

Online Simultaneous Interpreting in Algeria: A Brief Description of the Task: Case Study: Focus Group Sessions in Market Research**Fasla Allel Bilel****Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, Algeria,**allelbilel.fasla@univ-tiaret.dz

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Abstract:

Interpreters have constantly played a key role in various multilingual environments involving different entities. The sanitary context caused by Covid-19 led to the emergence and the spread of new technical means liable to help stakeholders ensure their communications remotely. As a result, all interpreters required to perform online interpreting have to be aware of the usual obstacles in order to perform their tasks in line with the guidelines expressed by the source and the target audiences in terms of effective multilingual communication, clarity and goal achievement. This paper aims at describing online interpreting by analyzing the methods and the tools that interpreters should take into consideration for such tasks. On the other hand, it illustrates some of the unexpected hurdles that interpreters may have to face by reviewing former studies on remote interpreting and by reporting multiple experiments involving multilingual market research sessions in three Algerian cities, namely Algiers, Oran and Sétif, from December 2020 to March 2023.

Keywords: Online Interpreting; Remote Interpreting; Translation; Multilingualism and Translation; Effective Communication

الملخص:

يؤدي المترجمون الفوريون دورًا حاسمًا في نقل المعرفة وفي تفعيل الحوارات والتبادلات في بيئات متعددة اللغات التي تشمل فاعلين متعددين، غير أن أدى السياق الصحي الناجم عن جائحة كوفيد 19- إلى ظهور وسائل تقنية جديدة تسمح لأصحاب المصلحة بضمان تواصل عن بُعد باستخدام المنصات والبرامج عبر الإنترنت. يهدف هذا المقال إلى وصف عملية الترجمة الفورية عبر الخط في الجزائر من خلال تحليل أساليب وأدوات التي يجب على المترجمين الفوريين أخذها في الاعتبار لمثل هذه المهام. كما يوضح أيضًا العقبات غير المتوقعة التي يواجهها المترجمون الفوريون من خلال تحليل تجارب متعددة تتضمن حصص دراسات السوق متعددة اللغات في ثلاث مدن جزائرية الجزائر، وهران و سطيف من ديسمبر 2020 إلى مارس 2023.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة الفورية عبر الخط، التواصل المتعدد اللغات، الترجمة، الترجمة والاتصال، الترجمة الفورية

1. Introduction

Interpreting has long been at the center of multilingual collaborations. It is also known to be very challenging for all interpreters, who constantly seek to improve their skills by doing various types of subject-driven research and by adjusting their services according to their clients' needs. Online interpreting, also known as an extension of remote interpreting, illustrates this evolution well enough since it makes the interpreters' assignments more intricate from many perspectives. It is a logical evolution of interpreting, as: "The increasing practice of remote interpreting by telephone and video has profoundly changed the ways in which interpreting services are being delivered" (De Boe, 2023, p. 01). This is, actually, what has led many scholars and interpreters to delve into the opportunities and the challenges inherent to these practices, namely about the role of remote interpreters in various patterns, and compare them with traditional interpreting settings.

The interests in remote interpreting have been growing significantly since the 1970's, but more remarkably these last years, as a solid alternative to overcome the Covid-19 restrictions all over the globe, making multiple companies and institutions rely on it for business and organizational matters. That being said, online interpreting is also determined by external factors that must be taken into account by interpreters at all levels since they, relatively, affect their missions in terms of faithfulness, quality, performance and health. Thus, the researcher is inclined to advance practical interrogations about the nature of online interpreting, the obstacles and the challenges met by online interpreters and the required skills in some settings.

This research deals with the analysis and description of online interpreting sessions from March 2021 to May 2023 in order to explore procedural aspects and expectations assessment in online interpreting patterns in the field of market research, namely during focus group sessions as: "focus groups bring together several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher" (Morgan and Spanish, 1982, p.253). The participants are also selected according to predetermined criteria, such as age, gender, marital situation and professions. Those patterns may also be generalized to other fields since online interpreters seek better work conditions.

