

# Exploring perceptions on the integration of technology in the interpreters' workflow: reluctance, resistance and reservations.

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In recent years there has been a growing interest on the topic of technology and interpreting, with research on topics such as the utilisation of computer-assisted interpreting (CAI) tools (Fantinuoli 2017, 2016; Xu 2015), the use of tablets in interpreting (Goldsmith 2017; Goldsmith & Holley 2015; Drechsel 2013) and the use of digital pens for note taking in consecutive mode (Orlando 2010, 2014; Chen 2017).

In initial explorations on the use of technological tools in the interpreting profession such as the survey from Berber (2010), there appears to be a degree of reluctance by some interpreters to the incorporation of technology in their workflow. These reservations mainly relate to questions that have been raised by interpreters' and researchers alike on "whether technological tools can actually improve interpreters' performance and professionalism" (Tripepi Winteringham, 2010: 89).

Further research in this area is necessary to ascertain whether this "reluctance" is still evident today and what the underlying concerns or reservations from interpreters may be. The assumed perception may rather be that interpreters approach technology with some trepidation and/or scepticism and perceive the use of technology in their workflow as too complex or alternatively deem it as unnecessary.

This aim of the research is to investigate the perception of interpreters on the incorporation of technology in the sub-processes of interpreting. The study investigates whether or not the perceived reluctance to technology does exist and what the possible underlying reasons may be. This is done by utilising an exploratory mixed method approach which uses both qualitative and quantitative data obtained from questionnaires distributed to interpreters in the profession.

*Keywords: computer-assisted interpreting, technology, interpreting, interpreter workflow*

Sabine Braun

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). In its 'Code for the use of new technologies in conference interpretation', published in 2000, the association warned that "the temptation to divert certain technologies from their primary purpose e.g. by putting interpreters in front of monitors or screens to interpret at a distance a meeting attended by participants assembled in one place (i.e. tele-interpreting), is unacceptable" (2000). P 5 2015

Tripepi Winteringham

on whether technological tools can actually improve interpreters' performance and professionalism and many interpreters have shown some degree of reluctance to the

use of ICTs in their profession, as shown by Berber in her survey on the use of ICTs in professional interpreting settings (2008: 9).

Questions 9 and 10 were both intended to analyze the attitudes of the CIs and CITs, and to see the impact of ICTs on the profession. Although there were many professionals and educators who openly stated that ICTs cannot produce quality and professionalism, in general they admitted that they were an important means to obtain the information needed to perform the job, and were therefore unavoidable. In spite of this, they were still wary of expressing a very enthusiastic approach regarding ICT use to produce quality and professionalism.

**Berber 231** With respect to our hypothesis a), it can be said that there is still a certain resistance to the use of ICTs in the booth, and to the availability of ICTs during delivery. Although all the ICTs presented as options in this study were all used to a certain extent, it cannot be claimed that they are universally used; there are variations.

On the other hand, not all conference interpreters have a positive attitude. In fact, they are more skeptical about the effectiveness of ICTs for their work: some even referring to it as interfering to listening and concentration, or they are altogether against considering ICTs an integral or important part of interpreting. In several instances, conference interpreters who work only with pen and paper were mentioned, explaining that just as they make an extraordinary use of pen and paper for support, so ICTs should be used as no more than support, without expecting them to do one's job. On the other hand, other conference interpreters state that the use of ICTs ensures competitiveness in this age of rapid information, and the conference interpreter who cannot use ICTs is at a disadvantage. Thus there does not seem to be a consensus.

This research is carried out in light of three hypotheses:

There remains a certain resistance to the use of ICTs in the booth.

If I can prove that there is still a certain resistance to the use of ICTs in the booth, meaning by "certain" that they are not as universally used as, for example, book dictionaries have been, then it would confirm Donovan's statement (see section 1.2) that even today the use of ICTs is considered to some extent as unnatural, that is, not generally accepted. This hypothesis will show that a universal claim cannot be made, and beyond proving Donovan's statement. By providing information on the subject, it should help motivate more CIs to experiment with – and benefit from – these tools in the booth.

When discussing these processes, it comes to the mind that in spite of the fact that the analysis of the responses received could eventually prove that ICTs can truly help alleviate the efforts, it should be remembered that throughout interpreting history, and in fact throughout history of the world, there has been resistance to the new, especially in the older professions, although it must be stated that not necessarily among the older professionals.

In general, CIs and CITs perceive the impact of ICTs on their work as positive, with more emphasis on the benefits to be obtained by CITs – and not only regarding CAIT, but ICTs in general. CIs were more skeptical about the effectiveness of ICTs, with some being downright negative, while others viewed ICTs as indispensable. Thus, there does not seem to be a consensus on the part of the CIs.

