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(54) Title: GROUP FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING SYSTEM AND METHOD

(57) Abstract: A method and system for teaching a foreign language to a user who has knowledge of a base language is disclosed. The method and system may include delivering a video presentation simultaneously to a plurality of users. The method and system may also include simultaneously delivering a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language audio and/or text streams to the plurality of users, each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language audio and/or text streams corresponding to the video presentation.



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Group Foreign Language Teaching System and Method

Related Applications

This application is generally related to U.S. Application Ser. No. 11/508,032, titled "Method and System for Teaching a Foreign Language," filed August 21, 2006. The entire disclosure of said application is incorporated herein by reference thereto.

Field of the Invention

Example embodiments of the present invention are generally related to foreign language teaching systems and methods, in particular systems and methods for teaching multiple students at the same time.

Background

[0001] Mastering a foreign language is a valuable tool that may be beneficial to one throughout one's life. However, current foreign language learning tools have several drawbacks that impede their utility. One of the main hindrances to learning a foreign language is lack of time. Busy people often do not have the ability to set aside time on a regular basis to learn a new language. Existing foreign language learning tools utilize simple stories or mechanisms to teach the new language. However, they do not utilize activities which the user would already be engaged in to teach the new language, such as going to see a movie, thus maximizing use of the user's time.

[0002] In U.S. Application Ser. No. 11/508,032, filed August 21, 2006, which is incorporated herein by reference, a method and device for teaching a foreign language is described. A fraction of the words in a text written in a known base language are replaced with synonymous words or phrases in a target foreign language that is being taught. The fraction of words that are replaced can be modified by the user, or can be automatically adjusted in response to measurement of the user's proficiency.

[0003] In addition, current foreign language learning tools are designed to teach users who are on the same proficiency level, or to teach users on an individual basis. However, they are not able to simultaneously teach a multiple of users who have varying levels of proficiency.

[0004] Some existing systems present full translations to multiple users simultaneously. The New York Metropolitan Opera has individual screens on the seatbacks of each seat which contain subtitles (or "Met supertitles") that translate the opera being sung, thereby allowing the listeners to understand the plot. Anthony Tommasini, *Reinventing Supertitles: How the Met Did It*, N.Y. TIMES, October 2, 1995, at C11. However, the supertitles are not designed

to teach users a foreign language. The supertitles present translations of the opera to the users. However, the translations are not presented as diglot weaves and are not configured to help the users to learn the foreign language being used in the opera.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0005] FIG. 1 is a simplified block diagram of an example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention;

[0006] FIG. 2 is a simplified block diagram of another example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention;

[0007] FIG. 3 is a simplified block diagram of another example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention;

[0008] FIG. 4 is a simplified block diagram of another example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention;

[0009] FIG. 5 is an example graphical representation of one pair of special glasses, as referenced in FIG. 4;

[0010] FIG. 6 is a simplified block diagram of another example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention;

[0011] FIG. 7 illustrates an example foreign language learning tool operable in conjunction with visual presentations, according to an example embodiment of the present invention; and

[0012] FIG. 8-10 are flowcharts illustrating example procedures, according to example embodiments of the present invention.

Summary

[0013] Some embodiments of the present invention may work cooperatively with existing audiovisual presentations to teach a target foreign language to a user with knowledge of a base language. The methods and tools present users with content where the target foreign language and base user language are intermixed or “woven,” e.g., by replacing a subset of the words and phrases in a text in the base language with words and phrases in the target foreign language, or vice versa. In some example embodiments of the present invention, while watching a visual presentation, the user may be presented with content, including audio, text, or a combination, which is in the form of a weave, where various words and phrases are presented in a mixed format, some in the user’s known base language and some in the user’s target foreign language. In some example embodiments of the present invention, multiple

users may view the same visual presentation simultaneously, and each user may be presented with a written text and/or audio stream that is associated with the visual presentation. The text and/or audio stream may be presented to each user in an individualized weave corresponding to each user's level of indicated proficiency. In some example embodiments, each user may be able to request a different level of difficulty for the weave, e.g. by adjusting a control. Alternatively, levels may be adjusted by the system, e.g. automatically based on automated assessment of user proficiency.

[0014] In some example embodiments of the present invention, multiple users may simultaneously view a visual presentation, such as a movie, while each listening to a customized audio weave based on each individual user's indicated difficulty level. This may be, for example, in a movie theatre. The customized audio weave may be presented to the users in various languages. Each user may have his own personalized audio device, e.g. headset or earpiece, which presents him with a customized audio weave. Each user may also have a device whereby he is able to indicate his desired level of difficulty, which in turn affects the amount of target foreign language in the audio weave. This device may be, for example, a remote control.

[0015] In some example embodiments of the present invention, multiple users may simultaneously view a visual presentation, such as a movie, while each being presented with a customized text weave based on each user's indicated difficulty level. The users may be seated in rows of chairs, with personal screens on the back of each chair. This may be, for example, in a theatre setting or on an airplane. Each user may have a device whereby he is able to indicate his desired level of difficulty. Each user's personal screen may be customized with a subtitle text weave according to the user's requested level of difficulty. While the user views the movie, a subtitle text weave at the requested level of difficulty may be presented on the screen. Additionally, the users may simultaneously be presented with the audio corresponding to the visual presentation. The audio may be in the language in which the visual presentation was initially created, or in any other language. It may also be presented in a weave using the approach previously described.

[0016] In some example embodiments of the present invention, one or more users may view individual visual presentations, such as television broadcasts or digital television programs, while being presented with a customized text weave based on each user's indicated difficulty level. The users may be seated in rows of chairs, with screens on the back of each chair. This may be, for example, in a theatre setting or on an airplane. Each user may have a device

whereby he is able to indicate his desired level of difficulty. Each user's personal screen may be customized with a subtitle text weave according to the user's requested level of difficulty. While the user views the visual presentation, a subtitle text weave in the requested level of difficulty may be presented on the personal screen. Additionally, the users may be simultaneously presented with the audio corresponding to the selected visual presentation. The audio may be in the language in which the visual presentation was initially created, or in any other language. It may also be presented in a weave using the approach previously described.

[0017] In some example embodiments of the present invention, multiple users may view a visual presentation, such as a movie, simultaneously while viewing a customized text weave based on each user's indicated difficulty level. The users may view the customized text weave via an individual visual output device, e.g. special glasses. Each user may have his own individual visual output device which presents him with a customized text weave. Each user may also have a device whereby he is able to indicate his desired level of difficulty. This device may be, for example, a remote control. Additionally, the users may be simultaneously presented with the audio corresponding to the selected visual presentation. The audio may be in the language in which the visual presentation was initially created, or in any other language. It may also be presented in a weave using the approach previously described.

