Challenges
and Success Stories
in Interpretation
and Translation
since the Outbreak
of the Pandemic

Introduction

The MoU Conference emphasizes the importance of multilingualism as a core value for promoting diversity, efficiency and transparency. It is a forum where the United Nations and partner universities come together to review their collaboration, discuss changes in the various disciplines, and debate the features of an ever-evolving ancient profession, with the ultimate goal of bringing the training of language professionals closer to the needs of the United Nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, for the time being, heavily impacted the frequency, duration and format of in-person meetings. Consequently, this year, the United Nations has convened this virtual MoU Conference to continue sharing ideas, concerns and opportunities with MoU universities, and ensure uninterrupted dialogue on training future language professionals.

The seventh MoU conference, hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in partnership with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), is an opportunity to showcase the irrepressible power of languages. MoU universities from across the world have been invited to share their challenges and success stories since the outbreak of the pandemic. Although the past year was filled with tragedy, loss and radical change, it has also opened up exciting opportunities for the language profession.

The present report aims to launch a debate on how the United Nations and MoU universities have overcome adversity and distance to keep the power of languages alive. It highlights how changes, discussed for years, had to suddenly be implemented overnight to sustain both the training of the next generation of language professionals, and the multilingual nature of United Nations intergovernmental affairs.

Beijing Foreign Studies University

The COVID-19 pandemic has moved face-to-face interpreting teaching to an online mode via video conferencing platforms. Surveys of trainers and trainees of simultaneous interpreting (SI) delivered in online classrooms indicated that this mode is feasible and effective, probably because SI classes do not involve as much interaction as consecutive interpreting.

Trainees have not reported significant differences in the effects and learning outcomes. Forty percent of the students surveyed even preferred such a mode. Most trainers surveyed also felt little difference in the processes and effects. Online delivery is considered convenient and overcomes physical constraints such as interpreting booths or special classrooms. It also promotes constructive and independent learning via Internet, allows recording and review, and enables trainees to practice longer by avoiding rotation and interruptions in a traditional classroom with inadequate numbers of booths. Trainers also become more focused and work more as a facilitator or enabler.

There are challenges. For example, due to the lack of SI-specific teaching platforms, teachers have to adopt general-purpose social platforms such as Zoom, Wechat or QQ. As a result, sound quality is sometimes compromised. Trainee-trainer interaction is limited. Dual track recording and real-time monitoring of trainee performance is impossible. Trainees do not feel as much pressure as working in a simulated working environment; they also miss the opportunities to learn equipment operation, booth protocols and teamworking.

Due to the pandemic, translation teaching was also moved online. The most popular platform is Tencent or VooV. In this teaching environment, most students will turn off their cameras and the teacher is not sure if they are listening. But this can be overcome through exercises. Students can be frequently required to translate short passages and post the results in the chat box. The record can be later used to evaluate student participation. This feature is so useful that our teachers have decided to continue to use it when we go offline.

Online teaching can also be used for a large audience. Our teachers have been frequently invited to give lectures online. The audience may reach several thousand, or even tens of thousands.

Onsite internship with the UN has been disrupted by the pandemic, but distance internship has continued. Online tutoring happens from time to time.

In general, the pandemic has provided interpreting and translation teachers with more opportunities than challenges. The technology has long existed, but it is the pandemic that forced us to use it.

National University of Córdoba

The Unexpected Challenge

When the Academic Year was about to begin by mid-March, the government ordered a lockdown and classes were suspended. Overnight, the schools at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba were forced to turn all face-to-face classes into online ones. Fortunately, as UNC had started implementing distance learning through its virtual campus a few years back, some professors already taught their subjects online. These professors played a vital role in the virtualization process since they helped train those colleagues who had no prior experience. At Facultad de Lenguas, the E-learning Department along with the teaching staff took care of this transformation with such efficiency and professionalism that we missed only one week of classes. A total of 275 virtual classrooms at graduate and undergraduate level were created and hosted in our Moodle Platform to provide over 4000 students with quality distance learning. Besides the asynchronous material uploaded in the virtual classrooms, all the subjects offered synchronic meetings through Zoom or Google Meet, in many cases to single groups of over 100 students. All this was possible thanks to a licence bought by the authorities to ensure that all students no matter their economic situation or place of residence received academic instruction. We have to bear in mind, that UNC is a State University where students attend for free, so this type of measures are most praiseworthy. Despite the pandemic, the successive lockdowns and the economic crisis that ensued, we managed to complete the academic year successfully: we complied with all syllabi, administered exams and even served as a source of emotional containment for all those students who felt lonely or under great distress during the first year of the pandemic.

Success Stories

Despite all the challenges faced, our institution was able to continue the collaboration started in the area of terminology between the National University of Cordoba and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Approximately 250 students who took the Terminology course in the undergraduate Translation program participated in a project in the field of Civil Engineering. By means of this project-based approach, students worked on one innovative field of knowledge in relation to patents, which entails the extraction of specialized terms, the consultation with local and foreign experts and a fluent communication with WIPO's terminologists. Our professors worked together with specialists from the WIPO to provide the students with the necessary tools so that they can contribute with multilingual terminology records.

