

THE MEDIUM TURN IN INTERPRETING STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: Remote interpreting has already made its debut in the field of interpreting in Turkey as well as in other parts of the world. From the educational perspective, the concept of new media/technology per se emerges as a significant component of the general discussions in interpreting and translation. Technology and information technologies are imposed by the Bologna Process to which Turkey is also striving to adapt its higher education system. Therefore the inclusion of the new media and technology to interpreting through methods such as remote interpreting and e-learning is an important issue in our agenda.

This paper would like to offer an overview of the role and use of remote interpreting in interpreter training in Turkey. The share of remote interpreting as a specific type of new media is briefly discussed in relation to the interpreter training curriculum in Turkish academic institutions. By the help of a descriptive and overall analysis of the interpreting curricula of the institutions which offer interpreting training in Turkey, this paper tries to come up with the probable future implications and suggestions for the Turkish interpreting field with its practice and training. The paper takes remote interpreting as a moving point and argues that the interpreting curricula at Turkish training institutions do not seem to be well-constructed for this era of new media.

Keywords: Remote Interpreting, New Media and Technology, Interpreter Training, Video-Conference Interpreting

SÖZLÜ ÇEVİRİ ARAŞTIRMALARINDA MECRA DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

ÖZ: Uzaktan çeviri, dünyanın diğer kısımlarında olduğu gibi, Türkiye’de de sözlü çeviri alanında varlığını göstermeye başlamıştır. Eğitim bakış açısından bakıldığında, yeni medya/teknoloji kavramı, kendi başına, yazılı ve sözlü çeviri alanındaki genel tartışmaların önemli bir bileşeni haline gelmektedir. Teknoloji ve bilgi teknolojileri, Türkiye’nin de yüksek öğrenim sistemini uyarlamaya çalıştığı Bologna Süreci tarafından bir öncelik olarak koyulmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, yeni medya ve teknolojinin, uzaktan çeviri ve e-öğrenme gibi yöntemler aracılığıyla dahil edilmesi gündemimizde önemli bir unsurdur.

Bu makale, Türkiye’de uzaktan çevirinin sözlü çevirmen eğitimindeki rolüne ve kullanımına genel bir bakış sunma amacını taşımaktadır. Yeni medyanın spesifik bir türü olarak uzaktan çevirinin payına, Türk akademik kurumlarındaki sözlü çevirmen eğitimi müfredatıyla bağlantılı olarak bakılmaktadır.

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Betimleyici ve bütününde çözümleyici bir yöntemin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada, Türkiye sözlü çeviri alanının uygulama ve eğitimine yönelik gelecekteki olası etkiler ve tavsiyeleri ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma uzaktan çeviriyi bir hareket noktası olarak almakta ve Türkiye'deki eğitim kurumlarındaki sözlü çeviri eğitimi müfredatlarının bu yeni medya çağına yönelik olarak henüz iyi yapılandırılmamış olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzaktan Çeviri, Yeni Medya ve Teknoloji, Sözlü Çeviri Eğitimi, Video-Konferans Çevirisi

Introduction

It was when the Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland erupted and all of a sudden the flights were cancelled all over Europe, having an impact on the organization of events such as conferences and workshops because people simply could not travel to their destinations. An informative one-day conference in Istanbul, Turkey about the recent trends in gastrointestinal diseases and the pharmaceuticals in gastrointestinal field was also affected by such weather conditions. As the conference interpreters assigned for this particular event in which there would be simultaneous interpreting to and from English and Turkish language pair, my colleague and I arrived at the event venue early in the morning only to find a group of concerned organizers and a confused technical team. The last minute update they received was "The main speaker who is an expert physician in his field and was supposed to be lecturing about the latest developments in gastro-intestinal diseases had been stuck at the airport so he would be joining the event in Istanbul via a telephone line in Ireland". This was a sudden change in the conference schedule; on top of interpreting a physician in a relatively complicated subject and field, now we had to do it remotely. The whole event did take place through the telephone and interpreting was carried out in a remote modality. Technics-wise there were only a couple of problems experienced however the bigger challenge, in my opinion, had to do with our (as the interpreters) attitude and feeling: the misperception, if not a fallacy, one falls into that when you cannot see the speaker the message will somehow get lost or be diminished to a certain extent. As time went by, both the audience and we familiarized with this remote context and the whole event ended successfully.