As to their reaction to the first question related to professionalism, which reads: “Would you consider that the use of ICTs can enhance professionalism of the conference interpreter?”, 87%, a clear majority, agreed that they would help, while only 8% said “no”. The remaining 5% did not reply to the question. CIs foresee that ICTs can eventually help ease the production effort, mainly through search engines (54%), terminology data bases (53%), and online dictionaries (50%). Fewer CIs (44%) believe ICTs can help in the listening and analysis effort, and even fewer (41%) believe ICTs can help in the memory effort. Since this research is based on responses from 267 subjects in 47 countries and in practically all regions on five continents, 41 languages, and 173 language combinations, it is one of the most comprehensive grassroots studies made in IS regarding usage of ICTs. The data can be particularly useful for trainers, and perhaps for the developers of ICTs. Interesting individual results can be found in the various tables and charts as well as in the analysis made in section 10.1 of each of the hypotheses and research questions. I highlight here the most significant:

Today CIs tend to integrate the use of ICTs as part of their work in a more natural way, with only a few exceptions, which are not always due to generational or regional differences. Although there might still be resistance on the part of some CIs and CITs, most conference interpreters and conference interpreter trainers are now embracing ICTs in their work.

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- . Secondly, there will be a discussion on the identified potential resistance, aversion or lack of interest from the side of interpreters when it comes to technology and their profession

### 2.5.2 Aversion to technology by interpreters

Fantinuoli (2017: 154) indicates that despite various technologies available to interpreters today, the attitude of many practitioners towards interpreter specific technologies appears to be rather negative. Interpreters today, may still approach technology with an amount of scepticism and perceive the use of technology in their workflow as too complex and deem it as unnecessary. More than a decade ago, a survey on the use of ICTs in the profession of interpreting was conducted by Berber (2010) which indicated that interpreters have shown some degree of reluctance to the use of ICT in interpreting. Some responses from the survey indicated that there is a perception from members in the profession that ICT interferes with their work. Tripepi Winteringham (2010: 89) states that although CAI tools may be a major breakthrough in interpreting, practitioners are questioning whether technological tools are actually able to improve the performance of an interpreter and whether their practical use is feasible.

It is indicated that the main drawback of these tools, are how their use during interpreting is still considered by some as unnatural in the booth. Also how these tools may be time-consuming and acquires an additional effort when having to search for a term by typing which may result in distraction and possibly a loss of concentration. Jones (2014) puts forward the view that technology 'alienates' the interpreter from their task and that the use of technology during interpreting is not conducive to communication. Jones further states that while the use of ICT in a booth does have its advantages, the concentration of the interpreter should not be fixed on terminology and text but rather on the primary aim of interpreting which is the transfer of meaning and facilitation of communication. Jones concludes that technology in the booth is viewed as an obstacle to communication.

In recent years there have been a handful of empirical studies conducted on the use of CAI as a supportive tool during the preparation phase of an interpreting assignment (Xu 2015) as well as studies investigating the use of CAI tools in the interpreting booth (Gacek 2015, Biagini 2016, Prandi 2015).

Xu (2015) investigated how Corpus Driven Interpreter Preparation can improve trainee interpreters' performances. The results from the experiment show that test groups had a better terminological performance based on how there were more terms interpreted correctly and fewer terminological omissions.

Gacek (2015) set out to analyse whether the use of a particular CAI tool, *InterpretBank*, could improve the interpreter performance in terms of terminological quality. Based on the experimental data and the perception of the participants, it was indicated that a booth-friendly tool proves to be more efficient than a pen-and-paper method in terms of terminological quality. Fantinuoli (2017: 161) argues that although the study from Gacek suggests that the negative attitude of some practitioners who claim that the use of such tools are unnatural in the booth, is unfounded, the study lacks a robust experimental setup. Biagini (2016) set out to investigate whether the use of an electronic glossary in the booth could be viewed as a disturbing factor in the interpreting process or as a supportive tool. Based on the results of the experimental data it had indicated that all test subjects performed better when using the software. The analysis of the results indicate that CAI tools improve the overall interpretation quality.

A study by Prandi (2015) set out to investigate the integration of CAI tools in the interpreting curriculum by collecting data on the students' use of CAI tools while looking up terminology while in the booth. The data collected indicated that experience seems to play a key role in the integration of the tool by students in their workflow. The research showed that some students rely too heavily on the program. Other students were of the view that the tool was a distraction and find it hard to focus on delivery. The research concluded that "there is reason to believe the tool will prove a useful addition to the curriculum of trainee interpreters, yet more empirical studies are needed to test and improve the way it can be integrated with current interpreter training approaches" (Prandi, 2015: 2).

The results from the research studies mentioned above, have provided ample support for the assertion that CAI tools are beneficial to interpreters when used as a supportive tool before or during the interpreting process. The views put forward by Jones (2014) are not based on empirical research and there is still insufficient research on the use of CAI tools during interpreting to draw any firm conclusions on how the use of CAI tools impact on the cognitive load of the interpreter during the interpreting process as well as the overall interpreting performance. The handful of empirical studies discussed above, investigated and gave some insight into the practical use of CAI as a supportive tool and how it impacts on the quality of terminology, however, these studies were all product-orientated. Further research in the field should include process-orientated empirical research on the use of CAI tools and how it may impact on the overall interpreting process and whether or not there is an impact on the cognitive load of the interpreter. A pilot study by Prandi (2017) aims to address this gap by adapting the Cognitive Load Model from Seeber (2011) to operationalise hypotheses in the use of CAI tools in the booth.