Another success story came in the area of Interpreting training. Being as we are very far from the main UN offices, virtual tools came to the help our Interpreting trainees through the goodwill of Mariano Said from the Vienna Office. Once a week our trainees have the opportunity to engage in Interpreting training in different areas addressed during UN Meetings and thus they have the chance to better grasp the needs and challenges faced in interpreting for international organizations. To carry out the training, we tested different platforms and tools which allow us to mimic face-to-face training, with the advantages and disadvantages that this new form of learning entails.

École supérieure d'interprètes et de traducteurs

Since March 2020 our University, as many others, has been faced with a series of health-related restrictions which have prevented us from giving on-site training for lengthy periods and made forward planning impossible. In the following, we would like to describe final exams in this context of uncertainty. This is a key issue, as we have a legal obligation to provide prior information about exam modalities and give candidates an opportunity to practice for a specific exam format. And of course, exams determine the future of our students.

Our final exams cover all interpreting modes for a wide range of languages. We count on the input of institutional partners, including the UN. UN staff interpreters participate in our panels, expressing the viewpoint of a major recruiter. Their presence guarantees professional criteria and standards. The pandemic has led to a radical revisiting of how we organise the exams.

Last year, access to our training site was uncertain, and our institutional partners could not travel to Paris. It was therefore decided to hold final exams entirely in remote mode. To avoid connectivity issues, it was decided to have all tests asynchronously, with speeches recorded beforehand. The same holds true this year.

A trainer-student tandem was set up for each test. Similar tests were held at the same time for all students. At the allotted time, the trainer created a Zoom meeting with "their" student, then sent them the recorded speech. The recording received, the test started. The trainer acted as a "benevolent listener", observing the test, recording any technical problems, finding solutions, calming the candidate and ultimately deciding if the test should be discontinued. Both student and trainer recorded the interpretation and sent it to the secretariat.

Panel members received all recordings, original speeches and interpretations. They were asked to interpret the speeches themselves to identify difficulties and then to fill out in advance an assessment sheet for each test. The panels met virtually subsequently and discussed each test. Marks were awarded and agreed by consensus.

Despite the obvious drawbacks of remote interpreting, this new exam format presents a number of benefits worth retaining. Speeches are validated beforehand. Students work from the same speech. Technical matters are the responsibility of the "benevolent listeners". Panellists could interpret the speech themselves. Remote panels allow for broader participation, notably of institutional partners such as the UN.

University of Geneva

Challenge (adaptation of admission exams in translation)

Admission to the MA translation programmes of the University of Geneva's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) requires passing a competitive entrance exam. The exam had been held on-site in Geneva in April each year. In March 2020, the Swiss Federal Council announced a nationwide lockdown, and Geneva's FTI had to quickly find an innovative solution for maintaining the scheduled exams. Two major changes were introduced. First, the exams were to be held online, open book and open web. This was also expected to reveal how candidates would tackle complex tasks under realistic working conditions of translators and multilingual communicators. Secondly, the previous three exams – A language, B language and translation – were merged into a single exam per language pair, consisting of an interlingual precis-writing task, with a view to assessing the candidates' comprehension of their B languages, their command of their A language and their basic translation competence.

Overall, the experience with the first online session was very positive and led to further changes for 2021. The new concept still allows for a nuanced assessment of the candidates' relevant core skills. Moreover, the pool of potential high-performing candidates has been expanded, as examinees can now take part in the exams regardless of their place of residence.

Success Story (introduction of sign language combination in BA programme)

In the context of its Centre for Barrier-Free Communication, and despite the challenges presented by the outbreak of the pandemic, Geneva's FTI is introducing sign languages in its BA in Multilingual Communication beginning in September 2021 (initially with French sign language, followed by Italian in 2023). In total, 12 new courses per language combination will be created. Sign language courses will be taught by Deaf people, and translation courses by sign language interpreters in collaboration with Deaf people. Students will also be trained in accessibility and digital skills related to sign languages.

This is the first university degree to offer a complete curriculum in sign language in Switzerland. The aim is to provide students with strong foundations in topics related to sign language, communication and technology, so that they can then pursue their academic path up to the PhD level, either in translation, interpreting or accessibility. We also expect to contribute to the development of new teaching resources, and promote research in this field.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 and the Swiss Disability Discrimination Act of 2002 state that communication has to become accessible. This means that more content will need to be translated into sign languages. The new FTI degree is thus in line with the current legal framework, and also responds to a strong market demand to have more information translated or interpreted into sign languages. It will also allow Geneva's FTI to become more inclusive and raise awareness on Deaf culture.

Herzen University

Context: SCIT operated entirely online from April till the end of the academic year, including for the final exams, and next year's entrance exams. In the new, 2020/21 academic year, the school was back offline, but a new model has emerged that combines the best of both worlds.

Challenges: The biggest challenge was to ensure a smooth transition from face- to-face classes to a virtual format, without compromising the learning experience, and staying on track with the students' expected levels of progression. In particular, it was necessary to adapt simultaneous and consecutive instruction to the online mode, maintaining, if possible, the same quality of environment (teamwork, handovers in sim, performance monitoring, and feedback); to develop modalities for at-home interpreting practice, such as mock conferences; to tailor the established assessment framework so as to recreate and measure demonstration of the same performance criteria remotely, etc.

