

Advice to Radboud in'to Languages for online teaching

Authors: Esther Steenbeek-Planting & Wendy van Ginkel.

Advisors: Asli Özyürek, Peter Hagoort, Linda Drijvers, Kristin Lemhöfer, Willemijn Doedens, Hans Rutger Bosker, David Peeters, & James Trujillo.

Members of Radboud in'to Languages: Kasper Maes, Silvia de Groot, Myrte van Hilten, Onno ter Haar

Moderator: Bas Hendrikx (Research & Impact)

Radboud University & Max Planck Institute, 2021



Radboud University Nijmegen



ADVICE IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS POSED BY TEACHERS OF RADBOUD IN'TO LANGUAGES

QUESTION 1: HOW DO YOU STIMULATE / IMPROVE THE MUTUAL INVOLVEMENT BETWEEN STUDENTS ONLINE, IN BOTH SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS TEACHING?

Synchronous teaching refers to a situation where the student and the teacher are present in the lesson at the same time, whereas asynchronous teaching refers to a situation where both parties are not present at the same time (for example when students work on an assignment without the teacher's presence).

Challenge: During online lessons it is more difficult to signal who wants to say something or interact: how can the teacher better anticipate that someone wants to say something? Also, personality differences between students, like students being extroverted or introverted, can become amplified by the online format (with shy students communicating less). People don't always know the rules for this type of classroom interaction online, how do you gauge their reactions? How do you create assignments where students really interact with each other like in a normal face-to-face class?

VISUAL INFORMATION IS CRUCIAL

In addition to the language content, teaching situations require visible cues from the face and from gestures. In the face-to-face situation, a teacher regularly uses body language to convey his/her message. In social interaction eye-contact is really important. Therefore, during online teaching, look directly at your camera every now and then, rather than at your screen. This will increase the students' feeling of being in an interaction with you as teacher.

In the three paragraphs below, we elaborate how teachers and students can include visual support in their online classroom.

Gestures

The gestures we make during our speech are very important for effective communication. Not only do gestures support the content of what is being said, but the rhythm and timing of the gestures can also support 'hearing' your words, thus improving intelligibility. Therefore,

- Try to use hand gestures – even the simplest up and down movements will do – to highlight important information in your communication.
- Make sure that both the teacher and the students are properly positioned in the frame of their video, so that the gestures they make to support the message are visible.
- Check before each class starts whether every student is well visible, including the upper part of their body. If not, the teacher could provide some advice. Moving the camera too far back may not always offer the best solution, since it may reduce visibility of the face.

- Make sure that your hands are in view when you are gesturing.
- Emphasize and tell students that the class is not just about 'hearing', but that the visuals matter.
- Make sure that the face is at all times well visible: the movement of the lips is an important aid, especially when learning a new language.
- Note, learners from different cultural backgrounds may need some extra encouragement to use their gestures in online class.
- If circumstances allow, use a stable internet connection to make sure the timing of the hands and lips is 'in sync' with the spoken words.

Visual support

Use visuals to support the lesson. These could include images, video's, etc. The inclusion of visuals makes the lesson more vibrant and engaging for the student. You can also use pointers to point out the most important parts of the lesson on the screen. Kaltura has a pointer function (it looks like a colored, slightly enlarged mouse cursor). Make good use of the chat window – students who might find it difficult to raise a question in face-to-face classes and even more so in online class, may have less difficulties to type their question in the chat.

Integrating visuals & gestures to support verbal information

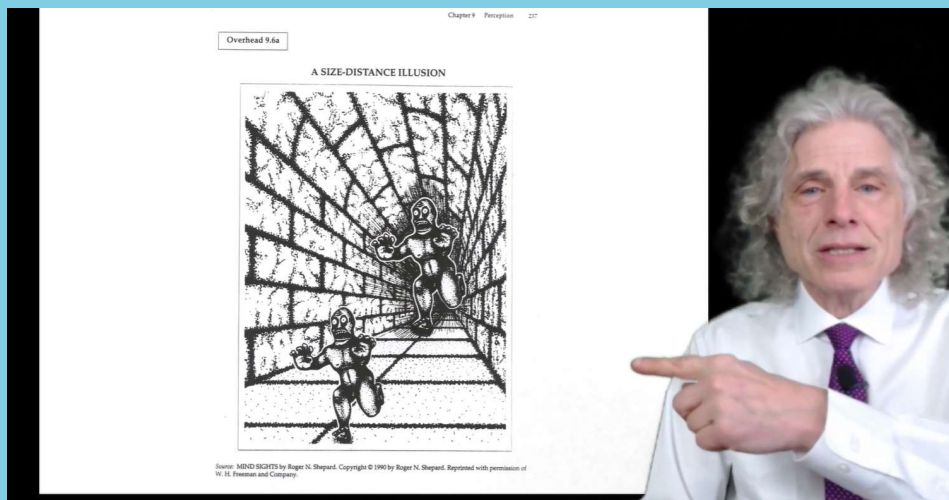
Integrate the supportive visuals along with your gestures. Enhance your gestures *with* the visuals in your slides. It is the 'triage' of integrating your verbal information with visuals and gestures.

