Perspectives of Trainers and Trainees on Online Interpreting Courses at BME's Centre for Interpreter and Translator Training (TFK)

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Abstract

Due to Covid-19, most education institutions, including tertiary level institutions, found themselves in a predicament, particularly those that teach specific skills and rely heavily on equipment and infrastructure. Interpreter training institutions also had to make the switch to remote learning in a very short space of time and transfer methodological solutions – applied routinely in classrooms – to online platforms by learning to use a set of new technologies. The first part of the paper outlines a number of surveys conducted to explore teachers' and students' views of online education on the one hand, and it also offers examples of both national and international cooperation schemes between various training institutions. The second part of the paper provides the reader with a summary of – mainly positive – experience gained at the interpreter training courses at the Centre for Translator and Interpreter Training (TFK) of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), with a specific focus on the four modes of interpreting: sight translation, consecutive, simultaneous, and liaison.

1.   Introduction

Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, education institutions at all three levels around the world were faced with an unusually difficult situation where they were required to make the transition from on-site to online education in a matter of days, and teachers had to adapt to the new situation without adequate preparation, appropriate technical infrastructure, or relevant experience. This task was perhaps even more daunting for those intuitions that rely heavily on specific equipment and/or infrastructure and teach specific skills. Two years on, there are surveys available – conducted with the involvement of teachers and students and with either a general or specific focus – which reveal some of the difficulties that the participants of the education process had to face during this period.

2. Teacher perspectives of online education

2.1 Online teaching experience gained at the tertiary level: international insights

There have been several international surveys conducted with an attempt to explore what impacts Covid-19 may have had on the mental health of teachers and students following the transition to online education. The Times Higher Education circulated a survey in 2020 entitled Digital Teaching Survey to gauge these impacts. In the study involving 520 voluntary respondents, the majority of which came from the United States and the United Kingdom, both teachers and students reported their experience. The results showed that some 50 percent of the teachers asked had encountered problems in the initial phase of online teaching; 61% of the respondents complained about the magnitude of efforts they needed to make to be able to teach online, while 28% said they had various difficulties but having to switch to online platforms was not too taxing. 51% of the participants felt that online teaching caused mental issues at the beginning even though most respondents appreciated the support that their universities (and departments) were providing (42% reported such support).

An interesting piece of data reveals that, having surmounted the initial stumbling blocks, teachers enjoyed online classes more than on-site opportunities (possibly owing to the obligation of having to wear a mask on-site), but one of the most encouraging results of the survey was that 80% of the teachers reported to have gained some valuable insight from how their fellow colleagues transferred from on-site to online teaching.

2.2 Online teaching experience gained at the tertiary level: national perceptions

G7.hu, a Hungarian online economics news portal, published an article on 3 May 2020 in which some Hungarian university teachers reported that their workload had quadrupled with the introduction of remote learning (Hajdú & Jandó 2020). Here, during the first wave of the pandemic, most universities provided their staff with Microsoft Teams licences, and while some institutions allowed the use of Zoom, the general problem across the board was that neither the teacher nor the students had sufficient technical skills to efficiently operate these platforms. As highlighted by a senior official from the Ministry for Innovation and Technology, besides having to grapple with the shortage of ICT equipment, teachers also had to do a significant amount of extra work to readjust their materials so that they could be used in asynchronous schemes (a flexible educational framework where students access learning materials during different hours and from different locations, and therefore there is limited or no real-time interaction) (Sinóros & Szabó 2020).

Another survey carried out in October 2020 and published in early 2021 (Grazjczár, Schottner & Szűts 2021), widened the focus of their investigation and included the second wave of the pandemic. Out of the 102 trainers involved in the inquiry, 79 claimed that transition to online teaching in the second wave posed no problems to them, and only 12% reported about the necessity of putting in extra efforts on their part. Offering a detailed analysis of the data, the authors have concluded that training programmes can be made much more efficient if on-site activities are combined with online (remote) elements. In other words, they argue for the promotion of blended learning schemes, a form of education combining online and on-site learning experiences, since the feedback from trainers confirms the viability of such forms.

