

REMOTE INTERPRETING: TEACHING INTERPRETATION IN A NEW TECHNOLOGICAL ERA

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Résumé:

La nouvelle ère technologique a déployé un large éventail de méthodes de communication, qui mettent à notre portée des outils plus rapides, plus efficaces et plus fonctionnels pour accéder à l'information et nous permettre de nous connecter directement et immédiatement avec n'importe quelle partie du monde et à tout moment. En ce sens, l'interprétation n'est pas en reste et a évolué à pas de géant au gré des besoins imposés par la société, c'est pourquoi l'interprétation à distance est devenu ces dernières années et, surtout depuis la pandémie du COVID-19, en une réalité et dans une modalité de plus en plus présente dans la vie professionnelle de l'interprète. L'interprétation à distance permet de communiquer à distance avec un interprète professionnel presque instantanément et avec des résultats efficaces. Grâce à l'utilisation d'un téléphone ou d'un ordinateur, appareils électroniques à l'ordre du jour, l'interprète et l'interlocuteur peuvent établir une connexion en temps réel, ce qui, en plus d'un gain de temps et d'argent non négligeable, permet une compréhension entre les deux parties impliquées dans l'acte de communication et, avec lui, dans la réussite du processus interprétatif.

Notre objectif est d'analyser l'importance de mettre en pratique les techniques d'interprétation à distance en classe afin que nos futurs interprètes aient les connaissances de base et les ressources pour mener à bien cette modalité dans leur profession. De plus, ces deux techniques permettent à l'étudiant une approche plus réelle du contexte communicatif et des difficultés du processus interprétatif.

Mots-clés: Interprétation, interprétation à distance, acte communicatif, interlocuteur.

Abstract:

A new technological era has brought a wide catalogue of communication methods within our reach. Faster, more effective and functional tools for accessing and processing information that allow us to establish a direct and immediate connection anywhere in the world and anytime. In this sense interpreting has not fallen behind taking giant steps forward in the race of innovation and adapting the needs of the society. For this reason, in the last few years and, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, remote interpreting has become a reality and a more increasingly demanded technique in the professional life of an interpreter. Remote interpreting enables distance communication with the interpreter in real time and with positive results. Thanks to the use of a telephone or computer, electronic devices fully integrated in our daily lives, interpreter and speaker can carry out a real-time connection, what in addition to the cost and time savings, makes possible the understanding between the two parties involved in the communicative act, and consequently, the success of the interpreting process. Our purpose is to analyse the relevancy of practicing the fundamental techniques of remote interpreting in the lessons, in that way our undergraduates acquire the essential knowledge and skills to be able to work as telephone or videoconference interpreters with a certain degree of expertise. Besides, these two interpreting techniques enable the student a more real approach to the communicative context and particular difficulties of the interpreting process.

Keywords: Interpreting, remote interpreting, communicative act, interpreting process, speaker.

1. INTRODUCTION

Laver and Mason (2018:68) define interpreting as «the oral translation by an interpreter of utterances spoken in one language into another, for the benefit of one or more listeners unable or only partly able to understand the original language». According to Pöchhacker (2010:14) research on interpreting dates back to the 1950s, however, it was not until the early 1990s when it became a part of the academic field of study. Many European Universities instituted Translation Studies, while interpreting was studied in specialized training programs or

master's degree. That was the case of many British and German Universities, the University of Geneva or the Institute of Translation Studies in Prague. However, since 1979 the academic program of the Spanish Faculties of Translation and Interpreting includes interpreting as compulsory subject. Interpreting training focuses two subjects, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. The purpose of these subject is for the future interpreter to acquire the basic skills and techniques to be able to carry out simultaneous, consecutive or liaison interpreting. This study focuses its attention on simultaneous interpreting, as it has been one of the modalities that has undergone the most technological advances in recent years, especially due to its technical requirements. Simultaneous interpretation requires the use of interpretation booths that guarantee a noise-free workspace, as well as sound and microphone equipment, through which the interpreter listens to the original speech and delivers his or her interpretation in the target language, so that it can be simultaneously received by the receivers. Remote interpretation (RI) is the result of this evolution of new technology that makes its way as a new technique in the context of simultaneous interpretation.

With COVID-19, remote interpreting has considerably increased its number of users, not only by clients who request this type of language assistance through virtual channels, but also by the interpreters themselves who have started to offer remote interpreting as a usual and priority work technique.