I inserted this experience at the start of what I intend as an overview of remote interpreting because I hold the belief that this has been one of my major experiences in remote interpreting as the whole event took place in remote interpreting setting. Only then it struck me that as a 'practisearcher' in Daniel Gile's¹ terms I had neither sufficient experience nor relevant

¹ Daniel Gile, "Opening Up in Interpretation Studies" *Translation Studies An Interdiscipline*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1994, p. 149-158.

educational insight regarding this rather new type of interpreting; hence my question of wonder and the reason of this article to a large extent.

From an interpreting perspective; one can argue that this is one of the newest fields for interpreting training in Turkey. Looking at the mainstream interpreter training offered at educational institutions, one sees the dominance of the conference and consecutive interpreting modes in general in the specifically designated interpreting labs. However these interpreting courses usually fail to address the state-of-the-art aspects of the interpreting field for understandable reasons: the technology is advancing at a very rapid pace in communication and related disciplines. Furthermore, it is quite costly to adapt such innovations to the existing infrastructure or curricula in the interpreting modules at universities in addition to the time and paper work required for such changes to be made. Therefore one can state that the `newer and more technological` interpreting types such as remote interpreting and video-conference interpreting remain to be untouched at least in the practical sense at most of the interpreter training institutes if not all of them in the case of exceptions.

However there remain a number of questions regarding this rather new type of interpreting- at least new in terms of practice and the relevant research conducted in relation with the subject.

Having stated that remote interpreting is a rather new type of interpreting within the interpreting world, one can look at this notion starting from the basics.

Remote interpreting as defined by Franz Pöchhacker is the type of interpreting in which the interpreter is not in the same room as the speaker or listener or both². If we consider remote interpreting as the overarching category, then the sub-categories will be listed as telephone interpreting or over-the phone interpreting, the initial form of remote interpreting followed by videophone interpreting which is particularly significant for the deaf and hard-of-hearing³.

Remote interpreting and new technologies in interpreting studies and practices have found a place on the institutional level as well. As interpreting scholar Ebru Diriker puts it “[t]he ever increasing number of languages that need to be covered in the meetings of international organizations such as the UN and EU have placed remote interpreting on the agenda”⁴. One can also

² Franz Pöchhacker, *Introducing Interpreting Studies*, Routledge, London, 2004.

³ F. Pöchhacker, *ibid.*

⁴ Ebru Diriker, “Simultaneous Conference Interpreting and Technology”, *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Volume 1, John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, p. 363-377.

state that remote interpreting and relevant technologies will be making their way into the training institutions, interpreting curricula and the daily professional practices before long. One example would be the training for the use of technology by interpreting trainers and interpreters that was organized by AIIC in 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey.

It was a one and a half day AIIC training.⁵ The theme of the training of the interpreting trainers was technology and the use of latest tools to make interpreting experience within the classroom or training institutions more practical and more efficient. This training for the trainers also consisted of the virtual classroom management, techniques of recording interpreted speech over a virtual shared repository and providing feedback through the same system. One of the key names at the training programme was Martin Wooding- a staff interpreter and Head of Unit responsible for Enlargement and Multilingualism at the European Parliament who provided some useful insights about using the Internet to train interpreters and interpreter-to-be's.

As can be easily gathered, European Parliament is a large institution employing 1000 interpreters per day on average per year. According to Wooding, "if [they] send their interpreters away, it takes 1000 Euro on average to replace them and sometimes they cannot replace them at all".⁶ The European Parliament delegates opt for video conferencing due to time and resources because this method proves to be not only practical but also cost and time-efficient particularly for the last minute events.

Nevertheless Wooding notes that they "do not use the video-conferencing (VC) method to train interpreters because it has major challenges".⁷

European Parliament serves as a good reference point in case: they have two types of virtual classes, one of them is up and running and there is connection between European Parliament and the classroom. At the moment European Parliament has virtual class practice with three universities; namely Bogazici University, Bilkent University and Sofia University. Multilateral virtual classes accommodate up to three universities, which are offered by Genève University, FLUL Lisbon, Charles University Prague and ESIT Paris. The bilaterals are offered by Bilkent University Ankara, Comillas University Madrid and Herzen University St Petersburg. As

⁵ Using Moodle and other IT platforms in interpreter training, <http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article2519>, online, last access 1 May 2017.

