

# Videoconferencing in University Language Education

Libor Štěpánek  
Kateřina Sedláčková  
Nick Byrne  
(Eds.)

Masaryk University

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PRESS



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The authors take a sociopragmatic approach to their use of videoconferencing. The feedback from their programme reveals not only the linguistic challenges of using English as a Lingua Franca but also the socio-cultural challenges inherent in exchanges between students from different countries and cultural backgrounds as well as at different stages of linguistic and emotional development. The programme contributes to raising students' awareness of related issues and practical workarounds. It also shows how videoconferencing can open an international window while maximising the reassurance of a familiar setting in order to minimise the shock of the new.

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## About the editors

### Libor Štěpánek

Libor Štěpánek is Assistant Professor in English and Director of the Masaryk University Language Centre, Brno, Czech Republic. His broad international teaching experience and teacher training activities include EAP soft skills such as videoconferencing, academic writing and creativity. His main academic interest lies in Creative Approach to Language Teaching (CALT).

*libor.stepanek@cjv.muni.cz*

### Kateřina Sedláčková

Kateřina Sedláčková is Assistant Professor at the Masaryk University Language Centre, Brno, Czech Republic, where she is responsible for research activities. She teaches French for Law and academic skills in French for Social Science. Her research interests concern motivation to learn a second foreign language, CLIL, and enhancement of critical thinking.

*katerina.sedlackova@cjv.muni.cz*

### Nick Byrne

Nick Byrne is the former Director of the Language Centre at the London School of Economics. He has been active in teaching languages in higher education for over 25 years, has talked and written widely about management issues in language centres across Europe. He has been a board member of key language organisations, and now works as a freelance communications consultant in Berlin.

*nickbyrne29@yahoo.co.uk*



<h1>Notes on the Contributors</h1>	<p>Janice de Haaff</p> <p>Janice de Haaff has taught English for Academic Purposes at Aberystwyth and Manchester Universities in the UK; Concordia and Bishops in Montréal, Canada; Zhuhai, in China; and currently in Dubai, UAE. She has a MEd specialising in Educational Technology with pedagogical interests in non-essentialist views of culture and video conferencing.</p> <p><i>jdehaaff@outlook.com</i></p>
<p>Zuzana Bezdičková</p> <p>At the University of Pardubice, I teach English in ESP courses with a focus on economics and health studies. I welcome the changes brought to education by digital technology, and I consider videoconferencing an integral part of 21st century language teaching.</p> <p><i>Zuzana.Bezdickova@upce.cz</i></p>	<p>Marketa Denksteinova</p> <p>Marketa Denksteinova is an ESP lecturer at the Language Centre of University of Pardubice, Czech Republic. She focuses mainly on English for Information Technologies and English for Intercultural Communication. She has incorporated social media and videoconferencing technology into her language teaching especially through international cooperation initiatives.</p> <p><i>marketa.denksteinova@upce.cz</i></p>
<p>Marek Blahuš</p> <p>Marek Blahuš earned a Master's Degree in Applied Informatics at Masaryk University, Faculty of Informatics in 2011 and has since been working as an ICT technician at the Masaryk University Language Centre, where he aids language teachers with regular international videoconferences as an optional part of the curriculum.</p> <p><i>marek.blahus@cjv.muni.cz</i></p>	<p>Jo Eastlake</p> <p>Jo Eastlake is a teacher and teacher educator at the IEC, Aberystwyth University. Her 25 years' experience includes teaching of English and academic skills in the UK, Spain and Vietnam, coordinating teacher trainings and pre-sessional programmes (IEC) and developing postgraduate programmes (SOAS, UCL). Her academic interests lie in teacher subjectivity and sociocultural approaches to teacher education.</p> <p><i>jme13@aber.ac.uk</i></p>
<p>Miranda Capecchi</p> <p>My name is Miranda Capecchi. I have been teaching TESOL since 2004. I have a BA (Hons) in Drama and an MA in Creative Writing. I was involved with teaching English via videoconferencing from September 2011 to June 2013, collaborating with Masaryk University to realise the aBerNo project.</p> <p><i>mercurial20042@hotmail.com</i></p>	<p>Judit Háhn</p> <p>Judit Háhn is a senior lecturer at the Department of Language and Communication Studies of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. She teaches a variety of courses on applied linguistics for English majors. Her research interest concerns sociolinguistics and discourse studies.</p> <p><i>judit.hahn@yiu.fi</i></p>