2.3   Interpreter trainers' experience with online teaching

International cooperation

Interpreter training is typically conducted in on-site formats across the globe. Prior to the pandemic, only very few training institutions ventured to offer online classes as a part of their interpreting curricula[1]. When Covid-19 hit, even institutions with excellent infrastructure (i.e. state-of-the art equipment for simultaneous interpreting) found themselves in the same quandary, forced to hold classes exclusively on online platforms with which they had had very limited experience. Realising the magnitude of the problem, training institutions joined forces almost immediately: they created a social media platform in March 2020, a private Facebook group bearing the expressive title *Interpreting trainers blundering through online teaching in a pandemic* and operating under the guidance of the renowned professional, Sophie Llewellyn Smith. Starting off with a small number of participants, the group soon grew to 1,200 members who exchanged ideas, discussed different possibilities, and provided invaluable assistance to one another via a range of online events (conferences, webinars, discussion fora) during the difficult times of the first wave. While most institutions used the platforms offered by Teams or Zoom, KUDO provided extra support to members of the EMCI consortium by offering their online platform, initially free of charge, and later by offering various package deals.

Trainer cooperation at the European level

Training institutions acting in cooperation with the interpreting services of the European Union, with SCIC[2] in particular, were also offered

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[1] One such notable exception is the Glendon College at University of York where they run a two-year blended programme; the first year is conducted exclusively in the form of online classes and only in the second year do they switch to on-site education.
[2] SCIC: Directorate-General for Interpretation at the European Commission.

considerable support that came in various forms. KCI[3], the knowledge centre set up a few months prior to the pandemic, proved immensely valuable as it offered another discussion forum for trainers dealing with the same issues. SCIC had already relied on remote training schemes by holding virtual classes for training institutions earlier, but during the pandemic they provided extra help by allowing their staff interpreters, who could not attend live sessions and therefore had excess capacities, to give feedback to students of conference interpreting. On the SCIC's website, KCI created a separate virtual "space" and launched smaller, topical groups where colleagues could share online tools and training resources.

Knowledge exchange in the national context

As for the Hungarian professionals involved in interpreter and translator training, universities also organised various events to exchange ideas about their experience with online training. At the MANYE[4] conference organised by the University of Miskolc in January 2021, an event referred to as *Trainer-Trainer Talks* (Szabó 2020c, 19) was held. In this discussion forum – facilitated annually by BME TFK – colleagues from various training institutions reported how they organised online interpreting exams.

It was the University of ELTE that first summarised their experience in a book format; in a volume entitled *Distance education in translator and interpreter training* (Seresi, Eszenyi & Robin, eds) published in March 2021, two of the editors, Seresi and Eszenyi, described their efforts to organise interpreting classes on online platforms. Furthermore, ELTE devoted its annual conference to this issue and granted an opportunity for speakers from other universities where the authors of this paper reported on their experience at BME.

3.   Student perspectives of online education

The forced transition to online education has posed new and unexpected challenges not only for the teaching community but also for university students. They have had to show flexibility and resilience to be able to adapt to the gradually evolving and continuously changing new digital learning environment, which, as referred to above, also caused a great deal of headache for their trainers.

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[3] KCI: Knowledge Centre on Interpretation, "the single go-to space to manage and exchange knowledge, create synergies and disseminate best practices on conference interpreting".
[4] MANYE: the acronym for the Hungarian Association of Applied Linguists and Language Teachers.

3.1 Students' experience gained on online teaching: international surveys

The European Students' Union (ESU) initiated an online survey in June 2020 to gain insight on students' views on online education. The survey was coordinated by the University of Zadar and involved higher education institutions in 41 European countries. The aggregated results of the survey show that students themselves were also rather divided in their assessment of online education and seemed to favour 'traditional' on-site education practices in many aspects (ESU 2020). For example, 57% of respondents preferred to attend real-time online lectures and seminars because it was of primary importance for them to have personal, face-to-face interaction with the academic staff. This attitude was also reflected in the fact that most of them preferred to have supervision sessions via video-calls (as opposed to sending emails, for example). 50% of students felt that their study load increased with the introduction of online education, and although the requirement and assessment system was judged to be relatively consistent by the end of the first 'Covid-stricken' semester, many students complained about the lack of regular and detailed feedback. Students were mostly satisfied with the supportive attitude of lecturers but had a number of critical remarks when it came to the organization of their seminars and practical classes on various platforms used for online education (ESU 2020).