Approaches

- Intensive capacity-building in the first weeks of lockdown for trainers and trainees, drawing in external expertise to integrate Zoom, Kudo, GoReact, Watch2Gether, and other applications into the learning process;
- Timetable modifications for the more flexible scheduling of training sessions;
- Emphasis on preparation, coordination, and communication between trainers;
- Increased use of written feedback;
- Use of online sessions instead of pedagogical assistance visits;
- 'Trial' exams to test whether remote technologies can support the same assessment strategies and criteria.

Results

- Not a single academic hour was lost;
- Final assessment (observed by the UN and DG SCIC) showed no slip in the demonstrated competency levels;
- Increased communication among trainers, better monitoring;
- Much-needed impetus to improve planning, coordination, execution, and assessment of training interventions;
- Increased technical capacity to deliver online training;
- Easier access to external expertise – trainers and practitioners from universities, IOs, employers, etc. around the world;
- Enhanced cooperation with other schools around the world, including MoU;
- Better emergency preparedness and responsiveness;
- greater use of hybrid formats following reopening, providing sustainable gains for the future.

Institute of Intercultural Communication and Management

The success story is that we have been able, despite the pandemic, to maintain most of our conference interpreting classes and deliberate practice sessions on site thanks to the small number of students involved and the need for them to have access to specific equipment (i.e. interpreting booths). Those 2 factors enabled us and them to benefit from a special authorization from the French Minister of Education, Research and Innovation despite the health crisis.

Having said that and this leads me to the challenge part of the story, some of our interpreting trainers were not able to make it to Paris because of travelling restrictions and specific rules applying to the international organisations for which they work. Students therefore benefited from a hybrid course (part on-site and part remote on Zoom for language-specific interpreting classes and on KUDO for multilingual mock-conferences). This hybridity is a good preparation for what expects them in the interpreting market. What I would have liked though is for them to be able to be on site in the physical booths while their teachers – if need be - were teaching from a distance. In practice, this type of hybridity turned out to be very challenging from a technical point of view and I would be happy to exchange best practices and technical tips so as to be able to turn our interpreting classrooms into mini-hubs in the near future.
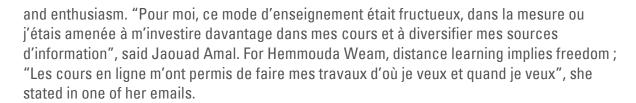
King Fahd School of Translation

In Morocco, as in other parts of the world, COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of citizens in different ways and in different sectors. Numerous persons, real or artificial, have run into bankruptcy, religious and cultural celebrations have been disrupted, hotels and restaurants have closed, areas and even whole cities have been forced into partial or total quarantine with the end view to curb the exponential expansion of the highly communicable viral disease. Schools, colleges and universities have had to shift, in part or in whole, from the traditional offline mode of teaching to the online mode.

King Fahd School of translation (KFST) was no exception. In April 2020, it had to combine the traditional face-to-face courses with online remote courses. The challenge was high; teachers and students alike, had to rise up to it by exploring new ways of teaching and learning. If the experience turned out morose and harrowing for some, it was enjoyable and rewarding for others like Ismail Mellouki, professor of general and specialized translation in the department of Arabic-French-English translation at KFST since 2018. "It is true that distance teaching came out as the sole solution to opt for in order to keep and maintain contact with students after the outbreak of the disease, but for me it is not the first time", he said. At the beginning of the crisis, in a meeting of the pedagogical committee held at KFST on 7 April 2020, he had to power-present his previous experience in online teaching through the class organization platform, Google classroom. His intervention was opportune not only for being informative and instructive, but also reassuring. The majority of the teaching staff of KFST adopted this mode of teaching which generally involved exchanging different digital materials in different formats (Word, PDF, and videos) and organizing direct webinars and video-conferences through Google-Meet application. During a period of three months, April, May and June 2020, 75 audio and video materials and 666 documents in Word or PDF format were exchanged and more than 10 videoconferences organized. These figures have more than doubled since. During the last autumn semester 2020-2021, 135 Videoconferences were organized with an increase rate of more than 100%. This means that students have benefited from more interactive online translation and interpreting classes. This applies also to the United Nations outreach activities scheduled for the second year students within the framework of the Memorandum of understanding signed by the UN and KFST in 2016. Only distance lectures and workshops were scheduled.

To the opinion of the majority of professors and students, the experience was more than rewarding. According to Professor, Mellouki Ismail, the use of online materials and means enabled him to attain objectives which 'I could have never achieved in traditional face-to-face classes,' he declared. The off-class scenario, offered him the opportunity to simulate the real hands-on experience of the professional world by assigning texts to translate in the form of contractual projects. The empowerment and self-independence of students were possible as they had to develop their skills through individual intensive text analysis, documentary (terminological) search and reformulation strategies. His students share the same optimism

and enthusiasm. "Pour moi, ce mode d'enseignement était fructueux, dans la mesure ou j'étais amenée à m'investire davantage dans mes cours et à diversifier mes sources d'information", said Jaouad Amal. For Hemmouda Weam, distance learning implies freedom ; "Les cours en ligne m'ont permis de faire mes travaux d'où je veux et quand je veux", she stated in one of her emails.

However, this does not mean that everything's coming roses. Problems like weak internet connection for some students, unaffordability of personal computers for others, … urged Pr. Mellouki and other members of the teaching staff of KFST to think about improving further their modes and techniques of online teaching. "Corona won't disappear tomorrow and we're ready to take this challenge for the benefit of our students", underlined Pr. Mellouki.