[0018] In some example embodiments of the present invention, multiple users may view a visual presentation, such as a movie, simultaneously while viewing a customized text weave based on each user's indicated difficulty level and while each listening to a customized audio weave based on the individual user's indicated difficulty level. The users may view the customized text weave via an individual visual output device, e.g. special glasses, that they are wearing. Each user may have his own individual visual output device which presents him with a customized text weave. Each user may also have his own personalized audio device, e.g. headset or earpiece, which presents him with a customized audio weave. Each user may also have a device whereby he is able to indicate his desired level of difficulty. The text weave presented to each user and the audio weave presented to each user may correspond to each other.

[0019] Some example embodiments of the present invention provide several technical advantages:

[0020] By providing simultaneous streams to a plurality of users, multiple users can be taught at the same time, rather than having a separate process and device for each user.

[0021] By varying the language and/or the difficulty level, multiple users can share a single experience, while all learning their chosen target language at the optimum level.

[0022] By providing the streams through broadcasting or multicasting, students in a wide range of areas can be supplied with instructions from a central source. Moreover, the use of conventional content as a basis for such streams may increase student interest. Foreign language instruction may also be provided in conventional settings, e.g., during normal broadcast television or with a normal in-theater movie presentation.

Detailed Description of Example Embodiments

[0023] FIG. 1 is a simplified block diagram of an example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention. Multiple users 100 may view a common visual presentation on a screen 102. This may be, for example, a movie or a television program. Each user 100 may have a personal audio device 104, e.g. a headset or an earpiece, which may receive an audio weave corresponding to the text of the visual presentation from a weave repository 106. Methods for creating and managing weaves are described in U.S. Application Ser. No. 11/508,032, which is incorporated herein by reference. The user may also have an input device 108 whereby the user may select a desired difficulty level for the weave to be presented to him. For example, the user may select "easy" and the weave presented to him may consist of most words in the user's base language and only a few words in the target foreign language. The input device 108 may be, for example, a keypad with several different buttons that the user may select. For example, the keypad may contain the following buttons: easy, medium, hard. Via the input device 108, the user 100 may also be able to select the desired target foreign language. For example, the user may be presented with the following selections for a foreign language: Spanish, French, Italian. Then, the user 100 may choose, for example, Spanish. The audio text weave presented to the user 100 may contain words from the user's base language, such as English, and from the target foreign language, such as Spanish. Each user 100 may have their own personal audio device 104, e.g. a headset or an earpiece, and input device 108. Each user 100 may then be presented with an audio weave in the difficulty level that they choose. A user 100 may also listen to the audio being projected by the main speaker 110 without the use of a personal audio device 104. This audio may correspond to the visual presentation and may be totally in the users' 100 base language, totally in the target foreign language, or in any other language.

[0024] FIG. 2 is a simplified block diagram of an example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention. A user 200 may view a visual presentation on a screen 202. This may be, for example, a movie or a television program. A user 200 may receive a text weave on a personal output device 204, e.g. a personal screen, corresponding to the text of the visual presentation. This personal screen may be, for example, on the back of the chair in front of the user. The weave may be obtained from a weave repository 206. The user may also have an input device 208 whereby the user may select a desired difficulty level for the text weave to be presented to him. For example, the user may select "easy" and the weave presented to him may consist of most words in the user's base language and only a few words in the target foreign language. The input device 208 may be, for example, a keypad with several different buttons that the user may select. For example, the keypad may contain the following buttons: easy, medium, hard. Via the input device 208, the user 200 may also be able to select the desired target foreign language. For example, the user may be presented with the foreign language choices Korean and Chinese. Then, the user 200 may choose, for example, Korean. The text weave presented to the user 200 may contain words from the user's base language, such as English, and from the target foreign language, such as Korean. Each user 200 may have their own personal screen 204 and input device 208. Each user 200 may then be presented with an text weave on their personal screen 204 in the difficulty level that they choose. This text weave may correspond to the visual presentation being displayed on the screen 202. The users may listen to audio being projected by a main speaker 210. This audio may correspond to the visual presentation and may be totally in the users' 200 base language, totally in the target foreign language, or in any other language.

[0025] FIG. 3 is a simplified block diagram of an example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention. A user 300 may view a visual presentation, such as a movie or television program, on the personal screen 302 in front of him. This personal screen 302 may be, for example, on the back of the chair in front of the user 300. A user 300 may also receive a text weave on the personal screen 302 corresponding to the text of the visual presentation. The text may be provided using the same general system used to deliver Met supertitles, but instead of different languages, different weaves may be provided in one or more target languages. The text weave may appear, for example, as a subtitle on the personal screen. The weave may be obtained from a weave repository 304. The user may also have an input device 306 whereby the user may select a

desired difficulty level for the text weave to be presented to him. For example, the user may select "hard" and the weave presented to him may consist of most words in the user's target foreign language and only a few words in the user's base language. The input device 306 may be, for example, a keypad with several different buttons that the user may select. For example, the keypad may contain the following buttons: easy, medium, hard. Via the input device 306, the user 300 may also be able to select the desired target foreign language. For example, The input device 306 may also contain buttons corresponding to different foreign languages, such as Korean and Chinese. Then, the user 300 may select, for example, Korean. The text weave presented to the user 300 may contain words from the user's base language, such as English, and from the target foreign language, such as Korean. The input device 306 may also allow the user to choose a visual presentation which he wishes to view. For example, via the input device 306, the user 300 may be able to choose amongst several pre-recorded television programs. Alternatively, the input device 306 may allow the user to choose from amongst several stations on cable television. Each user 300 may have their own personal screen 302 and input device 306. Each user 300 may then be presented with a visual presentation and a text weave on their personal screen 302 in the difficulty level that they choose. This text weave may correspond to the visual presentation being displayed on the personal screen 302. The users 300 may listen to audio being projected by a main speaker 308. Alternatively, the users may listen to the audio via headphones. This audio may correspond to the visual presentation and may be totally in the users' 300 base language, totally in the target foreign language, or in any other language.