Evidently, the transition was not smooth and easy for university students either, but in retrospect it can be concluded that the community of students was much more open-minded – and in many respects better prepared – for this enforced 'digital shift' than the academic staff. 80% of students can confidently use a wide range of educational platforms (Moodle, Canvas, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.), and the vast majority (99.5%) had the necessary digital equipment. The only prevalent problem to be solved was reliable access to stable internet connection (for 59% of students). Nevertheless, online education had its downside for students, too: many of them referred to an ever-increasing lack of motivation, decline in their social life, as well as apparent negative effects on their mental health, especially during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 (ESU 2020).

3.2 Students' perception of online education: national surveys in Hungary

Several comprehensive surveys have been conducted among Hungarian students on the perception of online teaching introduced in higher education in the wake of the Covid pandemic. The *Distance Learning Research Study* of the Political Science Research Workshop at the University of ELTE was the first survey to sum up students' reflections in May 2020 (ELTE PM 2020). The survey involved more than 2,000 students from 11 Hungarian universities, and the respective results show that students were relatively satisfied with the transition to and implementation of online

education in the first months of the pandemic (on average, respondents assigned 4 points to this question out of a maximum of 7). They had similar views on the access to learning materials and resources (with an average of 4.4 points) and the extent to which the requirements were realistic and attainable (4.3 points). During this period, students detected the greatest shortcomings in the field of collaboration and co-ordination. They complained about not having been involved in the design of the refurbished requirement and assessment system (on average 2.8 points) and sensed a lack of co-ordination among trainers (scoring 3.2 points) (ELTE PM 2020). In this initial period, 43% of students had the overall impression that online education was not fully capable of replacing 'traditional' on-site training practices.

The *Distance Learning Report* of the National Union of Students in Hungary (HÖOK) provides a somewhat more comprehensive and nuanced overview of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in higher education, which may be attributed to the fact that this survey was conducted in two phases, first in May 2020 and repeatedly in August 2020. It involved 28 universities and approximately 17,600 students (HÖOK 2020). The comparative analysis of the results of the two-phase survey shows that from the students' perspective, there was a significant increase in the proportion of university courses that could be fully covered in a digital learning environment instead of on-site. While in April 2020 only 42% of the on-site classes were said to be replaceable and compensated for by online teaching methods, by the end of August, the average demand increased to 70%. In light of the aggregated results, the National Union of Students drafted innovative proposals for the future of higher education, including a decrease in the number of on-site classes and contact hours, improvement of the digital competence of both students and teachers (by introducing compulsory IT training courses) as well as the establishment of a unified institutional e-learning structure in Hungarian higher education institutions (HÖOK 2020).

3.3   Interpreter trainees' experience with online teaching

Distance learning is not a new phenomenon in translator training, an increasing number of training institutions both in Hungary and abroad offer postgraduate courses in translation studies in the form of blended or distance learning. In contrast, interpreter training is provided predominantly on-site at real-time courses in the vast majority of training institutions, primarily due to the interactive nature of interpreting. Thus, it is not surprising that while several studies and student satisfaction surveys focused on the effectiveness of distance learning practices among translation trainees have been conducted (Petz 2020; Almahasees & Qassem 2021), no comprehensive international or Hungarian survey on students' perception of online interpreter training has been available so far. This may also be attributed to the fact that at most European universities, interpreter training takes place in relatively small groups due to the high

admission requirements and the necessary technical equipment, which makes it rather difficult to conduct a truly representative survey. An exciting starting point for such a survey could be Robertson's research, which summarized the experience of participants with a blended training course for interpreting trainers (Robertson 2015).

For the time being, only small-sample, targeted surveys have been conducted among Hungarian interpreting trainees on the perception of online interpreter training during the pandemic. Seresi and Robin referred to certain aspects of online interpreting classes from the trainees' point of view (Seresi, Eszenyi & Robin eds.). Seresi gave an overview of students' feedback on the effectiveness of asynchronous consecutive interpreting classes (Seresi 2021), while Robin compiled a collection of trainees' subjective impressions about the efficacy of online training at the Department of Translation and Interpreting at ELTE. Robin's paper revealed that after the initial shock, students had gradually become aware of the benefits of online education and managed to overcome the emerging methodological and technical difficulties with self-discipline, a bit of humour, and conscious autonomous learning (Robin 2021).

Pros and cons of online interpreter training from the trainees' perspective

In the 2020/2021 academic year, interpreter graduates gained extensive experience in the field of remote interpreting as they were allowed to attend on-site interpreting classes for a couple of months, before the university premises were closed due to lockdown measures. Thus, a significant part of their training ran via various digital platforms, Zoom in particular. After having attended six months of online interpreting courses, they were asked about their experiences and the advantages and disadvantages of being trained online in March 2021. Table 1 shows a compilation of trainees' responses.

