Remote interpreting in Spain after the irruption of COVID-19: A mapping exercise

Interpretación remota en España tras la irrupción de la pandemia de COVID-19. Un ejercicio de mapeo

RAQUEL LÁZARO GUTIÉRREZ
raquel.lazaro@uah.es
Universidad de Alcalá

ALMUDENA NEVADO LLOPIS
anevado@usj.es
Universidad San Jorge

Abstract: Remote interpreting, particularly telephone interpreting, was implemented in Spain less than 20 years ago and, since then, it has become increasingly common. Its use has even increased during the last months, due to COVID-19 circumstances and the subsequent growth of telecommuting. This paper aims at mapping remote interpreting services in Spain. With that purpose, structured qualitative interviews were conducted with representatives of the six main Spanish companies offering these services. The results show a diffusion of telephone interpreting across the country and an incipient presence of video-link interpreting. Nevertheless, more attention to quality performance and working conditions should be paid.

Keywords: Telephone interpreting, Video-link interpreting, Mapping, Qualitative interviews, Spain

Resumen: La interpretación remota, en particular, la interpretación telefónica, se implementó en España hace menos de 20 años y, desde entonces, su uso se ha vuelto cada vez más habitual, llegando incluso a incrementarse en los últimos meses, debido a las circunstancias derivadas de la COVID-19 y el consecuente aumento del teletrabajo. El propósito de este artículo consiste en realizar un mapeo de los servicios de interpretación remota en España. Para ello, se llevaron a cabo entrevistas cualitativas estructuradas con representantes de las seis empresas principales que ofrecen estos servicios. Los resultados muestran una difusión de la interpretación telefónica en todo el país y una presencia incipiente de la interpretación por videoconferencia. No obstante, se debería prestar mayor atención a la calidad de la interpretación y a las condiciones laborales de los intérpretes.

Palabras clave: Interpretación telefónica, Interpretación por videoconferencia, Mapeo, Entrevistas cualitativas, España

INTRODUCTION

Remote interpreting can take different shapes and configurations. Following Braun and Taylor's (2011) terminology, it implies that the primary participants in a conversation, who are together at one site, connect with an interpreter who is in another location through a video or audio link. Ruiz Mezcua (2018, p. 10) mentions that «[r]emote interpretation happens when the interpreter is not in the same room with the rest of the participants. This means that the interpreter needs a piece of equipment or tool to be connected to the speakers». When the main participants are not at the same site and connect to one another through a three-way telephone or video call, the method of interpreting can be termed, following Braun and Taylor (2011, p. 352) teleconference interpreting.

Traditionally, remote interpreting «takes place in consecutive mode or dialogue mode, which means that the interpreter waits until the speaker finishes his/her statement before rendering the interpretation into the target language» (Ruiz Mezcua, 2018, p.10). However, in the last years and very prominently after the outbreak of COVID-19, remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI) is becoming increasingly popular (Jiménez Serrano, 2020; Perramon, 2020).

The first reference to remote interpreting is said to be that of Paneth (1957), who characterized this modality as a «very neat and obvious use of interpreters» (Paneth, 1957 [2000], p. 39, quoted by Braun, 2015, p. 353) and foretold its further development. And the first service for remote (telephone) interpreting was set up in Australia by Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), now dependent from the Australian Government, in 1947 (Cabrera Méndez, 2016). Around 50 years later, telephone interpretation would reach the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Phelan, 2001). In Spain, telephone interpreting was firstly offered in 2004, when Dualia Teletraducciones introduced this system in different public institutions. Other initiatives and companies, such as Interpret Solutions, joined later, and innovative changes have occurred in recent years thanks to the spread of smartphones, as it is the case of the Voze mobile application developed by Migralingua Voze (Jaime Pérez, 2015).

Remote interpreters, particularly those working over the phone (in contrast with those who connect through video-link) lack the majority of the contextual information of the interaction, including the individuals and elements that are present, their roles, their body language, their movements,

etc. The lack of visual context in telephone interpreting has actually been pinpointed by researchers and practitioners as one of the most salient difficulties of this modality of interpretation and has been targeted as a research objective, sometimes described as a disadvantage, but also as an advantage (Gracia-García, 2002; Heh & Qian, 1997; Phelan, 2001). For instance, Lázaro Gutiérrez and Cabrera Méndez (2019) described the most common challenges that a telephone interpreter faces in the healthcare setting, most of which are related to the difficulty of selecting the right context (as defined by Verschueren, 2008) because of an absence of key information about participants or physical setting due to a lack of visual cues. This lack of visual context is one of the main reasons that prompt the development of video-link interpreting. Although technically more complex, videoconference interpreting seems to help overcome one of the main difficulties of telephone interpreting and is being implemented in some public service settings, such as courts and, still very humbly, healthcare.

On another subject, although technological improvements allow for more frequent and better communication, sound quality can never stop being a concern for telephone interpreters. Several researchers have focused on telephone interpreting technological needs and have emphasized the importance of the sound quality of the phone and the connectivity of the line (Kelly, 2008; Lee, 2007), particularly in later times when the use of mobile phones has increased. Mobile phones hands free systems are very popular amongst clients (definitely preferred to passing the handset back and forth), but have proved to provoke important difficulties for interpreters, as their use impacts very seriously on sound quality and, consequently, on the interpreters' performance (Kelly, 2008; Rosenberg, 2004). Similarly, videoconference interpreting poses analogous difficulties related to the quality of image and the position of cameras, which, if not used properly, might not register the necessary visual information.

