

93. A corpus-based study of problems in telephone interpreting

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Abstract

In telephone interpreting, the first type of remote interpreting, interpreters interpret in consecutive mode over the phone in community interpreting settings. While it has various advantages, such as fast access to interpreters, flexibility of working hours, and no commute, telephone interpreting literature also depicts various problems such as lack of visual information, overlapping speech, low remuneration, low professionalism, fatigue and stress, which negatively affect interpreters. This study aims to present the challenges and problems of telephone interpreters. Document analysis was used as the data collection tool; a corpus consisting of forty-three entries related to telephone interpreting in Proz.com was created. The corpus was then analyzed with the content analysis method conducted with Maxqda 2020. Six main themes emerged in the analysis: general options regarding telephone interpreting, industry-related aspects, interpreting process, equipment, charging, skills and training. The results show that while there are various advantages of telephone interpreting, disadvantages such as low remuneration, demanding nature and lack of visual information are demotivation factors for interpreters. In addition, charging methods and rates are regulated by global companies, driving the wages lower to attract governmental organizations. The landline norm of companies persists, and the interpreters point out the dangers of using mobile phones. The frequently cited problems during the interpreting process were also mentioned in the corpus. The study concludes with suggestions for special training in telephone interpreting.

Keywords: telephone interpreting, remote interpreting, working conditions, coordination in interpreting

Telefonla sözlü çeviride karşılaşılan sorunların bütüncü tabanlı bir incelemesi

Öz

Uzaktan sözlü çevirinin ilk türü olan telefonla sözlü çeviride çevirmenler, telefon aracılığıyla, toplum çevirmenliği ortamlarında, ardıl modda çeviri sunmaktadır. Telefonla sözlü çeviri, çevirmenlere hızlı erişim, çalışma saatlerinin esnekliği, evden çalışma gibi çeşitli avantajlar sunmakla birlikte, literatürde görsel bilgi eksikliği, üst üste binen konuşma, düşük ücret, düşük profesyonellik, yorgunluk ve stres gibi çeşitli sorunların da var olduğu görülmektedir. Bu çalışma telefonla sözlü çeviri hizmeti sunan çevirmenlerin yaşadığı zorlukları ve sorunları ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak doküman analizi kullanılmış; Proz.com'da telefonla sözlü çeviriyle ilgili kırk üç girdiden oluşan bir bütüncü oluşturulmuştur. Bu bütüncü üzerinde Maxqda 2020 nitel veri analiz programı aracılığıyla bir içerik analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Analizde altı ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır: telefonla sözlü çeviriye ilişkin genel düşünceler, sektörle ilgili konular, telefonla sözlü çeviri süreci, ekipman, ücretlendirme, beceriler ve eğitim. Sonuçlar, telefonla sözlü çevirinin çeşitli avantajları

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olmakla birlikte, düşük ücret, zorlayıcı yapısı ve görsel bilgi eksikliği gibi dezavantajlarının çevirmenler için motivasyonu düşüren faktörler olduğunu göstermektedir. Buna ek olarak, ücretlendirme yöntemleri ve oranları küresel şirketler tarafından düzenlenmektedir ve bu şirketler, kamu kurumlarının dikkatini çekebilmek için telefonla sözlü çeviri ücretlerini düşürmektedir. Şirketlerin telefonla sözlü çeviri için çevirmenlerden sabit hatta sahip olmalarını hâlâ beklediği görülmüştür. Buna ek olarak, bütüncedeki çevirmenler, cep telefonu kullanmanın tehlikelerine dikkat çekmiştir. Bunların dışında telefonla sözlü çeviri sürecinde sıklıkla dile getirilen sorunlara da bütüncede değinilmiştir. Çalışmanın son bölümünde, telefonda sözlü çeviri konusunda özel eğitimin gerekliliğine ilişkin öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: telefonla sözlü çeviri, uzaktan sözlü çeviri, çalışma koşulları, sözlü çeviride koordinasyon

1. Introduction

Telephone interpreting, also referred to in the literature as over-the-phone interpreting (OPI), tele-interpreting or telephonic interpreting (Gracia-Garcia, 2002), is generally defined as providing participants with access to an interpreter through technology via telephone or teleconference call (Kelly & Pöchhacker, 2015: 412). It is considered the oldest and most common type of remote interpreting and is closely related to community interpreting (Wang, 2017). Telephone interpreting is usually used in community interpreting settings in the consecutive mode (Kelly & Pöchhacker, 2015: 413). Emerging as a response to the immigrants' language problems in Australia, the first telephone interpreting service was introduced by the Australian Commonwealth Government as a public service. Telephone interpreting started in the USA in 1981 as a charity organization, but later, this service turned into a for-profit organization, which is now the leading global telephone interpreting company (Kelly, 2008). Various companies offer telephone interpreting as a practical alternative to on-site interpreting, which mainly attracts public institutions in multicultural countries (Gracia-Garcia, 2002). The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a fast shift to telephone and video-conference interpreting (Pielmeier, 2020: 31-39).

Telephone interpreting is provided in Türkiye by public and private organizations. International Patient Assistance Unit Interpretation and Call Center, affiliated with the Ministry of Health, provides telephone interpreting to foreign patients and tourists on a 7/24 basis. The center was founded in 2011 and provides telephone interpreting in German, English, Arabic, Russian, Persian and French. The center started its services with 847 calls in 2011, but due to the increase in Syrian immigrants, it received fifty thousand calls in 2014 (Dayıoğlu, 2015: 79-85). Apart from these, private language services providers also present telephone interpreting, focusing on its advantages, such as easy and fast access to interpreters.