To this end, an analysis of remote interpreting (telephone interpreting and videoconference interpreting) is proposed from a technological, professional and pedagogical approach; and the advantages associated with its practice in the classroom with the purpose that the students acquire the basic resources for the management of interpretation techniques, delve into the linguistic and formal difficulties, and complement their academic training from a perspective more in line with the professional needs of today's society.

2. REMOTE INTERPRETING

On the Nuremberg Trials 75 years ago now, the modality of simultaneous interpretation was born, which meant an important breakthrough in the oldest profession of humanity: communication and understanding between people and countries of different languages. The Nuremberg Trials were the pioneers in implementing a wiring system for the emission of interpreted speech. Of course, this rudimentary system evolved rapidly, since, although it offered many linguistic advantages, unknown and novel to date, it had many technical shortcomings, such as weak hearing impairment or noise isolation, which made it difficult for the interpreter to listen, understand and reproduce the speech.

If we move to a closer time, the second great change in the interpreting profession came with the appearance of the Internet, which has revolutionized connections, relationships, communications and ways of working throughout the world. This technological advance has gone parallel with the evolution and refinement of remote interpreting techniques, which are increasingly more demanded and, on the rise, as they offer their clients a wide variety of possibilities, flexibility for the parties involved in the communicative act and a considerable save of time and money.

Laver and Mason (2018) and Braun (2015) agree on the definition of remote interpreting as the modality of consecutive or simultaneous interpretation that, through the use of technological communication tools, it is possible to connect by telephone or by videoconference with the interpreter that is not physically present in the same place as the interlocutors.

There is no doubt that its main advance lies in the immediacy, the cost-cutting and the communicative approach thanks to technological devices at our fingertips, we could even dare to say that it is direct communication at the click of a button, since that remote interpreting encompasses two disciplines, interpreting by telephone and interpreting by videoconference. The use of one discipline or another will depend on the accessibility to technical equipment and the level of attendance, as indicated by Ziegler and Giglioblanco (2018: 121):

These setups range from a traditional presence-based scenario where interpreters, main speakers and the audience are concentrated at one event location, and one or several secondary speakers are connected from a distance for a limited duration, to a situation where none of the actors within the triad, speaker-listener-interpreter, are at the same location as the others.

2.1. Videoconference interpreting

According to Esteban Causo (2003:145) the first videoconference interpreting was named «Symphonie Satellite» and was carried out by the UN in 1970 to connect Paris and Nairobi. Braun (2015) affirmed that since then this technique has been evolving thanks to the interest shown by official institutions of the European Union, such as the Commission and the Parliament, or the École de Traduction et d'Interpretation (ETI), in its promotion and use to alleviate linguistic needs.

This technique is especially widespread in the medical and legal sectors of many European countries. Today many hospitals and courts are provided with the necessary equipment to carry out an interpretation by videoconference. According to Braun (2015):

Many European countries have implemented videoconferencing facilities in courtrooms based on the ITU's more recent H.323 standard for videoconferences using the internet, which provides better video and audio quality than ISDN-based systems. Together with high-end peripheral equipment such as cameras and microphones, these systems can provide better support for videoconference-based interpreting than older systems. At the same time, the availability of web- or cloud-based videoconference services providing varying and unstable sound and image quality, and access to them on tablets and other mobile devices.

To perform this discipline of RI, the interpreter needs a computer with a rapid Internet connection, which allows him to access the communication platform where he finds a direct connection to the event. The most used platforms for videoconference interpreting, ordered according to their frequency of use, are: *Zoom*, *Skype*, *Interactio*, *Voiceboxer*, *Interprefy*, *Google Meet* and *Kudo*. However, only *Interactio*, *Voiceboxer*, *Interprefy* and *Kudo* are platforms specifically designed for videoconference interpreting, however, their use remains relatively low compared to other generic platforms such as *Zoom* or *Skype*.

Like any professional activity, this discipline is regulated by standard protocols, regulations and glossaries included in the Code for the Use of New Technologies in Conference Interpreting, which was described by the International Association of Conference Interpreters in collaboration with the Technical and Health Committee.

2.2. Telephone Interpreting

It has its origin in the Telephone Interpretation Service (TIS) that was created in Australia in 1947. Therefore, it is considered the oldest remote interpretation technique. It was a type of social interpretation or community interpretation that arose from the great linguistic demand to establish communication between the locals, with Australian as the official language of the country, and the great diversity of languages of the immigrants (Cabrera 2016:4). From then on, the rest of the countries receiving immigrants made use of telephone interpreting (Kelly 2008:13).