Example: Integrating visuals, gestures and verbal information

A clear example of integrating verbal information with visuals and gestures is this recent video from Steven Pinker. Note how he uses pointing gestures to the visuals in his slide. In this way, the verbal information is supported by both the visual and his gestures. You can also use the laser pointer to mark the relevant information on your slide.

<https://harvard.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=50362e2c-f813-4f5e-88b7-acbb00bf343>

Example of Steven Pinker pointing with his finger to supportive visuals on the screen:



With respect to L2 learning (see Question 2), if you teach a foreign language, you might want to use gesture (e.g., gesturing a bird, or flower [like smelling] or trace a house) and then show those pictures on the screen. In this way, you use both gestures and visuals to support the verbal part of your message.

Consistent turn taking

It is more difficult to signal when someone wants to say something during online classes than in face-to-face classes. In face-to-face situations turn taking requests can be signaled by a nod of the head, a hum or a look in the eyes, but also by anticipating when someone else's sentence will likely finish. Due to some minor delays in online gatherings, the timing of these small signals (partly) falls away.

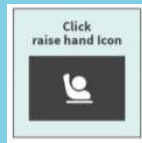
Therefore, implement standard protocols in the online class to make this easier and establish these 'rules' for the interaction before the lesson starts. Be consistent in the way you implement this across all courses within Radboud in'to Languages. By being consistent, the rules are clear to students in each class and turn taking will become more smooth after a while.

Examples 'This is how we take turns'.

- ✓ **Adding** to a current conversation? Raise your (physical) hand. Raising your physical hand is one of the fastest ways to signal visually.



- ✓ Wishing to **start a new topic or just say something**? Show this by activating a specific visual item (like the 'raise hand' button in Kaltura). Note, this action takes a bit longer than physically raising a hand and may not be convenient for fast turn taking.



- ✓ **Finished talking**: Would you like to end your turn and give the floor back to the teacher? Raise both of your hands with the palms visible to the camera, as a sign that you are done. This could help the teacher to smoothly offer the turn to another student or raise a question in return.



- ✓ After a yes/no **question to the entire class**, everyone nods yes or shakes no. For example, the teacher says: 'Have I explained this grammatical construction in a way that you understand?' Every single student answers visually by nodding.



AVOIDING DISTRACTION

Reduce distractions by minimizing the amount of 'noise' during the lesson. In this way, you can convey your message more effectively. It could be worthwhile to offer every student a virtual background image that they can use, so that everyone has the same background. By reducing the distractions from the environment, the signals that you send will be amplified a bit more. This also benefits the feeling of a shared space, a common class everyone is in, or the feeling of being in a collective environment where you are working towards the same goal. This stimulates engagement.

In larger groups, you can also mute the microphones of the students to have no background noise from their environments during the lesson.

MORE AND SHORTER MOMENTS OF EXPLICIT INTERACTION

Implement standard moments for interaction by alternating between information and interaction during the lesson. Whereas in the face-to-face class you might offer a 'chunk' of information before giving possibilities for interaction, alternate between information and interaction more frequently in an online class. For example, you can facilitate interaction by asking questions after providing small bits of information. Students can then respond verbally or via the text chat with their answers or questions. Continue with another piece of information after the interaction, etc. Doing this regularly will create more opportunity and moments for interaction and may make interacting in the online environment more 'normal' for the students.

The end of the lesson can also provide an interaction moment of feedback to the teacher. Ask students what they thought was the hardest part of the lesson and when attention dropped. It will provide the teacher some feedback about what was hard to understand or about the assignments in breakout rooms and in the lecture.

QUESTION 2: HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN THE PRINCIPLE "TARGET LANGUAGE = MAIN LANGUAGE" ONLINE?

