Original Research

Emergency remote teaching and learning in simultaneous interpreting: Capturing experiences of teachers and students

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The article covers the transfer to emergency remote teaching and learning in Simultaneous Interpreting (SI) during the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown in early 2020. The study aims to establish some approaches as to how the emergency move to online training was conducted, what we can learn from this experience and what were the main challenges. The article presents and analyses the findings of the survey of teaching staff and students in seven universities in Europe and Australia. Twelve interviews were conducted remotely with selected members of teaching staff and students. The study confirms that universities were able to complete their modules in Simultaneous Interpreting by making arrangements for a smooth transfer to remote training in synchronous and asynchronous modes. The transfer and emergency remote teaching and learning mostly depended on the prior experience of teaching teams in delivering online workshops and webinars and their close engagement with students. The role of course or module leader has been outlined as key to providing leadership during the transfer to emergency arrangements during lockdown. One of the conclusions of this study addresses the need for teaching remote interpreting within university Interpreting or Translation and Interpreting courses in view of the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic and possible new requirements in the future.

KEYWORDS: *emergency remote teaching and learning, simultaneous interpreting, online training, cognitive strain, social interaction*

1. INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented emergency situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic led to lockdowns in numerous countries around the world. In response to this, many universities had to move teaching to a remote mode in a very short period of time in order for the students to complete their year of studies and in some countries, to make necessary arrangements for an alternative online assessment at the end of the academic year. The speed and ur-

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'The remote synchronous mode also requires the availability of at least dual channels of communication: one for the incoming presentation or speech in the source language (SL) and another one for the interpretation in the target language (TL) delivered by a student. The synchronous mode is achieved by continuous use of both channels when practising simultanious interpreting'

gency of changes was extraordinary since universities and many programmes had to adapt to the new environment in order to ensure that students achieved their targets for the academic year. In view of this situation, many teaching teams had to improvise quickly without any appropriate guidance or infrastructural support (Rapanta et al., 2020). In this respect, the provision of training during the lockdown can be considered as emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) (Hodges et al., 2020).

The present research explores some aspects of the move to emergency remote synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning in conference simultaneous interpreting (SI). This particular subject of study was chosen for our research since even in face-to-face mode it requires the use of specialised equipment incorporating, apart from microphone and earphones in a soundproof booth, a video screen and a computer with Internet access. Our interest was focused on the ability of academic teams teaching SI to cope with the task of transferring training to online synchronous mode in a matter of days or weeks. The remote synchronous mode also requires the availability of at least dual channels of communication: one for the incoming presentation or speech in the source language (SL) and another one for the interpretation in the target language (TL) delivered by a student. The synchronous mode is achieved by continuous use of both channels when practising SI. At the same time, the existing IT systems for online

teaching used by universities have only one channel, which presented a significant challenge for trainers of SI. The present exploratory research aims to assess approaches used at seven universities around the world providing emergency online synchronous training in SI during the lockdown period in March – June 2020. The research also aims to explore how academic teams and students managed the transfer from face-to-face to online synchronous SI training and identify challenges in preserving the quality of output.

2. TEACHING REMOTE INTERPRETING BEFORE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The development of ICT influenced the interpreting profession and the introduction of video-mediated interpreting by some multinational organisations. One of the earliest experiments was carried out by UNESCO in 1976 linking the headquarters in Paris with a conference centre in Nairobi (Carl & Braun, 2017). This experiment pushed other organisations to trial online interpreting and a variety of ICT systems by other international organisations, such as the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as other bodies such as the United Nations. Covid-19 has dramatically changed how we work, and interpretation was not exempt since many organisations have explored further the use of remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI) systems since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 (Chaoui, 2020).

Online synchronous teaching and learning has attracted more and more attention in the 21st century. Some authors thought that synchronous teaching relies heavily on the teacher, that it is good for answering questions and troubleshooting, while a student-centred approach can be developed in asynchronous online teaching which has to become central for learning (Murphy et al., 2011). The statement that synchronous teaching becomes secondary or supporting teaching and learning in asynchronous mode may sound somewhat misleading since in both synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning teachers have key positions, however their role may change.

Means et al. (2014) provide the most comprehensive study of different types of online learning and their effectiveness. They argue that student outcomes arise from implementation or how the teaching and learning are conducted, the context, and learner characteristics and learners' abilities to interact effectively with technology, and not from technology alone. The authors consider the implementation stage of online learning and various forms of online learning for specific kinds of students, subject areas, and contexts, and identify nine dimensions, such as modality, pacing, student-instructor ratio, pedagogy, instructor and student role online, online communication synchrony, role of online assessments, and source of feedback (Means et al., 2014).

Another area which drew the attention of scholars was around the transfer to online teaching and learning, how the move is managed and the requirement for the adaptation of approaches in teaching and how the modules are designed and structured (Boling et al., 2012; Koehler & Mishra, 2009). The authors saw the transformation of routines or the way teaching and learning was organised as the main goal in the transfer to online mode. A similar situation was witnessed in teaching interpreting where some early synchronous interaction was limited to text messaging, thus mostly considering some basic forms of asynchronous learning and limited forms of synchronous learning (Braun, 2013). Alternatively, some authors considered the use of digital materials in the physical classroom and the possibility of students using them during their self-study periods (Mayor et al., 2007).