Advantages of online interpreter training	Disadvantages of online interpreter training
• *"you can attend classes practically from anywhere, there are no geographical limitations, no need to travel"* • *"it is comfortable, I can study at home"* • *"this way of learning is time-saving, I create my own flexible schedule"* • *"our digital competence is improving"* • *"we can practice interpreting in several languages at the same*	• *"sometimes it is harder to stay focused at home due to disturbing circumstances"* • *"we cannot meet in person, and tend to miss our peers"* • *"less lifelike context"* • *"more tiring, other types of stressful situations"* • *"less experience with the use of interpreting equipment, less practice in the booths"* • *"online learning requires infrastructure, adequate IT*

time in multilingual mock conferences" • "the speaker's face and the participants' reactions are clearly visible" • "we have more individual assignments, and the option of interpreting the same speech simultaneously in parallel breakout rooms" • "less stress" • "it prepares us for remote interpreting, and thus, reflects real-life market requirements"	background (e.g. stable internet connection etc.), technical problems may occur" • "personal interaction is missing, the lack of body language and gestures may deteriorate the quality of interpreting" • "Zoom fatigue"

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of online interpreter training (BME, 2021)

The responses show that online classes are more convenient and less time-consuming for trainees as they do not have to travel to the university premises, and they also feel less stressed while studying in their homes. They also welcomed the opportunity to practice more due to the parallel workflow in breakout rooms, which is an option available in various online platforms. Some trainees also pointed out that online interpreting classes would be useful for their future career since remote interpreting was likely to become more and more prevalent. Nevertheless, learning from home has a number of disadvantages, including distracting circumstances which make it more difficult to stay focused. Although the interpreter module in the Zoom Webinar function makes it possible to simulate a simultaneous interpreting setting, trainees undoubtedly had little opportunity to sit in a booth and practice using the interpreting equipment. In addition, some respondents complained about technical problems occurring during classes and most of them really missed the personal interaction with their peers and trainers.

From the trainees' feedback it can be concluded that similarly to other aspects of the Covid-driven digital transition, the coin has two sides as far as the assessment of online interpreter training is concerned. Despite the difficulties, significant progress has been made in many areas within the framework of online education, and this new approach may bring a vast array of innovative ideas into interpreter training practices.

## 4.	Experience gathered at the interpreting courses offered by *BME's Centre for Interpreter and Translator Training* (TFK)

Having provided a brief overview of trainer and trainee opinions related to online teaching, as well as some initiatives and efforts made between colleagues to cooperate and exchange knowledge, the next section

will focus on the processes that TFK underwent during this period in an attempt to adopt and implement crises management strategies that interpreter trainers at TFK thought would most effectively ensure the high-standard training we had been providing prior to the pandemic.

4.1 TFK trainers' concerted effort for a smooth transition to online training

In March 2020, during the first wave of Covid-19, the main challenge was to find the most suitable virtual platform best serving the needs of interpreter trainers. Online meetings were held with both in-house and external trainers and the sessions were recorded on an online platform (Google Drive) made accessible to all. The community tested different platforms, individually or in pairs, a process which resulted in a number of shorter or longer descriptions and reports about platforms in terms of their feasibility and efficiency for teaching interpreting (e.g. Skype, Jitsi, In-Train, Teams, Zoom, Interprefy, InterpreterQ, Adobe Connect, Discord, GoReact, etc.). A virtual visit was organised to Simy, a Hungarian application, developed to provide online interpreting services with focus on business settings. Besides testing the platform, feedback was returned to Simy operators on how to improve the system so that it not only serves interpreters and clients but is also suitable for educational purposes. Trainers also compiled thematic folders on the shared interface to collect methodological ideas on the four interpreting modes taught at TFK (sight translation, consecutive, simultaneous and liaison), which proved immensely helpful to trainers and also facilitated our ongoing harmonisation efforts in the six languages offered at our centre.