2. An Overview on Online Interpreting

Online interpreting may be defined as performing a transmission of audio materials from S.L to T.L using online devices and tools. In the available literature, online interpreting is defined as a logical continuity of remote interpreting; a discipline that emerged in 1970's using communication devices, namely hand phones as claimed by (Moser-Mercer, 2003, p.01): "The first major remote interpreting experiments were carried out in the 1970s: the Paris-Nairobi ("Symphonie Satellite") experiment by UNESCO in 1976 and the New York-Buenos Aires experiment by the United Nations in 1978." Today, OI has become

a significant option for organizations and stakeholders, given its advantages that are usually comprised in financial savings, time saving and quick access to remote information. Moser-Mercer (2003, p.02) notes that while: “cost and effort necessary to ensure high-quality remote interpreting set-ups are certainly still not negligible, they are likely to decrease as equipment becomes less expensive and technical support staff become more experienced.” The need for RI has increased ever since and has acquired considerable market shares in the interpreting field. Gaber and Corpas (2020, p.66) reveal that: “For the settings in which remote interpretation is performed, the percentages, in descending order, are as follows: Healthcare (71.43%); social and administrative (64.29%); legal and judiciary (58.93%); police stations (53.57%); educational centers (37.50%); and others (21.43%).”

On the other hand, it is also important to remember that consecutive and simultaneous R.I has been a topic of discord and rejection. The available literature in this field mentions the early negative reactions towards this activity. For instance, Braun (2015, p.05) highlighted that: “The idea of remote interpreting was also met with considerable resistance by professional conference interpreters, most visible in the discourse of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).” Moreover, many practitioners show a great resistance towards R.I for valid reasons, as claimed in Mouzourakis (2006, p.55): “It is unlikely that much progress in RI will be achieved without a more systematic understanding of the ergonomic and cognitive issues involved and, in particular, interpreter alienation or the absence of a feeling of participation in the meeting room universally observed and experienced in remote interpreting experiments.”

3. An Experiment-driven Description of the Assignments

As a reminder, all the subject assignments were ordered starting from the Covid-19 pandemic since the stakeholders, namely the clients and the market research teams, could not organize meetings and focus group sessions unless they did it remotely using videoconference platforms, such as Zoom and Microsoft teams. Since the start of this collaboration, the stakeholders comprised of the meeting leader and the clients and the participants have discussed the consumers’ perceptions on multiple products’ categories and brands that we can summarize as follows:

- Foods: Olive Oil, Mayonnaise
- Soft Drinks: Sodas.
- Infant Nutrition: First Milk, Follow-on Formulas.

The aim of those meetings is to learn more about the consumers’ behavior towards pre-selected products or brands. The meetings sessions, gathering in the same location as the meeting leader and the group of six to eight consumers, last proximately two hours. The questions and the answers are in Arabic or Algerian

dialects, and the online interpreter's role is to interpret the contents of the conversation into French or English, depending on the language spoken by the clients, who are usually the target audience.

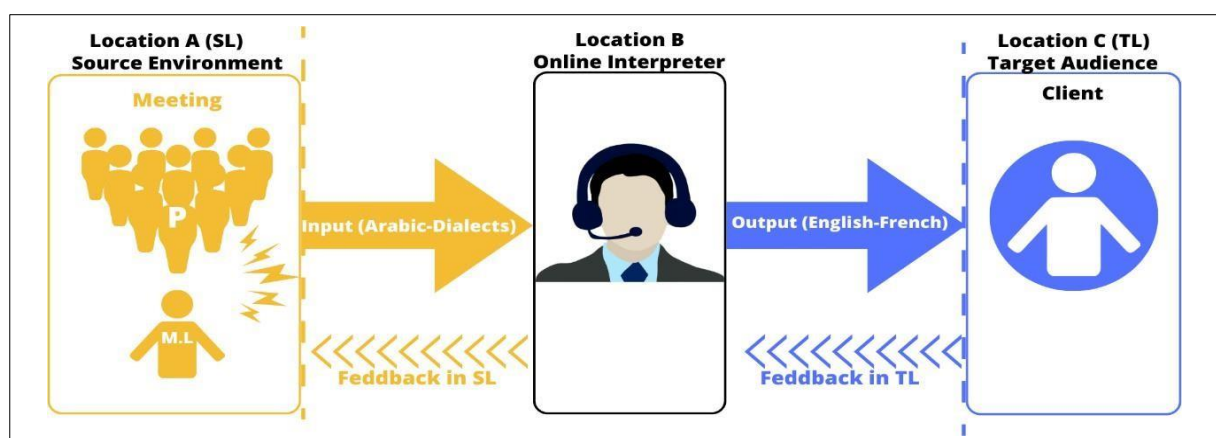
4. Online Interpreting Settings

From an operational interpreting perspective, the nature of the settings evolved gradually according to the sanitary context. Three remote settings can be relied on as follows:

4.1 Setting A: The Interpreter's Complete Isolation

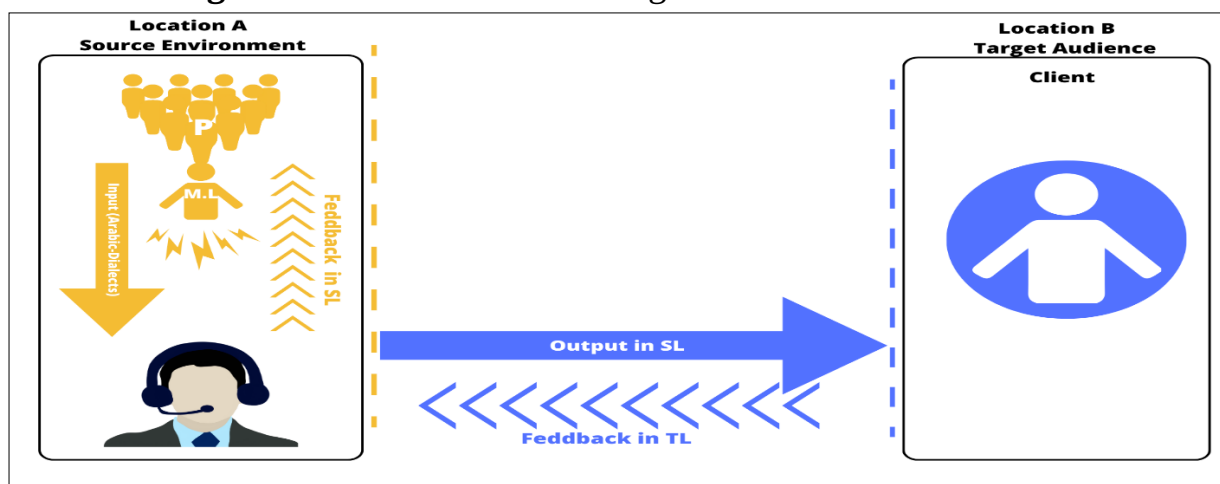
The interpreter performs his task in a remote location, isolated from the source and the target environments, and uses a videoconference platform in order to access the conversation and to interpret the dialogues and the debates to the client using another device connected to another online meeting with the clients. To clarify this pattern, the interpreter uses two devices: the first one which is connected to the source meeting is set to establish the input flow, while the second is connected to another meeting, where the client can listen to output flow in English or French.

Figure 1: The Interpreter's Complete Isolation



4.2 Setting B: Isolation from the Target Audience's Environment:

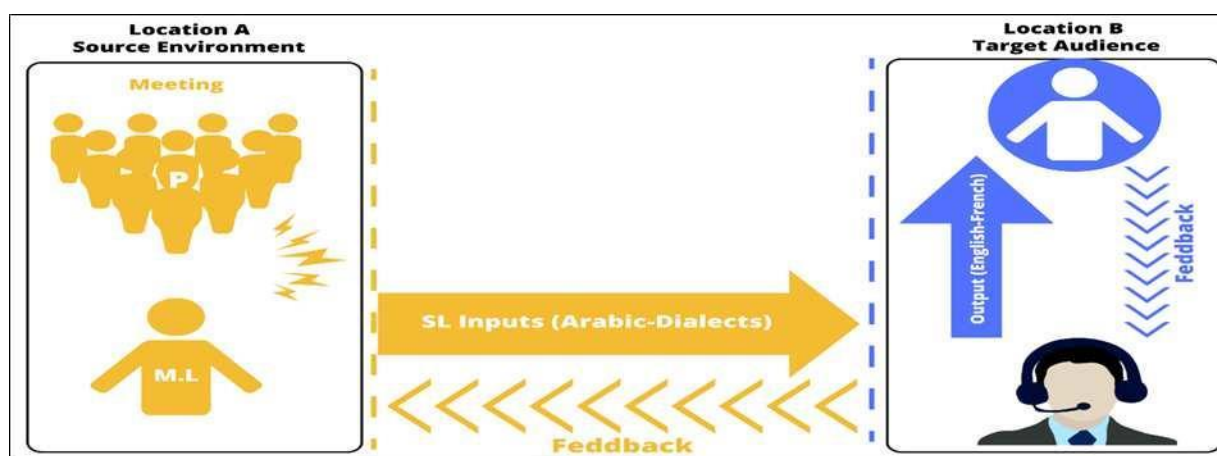
The meetings gathering in the same location, with the meeting leader and the group of six to eight consumers, last proximately two hours. The interpreter's role is to interpret the contents of the conversation. The interpreter performs his task in the source environment and catches the contents of the conversations and the debates around a selected topic. He is, however, delivering the output in the T.L via an online call with the client using a videoconference platform.

