

Feedback from the perspective of students and professional interpreters

Miroslava Melicherčíková
Matej Bel University
miroslava.melichercikova@umb.sk

Abstract

The present study focuses on feedback from the perspective of students and professional interpreters. Its aim was to compare the data collected about both groups, compare them with the literature and formulate recommendations for the training of future interpreters. A qualitative-quantitative analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that most of the students perceived the feedback provided (by the teacher) as beneficial. Content analysis of the responses indicated that the students also needed praise and perceived it as motivating alongside the highlighting of shortcomings. Only a few individuals felt a lack of more detailed feedback or harsh criticism. The research confirmed that the benefits of feedback depend on several aspects, not only on the teacher but also on the personality of the student and the number of students in the interpreting seminar. Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews with professional interpreters indicated that feedback was less frequent and rather sporadic compared to their university studies or their past professional experience. When interpreters receive feedback, it is predominantly positive. For some, negative feedback provides a stimulus for improvement; for others, it can be demotivating. The professional interpreters distinguished between justified and unjustified feedback, which is something students should be aware of.

Melicherčíková,
Miroslava. 2023.
Feedback from the
perspective of students
and professional
interpreters. In: *Bridge:
Trends and Traditions in
Translation and
Interpreting Studies*. Vol.
4, No. 1: pp. 72-91.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on effective feedback at all levels of education and training. According to Behr (2015, 215), the key to successful training is not only students' willingness and motivation to expand their knowledge and improve their skills, but also a competent teacher who can provide constructive feedback. Setton & Dawrant (2016) express the same view when they attribute the quality of any course to the personality of the teacher and the quality of the feedback and guidance provided.

It is clear that feedback, and especially effective feedback, also plays an important role in the training of future interpreters. As emphasized by several scholars (Setton & Dawrant 2016; Lee 2018; Domínguez Araújo 2019), it is a key part of the teaching and learning process in conference interpreter training. We believe the same is true for community interpreting. Domínguez Araújo (2019) declares that there is little research on how feedback should be provided to enhance preparation for professional practice. In the same way, she sees a need for more research on what teachers and students think about feedback's role (Domínguez Araújo 2019).

A potential deficiency of feedback in interpreter training is pointed out by Setton & Dawrant (2016), who note criticism from students that they do not receive enough practical advice, but mostly receive very general comments, holistic feedback on their performance, accompanied by encouragement, so it is apparently up to them to figure out how to improve in the interpreting profession (Setton & Dawrant 2016).

Despite some of the above arguments, we believe that interpreting studies has solid theoretical foundations as well as practical research findings that can be applied to the provision of effective feedback in interpreter training. Conducting surveys among students of different stages and curricula, as well as among teachers, can produce new findings on providing effective feedback in interpreter training, and can thus either confirm existing recommendations or suggest their modification.

2. Brief overview of the issue under study

The traditional form of feedback in conference interpreter training, as outlined by Setton & Dawrant (2016), involves the provision of oral feedback to an individual from the instructor in the presence of their classmates. Such traditional feedback is now supplemented by peer feedback and self-feedback (Lee 2018; Ahrens & Beaton-Thome & Rütten 2021). A well-designed (conference) interpreting class usually combines all three aspects of feedback (Behr 2015).

The process of providing feedback itself is quite complex, but can be generally specified according to the following recommendations by Setton & Dawrant (2016, 2):

- Feedback should be three-dimensional; that is, it should be based on observation, include a diagnosis of the causes of problems, and suggest recommendations for modification (e.g. suggestions for individual and group exercises, appropriate texts).
- Feedback should be positive and critical at the same time, but above all constructive, with suggestions for improvement. Feedback must be formulated as a critique of the performance, not of the student. A distinction should be made as to whether the feedback can be given publicly or whether it should be provided on a one-on-one basis (e.g. in relation to facial or attitudinal tics).
- Feedback should provide the student with an opportunity for self-correction.
- Feedback should focus on the current pedagogical objectives of the course. It should be primarily process-oriented in the initial stages, and increasingly product-oriented in the later stages.
- Feedback should be carefully recorded, e.g. in an interpreting diary, both by the student (an opportunity to work on the problem) and by the teacher (to be compared with that of other teachers, monitoring of progress).
- The student should receive feedback in every lesson. They should also receive comprehensive feedback after exams and mock conferences (Setton & Dawrant 2016, 2).

In addition to traditional feedback, peer feedback aims to encourage students to exchange and share ideas among each other. Such feedback can be motivating in that it can help peers with similar difficulties not to give in to negative self-criticism (Lee 2018). Given the asymmetry of the teacher–student relationship, it may be easier to accept criticism from peers than from teachers (Värlander 2008).

The last type of feedback, self-feedback, can be defined as a self-assessment or analytical evaluation (Lee 2018) based on critically listening to recordings (audio, video) of one's own interpreting. Interpreter diaries can also be a tool for self-feedback in interpreting (Melicherčíková 2021b; Djovčoš & Melicherčíková & Vilímek 2021). Through such reflective practices, learners can gradually improve their performance, specifically by identifying strengths and weaknesses and seeking opportunities for improvement (Russo 1995). According to Machová (2016), the most significant benefit of self-reflection for interpreters lies in the fact that it leads to increased autonomy in students, which means that they take more responsibility for their learning progress and do not rely solely on what the trainer teaches them. Apart from these aspects, Postigo Pinazo (2008) adds the increase of individual and group confidence, promotion of direct

communication between students and teachers, and improved learning environment.

