Training interpreters: Old and new challenges

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Introduction

We are living in a turbulent world and the field of interpreting and consequently interpreter training is no exception as may be also evidenced by the appearance of new labels for various interpreting settings and scenarios such as *humanitarian interpreting,* or *conflict and post-conflict interpreting* (cf. Ruiz Rosenado and Todorova 2022). Some trends have been present for longer time such as the increasing use of scripted speeches, and the corresponding need to train interpreters for simultaneous with text, others have emerged relatively recently and have been triggered by events external to interpreting. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of remote meetings, and thus the need for remote interpreting, especially remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI), or the Russian aggression in Ukraine has created demand for interpreters in refugee settings with Ukrainian, which is a language not usually offered by the translation and interpreting programmes. In addition, new emerging challenges such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) are still not fully processed in the context of interpreting and interpreter training, which should be taken as an opportunity, rather than a threat. Against this changing landscape, this paper and other papers in this special issue will try to provide more or less tentative answers to the following questions: *what* to teach, *how* to teach, and *where* and *when* to teach, as well as the underlying question *why*.

What to teach?

An easy answer to the question could be *interpreting skills*. And it would be a right, yet insufficient answer in today's world. To be successful and employable, graduates from interpreting programmes will no longer do with note-taking and the technique for simultaneous interpreting. Since global surveys (e. g. Nimdzi 2023) show that RSI seems to be here to stay, despite its numerous downsides as opposed to on-site interpreting, it may also be seen as an opportunity generating more jobs. Therefore, it is logical that it should become a permanent part of the interpreting curricula, not only as an emergency option in the cases of crises such as the pandemic. The incorporation of RSI may have different forms, e.g. a standalone course, part of non-remote simultaneous classes or a crash course, but ideally graduates should have experience with interpreting through a general platform like Zoom or Webex, as well as with interpreting through an interpreting-specific RSI platform. The exposure to RSI in training is important for students to realize the specifics involved as well as the importance of the technical set-up. It should not be forgotten, however, that remote interpreting is a much broader area (cf. Pöchhacker 2022, Šveda 2021) and the focus on RSI should not overshadow other modes, such as over-the-phone interpreting, which is a frequently used option especially in some markets and in community settings and presents a lot of specifics that students should be introduced to, as demonstrated by Alarcón-García in her paper in this issue (Alarcón-García 2023).

It is not, however, only technology that impacts what we teach. Traditionally, consecutive interpreting has been taught to prepare students for interpreting 6–7-minute speeches with note-taking as this is usually the task tested in final exams and accreditation exams e.g. for the European Institutions. However, current practice shows that it is hardly the type of consecutive that is done in professional settings. In practical life, utterances often do not exceed 2 minutes (e. g. see Russel and Takeda, 2015) which is a trend that should be reflected in our teaching. Consecutive interpreting training should perhaps focus more on dialogue and bilateral interpreting be it in business or diplomatic settings, but also in the form of interviews e.g. at film festivals or press conferences. The dynamics of such consecutive interpreting brings along a number of additional challenges in addition to the *consecutive interpreting proper* such as turn-taking. In addition, consecutive interpreting of workshops or training events could be included in the curriculum to make the content of consecutive classes more real-life. Unfortunately, training materials for consecutive interpreting other than speeches are rather scarce as there is no role-play depository available with audio or video recordings, and any materials available are essentially limited to transcripts.

As mentioned above, simultaneous interpreting with text is becoming more prominent in practice in international institutions such as the EU

(Seeber 2017) or the UN (Baigorri-Jalón and Travieso-Rodríguez 2017), but also on the private market. Since it is an activity rather different from simultaneous interpreting of an impromptu speech in terms of cognitive demands, and thus the strategies that need to be applied, it should be addressed systematically in interpreting programmes, possibly with special training modules (cf. Seeber and Delgado Luchner 2020).

