common classroom experience and increases their sense of community
- easy access to video and audio material as well as internet resources creating a rich learning environment

Video conference system



View from both classrooms

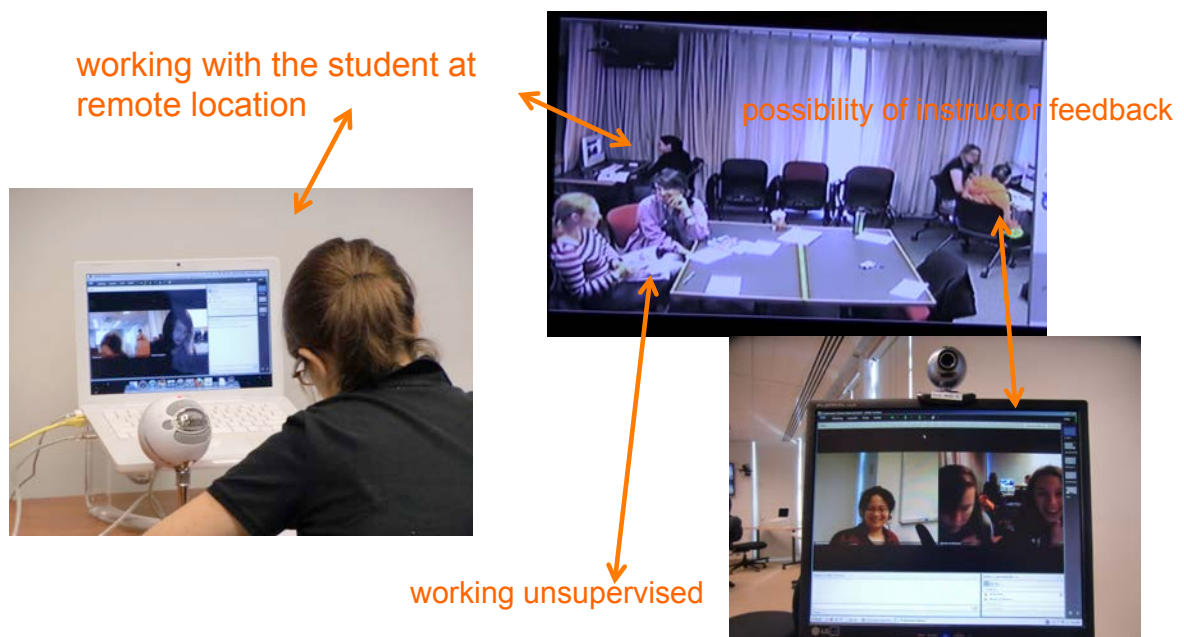


Group work

How do we ensure group work between all students regardless of their location, in order to:

- increase speaking time for individual students
- create a classroom in which students get to know each other and work together on assignments together
- allow the instructor to give individual feedback
- increase the variety of learning activities in class

Workstations



Adapting to a distance learning environment

- think of a specific distance learning situation for language learning
- what would be necessary in terms of equipment and technology?
- **preconditions:**
 - technology and equipment is available (costs)
 - on-hand technological assistance is available
 - logistics (good agreement on schedules, breaks, credits, registration)
 - receive sufficient support (technical training, student-assistant) and allow time for adequate preparation

instructors need to be:

- relatively experienced
- relatively comfortable with technology

Adapting to a distance learning environment

- **In what way do you need to adapt your teaching?**
 - be aware of the camera angles and remote view at all times during teaching
 - keep connected to especially the remote students by keeping track of current events
 - be prepared for technical glitches (a back-up is needed if technology fails)
 - everything needs to be prepared beforehand, which leaves less room for spontaneity in class

Adapting to a distance learning environment

- **In what way would you need to adapt your teaching materials?**
 - all materials have to be prepared in advance and sent to the far site / individual students
 - all materials have to be digitalized
 - all classroom activities have to be reassessed and adapted to the distance learning situation
 - > very large time commitment for instructor