At TFK, the four modes of interpreting, specified above, are taught at various phases of the programme each lasting for two or four semesters (except for sight translation, which used to feature as a separate subject for conference interpreters but have been merged under simultaneous as a speech-to-text add-on feature, and is also used in liaison classes as a supplementary component). In the section below, the paper will detail our experiences gathered during online teaching with these four modes of interpreting and will highlight the benefits and mention a few potential drawbacks. It will offer some insights about the practice developed for online classes in all the four modes and will contemplate some of the difficulties that our community faced, the opportunities that digitals tools presented via the virtual platform, as well as some new tasks that were worked out to reap the benefits of the new setting.

4.2 Trainers' experience with teaching sight translation online

Numerous papers have been written on why and upon which professional considerations sight translation should be incorporated in interpreter training programmes (Valentinyi 2003; Viaggio 1995; Weber

1990). It often happens in real-life interpreting assignments that interpreters are asked to translate written source texts at first sight, which requires special skills and targeted practice. In addition, sight translation is also suitable for developing skills necessary for other modes of interpreting. It is quite often used, for example, as a preparatory exercise for simultaneous interpreting, or as a complementary task to improve analytical and segmentation skills in consecutive interpreting classes (G. Láng 2002). In sight translation, trainees work with written source texts, consequently, factors like the presentation style or the delivery of the speaker do not influence the quality of sight translation. The same applies for non-verbal features or external input variables that are usually of major importance in other modes of interpreting (Mead 2015).

Practical experience in teaching sight translation shows that the use of digital tools provides various opportunities:

- The entire source text (or certain segments of it) may easily be shared either with the whole group simultaneously, or only with one student depending on the type of task to be performed.
- The morphosyntactic analysis of the source text can be carried out in a very spectacular way by using visual aids on the shared screen (by highlighting, using drawing tools or by applying different colours to certain words or parts of sentences etc.). Trainees can collectively work on documents, spreadsheets and files shared in cloud-based OneDrive folders and may easily perform tasks like keyword sampling, term extraction, or mapping the logical structure of a text.
- The different text types may be illustrated and analysed comparatively by putting parallel texts next to each other and listing the characteristic features of each text type in both languages.
- The sight translation performance can be recorded live on online platforms and replayed for analysis and evaluation later on.
- The breakout room function can also be used for sight translation purposes, for example for text analysis in smaller groups or parallel back translation exercises. This function allows for more practice and more personalized feedback.
- The chat function can also be used for peer evaluation and for giving instant feedback on smart solutions and the necessary transfer operations in translation, as well as to highlight potential mistakes.
- The great advantage of real-time (synchronous) classes is that the necessary resources (background materials, glossaries, parallel texts etc.) can easily be found and shared by trainees and trainers alike.

Online education provides opportunity to introduce new types of tasks previously not included in the sight translation training toolset:

- Gamification and playful tasks can be incorporated in the thematic framework of sight translation classes. For example, the translation of online quiz questions can be a good warm-up exercise to activate trainees' vocabulary in a given topic.

- Gap-filling exercises and anticipation tasks may serve as complementary or preparatory exercises for actual sight translation tasks.
- Both segmentation and anticipation skills can be improved by sight translating online videos with subtitles.
- Online sight translation tasks can easily be linked to other modes of interpreting, for example, infographics or handouts related to a given topic may be taken as a starting point for impromptu speeches meant for practicing consecutive interpreting.

All in all, we can conclude that in the case of sight translation, online synchronous classes were sometimes even more effective than traditional on-site lessons, which may be attributed to the toolset provided by the digital learning environment. Obviously, group dynamics in the classes changed and there were a few technical difficulties, but these were compensated for by the more diverse methodological options.

4.3 Trainers' experience with teaching consecutive interpreting online

Although consecutive interpreting assignments are becoming scarcer in the language mediation market, there are several settings and "situations where consecutive survives and will continue to survive" (Gillies 2019, 5). One case in point is the entrance and final examinations (graduation tests), as well as accreditation tests where a long consecutive interpretation is a mandatory task to demonstrate interpreting skills both from candidates' best foreign (B) language into their mother tongue (A) and vice versa (Lee 2008, Szabó 2020b). Consecutive is an equally important mode in community, court, medical and liaison settings, not to mention the fact that the basic strategies that trainees acquire when studying consecutive will prove immensely useful when they try their hands at other modes (Setton & Dawrant 2016).