The question of what to teach could be extended to whom we interpret. This is also an increasingly relevant issues as especially with interpreting from English, it is less frequent to interpret English native speakers and working with *English as lingua franca* is becoming interpreters' daily job (cf. Albl-Mikasa et al 2017). This should also be reflected in the materials we use in the classroom featuring non-native accents and also speakers of the students' native language speaking English.

There are also a number of more general issues that could be included in the programmes in response to the changing situation. For example, the use of RSI has raised awareness of auditory health, or interpreting in the Ukrainian refugee crises has brough to light the importance of mental hygiene and vicarious trauma in interpreting[1]. Therefore, interpreting programmes should not ignore the issues of mental hygiene, stress management, but also ethics and ethical decision-making[2], with new ethical challenges being involved in the new trends described above. Moreover, one must not forget that trainees are not machines. They also need to be trained in "world knowledge" or "extralinguistic knowledge base" (Gile 2009). The more they know about the world, the better they visualise and remember. If handled properly, they understand their civic responsibility and, although this may sound a bit pathetic, become better human beings. Our goal thus is not to train flawless cyborgs, but highly responsible and competent professionals.

In concluding the "what to teach" segment of our introduction, it is imperative to revisit the formulation of educational goals within interpreter training. These goals should be articulated in a comprehensive and outcome-oriented manner, underscoring the practical applicability of acquired skills while providing students with a clearly defined objective. In our prior publication (Djovčoš and Šveda, 2021), we outlined the educational goal for an introductory course in consecutive interpreting as follows:

> "*The student should proficiently perform consecutive interpretation for up to three minutes of spontaneous spoken text, encompassing general vocabulary in both working languages. They should adeptly apply the fundamental*

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[1] In fact, the 2024 AIIC Training of Trainers seminar focuses on addressing vicarious trauma in interpreter training.

[2] A much-welcome contribution will be a new guide by Tipton (forthcoming).

principles of consecutive note-taking, comprehend the nuances of consecutive interpreting, and demonstrate an understanding of the strategies and methods employed to address emergent challenges" (Djovčoš and Šveda, 2021, 112).

Likewise, an analogous objective for the introductory course in simultaneous interpreting would delineate educational goals as follows:

"The student should demonstrate the ability to concurrently interpret texts of up to ten minutes in duration. They should interpret uncomplicated texts with neutral input variables as well as more terminologically demanding texts, with prior preparation, avoiding significant content or logical errors in both working languages. Furthermore, they should exhibit familiarity with the basic techniques, methods, and specificities of booth interpreting, possess collaborative skills, and demonstrate proficiency in preparing for simultaneous interpreting" (Djovčoš and Šveda, 2021, 115).

The establishment of such goals in a transparent manner, drawing inspiration from frameworks like the EMCI Core Curriculum or other recognised and respected standards, facilitates enhanced mutual recognition. This recognition operates on both practical levels, such as student exchanges, and on the academic plane, allowing for meaningful comparisons and evaluations.

How to teach

It is not only the content that needs to be adapted to the changing needs and new challenges, but also the methods we use. While the transmissionist approaches to translator training and collaborative or cooperative learning have been promoted for some time since the seminal book by Kiraly (2000), they are also relevant for interpreter training as argued by Pavlisová in this issue (Pavlisová 2023) and specifically in public service interpreting as stressed by Tisselius and Herring in their paper in this issue (Tisselius and Herring 2023). What also changes is the effective use of the classroom time. Some time ago, consecutive classes meant one student was interpreting in front of the class with the rest of the students listening and providing feedback. Today, some trainers prefer to have the rest of students interpret consecutively in the booth, which, though not real-life, makes it possible to record their interpretation and thus increases possibility of feedback, which is critical part of interpreting training, or more exactly learning as also attested by the study of Melicherčíková in this issue (Melicherčíková 2023). In fact, providing feedback is also closely related to the effective use of classroom time. Yet, we must not forget that "didactic" evaluation of interpreting recordings is far from real life quality assessment,

which is always spontaneous based on the goal of communication and often also personal affection.

