Remote mock conference: Students' impressions
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1. Mock conference conditions and scenario

1.1. Sample

16 second-year EMCI students at ESIT, with the following A languages: French (5), Chinese (4), English (2), Spanish (2), Russian (2) and Lithuanian (1).

1.2. Scenario

Participants: Respectively three and four speakers (EN, FR, RU, ZH) presented on the topic of telework and gender equality, with one of them also playing the role of moderator, so that only one person at a time was able to speak. During the first simulation, students could only see the speaker on the screen. For the second simulation, all participants were visible.

Duration: the conference lasted a total of 90 minutes: 30 minutes of technical testing followed by 60 minutes of the actual conference. Each student interpreted for 30 minutes, with some working into their B language.

Platform: Kudo.

1.3. Equipment

Half of the students felt that their equipment was suitable for participating in the mock conference.

Devices: The students interpreted using their personal computers (63% Mac, 38% Windows). Only 2 students felt that their computers were not powerful enough for remote interpreting (RI).
The majority of the students also used a second device, mainly for communicating with their interpreting partner, doing research and displaying documents.

Headsets: 63% of the students used headsets with integrated microphones. Only 2 students felt that their headsets were of insufficient quality.

Environment: The students interpreted alone in their homes. 2 or 3 students felt that their environment was not quiet enough.

Internet connection: 8 students (5 for the second experiment) felt that their connection was of insufficient quality, even though only 2 of them actually have a download speed of less than 5 mbps which is Kudo's recommended speed). Only 1 or 2 students used an Ethernet cable.

63% of the students were the only ones using their Internet connection (31% for the second mock conference).
Overall, 2 students (4 for the second mock conference) stated that they had had connection problems significant enough to interfere with their interpreting, although these were not the same students who have low download speed.

1.4. Preparation

Only 3 students felt fully prepared for the first mock conference. As expected, more students felt fully prepared for the second mock conference: 7.

Platform: The students took the Kudo tutorial designed for interpreters, read the information documents provided, and tested the platform for 90 minutes prior to the mock conference (5 students had done RI before, two of them using Kudo). 5 students felt that they had not been given enough time to test the platform before the mock conference, and 5 said that they had not sufficiently practiced RI beforehand, for both mock conferences.

Topic: The students were allowed to prepare the topic in advance, and also received the PowerPoint presentation of one of the speakers. 20% of students said that they had not prepared the topic sufficiently.

Teamwork: 7 students (2 for the second mock conference) stated that they wished they were more coordinated with their partner before the mock conference.

2. Students' impressions following the mock conference

2.1. Comparison with on-site interpreting

Fatigue and concentration: 56% of the students said that they experienced increased fatigue, and 44% said that they had more trouble concentrating after the first mock conference. After the second mock conference, 94% of the students said that they experienced increased fatigue, and 75% said that they had more trouble concentrating.

Quality: For the first mock conference, 63% of the students did not feel that their interpreting had suffered. But for the second mock conference, 94% of the students said that their interpreting had suffered. They state that they had difficulty putting themselves in the speaker's shoes, had a hard time engaging with the audience, and that their rendition contained more omissions.
For the first mock conference, 44% of the students felt that they had been unable to ensure communication among the participants, or at least not as well as they would have had they been interpreting on-site, while 56% said that they did not know. None of the students felt that they had facilitated communication among the participants.
For the second mock conference, where students could actually see their audience, surprisingly, 75% felt that they had been unable to ensure communication among the participants, or at least not as well as they would have had they been interpreting on-site. This being said, 94% of students said they prefer being able to see all the participants.

Sim-text: Of the 7 students who did sim-text, 71% of them found it more difficult during the first mock conference and 44% during the second mock conference.

2.2. Conditions specific to remote interpreting

Single track: 81% of the students were bothered by the fact that they could not listen to the original and the interpretation at the same time while they were not interpreting. For the second mock conference 56% of the students were bothered.

Handover: About 40% of the students were able to hand over to their interpreting partner successfully for both mock conferences. About half the students chose not to use the integrated handover function and to message their partner instead. The success rate was virtually the same for both platform and messaging handovers.

Written messaging: For both mock conferences, around 70% found that messaging their partner regarding handovers or technical difficulties while interpreting affected their concentration, or were unable to message their partner.

Document display: Out of 9 students, 33% found that downloading speeches while they were interpreting affected their concentration, while the same was true for only 11% when they had to display the questions and results of the integrated survey tool. For the second mock conference, only 2 out of 8 students had difficulties displaying the PowerPoint presentation while interpreting.

Relay: During the second mock conference, 3 students out of 12 managed to take other students on relay without any difficulty.

Technical difficulties: During the first mock conference, over half the students (56%) reported having technical difficulties with the platform, and 44% said that their interpreting suffered because of these difficulties. During the second mock conference, 75% of students reported having technical difficulties with the platform, and 63% said that their interpreting suffered because of these difficulties. 38% of the students also said they had trouble hearing one or more of the speakers.

2.3. Opinions on remote interpreting

After both mock conferences, 25% of the students said that they would have to experiment more with remote interpreting before venturing an opinion, while the rest (75%) expressed a negative opinion.

Obstacles: Lack of direct contact with the other interpreters (88%); being potentially responsible in the case of technical difficulties (75%); having to work from home (75%); lack of direct contact with the conference participants (63%); increased fatigue (63%); and having to charge potentially lower rates (50%). Only 2 students mentioned having to work from a hub or a studio.

Paid assignments: Three student stated that they would not accept RI assignments, even with pay. Of the other 13, the large majority said they would agree to take paid RI assignments, but

only if AIIC standards were complied with, while 4 students said they would only accept such assignments during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Next steps

The main problems that arose during our mock conference had to do with the fact that the students had to work alone and with technical issues. Unfortunately, these are currently the only conditions under which these mock conferences can be carried out.
Two mock conferences don't seem to be enough for students to feel at ease with the platform and remote interpreting in general. Students actually encountered more difficulties during the second mock conference, which might explain why most of them have a negative opinion on remote interpreting.