After the first few weeks of experimenting with various platforms, TFK trainers agreed that Zoom was the most suitable platform for their purposes, a finding that coincided with that of the colleagues at other training institutions (Ahrens et al 2021). Teaching consecutive remotely, via virtual platforms, was not a novel idea; it had been raised by professionals earlier (Clifford 2018; Ko & Chen 2011), and there are a number of institutions that had already included real-time but remote classes to practice consecutive interpreting as part of their blended learning scheme (Gorjanc et al 2016).

The Zoom platform proved highly suitable for teaching the consecutive mode during the pandemic, and a large number of positive factors can be listed (some of which can also be used in other interpreting modes):

- At a virtual class, the incoming text (ST) is easier to hear, (the volume and pitch can be adjusted) and the video is easier to see for all the participants.
- The trainer can share the video by pushing the share button, but may also send the video link via chat, and the trainees can open it for themselves.
- Trainees' interpreting performance is easier to record and can be forwarded to other platforms for peer review (Moodle, Canvas or GoReact where formative assessment techniques such as peer assessment can be applied on the basis of videos that can be uploaded (and in GoReact, also timecoded) (see more details in Szabó 2020a: 97).
- Teaching note-taking by involving trainer demonstration is easier either by the Whiteboard function readily available in Zoom, but trainers may also connect their appliances (tablet, iPAD, or any graphic device developed for this purpose) and, at the touch of a button, all the trainees can see the notes taken on the spot.
- Breakout rooms provide superb opportunities for individual (concurrent) renditions as well as pair or group work (one trainee interprets another or others act as assessors based on predefined observation criteria).
- The chat function can be used to share ideas, links, and organise impromptu mini contests where it is easy to check who gave the fastest answer.
- From trainers' and trainees' digital devices (e.g. PC, laptop, tablet, telephone) virtual education platforms such as Moodle or Canvas can be accessed directly so that materials can be prepared beforehand, and presentations and/or renditions recorded in the classroom can be immediately uploaded into these platforms.
- Trainees can mute themselves and interpret concurrently; they can record themselves and upload their recordings into Moodle or Canvas along with their notes, and the trainer can assess their renditions and notes at a later stage, providing feedback either in writing, or in speech, recording their audio feedback on a device, and send it to the trainee or upload it into the given learning platform.

Teaching the consecutive mode on online platforms admittedly has a few drawbacks as well which also deserve to be highlighted. The number of such potential issues, however, is relatively small in comparison to the benefits, and more or less relate to presentation skills and techniques.

- One such disadvantage stems from the fact that trainers do not see the trainees properly, only the upper part of the body, and therefore cannot advise them on kinesics issues such as poor posture, excessive movements, involuntary, repetitive movements produced below the waistline, and it is also difficult to notice and advise them on various issues with prosody, tone, intonation, pitch or volume (Ko 2006; Ko & Chen 2011) to name but a few. However, these disadvantages can also be turned into advantages, as presentation problems can be purposely

made less of an issue, which allows more focus to be put on content and fidelity, given that the instructor is not distracted by elements that indicate a presentation deficit.

- Another problem may be that trainees are not able to practise interpreting in a standing position, where – in addition to general presentation techniques – handling a notepad, for example, can be a challenge.
- Owing to the opportunity presented for trainees' individual (concurrent) interpreting, trainers may listen to only one trainee at a time (as they would in an on-site setting), but the other trainees, interpreting at home with their device muted, may find themselves in a void with no audience, a wholly inauthentic context.
- Keeping eye-contact may also prove problematic: trainers can check how often trainees look up from their notes when presenting but they cannot judge whether trainees would attempt to look at the whole audience as the setting makes it nearly impossible to address the whole audience in an online setting.

Ahrens et al (2021, 256) also highlight that a trainer assessment given on the spot in conventional on-site classes cannot be properly done with online teaching, or not to the extent that would be preferable. The trainers at TFK had the same experience: they could not assess all the presentations that were made in parallel, so they did their best to give feedback to as many trainees as possible –to compensate for the online mode – that, ultimately, increased their workload tremendously. And although the principle of immediacy may have been violated with this delayed assessment, providing individual, tailor-made feedback to more than one trainee did in fact increase trainers' efficiency on the one hand, and it also saved the trainees from having to be confronted with their mistakes in front of the group, on the other hand. TFK's trainers sometime resorted to giving an overall group feedback on the basis of recurring issues and therefore saved time but offered valuable information to everyone in the group. These recorded interpreting assignments and the corresponding audio feedback files offer another plus to trainees: they can revisit their attempts, compare them along a given timeline, and can draw conclusion about certain areas and assess their line of development (i.e. ipsative assessment). Finally, the large number of trainee renditions recorded on the same speech and stored on a single platform provide trainers with excellent research material; another key factor when assembling the potential gains of online interpreter training.