However, various aspects of telephone interpreting differentiate it from other types. The frequently cited advantages such as easy and fast access to interpreters (Wadensjö, 1999; Mikkelsen, 2003; Phillips, 2013), no commute and flexible work hours (Lee, 2007), impartiality and confidentiality (Kelly, 2008: 85-86), protecting oneself from harm, such as emergency rooms and other traumatic locations (Gracia-Garcia, 2002). However, telephone interpreting has disadvantages, the most obvious being the lack of visual information (AIIC, 1997; Oviatt & Cohen, 1992). Problems with turn-taking and overlapping speech (Wadensjö, 1999; Lee & Newman, 1997; Ko, 2006; Cheng, 2015; Wang, 2018) are also more frequent in telephone interpreting due to the lack of visual information. Technical problems, bad voice

quality, not using suitable telephones, and background noise are some disadvantages for interpreters (Wang, 2018; NAJIT, 2009; Rosenberg, 2007).

This study aims to present the challenges and problems of telephone interpreters through a content analysis of entries related to telephone interpreting on Proz.com. The study aims to present a general view of the challenges and problems of interpreters from different countries, allowing for a general overview of persistent problems in telephone interpreting worldwide.

The article will present a literature review on telephone interpreting in the second section. In the third section, methods and materials for the corpus creation and content analysis will be explained. In the fourth section, findings will be presented in line with the main themes of the content analysis. In the fifth section, findings will be discussed in line with other studies in the literature. The last section will summarize the study and some recommendations regarding telephone interpreting.

2. Literature review

When the literature on telephone interpreting is analyzed, it is seen that two main strands of research approaches appear. The discourse-based studies depict the interpreting process, including problems in turn-taking and overlapping speech in the lack of visual information. In contrast, survey-based studies reveal professional problems, mostly related to the professional status of telephone interpreters and problems in the telephone interpreting market, dominated by global companies.

2.1. Discourse-based Studies on Telephone Interpreting

While there are similarities between on-site dialogue interpreting and telephone interpreting, many features make telephone interpreting different from other types of interpreting. Fernández Pérez (2017) lists the features that distinguish telephone interpreting as follows: the use of technology, the location of the interpreter, the lack of visual information and the quick access of speakers to the interpreter. Using the telephone may create a sense of isolation for interpreters, which may impact the decision-making process. The interpreter's physical location differs from at least one speaker, affecting the turn-taking. The lack of visual access negatively impacts the interpreter's capacity to contextualize speech, understand utterances correctly, manage the turn-taking, and coordinate the triadic communication. In addition, speakers can access the interpreter immediately, thus leaving no preparation time for the assignment.

Some discourse-based studies conducted in the early telephone interpreting literature reveal the specific features of this type of interpreting, especially its difference from on-site dialogue interpreting. Oviatt & Cohen (1992) analyze service-oriented telephone interpretation to develop an automated telephone interpretation system. The researchers analyzed a Japanese-English corpus consisting of transcriptions of 12 interpreting activities via telephone. Stating that telephone interpretation is complex because it is multilateral and mediated, the researchers stated that in order to identify situations in which interpreters assume the role of an independent agent and actively manage information, situations where interpreters leave verbatim rendering and offer additional information, omit information, present information to the speaker, or remind information they have forgotten were searched in the corpus, which they found in all transcriptions. In addition, it has been observed that interpreters use the first person singular for self-referral purposes while using the third person singular to express the party that is not speaking at the time. The researchers state that this clear expression style may have been applied

to avoid confusion due to the lack of visual information. These findings reveal that interpreters play an additional role in managing the turn-taking in telephone interpreting.

Wadensjö (1999), who compares on-site dialogue interpreting and telephone interpreting, aims to discover how these different environments affect interpreting as a social activity. The researcher, who considers interpreting a social interaction, analyzes how the speakers and the interpreter interact and coordinate in the process of taking testimony regarding the same event with the same speakers and interpreter. The same speakers discussed the same event, which was firstly interpreted via telephone, during which the speakers were in the same room, and the interpreter was connected via phone. The second time, conducted face-to-face, all participants were in the same room at the police station. There were some striking differences between these two activities. First, the speakers started to speak longer in the on-site interpreting, starting at an earlier phase than telephone interpreting. In addition, the on-site interpreting was shorter but more fluent, and the turn-taking was more frequent than telephone interpreting. The researcher attributes the frequent turn-taking to the non-verbal feedback in on-site interpreting. Furthermore, there were more examples of overlapping speech in on-site interpreting, but this did not disturb the speakers. The main speakers and the interpreter spoke faster due to sharing the same physical space. All participants spoke faster compared to telephone interpreting. In telephone interpreting, overlapping speech was a more serious problem, as the client was not accustomed to this type. In addition, the interpreter misunderstood long silences and tried to check the connection.

Rosenberg (2007) examines his corpus consisting of 1876 telephone interpreting activities and states that the difference in this type of interpreting arises not only from linguistic differences in face-to-face and telephone communication but also from the complexity of situational and extra-linguistic factors that arise due to the access of people from a wider area to the interpreter. The researcher reveals that very few of the interpreting activities in the corpus fit the generally accepted interpreting model. The speaker usually starts speaking directly to the other speaker without giving the interpreter information about the call's content. The researcher states that one of the first rules taught to interpreters is that it should always be interpreted in the first-person singular, but it is very difficult to apply this rule in telephone interpreting. The reasons for this difficulty are very diverse. First, the speakers address each other using the third-person singular and use the interpreter as a representative. Despite the researcher's warnings, 85% of the speakers continued to use the third-person singular in the interpreting activities using speaker phones, and 100% of the speakers in the interpreting activities where the single handset phone changed between the speakers. The researcher suggests that one of the reasons for this may be that speakers who are not accustomed to communicating with interpreters have suddenly access to interpreters. Dialects he had not heard before had difficulties understanding the names of places and people spoken in these accents made telephone interpreting more difficult than on-site interpreting. The researcher concludes that not having a common framework of reference with the speakers is the main factor that makes telephone interpreting more difficult than on-site interpreting. He emphasizes that non-linguistic and situational reasons should be investigated, unlike researchers who think the telephone is unsuitable for quality interpreting due to a problem inherent in telephone communication.