Naturally, the technology also changes how we teach (see Rodríguez Melchor, Hováth and Ferguson 2020, Defranq 2023), but it may also bring new opportunities for creating training materials with the use of corpora as proposed by Balakhonov in this issue (Balakhonov 2023), or even using AI (Fantinuoli 2023), which may promote autonomous learning.

Where and when to teach

Interpreter training, which has transcended the traditional confines of classrooms and dedicated training rooms, faces diverse challenges that demand adaptive solutions. The integration of videoconferencing technology and the development of remote simultaneous interpreting training platforms (RSITPs) by companies like Televic and Contest have significantly reshaped the landscape of interpreter training. However, the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a reevaluation of training methodologies, calling for a comprehensive virtual platform that goes beyond technical aspects to fully immerse students in the intricacies of remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI).

The need to master turn-taking, microphone discipline, and advanced management of communication channels and digital resources within a virtual context remains a persistent challenge. While strides have been made in RSITPs, the quest for a holistic learning experience in the virtual realm continues, emphasizing the importance of replicating the multifaceted nature of interpreting scenarios.

Moreover, interpreter training is expanding beyond the conventional classroom, recognizing the value of practical field experiences. Traditional classroom settings are now complemented by practical consecutive training, enabling students to navigate real-world scenarios. This approach ensures that interpreters develop the essential skills needed to address the challenges presented in diverse and dynamic environments.

In the evolving landscape of interpreter training, the significance of community interpreting/public service interpreting in a dialogue mode has gained prominence. This mode requires interpreters not only to convey information but to actively engage in a dialogue, fostering a deeper connection with the communities they serve. The importance of this approach is underscored by the aftermath of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, where interpreter training took the form of crash courses and was provided in collaboration with NGOs, as discussed by Čeňková and Molchan in this issue (Čeňková and Molchan 2023). This adaptation to urgent situations showcases the dynamic nature of interpreter education, illustrating the flexibility required to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

In conclusion, the trajectory of interpreter training extends well beyond the confines of traditional classrooms, with the integration of virtual

platforms and practical field experiences playing pivotal roles. As the profession evolves, addressing the challenges of virtual environments and embracing community interpreting in dialogue mode becomes imperative. The experiences shared in the aftermath of geopolitical events underscore the need for adaptable training approaches, emphasizing the role of institutions and NGOs in shaping competent and culturally sensitive interpreters in the face of evolving global dynamics.

Survey

In order to provide more insight into "universal" training trends among the participants of the interpreting training workshop held as part of the Translation and Interpreting Forum Olomouc in November 2022 (and the authors of the papers in this special issue), we designed a questionnaire which sheds more light into current training processes. We were interested whether, and if so how, universities manage to adapt to new market and social needs for their graduates. One may assume that a rather rigid ivory towers would react slower and the innovatory force would depend mainly upon individual active trainers who would alter their existing courses based on their own real-life practice. We were mainly (but not only) interested in seeking answers to following questions:

1. What is the structure of the university program in the given country?
2. What type of the programme is offered?
3. Which specializations are covered in interpreter training programmes?
4. How has the interest among applicants evolved over the last 5 years?
5. Have universities incorporated latest trends into their curricula (mainly public service interpreting and RSI)?
6. Have there been any changes in interpreter training programmes the last 5 years?

To be able to correlate these answers with a broader institutional context, we also inquired about the country where the university resides and how many years they have been training interpreters. The survey included 11 questions. Two were open-ended and nine were closed. We received 13 answers from 10 countries (Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the USA, Turkey). This will later enable us to isolate the CEE region universities (all significantly impacted by the ruthless Russian invasion to Ukraine) and see how they managed to handle the refugee influx mainly concerning the area of public service interpreting. We will be able to compare their answers with "western" countries which have been traditionally more used to accepting the difference.

