GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE INTERPRETING
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Introduction

The following are AIIC's minimum standards and best practice recommendations applicable to working conditions for video remote conference interpreting in simultaneous mode (also referred to as Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI) or Distance Interpreting (DI)).[1]

This document provides guidance when working in situations where the interpreter is not co-located with both speakers and audience. DI implies delivering simultaneous interpreting services from a distant site, with the interpreters receiving, in addition to audio input, visual input from one or several video feeds displayed on one or more screens.

These guidelines are primarily drafted for conference interpreters and may also be useful to recruiters of interpreting services, event and conference organizers, consultant interpreters, as well as developers and providers of technical equipment for DI. This document also covers working conditions for sign language interpreting. In addition, a detailed description of the requirements for sign language interpreting is also available in the AIIC "Guidelines for positioning of sign language interpreters in conferences, including web streaming" (https://aiic.net/page/print/7821).

Note: This document does not cover interpreter-mediated events without the transmission of images of speakers and/or audience to the interpreter (such as telephone calls or audio conferences).

Location

Simultaneous conference interpreting is a team effort. The interpreter must be able to work with their language team and other language teams seamlessly (e.g. communication, collaboration, turn-taking). In order to work together effectively, it is strongly recommended that all interpreters be in the same room or space (also referred to as a DI hub). Individual

[1] The following guidelines have been developed by the Task Force on Distance Interpreting of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) and are based on publicly available information as well as research findings from different scholars, AIIC Committees and Groups and individual interpreters. Wherever available, these guidelines are based on and refer to Standards of the International Standards Organization (ISO), developed by competent international experts and agreed upon by ISO member countries through their national standards bodies, as well as relevant research findings.

language teams/booths are required to be co-located in the same place in order to avoid added cognitive load.[2]

A DI hub allows for team members to collaborate in a single location, with a technician present. It is a controlled environment in which the hub and/or platform provider shall be responsible and liable for:

- Ensuring the quality and continuity of the data connection.[3]
- Safeguarding the confidentiality of all communications.
- Providing a private, soundproofed setting (ideally booths, as per ISO norm 2603 (permanent booth) or 4043 (mobile booth).
- Providing interpreting consoles according to ISO 20109:2016 Annex B.1, or interpreter interfaces offering the same basic functionalities.
- Ensuring that the interpreter has access to conference documents and can view them live as they are displayed to the audience.

Receiving input via a non-direct source (e.g., screen and/or audio feed) adds increased cognitive load for the interpreter. Depending on the duration of the event, in order to ensure sustained interpretation quality, manning strength in a DI working environment requires additional interpreters.[4]

Availability of a conference technician

- At least one qualified conference technician shall be present on site throughout the event to assist interpreters with the correct functioning of the equipment. Monitoring and controlling of the entire interpreting system may be carried out by the technician on site or by a second technician. The latter may either be physically present at the local site where the interpreter is delivering the interpreting service, or located elsewhere.

Booth furniture and equipment

- Interpreting consoles shall be in line with ISO 20109 requirements.
- If software-based interpreter interfaces are used, they shall offer the same basic functionalities. Access to the software shall be facilitated through a separate computer/dedicated workstation, to which the provider of the DI platform must have access during the entirety of the assignment.
- Each interpreter needs to be provided with a work surface with enough room for a laptop and documents.

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[2] Remote interpreting solutions currently available on the market make use of text chat features, ultimately adding to interpreter cognitive load.

[3] Internet connection/bandwidth: 4Mbps are required for every HD video feed, audio included. E.g. if the setup requires 1 video feed for speaker (close-up with facial expressions), 1 video feed with speaker on stage, 1 video feed with a view on audience, 1 video feed with document presentation, then a total of 16 Mbps download speed will be required. This bandwidth must be permanently available and assured, not merely an "up to" measurement.

[4] Future research findings are expected to shed light on this aspect. Presently, the European Commission interpreting service, SCIC, reduces the duration of the session when providing DI for European Council lunches and dinners.

- Each interpreter shall have an adjustable chair.[5]
- One compact, table-top, low-heat, adjustable reading light per interpreter shall be available.
- Interpreter's equipment (consoles, interfaces) must be accessible for all, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Access to relevant documents

- The interpreter shall be provided with centralised access to all documents relevant to the communicative event. This access shall be available reasonably in advance to the event and throughout its entire duration.
- During the event, the interpreter shall have a point of contact from whom to obtain any missing documents being referenced.

Confidentiality and data protection

- Confidentiality and data protection shall be laid down in a binding agreement by the parties providing the working facilities and the systems used for data transmission. The agreement shall state who assumes the liability for ensuring that the infrastructure connecting to the event's data system complies with all necessary measures to ensure confidentiality and data protection. It is not recommended for the interpreter to work from their own location.