These studies reveal that telephone interpreting has its peculiarities due to the various conditions. First of all, the lack of visual information creates problems in turn-taking. Thus, to solve/avoid overlapping speech, the interpreter may have to do explicit coordination (Wadensjö, 1998: 105), indicated by non-renditions. In addition, the access of speakers not accustomed to working with interpreters from a large area and their failure to brief the interpreter create problems for interpreters while choosing the right context.

2.2. Survey-based Studies on Telephone Interpreting

The survey-based studies on telephone interpreting focus on the problems of interpreters. These are usually focused on the professional status of telephone interpreting and other aspects, such as the problems during the interpreting process. Lee (2007) conducted telephone interviews with 20 interpreters in Australia who provide telephone interpreting services in order to determine their views on this type of interpreting. Telephone interpreting jobs usually come from public institutions. For interpreters, the positive aspects of telephone interpreting were listed as not traveling, flexible working hours, no face-to-face contact, good service, and more focus. The lack of face-to-face contact was also the most important disadvantage, followed by technical problems, the feeling that telephone interpreting is useless, physical discomfort, and the fact that it is simple and tiring work. In addition, the uncertainty and irregularity of the work negatively impact interpreters, who cannot earn a professional income solely from interpreting over the phone. Cell phones are reported to cause ear and arm pain when interpreting over the phone. 60% of professional and 36% of semi-professional interpreters stated that they do not consider telephone interpreting a profession. They usually do telephone interpreting for additional income. Interpreters do not find the remuneration satisfactory. 44% of interpreters would consider giving up telephone interpreting due to low salaries.

Cheng (2015: 29-39) surveyed 21 interpreters providing telephone interpreting services in New Zealand and found that none do telephone interpreting full-time. They all work with a global telephonic interpreting company, but they reported that they do not have a mentor and do not know how quality processes are carried out. In addition, interpreters complained about not knowing the order in which they were called and who was prioritized. Some interpreters experience stress when they cannot pick up the phone because they think they are lower on the priority list. The researcher asked the participants about their opinions on the remuneration they receive for telephone interpreting and reached different opinions. While an inexperienced interpreter found the remuneration adequate, other interpreters found it very inadequate and stated that it was inappropriate to pay everyone equally regardless of experience.

Wang (2017) surveyed 465 interpreters working in Australia and providing interpreting services over the phone and found that interpreting over the phone is generally attractive for inexperienced interpreters and that interpreters leave interpreting over the phone as they gain experience. The researcher asked the respondents about their satisfaction with remuneration and received various responses. While 62% of the participants were dissatisfied with the remuneration policy, 31% found it acceptable. In addition, the researcher asked interpreters about the factors that affect the quality of interpreting over the phone. The main factors were the clients' speaking style and communication skills, voice quality, the content of the conversation, the context in which the conversation took place, the interpreter's skills and the availability of time.

These problems indicated by the abovementioned studies can be attributed to the low status of telephone interpreting. Experienced interpreters often quit due to low remuneration, while telephone interpreting companies often find inexperienced interpreters without screening and quality control processes. In addition, irregularity of workflow is also a stress factor for interpreters. While these studies were mostly conducted in Australia, where telephone interpreting first emerged, the problems mentioned in other countries persist. In the following sections, the results of a content analysis conducted on the problems of telephone interpreters from different countries based on a corpus of interpreters' entries are presented and discussed in line with the studies above and other studies in the literature.

3. Methodology

A qualitative study was conducted to examine the challenges and perceptions of interpreters in telephone interpreting. The study was based on analyzing the entries of interpreters about telephone interpreting in the forums section of Proz.com, one of the largest social platforms for translators and interpreters. Interpreters can ask questions regarding various aspects of translation and interpreting, and other interpreters answer these questions based on their experiences and opinions. A corpus was created by using the search tool of the platform. A total of 43 entries related to telephone interpreting were found and included in the corpus comprising 250 paragraphs, totaling 26.182 words. The entries started in April 2003; the latest was posted in January 2023. Only English entries were included in the corpus. The quotes were taken and presented in their original form. The content analysis method was employed to analyze the corpus, which required finding the themes and codes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018: 242-254). A basic qualitative analysis was conducted with the Maxqda 2020 program, allowing fast text identification and analysis. Regardless of size, a text can be given one or various codes with the program, and various relationships can be established between codes. The previous coding systems in the literature and the codes emerging from the current corpus were employed during the coding process. Jiménez-Ivars (2021) conducted a similar study on interpreters' perceptions regarding two of the largest telephone interpreting companies in the USA. The coding developed in this study was taken as a foundation and enriched with the themes and codes emerging from the corpus in the current study. A total of six main themes were found. These are general options regarding telephone interpreting, industry-related aspects, interpreting process, equipment, charging, skills and training. Then, categories emerged under these themes. The categories were determined and identified in line with other studies in the literature (Wang, 2017; Lee, 2007) for a comparison of results.

4. Findings

In this section, findings of the content analysis on the created corpus are presented. The resulting themes and categories are presented in Table 1, along with their frequency in the corpus. In addition, some quotes are provided to illustrate the opinions and experiences of interpreters in the framework of telephone interpreting more comprehensively.

Table 1: Themes, categories and their frequencies

				Frequency
All codes				512
Main Themes	Categories	Sub-categories	Sub-categories-2	
Industry related aspects	Job distribution			41
		based on the time of the call		8
		based on language pair		16
	Settings in telephone interpreting			26
	Telephone interpreting companies			42
		unqualified interpreter employment		10
	Shift to telephone interpreting			16
Interpreting Process	participant distribution			4

	Interpreter Strategies	15
	Briefing	11
	Interpreting type in telephone interpreting	7
	Coordination effort	4
	Problems during the process	71
	Stress and fatigue	17
	Client related	14
	Content related	4
	Duration of call	5
	Speech	15
	Visual	8
	Equipment related	6
Equipment	Computer	3
	Skype	5
	Amplifier	4
	Headset	10
	Landline	22
	Phone	12
	Mobile	9
Training and skills	Required skills	8
	Training opportunities	6
Charging	Opinions on charging	54
	Reduced wages	20
	Charging method and rates	58
General Opinions on telephone interpreting	Disadvantages	35
	Advantages	27

4.1. General opinions on telephone interpreting

A total of 27 quotes contain the advantages of telephone interpreting. 12 quotes contain the idea of no commute as the most important advantage of telephone interpreting, followed by the idea of helping people. One interpreter stated its importance as follows:

"I enjoy helping my compatriots in that way. This is particularly applicable to interpreters of very rare languages. For the speaker of a rare language, having an interpreter can be a tremendous blessing, sometimes a lifesaving one!"