Additionally, working conditions for remote interpreters have been widely discussed at the heart of professional associations, and also by academia. A remote performance implies a new understanding of interpretation assignments which also impacts on fees and pricing systems. As remote interpreting companies provide interpretation 24 hours 7 days a week in a huge variety of languages, interpreters who are hired are located all around the world. In this way, they can profit from the different time zones. However, some interpreters make themselves available outside typical working hours (Kelly, 2008), which may mean an advantage, as they can choose their accessibility. Regarding pricing, interpreters are usually not paid for waiting for calls, although some companies add an extra payment on a monthly basis for waiting time at night and during the weekend. Instead, they

receive payment according to the number of minutes they are on the phone (some companies pay a minimum number of minutes to the interpreters in every call).

Last but not least, as they can be waiting where they want to, they can combine their work as remote interpreters with other occupations, such as freelance translation. In fact, most telephone interpreters work part-time and as freelancers (Crezee, Jülich & Hayward, 2013) and it has been reported that the unpredictability and irregularity of their assignments, together with lower rates (when compared with other interpretation settings) cause stress and an impact on their work-life balance. There are many factors that can become stressors for interpreters. Lower working rates, instability, and unpredictability have already been mentioned as examples but, of course, other personal factors, such as life experiences, their level of resilience and their psychological skills also play a part (Crezee *et al.*, 2015; Cheng, 2015). On this subject, some authors mention that remote interpreters suffer more stress than on-site interpreters (Andres & Falk, 2009), as well as an increased psychological effort and sense of alienation (Moser-Mercer, 2005, p. 145; Mouzourakis, 2006) and augmented fatigue (Napier, Skinner & Braun, 2018; Wang, 2018). However, other authors, like Gracia-García (2002), also point out at the interpreter's remoteness as a circumstance that can allow them for detachment and a lighter emotional involvement and alignment to patients' suffering.

Finally, the lack of briefing, characteristic of public service interpreting, becomes more prominent in remote interpreting, as it is exacerbated in emergency and sudden situations, when it is popular, and remote interpreters usually have to deal with the unpredictable content of their assignments (Lee, 2007). Besides, remote interpreters find it also more difficult to prepare their assignments beforehand, as they are not able to specialize as much as on-site interpreters (Gracia-García, 2002; Heh & Qian, 1997) because they are subject to the contracts that the companies they work for sign. This means that remote interpretation companies, as we will see in the following pages, may sign to provide interpretation for regional healthcare services as well as for an insurance company, and they will hire the same interpreters for both contracts.

1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Remote interpreting, and more specifically telephone interpreting, has gained popularity in the last decade in Spain, both in the professional and in the research and academic field. In fact, as mentioned by Ruiz Mezcua (2018, p. 11), remote interpreting «is becoming increasingly common nowadays, as it provides a professional interpreting service almost instantaneously, saving

time and money, and with successful outcomes». Evidence of its increased recognition and use can also be found in recent works dealing with telephone interpreting companies (del Pozo Triviño & Campillo Rey, 2016), the quality of telephone interpreting services (Jaime Pérez, 2015; Sanz Moreno, 2018), remote interpreters' training (Fernández Pérez, 2015; Iglesias Fernández & Ouellet, 2018; Ruiz Mezcua, 2019; Vigier-Moreno & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2019) or the provision of telephone interpreting in specific settings (Fernández Pérez, 2015; Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2018).

This trend, which was already gaining momentum before the lockdowns occurred in relation with the COVID-19 pandemic (Jiménez Serrano, 2020), has enormously increased along 2020 and 2021, as remote working was encouraged in all sectors to prevent infections. In Spain, 4.8% of workers worked remotely in 2019, in comparison to 34% during the COVID-19 lockdowns, following Peiró and Soler (2020). These same authors signal that the possibilities for remote working are higher in the service sector, with a 21.4% for private service and 36% for public service provision. It is precisely for this sector that most remote interpreting services are provided, including public service interpreting (in the healthcare setting, for the police, for schools, etc.) and over the phone services (banking, insurance companies, customer services, and so on).

In particular, in the healthcare setting, where interpreting services are provided both on-site and remotely, some professional associations recommended the implementation and fostering of remote interpreting not only to guarantee service provision in times when the demand had seriously increased, but also to protect the interpreters' safety, who, in spite of working side by side with healthcare staff, are usually not fully considered as such and are not always provided with personal protective equipment (Runcieman, 2020).

In view of the advances of this type of interpretation and its very likely growth in the last two years due to the COVID-19 circumstances and the related spread of telecommuting, an updated mapping of remote interpreting services provided in Spain was considered relevant. With this mapping exercise we want to find out not only about the spread of remote interpreting in Spain and its characteristics, but also about the possible impact of telecommuting.