[0026] FIG. 4 is a simplified block diagram of an example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention. A user 400 may view a visual presentation on a screen 402. This may be, for example, a movie or a television program. A user 400 may have a personal video output device 404, e.g. special glasses, which may receive a text weave corresponding to the text of the visual presentation from a weave repository 406. The user may also have an input device 408 whereby the user may select a desired difficulty level for the weave to be presented to him. For example, the user may select "medium" and the weave presented to him may consist of some words in the user's base language and some words in the target foreign language. The input device 408 may be, for example, a keypad with several different buttons that the user may select. For example, the keypad may contain the following buttons: easy, medium, hard. Via the input device 408, the user 400 may also be able to select the desired target foreign language. For example,

the user may be presented with French and Japanese as selections for a foreign language. Then, the user 400 may choose, for example, Japanese. The text weave presented to the user 400 may contain words from the user's base language, such as English, and from the target foreign language, such as Japanese. Each user 400 may have their own personal video output device 404 that allows the user to see both the shared video and the text, e.g. special glasses, and input device 408. Each user 400 may then be presented with a text weave in the difficulty level that they choose. A user 400 may not wear the personal video output device 404 and may view the visual presentation on the screen 402 without the subtitled text weave. The users 400 may listen to audio being projected by a main speaker 410. This audio may correspond to the visual presentation and may be totally in the users' 400 base language, totally in the target foreign language, or in any other language.

[0027] FIG. 5 is an example graphical representation of one pair of special glasses, as referenced in FIG. 4. The special glasses 500 may operate wirelessly. Alternatively, the special glasses 500 may be connected to the weave text repository via a wire. The special glasses 500 may receive a text weave 502 corresponding to the visual presentation on a screen. Special glasses containing subtitles have been described in numerous patents, for example, U.S. Patent No. 5,648,789.

[0028] FIG 6 is a simplified block diagram of an example foreign language learning tool, according to an example embodiment of the present invention. Multiple users 600 may view a common visual presentation on a screen 602. This may be, for example, a movie or a television program. Each user 600 may have a personal audio device 604, e.g. a headset or an earpiece, which may receive an audio weave corresponding to the text of the visual presentation from a weave repository 606. Additionally, each user may have a personal video output device 608, e.g. special glasses, which may receive a text weave corresponding to the text of the visual presentation from a weave repository 606. The user may also have an input device 610 whereby the user may select a desired difficulty level for the weave to be presented to him. For example, the user may select "hard" and the weave presented to him may consist of most words in the user's target foreign language and only a few words in the user's base language. The input device 610 may be, for example, a keypad with several different buttons that the user may select. For example, the keypad may contain the following buttons: easy, medium, hard. Via the input device 610, the user 600 may also be able to select the desired target foreign language. For example, the user may be presented with the following selections for a foreign language: German, Finnish, Hebrew. Then, the

user 600 may choose, for example, Finnish. The audio weave and visual weaves presented to the user 600 via the personal audio device 604 and personal video output device 608, respectively, may contain words from the user's base language, such as English, and from the target foreign language, such as Finnish. Each user 600 may have their own personal audio device 604, personal video output device 608 and input device 610. Each user 600 may then be presented with an audio weave and text weave in the difficulty level that they choose. A user 600 may also listen to the audio being projected by the main speaker 612 without the use of a personal audio device 604. This audio may correspond to the visual presentation and may be totally in the users' 600 base language. A user 600 may also view the visual presentation without the personal video output device 608 containing the text weave subtitles.

[0029] FIG. 7 illustrates an example foreign language learning tool operable in conjunction with visual presentations, according to an example embodiment of the present invention. A user 700 may access the target foreign language learning tool through a personal input device 702, such as a keypad or remote control. The personal input device 702 may access the entertainment processor 708 via a network 706. The user may indicate his desired difficulty level via the personal input device 702. Once the user 700 has indicated his desired difficulty level, the entertainment processor 708 may access the appropriate weave for the user in the mixed test database 710. The entertainment processor 708 may also access the visual presentation to display to the user via the entertainment system 712. The user may be able to indicate his desired visual presentation via the personal input device 702. The entertainment system 712 may then access the visual presentation indicated by the user in the entertainment database 714. The user 700 may then be presented with a visual presentation and a corresponding text and/or audio weave, according to the indication of the user 700. The user may be presented with the visual presentation and the corresponding audio by the shared output device 716. Alternatively, the user may be presented with the visual presentation by the personal output device 704. The user may also be presented with the text and/or audio weave via the personal output device 704.

[0030] FIG. 8 is a flowchart illustrating an example procedure, according to example embodiments of the present invention. In 800, a video presentation may be delivered to a plurality of users. In 802, a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language audio streams may be delivered to the plurality of users, where each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language audio streams correspond to the video presentation.

[0031] FIG. 9 is a flowchart illustrating an example procedure, according to example embodiments of the present invention. In 900, a video presentation may be delivered to a plurality of users. In 902, a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language text streams may be delivered to the plurality of users, where each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language text streams correspond to the video presentation.

[0032] FIG. 10 is a flowchart illustrating an example procedure, according to example embodiments of the present invention. In 1000, input indicating a target foreign language for a user in a plurality of users is received. For example, the input may indicate that the user desires the target foreign language to be French. In 1002, input indicating a desired difficulty level is received. For example, the input may indicate that the user desires the target foreign language difficulty level to be "easy." In that example, most words presented to the user would be in the user's base language, and only a small portion of the words presented to the user would be in the target foreign language. In 1004, a shared video is delivered to a plurality of users. In 1006, a mixed known language-foreign language audio and/or text stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language audio and text streams may be chosen based on the user input. For example, if the user indicated that he would like a text stream with the target foreign language being Spanish, a text stream with the target foreign language being Spanish may be chosen. For example, if the user indicated that he would like a text stream in the target foreign language with a difficulty level of "easy," a text stream in the target foreign language with a difficulty level of "easy" may be chosen. In 1008, the chosen mixed known language-foreign language audio and/or text stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language audio and text streams may be delivered. For example, if the user indicated that he would like a text stream with the target foreign language being French, a text stream in the target foreign language of French may be delivered to the user. For example, if the user indicated that he would like an audio stream with a difficulty level of "medium," an audio stream with a difficulty level of "medium" may be delivered.

[0033] In the preceding specification, the present invention has been described with reference to specific example embodiments thereof. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made thereunto without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the present invention as set forth in the claims that follow. The specification and drawings are accordingly to be regarded in an illustrative rather than restrictive sense.

Claims

1. A method of teaching foreign languages to a group, comprising:
delivering a video presentation simultaneously to a plurality of users; and
simultaneously delivering a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams to the plurality of users, each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams corresponding to the video presentation.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the mixed known language-foreign language streams are audio streams.
3. The method of any of claims 1-2, wherein the mixed known language-foreign language streams are text streams.
4. The method of any of claims 1-3, wherein the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams include mixed known language-foreign language streams with respectively varying proportions of foreign language words.
5. The method of any of claims 1-4, wherein the video presentation is delivered in a movie theatre.
6. The method of any of claims 1-5, wherein the video presentation is delivered as a television broadcast.
7. The method of any of claims 1-6, wherein the video presentation is delivered in the form of digital television.
8. The method of any of claims 1-7, further comprising:
receiving a first input indicating a first target foreign language for a first user in the plurality of users; and
responsive to receiving the first input, delivering a mixed known-language-first target-foreign-language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams to the first user.
9. The method of any of claims 1-8, further comprising:

receiving a second input indicating a desired difficulty level for the first foreign language from the first user; and

responsive to receiving the second input from the first user, delivering a mixed known-language-foreign language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams to the first user.