⁶ Martin Wooding, AIIC Training, 10.07.2010, Istanbul.

⁷ Martin Wooding, AIIC Training, 10.07.2010, Istanbul.

Panayotis Mouzourakis⁸ explains in an article about remote interpreting and training of remote interpreting:

Speeches that can be used for practice and subsequent asynchronous evaluation are available through the EU Speech Repository (Speech Repository). These speeches, which in time will cover all the EU languages (and more) have been graded for difficulty (beginner, intermediate, advanced etc) by professional interpreters having the language of the speech in question at «C» level in their linguistic combination. For each speech, a list of key terms and expressions is provided and also, in most cases, the text of the speech itself. Through a special recording tool, downloadable over the Internet (iRec) trainees can record their interpretations and then submit them for asynchronous assessment by experienced judges.

In this type of classes, the interpreting trainees are offered a simulated interpreting environment that is quite close to a real interpreting context with the speakers, real life speeches etc. This is also important in terms of rendering the in-class practice circumstances as close to the real life interpreting conditions as possible.

Wooding also notes that political authorities at European Union are quite willing to use and implement the different types of virtual learning. One reason might understandably be that the `interpreter-to-be`s who will interpret at European Union institutions will be trained in a way that ensures the communication requirements in such contexts and institutions are met. The cost-effectiveness and the ease of such learning programmes and mechanisms could be cited as the other reasons as to why virtual learning is quite a preferred option.

Bologna Process and Use of New Technologies

This willingness is quite parallel to the latest set of requirements that Turkey has to comply within the scope of Bologna process in relation with the efforts for European Union accession. Turkey is in a phase of Bologna process in which some training and education institutions are modifying and trying to adapt their curricula to the upcoming Bologna process. According to the objectives set forth by the Turkish National Council of Higher Education; the higher education with the institutions and programs should be modernized; which also involves a disseminated use of technology and the related technological instruments. For example, Istanbul University,

⁸ Panayotis Mouzourakis, Remote Interpreter Training – Training for Remote Interpreting, <http://multimedialinguas.wordpress.com/edicoes/ano-i-2010/0001-janeiro/panayotis-mouzourakis-%C2%ABremote-interpreter-training-training-for-remote-interpreting%C2%BB/>, online, last access 1 May 2016.

Turkey's largest public university launched seven remote education bachelor's programs in 2009-2010; six bachelor's programs and three master's programs were added in 2010-2011 and the efforts to launch four more bachelor's and one more master's program still continue for the upcoming year.⁹

From an educational perspective, the concept of such new media and technology per se emerges as a significant component of the general discussion in interpreting and translation¹⁰. In an article Jarmila Fictumová¹¹ states as such:

Only time will show whether our hard work in e-learning can produce better results than the traditional teaching approach. Certainly, establishing a new system is a challenge. However, we would like to believe that once the groundbreaking work is done, the teaching must inevitably become much easier and better. We are more flexible without the paper resources and can adapt the content of the courses according to our ideas and wishes. "Blended learning" certainly has a future at our universities¹².

So it is possible to say that remote interpreting, as a form of interpreting which emerges out of the new media and technologies is demanded from the industry as well as being a rising subject of training with a big potential especially for the upcoming future. One can mainly talk about three main motivations for remote interpreting:

1. Overcoming physical space problems such as lack of space for interpreting booths or reluctance to install them in historic buildings (e.g. the October 2005 informal European Council at Hampton Court)
2. Reducing travel time and cost (and possibly carbon footprint as well) for interpreters
3. Optimizing the use of scarce resources (exotic languages)¹³.

⁹ Istanbul University, <http://uzaktanegitim.istanbul.edu.tr/index.php/isuzem/tanitim.html>, online, last access date: 1 May 2016.

¹⁰ See Jaatinen, Jaaskelainen 2006: p. 83-88.

¹¹ Jarmila Fictumová, 2005. "E-learning for Translators and Interpreters: The Case of CMS Moodle" In *Theory and Practice in English Studies 3: Proceedings from the Eighth Conference of British, American and Canadian Studies*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita. p. 204-205,

[http://www.phil.muni.cz/plonedata/wkaa/Offprints%20THEPES%203/TPES%203%20\(201-206\)%20Fictumova.pdf](http://www.phil.muni.cz/plonedata/wkaa/Offprints%20THEPES%203/TPES%203%20(201-206)%20Fictumova.pdf), online, last access 1 May 2016.