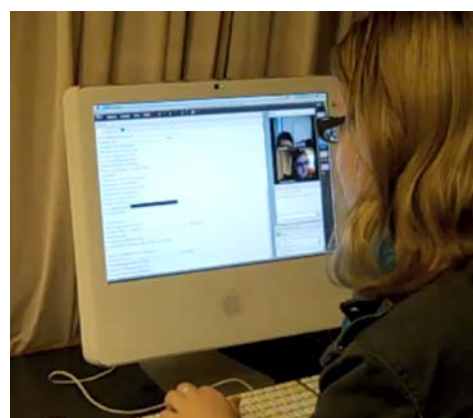
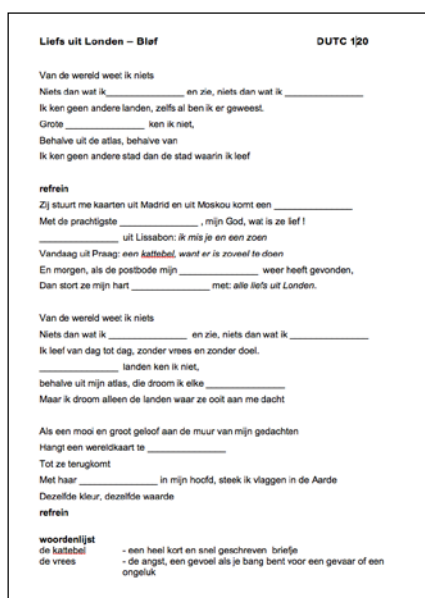
Opportunities

- it forces you to reevaluate your teaching methods and materials
- it encourages you to prepare classes well and to be prepared for anything during class
- **the distance between the students creates a natural information gap situation**

Modifying classroom activities

- Think of a successful language learning activity you regularly do in your classroom and try to redesign it to fit a distance learning environment
- Think of new activities which take advantage of the distance learning environment
- Can you implement these activities in your traditional classroom?

Examples of adapted materials



worksheet in Adobe
Connect

< paper worksheet

Examples of adapted materials

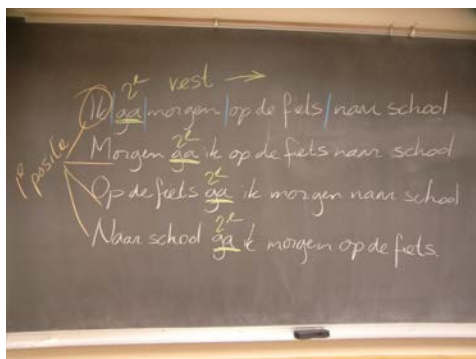


drawn map of the Netherlands



Google map of the Netherlands

Examples of adapted materials



grammar explanation on the blackboard



Mijn zus eet veel vuil toen zij kind was.
betekenis

Soms is mijn straat gehorig. Ik kan niet slapen met veel geluid.
combinatie mogelijkheden

Enerzijds wordt het Nederlands niet zo veel gebruikt, anderzijds zijn er minstens 16 miljoen sprekers!
grammatica

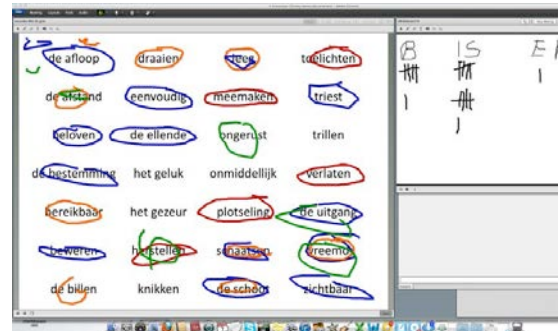
Ik heb de zulke naam als jij, het is raar om een andere "Bridget" te vinden!
grammatica

grammar explanation on the interactive whiteboard

Examples of adapted materials



vocabulary exercise on paper

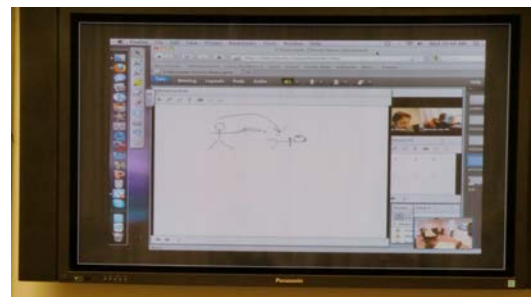


vocabulary exercise in Adobe Connect

Examples of adapted materials



playing pictinary



Examples of adapted activities

museum visit via a wireless Skype connection



on site museum visit



Examples of adapted activities



guest lectures face-to-face versus on the screen: opening up opportunities to 'invite' specialists from anywhere in the world as long as a decent internet connection can be secured

Student feedback

Final evaluation 5/2012 (my translations):

“I don’t see many differences between the video conference classes and normal classes. I can always see and hear Chrissy well and we can talk... I think the main disadvantage is that we have less contact with our teacher, but we can talk to her during Skype office hours... I think that video conference is a good way of learning languages in the future... It is a good solution to learn Dutch and makes my Dutch class one of my favorites”

Questions & Comments?

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