4.4 Trainers' experience with teaching simultaneous interpreting online

Few training institutions offer courses in simultaneous interpreting in Hungary, which is mainly due to the fact that this mode of interpreting requires gradually acquired coping strategies and high-level language skills

from trainees, as well as special technical equipment on the part of universities. In the TFK's curriculum, simultaneous interpreting classes begin in the second half of the interpreter training programmes, in line with the generally accepted professional recommendations (Setton & Dawrant 2016). These advanced courses are based on the trainees' previously acquired knowledge and interpreting skills and classes are held in small groups for the sake of efficiency. Compared to other modes of interpreting, there are several additional sources of difficulties that simultaneous interpreters have to face and cope with, since in this type of interpreting listening, comprehension, transfer and reproduction are all performed simultaneously, that is with no editing time or delay. Analysis and segmentation are carried out 'on the go', and the time lag between the speaker and the interpreter's rendering (*décalage*) should be adjusted to the speakers' pace and the difficulty of the content. No wonder that Daniel Gile described simultaneous interpreting in his often-cited Effort Model with the most complex formula of all modes of interpreting (Gile 1995/2009).

It was undoubtedly the teaching of simultaneous interpreting that has caused the most headaches for interpreter trainers worldwide, as this mode of interpreting seemed almost impossible to teach online. This was certainly the most common topic at 'crisis management' sessions and knowledge-sharing forums of interpreter trainers. It has been one of the fundamental principles of teaching simultaneous interpreting that the interpreter should be in the same room with the speaker, since the physical distance may deteriorate the quality of interpreting to a large extent (Mead 2015). However, the advancement of various video conferencing platforms and the worldwide spread of remote interpreting seem to be overwriting this axiom. Nevertheless, in the initial phase of the Covid-driven transition to online education, no digital platforms were widely available for teaching simultaneous interpreting. Thus, trainers teaching this mode of interpreting had to find ways to simulate the interpreting booth, the collaboration of interpreters within the booth, as well as the parallel dual-track recording of the trainees' interpreting performance. Experience shows that this venture was not as ill-fated as it may have seemed at first glance, and the digital learning environment has brought about unexpected advantages and opportunities compensating for the difficulties and challenges in this field.

Trainers have discovered the potentials of online video conferencing platforms and the advantages of the combined use of these platforms. The TFK trainer community finally opted for the simultaneous interpreting module of Zoom's Webinar function, while other universities of the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI) network used the KUDO multilingual web conferencing platform in interpreting classes. Several other innovative solutions were referred to in the discussion forums of interpreter trainers, including the combined use of Discord and Zoom, Watch2Gether and Microsoft Teams (Mercangöz, 2020).

- Various autonomous learning tools were used to make dual-track audio recordings of the trainees' interpreting performance (My Speech Repository, AudaCity, InterpreterQ).

- Trainees were able to work simultaneously in breakout rooms during online classes, and they also gained a certain level of experience with regard to co-operation within the interpreting booth.
- A relatively high number of high-quality audio recordings were made which lend themselves to comparative analysis and research purposes, thus, provide a valuable resource for developing course materials.
- New methods of assessment and giving feedback were applied, including simultaneous in-class peer evaluation in the chat box, detailed feedback about trainees' recorded performance via the interactive GoReact platform, as well as shared assessment sheets in OneDrive folders at the final exam.
- The teaching of simultaneous interpreting involved more autonomous learning elements than before, trainees were regularly instructed to prepare for certain assignments on their own or in pairs, they often had to compile thematic glossaries, and analyse their own recordings.
- Trainees gained considerable practical experience in remote interpreting, which will certainly be a great plus in their future professional career.