The fact of the matter remains that terminological accuracy during interpreting remains essential and whether or not technology is present in the booth, all interpreters have encounters where they struggle with terminology from time to time which they need to cope with and remedy in some way. Just as with pen and paper or hardcopy dictionaries which are taken along as a supportive measure by the interpreter into the booth – that should be the case for technology in the booth. Technology is merely an improvement or addition to pen and paper methods of support. Older methods were not questioned in the same way as technology as to how they impact on cognitive load and whether or not their use in the booth is feasible. Just as how pen and paper does not do the job of interpreting for you – the same is applicable to technology. Tripepi Winteringham (2010: 88) has mentioned how interpreting may be slower to adjust to technological transformation since it is the second oldest profession in the world. With that in mind, the following statement from Pym (2011) appears to be applicable with regard to the possible reluctance or aversion to technology in interpreting:

"No matter the empirical evidence for or against, the professional group that gained its mystique with an old technology will resist the advance of the new technology, at least until it can turn the new to suit its own strategic purposes. Resistance to technological change is usually a defence of old accrued power, dressed in guise of quality" (Pym, 2011: 4).

Although there has been relatively little research on the integration of technology in the interpreting workflow with some degree of reluctance and aversion on its use by interpreters, it appears that more practitioners and researchers are becoming aware of the importance of understanding the place of technology in the profession and how it may improve the quality and productivity of interpreters.

Despite all their **concerns**, which are part of human nature and **may not be unjustified**, a majority of 52% approve the use of new technology for the interpretation industry. Developments such as the use of Wi-Fi, smartphones and/or specifically designed online apps/tools to deliver "virtual on-site" or remote interpretation are very important as they provide clients/users with choices and additional benefits. Additionally, 31% consider it necessary in a changing world, 14% do not judge it relevant and would prefer not to use any. Only 3% think it totally ridiculous because they feel that technology makes things harder for everyone.

In the specific settings of conference interpreting, a vast majority has never used any tools other than traditional simultaneous interpreting equipment. However, **a fifth has**, out of which **one participant judges** that *"Both onsite and online VRI have merits and applications: online for webinars, onsite for highly interactive meetings. Hybrid solutions are a combination of onsite and online audiences and will become popular for professional conference organizers"*. Wisely seen and well explained.

**Questions 12 to 18** collect data about **the frequency remote interpretation** is performed by the participants and the **interpreting platforms, tools or apps they use**. A large percentage (74%) has delivered remote interpretation services. Twenty-one respondents gave particular answers as to the equipment used to perform remote interpretation in Q13, as well as their perspective or attitude towards the tools used—**for which we would like to thank them very much**. The individual answers cover a whole range of different perceptions with a clear predominance of those who welcome new technology but have some reservations. **Some presented irrefutable arguments against it**.

This third part also gathers information about the **frequency of use of alternative conference interpreting equipment (as opposed to traditional onsite conference interpreting equipment)** and offers **valuable insights into** the assumingly **best and worst options** of those alternatives, thanks to the many written answers.

Question 26 asked the respondents "What are your concerns using technology during interpreting?"

An analysis of the qualitative data received from the respondents were:

Most responses can be captured under the theme: Cognitive overload. Respondents indicated that they have concerns when using technology during interpreting because it is distracting, it disturbs the fluency of interpreting, you may lose track of the message,

Cognitive Overload

Distracts

Losing track of message

Disturb fluency of interpreting

Multitasking impacts on concentration

Takes focus away from listener  
Multitasking affects the product  
Dividing concentration  
Not keep up with interpreting  
Typing while interpreting  
Catch up with interpreting  
Stressed lose focus  
Overload and distracted  
Cognitive overload  
Losing breaking concentration  
Slowing down

Time consuming  
Results take long to download  
Speed when loading  
Take too long to look something up  
Slow response  
Take long to find word  
Difficulty in accessing terms  
Lag time looking up terms  
Takes too long  
Speed  
Pace  
Time consuming

Failure of tech  
Batteries dies  
Tech not reliable  
Crash or freeze  
Tech failure

#### WIFI

No wifi access, internet speed, bad signal; lack of access to wifi, no data on phone (as opposed to wifi connection).

#### Environment / Location

No space for my laptop when doing consecutive  
Not possible to use tech in certain locations

#### Appear distracted

Unprofessional, seen as socializing  
Loss of trust in quality in my interpreting quality  
Send wrong perception to client  
Distract client  
Perceived as being engaged in other things  
Restrictions by managers who see you as being engaged with social media  
Appear to be not paying attention  
Appear distracted

#### Confidentiality

Dependence on tech

Accuracy

Lack of knowledge and opp

Unsure of use for CI, difficulty in adapting to pace of developments, haven't had the opportunity

Sign Language Interpreters

Use hands while interpreting. Never do consecutive. No way to use tech while interpreting.