Moser-Mercer (2005) considered the development of online interpreting using the first controlled experiment to evaluate human factors and technical arrangements in remote interpreting where such factors as *'a sense of presence, such as degree of control, immediacy of control, anticipation of events, mode of control and the modifiability of physical environments'* were *'often compromised in a remote setting'* (Moser-Mercer, 2005, p. 79). These findings have had a significant impact on the development of the profession and online

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teaching and learning where a blended approach has gained more popularity. D'Hayer (2012) argues that technology offers unique benefits, considering collective learning as a crucial part of public service interpreting. However, perhaps the most overarching analysis of online teaching and learning in interpreting is provided by Clifford (2018) where he analyses previous research in the field and examines the nature of online learning in interpreting through different types of interactions, such as learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. He also provides valuable examples of remote teaching and learning at Glendon Campus of the York University in Canada.

What is obvious from previous research (see Clifford, 2018; D'Hayer, 2012; Hino, 2021) is that online courses require significant time for preparation and development or adaptation. However, in contrast to programmes that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, *'emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances'* (Hodges et al., 2020). This definition clearly shows that the ERTL is an immediate response to external circumstances, and academic staff may not have time to adapt materials or approaches for the online mode. The main objective of ERTL is to provide access to teaching and learning in a new environment where face-to-face teaching is not possible. The scale and timing of this transfer to the ERTL was perhaps unimaginable in the pre-Internet era. Many universities had to move the delivery to online mode in a matter of days in March 2020, often relying on academic staff and their ability to improvise, what Bryson and Andres (2020) called 'responsive improvisation'. These authors specifically

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address the issue of extensive and intensive approaches to facilitating online student learning encounters, suggesting that the curation of resources to support asynchronous learning (extensive approach) is reinforced by intensive online synchronous learning encounters (intensive approach) (Bryson & Andres, 2020).

When analysing the issue of synchronous online teaching, some authors established that it may require more concentration from teaching staff and therefore be considered more tiring and time-consuming as teachers have to work harder to 'decipher' non-verbal and social clues using video links with students (Bryson & Andres, 2020; Desai et al., 2009). Bearing in mind that the development of an online module or course usually takes many months, while the switch to ERTL was conducted in a very short period of time, it could have a negative impact on teaching staff and the quality of modules and courses, accessibility to learning materials and the achievement of learning outcomes. Thus, the current research attempts to analyse what impact ERTL had on teaching and learning in Simultaneous Interpreting.

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The study was conducted in August/September 2020 since it was important to give more time to academic staff and postgraduate students in SI to assess fully the transfer to online training in an emergency situation in March/June 2020 and look back at the experience they had during the lockdown. It was also useful to analyse this experience at this particular stage since many teachers were preparing for the start of the new academic year, and in most cases, it meant that they had to develop the entire programme for online SI teaching and learning. Participants in the study were academics/professionals teaching SI in the 2019/20 academic year and postgraduate students in SI modules majoring in Conference Interpreting or Translation and Interpreting, at seven universities in Australia, Belgium, Spain and the UK. Academic staff and postgraduate students from the following universities participated in the current research: Comillas Pontifical University, Spain; Heriot-Watt

University, UK; Ghent University, Belgium; KU Leuven University, Belgium; London Metropolitan University, UK; Monash University, Australia and Westminster University, UK. 17 members of teaching staff participated in the research by providing answers to the questionnaire. There were two members of staff who did not specify the name of their universities in the questionnaires. Overall, 24 students took part in the research and provided answers to our questionnaire. It is worth mentioning that both teachers and students participating in the research showed significant interest in the topic and provided comprehensive answers to all open questions included in the survey.

At the initial stage of this research, two anonymous short exploratory questionnaires, one for postgraduate students and one for teachers of SI, were designed and first piloted with a group of four students and five teachers in August 2020. The main objective of the survey was to explore the topic and identify common themes since the transfer to emergency teaching and learning had not happened before on this scale when universities had to move all teaching to remote mode. The questionnaires had open questions in order to create some space so that respondents could express themselves freely on any aspects of ERTL in SI and identify issues relevant to them, their group or specific tasks. This was also important because the questionnaire was planned for a number of countries and universities where conference SI was taught during the 2019/20 academic year. The pilot survey enabled us to establish several minor issues and enhance the clarity of some questions used in the questionnaires. The questionnaire asked participants to comment on various aspects of online teaching and learning, e.g. about previous experience in online/remote training and learning, how the switch from face-to-face to online teaching and learning was conducted, what went particularly well and what challenges participants experienced during online teaching and learning and whether students would be interested in attending another online course in conference simultaneous interpreting. The questions for teachers were slightly modified and included additional

questions asking them about previous experience in teaching SI or any other subject remotely, whether they had interpreted remotely before, whether there were any variations in student performance in the online part of the course in comparison with the previous face-to-face parts of the course. Additionally, there was a question about online assessment and exams and whether respondents experienced any difficulties because of the move to online teaching and learning. However, the findings in this part of the research and some other issues were not included in this article.

The approach of introducing similar questions in both questionnaires enabled us to establish and compare the experience of students and teachers during online teaching and learning and identifying specific issues which they observed during ERTL. The questionnaires also had two closed questions. One of them specifically addressed the move to ERTL and another one dealt with the format of online SI training, whether it was similar to previous face-to-face training. In addition to this, students and teachers were given an opportunity to explain further their answers. This mix of open and closed questions enabled us to identify and code the main common themes and specify key tendencies and issues experienced by both teachers and students during the move to ERTL in spring 2020.