Minsk State Linguistic University

The year 2020 was marked by one of the most challenging events for the global community – COVID-19 affecting all nations and all sectors of their economy. As for translation/interpretation training, there appeared one more challenge – the translation courses have been practiced in distant learning mode earlier, but virtually not a single university in the world tried remote teaching of interpretation, and this year it has posed a problem for many institutions how to train students in the lockdown, if we should provide them with remote simultaneous interpreting options, and which software developers are open enough to provide their resources and software for free use. **The challenge for all universities, including in the MoU network, is lack of options for ensuring academic mobility** for higher education teaching staff and students.

The solution has been found, because we are always ready to tackle problems. First, as for the teaching staff of the MoU universities: *remote (online) video-conferencing with open access lectures and practical classes*. Minsk State Linguistic University ensured the work of its teachers that applied therefor, namely: St. Petersburg Politechnic University of Peter the Great (a course of translation for master students), Novosibirsk State Technical University (a course of lectures and workshops for students and teachers), the North-Eastern State University (in Magadan) (a course on simultaneous interpretation is to be held in May 2021 for undergraduate and graduate students). This is a vivid and positive response to the challenges of lockdowns, with involvement of teachers disseminating translation and interpretation information and practical skills. As for *the academic mobility of students*, we are sure that various *translation and interpreting contests* held in Belarus, Russia and other countries, provide our students with even more participation opportunities than ever before: there is no need of funding travel expenses, students are willing to participate in these contests to check their skills and competences in comparison with various assessment systems, e.g. many students from the School of Translation and Interpreting of Minsk State Linguistic University have participated in over 10 contests held in Belarus, Russia, Poland, etc. Unfortunately, the St. Jerome Contest has not been organized this year, but we can assure you that there will be many applications from all MoU universities when we get information about this UN-sponsored contest.

We believe that the future depends on our efforts, and all the challenges can be tackled together. *We invite all MoU universities to organize joint translation contests for our students in various language pairs*.

Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Success

Since moving to all-remote instruction in March 2020, we've continuously adapted to deliver optimum remote T&I training and prepare our students for fast-changing working environments on the market.

This quick and intensive pivot has enriched our teaching in ways we could not have imagined. We now often have subject matter experts joining Zoom class sessions to provide specialized mentoring; interpreting students have formed practice groups with fellow students in other programs around the world; a panel of leading voices from different segments of the interpreting market has briefed faculty and students together on real-time developments in remote simultaneous interpretation (RSI). Every week, Interpretation Practicum students experience interpreting virtual multilingual events, including practice with booth-partner collaboration, handoffs and relay interpreting.

We've found all sorts of ways to use Zoom breakout rooms and interpretation channels for in-class discussions and practice (simul, consec, sight translation). We've been using the GoReact platform as a virtual simultaneous lab, for feedback, and for peer-to-peer collaboration. The platform enables live-stream monitoring and post-facto review with side-by-side dual-track viewing of the source and interpretation video, and a field for embedding comments.

One example that ties all of these elements together: In March, UN interpreter Dylan Westfeldt gave a background presentation on disarmament via Zoom. That talk was interpreted live from English into multiple languages via Zoom interpretation channels by remote teams of Practicum interpreters. The following week, Alice Ryckmans (UN, Vienna) joined an advanced FR>EN simultaneous interpreting class via Zoom and delivered a sample French speech on disarmament. Through screenshare, we then all listened together, transcript in hand, to segments of the students' interpretations, Alice providing feedback and mentoring tips along the way.

Challenge

Our biggest challenge has been to ensure the technology that makes all of this possible. Concretely, the pivot to remote teaching has meant establishing emergency funds for students to acquire needed equipment, mailing equipment to faculty (headsets, ipads, laptops, ethernet cables); co-training and "sandbox" sessions among faculty to troubleshoot and work out best practices.

Also, none of the technology solutions available were built for the use-case of teaching simultaneous interpretation remotely. (This is now changing with solutions like Cymo.) Consequently, we've had to figure out workarounds and be in direct consultation with the engineering teams to explain what we do and what functionalities we need. In sum, it's challenging to learn as we go and as realities keep changing, all while ensuring stable, effective learning for students.

Moscow State Linguistic University

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, people all around the world have been facing a health care emergency. Apart from the immediate threat to health posed by the virus, our everyday life seems to be full of challenges testing the many social, economic and institutional structures created over the past century. Education is no exception. The pandemic has generated enormous risks. The situation calls for concerted efforts to maintain learning continuity during this difficult period. Teachers has had to adjust to new pedagogical concepts and teaching delivery modes. Moscow State Linguistic University has adapted, too.

One of the most obvious challenges for my university in terms of the organization of the educational process was how to facilitate the transition to online format in order to maintain the same level of efficiency and productivity and to minimize the stress experienced both by the staff and students of the university because of the pandemic. With regard to teaching translation, the switch proved to be more practicable, probably, not least thanks to the nature of these classes in general, since assignments can be sent and checked via email. However, interpreting classes require not only certain flexibility on the part of the participants of the educational process, but also some technical adaptation — from the right choice of the platform and stable internet connection to the necessary set-up (in the case of simultaneous interpreting that would be different devices for listening and interpreting, earphones, etc.). It took time and a fair degree of ingenuity to implement all these adjustments.