Remote interpreting services in Spain are provided by governmental organizations, private companies, and non-profit groups. Six are the main companies currently offering remote interpreting services in the study context, namely Asitel, Dualia Teletraducciones, Interpret Solutions, Migralingua Voze, Ofilingua and Seprotec. Remote interpreting has different degrees of

presence in the overall activity of these companies. For Dualia Teletraducciones, Interpret Solutions and Migralingua Voze, telephone interpreting is the main service in their overall offer, whereas for Asitel, Ofilingua and Seprotec, remote interpreting services represent only a small part of their overall activity, as we will explain more in detail in the following section.

All these six companies were contacted to participate in structured qualitative interviews. This is precisely the distinctive feature of this mapping exercise, since, unlike previous research in the field of remote interpreting in Spain, which analyses the interpreters' experiences and opinions or the interpreters' performance (Corpas Pastor & Gaber, 2020; Fernández Pérez & Toledano Buendía, 2018; Iglesias Fernández & Ouelllet, 2018; Lázaro Gutiérrez & Cabrera Méndez, 2019; Torres Díaz, 2014), the interpreting companies' managers and coordinators' view is studied here.

The structured interviews contained 7 questions about the following issues: (1) provinces and (2) settings where the remote interpreting services are provided; (3) remote interpreting variety offered (telephone and/or video-link); (4) additional services available (i.e. on-site interpreting and translation); (5) type of interpreters' hiring; (6) contract of remote interpreting services (public tender vs. private agreement); and (7) observed changes in the supply and demand of remote interpreting services in the last months. Depending on the requirements and availability of the companies, different profiles were interviewed following various methods. Asitel and Interpret Solutions were sent the interview questions via email, and answers were provided using the same means. In the case of Dualia Teletraducciones, Migralingua Voze and Ofilingua, interviews were carried out over the phone and the interviewees allowed the possibility of introducing further questions, clarifications and explanations when needed. Finally, the interview with Seprotec was carried out through videoconference, after sending the questions via email.

The professional roles of the interviewees are provided in Table 1 as well as the code used to identify them when analysing their answers.

Company	Interviewee Professional Role	Code
Asitel	Interpreters' coordinator	I-1
Dualia Teletraducciones	Quality assurance manager	I-2
Interpret Solutions	Communication and quality manager	I-3
Migralingua Voze	CEO	I-4

| Ofilingua | CEO | I-5 |
| Seprotec | Coordinator of public service interpreting | I-6 |

Table 1: Interviewees' Information

All the interviewees were informed about the aims and scope of the study and agreed both to the interviews and to remain available in case information had to be contrasted, expanded, or checked. The answers given by them will be analysed and compared, as well as contrasted with the recent literature in the field, in the following pages. When relevant, quotes have been included to illustrate the interviewees' ideas and experiences.

2. RESULTS

The first question posed to the companies offering remote interpreting in Spain concerned the provinces where their services were provided. 4 out of 6 of those companies stated that they worked across the whole country, while one of them, in particular, Interpret Solutions, explained that they worked in some autonomous communities (Spanish regions), such as Asturias, Aragón, Basque Country, Catalonia, Castile and Leon, Castile-La Mancha and Madrid, and the latter, Migralingua Voze, listed the cities they covered, which were Badalona, Barcelona, Ciudad Real, Madrid, Santiago de Compostela, Manresa, Vigo, Santander, Granada, Teruel, Toledo, Molina de Segura, Salamanca, Zaragoza, Alicante, Algeciras, El Ejido, Bilbao, Las Palmas, and Aguas (Murcia). Additionally, concerning some specific clients, they indicated that:

> Prestamos servicios allí donde las ONG que son clientas tengan sus sedes. Por otro lado, la asistencia en carretera es nacional, por lo que ofrecemos servicios a los lugares desde donde llamen los clientes de las aseguradoras. [We offer our services where the NGOs which are clients have their offices. On the other hand, road assistance is provided nationally, so we offer our services in the places where the people who call are.] (I-4)

The diversity in the companies' answers corresponds to whether their clients are public institutions at state, regional, provincial, or local level, or whether they are private companies or NGOs, which may have headquarters in different towns.

Regarding the settings in which their remote interpreting services were provided, two main sectors can be mentioned. On the one hand, with respect to the public sector, most of the companies declared that they offer their interpreting services to healthcare facilities, social services, employment offices, police, and courts. Additionally, some of them also offer their services

to asylum support offices, local and provincial governments, and official tourism departments. On the other hand, when it comes to the private sector, NGOs, migrant associations, insurance companies, small and medium businesses, as well as the tourist sector (hotels, travel agencies and tour operators) were cited. In relation to the two sectors, according to the companies, they have usually participated in bidding processes to work on the public sector, while agreements and commercial contracts were signed to work on the private sector, as stated by some the interviewees:

> Depende: si es un organismo público quien nos contrata para luego ofertarlo a sus asociados, sí, licitación. Por el contrario, si son empresas o particulares las que nos contratan, se dan de alta y llaman, sin más. [It depends: if a public body hires our services in order to offer them to their associates, we participate in a bidding process. On the contrary, if our services are hired by companies or individuals, they do the registration and call, without further ado.] (I-1)

> En la mayoría de los servicios públicos, trabajamos por licitaciones públicas, que incluyen servicios de interpretación presencial, telefónica, videoconferencia y traducción. Para empresas privadas, solemos ofrecer un servicio puntual con presupuesto, contrato y factura. En ocasiones, trabajamos con convenios y acuerdos de colaboración, por ejemplo, con la Guardia Civil, que no tienen el servicio de interpretación externalizado, pero llaman a las empresas cuando necesitan interpretación. [In most public services we work by public tenders which include on-site interpreting, telephone and video-link interpreting and translation services. When working for private companies, we usually offer a one-time service, including budget, contract, and invoice. Sometimes we work with collaboration agreements, for example, for the Spanish Civil Guard, which does not have outsourced interpreting services, but call the interpreting companies when they need their services.] (I-6)

In both cases (private and public sector), their contractual relation was temporary, lasting from some months to some years.