The most common contexts where telephone interpreting is used are medical-health care centers, insurance companies, bilingual educational centers, security and emergency forces, courts, travel agencies and touristic services. Taking these scenarios into account, we deduce that the main users are foreign tourists, foreign residents or immigrants.

At a technological level, telephone interpreting has its origins in the American company *CyraCom* and the Spanish software *Dualia* that offer linguistic services through mobile and telephone devices. However, in Spain it will not be until 2003, when *Dualia* implements its tele translation services in some public institutions. Evidently, these standard protocols were the beginning of a new concept of remote interpreting, now more advanced thanks to the arrival of Smartphones and free mobile phones with Internet connection. An example of this is the *Voze* mobile application, developed by *Migralingua*. *Voze* is a mobile application that offers real-time telephone interpreting services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It has a team of more than 100 professional interpreters in 14 languages. The user selects the source language and the target language, makes the call, activates the loudspeaker; the interpreter of the chosen language combination will be on the other side of the line to interpret the conversation. *Voze* allows the multiconference option, so that several users can be online at the same time. In addition, it offers a translation or other express translation service; the latter works like an automatic translator that translates the entered text instantly. The application allows users to sign up creating a personal profile that files call history, payment methods, favorite interpreters, etc.

3. LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Based on the definitions of the previous concepts, we can conclude that telephone interpreting lacks the presence of the interlocutors involved in the communicative act. The linguistic transfer is carried out through the audio input and output channels (loudspeaker or headphones and microphone) of a landline telephone, a mobile phone or a computer with a voice-over IP system. Consequently, the interpreter is not able to visualize the setting, nor the participants involved in the act and, likewise, does not have the possibility to interact directly with the speakers. In a communicative context with these characteristics, verbal language occupies the fundamental and exclusive role of linguistic exchange, which leaves non-verbal language completely suppressed. The lack of non-verbal language elements in the communicative act implies the lack of nuances that would otherwise serve to reinforce the oral message.

The impossibility of the interpreter to see or establish a personal and direct communication with the interlocutors supposes one of the greatest difficulties and inconveniences in the transmission of the message. Communication of a non-verbal nature constitutes 60% to 93%, that is, in interactions with other interlocutors we transmit and receive a large number of messages of a non-verbal nature. For this reason, it is precisely non-verbal language a valuable information tool for the interpreter since it enhances and endows oral language with features and tones. In many communicative acts between doctor-patient, police-detainee, judge-accused, etc., non-verbal signals play a key role in the expression of emotions and behavior and they constitute a direct reinforcement mechanism for the verbal language.

The telephone interpreter must be a professional experienced in the technique and aware of the inconveniences faced due to the absence of non-verbal signals, not only at a linguistic level, but also at an emotional level. The degree of concentration rises considerably, increasing the levels of stress and pressure to which the interpreter is subjected before and during the communication process.

Meanwhile, the level of presence in videoconference interpreting is reduced to a computer screen through which the interpreter has a direct view of the speaker or speakers participating in the event. This is called single-screen video remote interpreting. If in addition to the speaker, you can also see the participants, it is a multi-screen video remote interpreting. Regarding the location of the interpreter, there are several ways to carry out remote interpreting by video: on the one hand, the interpreter can work from an interpretation hub or booth or from his own home or office through an online interpretation platform that enables to connect speaker-interpreter-audience. The European Commission Directorate General for Interpretation (DG SCIC 2019:3) describes the process as follows:

Interpreters work in front of a computer screen, part of which serves as a software-based interpreter console. Moreover, the active speaker and/or a presentation and/or a shared screen are displayed on the computer screen. The interface also contains a chat function, allowing users to communicate with each other. A second screen can be used to display visual content and/or meeting documents. Listeners can follow the meeting via audio and sometimes video in a language of their choice, on their computer or smart device, wherever they are. Although conventional interpreting and language distribution equipment is not required, it can integrate seamlessly with software-based systems.

In the particular case of interpreting by videoconference, the interpreter must take into account some technical inconveniences that may occur during his intervention: connection failures losing visual contact with his interlocutor or interlocutors, sound failures losing the audio signal, which supposes an interruption, pause or silence in the connection with the speaker's speech and this generates for the interpreter a loss of information, omission of data, lack of fluency in the speech and even discordances or unconnected ideas. For this reason, the professionalism and experience of the interpreter are especially required both for the linguistic task, and for the ability with new technologies and mobile applications.