However, these difficulties have been fully compensated by the extraordinary opportunities provided by this new remote mode. The COVID-19 pandemic has generated unique opportunities. Apart from various partnerships between universities, MSLU can now offer more internships, including in the field of translation and interpreting. These online internships give students a chance to build upon their skills and broaden their experience even in the times of a global lockdown. Our students have gained valuable experience in online interpreting that is getting more and more relevant, whereas our teachers are now better positioned to help them acquire all the necessary skills and knowledge.

It is needless to recall that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone – individuals, corporations, organizations, etc. However, our university managed to take advantage of this difficult period and to seize the window of opportunity offered by the pandemic. Today we are already "building back better", taking pride in the innovative spirit of our teachers and students.

University of Nairobi

Introduction

The University of Nairobi's Centre for Translation and Interpretation has continued teaching and carrying out all academic and administrative functions during the COVID-19 pandemic. All the teaching and learning during the COVID-19 season pandemic has gone on successfully using Online Learning Platforms that the University of Nairobi put in place during the season.

Our Success Story

We were able to move swiftly and efficiently all the teaching and learning activities from in-person to the online platform. This has been our greatest success. We have been able to teach, examine and grade all examinations online and to hold our graduation ceremonies online in September and December 2020. The success story is not complete without mentioning the input of our partnerships: the United Nations through the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and the European Union through the Directorate General for Interpretation (DG SCIC).
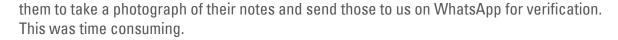
UNON has been giving tuition to some of our students during this time while the DG SCIC on its part, through the Pan African Masters in Consortium in Interpreting and Translation (PAMCIT), is offering tuition to students of the five universities under the consortium. The University of Nairobi is one of these universities and our students attend online training for at least two days in a week. This support from UNON and the DG SCIC has many benefits to our students, the first one being that students have access to some of the best trainers in the profession. Secondly, they are able to leverage on the strengths of their colleagues particularly in terms of language. When they break into specific language groups, they are able to cover more ground because group homogeny helps in generalizing feedback.

Challenges

In terms of the challenges encountered, the major one is inaccessibility of good internet connectivity by our students. Whereas the University has offered internet bundles to all students, some of them live in remote areas where connectivity is weak or unavailable. The second challenge is the lack of software for teaching some of the practical skills for interpreting, for example, in consecutive interpreting, teaching and learning is not a big problem since it is possible to give live speeches and for students to render real-time interpreting. However, the introduction to note taking is a bit problematic because demonstrating some skills such as the use of symbols has proved tedious. Similarly, it was difficult to check students notes where we suspected that the kind of notes they were taking might have been the cause of misinterpretations in their rendering. We sometimes would ask

them to take a photograph of their notes and send those to us on WhatsApp for verification. This was time consuming.

In addition, the teaching of Simultaneous Interpreting has been much more challenging. This is due to lack of software technologies that can support real-time simultaneous interpretation. Trainers have at times had to record their speeches and send them to students who record their renditions and send them back to trainers. This is time-consuming and results in delayed feedback. It is tiring to both students and trainers.

University of Salamanca

A Challenge in Interpretation

One of the biggest challenges we faced in March 2020, when the national government decreed the total confinement in Spain and the closure of all university centers was, on the one hand, the urgent online adaptation of simultaneous interpreting teaching and, on the other hand, the indefinite suspension (we later learned that they would not be resumed during that academic year) of all real-world interpreting opportunities foreseen for students in the last year of the Bachelor's Degree - Interpreting Itinerary.

This included the cancellation of the mute booth internships that our students have been doing on-site at UNG and UNV since 2000 (since 2010, under the MoU). Considering that one of our specialization subjects in interpreting consists almost exclusively of internal and external internships supervised by the professors, COVID-19 swooped in and flew away with our entire teaching plan, which is focused on direct contact with professional interpreting markets.

A Success Story in Interpretation

After the cancellation of any possibility of face-to-face practice at the European sites, our MoU coordinator at UNHQ (Francisco García Hurtado) contacted us a few days after the confinement began and expressed his willingness to try to mitigate the impact of the confinement on the training of our students through online collaboration. We assessed together the technical possibilities and the didactic relevance and then launched an innovative training initiative adapted to the needs of the students.

Marta Herrero Escobedo, former MoU coordinator at UNG, also participated in its planning and development, together with 3 trainers from the USAL team of teacher-interpreters.

What emerged from that collaborative effort was a training module of 4 virtual sessions for the final weeks of the course and focused on simultaneous interpretation with texts from real speeches delivered at the United Nations. The UN & USAL trainers were in charge of preparing and tutoring the students during their online practice sessions, reviewing the recording of their interpretations and giving them joint feedback on their performance:

16/04/2020 (2h)

General presentation and Q&A: Specifics of interpretation at the United Nations and the differences between Geneva and New York.

30/04/2020 (2h)

Simultaneous practical session with a FR-ESP text (preparation of the text with sight translation; asynchronous simultaneous interpretation and recording of the exercises, sending the material to the trainers)

07/05/2020 (2h)

Simultaneous practice with EN-ESP text (same work scheme and joint feedback from UN & USAL trainers on the results of the previous practice session)

4/05/2020 (2h)

Simultaneous practice with GE-ESP text (same work scheme and joint feedback from UN & USAL trainers on the results of the previous practice session).