Challenge: In a face-to-face class, the interaction in the target language is crucial for students' learning. However, in the online setting it is harder to ensure good quality of interaction: there is more distance and for teachers it is hard to know whether a student understands something or not. As a result, the outcome is not the same as in a face-to-face setting. Conversing in the target language is especially challenging for novice learners, because the barrier between the teacher and the students is higher and online lessons allow for less use of mimicry, gestures, and the spatial environment. It is a challenge to provide an environment in which students feel free to speak up. Learning the target language's pronunciations is harder online than in face-to-face settings.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Make explicit what is expected of the students when it comes to communication in the target language during the course. These expectations may differ between individuals from the Dutch culture and other cultures as well. For example, in some cultures it is quite rude to speak up too fast. Students sometimes have the feeling of intruding or being impolite to the teacher. Therefore, ask students what would make them more comfortable so they can be an active part of the interaction and are comfortable in taking turns.

SMALL GROUPS

Start with smaller groups of students, so that everyone gets a turn to speak. It may be helpful to appoint a chairman in the small group. The position of chairman can rotate so that everyone receives this role regularly. Also, in small groups, open everyone's microphones so that auditory responses are fastest and most natural. Muting hinders the interaction here.

Roleplay is very suitable for facilitating that everyone speaks up in small groups. Give students an assignment like 'you are now the doctor and you are now the patient' etc. Everyone being assigned a role makes that everyone is obliged to speak.

LEARNING PRONUNCIATION

When explaining how words should be pronounced, it is especially important that the lips of the teacher are visible to the student. In the face-to-face class, students can see how the teacher's lips, muscles in the face, and mouth move. When teachers are explaining pronunciation, ask students to spotlight the speaker (= teacher) in Kaltura so that the students can see the teacher most clearly.

However, if this does not work well enough online, the teacher can record short videos of him/her pronouncing the words with the lips very well visible. Teachers can show the pre-made movies on their screen. Also, it may be harder for teachers to check whether the pronunciation of the student is correct in an online setting, for example due to microphone interference. To overcome this, students could upload their own videos of them practicing the

pronunciation of the word, so the teacher can see their lips too to see and hear whether the pronunciation is correct. This might help the teacher to provide the right feedback to the student. Researchers participating in the brainstorm thought there might also be some movies available that show how certain pronunciations are physically formed by the mouth. This might further support the students' learning in the harder online situation. Another suggestion for learning pronunciation in the current situation might be specific apps that are used in speech therapy. These apps give biofeedback on pronunciation. Sometimes the apps have a recording option. Also, there are apps for neurological patients that give feedback on pronunciation.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

STUDENT INQUIRY

Inquire with the students what they prefer themselves and where they experience problems when it comes to interacting in online lessons. It is important to know the perspective of the end user (the students). You could do this at the end of every lesson to normalize the procedure. Some more in-depth interviews might offer you a more profound view of the students' experiences. For some students, it may feel that all eyes are on them when taking a turn in the conversation which increases the threshold for taking a turn. Therefore, ask students what makes them more comfortable.

REVISITING THE CURRICULUM?

Shifting from full face-to-face to full online education requires a new line of education. The curriculum is built with face-to-face lessons as the starting point, and this way of teaching cannot be copied to online teaching completely. Teachers may need to reconsider how the change their teaching style and content for this new situation.

THE HOMES IN THE CLASSROOM

It may be awkward for students (and teachers) that their home environment becomes part of the classroom when following online lessons from their homes. In a face-to-face lesson, everyone is present in a formal space that is meant for education, which facilitates the feeling of being part of an education setting with a group of people. This feeling is more difficult to create when everyone is at home. This can cause more informal attitudes towards the class. You can try explicitly inviting the home into the lesson by asking students to describe parts of their surroundings in the target language (for example: ask them to prepare for the lesson and pick an object and explain in the target language what the object is, where they got it or who they got it from, what it means to them, etc.). This may overcome the feeling of 'breaking into' someone's home environment and even (parts of) the home space becomes more of a shared space.

INTERACTION TOOLS

Use online tools to facilitate interaction. There are websites where you can create a shared online space and can interact with the environment through the use of avatars that can walk around, like in gather.town and get.mebo. Another example is borrel.app, which is a tool that is used to simulate the Dutch 'borrelcultuur' for networking drinks. These apps may help create a sense of being together informally, and talking may be more natural in these more informal virtual environments.

TEACHING STUDENTS WITH A VISUAL OR HEARING IMPAIRMENT

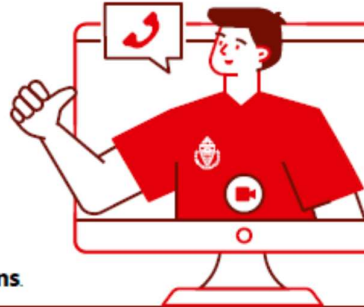
For students with a visual or hearing impairment following online courses can be extra challenging. The university of Cambridge published some suggestions for optimizing teaching to these students at this website: <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2020/09/22/sign-languages-and-deaf-people-during-covid-19-how-you-can-help-in-the-classroom/>

INFOGRAPHIC

TIPS & TRICKS

Successful video calls

Researchers from the research consortium Language in Interaction provide advice to facilitate successful **online group conversations**.