The present study adopts qualitative research methods guided by grounded theory (Patton, 2002) in the investigation of ERTL in SI. The qualitative method was chosen in order to identify the main approaches and tendencies in teaching SI during ERTL and to gain a better understanding of how the process of transfer to ERTL was conducted and whether the new remote mode of SI teaching and learning was effective from the point of view of teachers and learners. The qualitative method used in this research also allowed researchers to capture wider issues associated with ERTL in SI and identify some aspects of best practice in these emerging circumstances. The data received from exploratory questionnaires was triangulated with the data obtained during semi-structured interviews with individual students and teachers in participating universities. This approach enabled us to confirm and

expand various findings identified from the answers to open questions in questionnaires and strengthen their validity. Overall, twelve interviews were conducted online using Zoom, WhatsApp or Skype: 6 interviews with students and 6 with teachers in participating universities at the end of August/beginning September 2020. A number of students and teachers volunteered to be interviewed in our research. The selection of candidates for an interview was based on the university and country they represented as our aim was to have a wide representation of universities and countries in this research. A semi-structured interview format was used which allowed for interviews to be both situational and conversational, as topics were identified in advance and facilitated a flexible approach where the exact wording of questions was not important. The elicitation of more in-depth and useful responses from participants was key in these research interviews (Robson & McCartan, 2016). All interviews were initially recorded and when full transcription of their recordings was completed all recordings were deleted in line with research ethics requirements. All personal names, names of universities and other references were deleted from transcripts in order to keep all records confidential.

Comments of participants in 41 questionnaires (24 students and 17 teachers) and 12 interviews (6 students and 6 teachers) formed a major part of the data for this study, and the qualitative analysis of their feedback is presented in the next part of this article. The findings are split between feedback from students and teachers, however the comparative analysis of our findings is also provided in the discussion and concluding remarks. All references to quotes from questionnaires will be presented as SQ + ordinal number for students' replies and TQ + number for teachers' replies, while quotes from interviews as SIN + ordinal number for students and TIN + number for teaching staff.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection. Notes were taken during and after each interview, especially about emerging themes, and some adjustments were made for subsequent interviews. This included rephrasing questions or

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adding new lines of inquiry. For example, a teacher and a couple of students mentioned the role of their course leader or course director during the move to ERTL, saying that the support was particularly helpful not only for the smooth transition to online mode but also enabled effective and flexible teaching and learning for the rest of the course. Both teachers and students were asked about the role of course leaders and how they saw it during the emergency online teaching and learning in their interviews. This approach enabled us to identify thematic connections and verify data received in exploratory questionnaires.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Previous experience in remote teaching, learning and interpreting

This research aimed at establishing previous experience in remote teaching, learning and interpreting of participating teachers and students, and whether it had any impact on the provision of emergency remote teaching and learning during the lockdown. This context could also explain how students and teachers coped with the emergency move to RTL in SI. The first set of questions in the questionnaire to teachers covered three fields: (1) whether they had attended any online/remote courses in Interpreting or other subjects before March 2020, what was their experience and whether it was a degree or professional or other course; (2) whether they had had any experience in remote interpreting; (3) whether they had had any experience in teaching SI before 2020. At the same time, students were asked only about their attendance in online/remote courses.

4.1.1. Previous experience of teaching staff

It was interesting to establish that over half of all teachers (11 out of 17) participating in this research had had some previous experience in remote teaching and learning or interpreting before March 2020. However, even among those who had had some experience there were some variations in the exposure: from attendance in an online course on approaches to teaching (TQ17) to arranging and teaching synchronous virtual classes

between universities as well as online sessions with international organisations (TQ9). The engagement of universities with interpreting departments of major international organisations, such as the United Nations, the European Commission, the European Parliament and others, as well as bilateral and multilateral relations between universities, enabled many academic teams to develop synchronous virtual joint workshops and training sessions. However, in most cases, they covered consecutive interpreting (TQ 9, 10, 14, 17). Such previous exposure to online training and various social platforms for communication (e.g. MeWe, WhatsApp) as well as online teaching resources (e.g. SCICTrain, speech repositories, YouTube) and webstreaming during face-to-face teaching made the transition to emergency online teaching smoother and more straightforward.

Some members of staff (9 out of 17) were also practising interpreters and had some experience in telephone interpreting for local government and in the health service. While several participants (TQ 11, 13) found the experience positive, a few others complained about poor sound in these interpreting situations (3 out of 17), e.g. *'When I interpreted where I was the only one working remotely and the client and service provider in the same room in person, it was hard as they had the phone on speaker and the sound was awful'* (TQ15).

However, there were no colleagues who had experience in teaching RSI (Remote Simultaneous Interpreting) as a full degree or professional course or previously engaged as an interpreter in an event which was interpreted simultaneously from a remote location.

4.1.2. Previous experience of students

Previous experience in attending online courses was somewhat limited. On the whole, several students (7 out of 24) reported that they attended online events and webinars organised by the university where they studied during the academic year 2019/20. For example, joint online classes with other universities or international organisations (SQ 7, 23, 24). Some other students mentioned regular use of online resources and speeches for

interpreting practice (SQ 3, 14, 22). One respondent mentioned the attendance of asynchronous online short courses Introduction in the Interpreting for the Judicial system and Telephone Interpreting Refresher which were only a few hours long and where participants had access to resources such as PPT (Powerpoint) and video presentations and where participants had to complete the course on their own (SQ17).

A few students (3 out of 24) wrote about their attendance at online conferences on interpreting or watching recordings of online courses (SQ7, 23, 24). Overall, students were positive about the attendance at online events and short courses, however it was obvious that the experience was sparse,

and the majority of students confirmed that they had no experience in online training and learning before March 2020.