The misfortune of the pandemic and its sudden impact on teaching continues, but fortunately the quick reaction of the MoU coordinator and the collaboration of the team of trainers contributed in that difficult moment to maintain the pace and quality of teaching for the benefit of students who shortly afterwards received their graduation diplomas ... a happier ending than expected. We would like to thank our current and former MoU coordinators very much for making this possible.

A Challenge in Translation

From the strict confinement put in place by the government of Spain on March 13, 2020 until the end of the 2019-20 academic year, all teaching was conducted online, and all evaluation was encouraged to be done online using continuous assessment. Teaching was conducted mostly using Google Meet and Blackboard Collaborate, tools available via the University of Salamanca's contract with Google and through the Studium (Moodle) platform which is available for all teachers for delivery of material. Many teachers were quick to pick up skills in these previously seldom-used technologies, and the USAL's Institute for Educational Sciences (IUCE) speedily offered online courses for the teaching staff.

Those courses that began to adopt continuous assessment after the confinement were allowed to change the course syllabuses accordingly and abandon face-to-face teaching. Three specific types of evaluation tasks were recommended officially: task-based or project-based assignments, multiple-choice questionnaires, and virtual oral interviews. The university appointed an institution-wide Coordinator for online teaching and assessment whose task was to ensure that the university servers were not overloaded during the exam period. This coordinator collected information about what type of assessment each professor needed for each course and assigned time blocks for exams accordingly. No face-to-face evaluation tasks were allowed.

The main challenges faced by teachers and students consisted of quickly adapting to the online-only mode of teaching and learning, with many affected by substandard computers, equipment and connections at home as well as infection from COVID-19 and the need to care for family members affected. The USAL instituted programs to loan laptops and approved a number of regulations and decrees to safeguard equality for all students and staff who were negatively affected with respect to their peers.

In terms of translation and translation-technology classes, most teachers migrated to fully continuous assessment and adapted to the use of such newly-learned skills as adding audio tracks to PowerPoint presentations, recording mini-videos (*píldoras de video*) and using mobile phones as webcams. The challenge for many teachers consisted of embracing the uncertainty of students' academic honesty in these special circumstances and of updating their digital audio and video skills in record time.

Immediately prior to the confinement, the University of Salamanca held the *VIII Seminar on Legal and Institutional Translation for International Organizations* (February 17-21, 2020), with the participation of two members of the United Nations and more than 70 registered student volunteers and participants. However, during the confinement period, no MoU-related activities were organized.

A Success Story in Translation

During the 2020-21 academic year, the University of Salamanca decided to adopt the policy of "safe, in-person teaching and learning" (*presencialidad segura*). We are respecting social distancing in classrooms, computer rooms and libraries, and administrative spaces, following hand and surface hygiene rules (this includes the recommendation to use no photocopies), as well as establishing one-way paths in the hallways, staircases and public spaces. Masks are required in all areas of the Translation and Documentation Faculty of the University of Salamanca. In classrooms, teaching is being done relatively normally and students in isolation (those who have tested positive, who have had direct contact with someone infected and those with certification of other illnesses) can follow the class simultaneously via videolink. In Salamanca, we have not been put back into lockdown since the de-escalation in May 2020 and the rates of students and staff infections and isolation have been low.

This situation has meant yet another adaptation to a new environment, especially in terms of using live videoconferencing in virtually all classes and at the same time teaching to a body of students attending in person. Translation technology and project management courses are offered via remote desktops from computer-lab stations for students unable to attend. This is particularly important because it guarantees equal access to SDL Trados, Memsource and other tools. The challenge of this dual-mode teaching/learning amounts to ensuring that the teaching/learning experience is equally good for students at home and in class, despite the almost inevitable consequence that this mixed modality is inherently poorer for both groups. However, many teachers have been very successful in involving students at home in live activities such as the chat function and in imparting lively, thought-provoking lessons while remaining within the frame of the camera.

During this year of 'safe, in-person teaching and learning' we have organized a high number of academic and professional activities in an audiovisual format, including additional training for Master's dissertations (TFM), a complete series of academic conferences (6), various extracurricular training workshops (CAT tools, audiovisual translation) and a series of professional training activities (in the week of the 12-16th April). At the beginning of the year, it was decided that all extracurricular activities would be held virtually, and it has been a resounding success. Students and staff sign up for activities (they are free) using Google Forms and the conferences are held on Google Meet or, increasingly, on Zoom. These sessions have been held mostly on Wednesdays at 13:15 hours and attendees watch from home (classes end at 12:45, so there is time to commute home). This has been a resounding success story because the participation has been significantly higher than past participation for in-person activities and the online registration has facilitated the notification of time or venue changes and the issuance of attendance certificates for all who want them. Three MoU-related sessions will be held in this manner at the end of April and beginning or mid-May (a general session followed by specific workshops on interpreting and translation, respectively). In the same manner, informational meetings about each one of the

modalities of our master's program will be held (METS – Friday, 19th February; MATEM – double Masters with the University of Heidelberg – Thursday, 15th April; and the Masters in Translation and Intercultural Mediation (MUTMI) – Monday, 20th April at 6 p.m.).

The plan for the 2021-22 academic session is that classes will begin in mid-September with 'safe in-person teaching and learning', just like the current situation. In 2021-22 we will also offer a complete programme of academic and professional activities as well as practical and formative workshops for employability.