Five of the quotes presented telephone interpreting as an enjoyable activity. Another important advantage was extra income for interpreters; five quotes highlighted this idea. One of the quotes is as follows:

"I find it fairly lucrative, since I can do it between other jobs."

This quote reflects another important advantage of telephone interpreting: accepting telephone interpreting assignments between jobs. This advantage was mentioned two times in the corpus. Flexibility of working hours is another important advantage, which was mentioned three times in the corpus. One quote is as follows:

"Maybe telephonic interpreting is easy and comfortable, and you can fit it in your schedule easily while you are doing some translation at home"

Other advantages of telephone interpreting for interpreters were accommodating a disability, lifestyle choices (living in urban areas / being a stay-at-home mom), upskilling oneself, feedback, professional distance, and a variety of topics in telephone interpreting.

Apart from advantages, 35 posts contained disadvantages of telephone interpreting. Most of these disadvantages arose from payment. 13 of the posts contained the idea of "low rates". Rates are found "ridiculous, insulting". One of the quotes is presented as follows:

"My house-aid gets more than that per hour! Yes, I think you are being exploited. In fact, you'd earn more if you did housekeeping."

Apart from low rates, another important disadvantage is the demanding nature of telephone interpreting; it is found demanding, stressful and exhausting in eight posts. Some of these are presented as follows:

"you will be the interpreter - very often between medical doctor and foreign patient. Such calls can last an hour or longer, and it is highly exhausting."

"It is not so well paid as face-to-face interpreting and is much more demanding!"

Lack of visual information is also considered a disadvantage in five quotes. One interpreter discussed it as follows:

"I find it difficult to concentrate when I can't see the people"

Client-related problems are also frequently discussed in the corpus. Some problems are background noise (crying babies), overlapping speech, and tapping on the desk. One of the quotes is presented as follows:

"Also, some clients think the interpreter is a machine and they can just talk without being careful about making noise, talking at the same time or talking non-stop, talking to the phone and to the other side of the room alternatively or expecting the interpreter to stop the long interpretation because it's pointless or repetitive, etc."

Non-regular working hours (at night, holidays) are also cited five times as a disadvantage. Apart from these, some of the disadvantages found in the corpus are as follows: equipment-related problems (static in the telephone lines), telephone interpreting as a distraction for other assignments, problems related to telephone interpreting companies (non-payment), losing opportunities for better-paying jobs (due to waiting times for a call), repetitive nature of telephone interpreting calls, health problems (ears hurt due to earpiece for too long), and lastly face-threatening acts (clients shouting, cursing during the call).

4.2. Charging

Quotes on charging for telephone interpreting were found 132 times in the corpus, more than other themes. Three categories emerged during the coding process. These are charging methods and rates, reduced wages and opinions on charging.

The first category, charging methods and rates, is the most discussed in the corpus. 58 quotes discussed charging methods and rates in different countries and years. Some of the quotes are presented as follows:

"The problem is-they (companies) will find people (qualified or just amateurs) to do this job for the money they are offering and obviously never use the ones who demand any decent pay. That is the problem with the industry here. The agencies are charging up to 70% commission if you can believe that."

The charging method implemented by most telephone interpreting companies in the USA and the UK (most interpreters in the corpus are located in these countries) is based on per minute, but the seconds are not paid, according to most interpreters working for these companies. In addition, some interpreters working for private clients also demand a minimum duration, such as ten minutes or half an hour, for charging. Stand-by times, meaning logging into the system to receive the calls, are also not charged.

Most interpreters expressed their disappointment with the charging rates and methods. A total of 54 quotes also contain the opinions of interpreters on charging. Only three of these quotes included a positive approach to the charging. Some of the quotes, including the negative stances, are as follows:

"Per minute is too low for telephone interpreting or is this a belated April fool's joke?"

"Is there anyone else who is doing telephone interpreting and thinks we're being exploited?"

"I am getting too low per minute. Is this a slave trading?"

"I find these rates ridiculous, too. More than ridiculous - insulting, in my opinion. Yet, I know real people who slave away for these rates."

These and the remaining quotes present a bleak picture of telephone interpreting wages. Global telephone interpreting companies are usually blamed for reducing wages, which is the last category in this theme. It was mentioned in 20 quotes. Some of these are presented as follows:

"The rate paid by one big agency in the UK has been reduced twice over the last year or so. Both reductions were explained as caused by the recession and a difficult economic climate... When starting out in the profession very few can afford to be choosy and most try to make the best out of a bad situation."

"Some 'smart' companies started to take over the market, often from overseas, reduced the translators' rates - and I doubt if they did the same to the clients - and the newly set up wannabe companies followed them, preferably with even lower rates. They recruited 'interpreters' who were not tried and tested, because a lot of experienced interpreters were not prepared to work for the reduced rates offered. The clients are less satisfied and are less likely to pay well for inferior services and now the whole business is at a low ebb."

Most interpreters cite the low rates reduced even to a lower level as their reason to quit telephone interpreting. Both the global and new start-up companies are blamed for not considering professional interpreters. A general shift to outsourcing human resources to other countries is also cited for reduced wages.

4.3. Equipment

A total of 67 quotes were identified under the equipment theme. The interpreters discussed the tools and software they used for telephone interpreting. The following categories emerged under this theme: landline (22 quotes), Skype (5 quotes), computer (3 quotes), headset (10 quotes), amplifier (4 quotes), phone (12 quotes), and mobile phone as a sub-category of phone (9 quotes).