Concerning the remote interpreters' type of hiring, 4 out of 6 companies affirmed that they usually hired freelancers, except when there was a continuous demand (of some languages or some services); in this case, interpreters were hired with a short-term or an ongoing contract. One of the companies interviewed, in particular, Asitel, stated that they combined both, freelancers and contract interpreters, while the latter, Seprotec, explained that they did not hire freelancers, but their interpreters always signed a contract, which could be full time or part time. It seems that the hiring processes are

usually strict and official directives are followed, as explained by the representatives of two of the companies:

> Según la norma de calidad UNE-EN-ISO 9001:2015, pedimos que los intérpretes telefónicos tengan una formación universitaria en traducción o similar. Si no se posee, hay que cumplir una serie de años de experiencia, según la titulación que se posea. Como última instancia, la empresa proporciona un curso completo de interpretación telefónica, por lo que las personas que vienen con formación previa tan solo hacen la formación de protocolos, y las que no tienen formación previa en interpretación, pero tienen algún idioma exótico necesario, hacen el curso completo. En cualquier caso, y siempre después del curso/protocolos de interpretación telefónica, se hace una prueba de interpretación consistente en la simulación de una situación real. [According to the quality standard UNE-EN-ISO 9001:2015, telephone interpreters are asked to have a university degree in translation or a similar degree. If they do not have it, they should have a specific number of years of experience, depending on the degree they have. As a last resort, the company provides a full course on telephone interpreting, so people with previous training only attend the training on protocols, and people without previous training, but with a command of an exotic language, attend the full course. Anyway, after the full course or the protocols training, there is always a test consisting in an interpreting simulation.] (I-3)

> Para seleccionar a los intérpretes se les hacen entrevistas para valorar su perfil (se prefieren perfiles multidisciplinarios). Para ello, la empresa cuenta con técnicos de selección especializados, se exige que cumplan con el código deontológico de la empresa, que tengan permiso de trabajo sin actividad restringida y se procura respetar los convenios provinciales de cara a las condiciones laborales. [In order to select the interpreters, interviews are done to assess their profile (multidisciplinary profiles are preferred). To this aim, the company uses specialised selection technicians, interpreters are asked to follow the principles of the company's deontological code, they should have a working permit without restrictions regarding the activity, and local collective agreements are respected concerning the working conditions.] (I-6)

Most of the times, the interpreters working in these companies were expected to provide not only telephone interpreting services, but also video remote interpreting, on-site interpreting, or translation on demand. Specifically, telephone interpreting services are provided in two modalities: remote interpreting and teleconference interpreting, following Braun and Taylor's (2011) terminology. The most common configuration for the first modality is service provider and end user onsite and remote interpreter. The

second modality refers to three-way calls, where all the participants in the interaction, including the interpreter, connect to each other through audio or video-link.

Additionally, as stated by the companies, telephone interpreting services provided are minimum for two of them (Ofilingua and Seprotec), while all offer other translation services (general or specialized, such as sworn and technical translation, in the case of Migralingua Voze), subtitling and voice-over (in the case of Dualia Teletraducciones), and other interpreting services, both on-site and by video-link. With regard to video-link, the six companies offer this type of remote interpreting, depending on the client, being the most usual the NGOs, the private education centres and sometimes the courts. On this regard, one of the companies explains that they specifically offer video-link interpreting:

> […] para educación privada (para seminarios, conferencias). No se presta generalmente en los servicios públicos, pero se está intentando en los hospitales del País Vasco y Cataluña y para lengua de signos. [… for the private education sector (for seminars, conferences). It is not generally offered for the public services, but we are trying to provide it in some hospitals in the Basque Country and Catalonia and for sign language.] (I-2)

For this type of remote interpreting, a great variety of platforms and apps are used, as described by one of the interviewees:

> También interpretamos por videoconferencia, sobre todo con ONG porque ellos mismos utilizan videoconferencia para prestar sus servicios. Y las plataformas son muy variadas: Skype, Meets, Teams, Zoom, Jitsi, Whatsapp… [We also offer video-link interpreting, especially for the NGOs because they use videoconferencing to provide their services. And the platforms are very varied: Skype, Meets, Teams, Zoom, Jitsi, Whatsapp…] (I-4)

In short, the demand for remote and especially video-link interpreting seems to have increased during the last months in comparison to on-site interpreting, mostly due to the pandemic situation:

> En general ha descendido la demanda de interpretación, pero ha aumentado el porcentaje de remota frente al de presencial. Durante el confinamiento el 100 % de servicios se prestaron en remota (frente al 40 % habitual). Además, se observa la utilización de remota para llamadas cortas, algo inexistente antes de la pandemia. [In general, there has been a decrease in the demand of interpreting, but the percentage of remote interpreting has increased in comparison to on-site interpreting. During the lockdown 100% of the services were offered remotely (as opposed to the usual 40%).