Figure 2: Isolation from the Target Audience's Environment

In this setting, the interpreter shares the same source environment and delivers the output using online devices. The problematic feature in this setting concerns the audio quality of the output since the interpreter does not always have the opportunity to perform his task in a soundproof booth. Thus, the client does not receive the interpreter's output only; he may also receive S.L inputs caught by the interpreter's microphone.

4.3 Setting C: Isolation from the Source Environment

In this setting, the interpreter receives the input in S.L using an online device or program and performs his task in presence of the target audience. He can, however, play other roles, such as, asking the client's questions or interact with the meeting leader for the sake of acceptable transmission or clarification. This setting is, by far, the most advantageous one since the interpreter's assignment is not disturbed by the presence of the target audience. However, his task may become intricate due to unwanted technical issues or because of uncontrolled feedback from the target audience during simultaneous delivery.

Figure 3. Isolation from the Source Environment

5. Obstacles

At the start of every meeting in the described settings, the meeting leader reminds all participants that the session is being recorded and followed by interpreters, colleagues and the client. Although it is necessary to remind the participants that they must not interrupt each other to express themselves, and that they have to respect everyone's opinions or points of views, an acceptable input sound quality cannot be always reached because the pace of all the questions and the answers makes sometimes all the participants react verbally in the same time about a given topic or an open-ended question. As a result, the interpreter's input punctually becomes a sum of interjections, multiple voices at different audible levels added to the meeting leader's voice simultaneously. Additionally, focus group sessions in Algeria gather wide categories of consumers using various slangs and dialects making the interpreter's assignment more complex as argued in (Taleb-Ibrahimi 1998, p.22): "Algerian speakers live and evolve in a multilingual society where common spoken and written languages, for instance Arabic dialects, Berber, standard Arabic and French are in constant competition."

Although the settings may seem simple from an outer perspective, it has been challenging every time the interpreter was assigned to interpret online. The observed obstacles can be listed as follows:

5.1 Technical Issues

It is well known that the full understanding of the source material is crucial to translating or interpreting. In a traditional translation or interpretation setting, where the interpreter interacts directly with the source material and/or the speaker, he can also rely on technical support provided by experts in conference interpreting or similar settings, unlike online interpreting, which depends, mainly on Internet quality so that the source material is transmitted to or from the interpreter and any cut, any interference significantly affects the flow of the output feed in TL. As a result, the interpreter loses partially or entirely sentences or ideas expressed in the source meeting and cannot re-express them in TL unless he deduces, awkwardly, the global meaning at the end of each step of the meeting. It is also worth reminding that all stakeholders rely on internet quality to understand and be understood. Those interferences may happen in the first setting not only between the source meeting and the interpreter, but also between the interpreter and the target audience: "Difficulties in communication can be generated by technical problems, such as audio quality, connection problems, line being cut off etc." (Amato, Spinolo and Rodríguez, 2018, p.13). In other words, the reliability of the interpreted materials, depend almost entirely on the reliability of the internet flow. In addition to stress and frustrations, it can cause:

- Losses at lexical, syntactic and stylistic levels in TL because the interpreter cannot rewind the previous materials and deliver a comprehensible

message, which result in considerable losses at a semantic level.

- A significant delay due to cuts, interferences or interruptions given that the source material is distorted.
- Loss of concentration and self-control because the interpreter is forced to focus on fixing a given issue.
- Loss of confidence if the target audience starts asking questions about the overall meaning or the reasons causing this confusion.
- Loss of simultaneous interpreting flow since the delivered interpretation is cut or distorted.
- Loss of interpreting quality in the TL as an overall result.

5.2 Interruptions

Given the fact that simultaneous interpretation requires a short delay when the transfer of the material from SL to the TL is performed, distinguishing a speaker's entire sentence from the rest of the others' reactions when they start expressing their opinions at the same time is a challenging task; that is precisely what makes an interpreter hear suddenly many voices to be interpreted, at the same time. In addition, this situation can be observed most often when he has not finished interpreting the previous sentence or idea. At that stage, the Interpreter should remain calm and wait for the ML to establish order and quiet with the participants. This situation occurs every time the meeting leader asks vague questions or does not address a participant directly. As a result, the interpreted material is interrupted or distorted and cannot be normally received nor assessed by the target audience.