First, the telephone interpreting companies' landline requirement is discussed among interpreters. Most interpreters concur that the landline is the safest solution for telephone interpreting. In addition, telephone interpreting companies reimburse landlines used specially for telephone interpreting assignments. Some of the quotes in this regard are as follows:

"I am sure it is due to quality concerns (quality is higher in case of using a landline). But in our mobile world this is an "outdated" (though seemingly necessary) prerequisite."

"Because a landline call is clearer and does not rely on a signal that might be interrupted. Also: the voice quality on many mobile phones is very poor. A landline is better technology because the whole connection is hard wired, which means there is no interference."

"A landline telephone is much more reliable than a cell phone. You may easily lose connection with a cell phone. However, the probability of that happening with a landline is much lower. I think that difference in reliability alone is the prime reason why they prefer a landline telephone over a cell phone.... Voice quality is lower with a cell phone... When cell phones were not operating only hours after Hurricane Katrina (and others), landline infrastructure was completely operational. Think "reliability" again!"

While mobile phones dominate our world to the point that some houses do not have a landline, most companies still insist on landlines for the confidentiality, reliability and high quality of voice. This insistence is also highlighted in the quotes coded with "mobile phone".

"The voice quality on many mobile phones is very poor."

"I suppose mobile phones, i.e. the devices themselves, are more prone to defects than landline phones. A landline doesn't depend on battery power."

"Some telephone interpreting is intended to handle confidential situations, whether for industrial, commercial or government institutions."

The landline provides superior voice quality and confidentiality. There is no risk of charging down. In addition, with mobile phones, interpreters may be forced to accept jobs when they may not be suitable. Two quotes focused on this risk:

"Some years ago they tried to recruit me. We didn't even get around to talking about rates. They asked to tap into my cell phone. And then it hit me: without headphones, in heavy traffic, they were going to try to hang someone's parole or police charges on my hands. It was about as good an idea as when they sent someone with a police record down to the station to interpret."

"Then, the telephone system was introduced and they wanted to hook into my cell phone. I had to say no, as I cannot guarantee I will be 100% precise and accurate while simultaneously interpreting and, say, paying my bus fare or driving along the motorway -- which, on top of everything, is quite illegal (so I never had a chance to negotiate a phone rate). The system leaves a lot to be desired."

Some interpreters tried to use Skype for telephone interpreting but found the quality low. Some quotes describe the problems with Skype as follows:

"I use normal landline (about to buy a proper headset). I have tried to use Skype but it's not reliable. My mum tries to speak up when she calls me via Skype but it does not work! I often have customers

(LES -Limited English-speaking) who use Skype when they contact different institutions and the sound quality is very poor (echos and delays)."

"Skype seems to cut out when several voices speak at once"

While some companies use their mobile phone apps using VOIP, no interpreter mentioned using these apps for telephone interpreting assignments.

Other important tools for telephone interpreters are headset and amplifier. An amplifier increases the speakers' volume so the interpreter can hear better. Most of the interpreters in the corpus recommended the use of a headset and amplifier for telephone interpreting assignments. Some of the quotes are presented below:

"I can control both volumes (mic and headset) on the amplifier. Headset is plugged into the amplifier. The use of headset allows for hands to be free to take notes and to scratch your head when one or both parties keep changing directions in the middle of a sentence or go on afterburners at the same time."

"A headset would be useful at times to have my hands free to rifle through glossaries"

To summarize this theme, telephone interpreting requires minimum equipment: a normal phone, a landline, a headset and an amplifier. The cost of the landline is reimbursed to interpreters.

4.4. Training and skills

A total of 14 quotes were identified under the training and skills theme. The interpreters discussed the training opportunities, required skills in telephone interpreting, and whether it should be taught as a separate course. Two main categories emerged: required skills (8 quotes) and training opportunities (6 quotes).

According to interpreters, telephone interpreting requires emotional resilience, interpreting skills, and voice control. Some of the quotes are as follows:

"Your memory is one of your best tools and the second are fast handwriting to take good notes, third is your tone of voice to convey what is said."

"Telephonic interpreting requires just as much skill, if not MORE, than consecutive interpreting"

"Telephone interpreting, which is, in my opinion, much more difficult and stressful than on-site interpreting".

The interpreters have found telephone interpreting as difficult and stressful as on-site consecutive interpreting in three quotes, manifesting the demanding nature of telephone interpreting. In addition, increased memory and note-taking skills are mentioned. The importance of voice in telephone interpreting is also highlighted.

Regarding the training opportunities, interpreters focused on the training provided by the telephone interpreting companies and the necessity of telephone interpreting as a separate course taught at the undergraduate level at university. Some of the quotes are presented below:

"I guess telephonic & Skype with/ without a web-camera interpreting is becoming a growing segment in the market. So over-the-phone & Skype interpreting should be taught as a separate subject at the end of the course as far as I can imagine."

"It could be taught as a separate item as it is a different technique to liaison/community/face-to-face interpreting"

"By the way, a good agency would also give you adequate information about all aspects of telephone interpreting, may even provide some training, and they have set rates."

"There are training materials which can really help you master the art of controlling both parties on the phone - as it is normal for people to talk over each-other."

In summary, required skills in telephone interpreting may overlap with on-site interpreting at a certain level, but special training is necessary. The training, however, is presented by telephone interpreting companies, not undergraduate translation and interpreting programs at universities.

4.5. Industry-related aspects

As the second most frequent theme in the corpus, industry-related aspects were found 125 times. Four main categories emerged under this theme. These are telephone interpreting companies (42 quotes), job distribution (41 quotes), settings in telephone interpreting (26 quotes), and shift to telephone interpreting (16 quotes).