— OPTIMIZE ONLINE CONVERSATIONS —

Give each other space to take turns. Online conversations take place at a slightly slower pace than live conversations, so some courtesy will look good on everyone.



Use a **gesture or symbol** when ready to take a turn.



Appoint a **chairperson**. This person gives every participant a turn to speak.



Make a set of **explicit rules** for interaction during classes.

— PICK UP THE SIGNALS! —

Improve your positioning in front of the camera: the better you can see someone, the more signals you get. Look into the camera to spark engagement. Use this when you want to emphasize your message.



Make sure your **lips are visible**. Seeing someone's mouth can help with understanding what they're saying.



Make sure your **hands are visible**. The gestures you make while speaking can help with understanding.



Align backgrounds during online sessions to enhance focus and reduce noise.

— STIMULATE INTERACTION —



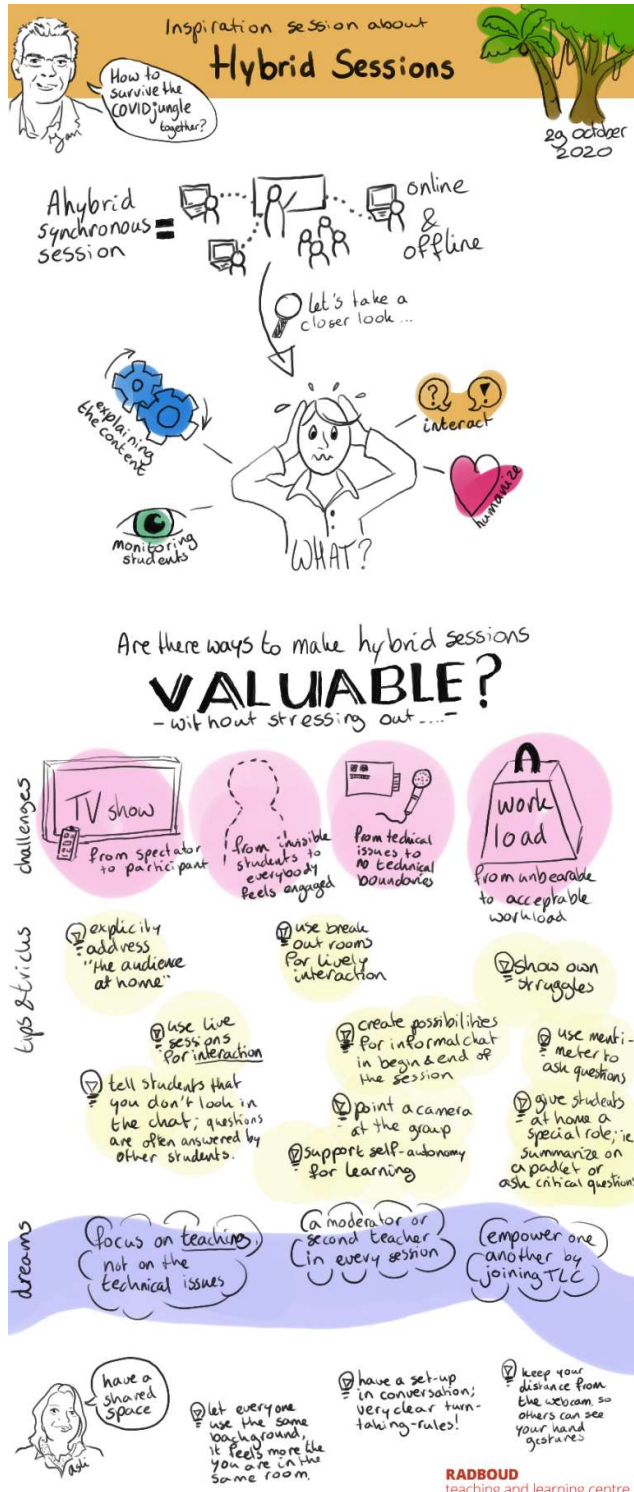
Ask to **actively participate** and contribute to the conversation and to interact with each other about the subject matter, for example by asking and answering questions in the chat.



Include several **short moments for interaction** and make sure that participants can indicate that they want to respond or say something.

SUMMARY OF AN INSPIRATION SESSION OF RABDOUD TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTRE

Drawing by Hienke Sminia





LANGUAGE
in **INTERACTION**



Radboud University Nijmegen



NWO

Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research