10. The method of any of claims 1-9, wherein the input is a user input indicating a desired difficulty level for the foreign language.

11. The method of any of claims 1-10, further comprising:

receiving an input indicating a desired difficulty level for the foreign language; and

delivering a mixed known-language-foreign language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams, where the amount of foreign language used in the mixed known-language-foreign language stream depends on the input.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the input is a user input indicating a desired difficulty level for the foreign language.

13. The method of any of claims 1-12, further comprising:

simultaneously delivering a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language text streams and mixed known language-foreign language audio streams to the plurality of users, each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language text streams and mixed known language-foreign language audio streams corresponding to the video presentation.

14. The method of any of claims 1-13, wherein each user may be presented with an individual video presentation.

15. The method of any of claims 1-14, wherein the video presentation includes a general audio stream.

16. The method of any of claims 1-15, wherein the general audio stream is in the target language.

17. The method of any of claims 1-15, wherein the general audio stream is in the base language.

18. The method of any of claims 1-17, wherein the mixed known language-foreign language streams are mixed known language-foreign language subtitles corresponding to the video presentation.

19. An article of manufacture comprising a computer-readable medium storing instructions adapted to be executed by a processor, the instructions when executed performing the method of any of claims 1-18 for teaching at least one foreign language to a group.

20. A system for teaching foreign languages, comprising:

a display device configured to simultaneously display a video presentation to a plurality of users;

a plurality of output devices configured to simultaneously deliver a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams to the plurality of users, each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams corresponding to the video presentation.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein a first output device is configured to present audio streams to the plurality of users.

22. The system of any of claims 20-21, wherein a second output device is configured to present text streams to the plurality of users.

23. The system of any of claims 20-22, further comprising:

a first input device configured to receive user input indicating a desired difficulty level for the foreign language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams.

24. The system of any of claims 20-23, further comprising:

a second input device configured to receive user input indicating a target foreign language for the foreign language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams.

25. The system of any of claims 20-24, further comprising:

a first content database configured to store a plurality of video presentations including the video presentation presented on the display device to the plurality of users.

26. The system of any of claims 20-25, further comprising:

a second content database configured to store the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams corresponding to the video presentation.

27. The system of any of claims 20-26, further comprising:

a processor which is in communication with the plurality of output devices, the plurality of input devices, and the plurality of content databases, the processor configured to receive user input indicating a desired difficulty level for a mixed known language-foreign language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams and to receive user input indicating a target foreign language for the mixed known language-foreign language stream from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams, and, responsive to the user input, to deliver a plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams from the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams to the plurality of users, each of the plurality of mixed known language-foreign language streams corresponding to the video presentation.