> Additionally, in contrast to what happened before the pandemic, remote interpreting is now used for short calls.] (I-4)

According to the companies participating in this study, the increase of this demand depended on the settings where they worked. While, for example, the demand experienced a significant decrease in some services (such as roadside assistance, tourism, and trials) for obvious reasons, the companies explained that there had been an upturn in some other services (such as healthcare and education) and some new clients had contracted them (concerning, for example, COVID tracking or phone medical assistance).

Other changes provoked by the pandemic situation have taken place, as explained by the representative of one of the companies:

> Sí, ha aumentado la demanda de videoconferencia. Ya que no pueden viajar, muchas empresas intentan mantener un trato más cercano con esa opción. Por otro lado, según ha ido evolucionando la pandemia desde diciembre de 2019, el tipo de llamadas y los países de destino también se han visto modificados. [Yes, the demand of video-link interpreting has increased. Since many companies cannot travel, they try to keep a close relation with this option. On the other hand, while the pandemic was evolving, from December 2019, the type of calls and the destination countries were also modified.] (I-1).

The main problem with video-link interpreting in Spain (in comparison with telephone interpreting), as stated by one of the interviewees, is that most of the clients (especially in the public sector) are not technologically prepared. Particularly, she clarified:

> La pandemia ha acelerado todo. Los servicios de videointerpretación siempre habían estado sobre la mesa, pero ha sido esta la oportunidad de ponerlos finalmente en marcha porque las administraciones están más abiertas a utilizarla. A pesar de eso, a veces resulta muy difícil porque los centros públicos en los que trabajan no están preparados tecnológicamente (no tienen ordenador, cámara ni altavoces). Con la interpretación telefónica, sin embargo, no ha habido ningún problema. Nuestros clientes están mucho más acostumbrados y su uso con la pandemia ha aumentado de manera exponencial. [The pandemic has accelerated everything. The video-link interpreting services had always been there on the table, but this has meant the opportunity to turn them on, since the authorities are now more open to use it. Nevertheless, sometimes it is very difficult because the public centres are not technologically prepared (they do not have computers, webcams or speakers). However, there has not been any problem with telephone interpreting. Our clients are used to it and its use has exponentially grown with the pandemic.] (I-3)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Technological innovations have influenced the evolution of interpreting as a profession, being this evolution «motivated by a desire for enhancement of productivity and a widening of service capability, with or without commensurate improvements in job satisfaction» (Hlavac, 2013, p. 35). It is precisely job satisfaction which has pushed most of the criticism about remote interpreting. Increased stress, additional abilities and skills, lack of briefing and visual input, decreased fees, isolation of interpreters, amongst other disadvantages, have been pinpointed by interpreters, professional associations, and researchers.

However, remote interpreting has also brought along the popularization of interpreting, allowing for the provision of services in more languages, settings and situations, and the use of interpreters for a greater variety of assignments, which differ in length, formality, and preparation. For instance, interpreting can be provided remotely for very short interactions without the concerns and expenses of bringing an interpreter to a particular location. Informal interactions which might take place, for example, as a result of a pop in visit of a patient to a GP for some fast questions, can be also mediated by an interpreter, at reach thanks to just a phone call. Sudden and emergent situations might also be the setting of a multilingual encounter, and interpreters can participate in them remotely without the need of having hired them in advance for a particular event.

Societal and work changes tending to an increasing technologization of procedures and services, and the disruptive adaptation to a pandemic, which has relegated physical presence to an essential minimum, have been decisive factors in the establishment of remote (public) service provision. Phone calls, emails and virtual platforms have replaced interviews, consultations, and meetings, to name just a few types of encounters. In this context, it is natural that interpretation services undergo a necessary transformation towards more distant and technological modalities, not only to be able to, for instance, interpret in three-way calls, but also, as Runcieman (2020) pinpoints, in order for interpreters to be protected from virus transmission, as any other worker.

Regardless of the many advantages and disadvantages of remote interpreting in comparison to traditional on-site interpreting, the idea of an inevitable decrease in service provision quality needs to be overcome. Professional associations and researchers (see, for instance, Kelly, 2008; del Pozo Triviño & Campillo Rey, 2016; and Jiménez Serrano, 2020) have emphasised that remote interpretation is not second-rate. However, interpreters, providers, contractors, and trainers have to work jointly to adapt

to these new circumstances and be able to provide service, conditions, infrastructures, materials, and training allowing for the highest quality.