The policies of telephone interpreting companies are usually discussed in line with charging methods, rates, and reduced wages. In addition, a further sub-category was created under telephone interpreting companies entitled "employment of unqualified interpreters" (10 quotes), as this problem was frequently mentioned in the corpus. Some of the quotes are as follows:

"They have a serious shortage of trained interpreters, because most of us do not accept such conditions, unless in need and/or for other valid reasons... But as you see, they will keep on changing interpreters, it is not possible to hold out for a long period of time."

"The problem is-they will find people (qualified or just amateurs) to do this job for the money they are offering and obviously never use the ones who demand any decent pay. That is the problem with the industry here."

"The government's response was that the use of unqualified interpreters is essential given the alleged shortage of qualified ones. I see a problem with their logic, however: now that the agencies have taken over and rates are being slashed, why will people want to enter the profession? The government claims to be making efforts to address the shortage of interpreters, yet at the same time it is counteracting these efforts by sanctioning the use of unqualified interpreters."

The quotes highlight the problems of the telephone interpreting industry in terms of charging rates and a general tendency to employ unqualified interpreters as professional interpreters who reasonably do not accept wages. However, there is a shift to telephone interpreting in most of the countries mentioned in the corpus, which left interpreters unable to find government-supported jobs, as these are auctioned to telephone interpreting companies, which reduced the wages of interpreters. Some of the quotes regarding the shift to telephone interpreting are presented below:

"I also read recently that a large telephone interpreting agency won a four-year contract to work with the Irish police. Both the British and Irish authorities seem to prefer working with agencies rather than freelancers nowadays."

"The problem - certainly in the UK, and apparently in Ireland too - is that the police and the courts have signed contracts with the agencies (for four years in the case of the Irish police)."

"There are only a couple of agencies that have got all the government contracts and they have a very strict price - take it or leave it. And the price usually is not very good either"

"This is already happening, the outsourcing has started and I believe it will continue. Also telephone interpreting is likely to gradually replace most of f2f interpreting, including magistrates' court cases, and more and more police assignments. The unthinkable has begun."

The quotes depict the shift to telephone interpreting among government bodies. The austerity policies implemented in the countries meant a cut in travel expenses, which led these organizations to telephone interpreting companies to provide interpreting.

Settings in telephone interpreting are also closely related to government agencies such as hospitals, employment, and social work offices. Some of the quotes on settings in telephone interpreting are presented below:

"Most of the clients are DSS, GP Surgeries, Inland Revenue, Job Centres, London Ambulance Service, Immigration Service and Custom Service in Dover (for some Italian calls when they catch illegal immigrants on the back of Italian lorries)"

"The clients can be the police, ambulance, immigration, various local authority departments - particularly social services and educational services, job centers, hospitals, doctors, insurance companies, commercial clients like banks, travel agents, manufacturing companies, service providers, etc. In other words, the variety is enormous, and yes, you can get 30 calls a day, or more."

Apart from government agencies, some private companies such as customer service, banks, travel agents, and cell phone companies also use telephone interpreting to provide services.

The last category of industry-related aspects theme, job distribution, has been further sub-categorized under "based on language" (16 quotes) and "based on the time of call" (8 quotes).

According to the interpreters, some languages are not paid well and do not get calls due to their common language pair (such as EN-SP). However, lower diffusion languages (such as Somali and Polish) are paid better, and the interpreters receive more calls. One quote illustrates job distribution based on language as follows:

"My language pairs are English/Italian (I get 5% of calls) and English/Somali (95% of calls)."

In addition, some interpreters also mentioned that they do not receive calls due to their restrictions on weekends and after working hours. One quote highlights this policy as follows:

"I did not want to be disturbed at night or on weekends, so, probably because of that I was contacted several times in several months."

4.6. Interpreting process

The interpreting process was frequently cited in the corpus. As a result, it was regarded as a theme with six categories, which were then sub-categorized to create a fine-grained analysis of problems and experiences of the telephone interpreting process. A total of 112 quotes were identified under this theme. Then, categories emerged as follows: participant distribution (4 quotes), interpreter strategies (15 quotes), briefing (11 quotes), interpreting type in telephone interpreting (7 quotes), coordination effort (4 quotes), and lastly, problems during the process (71 quotes).

In terms of participant distribution, the interpreters in the corpus highlighted the equipment and participant distribution together. One quote illustrates this as follows:

"If the other two people are together, and you are the only one not there. Then they hear each other, of course. In that case the first thing you HAVE TO establish, is the call on a speakerphone, so both of them hear YOU at once, or they each hold a handset, which is much the same. Then all I said before will apply. But if they only have ONE telephone, and they have to pass it between them."

In terms of interpreter strategies, the interpreters implemented various strategies in telephone interpreting as follows:

"I always slow down my speech and pronounce as clearly as possible to make sure each party concerned can get 100% what they are supposed to get."

"They should hear the other person as well, even if they don't understand what they say. They will hear if it was a statement or a question, they will perceive the mood of the other person. Don't even think of silencing the line for the other party while you are listening!"

"Sometimes it makes sense to receive more information, ask two or three questions at once and for you to make more notes."

"I regularly have to be very patient when Dutch callers. But if I need to clarify something to both parties, I start by saying 'Interpreter speaking: ...' and then clarify what is going on or going wrong in the event of any misunderstanding."

The quotes show that interpreters favor letting the two main speakers hear each other, allowing for a common understanding despite not knowing each other's language. In addition, speaking slowly and clearly during telephone interpreting was frequently cited as a strategy in the corpus. Another important and related category was the coordination effort of telephone interpreters. A total of 4 quotes illustrate the coordination effort in the corpus. These quotes are presented as follows:

"Also bear in mind that you are connecting the two (or more) parties and you are the principal coordinator, so it's you who must make them obey the rules."

"Sometimes both parties would speak at the same time, and I had to instruct them to talk in turns to my cue. So you will be pretty much the director of the show, allowing for the directions of your main client"

"The interpreter has to then be assertive and interrupt and say, in both languages "Please speak up, the interpreter cannot hear every word"/"please speak slower/more clearly or whatever. I am not afraid to be assertive and am not always the "conduit"."