Generally, we may conclude that vast majority of the surveyed universities (69%) offer BA and MA level programs with 77% of them combining translation and interpreting training:
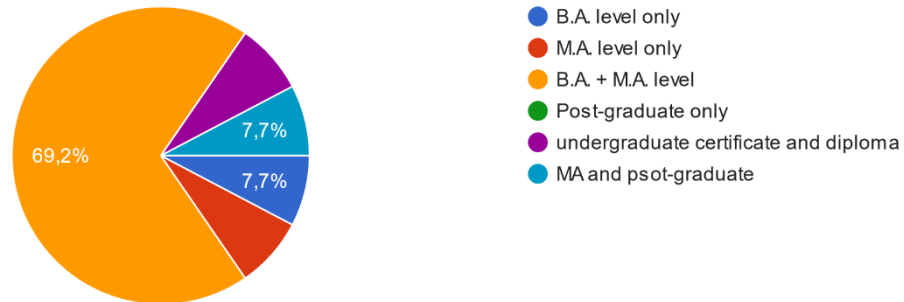
Figure 1. Type of the interpreting programme

If we look only at the CEE countries (57% of responses), the percentage is even higher[3]. The only country in the CEE region offering purely interpreting programme is Charles University in Prague, the Czech Republic. MA level only is on the other hand provided by Hungary and Austria.

Up to 77 % of universities in question have more than 20 years of experience with training translators and interpreters. Almost 54% of all participants teach conference interpreting (both simultaneous and consecutive), while only 15,4% concentrate specifically on public service interpreting.
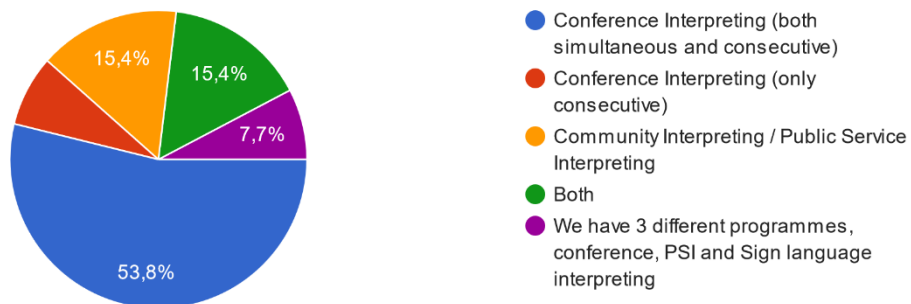

Figure 2. Specialization of the interpreting programme

Looking at special university courses of PSI, our assumption is confirmed.[4] They are taught in Sweden, Spain and the USA (and partially

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[3] For better definition of what Central Europe is and programme overview in this region please see *Changing Paradigms and Approaches in Interpreter Training Perspectives from Central Europe* (2021) edited for Routledge by Pavol Šveda.

[4] For better insight into why e.g. Slovakia had been so resistant to difference, see Šveda's and Tužinská's paper on etnopopulism (2021).

in the Czech Republic: Prague), while bilateral/dialogue interpreting is arbitrarily (not systematically) provided in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia. Systematically it is a part of programmes in Sweden, Spain and Poland. As for the crash courses of PSI, only one country provided it in response to war in Ukraine (due to non-existent systematic preparation of public service interpreters): Slovakia. Spain has provided it as well as, but as a complement to their existing courses.

The data suggest that most of the training programmes reflect the need for training students for simultaneous interpreting with text as it is either systematically or arbitrarily included in the curriculum in almost 70% of the surveyed institutions and 15% of the survey institutions have a specific course devoted to this modality. This is good news since it shows that universities adapt rather quickly to new trends in the professions. Even better news is the fact that universities have managed to adapt and react rather promptly when it comes to RSI since the results for RSI are in fact very similar to those for simultaneous interpreting with text although the RSI is a much more recent phenomenon. Almost 70% of survey participants teach RSI systematically or they arbitrarily include it into their existing courses. Only 23% do not teach it at all or teach it very occasionally during their conference interpreting classes.
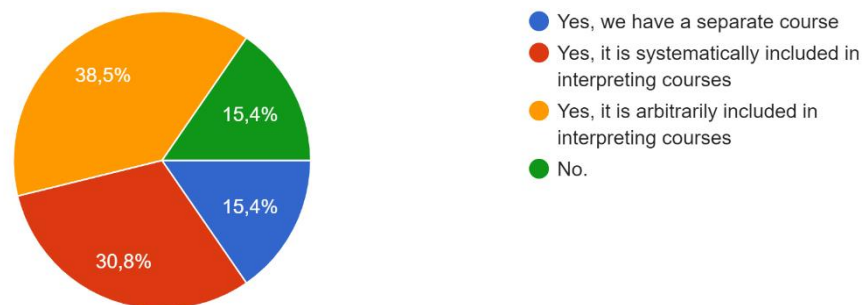