4.2. Transition to ERTL

The majority of students (20 out of 24) thought that the transition to ERTL went smoothly and they were clear about the process (Figure 1). This is undoubtedly a significant achievement of the academic teams engaged in the process. However, the views of teaching staff split almost equally between agreeing that it went generally smoothly, and those who disagreed with this. In this part of our research, we aim to establish why there was a difference in views between students and staff.
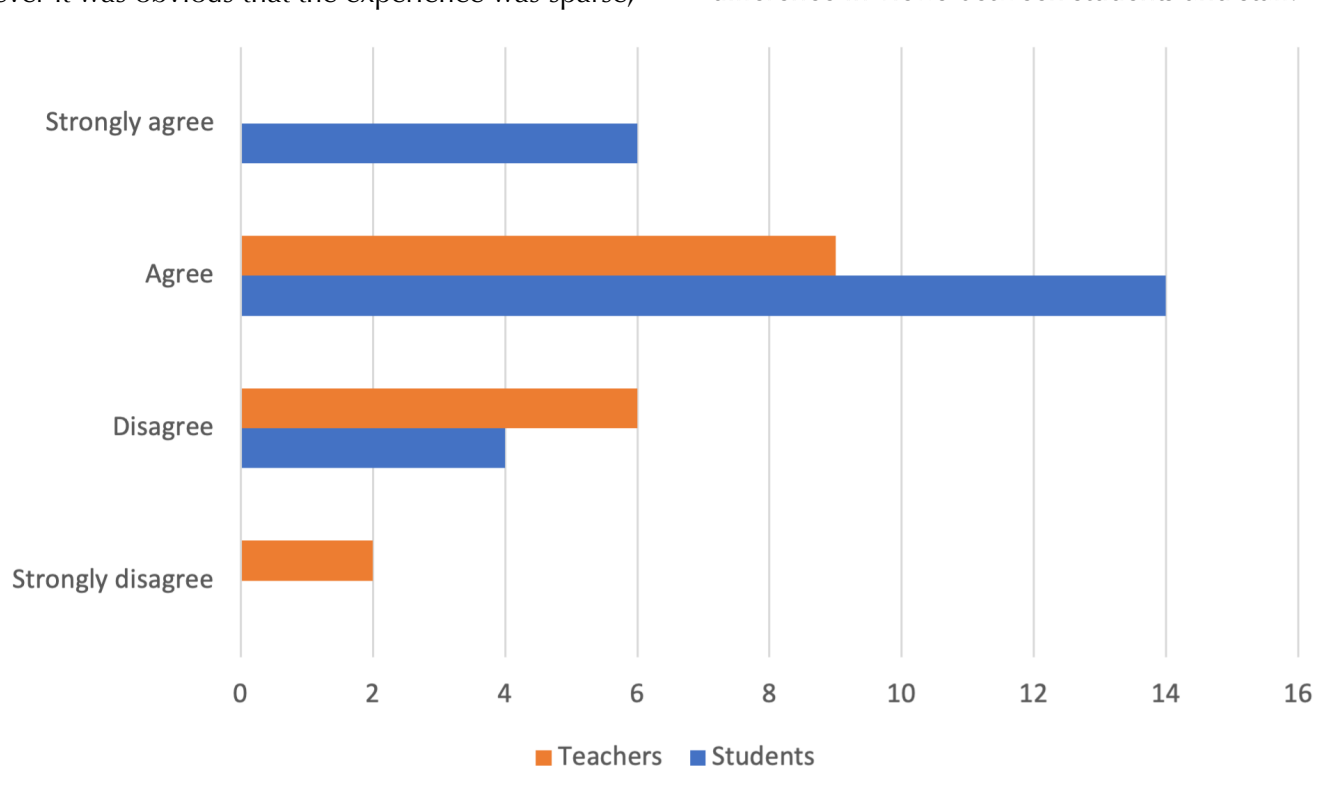

Figure 1. Answers to the question about the switch from face-to-face to ERTL, whether it was smooth, and respondents were clear about the process

There were several reasons for this discrepancy in attitudes between the two groups of respondents. Firstly, we need to analyse why there was significant discrepancy in the views of teachers about the move to ERTL in SI. In this respect, it will be good to analyse variations in approaches and explore possible links to previous experience. The

data collected enabled us to identify three broad groups of academic teams and the way they approached ERTL in SI at their universities.

1. Academic teams which had accumulated considerable experience in online teaching and learning prior to March 2020 and had no problem in switching to online mode for the rest of the

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course by identifying the best available and affordable technical solution for the provision of ERTL. Some colleagues in this group (7 out of 17 teachers) confirmed that they were confident in technology and the use of various online resources. They already used many online resources during the face-to-face part of the course, such as speech repository, SCICTrain, and worked closely with the students in developing their interpreting skills and organised online videoconferences and virtual classes with other universities and international organisations from the very beginning of the academic year. They also developed trust and the students' confidence that the team of trainers *'knew what they were doing'* (TIN1, 5, 6). This approach paid off when the transfer took place during the emergency situation and enabled smooth transition to an online mode of module delivery.

One of the themes which came up when discussing the transition to online training was the role of the course or module leader or director in ensuring efficient transition in these emergency circumstances. The ability to work like 'a conductor of the orchestra' and create a space for trainers and students to work effectively and achieve results is crucial in the success of any course, and what is even more challenging is *'to recreate that space online and to make sure that learning is going to happen'* (TIN1). Course leaders were instrumental in the provision of training for staff, exploring and suggesting solutions for online delivery of modules and courses in a very short period of time during the move to ERTL (TQ15, 17, TIN 5, 6).