The quotes clearly show the coordination effort of the telephone interpreters. The interpreters coordinate the turn-taking, regulate the speech rate, and manage the overall process. The non-renditions in the quotes have a coordination function, which is also related to the briefing category under the same theme. A total of 11 quotes were coded with the briefing, during which the interpreter laid out the rules for the parties to manage the triadic interaction. Some of the quotes are presented as follows:

"Once all three parties are connected: Instruct the other two parties: -to speak in short sentences - to stop when you say a certain cue like "hold it, please, - to proceed when you say "please, proceed"

"What you can do is prepare a brief interpretation kit/guide for the parties involved, and give them some time to go through it, pointing they must strictly adhere to those instructions, for the interpretation process to be carried out smoothly. For example: ~ do not talk when I'm interpreting ~ do not talk before the other party has finished talking ~ do not send more than 5 sentences for interpretation in one reply to the other ~ bear in mind I'm just a human~ watch the interpretation dynamics ~ prepare yourself for the meeting (agenda, questions etc) etc. You can also read these instructions out loud for them at the beginning of a meeting and just hope they will stick to them, however, there is no guarantee."

"I agree that it's essential to set guidelines. I'll usually begin by saying something to the client along the lines of, 'Go ahead and speak directly to [the other party] and remember to stop after a few sentences so that I can interpret.' A few times I've had to interrupt a conversation. 'The interpreter needs to interrupt here: okay, I can't interpret if everyone is going to talk at once.' Usually one reminder is enough."

The interpreters actively provide the general rules for interpreting during the briefing process. However, the clients may not obey these rules as 71 quotes were identified with problems during the telephone

interpreting. The problems were further divided into sub-categories as follows: stress and fatigue (17 quotes), client-related problems (14 quotes), equipment-related problems (6 quotes) and content-related problems (32 quotes).

Equipment-related problems are usually related to phone lines. One quote illustrates this as follows:

"There are often technical difficulties; poor phone link; one speaker may be using a mobile phone!"

Client-related problems are related to speech rate, accents, turn-taking and overlapping speech problems. Some of the quotes are presented as follows:

"Usually when the service provider (I am mainly talking about social service interpreting here) couldn't see you, they tend to speak much faster, treat you like a machine, and they get annoyed when the patients/ service users get confused with whom they are really talking to."

"Also, some clients think the interpreter is a machine and they can just talk without being careful about making noise, talking at the same time or talking non-stop, talking to the phone and to the other side of the room alternatively or expecting the interpreter to stop the long interpretation because it's pointless or repetitive, etc."

A total of 32 quotes included content-related problems such as lack of visual information (8 quotes), duration of calls (5 quotes) and problems with the speech (15 quotes).

Lack of visual information is usually cited as a disadvantage of telephone interpreting and the source of most problems during the interpreting process. Some of the quotes are as follows:

"There are no facial expressions to give any clues, nor can the interpreter give any clues by writing something down and showing it to either party!"

"Since you can't see the person, you can't read body language."

Apart from the lack of visual information, the duration of calls is longer than recommended in the literature (Mikkelsen, 2003; Ko, 2006). Some of the quotes are presented to illustrate this problem:

"I had a call today of about 1 hour 20 minutes, and I had to stop the call myself and tell the users that I was too tired to carry on."

"The more "family like" approach by the British DWP personnel tends to extend the calls over 90 minutes sometimes."

Other problems encountered during the interpreting process are the usage of lingua franca, heavy accents and the need to repeat the messages. Some related quotes are presented below:

"Big difference: you do not see the people for whom you are interpreting/there are accents from all over the place; in my job I interpret for Scottish people, Welsh people, people from Birmingham, UK, London, Newcastle, and English people who all have different ways of speaking!!"

"Yet it also can be pretty difficult because interlocutors are not always native speakers and it takes me about a minute to get used to their manner of speaking."

"But I had to keep repeating what was being said to both parties and frankly it was so tiring!!"

The last category in this theme was fatigue and stress, which naturally arise due to the problems with clients, content and equipment. Some interpreters compared telephone interpreting to on-site consecutive and simultaneous interpreting in terms of its demanding nature. Some of the quotes are presented below:

"Telephone interpreting is much harder and more stressful than any other type of interpreting."

"It is in some ways more complicated than working face-to-face. Not least of the reasons for this would be the lack of visual clues to meaning, and the necessity to clarify and reconfirm spellings and numbers, etc. The other challenge is that telephone interpreters are rarely booked in advance, and most companies require the interpreter to answer unscheduled calls within two or three rings making the time logged on a fairly tense experience."

"Telephone interpreting, which is, in my opinion, much more difficult and stressful than on-site interpreting, even if you are dressed with your pajama and have slippers on..."

The interpreters in the corpus highlighted the demanding nature of telephone interpreting. One of the stressors for the interpreters is not having booked in advance. Other stressors can be the lack of visual information, long duration of calls and other content and client-related problems.

5. Discussion

In the previous section, the findings of the content analysis were presented under six main themes emerging from the corpus. Most of these findings corroborate with the previous studies in the literature. However, some of them indicate current problems faced by interpreters.

The quotes under the theme "general opinions on telephone interpreting" align with the previous studies in the literature. For instance, Lee (2007) and Wang (2018) also found that flexible working hours and no commute were advantages for interpreters, while technical problems, physical discomfort, and simple and tedious work were disadvantages. In addition, remuneration policy was frequently cited as a disadvantage (Wang, 2017; Jiménez-Ivars, 2021). Face-threatening acts are also frequently encountered in telephone interpreting, a form of indirect and distant communication (Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2021).

The findings under the theme "charging" also align with the existing literature (Wang, 2018; Gracia-Garcia, 2002; Lee, 2007; Cheng, 2015) regarding global markets' effects on lower remuneration. In addition, the employment of unqualified or inexperienced interpreters also saturated the market. Thus, qualified and experienced interpreters quit telephone interpreting for better opportunities (Jiménez-Ivars, 2021; Lee, 2007).