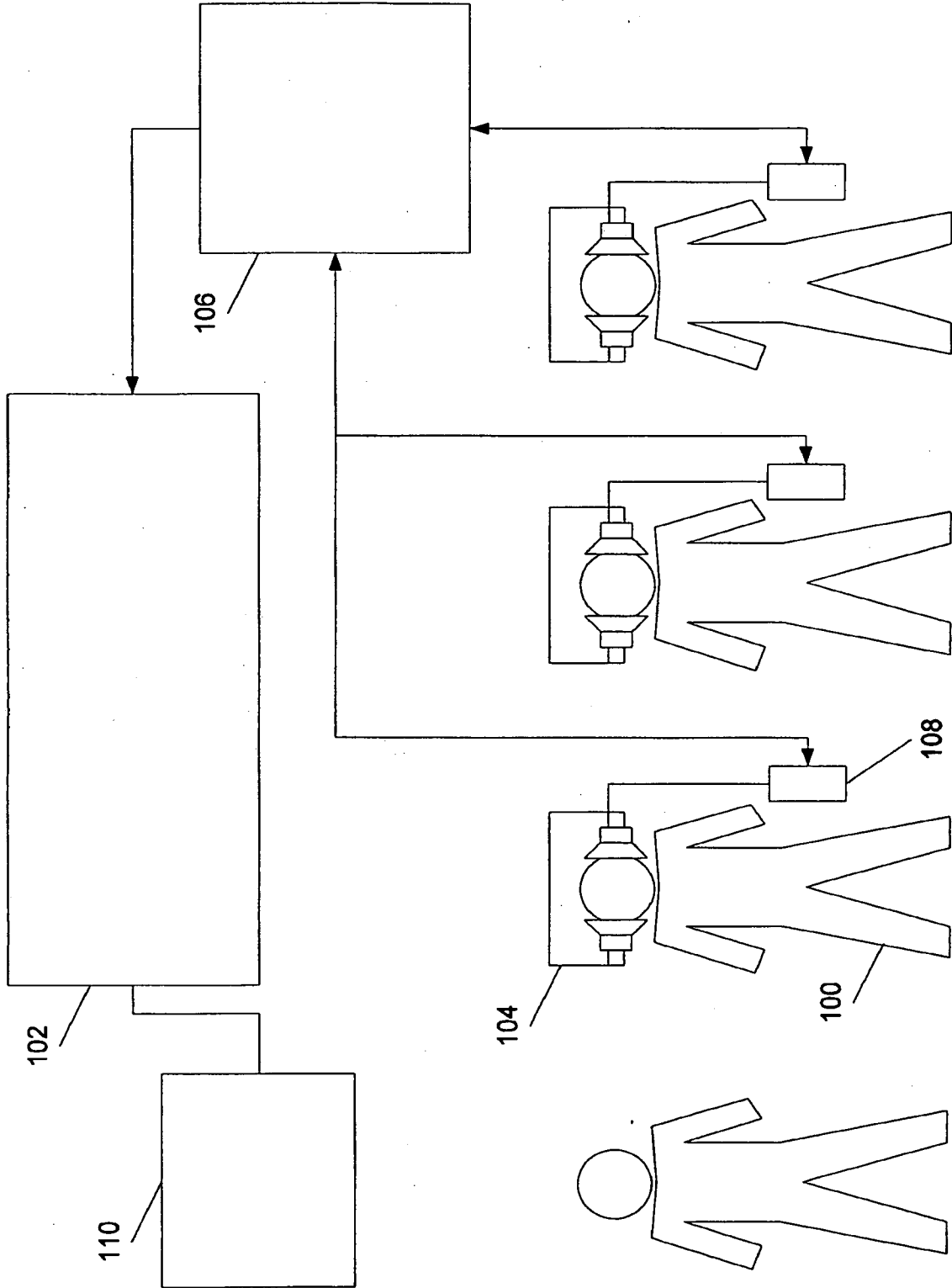


Figure 1

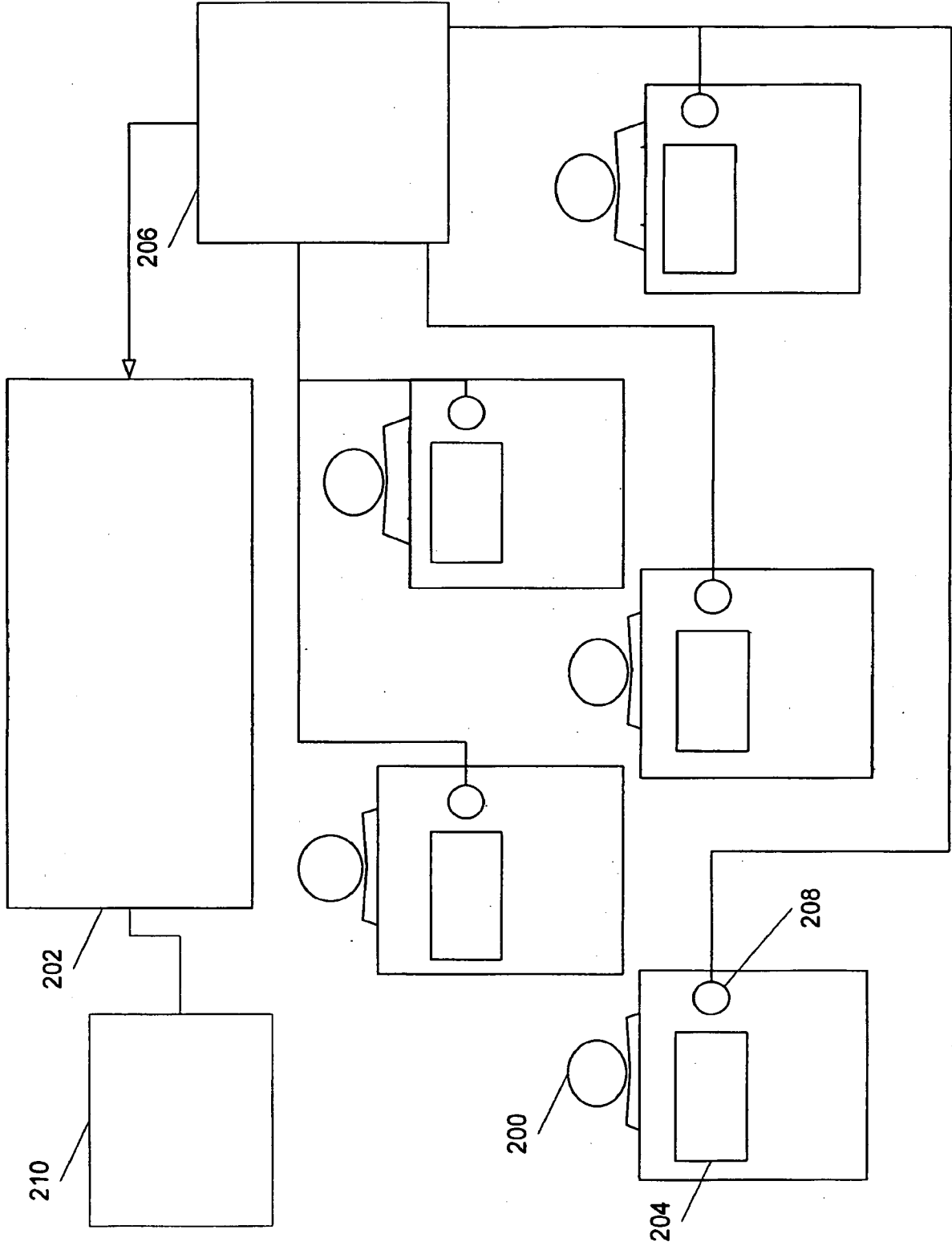


Figure 2

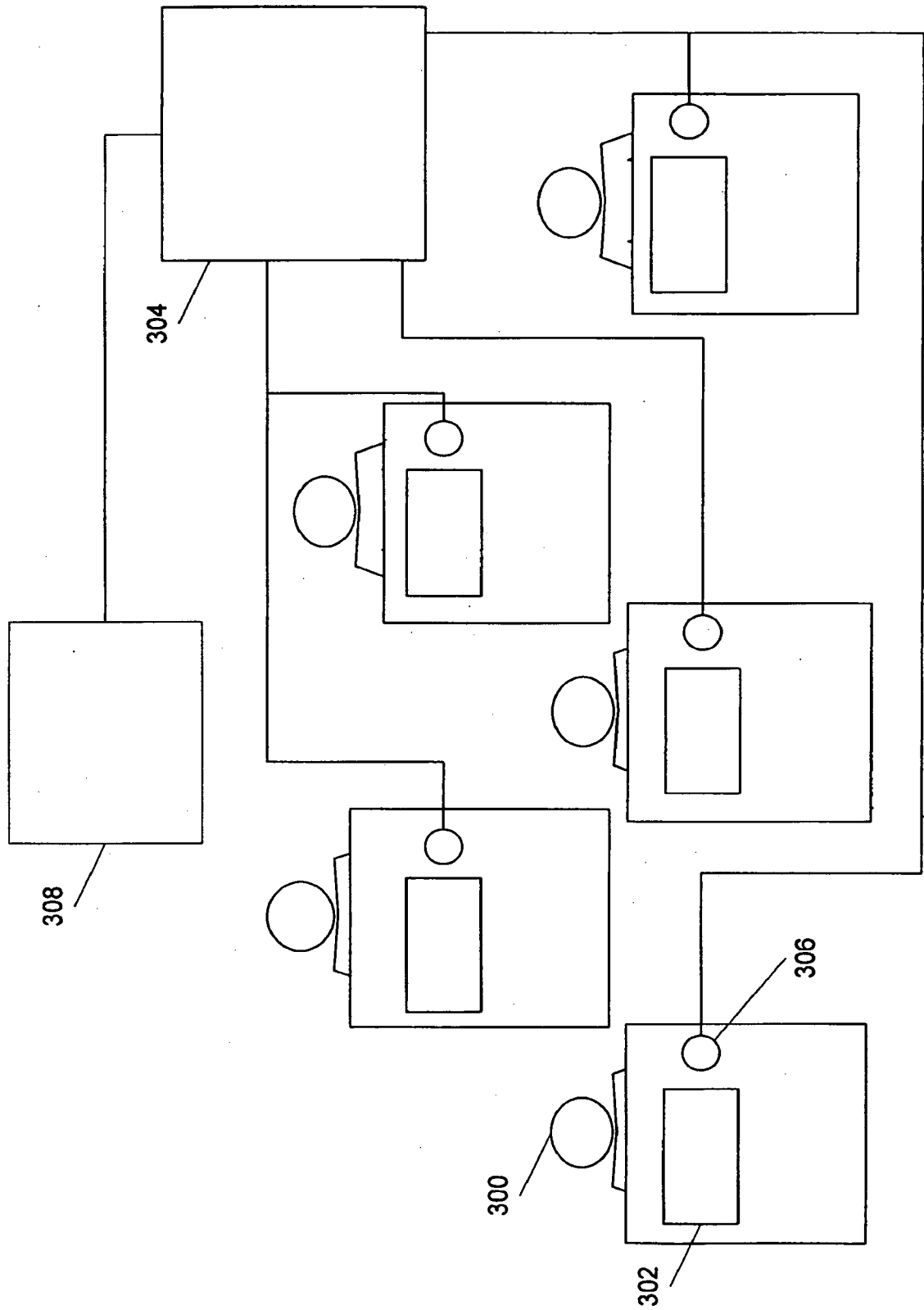


