
SOME ASPECTS OF ONLINE INTERPRETING: CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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The challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for a number of emerging changes in the translation industry related to the use of new information and communication technologies (hereinafter referred to as ICT) in interpretation [2. P. 260; 17].

Despite the fact that it was technology that contributed to the emergence of interpretation as a profession in the 20th century, there have been no fundamental changes in the tools of interpreters – unlike translators – for decades [10] This is probably why, relatively recently, technological innovations were not taken seriously by the professional community [9. P. 34], and the realization that technology can change the usual *modus operandi* did not come [4. P. 262]. Today, new tools, rapidly changing the conditions of competition in the profession, require the translator to master technological competencies and quickly adapt to new working conditions [1].

There are three components of the technological transformation of interpreting (in the terminology of Braun – technological turn): 1) remote translation tools (technologies used to deliver interpreting services and enhance their reach, leading to technology-mediated or distance interpreting); 2) computer-aided interpreting technologies (CAI; technology-supported interpreting); 3) machine interpreting technologies (MI); as well as hybrid technologies related to automatic speech recognition (for example, respeaking) [5. P. 271; 10].

If automation in interpreting is a fairly new phenomenon, then the first experiences of translation using telecommunication technologies began in the 1970s: in 1973, the Australian Migration Service established a telephone translation service [5: p. 275], and in 1976, UNESCO for the first time used satellite communication technologies to broadcast simultaneous translation [16. P. 124].

Despite the broad prospects for new technological solutions, for a long time the position of the professional community was that conference interpreters should not switch to remote work [8]. In 2017, the AIIIC (Task Force on Distance Interpreting) working group was created, whose tasks include coordinating all issues related to working remotely [16. P. 125].

Studies of the technical, psychophysiological, social and discursive aspects of both simultaneous and consecutive translation in remote mode determined its special status, pointed to the dependence of the quality of translation on technical conditions and ergonomics of the workplace, revealed an increased cognitive load in comparison with contact types of translation (term by Alikina [3. PP. 60–62]), and also pointed out the potential negative impact on the health and psychological state of the translator [5. 11, 12, 15].

As the pandemic restrictions forced the world to move institutional and personal communication online in April 2020, the professional community's thoughts

about poor audio and communication quality, an interpreter's excessive cognitive load, and potential injuries when working remotely were temporarily sidelined, all types of interpreting inevitably moved to the online environment [4. P. 264]. Nimdzi, who in 2019 called virtual translation technologies "newbies" on the market [13], will later write: a year ago, these tools were just a fashionable solution to non-existent problems, and in 2020 year without them, we simply would not be able to solve the problems of the pandemic (virtual interpreting technology... became the solution to the problem) [14].

The forced transition to "distance learning" set the vector for ICT research in translation education [8]. Further changes in the industry are likely to give impetus to professional practice research in the coming years. Today, scientific projects devoted to technologies in interpretation are not widely represented in Russian translation studies, however, the theoretical and methodological base of the cognitive [7], communicative functional and corpus areas can be enriched by modern research new types of interpreting. Therefore, there is a need to systematize and unify the metalanguage of this field of knowledge, as well as to comprehend the existing methods, approaches and results of foreign studies of distance translation.

In addition to the variety of scenarios of human-machine interaction, among the reasons for the indicated terminological variability is the variety of scientific approaches in the modern DI research corpus. A significant part of remote translation research has been carried out under the auspices of international organizations: the UN (1999), the European Commission (2000) and the European Parliament (2001, 2004); see: [15] and review in [11]. Interest in ICT in interpreting is determined primarily by economic and organizational considerations: remote work means not only a reduction in travel costs, but also a solution to the problem of equipping new booths for simultaneous translation (for example, during the expansion of the state when new member countries join the European Union [12]). With the cooperation of the International Telecommunication Union and the School of Translation and Interpretation of the University of Geneva (1998), one of the first large-scale projects devoted to the experimental evaluation of psychological and physiological factors, as well as the technical conditions for remote simultaneous interpretation (VRI-mono-SI) was implemented [11].