As for the "equipment" theme, the preference for landlines is still the norm for protecting confidentiality and ensuring voice quality (Kelly, 2008: 97; Ozolins, 2011). However, recent literature also revealed an increase in the use of mobile phones due to their convenience (Cheng, 2015: 46), but this may result in unsafe practices, such as interpreting while driving (Angellelli & Ross, 2021).

Under the theme "training and skills", the interpreters highlighted the prevalence of remote interpreting and the difference between telephone and on-site community interpreting. However, special training for telephone interpreting at the undergraduate or graduate level is uncommon globally. Thus, global telephone interpreting companies started training and certification programs (Kelly, 2008: 88), also cited in the corpus. In addition, a recent surge in the literature for developing training materials by the EU-funded Shift in Orality Project and role-plays (Fernández Pérez, 2015) can also be seen.

As per the "industry-related aspects" theme, it can be easily noticed that a general shift to telephone interpreting among governmental organizations (Ozolins, 2015; Gracia-Garcia, 2002) and telephone interpreting companies' unfavorable policies in terms of job distribution and charging negatively affect telephone interpreters, most of whom quit doing telephone interpreting, thus leaving the market to

unqualified interpreters, as also put forward by Jiménez-Ivars (2021). This general tendency may soon result in worse quality interpreting in community settings.

The findings under the “interpreting process” theme corroborate other literature studies. Oviatt & Cohen (1992) and Wadensjö (1999) also put forward the frequent overlapping speech, problems in turn-taking and the explicit coordination by telephone interpreters. In addition, the importance of explaining the interpreting process to the clients, especially to those who are not accustomed to working with interpreters, is frequently cited in the literature (Wang, 2017; Cheng, 2015; Hale et al., 2022; Amato, 2020; Xu et al., 2020; Kelly, 2008: 119). Furthermore, the existing literature also highlights the abovementioned stress factors in the corpus, such as lack of visual cues (Wadensjö, 1999), managing triadic communication (Rosenberg, 2007; Mikkelson, 2003), duration of calls (Mikkelson, 2003; Ko, 2006), problems in speech, such as accents and use of lingua franca (Rosenberg, 2007; Määttä, 2018).

6. Conclusion

In this study, a content analysis was conducted to examine the challenges and perceptions of interpreters in telephone interpreting. The study was based on analyzing the entries of interpreters about telephone interpreting in the forums section of Proz.com. A total of 43 entries related to telephone interpreting were found and included in the corpus, comprising 250 paragraphs. Six main themes were identified, and findings were presented with quotes from the corpus under relevant categories.

The results show that the low remuneration, demanding nature of telephone interpreting, lack of visual information and non-regular working hours are the main disadvantages for interpreters. At the same time, no-commute, flexibility, helping people and earning extra income are considered the main advantages. These results may indicate the low professionalism in telephone interpreting, and interpreters usually accepted telephone interpreting assignments between other main activities, such as on-site interpreting or translation, for extra, not main, income. Global telephone interpreting companies laid the charging method and rate, which reduced even to a lower level. The current rates are found to be very low by professional interpreters, who understandably quit telephone interpreting, leaving the market to unqualified and inexperienced interpreters. Regarding equipment, landline telephone interpreting companies persist in protecting confidentiality and ensuring voice quality. Mobile phones are also questioned regarding quality. In addition, unsafe practices, such as breaching confidentiality by accepting jobs in unsuitable places and interpreting while driving, are also cited as reasons for not using mobile phones. Training opportunities are limited to in-service training of global companies. Regarding industry-related practices, a general shift to telephone interpreting in some countries to replace on-site interpreting in community settings, led by telephone interpreting companies driving the telephone interpreting remuneration lower, emerged as a threat to interpreters in these countries. In the interpreting process, interpreters found the frequent overlapping speech, unheard accents, and usage of lingua franca problematic. In order to solve these, interpreters resorted to explicit coordination initiatives such as managing the beginning and end of the conversation, managing the turn-taking, as well as asking questions and speaking clearly. Stress and fatigue are frequently cited in the corpus, with long duration of calls, no booking in advance for telephone interpreting assignments, lack of briefing and lack of visual information are cited as reasons.

While telephone interpreting started in 1973 in Australia as a fee-free service for equal access to public services, it has been the fundamental line of business for the largest companies interpreting market, crossing national boundaries to outsource human resources and reaching wider areas to provide this

service, especially to governments who seek to minimize the costs in the face of austerity policies (Gracia-Garcia, 2002; Ozolins, 2011). The increase in remote working and distance education, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, also increased the demand for telephone interpreting worldwide: In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is predicted that remote interpreting will become widespread as large segments of the population were previously unaware of telephone interpreting and video-conference interpreting will rapidly adopt these technologies (Pielmeier, 2020: 31-39). In a similar report published by Nimdzi, Hickey (2021) reveals the impact of the pandemic on telephone interpreting. In the report, which analyzed data from 35 of the largest interpreting companies in the world, the demand for telephone interpreting was 10% before the pandemic, which increased to 25% during the pandemic. Although demand fell to 15% after the pandemic, the report states that remote interpreting now has a significant market share. It is emphasized that there has been a significant increase in demand, especially in telehealth services.

In Türkiye, the International Patient Assistance Unit Interpretation and Call Center, affiliated with the Ministry of Health, provides fee-free service to numerous people, while the local companies also provide telephone interpreting. It can be predicted that telephone interpreting will soon be much more widespread nationally, following the global trends mentioned above. While there is a surge in the studies on telephone interpreting (Özkaya, 2017; Ross, 2021; 2019; Eraslan Kıncal, 2023: 50-53), further studies are needed to understand the challenges and problems of telephone interpreters in Türkiye as well as to explore the discourse aspects of triadic communication. Based on the findings of these studies, training materials, including role-plays, could be designed to enable trainee interpreters to be ready for the national and international interpreting market, which global companies lead with technology as their driving factor.

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