Over the last 30 years, population movements and migrations have increased exponentially, resulting in a higher need of interpreters in a great variety of languages (Runcieman, 2020), particularly in public service settings. Although remote interpreting seems to be a plausible solution to current interpretation demands, as usual, it has not received as much attention as remote simultaneous interpreting in conference settings. Whereas ISO/PAS 24019:2020 was published last year regulating simultaneous interpreting delivery platforms, after the publication of AIIC's Guidelines for distance interpreting (2019), there are not specific regulations for remote dialogue interpreting. ISO 13611:2014 Interpreting – Guidelines for community interpreting acknowledges that community interpreters work «sometimes remotely using technology such as video or teleconferencing» (2014, p. 6) and, consequently, should demonstrate the ability to use related technology. However, no further explanation of that ability or the intrinsic characteristics of remote interpreting are offered.

Before the pandemic, Corpas Pastor and Gaber (2020) carried out a survey study to gather interpreters' perceptions about the use of technology in public service settings. 56 respondents reported about advantages and drawbacks of remote interpreting. Corpas Pastor and Gaber (2020) found out that telephone interpreting was the most widely used modality of remote interpreting in public services (91%), followed by video remote interpreting (36%). 21% of the respondents also used remote simultaneous interpreting. Additionally, respondents were invited to submit suggestions to improve the use of remote interpreting in public services. Most of the comments were related to improving technology and its use to reduce stress and increase comfort (improve sound quality, count on better tools and connectivity, or provide further training for interpreters and clients who are not used to technology or to working with interpreters). Many pre-pandemic interpreters were still hesitant to embrace remote interpreting, however, the health crisis has been a shot in the arm for many to start worrying about technological skills. Our findings show that the demand for remote interpreting both through audio and video-link has increased. However, not only interpreters need to hone their technological skills, also public and private service providers, clients of the remote interpreting companies, need to update their technological knowledge. Our findings show that particularly public service institutions lack sufficient infrastructure to set up video-link interpreting services. Public service providers also lack skills and do not feel prepared to communicate using remote interpreting, both because of a reduced

technological competence and because they are not used to working with interpreters (Lázaro Gutiérrez & Tejero González, in press).

The pandemic brought about noticeable changes in the demand of interpreting services in Spain, hand in hand with lifestyle changes imposed by lockdowns and mobility restrictions. Before the pandemic road assistance calls or communications about administrative matters, telephone mediated onsite consultations and social assistance interviews were frequent (Lázaro Gutiérrez & Cabrera Méndez, 2021). Population movements usually implied an increase in telephone interpreting demand. For instance, peaks were frequent during the summer, particularly at night, in Spanish coastal areas, and during Easter holidays due to tourism in the Spanish biggest cities. In holiday periods, there is also an increase of short-term returns of immigrant population to their original countries, which also increases telephone interpreting demand. However, during the lockdowns both mobility and regular non urgent services stopped, including interviews between social workers and immigrants in public shelters and internment centres, and the cancellation of appointments for applicants for Asylum and International Protection in the Immigration Departments of police stations. Telephone interpreters turned to work with conversations which almost exclusively revolved around the COVID-19 pandemic. New services emerged that hired telephone interpreting, such as nurse tracers, whose mission was to contact COVID-19 patients to communicate PCR results, watch the compliance with lockdowns and isolation measures, and provide hygiene and medication guidelines.

Telephone interpreting was also essential to keep foreign speaking populations informed. The Spanish government regularly communicated news and instructions on television, but this was exclusively done in Spanish or co-official languages (Basque, Catalan, and Galician). Those who were not able to understand these languages properly, would phone healthcare institutions (remarkably the healthcare emergency hotline) to ask for information, advice, and guidelines.

Our informants explain the behaviour of the demand of telephone interpreting services as having a peak just before the lockdowns imposed with the State of Alarm, when population was seeking information from healthcare institutions and leaving to their original countries, an enormous drop during the lockdowns (March and April 2020), and a considerable increase when home confinement measures softened (from May 2020), contagion increased and remote service provision was prioritised over face-to-face assistance.

There is also a change in the most demanded languages. Until the lockdowns, the most frequent foreign languages in Spain were Chinese, Arabic, Romanian, Polish and French. Most of the speakers of those

languages succeeded in returning to their home countries before the lockdowns. During the confinement, English experimented a considerable increase, as British residents remained in Spain.

Remote interpreting companies report having had to reinforce the training they provide to their workers to include contents that reflect the new market situation. After the lockdowns, more interpreters have been hired and initial training has reached more people. New protocols (sets of guidelines which include, amongst other aspects, information about the typical structure of a communicative event and the most recurrent vocabulary) have also been developed to cater for new needs. Some companies, such as Dualia Teletraducciones, have developed tailor-made technical solutions, such as an integrated application on tablets that was used in field hospitals for both spoken and sign language interpretation, or an improved interface that made it possible to access interpretation through voice commands, using internet-connected smart speakers, thus reducing the need of touching the screen of smartphones. They have also boosted their quality department including emotional support by means of debriefing sessions and peer group counselling. In fact, remote interpreters had to face difficult working situations during the pandemic. Many of them had to confront instability as freelancers and temporary part-time employees, and, while performing, they had to mediate highly emotional conversations, which has been demonstrated to produce stress and professional fatigue (Costa, Lázaro Gutiérrez & Rausch, 2020).