4. NEW TECHNOLOGICAL ERA IN THE CLASS

If we analyze the current and future trend of media and information, the most relevant feature is the high level of accessibility to electronic devices that, through an Internet connection, allows us immediate access to advanced communication tools and applications from any location in the world, in real time and with a

minimum cost. This dislocation of the communicative elements entails an adaptation of the interpretation modality and techniques. For the interpreters, any alteration in the communicative situation implies a substantial change in the performance of their linguistic task, not only in their training and preparation as a professional, but also in the constant updating of the technical means in order to adapt their work activity to the new technological times and the demands of the labor market.

This new technological era contributes to the fact that day after day we get more familiar with the basic tools that facilitate remote interpreting. Our daily routine is mainly based on the use of computers with software for video conferences and mobile phones or Smartphones, devices that accompany us every day and facilitate our instant communication. This technological revolution at global level leads to a growing intercommunication and interdependence between countries with the objective of enhancing their markets, policies and culture. This, added to the global pandemic by COVID-19, means that remote interpreting is one of the most demanded techniques when contracting interpreting services. Therefore, the opportunity to train Translation and Interpreting students in this modality turns out elementary, so they can achieve the technical basis in the field and keep updated in a labor market that constantly evolves and opts for technology and communication advances.

5. ADVANTAGES OF INTERPRETING TRAINING IN THE CLASS

As mentioned above, one of the main difficulties faced by telephone or videoconference interpreters is the lack of presence and direct contact with the interlocutors and participants in the communicative act. This, in addition to the considerable increase of the concentration and stress levels of the interpreters, can lead to a decrease in the quality of their interpretation since some questions can be ambiguous or may not be interpreted in the correct way. In interpretation, verbal language matters, it is the product of exchange, however, non-verbal language is the dressing, the packaging that presents and clarifies the message, and its relevance is at the same level as verbal language. For this reason, it is considered important to train the student in diverse communicative scenarios with a lack of non-verbal signals, in which gestures, facial expressions, postures and body movement are suppressed and reduced only to orality.

The practice of telephone and videoconference interpreting techniques in the classroom means for the student an update and adjustment with the professional reality required by today's labour market. In addition, it is considered that the practice of remote interpreting techniques allows the students to deepen their skills and gain security and confidence in the interpreting process. In line with Braun and Davitti (2018:41-43) regarding the factors that influence the development of this activity, we consider that, thanks to the practice of remote interpreting in the classroom, the interpreter in training will achieve:

- to adapt to the new communicative situation despite the dislocation of the elements involved in the communication process
- to be able to deliver a quality interpretation though his/her position towards the speaker may change or vary during the process
- to develop communicative skills that allows the professional to interpret correctly without causing any negative effect or impact during the execution of the activity despite the distance and the lack of presence.
- to know and experience linguistic and technical difficulties of this new modality, so it does not negatively in the services he/she can offer as a professional interpreter.
- to contribute to the "automatization" of the interpretation, and therefore to the analysis of modern methods and to the design of a renewed Interpreters Code of Ethics adjusted to the new technological era and the demands of today's market.

In order to find out the opinion of the students in this regard, we carried out a survey among the students of the last year of the Degree in Translation and Interpreting at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in which they were asked to assess their opinion considering the need for a more extensive and specialised training of interpretation in the classroom. A total of 21 students were surveyed and the results leave no doubt: 98% agree with the practice of remote interpreting in the classroom, 90% consider it essential for their training as interpreters, 94% consider that their abilities and skills as interpreters would be strengthened and 100% consider that their professional possibilities would considerably increase. With these results, the importance of practicing remote interpreting during their training is unanimously proven by interpreting students. Therefore, our next section is dedicated to its implementation in the classroom.

6. IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM

The practice of remote interpreting in the classroom requires an adaptation of the technical systems and the investment in high-tech equipment: a) in the case of telephone interpreting, the use of a hands-free telephone and headphones or a sound reproduction, which allows three-way intercommunication – interpreter, interlocutor A and interlocutor B-, and b) in the case of videoconference interpreting, the use of a computer with an high-speed Internet connection that enables the completion of the videoconference without any disturbances (camera and microphone).