2. The team had reasonable experience in developing materials for online teaching and learning but had to follow the university's strict rules about the use of online platforms. In this case, the teaching of SI was moved to asynchronous mode where the students provided recordings of their interpretation for the feedback of their teachers.

Some teams with less experience in delivering virtual and online training but with experience in developing materials for online teaching and learning, especially in asynchronous mode, faced the issue of strict university policies about the use of various tools for synchronous online teaching.

For example, one team reported that the use of Blackboard Collaborate Ultra was compulsory. This was the only platform they were *'officially allowed to use, which was really stupid because it did not work in some countries'* (TIN3). The team did not have enough experience in using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, which worked *'in a satisfactory fashion to an extent'* as it was difficult to incorporate SI in this platform. *'Class design had to be adjusted: students were given preparatory work (simultaneous interpreting to do in their own time), and the sessions were more dedicated to feedback'* (TIN3).

A similar experience was reported by another team (TIN4). They had to improvise and transfer the SI practice into asynchronous mode when students received speeches for interpreting in their own time and later sent the recordings of their interpreting to teachers for their feedback.

3. The academic teams and students had a close collaboration on the course which resulted in students suggesting the best platform for ERTL. In the majority of cases, this led to a combination of synchronous and asynchronous modes during this emergency situation.

In some instances, students took the lead during the transfer to ERTL in SI since they thought that they had more exposure to the existing online platforms and could identify a better platform for remote training in SI. They proposed platforms to teaching staff and in one case, a student suggested Discord, which he had been using for some time. In his interview he said that, *'I noticed that language schools were using Zoom… So, we used it from 1st April until the end of the semester. We used it in combination with Zoom'* (SIN1). Lecturers quickly adapted their teaching to the new medium and worked closely with their students in organising courses through Discord. In some instances, students recorded themselves *'and then sent the audio files to the professor for feedback'* (SIN1). In a way, this was a move to a synchronous/asynchronous mixed mode in ERTL.

There were some issues in the transfer of SI mock conferences to a remote mode. Almost all colleagues and students who participated in this

research reported certain challenges and limitations they experienced when they delivered mock conferences online. On the whole, *'the transformation wasn't as smooth'* for bi-weekly mock conferences organised by various professors of each language'. *'It turned out that it was impossible to gather all these people around a single virtual environment'* (SIN1). As a result, in some universities, mock conferences were substituted by self-study, where the engagement of students was variable.

The role of course leaders also transpired as key in this group of universities since they had to think about students and teachers/professionals engaged in ERTL. In some instances, there was more thinking about the centrality of students in the process which led to some frustrations and anxiety of teaching staff who felt they were neglected and found it difficult to provide reasonable teaching during ERTL (TQ3, 6, 16. TIN5). This could have an impact on the overall results in this part of the

research where the feedback from teachers was split between those who thought that the process was smooth and those who experienced more challenges, which will be covered further in 4.4.

4.3. The format of online classes

A similar split between teachers who thought about changes in the format of online classes in SI was observed in this research (Figure 2). To some extent, this was the result of some training in SI in a few universities being moved to asynchronous mode and although students were generally satisfied, it transpired that the move was viewed by some teachers as less effective and efficient due to the time gap between the actual production and recording of interpreting by students and the feedback provided by teachers. In view of this, there were teachers (4 out of 17) who expressed some concern about the practice and whether it might have an impact on learning (TQ8, 11, 12).
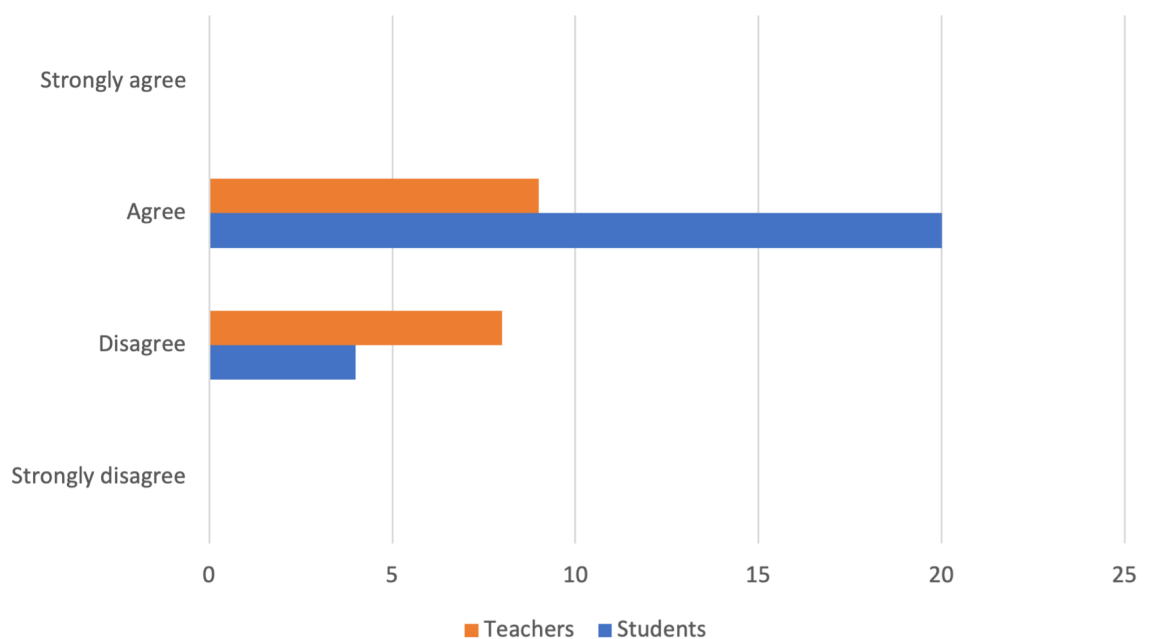