¹² J.Fictumová, *ibid.*, p. 205.

¹³ P. Mouzourakis, *ibid.*

Furthermore for the training programmes such as EMCI that involves different locations and different language pairs the prospects offered by remote interpreting and other technologies are quite wide.

However as every coin has two sides, it is also important to consider the remote interpreting from the interpreters` perception side. Some technical standards addressing sound quality, issues of background noise or signal quality in conference interpreting have been set as early as 1980s however with teleconferencing and remote interpreting one can see that such issues are discussed once again. Pöchhacker says that more than sound quality, these developments impinge on the interpreter`s visual access to the speaker and proceedings`”¹⁴. However it is also worth mentioning that research conducted in relation with this particular issue illustrates that the need for visual access to ensure a proper performance has not been successfully validated yet. “While many interpreters seem reluctant to the idea, arguing that not being present in the same room with conference delegates and various other psychological and physiological factors have a negative impact on their well-being and performance, the ongoing debate has triggered a number of studies exploring the actual impact of situational, psychological and physiological factors associated with remote interpreting on interpreters and interpreting performance” (Diriker op.cit.). For instance in her study titled `Remote Interpreting: Assessment of human factors and performance parameters`, Barbara Moser-Mercer¹⁵ puts forward:

[...] it appears that although the present study could establish only trends, interpreters seem to be under increased psychological stress when working away from the conference room, mostly because they experience a lack of control of the situation. Only additional studies along the lines of the present one will allow us to corroborate these findings. Given the importance of establishing and guaranteeing correct working conditions for interpreters working remote so that the high level of performance interpreters are asked to provide can be maintained without undue psychological stress, no effort should be spared to continue to investigate human factors in remote interpreting¹⁶.

The technological advances and the instruments brought alongside clearly revolutionized many things for the interpreters and interpreting users

¹⁴ F. Pöchhacker, *ibid*.

¹⁵ Barbara Moser-Mercer, 2003. *Remote interpreting: Assessment of human factors and performance parameters-Joint project International Telecommunication Union (ITU)-Ecole de Traduction et d'Interpretation, Université de Genève (ETI)*. <http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page1125.htm>, online, last access 1 May 2016.

¹⁶ B. Moser-Mercer, *ibid*.

however such advances should be carefully analyzed not only from a technical perspective but also from a psychological point of view. As Takis Mouzourakis points out in his article 'That Feeling of Being There: Vision and Presence in Remote Interpreting',

[...] interpreters engaged in remote interpreting have also experienced a level of psychological discomfort equal to, if not greater than, their level of physical discomfort. The vast majority of 'remote interpreters' have reported feeling a lack of participation, alienation, and loss of concentration, together with increased fatigue and reduced self-perceived quality. Moreover, there is a suggestion of potentially persistent 'after effects' in the form of mild cognitive disturbances as the result of prolonged exposure to RI; these should not be overlooked in future studies¹⁷.

Turkish Settings in Interpreter Training

This brings us to the curricula of interpreting institutions and the particular foci that need to be placed upon when dealing with remote interpreting and such. As mentioned above; in Turkey only two translation and interpreting departments offer remote interpreting class in connection with European Parliament and their framework programme. This can be partly justified with the fact that these two Turkish universities, namely Bogazici University and Bilkent University, are participating institutions within the scope of EMCI- European Master`s in Conference Interpreting-however considering that there are around 50 translation and interpreting studies departments in Turkey, at least one course covering the basics of this new type of interpreting should be allocated so that interpreting students can get a glimpse of what awaits them in the near future.

Through a look at the course contents of these translation & interpreting departments, the initial finding is that all of the curricula bear a number of similarities to one another. Needless to say; there are differences in the names of the courses and the materials used, however if we take simultaneous interpreting class as an example it simply shows us that the new media interpreting is not dealt with as a separate division. Things are not different in my university, Istanbul University, either. Istanbul University is not involved in EMCI for the time being therefore there is no opportunity to offer a co-class with European Parliament and the other participating universities. There are some efforts to familiarize the interpreting students with the new technology-induced interpreting types and modalities. Yet these efforts simply stay on the individual level rather than in an organized and well-structured manner.