<p>Alena Hradilová</p> <p>Alena Hradilová is responsible for studies and quality of education at the MU Language Centre. She is in charge of internal teacher training and Continuing Professional Development. She specialises in teaching English for law, the use of videoconferencing in teaching, ESP methodology, soft skills and the use of hedging in scientific writing.</p> <p><i>alena.hradilova@cjv.muni.cz</i></p>	<p>John Morgan</p> <p>John Morgan teaches academic writing and communication and aspects of applied linguistics at Aberystwyth University. Within his teaching activities he specialises in videoconferencing communication, in which he has been engaged since 2003. Over the past 30 years he has taught in Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, France, England and Wales.</p> <p><i>jpm@aber.ac.uk</i></p>
<p>Andrea Koblizkova</p> <p>My background in management, marketing and English studies has led me naturally to those issues of communication important to business professionals, mainly socio-pragmatic aspects of intercultural interaction. I have been working in the field of applied linguistics at the University of Pardubice for 20 years.</p> <p><i>andrea.koblizkova@upce.cz</i></p>	<p>Anjuli Pandavar</p> <p>Anjuli Pandavar is a British European lecturer in EAP at New York University in Shanghai. A proponent of transformative education, especially project-based experiential learning, she prepares students for a globally integrated world in which they would be expected to collaborate confidently with complete strangers, often internationally.</p> <p><i>anjuli.pandavar@nyu.edu</i></p>
<p>Olga Kozar</p> <p>Olga Kozar started her career as an ESOL teacher and later completed a PhD on language teaching via videoconferencing at Macquarie University, Australia. She also runs an online school that uses Skype for English lessons. She continues to work at Macquarie University and is passionate about all things learning and teaching.</p> <p><i>olga.kozar@mq.edu.au</i></p>	<p>Irena Podlášková</p> <p>Irena Podlášková works as an ESP Lecturer with a focus on economics and information technology at the Language Centre of the University of Pardubice in the Czech Republic. She is interested in e-learning and the use of information technologies in language teaching.</p> <p><i>irena.podlaskova@upce.cz</i></p>
<p>Juliet Lum</p> <p>Juliet Lum oversees the research training programme for postgraduate research candidates at Macquarie University. Over the last two decades, she has taught several academic communication courses for tertiary students at all levels in Australia and Canada. Juliet has also worked in the language technology industry as a dialogue designer and project manager.</p> <p><i>juliet.lum@mq.edu.au</i></p>	<p>Nadezhda S. Rudenko</p> <p>Nadezhda S. Rudenko is an English language teacher at Gymnasium # 104 "Classical Gymnasium", Yekaterinburg, Russia. She holds a doctoral degree in English Language Teaching. Her primary research focus is self-access in EFL, online education, virtual classroom, and intercultural communication.</p> <p><i>nadezhda.s.rudenko@gmail.com</i></p>

Martina Šindelářová Skupeňová

Martina Šindelářová Skupeňová is an English language lecturer at the Masaryk University Language Centre in Brno, Czech Republic. Having a strong interest in intercultural communication and arts, she has sought to incorporate those areas into her courses at the Faculty of Arts to the greatest extent possible.

*[martina.sindelarova@mail.muni.cz](mailto:martina.sindelarova@mail.muni.cz)*

Stellan Sundh

Stellan Sundh is a senior lecturer at the Department of Education, Uppsala University, Sweden. His main duties consist in teacher education and courses for international students. He is currently engaged in international cooperation with a special interest in English and intercultural communication and develops student-interactive video-conferences in several courses.

*[stellan.sundh@engelska.uu.se](mailto:stellan.sundh@engelska.uu.se)*

Kirby Vincent

Kirby Vincent works at the University of Helsinki as a lecturer in English. He teaches in various faculties, including Educational Sciences, Arts, and Law. Additionally, he works in the autonomous learning and master-level writing programmes and joint teaches an intercultural communications course.

*[Kirby.Vincent@helsinki.fi](mailto:Kirby.Vincent@helsinki.fi)*



# Acknowledgements

## The Editors

Libor Štěpánek  
Kateřina Sedláčková  
Nick Byrne

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The aim of this book is to present videoconferencing practice in the context of university language education as it currently exists. It could not have been created without the help of a number of people. Each chapter is a product of thoughtful analysis, reflection and research on videoconferencing teaching practice, and we offer our sincere thanks to the authors for their hard work, commitment to excellence, and collaboration throughout the many phases of creating this book. The other remarkable contribution without which this book could not have been written is the videoconferencing practice itself. We wish to thank all the teachers, lecturers, researchers, managers, technicians and students involved in their various capacities within their respective videoconferencing programmes for their interest and for the activities descriptions and analyses of which form the bulk of this book. We are equally grateful for the unfailing support and generous encouragement we have received from our institutions, professional colleagues and friends, many of whom continue to inspire us in our academic and teaching practice. A particular word of appreciation is owed to Colin Kimbrell, who helped enormously by reading and editing the drafts and by providing robustly helpful feedback and some absolutely crucial comments on multiple parts of the texts and many ideas we were working with as the book progressed. This made the whole process a rich intellectual experience. This book has also benefitted greatly from the editorial assistance of Dr Marta Rybičková, who was responsible for the extremely efficient communication with the authors and for the seamless organisation of all practicalities related to the publishing of this book. We would also like to thank Jennifer DeFelice for her most inspiring approach to searching for the best ways to match the design of the book to its content. It has been a real pleasure working with her. Final-