The quality of feedback provided in interpreter training is co-determined by a number of factors. In addition to the teacher's personality, mentioned in the introduction, another factor is the group size of students involved. Ideally, the number of students should be 3 to 6, with a maximum of 8 to 10 in a two-hour seminar. Longer seminars are recommended for practicing high consecutive interpreting. When practicing simultaneous interpreting, the teacher should be able to listen to each student for at least 6 to 8 minutes (Setton & Dawrant 2016). That said, this is not always possible in our circumstances in Slovakia, especially for compulsory interpreting courses in programs with high numbers of students (as is often the case with programs that include English). Setton & Dawrant (2016) suggest the use of teaching assistants and/or second-year students in larger classes. Such situations are not common in interpreter training at Slovak universities.

In relation to feedback in interpreting, the personality of the learner, especially their emotions, should also be considered. According to Värlander (2008), emotions should not be seen as a barrier to learning. This means that teachers and/or peers should apply an individualized approach. For some students, criticism can be demotivating; other students, on the other hand, cannot progress without sufficiently critical evaluation.

In the following section, we will present the main findings of several surveys on the perceptions or provision of feedback among interpreting students. The theoretical and practical aspects of feedback among interpreting students were mapped by Lee (2018). Through an online questionnaire survey, distributed to conference interpreting students (N=58), Lee focused on the feedback they received and gave. The results indicated that students valued feedback from both teachers and peers, but they valued feedback from teachers more and found it more comprehensive, authoritative, and thus the most effective. Analyses also confirmed that students sought the teacher's support not only for academic needs but also for emotional needs. The research indicated that teachers need to facilitate students' learning through feedback. Meanwhile, feedback as a complex task requires further scientific investigation (Lee 2018).

Domínguez Araújo's (2019) study presents the results of an extensive research project she conducted in three graduate training programs for conference interpreters. She collected data from teachers and students through individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, and supplemented them by direct teaching observations. She used content analysis to identify points of agreement or disagreement between teachers' and students' views (usefulness of feedback, preferred practices, and difficulty of giving feedback). The study's main findings indicate that students believe that feedback should be honest, concise and meaningful

and should provide an analysis of the problems they encounter as well as recommend specific strategies to overcome them.

Petrášová's (2019) research on feedback as a means of teaching consecutive interpreting also provides valuable findings. Through a questionnaire survey among graduating bachelor's (N=23) and master's (N=16) students, she wanted to verify whether students' expectations of feedback corresponded to the recommendations given in the literature. By comparing two groups of students, she investigated whether and how their attitudes toward feedback differed depending on their level of interpreting skills (less advanced vs. more advanced). The findings confirmed that many students considered feedback to be the most important part of their training. Most students were satisfied with its quality. In particular, students valued feedback from their instructor, which they found most useful. However, they also requested that teachers be more sensitive to their emotions and include positive elements in the feedback even in the case of less successful performance. The greatest differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students were evident in the question of peer feedback. Master's students were more interactive, characterized by better analytical skills. Both groups of students valued peer feedback. The majority of respondents also perceived self-feedback positively. In both groups, students did not make sufficient further use of their notes on the feedback they received. That is, although students took notes on their own performance and the feedback given (master's students were slightly more disciplined), they did not subsequently apply the recommendations systematically (Petrášová 2019).

The surveys mentioned thus far were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. The subsequent transition to online instruction highlighted the need for individualized and personalized feedback in conference interpreter training (Ahrens & Beaton-Thome & Rütten 2021). Similar findings concerning distance interpreter training were reached by Melicherčíková (2021a). A survey among students confirmed that they expect regular personal constructive criticism from the teacher. In the case of peer feedback, oral rather than written forms may be more beneficial; it is also important that evaluating peers are periodically rotated (Melicherčíková 2021a).

If we were to summarize the main findings of the literature on the provision of feedback in interpreter training, we would use the following attributes: regular, constructive, detailed, individual, personalized, positive, and considering students' personality and emotions. Most of the studies to date are based on data from students; some also consider the teacher's perspective. It is clear that both parties have an important role to play in the process of interpreter training, which is why future research should focus on students as well as teachers. We also consider the perspective of professional interpreters to be relevant, since the aim of interpreter training is to provide professionals for practice. For these

reasons, in our study, we attempted to combine the perceptions of feedback from students and professional interpreters and to focus on potential points of convergence and divergence.

3. Research methodology

Based on the findings of the literature and our own experience, we mapped what feedback students received in a compulsory interpreting course (*Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting*) at the beginning of their master's studies, how they perceived it, and what their expectations of (beneficial) feedback were. We compared these findings with data from a similar survey that we conducted among professional interpreters within the project VEGA 1/0202/21 *Reflection of Cognitive and Personality Traits in the Interpreting Performance of T&I Students and Professionals in Real and Virtual Environments*, where we investigated whether professional interpreters received feedback on their interpreting performance, what form it took and how they perceived it. Our aim was to analyze the collected data, compare them with the literature and formulate recommendations for the training of future interpreters.

