

What a micro-analytical investigation of additions and expansions in remote interpreting can tell us about interpreters' participation in a shared virtual space



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Abstract

This paper explores data from video-mediated remote interpreting (RI) which was originally generated with the aim of investigating and comparing the quality of the interpreting performance in onsite and remote interpreting in legal contexts. One unexpected finding of this comparison was that additions and expansions were significantly more frequent in RI, and that their frequency increased further after a phase of familiarisation and training for the participating interpreters, calling for a qualitative exploration of the motives and functions of the additions and expansions. This exploration requires an appropriate methodology. Whilst introspective data give insights into interpreting processes and the motivations guiding the interpreter's choices, they tend to be unsystematic and incomplete. Micro-analytical approaches such as Conversation Analysis are a promising alternative, especially when enriched with social macro-variables. In line with this, the present paper has a dual aim. The primary aim is to explore the nature of additions and expansions in RI, examining especially to what extent they are indicative of interpreting problems, to what degree they are specific to the videoconference situation, what they reveal about, and how they affect the interpreter's participation in RI. The secondary aim is to evaluate the micro-analytical approach chosen for this exploration. © 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Remote interpreting (RI) is a modality of interpreting whereby the interpreter is linked to the main participants by communication technologies such as videoconference, entailing that the space in which the interpreter-mediated interaction takes place is virtual rather than physical. This modality of interpreting is becoming more frequent, as public services are turning to communication technologies to optimise access to interpreters and reduce interpreting costs. However, research shows that RI is challenging and that it differs from onsite interpreting (e.g. Braun, 2013; Braun and Taylor, 2012a; Moser-Mercer, 2005; Price et al., 2012; Roziner and Shlesinger, 2010). In a series of experiments conducted to investigate the quality of the interpreter's performance in video-mediated RI in legal settings (Braun, 2013; Braun and Taylor, 2012a) we observed significant differences between onsite and remote interpreting, including a significantly higher number of additions and expansions in RI. A replication of the experiments, which took place after the interpreters had received short-term training in RI and had gained more practical experience with this method of interpreting (Braun, 2014; Braun and Taylor, 2016), painted a complex picture, making it difficult to determine the impact of training and increased exposure to RI. However, there was one unexpected result: the interpreters produced more additions and expansions after receiving training and gaining experience.

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In a normative approach, reflected in many current codes of conduct, additions and expansions are conceptualised as a deficiency. Bearing this in mind, it is striking that familiarisation and training would have led to an increase in such ‘deficiencies’. The findings of our study therefore raise questions about the nature of these additions and expansions. In accordance with this, the **primary aim** of this paper is to explore the motives for additions and expansions in RI. Of particular interest is whether they are indicative of interpreting problems, to what extent they are likely to be specific to the videoconference (VC) situation and what they reveal about the interpreter’s participation in RI.

Studies of monolingual VC communication have highlighted tendencies towards reformulation and redundancy, which the participants attributed to a perceived lower rapport with the others (Braun, 2004; Braun and Kohn, 2001). A lower rapport, articulated as a feeling of ‘remoteness’ or reduced social presence, was also reported by interpreters using RI (Braun and Taylor, 2012b; Moser-Mercer, 2005; Mouzourakis, 2006; Price et al., 2012; Roziner and Shlesinger, 2010). In line with this, the additions and expansions in RI could be analysed as attempts by the interpreters to overcome their problems of rapport, regardless of whether the added elements are necessary, effective or appropriate from a normative point of view. The increase in additions and expansions after familiarisation and training could then be an indicator of the interpreters’ efforts to resolve perceived problems of RI.

However, investigations of the motives guiding interpreters’ choices are notoriously problematic, as researchers have no direct access to their mental processes. Interpreting process research shows that introspection is a possible solution (Braun, 2004, 2007; Kalina, 1998; Mead, 2002) but the outcomes are by necessity incomplete, in the sense that it would be unrealistic to expect interpreters to be able to recall and comment on each aspect of their performance. An alternative approach in terms of achieving systematicity is a micro-analytical exploration of the data. Previous research using micro-analytical approaches to explore additions and expansions in interpreter-mediated communication has examined not only what interpreters add but also where and how additions and expansions occur, and how they contribute to the interaction and to the interpreter’s participation status (Angelelli, 2012; Baraldi, 2012; Davitti, 2013; Merlini and Favaron, 2005; Wadensjö, 1998). Building on these approaches, the **secondary aim** of this paper is to evaluate the usefulness of micro-analytical approaches in identifying the functions and motives of additions/expansions in RI, and in exploring their impact on the interpreter’s participation.

Section 2 reviews previous research into additions and expansions in interpreting and discusses the distinction between additions and expansions. Section 3 gives an overview of relevant micro-analytical approaches and explains their application to the analysis of RI in the study reported here. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings from this analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper with a summary of the main insights and implications for RI and an assessment of the chosen micro-analytical approach.

2. Additions and expansions in interpreting

Codes of conduct commonly assert that interpreters should not omit or alter any part of the message the interlocutors intend to convey and that nothing should be added. For instance, Article 6.4 of the code published by the Chartered Institution of Linguists in the UK states that interpreters “shall interpret truly and faithfully what is uttered, without adding, omitting or changing anything”. Codes of conduct may be understood as a normative ‘ideal’ or as a product of an oversimplified view of interpreters as ‘translation machines’ (Jacobsen, 2002). The crucial point is that the codes are sometimes at odds with observed interpreting practice. This discrepancy has prompted scholarly interest in all fields of interpreting.

Before reviewing this research, a word on definitions is in order. Schjoldager (1996:128) has defined additions as elements in the interpreted version that have no precedent in the original utterance, whilst Wadensjö (1998) distinguishes between “non-renditions”, i.e. elements which the interpreter adds on his/her own initiative, and “expanded renditions”, i.e. elements which elaborate on ideas explicitly expressed or implied in the original utterance. Following this distinction, this paper will refer to “additions” and “expansions” respectively, although it should be noted that the distinction is not clear-cut; for example, it may be difficult to know whether something that the interpreter makes ‘explicit’ in the target version was indeed implied in the source text.

In relation to simultaneous conference interpreting, Barik (1994:135) analyses additions as a type of “departure from the original”, but notes that the better qualified interpreters in his sample added more than less qualified interpreters and attributes this “to their very expertise, which frees them from following the text too closely”. Schjoldager (1996), who focuses on norms in simultaneous interpreting, finds that norm abidance can legitimise additions, especially additions made to avoid violating target text norms. Kohn and Kalina (1996) and Setton (2002) discuss both additions and expansions as strategies aimed at making the target text better suited to the needs of the target audience. These include linguistically and culturally motivated additions and/or expansions making explicit information that is implicitly present in the ST and/or conveying new, e.g. culturally relevant information. Palazzi Gubertini (1998) furthermore emphasises the role of additions and expansions in disambiguation. All in all, research in conference interpreting reveals a wide range of motivations for additions and expansions, far from Barik’s view that they constitute a type of interpreting problem.

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