Figure 2. Answers to the question about the format of online classes and whether they were similar to face-to-face classes they had before the lockdown

Some teachers (5 out of 17 respondents) considered synchronous SI as the most challenging part of the moving of interpreting courses to ERTL since there was no adequate platform *'for large groups of students and numerous language combi-*

nations' (TQ11, 15, 17). Some other teachers (3 out of 17) thought that *'there was no time to develop new approaches in this emergency situation'*, however they *'had to adjust activities to the new environment'* (TQ8, 12) and therefore the format

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'Academic staff, especially with less previous exposure to online training, were worried about the effectiveness of their sessions and the impact on the learning process and outcomes. Another reason was that academic teams received less support from their course/module leaders or the universities. On the contrary, students found the format of classes more or less similar and did not notice many issues which concerned academic staff'

of SI training began to change but rather gradually. Teachers in a couple universities also reported that there were no booths in ERTL, *'that is what had to be adapted'* (TQ3, 15) and they had to divide the practice element into several parts because they thought tha*t 'giving instant feedback was not possible, unless in a breakout room. The issue was the time it took to get from one breakout room to the next and gauging the length of activities'* (TQ16). Some difficulties in operating online platforms were due to insufficient experience in using those tools prior to ERTL.

In some instances, teachers were also concerned that it was strange for students to be in separate rooms and not to have the same interaction (TQ15). Overall, teachers thought that they managed their SI sessions in a slightly different format where some *'activities had to be altered to suit the challenges'* and introduce more pre-recorded work (TQ16). Academic staff, especially with less previous exposure to online training, were worried about the effectiveness of their sessions and the impact on the learning process and outcomes. Another reason was that academic teams received less support from their course/module leaders or the universities.

On the contrary, students found the format of classes more or less similar and did not notice many issues which concerned academic staff. Yet, during interviews with students, it transpired that

some students (3 out 24) put 'agree' to this question, however they felt uncertain about the best way of answering this question since in some instances they had mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, SI tutorials were similar according to the majority of students, but, on the other hand, they were different because, for example, they were connected with their lecturer remotely and there were no booths (SIN1, 4, 5).

Many students and teachers described certain difficulties in keeping the format of SI mock conferences. In some instances, it was technically possible to provide only one option of SI into 'A' languages, while in other cases, there were reports of limitations and temporal inactivity of some students due to the nature of online arrangements when, for example, they had to wait for other students to complete their interpreting of the speech or for teachers to provide feedback to other students (SQ13, 17; SIN5, 6; TQ17, TIN5). These delays or limitations contributed to a slower pace in mock conferences formats used by universities at the time.

4.4. What were the main challenges in the provision of ERTL in Simultaneous Interpreting?
4.4.1. Technical challenges
One of the main challenges mentioned by almost all students and teachers were issues related to technical parameters of platforms and stable Internet connection. In many instances, students and teachers had to use two devices in online SI training, and this arrangement presented certain challenges. A few students wrote about their frustration when facing technical issues, e.g. *'when I got my first internet connection problems, I imagined that it isn't the same as interpreting in the interpreting booths. Since simultaneous interpreting is already really hard, having these technical problems, we got more frustrated'* (SQ7). Many students (18 out of 24) reported stressful situations related to unstable Internet connection when they could not see the video (SIN1) or missed parts of the original speech (SQ15). Poor sound quality was another issue observed in this research, e.g. *'Sometimes the sound wouldn't be clear or loud enough. Or there*

would be chunks of speech that would be cut off altogether. This would make it very difficult to concentrate on the speech and provide a good interpretation' (SQ17).

Students and teachers tried to resolve these issues either by using various options of connecting to the Internet, e.g. using an ethernet cable, or sometimes by switching off videos and moving *'to audio only. This improved the quality of the connection. But of course, when you interpret for a lot of people you have a lot of problems'* (SIN2). Students could also open links to recorded speeches locally on their other devices which could improve the streaming. At the time of lockdown, the network also seemed to be significantly overloaded with all universities and schools delivering training online, and businesses and other organisations moving to remote delivery of services and business. However, one recent research at the Politecnico di Torino shows that, on the whole, university IT facilities and the Internet proved to be robust and coped successfully with challenges during the lockdown and maintained university operations (Favale et al., 2020). Our current research did not register any incidents which led to major breakdowns in communication or disruptions of online teaching and learning during the lockdown period.

Some students and teachers were not familiar with the platforms and software used for online SI training, and it took them more time to learn how to use online platforms for their synchronous sessions. For example, one of the students reported that *'there were some problems with Discord, especially for someone who is not used to all of this'* (SIN3). There were occasional comments from students that *'some professors were ready to adapt but some others were not fond of doing it…'* (SIN3). One of the course leaders described the situation even in more detail. She thought that 50% of teaching staff were *'scared of technology. Getting them to use any technology during their class is like already a hurdle… I had to connect with them on the system and had practice sessions with them'* (TIN3). This was a challenge in some teams, as discussed in 3.2 above. At the same

'Many students and some teachers described how tired they were after hours in front of the screen without any breaks, and even a lunch break was not enough to restore the energy. In this respect, some students compared remote and face-to-face SI training where they were usually able to move to booths or back to the conference room and make some other physical movements which allowed them to change their positions and create a more dynamic atmosphere'

time, according to the feedback received from all participants, most of the students did not have any major issues when using new technologies.