The research sample included two different groups. The first group consisted of first-year master's students of Philology (specializing in Translation and Interpreting Studies, N=39, mean age 23.3 years) who had taken the compulsory course *Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting* in the winter semester of the 2022/2023 academic year.

Basic data on the respondents of the first group were obtained from an online questionnaire, which constituted the first research instrument used. The questionnaire was made available after instruction had finished in the winter semester and could be filled in by the students between December 2022 and January 2023. The questionnaire was anonymous and its completion was voluntary. We designed it broadly to provide us with more information about the respondents, their preferences, aspirations and plans, in addition to their responses to the aspects under study. Through the questionnaire, we collected the following: basic data such as age, gender, study program, potential changes in experiencing stress while interpreting between the beginning and the end of the semester, current interpreting preferences, development of interpreting skills in leisure time as part of self-study, types of activities undertaken in the course, their effectiveness/ineffectiveness, desired future profession, feedback, its frequency, form, effectiveness, and suggestions for more beneficial feedback.

The student group was predominantly female (N=32; 82%); a predominance of women in translation and interpreting programs was also confirmed by, for example, Melicherčíková (2017) and Du (2020). The students in the present study were from a variety of translation/interpreting study programs, the common element being the study of English language

and culture. The programs are divided into combined (studying two languages) and interdisciplinary (combined with a non-language program) programs. The numbers of students in each program are shown in Table 1.

Translation and interpreting programs	
Combined (N=26) (two languages)	Interdisciplinary (N=13)
English – French (N=3)	English – Philosophy (N=7)
English – German (N=7)	English – History (N=6)
English – Russian (N=5)	
Slovak – English (N=11)	

Table 1. The group of students – study programs

In terms of preferences for interpreting or translation, the predominant tendency was for translation (N=26; 67%). Approximately 20% of students (N=8) declared an equal preference for translation and interpreting. Interpreting was preferred by only two students (5%). The same number of respondents could not specify a preference. One student, under the “Other” option, stated, “I am still more inclined toward translation, but after this semester I was motivated to improve at interpreting and to try to give this field a chance and to have the opportunity to ‘choose’ after school.” Similar preferences, especially the prevalence of preference for translation, were confirmed by Melicherčíková’s (2016) survey of first-year undergraduate students. These findings are consistent with the proportions of the services offered on Slovakia’s translation and interpreting market. As indicated by a recent (repeated) survey by Djovčoš & Šveda (2021), the majority of professionals exclusively translate (45.6%) or mostly translate and interpret occasionally (31.3%). Translation and interpreting are offered to an equal extent by only 13.7% of professionals.

The respondents in our student group were also asked about their desired future profession. How preferences for interpreting or translation were reflected in potential occupations is illustrated in Figure 1.

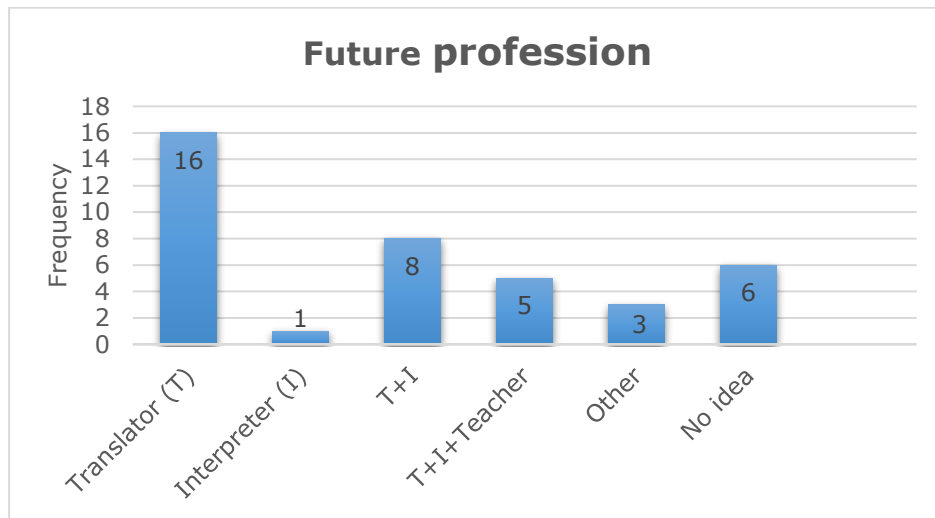


Figure 1. Desired future profession

It was clear that the highest number of students would like to work as translators only (41%), while the least would like to work as professional interpreters only (2.6%). Quite a significant proportion would like to combine translation and interpreting (20.5%) or complement these activities with teaching (12.8%). Some of the respondents did not yet know what they wanted to do (15.4%), and the rest wanted to pursue another profession entirely or combine it with translating (7.7%). These basic characteristics of the first group indicated that these were mainly students with inclinations toward translation and a desire to become professional translators.