Figure 3. Simultaneous interpreting with text in the interpreting programmes
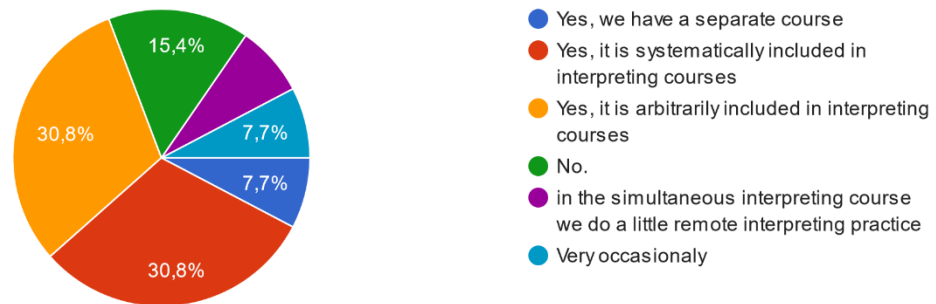
Figure 4. RSI in the interpreting programmes

When it comes to evolution of interest among applicants over the last five years, 46% declare that the number of applicants is stable while 23% say it has slightly or significantly decreased, and the same percentage reports a slight or significant increase. One university says it is too young to evaluate the overall trend.
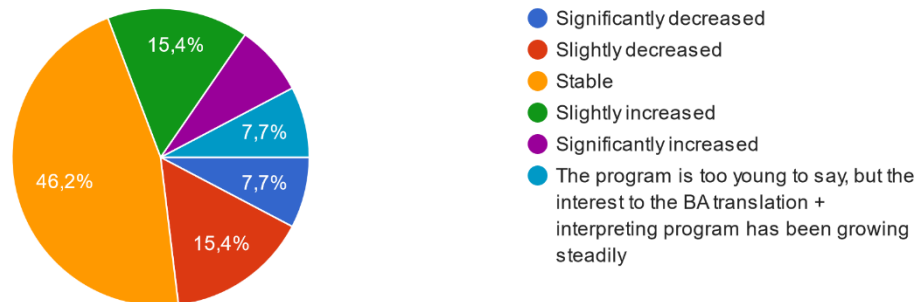

Figure 5. Interest in the interpreting programme

As for the significant changes in their interpreting programs, universities mainly report that they introduced more remote interpreting and started to concentrate more on PSI which sits well with the recent social, political and technological developments. However, they also mention the trend/pressure toward reduction of language combinations and increased demand for the Ukrainian language. One university mentions that students ask for more courses on how to handle stress, which will, in our opinion, become the significant topic of the years to come mainly as graduates take several roles in order to "survive" on the market (Djovčoš and Šveda 2023) and due to very turbulent social and political developments.

Conclusion

This brief overview has shown how several interpreter training programmes responded to the challenges presented earlier. The papers in this issue aim to contribute to an effective and reasoned response by providing data that may be used as a basis for such a change (Alarcón-García, Melicherčíková) or by sharing suggestions that may be adopted by the training institutions (Tiselius and Herring, Balakhonov, Molchan and Čeňková, and Pavlisová), and have, hopefully provided some answers and solutions to some of the open questions in post-pandemic and war-times interpreter training, and helped share some best practices. It also needs to be emphasized that papers on interpreting training are often very practical, but they help us inform the community on how to do our work better and inspire us with new ideas and insights some of us might want to catch up with.

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