¹⁷ T. Mouzourakis, *ibid.*

For instance, there is no separate course called the video conference interpreting or remote interpreting or the `new interpreting modalities` for that matter within the interpreting departments at Turkey. Moving from the classification put forward by Mouzourakis¹⁸, there are three main categories of interpreter training on the basis of the technology use and the remote involvement entailed:

- a. Minimal: providing course materials and tools online but retaining traditional, face-to-face instruction
- b. Blended learning: mixing (limited) face-to-face interaction with online tools and courses
- c. Fully remote: without any face-to-face contact (e.g. training interpreters in a crisis or war zone).

Mouzourakis also points out “most initiatives at the moment conform to the first paradigm, focusing on making course materials as well as speeches for individual interpreting practice available to a wider student public.” As a non-EMCI training institution Istanbul University can be better placed into the first category.

Conclusion

The technology is an essential aspect in translation and interpreting. As noted by Franz Pöchhacker¹⁹,

The role of technology is no less a long-standing issue in interpreting than globalization. Indeed, the field might not exist as such if it had not been for the use of electro-acoustic transmission equipment to allow for simultaneous interpreting in the 1920s.

Similarly Anthony Pym²⁰ states that “[...] the incorporation of e-learning into translator training might be regarded as the way of the future”.

Moving from these, we can lay down the following statements regarding the interpreter training:

1. The remote interpreting and the related technological advances and methods should be incorporated into the curricula of the interpreter training institutions.
2. This should not only be limited with the instructors but also create a familiarity and awareness on the level of the interpreting students and

¹⁸ P. Mouzourakis, *ibid.*

¹⁹ F. Pöchhacker, *ibid.*, s. 201.

²⁰ Anthony Pym, 2001. *E-Learning and Translator Training*. http://usuaris.tinet.cat/apym/online/training/2001_elearning.pdf, online, last access 1 May 2016.

interpreters themselves. Barry Olsen²¹ says “[...] few people think of the same thing when they hear or use the term ‘remote interpreting’, and with good reason. The term is bandied about to refer to a multitude of different scenarios that are as different from one another as apples and oranges”

3. The interpreting research in the field of new media and remote interpreting as well as video-conference interpreting should be expanded with a larger focus on the psychological impact on the interpreters as well as the working conditions and the overall professionalization of the interpreting. Furthermore; relevant issues such as interpreters` stress level, feeling of comfort and momentary concentration should be described via some experimental studies. According to Mouzourakis²²

[...]both trainers and trainees need to be aware of the limitations imposed by remote interaction and virtual environments and strive to compensate for them. Remote interpreter training does not have to be synonymous with (or motivated by) training for remote interpreting alone. We should avoid identifying the medium with the message; much more, we should avoid training a generation of «autistic» interpreters.

4. The repercussions and effects of the technology and the new media emerging every day will not only change the way of interpreter training but will also pave the way towards a reinforced and hopefully improved data collection and data evaluation in interpreting research. However these studies and research should be accompanied by sustainable efforts coming from both the interpreting trainers and practicing interpreters.

After the sociological turn, are we to see a medium turn in interpreting studies? Even if we cannot shout it aloud for the time being we can at least state that there is a major orientation coming on the way and the interpreting training and the institutions need to be restructured accordingly to pace up with the relevant repercussions in this field so that the professionalization of interpreting will be rendered even stronger.

In the light of the latest technological developments, it is possible to say that telecommunication industry will be going through an inevitable transition. Interpreting and the overall language sector will be receiving its

²¹ Barry Olsen, 2014. *Remote Interpreting: How Would You Define It?* <http://www.interpretamerica.net/index.php/blogs/barry-s-blog/134-barry-s-blog-remote-interpreting-how-would-you-define-it>, online, last access 1 May 2016.

²² P. Mouzourakis, *ibid.*

fair share from such a transition, too. For a smooth transition, we need technologies and infrastructures assisting interpreters in a way that interpreters will be working in enhanced manner and their task is facilitated, not made more challenging.

There is also a definite need for further research and more data so that there will be evidence-based experience in the field and industry to take informed decisions for curriculum development and training structuring.

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