The second, less numerous group of the research sample consisted of professional interpreters (N=9, mean age 38.7 years) who participated in multi-stage testing as part of the project VEGA 1/0202/21. Basic data on the respondents in the second group were obtained from semi-structured interviews, which constituted the second research instrument used. The interviews were conducted by another member of the project via video interviews in February 2022. Transcripts were subsequently produced from these interviews. Like the group of students, this group of professional interpreters was also predominantly female (66.7%, N=6). They also had several years of continuous interpreting experience, ranging from 6 to 25 years, with an average of 14.2 years. In terms of length of interpreting experience, a distinction could be made between subjects with shorter experience (6 to 10 years, N=5) and subjects with longer experience (20 to 25 years, N=4). The following figure illustrates interpreting experience in more detail.

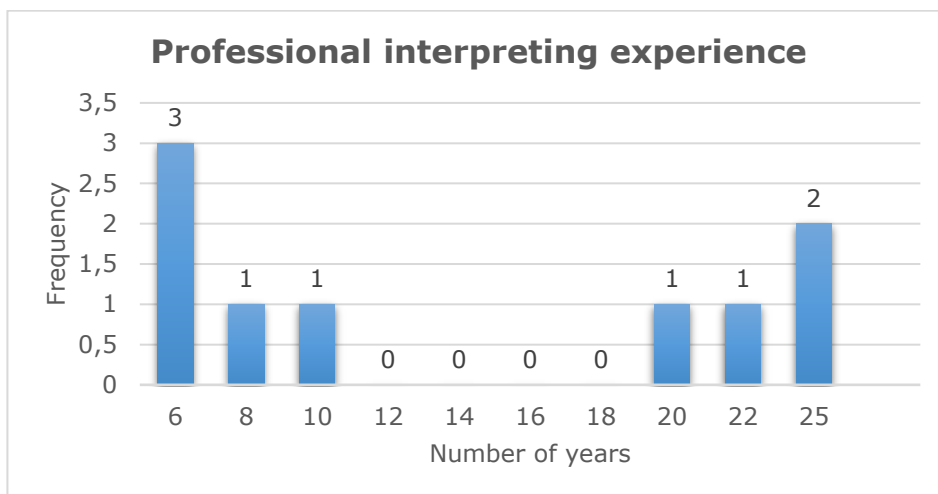


Figure 2. Length of interpreting experience

The working languages of the subjects were English and Slovak, and the majority of subjects (88.9%) also mentioned other working languages. In terms of the ratio of translation to interpreting in the professional services they offered, one subject interpreted exclusively (11.1%), the majority mainly interpreted, but also supplemented interpreting with translation (77.7%, N=7), and some were also engaged in other activities (33.3%, N=3).

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative–qualitative analysis of the student group

In the following section, we will evaluate the students' responses to the questionnaire, attempting a qualitative–quantitative evaluation. We will refer to the students by the abbreviation S and the corresponding number (1–39).

The first aspect investigated was the regularity of feedback. When asked whether students received regular feedback during the compulsory course *Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting*, 97.4% (N=38) answered "yes". Student S26 indicated the answer "no" (2.6%), while in her response to the following questionnaire item, she stated, "After each interpreting session we were told what we did wrong, but we did not receive an overall evaluation of our performance." Based on a content analysis of student S26's response, it is clear that they received feedback after each interpreting performance, but the student noticed a lack of an overall performance evaluation. This shortcoming was more closely related to the question on feedback effectiveness. Thus, it can be concluded that feedback was provided on a regular basis.

The second aspect examined was the frequency of feedback. To this aim, we simply asked students how often they received feedback or at what

intervals. This was an open-ended question, and therefore the responses cannot be as easily quantified as is the case with closed questions. Based on the content analysis, the responses could be divided into three main groups. In the first, the largest group, students declared that they received feedback after each interpreting performance in the seminar, i.e. several times during each class (48.7%; N=19). This is demonstrated, for example, by the following responses¹:

- "We received feedback after each interpreting performance." (S3)
- "After every single interpreting performance, we talked about our pluses and minuses, which I really liked and rate positively." (S4)
- "After each interpreting session in class and sometimes concerning the interpreting diaries." (S10)
- "Every class multiple times." (S11)
- "We received feedback at every seminar – the teacher listened to us while we interpreted and took notes so that she could point out our mistakes. She did the same for rhetorical performances." (S12)
- "Every seminar multiple times; also after the seminars by email." (S17)
- "We all received feedback immediately after each interpreting session in class." (S19)
- "During each class, at the end of the class and also via email at different time intervals." (S28)
- "We always received feedback after interpreting or when we handed in transcripts of our recordings." (S32)
- "In each seminar, after each recording transcription, each of us received individual comments on our performance, and we also mentioned our interpreter's diaries at the beginning of the class, or our transcriptions of the recordings after we had handed them in." (S36)
- "After each form of interpreting as well as speaking." (S39)

In the second most numerous group, students reported that they received feedback every week, i.e. at every seminar/class (35.9%; N=14). Examples of such responses are given below:

- "We received feedback at every seminar." (S14)
- "We received feedback from the teacher at every class. It helped us to realize things (mistakes) that we hadn't noticed ourselves doing during our presentations and interpreting." (S15)
- "At each session, the teacher asked about our impression and reflected her feelings about our interpreting back to us." (S21)
- "Basically, in every lesson – we reviewed every activity." (S34)

¹ All the responses have been translated from Slovak into English by the author of this paper.