Two years after the outbreak of COVID-19, technology has found its way into the labour market, entering fields where telecommuting was simply unthinkable some months ago. Interpreting as an activity is naturally influenced by this technological turn that the society as a whole is experiencing towards remote modalities of work, service provision and human interaction. It is for this reason that we think that remote interpretation will no other than grow in the years to come in all its fields and settings. It is, however, our desire that dialogue remote interpreting is considered and appreciated by both professional associations and authorities so that quality performance and working conditions are pursued and achieved, together with the full recognition of public service interpreting in both remote and on-site modalities. This cannot happen without involving interpreters themselves and considering their work needs and levels of satisfaction with their profession. Future research should thus focus on surveying interpreters, following the line on recent contributions by Jiménez Ivars (2021) about telephone interpreting for asylum seekers in the US, or Matsushita (2022) about the interpreting industry in Japan: «there seems to be a growing need for continuous observation of

the interpreting industry as it transforms itself and how interpreters perceive and cope with future changes» (p. 183).

REFERENCES

Andres, D. & Falk, S. (2009). Information and communication technologies (ICT) in interpreting-Remote and telephone interpreting. In Andres, D. & Pöllabauer, S. (Eds.), Spürst Du wie der Bauch rauf runter? Fachdolmetschen im Gesundheitsbereich /Is everything all topsy turvy in your tummy? Health care interpreting (pp. 9-27). Munich: Martin Meidenbauer.

Braun, S. (2015). Remote interpreting. In Mikkelson, H. & Jourdenais, R. (Eds.), The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting (pp. 352-367). London/New York: Routledge.

Braun, S. & Taylor, J.L. (2011). Video-mediated interpreting: an overview of current practice and research. In Braun, S. & Taylor J.L. (Eds.), Videoconference and remote interpreting in criminal proceedings (pp. 27-57). Antwerp/Cambridge: Intersentia.

Cabrera Méndez, G. (2016). La interpretación a distancia: nacimiento, maduración y proyección de futuro. Informe VIU. Valencia: Universidad Internacional de Valencia.

Cheng, Q. (2015). Examining the challenges for telephone interpreters in New Zealand (Doctoral dissertation). https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/bitstr eam/handle/10292/9250/ChengQ.pdf?sequence=3andisAllowed=y

Corpas Pastor, G. & Gaber, M. (2020). Remote interpreting in public service settings: Technology, perceptions, and practice. SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation, 13(2), 58-78.

Costa, B., Lázaro Gutiérrez, R. & Rausch, T. (2020) Self-care as an ethical responsibility. A pilot study on support provision for interpreters in human crises. Translation and Interpreting Studies, 15(1), 36-56.

Crezee, I., Jülich, S. & Hayward, M. (2013). Issues for interpreters and professionals working in refugee settings. Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice, 8(3), 253-273.

Crezee, I. et al. (2015). Teaching interpreters about self-care. International Journal of Interpreter Education, 7(1), 74-83.

Del Pozo Triviño, M.I. & Campillo Rey, L. (2016). La interpretación telefónica y su práctica profesional. Estudio de caso sobre dos empresas proveedoras del servicio en España. Sendebar, 27, 73-95.

Fernández Pérez, M.M. (2015). Propuestas de ejercicios de simulación para la didáctica de la interpretación telefónica. MonTI. Monografías de Traducción e Interpretación, Special Issue 2, 259–279.

_____ (2018). La interpretación remota en contextos de violencia de género. In Toledano Buendía, C. & del Pozo Triviño, M.I. (Eds.) Interpretación en contextos de violencia de género (pp. 110-122). Valencia: Tirant Humanidades.

Fernández Pérez, M.M. & Toledano Buendía, C. (2018). Contextualisation in telephone Interpreting. Quaderns. Revista de Traducció, 25, 231-244.

Gracia-García, R.A. (2002). Telephone interpreting: A review of pros and cons. In Brennan, S. (Ed.) Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Conference (pp. 195-216). Alexandria: American Translators Association.

Heh, Y.C. & Qian, H. (1997). Over-the-phone interpretation: A new way of communication between speech communities. In Jérôme-O'Keeffe, M. (Ed.) Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference (pp. 51-62). Alexandria: American Translators Association.

Hlavac, J. (2013). Should Interpreters Be Trained and Tested in Telephone and Video-Link Interpreting? Responses from Practitioners and Examiners. International Journal of Interpreter Education, 5(1), 34-50.

Iglesias Fernández, E. & Ouellet, M. (2018). From the phone to the classroom: categories of problems for telephone interpreting training. The Interpreters' Newsletter, 23, 19-44.

International Association of Conference Interpreters. (2019). AIIC Guidelines for Distance Interpreting. https://aiic.org/document/4418/AIIC%20Guidelines%20for%20Distance%20Interpreting%20(Version%201.0)%20-%20ENG.pdf

ISO/TC 37/SC 5. Translation, interpreting and related technology. 2014. ISO 13611:2014. Interpreting — Guidelines for community interpreting. https://www.iso.org/standard/54082.html

ISO/TC 37/SC 5. Translation, interpreting and related technology. 2020. ISO/PAS 24019:2020. Simultaneous interpreting delivery platforms — Requirements and recommendations. https://www.iso.org/standard/77590.html

Jaime Pérez, A. (2015). Remote Interpreting in Public Services. Developing a 3g Phone Interpreting Application. In Lázaro Gutiérrez, R.; Vigier Moreno, F.J. & Sánchez Ramos, M.M. (Eds.) Investigación Emergente en Traducción e Interpretación. (pp. 73-82). Granada: Comares.