Shanghai International Studies Univerity

As early as the start of the spring semester in March 2020, Chinese university instruction was ordered to be carried out remotely. Faculties at Graduate Institute of Interpretation and Translation (GIIT) of Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) immediately set out to get familiarized with various online platforms. In the end, two platforms have been used predominantly, the Chinese learning management system "ClassIn" and the internationally used business platform "Zoom".

In translation, we implemented a digital transformation plan of action using ClassIn and deployed its simultaneous practice and feedback system during classes to enable a leading translation pedagogy known in the field as Discourse Analysis for Legal Translator Training. ClassIn also recorded students taking final exams and producing much higher quality of output than has previously been documented. Ours was the earliest to deploy a cloud-based digital transformation to enable simultaneous feedbacking where our students have demonstrated capability to carry out Discourse Analysis in Chinese > English legal translations.

In interpreting, we refined the online exam procedures of our graduating Conference Interpreting class. As a program requirement, the senior class of our Conference Interpreting students have to pass the Professional Diploma Exams (PDE) to get the diploma. As stipulated by the curriculum, the jury consists of external members from our international partner organizations such as the UN and EU. Last July, one in-house faculty (Chinese A/English B) organized the video feeds and recordings from our mock conference room at the university. The other five jury members connected via Zoom from Geneva (UNOG Chinese A/English B), Brussels (SCIC English A), Berlin (AIIC English A), California (in-house faculty Chinese A/English B) and Shanghai (external member Chinese A/English B). The candidate students were tested 6 subjects over the course of 3 days. Each student was assigned (by drawing lots) a time slot for each day. In the end, the jury tested 8 students among whom 6 passed. Both the candidates and the jury members were satisfied with the outcome and the processes. The main take away was that one cannot be overprepared. One has to think of all the contingencies in advance and has a backup plan. The main challenge of the arrangement was that with jury member spreading on three continents, namely Asia, Europe and the US, the exam hours could not be convenient for all. Ultimately, the in-house faculty in California had to make some sacrifice and worked throughout the nights.

University of Mons

Challenge

One big challenge the University of Mons had to face in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was a quick (compulsory) transition from physical learning to remote learning. Students and lecturers had never had to face such a situation before, and nobody was prepared for that. When teaching, for instance, translation technology in the university facilities, all students had a similar access to all the software they needed to work with (CAT Tools such as SDL Trados Studio®, terminology software such as SDL Multiterm®). However, when the authorities decided that online learning would become the norm for several months, students became heavily reliant on their own hardware. Of course, they were provided free access to the relevant software, but lecturers did not have any control on the type of computers they were using (for instance, SDL® software is not supported by Mac computers), nor did they have control on the quality of hardware used by students. These factors caused inequalities: some students were unable to access the software from home, hence not being able to proceed with the tasks they needed to carry out. However, translation technology skills remain of utmost importance for any future professional translator (for instance, in the UN), which means we had to find ways for all students to be able to work with CAT Tools in spite of the transition to online learning.

Success Story

Regarding the acquisition of CAT tools skills, systems such as remote desktop enabled each and every student to access the relevant software from their homes. But, more importantly, the University of Mons acquired new software aiming at making remote translation teaching easier for everybody. This new software, designed by a Belgian firm, provided for new ways of teaching written and sight translation remotely, and enabled translation lecturers to provide a more precise and coherent feedback to students regarding all types of translation tasks (thanks, for example, to revision memories and standardised exercises). Overall, the pandemic initiated all of us to remote translation teaching, and indirectly enabled students and lecturers to feel more at ease when it comes to using translation and teaching technology. It also enabled some lecturers to understand the importance of using translation technologies in the framework of translation training. This could be of great help to students in the framework of a UN translator career, in that they were forced to try and solve technological problems when working from home (some problems were also dealt with during online teaching sessions), hence making them more autonomous when it comes to dealing with technology in general, and translation technology and resources in particular.

Shortly after the pandemic struck, we started wondering how to go about organizing the June evaluation tests, should they take place remotely (which ended up being the case). During the first few weeks of lockdown, we tested several platforms with a view to identifying the one that would best suit our needs. Even though they were all good enough for training purposes, it turned out that most of our students were nevertheless faced with connection problems. We therefore concluded that we could not run the risk of putting them under such stress in exam conditions. After a great deal of discussion, we reckoned that the only way out was to allow our students to download the speech and interpret it without the burden of depending on a good and reliable connection. But then, another issue had to be taken on board, that is, preventing students from listening twice to the exam speech or fiddling with their own recording.

After due consideration, we agreed on the following modus operandi. For the simultaneous test, all students were asked to connect to Teams with their cameras on. Then a download link to the speech was sent to them. We made sure that their microphones were on, which enabled us to be sure that they would not start listening to the speech before all of them had received the file. When all of them had the speech downloaded on their computers (information transmitted via chat), the trainer told them to put on their headphones, cut the Teams microphone, and then start listening and interpreting while recording themselves. Once the interpretation test was completed, students were required to post their recordings on the Moodle platform (a platform used by the University for courses and exams). Having the students on screen all along and having them interpret the same speech, with the same word count, ensured that they had no way of playing the speech several times and that they recorded themselves only once. Furthermore, the downloading and posting processes were the only ones for which an Internet connection was necessary.