The last group of responses regarding the frequency of feedback could be described as “varied”, as in terms of content there were minor differences from the previous two groups (15.4%; N=6). Due to the small number of subjects, we present all the responses here:

- “1–2 times a week.” (S5)
- “Always at the seminars or by the end of the week.” (S7)
- “Almost on a weekly basis.” (S23)
- “Almost every time.” (S24)
- “I received feedback more or less during each class.” (S31)
- “At least once per seminar.” (S33)

The above responses for all three cases confirm that almost all students received feedback at least once in every seminar.

The third aspect examined was the form of feedback (“What form did the feedback take?”). This was also an open-ended question, so we again applied content analysis to the responses to help us identify the different forms of feedback. The responses were quite varied as students perceived the question in different ways. We identified two main tendencies in the responses: students either focused on the oral–written dichotomy (form) or on the content of the feedback. Some specified both (form and content) in their answers. In our evaluation, we will focus only on the two main tendencies. In terms of form, the predominant response referred to orality, confirming oral feedback (74.4%; N=29). Mention of written feedback, specifically via email, occurred in only two responses that also mentioned oral feedback. This demonstrates that feedback was primarily provided verbally. In terms of content, students (51.3%; N=20) characterized feedback as primarily evaluating and analyzing a particular performance, pointing out positives, negatives, or both, and accompanied by recommendations for improvement. Examples of responses demonstrating specific (oral) feedback are provided below:

- “Oral evaluation of interpreting. What to watch out for, what was positive, negative.” (S1)
- “Oral, the teacher evaluated our performance in a few sentences or gave us advice for the future.” (S6)
- “Verbalizing my shortcomings but also positive qualities.” (S8)
- “It was related to the evaluation of our activities (interpreting, speaking) and included points to work on related to our shortcomings. But the teacher also praised us many times for what we did well.” (S15)
- “Highlighting the positives of my activity, pointing out my shortcomings, suggestions on how to improve, suggestions for self-learning exercises.” (S17)
- “In the form of comments, reminders, and advice for the future on how to avoid certain mistakes, what to look out for, etc.” (S22)

- "I liked that the teacher also expressed positive evaluations and mentioned what could be improved." (S24)
- "In the feedback I got after each exercise or interpreting session, I was told how my performance was. We pointed out things that negatively affected my performance and said what would help to improve it. The feedback on the positive aspects was the same, which was motivating." (S28)
- "There was always praise or advice on what I could improve." (S29)
- "Feedback on mistakes and then possible solutions." (S39)

Two views on the form of feedback can be mentioned separately, since they also emphasize the nature and perception of the learning environment:

- "The feedback was really constructive, friendly, fair and balanced." (S3)
- "It was in emails and interpreting diaries. In addition, we were always assessed during lessons, which was very beneficial. The classroom environment was like a safe space where no one was afraid to say what they wanted to." (S5)

The last aspect examined was the benefits of feedback. We deliberately framed the question of whether the feedback given was beneficial as open-ended to allow students to comment freely on it. All students unanimously stated "yes" (100%, N=39), with student S6 adding, "Yes, but I would also accept feedback on overall performance." Thus, we can conclude that students perceived the feedback provided as beneficial. At the same time, in the next question, we gave them space to specify which form of feedback would be more beneficial to them. Given the nature of the question (open-ended), we attempted to evaluate each response based on content analysis. The majority of students (71.8%; N=28) indicated that they were satisfied with the feedback they received in the course, of which five added additional insights, mostly indicating a lack of detailed evaluation:

- "Personally, I was satisfied with the feedback. Of course, I would have preferred to hear more detailed feedback on my whole interpreting performance, but this was not possible because there were so many of us. However, a basic, brief evaluation was given in each lesson." (S1)
- "I learned something from each evaluation, although it is true that the evaluation in school was not as detailed as, for example, in the mock conference². However, this is logical when there are thirteen of us sitting in the class." (S8)

² The mock conference was held at the last seminar of the course.

- "As there were eight of us in the group, any feedback had to be brief, and sometimes more in-depth feedback would have been very helpful." (S11)

Three students did not answer this question (7.7%), and three other students stated, "I don't know" (7.7%). The remaining five students (12.8%) specified their ideas of more beneficial feedback as follows:

- "Whether an improvement was seen compared to the previous lesson." (S26)
- "Maybe I would have seen the written form as beneficial, for example after a couple of weeks." (S27)
- "I definitely like constructive criticism. I know I interpret well, but sometimes it's good to hear that one doesn't always interpret everything 100%. There is no need to rest on one's laurels; one should always try to improve." (S29)
- "I wish the teacher would listen to each student in the class for a longer time and give comprehensive feedback, not just partial feedback." (S33)
- "Personally, I would accept 'proper' feedback, outlining mistakes, possible corrections, etc. without sugar-coating. I accept that not everyone would be able to take harsh criticism, it isn't easy to hear, but that's the best way to learn. Personal opinion." (S39)