Figure 3

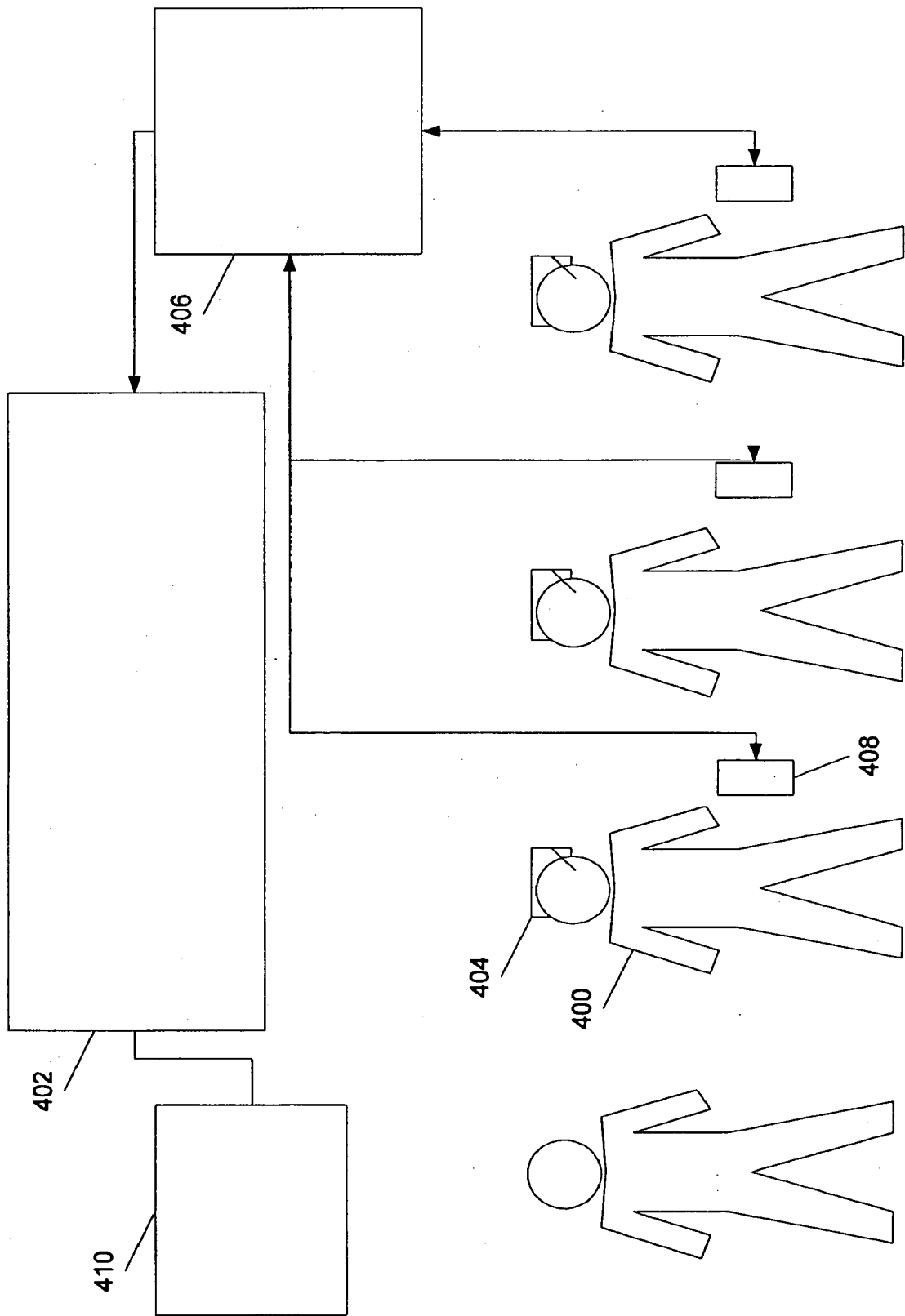


Figure 4

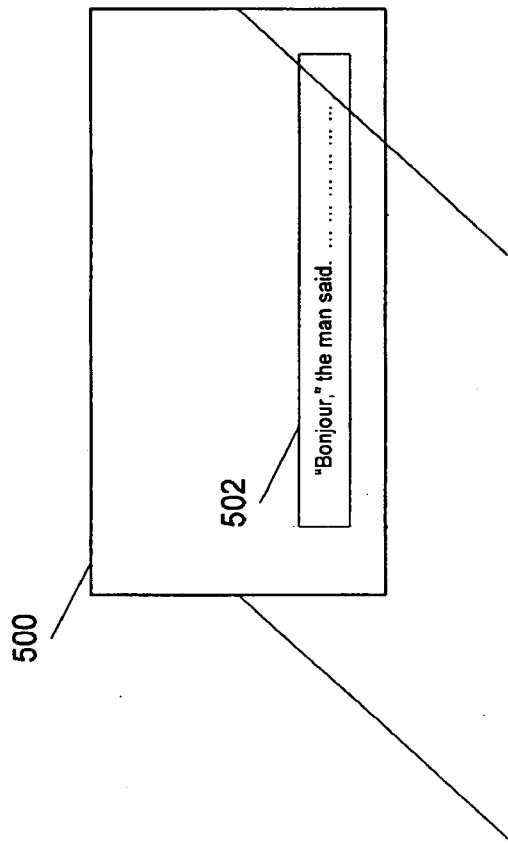


Figure 5