Individual home situations of students and teachers had some impact on the performance of participants in teaching and learning. During the lockdown, many people worked or studied from home. One student reported that there was a lack of understanding from her teachers because of the background noise she had as her partner was also working from home and had meetings and she *'had a feeling that teachers sometimes did not respect this'* (SIN1). There were a couple of similar cases in our data, however, overall, these instances were not systemic.

4.4.2. Other challenges: from cognitive strain to lack of social interaction

Many students and teachers mentioned heavier cognitive strain in their replies in questionnaires and interviews. One student reported that when they moved to ERTL *'classes that normally lasted around four hours were forcibly shortened, since it makes no sense to practise if students and/or teachers are exhausted'* (SQ11). Many students and some teachers described how tired they were after hours in front of the screen without any breaks, and even a lunch break was not enough to restore the energy. In this respect, some students

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compared remote and face-to-face SI training where they were usually able to move to booths or back to the conference room and make some other physical movements which allowed them to change their positions and create a more dynamic atmosphere. While in the remote mode, the situation was extremely static, and there was hardly any movement for at least two hours in a row, which was extremely tiring for students and some teachers. A couple of teachers called it *'computer fatigue'* as this is what they could see every day from morning till evening without going anywhere (TQ15-17). This finding confirms earlier findings made by Moser-Mercer (2003) who observed a more rapid decline in the performance of interpreters in remote interpreting in comparison with on-site performance.

In order to deal with tiredness and the static nature of online teaching and learning, some universities or rather course leaders began introducing longer and more regular breaks. One student mentioned that they had more breaks during online training (SIN2), while another student wrote in her questionnaire that *'this time we've got a 15min break after each hour of studying which is just great. It takes the pressure away from your body and gives your eyes and brain some resting time'* (SQ17). At the same time, the experience was also really exhausting for teachers as well who complained even about two-hour sessions: *'You need to do a proper break. It also depends on the students. Because some students are so eager, they do not mind but some of them are getting tired'* (TIN3).

In his interview, one student spoke about four-hour SI classes, where they interpreted speeches and did some other exercises in between which allowed them to relax. He also thought that the dynamics in the class had changed, and everything moved faster because *'in normal classes we listened to each other, compared and discussed and online it was impossible. The progression of texts accelerated and after two hours we were tired because actually it was non-stop interpreting'* (SIN4). However, many universities were more preoccupied with other issues and were more focused on

the technological tools (Rapanta et al., 2020) and did not consider changing the time allocated for online classes and introducing more substantial breaks across the board.

The cognitive load and tiredness of students also increased because they had to pay constant attention to various devices, their internet connection, recording facilities, their glossaries and other resources and follow all activities during their online class (TQ9, 10, 17). The combination of tiredness, screen fatigue and the working from home situation as well as limited opportunities for outside physical exercise had a negative impact on the level of concentration during interpreting classes. Staying focused due to being in a totally different environment was an issue reported by eight students (SQ1-4, 17, 18, 23, 24). One student wrote that *'it was not easy to concentrate while being in my very own living room or study room, and to remain focused throughout the lessons and activities we did'* (SQ3).

On the other hand, in the new environment of working from home, students reported that they generally felt less stress in comparison with being in a booth and being observed by everyone, e.g. *'I didn't experience the stress of interpreting in front of my teachers. Instead, I felt 'safe' behind my desk'* (SQ5). Another issue related to this challenge was the difficulty of recreating a conference situation for practising such key skills for interpreters as coping with stress and developing self-control when dealing with stressful situations and showing emotional resilience. However, some teachers and students were pointing to the fact that the need to deal with additional issues in remote interpreting mentioned above taught students how to stay in control of the situation and develop required skills.

Another issue which dominated in the feedback from both students and teachers was the lack of social interaction with peers. It was rated by some students as the most negative aspect of ERTL (SQ17, 18, 23, SIN1, 2, TIN 5, 6). Students missed the opportunity to discuss their progress with their peers and either vent their frustration or share their excitement about what was happening in their classes, tutorials, SI practice or simply to exchange

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views on various issues of interpreting. In the words of one student, the training was more *'mechanical'* when *'the teacher was saying this and that, and we had to move to another exercise. Also, the feeling we had that we perhaps wanted more explanations, that we are neglected sometimes'* (SIN1). Another student missed lunches with their peers and time for *'chatting and building up relationships. Some other students reported that they had informal meetings with other students on Zoom, however they could not 'replace a real face-to-face interaction'* (SQ17).

Teachers in some universities realised that this was a major issue, that they experienced themselves the impact of lockdown and limited opportunities for communication and the absence of face-to-face socialising. In order to create at least some space, some teachers decided to offer students an early connection time on Zoom for those who wanted to have a chat before the start of the class (SQ17). Overall, it was challenging for students and teachers *'to feel connected, positive and in full shape'* when everything went online (TQ9).