# Preface

Videoconferencing has been available for more than thirty years but could now, due to its greater accessibility and affordability, be ready for a higher profile and uptake. It is only in the last decade that it has reached a level of usability which enables its effective application in real academic settings. Teachers in higher education today use videoconferencing in a wide range of situations. This enhances language development, learner motivation and autonomy, cultural awareness and understanding, and introduces greater authenticity in the learning process. The goal of *Videoconferencing in University Language Education* is to provide a practical, reliable and comprehensive single-volume review of the use of videoconferencing in academic language education. The idea to examine diverse perspectives, current theories, methodological developments, and effective videoconferencing practice in the context of higher education came from meetings with teachers, students and videoconference practitioners. Their intensive debates on the breadth of research projects, variety of approaches to language teaching and scope of innovations in the area of videoconference use have formed this book into its current shape.

The initial thoughts were accompanied by genuine enthusiasm and slight hesitation. The enthusiasm was generated by the ambitious vision of inviting videoconferencing practitioners from around the world to actively exchange ideas, and to share and showcase their best practices. The hesitation was closely related to the fear of the enormous quantity of diverging perspectives and approaches that could hardly fit into one coherent text. From the beginning, we felt this book could not be a collection of accidental descriptions of research findings and practical activities loosely related to the topics of language learning and videoconferencing. To delimit the range of topics to be dealt with, we decided to frame our scope with a definition. For the purposes of this publication, we defined videoconferencing as the use of telecommunication technologies that allow two or more groups of students in different locations to share non-desktop face-to-face sessions and communicate by simultaneous video and audio transmissions without having to move to a single classroom. This definition seemed closest to the style of videoconferencing we intended to discuss, and at the same time, it allowed us to eliminate the area of desktop videoconferencing, which seems to have already been investigated and documented extensively for all educational levels. We also agreed that

this book would primarily focus on language teachers and teacher trainers in a higher education context, and that the style should make it accessible to anyone with an interest in videoconferencing. Although the authors are academics, and most readers will be likely to be engaged in languages in higher education, teachers and researchers in other disciplines, in fact anyone interested in the use of videoconferencing in general could find this publication equally useful.

Once we began approaching the prospective authors, we realised the complex and hybrid nature of our work, and the richness such work brings on many levels. Texts began to arrive from different parts of the world, from different types of educational institutions and from different types of authors - teachers, students, managers and technicians. The texts reflected a great variety of types of content, from personal reflections, practical issues and best practices to research results and theoretical frameworks. The variety of perspectives was equally wide. As the book began to take shape, it became evident we had turned the creative process into a natural continuation of our initial meetings and debates. Individual authors redefined and modified the subject matter in specific ways and explained their integration of videoconferencing into their language classes from different perspectives. This multiplicity of approaches was truly appreciated and is clearly visible in the use of the term itself; the keyword in this book is referred to by terms such as videoconference, videoconferencing, videoconference-enabled classroom, videoconference-based lessons or the simple abbreviation VC (which is, coincidentally, identical with the abbreviation for virtual classroom, as Anjuli Pandavar comments in her chapter). The only unifying characteristic of the keyword in this book we have introduced is the non-hyphenated one-word version of the word “videoconference”, as opposed to “video-conference” or “video conference” used for the same or similar subject matter in other texts.

In order to keep the variety visibly present, the original styles of individual authors in distinctive chapters have been preserved and we have kept editorial changes related to style to minimum. This simultaneity of perspectives, voices and styles that also reflects the very nature of institutions the authors come from, namely the university language centres and departments, reflects a sort of

microcosm of the very subject of this publication. Videoconferencing is based on meetings. Videoconferencing brings together different worlds in one virtual space. The publishing process brought together twenty authors to meet and communicate on the topic of videoconferencing and language education. Similarly, this book presents a meeting of chapters communicating with one another - a chapter analysing videoconference-based teaching may find confronting or supporting views in chapters described from the perspective of a language learner, or a technological issue in a chapter written by a teacher can find its solution in a chapter written by a technology specialist. The continual dialogue among editors and authors finally resulted in a set of texts that demonstrate the true potential of videoconferencing for language teaching and learning in higher education. With the emphasis on variety in mind, we have chosen fifteen texts covering a wide range of issues and topics in this field and grouped them into five parts, each dealing with a different aspect of videoconferencing.

