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DISTANCE INTERPRETING AND TRAINING: A SURVEY

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Abstract

Distance Interpreting (DI) has gained momentum and become a permanent feature of the Conference Interpreting profession since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Even though there were already trends indicating that such a change was likely to occur, the pandemic served as a catalyst and Distance Interpreting became the daily routine for many conference interpreters. Given the suddenness of the change, many people had to adapt to the new reality at unprecedented rate. This study investigates the main challenges of DI, particularly for recent graduates, and better ways of training new generations of conference Interpreters. To this end, recent graduates of the Genevan FTI's Master of Arts (MA) in Conference Interpreting were surveyed to get first-hand views on this matter. It must be concluded that recent graduates feel more dissatisfied with their performance when facing DI. Furthermore, they acknowledge that this training did not focus sufficiently on DI. Finally, the challenges of different DI modalities could be addressed by means of practical classes.

Keywords

Distance Interpreting; Challenge; Training; Survey; Pandemic

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DISTANCE INTERPRETING AND TRAINING: A SURVEY

1. Introduction

"Nowadays, information and other technologies evolve at a very fast pace, creating new training and practising demands for interpreters, who need to update their technological abilities in order to familiarize themselves with new sources of information and also with new devices and different working environments, working schedules, etc." (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021, p. 15).

The former quote highlights how technological developments dictate the working conditions and practices in Conference Interpreting. It is a modern profession, barely a century old, and a product of technical developments such as microphones and headsets in the case of simultaneous interpreting. In recent years, a third mode has emerged alongside the traditional ones of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (Pöchhacker, 2015): Distance Interpreting (DI). This term serves as an umbrella for different methods of interpreting (Braun, 2015), such as remote or teleconference interpreting, that are distinguished from each other according to the spatial arrangement of the speakers and the interpreters and the presence of audio or video in them. Like many other sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point for the Conference Interpreting profession. Mobility restrictions were decreed in many countries, leading to a major shift from on-site interpreting to DI. Although the acute phase of the health emergency is now behind us, the changes experienced during those years have bequeathed us a world of Conference Interpreting where Distance Interpreting has become normalized and is now just another way of working, with its advantages and disadvantages. Gone are the days when interpreters' associations opposed the possibility of introducing some of DI modalities in the daily work of conference interpreters.

Training institutions should adapt their curriculum to include DI methodologies if they want to prepare the next generation of conference interpreters for the current market. However, successfully expanding the curriculum requires two key steps: first, identifying students' needs for mastering various Distance Interpreting modalities; and second, developing a curriculum that focus on the critical differences between traditional and "new" interpreting settings. Moreover, the practice of Conference Interpreting should be approached from these updated parameters.

This research seeks to identify key priorities for DI training while evaluating the current teaching model's limitations in light of recent developments.

1.1. Research Questions

Distance Interpreting has been on the rise for quite a few decades, (Lázaro Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis, 2022; Wren, 2018). However, its use and relevance have increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic and since then more Conference Interpreting services are being delivered with that setting than it was the case years ago (Baumann, 2023; Lázaro Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis, 2022). According to the AIIC Statistical Report of 2023, most AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence) interpreters who answered the corresponding part of the survey reported having worked in some DI mode at least one day in that year (71.22% of respondents at least) (2024a). Out of 834 respondents, 594 interpreters said to have worked a median of 35 days with remote speakers and 470 interpreters indicated a median of 31 days of work for remote audiences. 227 interpreters reported working a median of 8 days without a direct view of speakers, 260 claimed to have interpreted from remote hubs and 399 from home. 217 claimed to have used virtual consoles designed for simultaneous interpreting (AIIC, 2024a). It must be noticed that the whole AIIC membership, together with the candidates and precandidates who were invited to take part, amounted to 3,488 members (AIIC, 2024a).

Given the growing importance of Distance Interpreting, this study aims to examine how recent graduates cope with DI and which skills they perceive as beneficial or lacking from their Conference Interpreting training. This insight will provide a better understanding of the challenges related to this modality and some ideas for improving the training of new interpreters to meet the demands of the new world of Conference Interpreting.