Personal data

- Rules relating to the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and rules relating to the free movement of personal data shall always be respected.[6]

Briefing

- The interpreter should have a "technical briefing" to ensure they know how to use the DI platform in question, and be compensated accordingly for their time.
- Clients should have a "test run" of the DI platforms to ensure they are satisfied with the level of support provided. It is recommended to hold a briefing session with interpreters, speakers and event organizers prior to the event. This will allow interpreters to familiarize themselves with the voices and the speaking or signing style of the presenters, gather relevant event information, and optimally prepare themselves for the interpreting assignment.

Recording and web streaming

- According to regulations on intellectual property,[7] prior written consent shall be obtained from the interpreter in case interpreting services are recorded.

[5] For details see ISO 20109, Annex B.
[6] See e.g. EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
[7] See Universal Copyright Convention and Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works.

- The interpreter should include in their contract with clients specific clauses regulating the use of their individual interpreting services.
- A language disclaimer should be added to the web streamed and/or archived recording stating that interpretation via video and audio (including any interpretation via an audio and video channel) are intended to facilitate communication and do not constitute an authentic record of the event.

Intercommunication

Communication between the interpreter and other relevant actors shall be possible at any time using a dedicated function integrated in the interpreter console. The use of this function should cause minimal additional cognitive load so as to not to interfere with the primary function of delivering interpretation. Intercommunication shall be possible between:

- Interpreter and technician.
- Interpreter and event moderator.
- Interpreters using the same outgoing language channel.
- All interpreters at the same communicative event.

Sign language interpreters do not work with an interpreter console and another form of communication with the relevant actors should be agreed upon prior to the event, e.g. directly with the head of the interpreter team.

Screens

As interpreters are in a different location removed from the conference room, they require visual input provided via screens or video monitors.

Screens, preferably LED, should be large enough for the interpreter to read the text displayed or clearly see any images. Speakers intervening from any point connected to the event, as well as any visual materials displayed to the participants and/or the audience, shall be made available to the interpreter as a separate video feed during the event, ideally on a dedicated screen. The active speaker should be displayed on at least 65% of the main screen with the correct aspect ratio. Other participants, including the chair/bureau, and a general view of the event room should be displayed on the remaining part of the screen or on separate screens. In case of a presentation or intervention in a signed language, the signer should be displayed on the screen from the signer's waist to just above the head. If speech to text services are provided,[8] a separate screen is required for this live text.

For sign language interpreters, multiple video feeds should display:

- Panoramic view of the room.
- View of the speaker, moderator or participant who is speaking or signing.
- View of the sign language interpreter (for sign language interpreters to check their positioning and placement).
- Documents, as displayed for the audience.

[8] Also referred to as re-speaking, live speech to text interpretation, velotyping, court reporting, and captioning.

Screens can be placed in each of the booths or, alternatively, a larger screen can be placed in front of the booth or booths. Sign language interpreters will require the same visual input and will need to have the screens placed diagonally in front of them, in order not to obstruct the user's view of the sign language interpreters.[9]

The images displayed on the screen should be of high quality (sharpness, color, contrast, brightness and smoothness) and should be large enough to be visible. The interpreter must be able to adjust the image contrast and brightness of the image.

Placement of sign language interpreters

- There must be sufficient space for the sign language interpreter team to work together and the members of the team must be able to see each other. The active interpreter needs a space of approximately 1.5 x 1.5 metres minimum (2.0 x 2.0 metres maximum).
- The supporting interpreter is seated approx. 1–3 metres in front of the active interpreter. The chairs are preferably non-revolving and have either a low armrest or none at all. They should also be ergonomically adjustable to suit the working interpreters.

Visibility of the sign language interpreter

- A background screen shall be placed behind the sign language interpreter; this shall be of a solid color in contrast to the interpreter, e. g. blue-grey, and not be visually distracting.
- The lighting on the sign language interpreter should be indirect and shall not cause any shadows on the face or hands.

Video and camera images of sign language interpreters

- A dedicated cameraman for sign language interpreters shall be provided. The cameraman is responsible for adjusting the heights of the image to that of the individual interpreters.
- The camera should be frontal to the working sign language interpreter in order for the interpreter to look directly into the camera.
- Viewers of sign language interpreting services prefer the use of a chroma key screen in which the interpreter is embedded in the image, also called a 'green or blue screen' where the technician overlays the web-streamed picture of the event with the sign language interpretation. The sign language interpreter should be displayed on at least ⅙ of the screen.
- In case of a signer making an intervention, the camera should be on the signer (not on the interpreter working into a spoken language)

[9] See "Guidelines for positioning of sign language interpreters in conferences, including web streaming" (https://aiic.net/page/print/7821) for all specifications.

Technical requirements

There are a number of internationally agreed and commonly used ISO Standards available. They include technical requirements on equipment used for simultaneous interpreting, as well as for quality and transmission of sound and image to interpreters in presence-based interpreting scenarios (ISO 2603, 4043, 20108 and 20109). Although these requirements, with the exception of some specific requirements addressing the modality of Distance Interpreting in ISO 20108, were originally not specified for distance interpreting solutions, there are a number of relevant parameters for simultaneous interpreting that apply equally to this modality.