Anticipating the terms of these exams well in advance allowed us to assist our students in their preparation for their exams. During several weeks, they had ample opportunity to get familiar with and gain confidence in the procedure. There is now little doubt that RSI is here to stay and be a major part of their future professional career. At the end of the day, reviewing and adapting the format of our exams could turn out to be a stepping stone into what some already call the "new normal" in interpretation.

7TH MoU CONFERENCE

USJ
Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth
ETIB
Faculté de langues et de traduction
École de traducteurs et
d'interprètes de Beyrouth

Saint Joseph University

Interpretation

At the School of Translators and Interpreters of Beirut, the transition to a partial remote training of future interpreters during the COVID-19 pandemic has been something of a roller coaster for trainers and students alike.

Many problems arose, exacerbated by the disastrous economic situation in Lebanon. The most daunting were, and still are, physical and technical constraints: from ensuring a constant source of electrical power, when faced with repeated and sudden power cuts to having to do without university training booths, equipment and technicians. Students and teachers, equally, were required to overcome the nerve-wrecking challenge of becoming their own technicians and "install" their own booth/teaching equipment at home. That meant finding a space that would be as quiet as possible but also investing in onerous hardware and software, and ensuring seamless Internet connectivity, which is not a given as most parts of Lebanon still use ADSL technology. For students who, for financial reasons, cannot meet these basic working/learning conditions, this means that they have to do with what is available: poor soundproofing, unreliable networks and inconsistent audio or video feeds.

However, technical and physical constraints are not just that, inasmuch as they have implications for the future practice of interpreters. In the absence of a dedicated platform developed for simultaneous interpretation training some very important learning outcomes cannot be adequately met in remote setting. These are mainly: acquiring the reflexes of good teamwork, the handover etiquette, relais, and retour.

At a professional and ethical level, how is it possible to reconcile training in below par conditions with the necessity to refuse work offered in these very questionable conditions, at a time interpretation, as a profession, is entering a new age with the multiplication of commercially-oriented RSI platforms and in the context of a serious economic crisis.

Translation

Successful collaboration with the United Nations relies mainly on a comprehensive activity organized by ESCWA and crowning the translator's training at the School of Translators and Interpreters of Beirut (ETIB).

Thanks to this activity encompassing various professional skills and competencies learned at ETIB and requested by the United Nations, ESCWA gives ETIB students substantive insight into the professional world, better equipping them for both academic and career paths in line with ETIB's strategy to professionalize its Master's program of translation.

As part of this collaboration, ESCWA provides Master's students with an authentic English document to be translated into Arabic and delivered within a tight timeframe. During this work simulation which extends over 10 working hours, students have the chance to apply project management basics and translation theory into practice since they perform actual translation tasks for ESCWA and try to solve real workplace issues in terms of terminology management, translation workflow, communication, teamwork, time management, coordination, negotiation, and digital fluency.

The final Arabic version of the document is thoroughly reviewed by appointed ESCWA team and a comprehensive feedback is sent to each student who contributed to this hands-on activity. Usually, this project takes place within ETIB premises in order to give students a real feel of the workplace. However, this was organized virtually this year due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

It is worth noting that this project gives ETIB students a chance to get recruited by ESCWA as trainees: last year, two students were recruited for a three-month internship and one of them even got an individual contract to work with ESCWA on a freelance basis.

University of Westminster

One Challenge (of so many…)

Delivering interpreting teaching and assessment online – with next to no notice in March 2020, and then with plenty of notice and a comprehensive hardware & software upgrade from January 2021 onwards. The challenge here was twofold:

1. Limited technological capability – good basic online teaching platform but no interpreting-specific software solutions back in March; major upgrade and full digitisation of our interpreting suites over the summer, enabling us to deliver online interpreting teaching and student-led practice sessions in a much more sophisticated manner once our courses started again (with a pandemic-related 4-months delay).

2. Limited staff capability – most interpreting tutors were, certainly back in March, of a firmly analogue disposition and had little experience of (and little inclination for) either remote interpreting or online pedagogy. With only one interpreting colleague on the permanent course team, designing and delivering staff training, as well as producing a comprehensive suite of 'scaffolding material' colleagues could use to enhance/augment their online teaching offer was an intellectually complex and very time-consuming endeavour, with buy-in from colleagues still remaining somewhat uneven.

Success (surprisingly, also of many…)

One unanticipated side-effect of the move to online delivery was the depth and complexity of reflection on pedagogy this engendered both in individuals and in the course team collectively. Two interrelated results of this were:

1. The production of two comprehensive suites of scaffolding material (interpreting pre-learning videos on a range of non-language-specific issues such as ethics, voice, and note-taking, and a suite of videos on translation strategies broadly following Chesterman's classification), to (a) support practitioner-tutors in their online delivery and (b) serve as self-study material for students to add value to their learning journey.

2. The introduction of 'Study Space', comprising (a) a series of tutor-led online workshops for students on self-directed learning, flipped classrooms, and communities of enquiry to enable them to reflect on what learning is in both online and onsite context; this was (b) followed by practical sessions putting the insights gained into practice (e.g. virtual writing retreats, weekly 'Accountability Hour' sessions); all of this accompanied and framed by (c) a dedicated online space (within the University's VLE) for students to form and conduct student-led workshops, reading groups, lab practice sessions, etc.; this virtual space has both live interactive functionality and is enhanced by a comprehensive collection of internal and external study skills content.

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