A major issue of *'presence'* was reported by both teachers and students (SQ10, 23, 24, TQ 7, 12, 17, TIN5, 6). Some respondents thought that it was difficult to *'link with the audience'* or *'get visual feedback from the audience'* as it was not always clear what the participants were looking at and whether they could *'understand the interpretation and whether the students followed teachers' instructions'* (TQ7). As a result, the following two aspects of the same issue were identified:

(1) inability to connect fully with the students since the screens, cameras, lighting and other technical issues did not allow teachers to see exactly what students were doing and what they thought about certain issues (TQ12, 17);

(2) it was difficult to connect with the imaginary audience for whom the interpretation was provided (SQ24), *'it felt like you are speaking to a black hole. You do not know whether anyone actually understood what you said. Perhaps, this is similar to radio and TV presenters who are not able to see the audience…'* (TIN6).

Both teachers and students felt somewhat disconnected, which had an impact on the overall quality of presentations during interpretation exercises (SQ10, 23, TIN5). This confirms previous studies into remote SI summarised by Moser-Mercer (2005) where such factors as 'a sense of presence' have an impact on the production in a remote setting. More recent research conducted by the United Nations in the use of RSI during lockdown supports this conclusion and specifies other technical challenges, such as the quality of sound and video streaming (Chaoui, 2020).

Students and teachers also identified the absence of a booth as another challenge for SI training. Normally, students are taught how to work together and collaborate in the booth, e.g. they could not practise switching microphones with a booth partner (SQ1, 8). In a remote setting, all students worked individually and there was very little cooperation between them in the same language combination. Some teams of teachers introduced Jamboard (Google Workspace, 2021), which offered opportunities for collaboration in real time and could 'replicate the notepad in the booth. But yet again, it requires an additional tool' (TQ9). Such abundance of tools, platforms, and new approaches to learn and absorb in the last part of the course was not always welcomed by students who sometimes felt overwhelmed by the number of devices they had to operate in SI online classes.

Students from almost all universities raised the issue of the quality and regularity of feedback from teachers as one of the major challenges during ERTL (SQ 21, 22, SIN1-4). One student wrote that

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'the quality and continuity of the feedback to students to improve interpreting performance took a toll … due to the lack of familiarity (by teachers) with the medium' (SQ21). Another student provided more explanations in his interview stressing that *'we could do more exercises in the face-to-face course and get immediate feedback so that we do not forget what was actually happening during the interpreting'* (SIN1).

Teachers also raised other concerns, e.g. time difference and the ability to accommodate students in different time zones, the use of other additional tools in ERTL in SI, organisation and the provision of training for teaching staff, the amount of work teachers had to put into the preparation and provision of remote SI training and the lack of adequate recognition of their considerable efforts and additional time by universities during this difficult, stressful, and emotional time for many (TQ9-12, 17; TIN1-6). The parameters of this article do not allow us to cover all issues raised in this research. Some findings will be considered and presented in future articles on the topic of remote simultaneous interpreting training.

5. CONCLUSION

Irrespective of challenges and limitations experienced by academic teams teaching SI, it is important to note that teachers were able to complete their modules in SI by making arrangements for a smooth transfer to ERTL in synchronous and asynchronous modes. The smooth transfer and the choice of the mode mostly depended on the prior experience of the teaching team in delivering online workshops and webinars and their close engagement with students. In this respect, the role of the course or module leader/director has been outlined as key in providing leadership, a sense of direction and necessary training at a time of change. The organisational side of ERTL was challenging from both technical and pedagogical points of view and requires further research and experimental training as well as more sharing of practices between universities nationally and internationally. Perhaps, international organisations and the CIUTI could give greater impetus to this work.

'The need for remote interpreting is obvious, as there could be many other situations and circumstances where face-to-face meetings may not be possible for various reasons, and universities will need to respond to this new challenge and consider introducing changes in the current provision of simultaneous interpreting and interpreting as a whole'

The proposed direction of developing remote SI training either within the entire postgraduate course or as part of an SI module is based on the feedback from students, teachers and professionals who have already been directly engaged in some modes of remote interpreting after finishing their courses. Irrespective of numerous limitations of the remote SI discussed in this article, this mode remains key in the current circumstances and students will benefit from some exposure to it.

The proposed development could also enhance the methodology of RSI teaching as well as introduce new approaches in our current interpreting teaching and learning. This research confirmed that blended learning is here to stay but requires the creation of new methods and techniques based on examples of good practice, their analysis, and further studies across a wide range of institutions.

Many universities will continue to teach SI and other subjects remotely due to the pandemic situation. In this respect, this study will help teaching staff identify and consider issues and challenges which could be avoided in the provision of either fully or partially remote courses in interpreting. More specific issues identified for SI in this research are also applicable to a variety of subjects, for example, the issue of quality and regularity of the feedback to students as well as the availability of peer feedback.

However, the main challenge in remote SI teaching and learning is the provision of appropriate and affordable platforms for training SI and ensuring good internet connection for all participants

which in its turn will contribute to the improvement of the quality of sound and video streaming of speeches. These changes should be accompanied by more focused training of teaching staff which would allow them to practise the use of platforms for specific tasks in RSI classes and mock conferences.

New studies and practical experiments should address other emerging challenges for RSI teaching and learning identified in this research, e.g. cognitive strain, tiredness and computer fatigue, the ability to cope with stress when working remotely and developing self-control and resilience when dealing with stressful situations, the issue of 'presence' and how students can develop 'links with the audience', the absence of booths and many other important issues. The need for remote interpreting is obvious, as there could be many other situations and circumstances where face-to-face meetings may not be possible for various reasons, and universities will need to respond to this new challenge and consider introducing changes in the current provision of simultaneous interpreting and interpreting as a whole.

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