The following basic parameters and functionalities shall be considered applicable to distance interpreting in the simultaneous mode:

Microphone management

- Preferably, there should always be only one microphone switched ON. The system should allow for different microphone management settings in order to consider specific needs (e.g. interactive discussions with fast changes of speakers).
- There should always be someone (e.g. the moderator, operator or chair) who is able to switch OFF all other microphones, when needed.
- All distant sound sources (including laptops, smartphones etc.) need to be managed within the system.
- Sign language interpreters are usually not placed in a booth, including when working at distance. When sign language interpreters are expected to provide retour into a spoken language, they will need a wireless handheld microphone to work into the spoken language.

Frequency response

- The microphone and headphones both for speakers and for interpreters (the interpreter's microphone becomes a speaker's microphone when working in relay mode) shall correctly reproduce audio frequencies between 125 Hz and 15 000 Hz.[10] It is important to consider that this requirement also applies to handheld, lapel, head-worn and any other type of microphone, as well as to sound input from external sources such as laptops and videoconferencing systems.

Prevention of acoustic feedback and acoustic shock

- To avoid damage to interpreters' and participants' hearing, measures shall be in place to avoid acoustic feedback and provide acoustic shock protection.[11]
- Systems shall include measures to reduce sound degradation caused by too many microphones switched ON.

[10] For more details, please refer to ISO 20109, clause 4.

[11] Interpreters shall enquire whether a compressor limiter will be installed before accepting an assignment. They are also recommended to have their hearing checked (so as to establish a baseline), to secure disability insurance, to consider purchasing hearing protection devices (e.g. PreservEar or LimitEar), and make sure that any incidents are reported.

Acoustic echo canceling

- At every location connected to the communicative event (conference) acoustic echo canceling shall be in place.

External sources

- Sound input from external sources such as laptops and videoconferencing systems shall have a dynamic range at least equal to that described above under *Frequency response.*
- It shall be possible to switch video conferencing microphones ON and OFF or to mute them.

Image quality

- The quality of image input to the interpreter shall be kept on a level that prevents visible distortion such as blurring or freezing.
- In case of excessive blurring, freezing or distortions, interpreting may have to be temporarily suspended until the image stabilizes.
- If videos are displayed at a distance within the communicate event, the interpreter will only be able to provide simultaneous interpretation if this video (including the embedded audio) is transmitted to the interpreter as an independent video feed (not embedded in the main video feed), compliant with the requirements on audio and video quality as set out in this document. Simultaneous interpretation will have to be suspended if these requirements are not met.

Lip sync

- Sound and image from a distant site shall be synchronized.
- Sound shall not lag image by more than 45 ms.
- Sound shall not lead image by more than 125 ms.

Latency

- Image and sound must arrive at the interpreter‘s screen and headphone within 500 ms of being produced at the source.
- Latency between the original speech and the reception of simultaneous interpreting by the audience shall not exceed 1000 ms.

ANNEX 1 DEFINITIONS

Cognitive load
Borrowing from mental workload and cognitive load theory research, cognitive load in interpreting is defined as the portion of an interpreter's limited cognitive capacity devoted to performing an interpreting task in a given environment.

Distance interpreting
Interpreting of a speaker in a different location from that of the interpreter, enabled by information and communications technology (ICT). (Source: ISO 20108)

Individual language teams
Boothmates, or colleagues working into the same languages.

Interpreting hub
A space or location where a platform provider offers the possibility for several language teams to work together.

Remote interpreting
Interpreting delivered from a different location than that of the speaker and the audience, enabled by information and communications technology (ICT), with either only sound from speaker(s) (audio remote interpreting) or sound and image from speakers (video remote interpreting) being transmitted to interpreters.

Simultaneous interpreting mode
Delivery of interpreting with simultaneous reception of Source Text (listening) and production of Target Text (speaking). In the case of signed languages, the source text can either be visual or audible and the target text can either be signed or spoken.

Video remote interpreting
Interpreting delivered from a different location than that of the speaker and the audience, enabled by information and communications technology (ICT), with sound and image from speakers being transmitted to interpreters.

Main characteristics: Interpreter has no direct view of the speaker and the audience; Visual input (view of speaker, audience and visual material available for the audience) is shown to interpreters on one or several screens.

ANNEX 2 CHECKLIST

Interpreters shall request the Distance Interpreting (DI) platform provider to sign a disclaimer exempting the interpreter from any responsibility for technical problems related to transmission of sound and image to interpreters and sound output to audience that may arise during an event**.** The interpreter shall also assume no liability for data losses. Prior to assignments it is recommended that interpreters request and attend briefing sessions geared toward working with the equipment.

The following are issues to bear in mind and clarify prior to accepting DI assignments:

- Professional fees and copyright added fee.
- The type of technological platform to be used.
- Platform compliance with ISO 20108/20109.
- Technical support during the event.
- Live communication with team partners and event partners.
- Liability.
- Confidentiality.
- Time allocated for testing the system.
- Clients/end users.
- Potential for retour.
- Directionality for sign language interpreters.

N.B. This checklist is not exhaustive and will be periodically updated, depending on technological advancements.

ANNEX 3 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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