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Technology in Interpreter Education and Practice: Introduction

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Abstract & Keywords

Keywords:

Technology has deeply changed if not revolutionised many aspects of our daily life. It has changed the way we work, how we shop, where and how we receive information and knowledge, where and when we listen to music and watch movies, the way we communicate and stay in touch, and - last but not least – it has deeply changed how, where and when we learn and teach. If we also include artificial intelligence (AI) in the picture, technology is becoming increasingly capable and proficient in some cognitive activities such as making a diagnosis or translating a text, which we used to think only humans could do. The digital revolution has also changed both the practice of interpreting and interpreter education and training.

In the professional practice of interpreting, technology has stormed in and changed the interpreter's work basically in three ways. Firstly, it has extended the tools and sources to prepare for interpreting assignments by offering an increasingly wide pool of materials that can be accessed online. Secondly, technology can provide on-the-job support through CAI (Computer Assisted Interpreting) tools for terminology management and information retrieval (Fantinuoli 2017). And thirdly, technology has changed the very way in which interpreting services can be delivered, with a partial but substantial shift from on-site to remote interpreting, a trend which was definitely accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has happened both in dialogue interpreting and in conference interpreting, thanks to over-the-phone connections and, more recently, to videoconferencing systems (Russo et al. 2019; Braun and Taylor 2012). For conference interpreting in particular, distance is not the only factor that makes a difference between on-site and remote modes: while, until recently, remote conference interpreting was still delivered using traditional equipment, only with the booths located far from the conference venue (Moser-Mercer 2005; Roziner and Shlesinger 2011), it is currently and increasingly being carried out through specific Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI) platforms, where the interpreter uses a computer and a 'virtual console' (or 'soft console') instead of the traditional interpreting console in the booth (or 'hard console'), and may either work from home or from a hub. All these new variables concerning both the location of the interpreter and of primary participants and the tools used for interpreting performance and assistance may have countless implications from the point of view of the interpreters' workflow management, cognitive load and mediated communication in general (Mellinger 2019).

As far as interpreter training and education are concerned, computer assisted interpreting training tools (CAIT) – derived in the 1990s from computer assisted language learning tools (CALL) – are now routinely used in several educational institutions (Kajzer-Wietrzny and Tymczyńska 2014). The next step forward was moving from the physical classroom to virtual environments and experimenting with on-line teaching and learning (Ko 2008; Ko and Chen 2011; Braun and Slater 2014; Motta 2016). This migration from physical to digital is constantly and rapidly evolving to the point that our time has been defined the era of the 'glass slab' (Susskind 2018), since we spend a great part of our lives in front of a screen (of our desktop or mobile devices), and language teachers, learners and professionals are not an exception to the rule. This is why this special issue of *inTRAlinea* collects a number of contributions by scholars who are also trainers and who reflect about various ways in which technology has entered or is entering the realm of interpreting education and practice. The 'technological turn' in interpreting (Fantinuoli 2018) is mirrored here through a selection of contributions originally presented at the Techling'17 (<http://cehum.ilch.uminho.pt/techling2017>) '2nd International Conference on Languages, Linguistics and Technology: New Trends in Language Teaching, Interpreting and Translation'. All the selected papers focus on the impact of new technologies on interpreting both in professional practice and in education, two areas which are strongly connected and dependent on one another.

The papers by Amato, Sandrelli and Spinolo mainly focus on professional practice, while those by Araújo and Correia, González Rodríguez, and Prandi are more centred on interpreter training.

The contribution by Amato deals with the rise of telephone interpreting in healthcare service calls. Although service calls are nothing new under the sun, the 'presence' of an interpreter in this type of interaction affects the structure of participation remarkably, from the opening of the call till the very end. Using the phone as a medium also affects the role of the interpreter who teams up with the health care professional to deliver a service as efficiently and accurately as possible. The author discusses this aspect on the basis of examples taken from a data set of interpreter-mediated healthcare service calls collected during the EU-funded SHIFT in Orality Erasmus+ research project (<http://www.shiftinorality.eu>).

Sandrelli's empirical study compares simultaneous interpreting to respeaking as a method for interlingual live subtitling based on speech recognition technology. Live subtitling is a novel way to generate subtitles for deaf and hard-of-hearing people during live TV broadcasts and events, and it may gain further ground as technology evolves. The subtitles produced via respeaking and the interpreters' renditions in simultaneous mode produced during the same event – an international conference – are analysed to identify instances of successful content transmission, content loss and content distortion. This case study sheds light on interlingual respeaking, which so far is not a widely investigated translation mode, and raises the issue of defining guidelines and best practice for an activity aimed at facilitating multimodal communication.

Spinolo's paper presents an overview and a classification of new technologies for delivering simultaneous interpreting, both on-site and remotely, describing their similarities and differences and suggesting configurations for use. The paper starts with a brief presentation of traditional technologies, moves on to introduce the notions

underlying BYOD (bring your own device) and RSI technologies as well as their basic features, and ends by recommending a set of good practices. It also highlights the importance of conducting research on these tools and on their impact in order to elaborate and suggest guidelines and standards for education and practice.

Digitally-oriented learning and participatory teaching is the subject of a paper in which Araújo and Correia report about the use of mind mapping in a collaborative digital environment to teach students writing and public speaking skills using consecutive interpreting as a means to acquire them. This approach was developed to meet at least two urgent challenges faced by several education institutions nowadays: moving from the classroom to a virtual environment in order to offer access to education to a higher number of students, and experimenting new teaching methods that are more suitable both to the virtual environment and for the young digital generation.

The paper by González Rodríguez reports on an intensive remote interpreting training proposal and, more specifically, presents suggestions on equipment and space arrangement in the classroom for remote interpreting training. These suggestions are based on the experience of the SHIFT Summer School of Remote Interpreting, a one-week intensive training course in remote dialogue (telephone and videoconference) interpreting held in 2018 at the Department of Interpreting and Translation of the University of Bologna at Forlì within the SHIFT in Orality Erasmus+ project. In particular the paper deals with how to simulate remoteness in an on-site educational setting and how to make the best use of training methods and materials for this purpose.

Finally, computer assisted interpreting (CAI) tools are the object of a study by Prandi, who explores whether and how these tools are integrated in the curricula of 25 different interpreter training institutions. The survey conducted by the author shows that over half of the sample (13 institutions) include CAI tools in their curricula, but only a small number of them offer a specific course devoted to these tools to their MA students. Lack of material or financial resources but also lack of information and interest among conference interpreting trainers are possible obstacles to the inclusion of CAI tools in interpreter education. More research work investigating the use of CAI tools and providing evidence of their benefits could help remove obstacles and promote a wider integration of these tools in interpreter training and practice.

This *inTRAlinea* special issue will be of interest for interpreting scholars who wish to have a deeper insight into the role of technology in professional and teaching practice, for interpreter trainers seeking to include technology-enabled practices in their classroom, and for interpreting students and professionals interested in learning more on the use of technology in interpreting.

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