Analyses of the responses about potentially more effective feedback in interpreting confirmed that the students are satisfied if they receive feedback on a regular basis, at least in the form of a brief general evaluation of their own performance, highlighting the positives, pointing out the negatives, and stating ways to improve. At the same time, in line with the literature (Setton & Dawrant 2016), it was confirmed that some students felt a lack of detailed feedback and ongoing concretization of their progress. These were a small number of students of larger programs who were aware of the limiting factor of their group size. They also either equally preferred translation and interpreting or tended toward translating only, and interestingly, most of them aimed to complement future careers as translators and interpreters with teaching. In only one case did a student request more critical feedback than they had received. This was a student who was equally inclined toward translating and interpreting, yet could not specify his desired future profession. In another case, one student would have perceived written feedback after a few weeks as more beneficial. This opinion may also be related to the same student's greater inclination toward written translation and desire to become a translator in the future.

4.2. Qualitative analysis of the group of professionals

We also surveyed the opinions on feedback or criticism of the group of professional interpreters. This topic was part of individual semi-structured interviews which were carried out as part of the project VEGA 1/0202/21 on the basis of a pre-prepared outline. Due to the individual form of the interviews and the reactions of the participating professional interpreters, some topics were discussed more comprehensively, others more briefly. This may be one of the reasons why the question of feedback did not appear explicitly in two interviews. As a result, we had to adjust the original sample of 9 interpreters to 7 with regard to examining feedback. We denoted the professional interpreters with the abbreviation "I" and the corresponding number, which indicated the order of the interviews. We then divided the interpreters into two groups according to their length of experience in order to investigate whether the reception and perception of feedback varied in relation to the length of experience.

The first group of interpreters, those with longer experience (20 to 25 years), included three subjects (I4, I7, I9). Interpreter 4 perceived that the social status of the interpreter had changed over the past years (approximately two decades), which is also related to feedback. Interpreter 4 felt that people perceive interpreters as useless, as nowadays many people in Slovakia speak foreign languages, especially English. In the past she received positive feedback on her interpreting. Nowadays, she receives feedback mainly when interpreting in EU institutions, when colleagues write reports on the performance of other interpreters. She sees these evaluations as an unpleasant duty from her colleagues' perspective. Explicit praise for her interpreting is something I4 now encounters only very sporadically. At the same time, she added that she does not do her job to earn praise.

Interpreter 7 said that she currently receives feedback, but it does not happen often. As an example, she mentioned a thank-you letter that she and her colleague received after a difficult interpreting session. The letter specifically analyzed both the content and the form of the interpreting in question, which allowed the foreign participants to be active at the interpreted event. This feedback pleased interpreter 7. However, she also added that she personally valued the feedback from her colleagues (professional interpreters) the most, and not only the positive feedback but also the criticism. Over the course of several years of her practice, she has experienced the formation of groups or teams of cooperating interpreters who provide each other with a kind of mutual mentoring, which she appreciates.

Interpreter 9 also receives feedback, even after many years in the trade. Sometimes he even requests it himself. In addition to working as an interpreter, he is sometimes required to provide all the interpreting booths as well, thus becoming a sort of mini-agency. Most of the time, the

feedback he receives is positive, which is easy to deal with. Rarely is the feedback negative, and when it is, it mainly manifests itself in different interpreters being hired for a particular ongoing project. When he does receive negative feedback, he tries to analyze whether there has been a mistake on his part, and whether he could have influenced it in some way or done something about it. Based on years of experience, he knows that in addition to interpreting skills, the client's personal preferences are also important, as their satisfaction is a priority. He considers adequate preparation and the conviction that the interpreter has done their best within the limits of their abilities to be essential.

Next, we will look at the second professional interpreter group, which included four interpreters (I1, I2, I6, I8) with shorter experience (6 to 10 years).

Interpreter 1 reported that she does not receive feedback often at present, but during her studies she perceived it as beneficial that her teachers "criticized" them, i.e. told them what they had interpreted incorrectly and so on. That is, she tries to see criticism positively as something that will move her forward. But at the same time, she stressed, it also depends on who the criticism comes from. If it comes from a good interpreter or someone whose opinion she respects, she welcomes criticism.

Another interpreter (I2) said that she appreciated all kinds of feedback, including criticism of her performance. She also pointed out that since she is a perfectionist, she usually feels that she could always give an even better performance. That said, feedback from others could not be more critical than her own self-feedback. Similarly, as in the case of interpreter 1, she tries to distinguish between unjustified and justified criticism. In her own words, unjustified criticism does not affect her, and conversely, in the case of justified criticism, she will reflect on it and try to take it into account. The interpreter further added that praise always makes her happy.

Another interpreter in this group (I6) is pleased to receive positive feedback from, for example, an agency. If he receives negative feedback, it is more likely to demotivate him. As he states, he can already evaluate, based on experience, if there are shortcomings in his own interpreting performance, and he perceives his awareness of them as a motivation to eliminate them. Unlike his self-criticism, however, he feels that negative feedback from another person does not motivate him.