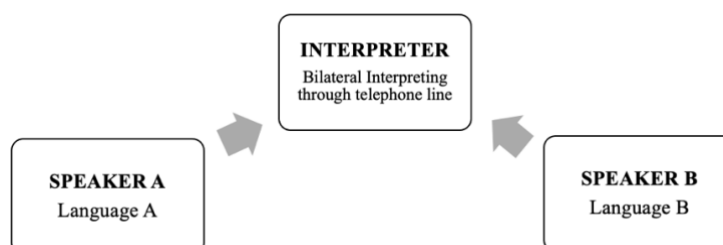


Figure 1: Three-way telephone communication

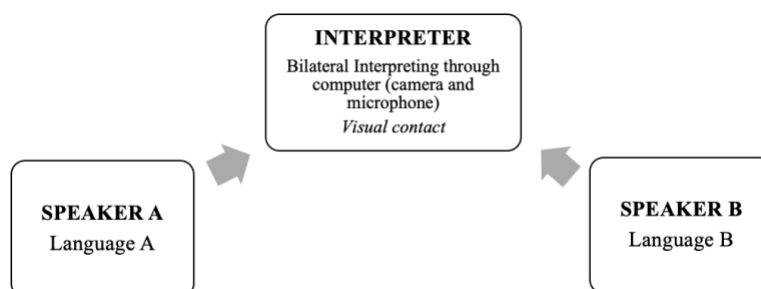


Figure 2: Videoconference interpreting.

In order to implement this modality in the interpreting lessons, the following activities are suggested to be included in the academic program of the subject:

- To get in contact with teaching and research staff of other universities who could be interested in giving a speech or an interview either by telephone or by computer.
- To schedule remote meetings to be assisted by interpretation students
- To participate remotely as interpreters in activities organized by the university both within the university institution and outside (conferences, meetings and even defenses of final degree projects, master's degrees or doctoral theses)
- To interpret simulated telephone conversations previously designed by the students and framing different communicative contexts (hospitals, judges, tourist information offices, police, etc.)
- To take advantage of the peak in e-learning propelled by the sanitary pandemic to promote the use of the virtual university campus (Moodle or similar platforms) or applications such as Teams, Google Meet, Skype or Zoom, as complementary tools to facilitate remote teaching and e-learning of the subject:

The Virtual institute is a collaborative learning platform that promotes self-regulated learning. The interface allows trainees to have their interpreting performances critiqued by teachers, tutors and peers through uploading their performance files via a web-based dual-track recording functionality (Moser-Mercer, 2015).

The virtual campus allows students to practice with interpreting materials provided by the teacher. Subsequently, these activities are individually graded and evaluated by the teacher. In addition, it is a platform that allows the creation of debate or discussion forums between students and teachers where different aspects are commented and discussed and interested materials can be shared.

The implementation of this type of activities in the classroom implies the specific learning of computer-assisted interpreting, known by its acronym CAIT (Computer Assisted Interpreting Teaching), and which is already part of the curricula of other universities and master's degrees in Translation and Interpreting, not only in Europe, but also in Spain. Examples of this, are the University of Alicante and the University of Córdoba, where they have already installed a computer program that allows working with personal computers inside the interpretation booths.

This analysis highlights the need for specialised training in the field of interpretation, paying special attention to the difficulties of the technique, stress management, the ability to concentrate and, above all, the lack of direct contact with the speaker or speakers. The teaching of interpreting in the classroom must focus on progress and adaptation to new communication technologies and technological devices, putting into practice a multidisciplinary methodology that allows students to be up to date with new interpreting techniques, tools and platforms, so they can expand their professional abilities and skills and thereby expand their job opportunities.

7. CONCLUSIONS

As this analysis has shown, the practice of remote interpreting in the classroom is not only a safe bet for the evolution and adaptation of interpreters to the new technological era, but also an imminent necessity to guarantee a detailed and specific learning of this new discipline, which is already a growing reality in the field of multidisciplinary communications and information exchange between countries at global level.

Graduates in interpretation must have a technical and practical knowledge that allows them to acquire the essential linguistic skills to deliver a remote interpreting of quality that complies with the basic requirements stipulated in the Interpreters Code of Ethics (neutrality, faithfulness and professionalism).

Beyond the beliefs of those who are unaware of this ancient profession, interpretation is neither an extraordinary gift, nor an innate human ability, interpretation is a professional activity that requires practice, study, research and a substantial previous preparation, therefore, it is necessary to opt for its adaptation to new technologies and its implementation in the classroom to train professional interpreters in line with today's market demand. To sum up Degrees and Masters in Interpreting should create and train interpreters of the new technological era.

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