Jiménez Ivars, A. (2021). Telephone interpreting for asylum seekers in the US: a corpusbased study. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 36ª, 125-146.

Jiménez Serrano, O. (2020). Foto fija de la interpretación simultánea remota al inicio del 2020. Revista Tradumàtica. Tecnologies de la Traducció, 17, 59-80.

Kelly, N. (2008). A medical interpreter's guide to telephone interpreting. International Medical Interpreters Association. https://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/pages/307_2.pdf

Lázaro Gutiérrez, R. (2018). Design and Compilation of a Multilingual Corpus of Mediated Interactions About Roadside Assistance. In Ruiz Mezcua, A. (Ed.) Approaches to Telephone Interpretation: Research, Innovation, Teaching and Transference (pp. 87-106). Berlin / Bern: Peter Lang.

Lázaro Gutiérrez, R. & Cabrera Méndez, G. (2019). Chapter 2. Context and pragmatic meaning in telephone interpreting. In Garcés-Conejos, P. et al. (Eds.), Technology Mediated Service Encounters (pp. 45-68). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

_____ (2021). How COVID-19 changed telephone interpreting in Spain. The Journal of Internationalization and Localization, 8(2), 137-155.

Lázaro Gutiérrez, R. & Tejero González, J. M. (in press). Challenging ideologies and fostering intercultural competence: The discourses of healthcare staff about linguistic and cultural barriers, interpreters, and mediators. In Määttä, S. (Ed.) Mapping Ideology in Discourse Studies. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Lee, J. (2007). Telephone interpreting seen from the interpreters' perspective. Interpreting, 9(2), 231-252.

Matsushita, K. (2022). How Remote Interpreting Changed the Japanese Interpreting Industry. INContext, 2(2), 167-185.

Moser-Mercer, B. (2005). Remote Interpreting: Issues of Multi-Sensory Integration in a Multilingual Task. Meta, 50(2), 727-738.

Mouzourakis, P. (2006). Remote interpreting: A technical perspective on recent experiments. Interpreting, 8(1), 45-66.

Napier, J.B., Skinner, R. & Braun, S. (2018). Interpreting via video link: Mapping of the field. In Napier, J.B., Skinner, R. & Braun, S. (Eds.) Here or there: research on interpreting via video link (pp. 11-35). Washington DC: Gallaudet.

Peiró, J.M. & Soler, A. (2020). El impulso al teletrabajo durante el COVID-19 y los retos que plantea. Generalitat Valenciana, IVIE. https://www.ivie.es/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/11.Covid19IvieExpress.El-impulso-al-teletrabajo-durante-el-COVID-19-y-los-retos-que-plantea.pdf

Perramon, M. (2020, July 22). COVID-19, interpretación remota y tecnología. [Web log message] https://www.tradiling.net/covid-19-interpretacion-remota-y-tecnologia/

Phelan, M. (2001). The Interpreter's Resource. Clevedon / Buffalo / Toronto / Sydney: Multilingual Matters.

Rosenberg, B.A. (2004). A data driven analysis of telephone interpreting. In Wadensjö, C., Edmund Dimitrova, B. & Nilson, A.L. (Eds.) The Critical Link 4: Professionalisation of interpreting in the community (pp. 65-77). Amsterdam: John Benjamin.

Ruiz Mezcua, A. (2018). General Overview of Telephone Interpretation (TI): A State of the Art. In Ruiz Mezcua, A. (Ed.) Approaches to Telephone Interpretation. Research, Innovation, Teaching and Transference (pp. 7-17). Bern: Peter Lang.

_____ (2019). El triple reto de la interpretación a distancia: Tecnológico, profesional y didáctico. In Tolosa Igualada, M. & Echeverri, A. (Eds.) Porque algo tiene que cambiar. La formación de traductores e intérpretes: Presente y futuro / Because something should change: Present and Future Training of Translators and Interpreters. MonTI. Monografías de Traducción e Interpretación, 11, 243-262.

Runcieman, A.J. (2020). Community interpreting and the Covid-19 crisis: Present relevancy and future directions. Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies, 242, 1-21.

Sanz Moreno, R. (2018). La percepción del personal sanitario sobre la interpretación en hospitales. Estudio de caso. Panace@, XIX(47), 67-75.

Torres Díaz, M.G. (2014). La interpretación telefónica. El intérprete como coordinador: estudio de unas interacciones telefónicas. Mutatis Mutandis: Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción, 7(2), 401-417.

Verschueren, J. (2008). Context and Structure in a Theory of Pragmatics. Studies in Pragmatics, 10, 13-23.

Vigier-Moreno, F.J. & Lázaro Gutiérrez, R. (2019). La formación en interpretación remota: una experiencia docente interuniversitaria. Innovación educative, 29, 141-156.

Wang, J. (2018). Telephone interpreting should be used only as a last resort. Interpreters' perceptions of the suitability, remuneration and quality of telephone interpreting. Perspectives, 26(1), 100-116.