Interpreter 8 stated that before the COVID-19 pandemic there was more space for feedback, while during the pandemic it was rather rare. In her opinion, in face-to-face interpreting it is more noticeable when the client is satisfied and expresses thanks than in remote interpreting. She is more impacted by negative feedback, seeing it as a potential motivation to prevent any dissatisfaction on the part of the client. As with previous interpreters, she emphasized the possibility of unjustified criticism, namely

in cases of failure to fulfill infeasible demands from the client. On the other hand, she felt that overestimating one's own abilities was a justified ground for criticism.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews with professional interpreters showed the following main findings:

- When interpreters do receive feedback, it is overwhelmingly positive, which makes them pleased.
- Negative feedback is rather sporadic and perceived differently by the various subjects. Some analyze it and investigate its causes, seeing it as motivation for potential improvement. For others it can be demotivating, as they believe they can constructively evaluate their own shortcomings.
- Negative feedback can also manifest itself in a certain project continuing but other interpreters being selected for it.
- Feedback can be verbal or written, the latter being more common when interpreting in EU institutions.
- Interpreters in both groups distinguish whether the feedback is from the client or from a fellow interpreter. Feedback from the client is important for successful future cooperation and the provision of quality interpreting services, whereas feedback from an experienced colleague is more beneficial in terms of professional assessment and potential improvement of one's interpreting.
- In particular, interpreters with shorter experience were more likely to reflect on whether criticism is justified. Justified criticism refers to an adequate evaluation of the shortcomings in interpreters' performance. Unjustified criticism could be described as a subjective, undue negative evaluation.
- Professionals with longer experience observed a lower frequency or sporadic nature of external feedback.
- A similar perception is reported by the group of professionals with shorter experience, especially in relation to more frequent assessment during their studies.
- One interpreter sometimes asks for feedback.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study has focused on feedback from the perspective of students and professional interpreters. Its aim was to compare the data collected about both groups, compare them with the literature and formulate recommendations for the training of future interpreters.

Firstly, the study mapped how students (N=39) perceived the feedback provided by their teacher. The respondents were first-year master's students who had taken the compulsory interpreting course *Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting*. Most of them preferred translation to interpreting and wanted to become translators in the future.

A qualitative–quantitative analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that most students perceived the feedback provided (by the teacher) as beneficial and were generally satisfied with it. They perceived its regular and frequent provision in oral form immediately after the activity (interpreting, speaking) as relevant. Content analysis of the responses indicated that students also needed praise and perceived it as motivating alongside the highlighting of shortcomings. They also appreciated specific hints, tips and exercises aimed at eliminating deficiencies. Only a few individuals felt a lack of more detailed feedback or harsh criticism. One student would have welcomed additional written feedback as well. There were also mentions of self-feedback in the questionnaire responses. The data collected indicated that students expect individualized feedback and constructive criticism, but at the same time they can also learn from recommendations addressed to other classmates. A friendly (not stressful) atmosphere in seminars may be more effective in helping students without interpreting aspirations to improve their interpreting skills.

One of the various solutions students mentioned for providing more comprehensive feedback is mock conferences where, even in larger groups, more detailed individualized feedback can be provided compared to regular seminars. This is because in mock conferences, students generally interpret one at a time and thus have the instructor's full attention, unlike in interpreting seminars where many students interpret at the same time. Teachers could include mock conferences in the curriculum at least twice over a semester, for example in the middle and at the end of the semester. They are also an opportunity to demonstrate individual and collective progress. The research confirmed that the benefits of feedback depend on several aspects, not only on the teacher but also on the personality of the student and the number of students in the interpreting seminars. The teacher should strive to acquaint themselves with the students in each group from the beginning of the semester in order to be able to provide effective individualized feedback based on each student's abilities and skills. Generally applied harsh criticism could demotivate more students, and insufficiently constructive criticism could slow down the interpreting progress of motivated students.

Individual semi-structured interviews with professional interpreters gave us a different perspective on feedback in interpreting. Although we divided the group into interpreters with longer (20–25 years) and shorter (6–10 years) experience, in many aspects the respondents' (N=7) views and experiences were consistent. Qualitative analysis of the interviews indicated that feedback was less frequent and more sporadic than during their university studies (professionals with shorter experience) or earlier in their career (professionals with longer experience). This may also be related to a changed societal perception of the status of the interpreter. When the professional respondents do receive feedback, it is predominantly positive; although they have also experienced negative feedback, it is

rather sporadic. For some, however, negative feedback provides a stimulus for improvement through self-reflection and analysis of potential causes of shortcomings; it indicates room for improvement, thus providing a kind of motivation. One respondent finds negative feedback demotivating, as he claims to be able to assess his own strengths and weaknesses in interpreting. According to the respondents, negative feedback can also manifest itself as the agency/client not contacting the interpreter again. This is not necessarily the result of poor interpreting skills; personal antipathies may also be the reason.