The first text represents memories of a retired VC practitioner in the form of an interview and can be considered a personal introduction to the book. This interview is followed by *the Part 1: University Perspective*, which sets out the context of this book. It addresses specificities of the use of VC language teaching and learning in an academic setting. In the first chapter, Andrea Koblížková and Zuzana Bezdíčková discuss linguistic and socio-cultural challenges for language learners using English as a Lingua Franca, and show how videoconferencing can raise students' awareness of those issues in everyday communication. The second chapter, written by John Morgan, analyses effectiveness of the use of videoconferencing for the purposes of giving feedback on academic writing, and considers the importance of establishing a community focus among students and teachers. The third chapter presents ideas of Olga Kozar and Juliet Lum who focus on geographically disperse communities of writing researchers and offer practical and detailed advice to teachers on how to facilitate such programmes.

*Part 2: Students in Focus* draws attention to the target group of videoconferencing, to language learners in higher education. The fourth chapter, authored by Nadezda Rudenko, is dedicated to the intercultural skills and strategies of language learners for the purposes of communication

and teamwork. In the fifth chapter, Judit Háhn and Irena Podlášková present and describe a list of roles available to a learner in videoconference language programmes. The learner's roles and associated transferable skills are discussed in the context of task-based collaborative activities. The sixth chapter can be perceived as a mirror and echo of some other chapters in this book. Libor Štěpánek offers a collection of extracts from reflective essays of students who participated in videoconferencing language courses and shared their feelings and impressions as well as the advantages and disadvantages of videoconferencing from their point of view.

*Part 3: Teachers' World* approaches the topic from the opposite perspective and, looks at how teachers work. In the seventh chapter, Alena Hradilová and Kirby Vincent provide an insight into a videoconferencing course design and present a detailed description of a course English for Law, including its development, writing of the syllabus, and integration of the subject matter and technology into the programme. The eighth chapter offers the teacher's equivalent to chapter five in the previous section, bringing, thus, theoretical aspects of potential performances of learners and teachers to balance. Markéta Denksteinová and Stellan Sundh present and describe a list of roles available to a teacher in videoconference language programmes. The roles are accompanied by examples of specific tasks, methods and skills teachers should adopt in order to make videoconferencing work effectively.

Expanding on the preceding section, *Part IV: Reflection and Realism*, focuses on the teacher experience and deals with a wide variety of topics and ideas that are not necessarily supported by in-depth research but are still important for the field. The ninth chapter, written by Miranda Capecchi, records individual stages of a videoconferencing project and focuses on personal descriptions of the implementation of academic skills into a videoconferencing language course. In the tenth chapter, Anjuli Pandavar considers different stages of her use of videoconferencing in language courses and identifies pitfalls and challenges relating to technology and methodology. The eleventh chapter, authored by Jo Eastlake and Martina Šindelářová Skupeňová, analyses a case of two contrasting student groups and their diverse approaches to learning situations in the context of videoconferencing.



Finally, *Part 5: Management and Technology* departs slightly from the primary focus of this volume as it deals with no teaching or learning related issues. Instead, it addresses two critical aspects that must be considered when videoconferencing is incorporated into language courses. The twelfth chapter, written by Libor Štěpánek, explains key management issues to be considered and offers practical advice for the management of physical space, time and finances. The last chapter is devoted to technology, the most prominent non-teaching aspect of videoconferencing language courses. Marek Blahuš provides a personal and highly professional overview of the key technological issues in videoconferencing. These serve as a useful reference to both teachers and technicians in charge of technical support for videoconferencing sessions.

This set of sectioned chapters is adjoined by a quick VC guide which is a compilation of materials that were originally created to help teachers prepare their students to become acquainted with the use of videoconferencing in language courses.

Realisation of this book represents a strong belief that sharing experience and expertise of committed practitioners enhances the quality of language education we currently provide. Bringing the chapters for this publication together has been exciting work. We greatly appreciate the open-minded attitudes, pioneering visions, critical reflections as well as research and experience based suggestions of the authors of this book who offer valuable insights into new and alternative uses of videoconferencing in the context of language learning. We hope their ideas can be useful to your practice and can serve to prompt further discussion on the use of videoconferencing in language teaching and learning in higher education. We wish you an enjoyable and inspiring reading.

The editors