

From cloning to self-authoring video content in the language classroom: a reflection on practice

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Abstract. This paper will detail the introduction of the open-source content creation tool H5P in a first year university French language module with 115 students in autumn 2019 and its evaluation in early spring 2020. The aim of this project is to analyse what happens when students are given access to an authoring tool traditionally intended for and used by educators and how it impacts their language learning and their digital skills. The background to this initiative will be documented and findings from the post-project student survey and focus group will be shared. The researchers will also detail plans for a second iteration of this initiative, which will be refined based on the findings.

Keywords: H5P, self-authored videos, creative video content, reflective skills, digital skills development.

1. Introduction

Video enjoys near ubiquitous use in language learning (Hockly & Dudeney, 2018), particularly in the multimodal environments afforded by video platforms such as YouTube (Kramersch, 2014). However, challenges lie in how educators, specifically language teachers, can harness students' familiarity with video content and facilitate their transition from passive video consumers to active video creators (Hockly & Dudeney, 2014), all the while encouraging the development of their critical, creative, linguistic, and digital skills (Loftus, Tiernan, & Cherian, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to analyse what happens when students are given access to an authoring tool traditionally intended for and used by educators and how it impacts their language learning and digital skills.

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2. Method

H5P is an open-source content creation tool enabling, among other things, the enhancement of existing video content from the web with interactions. Interactions such as multiple choice questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, drag-and-drop questions, and interactive summaries can be added to cloned videos. Although intended as a lecturer tool for creating instructional content, in autumn 2019, a group of first year intermediate French language students at Dublin City University were asked to use this tool for a series of tasks. It was deemed an appropriate means by which to hone the linguistic focus of student created video content and increase learner autonomy through meaningful reflection and learning (Russ & Fiorelli, 2010). Furthermore, it is linked to the concept of ‘students as creators’, which purports to give students a greater sense of agency over their learning and help them create new knowledge, as they are creating a tangible digital artefact (Lee & McLoughlin, 2007).

2.1. Participants

Dublin City University has recently embedded H5P in its Moodle-based virtual learning environment, Loop. H5P was introduced in a first year core French language module in a staggered manner. This cohort of students comprised 115 specialist and non-specialist language learners from five different programmes split into six different small groups.

2.2. Procedure

Using the Mahara-based eportfolio ‘Loop Reflect’ as the fulcrum of this project, students curated the interactive videos they created on this platform as part of a task-based evaluation linked to the theme of ‘university life’. Students had three contact hours per week in this module, one of which took place in a language laboratory. Firstly, students completed a listening comprehension piece with H5P interactions which were added by the lecturer. Secondly, students sourced existing language videos from YouTube, cloned them, and added H5P interactions to them. A learning technologist from the university’s Teaching Enhancement Unit came to present the technology in English to one of the six groups taking part in the project during a weekly language lab session due to timetabling constraints. Written instructions in French were also provided alongside their weekly online preparation materials as French is the medium of instruction. Lastly, each student filmed a three-minute interview with a French native speaker, enhanced it with H5P interactions to add three reflective hotspots in the video, and embedded it in

their Mahara eportfolio. A hotspot is a popup that is placed at a particular point of the student's choosing in the video. It can contain a combination of a header, text, and video (Figure 1). In the context of this project, students were asked to reflect on something surprising that they learnt from the exchange; something that they would have done differently; and a positive outcome from the interview (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Example of H5P reflective hotspot



Figure 2. Interactive H5P video embedded in eportfolio

2.3. Data collection

There were two stages to the data collection process. Firstly, a short post-project anonymous survey using Google Forms, composed of open and closed questions, was carried out during a class session upon completion of the assessment at the end of January 2020, 81 respondents (n=81) participated. Secondly, a small focus group exploring students' experiences of using H5P took place in February 2020. An email was sent to all the students in the module, inviting them to participate in the focus group, seven volunteered. The focus group was semi-structured, giving the facilitator the leeway to sound out areas of interest that arose during the process; it was subsequently transcribed.

3. Results and discussion

Experiences among the survey respondents and focus group participants were mixed. About 58% of survey respondents enjoyed using H5P and 42% did not. When prompted to expand on this in an open-ended question, respondents said that it allowed for a different way to learn, made things interesting, and allowed them to develop digital skills. Other respondents however felt it was not straightforward to use and that it took time to become familiar with. Some said that they do not enjoy using technology in general.

Only 15% of respondents felt that the technology was easy to use. Thirty-one percent found it difficult to use. Forty-seven percent esteemed that it was set at the correct level of difficulty for themselves. Related to this, over 80% said that their digital skills improved because of this project, reporting that it required them to do things they had not done before. One respondent remarked: "The software was challenging but turned fun once you got the hang of it since it allowed space for individual style". Despite the relatively high percentage of participants finding the technology challenging to use, it would appear that they were cognisant of how it enriched their digital skills. As a first year cohort of students took part in this task, perhaps a discussion around the constituents of digital skills and their usefulness should be factored into its future evolution.

Similarly, when asked about whether using H5P to reflect on their French native speaker interview helped their analytical skills, nearly 77% agreed. Respondents were split on whether or not its usage aided their language learning – 44% apiece. In open-ended responses, some reported that working with video required them to listen back to spoken French, and that adding their own interactions to the video

required them to think more carefully about the language. Others reported no effect or echoed previous sentiment about difficulty in becoming familiar with the technology. A possible way of addressing this in the future would be integrating some language specific hotspots as opposed to the existing purely reflective ones.

These issues and more were explored in the focus group. A number of themes emerged but the most salient was the one centred around instructions and guidance for the tasks. Some participants were unaware of the written technical instructions that were presented alongside their other preparation material. Others found the instructions difficult to follow as they were written in French but the H5P interface was in English. The group who received guidance from the learning technologist appeared to engage better with the technology than the others. Some participants felt that spending time orienting themselves around the technology at the start of the module with guided support would have been beneficial whereas others found the technology intuitive to use or were content to work it out for themselves. An effective way of dealing with this discrepancy in students' abilities to navigate technology would be to pair peer learners in order to facilitate informal troubleshooting amongst students.

4. Conclusions

The mixed experience of the students provides the project team with ideas for the refinement of the project in subsequent iterations. Such refinements include the provision of greater clarity of purpose for the students, as well as technical instructions, guidance, and support as they engage with the technology. The embedded hotspots honed students' focus on the required task but more variety needs to be introduced in the nature of the tasks such as some language focused activities. The team also intends to place a greater emphasis on creativity through securing the input of a creativity consultant who can spark creativity with the students and motivate them to try innovative things with their self-created videos. But the very fact of being able to share exemplars of students' work in the project's next iteration will enhance student partnership in this task as this pilot was the first time H5P was integrated and assessed in a module in Dublin City University.

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