Large-scale studies of remote conference interpreting were followed by experiments aimed at describing the features of DI in the social sphere and business. The possibilities of an interpreter working in small tripartite conferences using ISDN videotelephony were studied in the ViKiS project (Germany, 1996–1998) [7]. A series of AVIDICUS projects (2008–2016) was dedicated to a comprehensive study of VMI for use in the legal field (translation in court, police, correctional institutions) [7].

The materials of the SHIFT in Orality Erasmus+ project (2015–2018) describe the theoretical foundations of remote translation research (TI and VRI), as well as recommendations for developers of professional educational programs. In these projects, in order to solve applied problems, the cognitive and social aspects of DI are subjected to theoretical comprehension, the psychological and physiological features of the work of an interpreter in remote mode are empirically revealed; linguistic aspects are studied using the method of introspection, conversational analysis and multimodal discourse analysis. Since the requirement of confidentiality often prevents the collection of material in real translation situations, many DI studies are based on

translations in simulated typical situations of communication (however, the experimental nature of the task is not reported to translators in some cases, since the very fact of recording can cause additional stress, for example, see [8]). Thus, DI linguistic research is based on small samples, which is compensated by the multi-level markup of the material and the complexity of scientific approaches in general. The corpus direction stands out as promising (for example, [14]).

When studying remote conference interpreting, the psychological aspects of work (stress, motivation of the interpreter, social isolation, “alienation”), the impact of new conditions on the interpreter’s health (the impact on vision of the video image as the only source of visual information during translation) come to the fore [15]), as well as the distribution of cognitive load [11]. One way or another, each of these studies is aimed at identifying the fundamental differences between remote and contact translation, as well as the factors influencing ICT on the work of an interpreter. As Braun notes, this problem has not been solved to date, since the results of individual experiments are contradictory, and a wide range of conditions for their implementation does not allow full comparison and generalization. Nevertheless, a number of categories are distinguished in the corpus of studies used in the interpretation of the features of distance translation.

A number of recent studies have indicated a generally positive attitude towards some configurations of remote interpreting, both for experienced conference interpreters (VRI-mono / dia-SI [16]) and interpreters working in social situations (public service VRImono / dia-SI / CO [9: p. 73]). New opportunities for searching for orders, more comfortable conditions for efficient work, increased access to the services of professionals – all these are the advantages of working remotely. However, the key disadvantage, according to translators, is stress [ibid.]. Moral exhaustion, feeling of loneliness, despondency, absent-mindedness, as well as fatigue, headaches and other health problems are associated by translators with stress, including that caused by the technical aspect of work. The ergonomics of the translation space is of particular importance in the VRI-dia-CO configuration.

Problems with the connection, the lack of technological competencies of the customer (“80% of the work in Zoom goes to consultations, 20% to orders”), as well as the lack of paralinguistic information in remote communication in the long run can lead to professional burnout. Thus, the study of the causes of fatigue and burnout of an interpreter (post-work exhaustion [15])

Among the basic grounds for distinguishing between categories of remote translation, it is worth highlighting the location of the interpreter and communication participants, as well as the communication technology. Each remote translation scenario has its own specifics, due to the peculiarities of both human and human-machine interaction. As a key factor influencing the work of an interpreter in a remote mode, they name the limitations of the visual channel of information, which lead to additional cognitive and psychological stress.

In conclusion, we note the inevitable inclusion of remote translation studies in the paradigm of mediatization. Technologies, mediating interaction, become an agent of sociocultural changes. With the ubiquity of technology, the idea of remote translation is being strengthened not as a measure applied in extremis, but as a full replacement for traditional types of translation (cf. “hyperbolic, business-led discourse on VMI” [5: p. 282], “normalization” of technology” [6. P. 283]). The “business as usual” position [12] – equalizing the status of remote and contact

translation – is actively supported by technology platforms: new solutions are positioned as “an interpreter at the push of a button”. Thus, in the situation of “uberization” of the industry [1], scientific research acquires special significance and is designed to dispel the naive ideas that exist in society about the peculiarities of the work of an interpreter.

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