Similarly to the other modes of interpreting, the digital learning environment and the use of technology provided a number of new methodological opportunities in the case of simultaneous interpreting, as well:

- The online multilingual mock conferences were interactive, fast-paced and truly efficient due to the built-in interpreting module and the breakout room option in Zoom. Trainees worked simultaneously in six languages and practiced both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting in parallel breakout rooms.
- Trainees were able to gain some experience in booth collaboration by using the chat box in breakout rooms to assist their interpreting boothmates. In addition, various online resources were available, making information mining and background research very effective.
- Initially, practicing relay interpreting, that is interpreting from one language to another through a third language, was rather difficult to arrange. The only option for this exercise seemed to have trainees interpret in dummy booths (i.e. in muted mode, recording their own performance). However, the extended use of upgraded video conferencing platforms with built-in interpreting modules proved to be fit for this purpose as well, since trainees were able to use the live interpreting of one of their peers (of a previously recorded speech) as a kind of 'pivot' for simultaneous interpreting.

The last few semesters have shown that, although teaching simultaneous interpreting online has a number of disadvantages and drawbacks (e.g. the lack of live booth practice, physical distance from the speaker etc.), this loss is compensated for to a certain extent by new digital and methodological possibilities. We may conclude that depending on the

trainees' attitude, significant progress can be achieved in this mode of interpreting, partly due to consciously planned and systematically applied autonomous learning practices.

4.5 Trainers' experience with teaching liaison interpreting online

Liaison or, in other words, bilateral interpreting (Gentile et al 1996) seldom features on the palette of interpreter training institutions; only rarely is this mode used at entrance examinations or graduation tests. At TFK, the liaison mode has recently been introduced at aptitude test since, owing to the code-switching between source and target language, assessors may get a relatively realistic picture about the candidate's linguistic and mediation skills in both directions. When teaching liaison, our trainers attempt to cover this mode in various settings (e.g. court, community, corporate, business, healthcare, etc.) in a structured way, proceeding gradually with increasingly difficult texts and longer passages. In semester 1 and 2, trainees need to practice liaison in everyday situations and work with shorter passages, but as the final exams approach, they are required to interpret longer sections, especially in the A-B direction. As this mode does not typically feature in the curricula of most training institutions, there is little ground for comparison, however, as liaison also involves note-taking, and is similar in many respects to consecutive, the majority of the above findings concerning the benefits and drawbacks of teaching of consecutive online may apply here as well.

In the followings, only aspects different from the ones already described above will be highlighted.

- When practising the liaison mode, it is essential that a nearly authentic context is provided. Authentic speakers are much easier to involve in a class as geographical distances are no stumbling blocks in online settings.
- We can facilitate better cooperation between the various languages taught at the institution; trainees with other B languages can be invited and involved (as native speakers of Hungarian) which will make the situation authentic.
- Although the trainees' role as mediators cannot be fully performed (i.e. they cannot experience real-life proximity or test how to cope with issues stemming from such settings) the use of technology can be helpful here: for instance, trainees can switch from gallery to individual speaker mode and observe the speakers from the front (a rare treat in real-life bilateral settings but a valid option in a remote interpreting mode).
- Trainers need to be on their guard to call the trainees' attention to issues such as turn-taking which can be easily solved in on-site contexts with non-verbal communication but is difficult to manage in online settings.

By trying their hand at bilateral mediation in various semi-authentic situations (general, healthcare, court, business, corporate, etc.) trainees will be equipped with a complex set of competences, which provide justification for our trainers' conviction that liaison interpreting is, or should be, a key element in interpreter training.

5. Conclusions

The paper set out to introduce the findings of a few surveys conducted in national and international contexts among teachers and students about the success of online education during the first two waves of Covid-19. Examples were given for collaborative attempts to overcome the problems encountered in international, European and national contexts in relation to online interpreter training.

In addition to methodological considerations, the teaching of interpreting is also determined by the ongoing developments of the linguistic mediation market: the rapid spread of remote interpreting assignments requires training institutions to prepare students for a future where a lot of interpreting assignments are expected to shift from on-site settings to online platforms. The paper also referred to the fact that, after some initial uncertainty, international training institutions as well as Hungarian universities had made a successful technological and methodological transition to online learning. This study offers a summary of (mostly positive) experiences obtained during the online teaching of four major interpreting modes (sight translation, consecutive, simultaneous and liaison) at interpreter training programmes offered at the BME Centre for Interpreting and Translation Studies (TFK).

As illustrated by the long list of positive impacts, it will be worth retaining many good practices identified in this paper, all the more so as remote interpreting is not something for the distant future but the necessary and pragmatic present. Based on the experiences collected during the period with online teaching, trainers at TFK believe that a combination of online and on-site components might be the best way forward; in other words, blended learning forms may be most efficient in the field of interpreter training as well.

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