As for noise, OI is subject to all types of disturbing sounds and echoes that originate from the meeting and/or internet flow. All along the sessions, interpreters may receive them and cannot interfere to fix the issue. Amato, Spinolo and Rodríguez (2018, p.72) claim that "This can add numerous added difficulties which may be due both to the lack of any input other than the auditory one and to possible acoustic problems owing to bad lines or noise."

5.3 Lack of Context

Isolation from the source and the target environments remains a crucial obstacle when interpreting online. Added to the aforementioned difficulties, the interpreter might also be affected by the lack of contextual data, simply because he cannot experience the same space-time with both environments. In previous studies, (Moser- Mercer, 2005,p.05) claimed that "the conditions of remoteness or the lack of presence" may be the most likely common denominator for the problems with remote interpreting. The concept of presence and its effects are issues that will require a substantial amount of further research."

In various types of traditional settings, interpreters rely on non-verbal elements that may constitute relevant insights, such as gestures, body language, facial

expressions and contextual information in order to grasp the intended meaning as” Interpreters have to infer the speaker’s intended meaning by supplementing what was said with contextual information external to the utterance.” (2005, p.5). In a remote setting, the lack of face-to face interaction impacts the interpreter’s performance significantly as stated in Amato, Spinolo and Rodríguez (2018, p.07): “The inherent differences between face-to face and remote communication also apply to distance interpreting and interpreters seem to be the most disadvantaged party in a remote interaction.” This situation affects his task on various levels, namely, the psychological one because of the heavy stress, ethical responsibility and the output capabilities. When the interpreter experiences this situation, various physiological phenomena may be observed, such as heavy heartbeat, cold sweat, increased anxiety. Former studies highlighted the importance of context and the effects of such patterns, as argued in Braun (2020, p.15): “The perceived lack of ‘presence.’ requires additional cognitive resources of the interpreters and comes at the price of fatigue.”

As a result, online interpreters may misinterpret some materials; they can also be misled in some situations because of the occurrence of extra contextual events that may affect the source and the target environments. Thus, the quality of interpreting might be questioned by one of stakeholders at any time as referred to in Braun and Taylor (2012, p.32):

Much like videoconference communication per se, the viability of video-mediated interpreting has thus become the subject of much debate. While some see these forms of interpreting as ways of speeding up communication processes and providing timely access to qualified interpreters, others are concerned that they will have adverse effects on the interpreters' working conditions and the quality of interpreting.

That being said, online interpreters should make sure of the meeting plan beforehand, and organize their tools and equipment ergonomically. They also should ask whether their intervention is required in some cases, or not.

6. Conclusion

As a conclusion, online simultaneous interpreting can be performed in various settings and adjusted to the stakeholders’ needs. It is also regarded as a convenient alternative for those involved in multilingual communication. As discussed in this paper, some of the factors mentioned above may play in favor of the online interpreters’ mission, like the quality of internet flow and the possibility to observe the events that may occur in the source environment. However, they can also play against the reliability of his performance and output quality in TL. The consequences of that situation may lead interpreters to lose concentration. More importantly, they affect directly the clarity and the accuracy of the delivered messages. Given the fact that interpreters are relatively isolated in the demonstrated

settings, overcoming those hurdles easily and quickly remains a difficult task. Often, any interruption may cause a delay or makes the meeting last longer, which does not fit the stakeholder's schedule.

All things considered, online interpreting remains a challenging task although it fits current demands in an interconnected world, where languages and locations must be accessible at all times. In addition to the core skills that all interpreters have to dispose of, an online interpreting assignment also requires a mastery of videoconference platforms and programs. Finally, at a psychological level, one of the main problematic situations is isolation when extra contextual events are hard to grasp in the source environment and, thus, unintelligible in TL.

Moreover, the online interpreter's range of action is determined by ethical and procedural aspects inherent to the field, such as quality and faithfulness on one hand, and the complex range of obstacles inherent to an online performance, on the other. The intricacy of online interpreting reveals that interpreters have to demonstrate an additional range of skills added to their core ones, namely multitasking and problem solving. That is why, it is advisable to design RI training sessions in universities, institutions and translation entities that would allow students and future practitioners to improve all required skills in line with up-to-date technology and market requirements.

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