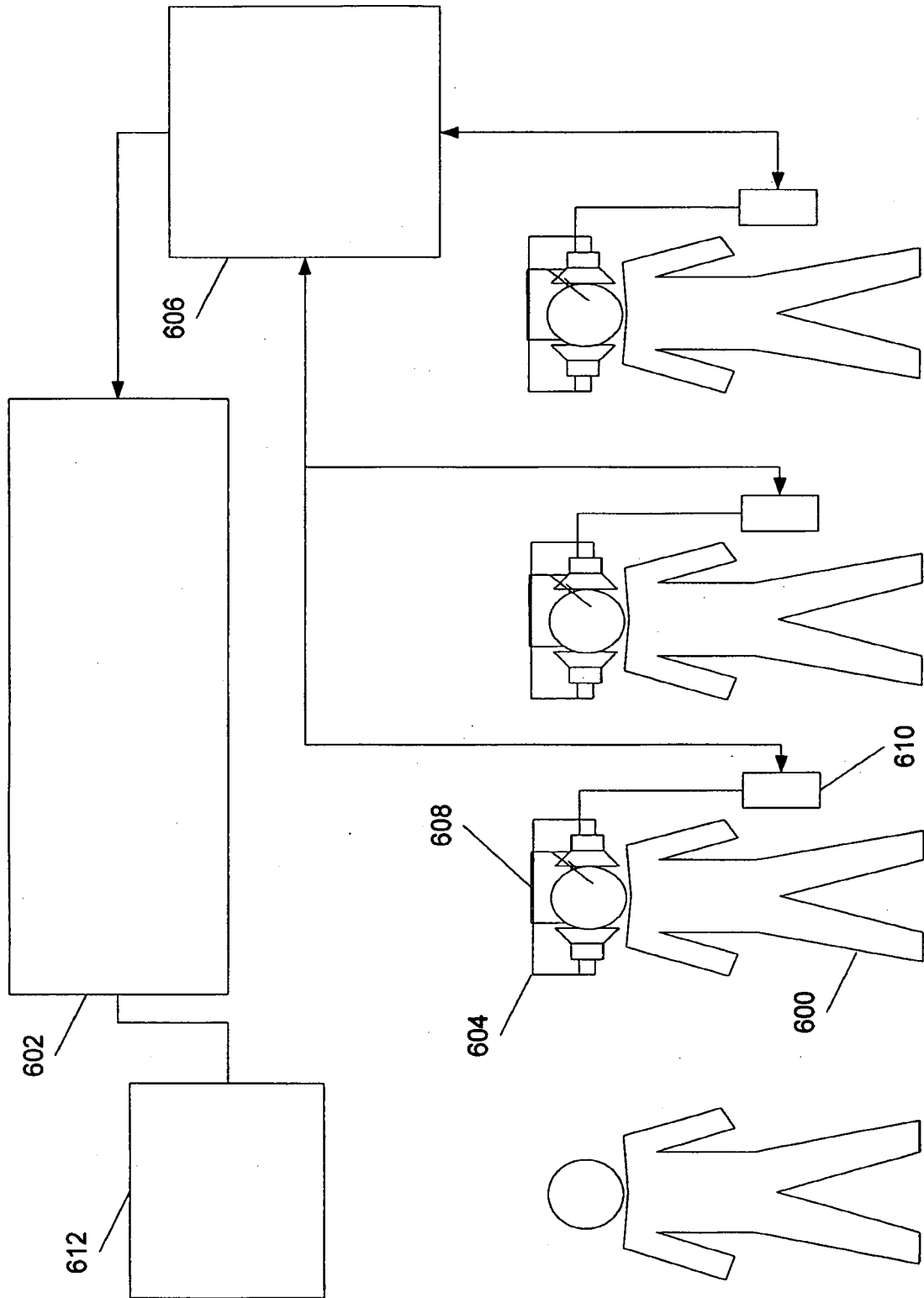


Figure 6

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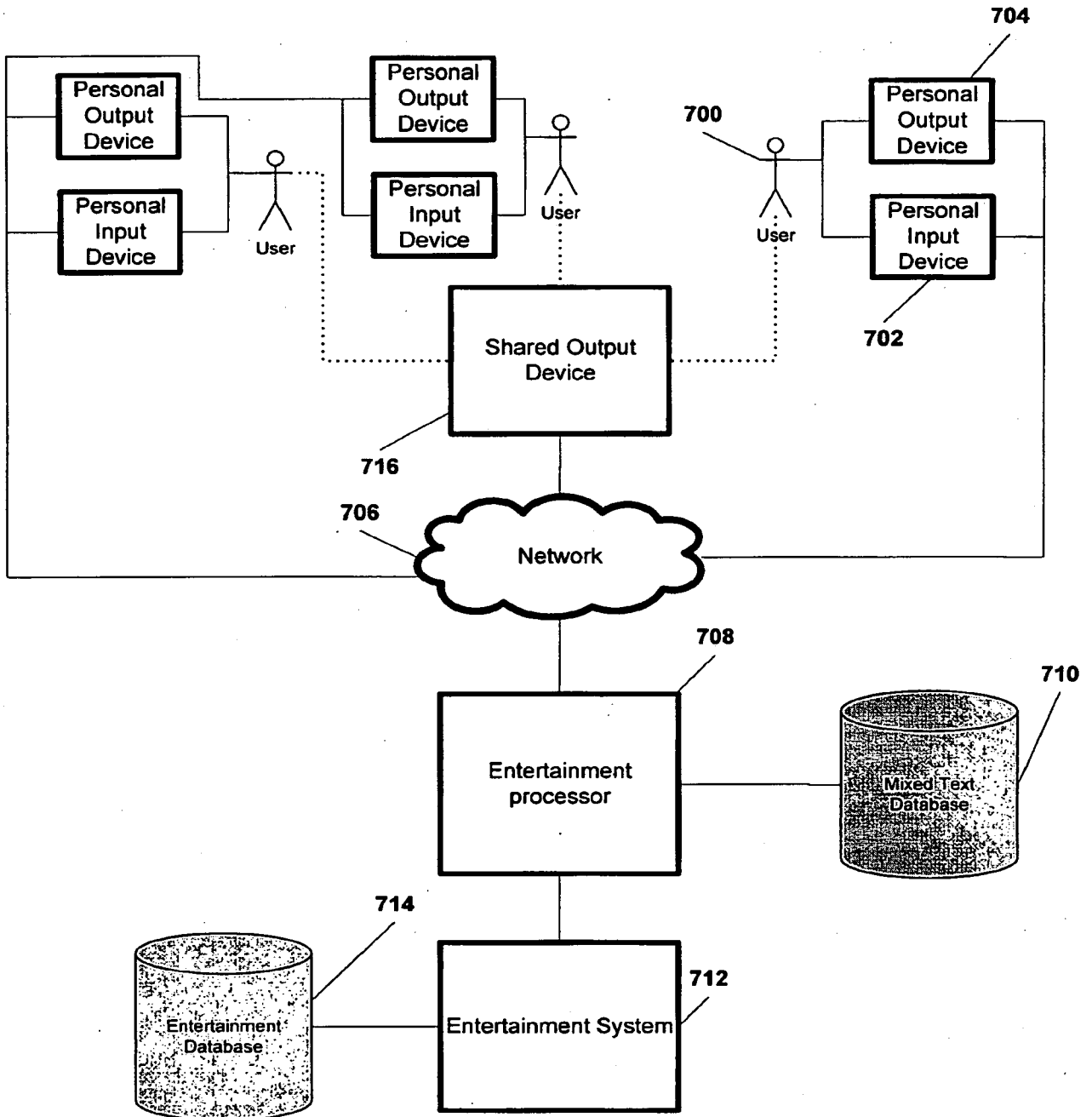