Similarly to the student group, the professionals also encounter either oral or written feedback, the latter being particularly common when interpreting for EU institutions. According to the literature, students most value feedback from the teacher (compared to peer-feedback and self-feedback), seeing them as the highest authority and expert; similarly, professional interpreters also highly value advice and recommendations from their colleagues. At the same time, meeting clients' expectations is paramount for them. A final aspect, which is only characteristic of the professional interpreters, is the distinction between justified and unjustified feedback. In particular, several interpreters with shorter experience reported that they had also encountered unjustified criticism. It is this aspect that we observe as distinct from the student group, and we consider it necessary for interpreting students to be aware of it.

In conclusion, we see a need for further interpreting studies research to compare not only the perspectives of the student and the professional, but also those of the student and the teacher. Large-scale studies could indicate potential differences regarding feedback for conference and community interpreting, or for bachelor's and master's students, as Petrášová's (2019) survey also showed. Such data are necessary for the continuous improvement of interpreter training.

Acknowledgements

This article was supported by the grant VEGA 1/0202/21 *Reflection of Cognitive and Personality Traits in the Interpreting Performance of T&I Students and Professionals in Real and Virtual Environments*.

References:

Ahrens, Barbara; Beaton-Thome, Morven and Anja Rütten. 2021. The pivot to remote online teaching on the MA in Conference Interpreting in Cologne: lessons learned from an unexpected experience. In: *Teaching Translation and Interpreting in Virtual Environments. Special issue of JoSTrans. The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 36(b): pp. 251-284. https://www.jostrans.org/issue36/art_ahrens.pdf. Accessed on: 20 April 2023.

Behr, Martina. 2015. How to back the students – Quality, assessment & feedback. In: Dörte, Andres and Behr, Martina (eds.). 2015. *To Know How to Suggest... Approaches to Teaching Conference Interpreting*. Berlin: Frank & Timme. pp. 201-217.

Djovčoš, Martin; Melicherčíková, Miroslava and Vilímek, Vítězslav. 2021. *Učebnica tlmočenia: skúsenosti a dôkazy*. Banská Bystrica: Belianum.

Djovčoš, Martin and Šveda, Pavol (eds.). 2021. *Translation and interpreting training in Slovakia*. Bratislava: Stimul.

Domínguez Araújo, Lara. 2019. Feedback in conference interpreter education: perspectives of trainers and trainees. In: *Interpreting*. 21(1): pp. 131-150.

Du, Biyu Jade. 2020. Gender and interpreting: An overview and case study of a woman interpreter's media representation. In: Von Flotow, Luise and Kamal, Hala (eds.) 2020. *The Routledge handbook of translation, feminism and gender*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 159-169.

Lee, Jieun. 2018. Feedback on Feedback: Guiding Student Interpreter Performance. In: *Translation & Interpreting*. 10(1): pp. 152-170.

Machová, Lýdia. 2016. *Hodnotiaci formulár ako nástroj tlmočnickej sebareflexie u študentov: Didaktické východiská* [The evaluation form as a tool for students' interpreting self-reflection: didactical background]. Unpublished PhD. dissertation. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského.

Melicherčíková, Miroslava. 2016. Obsahuje profil začínajúcich študentov OPT znaky hybridnosti? [Does the profile of beginner T&I students contain signs of hybridity?] In: Huťková, Anita and Djovčoš, Martin (eds.). 2016. *Preklad a tlmočenie 12: hybridita a kreolizácia v preklade a translatológii* [Translation and Interpreting 12: hybridity and creolization in translation and translation studies]. Banská Bystrica: Belianum. pp. 283-298.

Melicherčíková, Miroslava. 2017. *Kognitívne charakteristiky a tlmočnický výkon: "Súvisia spolu?"* [Cognitive characteristics and interpreting performance: "Are they related?"]. Banská Bystrica: Belianum.

Melicherčíková, Miroslava. 2021a. Dištančná výučba tlmočnických predmetov počas dvoch semestrov z pohľadu študentov [Distance interpreting courses over two semesters from students' perspectives]. In: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Philologica*. 2(2021): pp. 151-170.

Melicherčíková, Miroslava. 2021b. Tlmočnicke denníky v reálnom a virtuálnom prostredí [Interpreter diaries in real and virtual environments]. In: *Teória a prax prípravy budúcich translatológov a učiteľov anglického*

jazyka 3 [Theory and practice of training of future translators and teachers of English 3]. Banská Bystrica: A Grafik. pp. 8-18.

Petrášová, Marta. 2019. Zpětná vazba v hodinách jako prostředek výuky tlumočení [Classroom feedback as a means of teaching interpreting]. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Praha: Univerzita Karlova.

Postigo Pinazo, Encarnación. 2008. Self-Assessment in Teaching Interpreting. In: *TTR*. 21(1): pp. 173-209.

Russo, Mariachiara. 1995. Self-evaluation: the awareness of one's own difficulties as a training tool for simultaneous interpretation. In: *The Interpreters' Newsletter*. 6: pp. 75-85.

Setton, Robin and Dawrant, Andrew. 2016. *Conference Interpreting: A Trainer's Guide*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Värlander, Sara. 2008. The role of students' emotions in formal feedback situations. In: *Teaching in Higher Education*. 13(2): pp. 145-156.