Figure 7

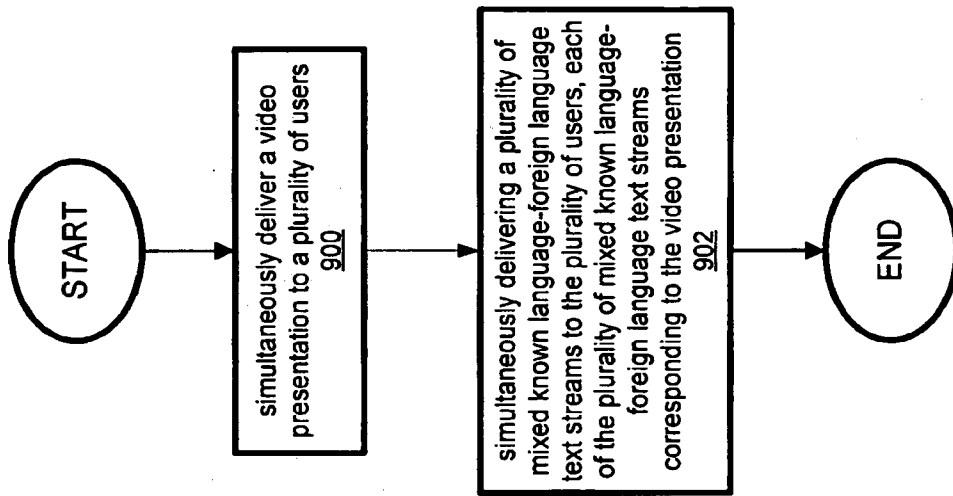


Figure 9

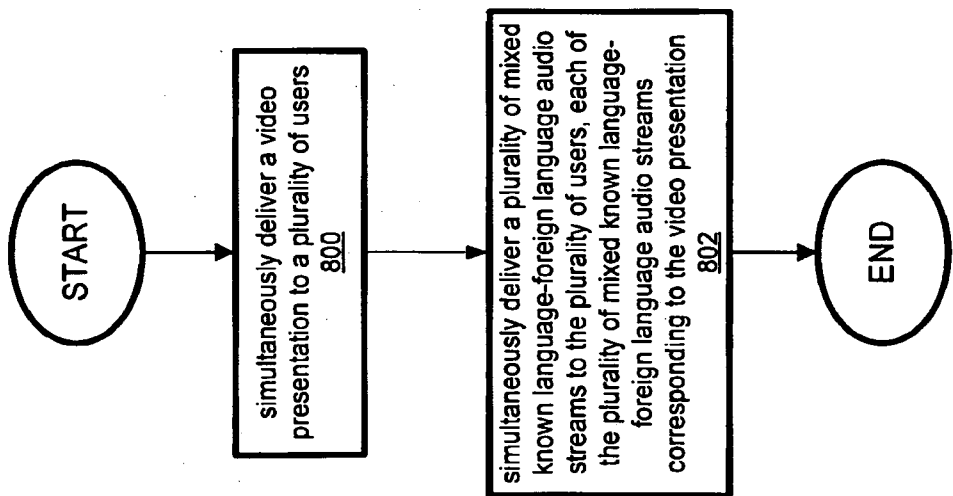


Figure 8

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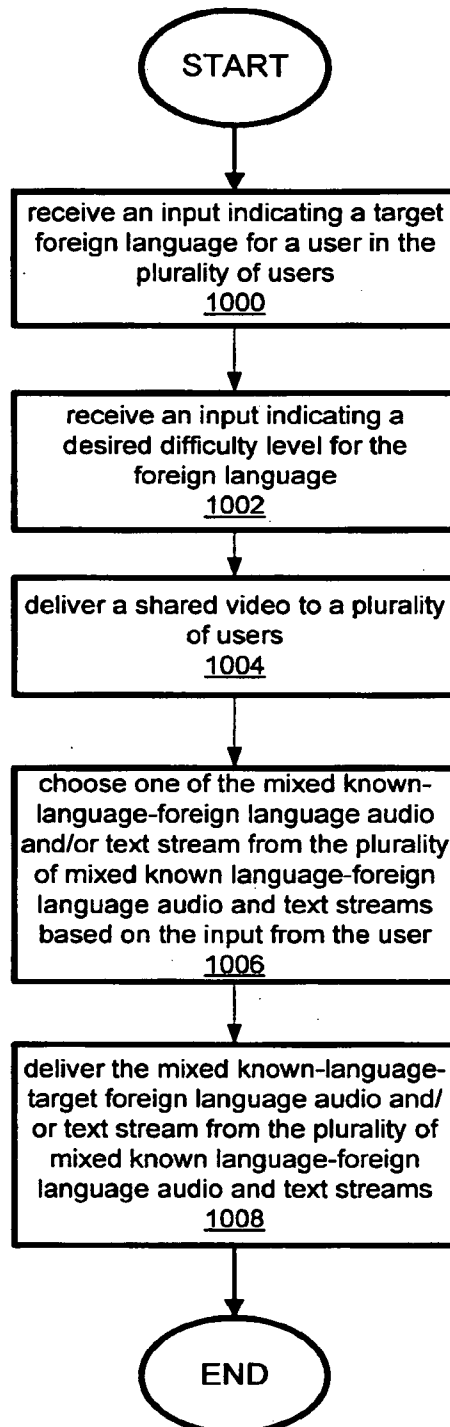


Figure 10