It can be hypothesized that training programs have not foreseen or adapted to the increasing role of DI and, therefore, the training provided to the students is not completely in line with the requirements of the current market of Conference Interpreting. To address this issue, we will explore how to better prepare new interpreters for the post-COVID-19 Conference Interpreting market, bearing in mind that DI in general and video-mediated interpreting in particular is an increasingly used technique (Bachelier & Orlando, 2024).

More specifically, we will focus on these sub-questions:

1. What are the biggest challenges of Distance Interpreting for recent graduates?
2. How does Distance Interpreting affect the perception they have of their own performance?
3. Was the training provided during their studies in Conference Interpreting useful for Distance Interpreting?

These questions are grounded in three key assumptions:
a) Recent graduates will probably feel that stress, fatigue or bad sound quality can be important burdens of DI. This has been pointed out by several authors such as Moser-Mercer (2005a), Braun (2017), Hansen (2020) or Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, (2022).
b) They will have the perception that their performance is negatively affected by these constraints, as evidenced by research conducted by Mahyub Rayaa & Martin (2022) or Moser-Mercer (2005a).
c) They might believe that the training provided during their studies on Conference Interpreting would have been more useful if it had focused more on DI. Some authors such as Alley (2012), Braun (2015) or Moser-Mercer (2008) have referred to the need of training interpreters for DI. Given that specific courses on DI were not introduced until 2023, for instance, at the Genevan Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI, 2023c), it might be speculated that students could have benefited from them.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conference Interpreting

Conference Interpreting has been defined as a "professional communication service rendered in either the simultaneous or the consecutive mode of interpreting in a conference(-like) situation" (Pöchhacker, 2011. p. 2). AIIC has described the work of Conference Interpreters as "[to] translate a spoken message from one language to another in a formal setting" (AIIC, 2024c), being this latter concept what distinguishes it from community interpreting or medical interpreting. This profession is characterized by a) the high-level settings in which is typically performed, such as international conferences, multilateral meetings or press briefings (Diriker, 2015); b) the modes of interpreting that are used, namely consecutive and simultaneous (Pöchhacker, 2015); c) a high degree of variability in the topics and procedures with which the interpreter must cope. However, the skills developed by conference interpreters make them adaptable to different interpreting settings, allowing them to potentially work beyond the realm of Conference Interpreting.

2.1.1. Conference Interpreting at International Institutions

Conference Interpreting came into being during the past century (Baigorri-Jalón, 1999; Herbert, 1978), whereas important international conferences were previously held only in French (Herbert, 1978). Structurally, contributing factors to this development included an "increasingly complex division of labor and professional specialization in the more developed national economies, and also of increasingly complex and hectic international relations" (Roditi, 1982, p.9). Specifically, during the aftermath of WWI the Paris Peace Conference, English was used alongside French as the request of U.S. President Wilson and British Prime Minister Lloyd George, giving birth to this profession in 1919 (Baigorri-Jalón, 1999). In the following decades, interpreting was used at international organizations such as the League of Nations, where an interpreter corps was eventually established (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021).

Main developments took place between the two World Wars. Above all, the emergence of Simultaneous Interpreting (SI) was of utmost relevance for the future of the profession, given that until WWII Consecutive Interpreting was the predominant mode (Baigorri-Jalón, 2015).

The Filene-Finlay system for SI, equipped with headphones for the listeners and microphones for the interpreters, was created during the 1920s and implemented in 1928 at the International Labor Organization in Geneva (Baigorri-Jalón, 1999, 2015). In the same year, SI was also used for the first time in the USSR during the VIth Comintern Congress and booths and headphones were introduced for the XIIIth Plenary Meeting of the Comintern Executive in 1933 (Chernov, 2002).

After World War II, the Nuremberg War Trials were a decisive moment for Conference Interpreting, since they represented the *coming of age* of SI: at that time it was definitely proved that SI was "technically feasible, time-saving and cost-effective" (Baigorri-Jalón, 1999, p. 34), and the profession changed forever as a consequence (Constable, 2015). During the Trials, the media reported on the work of interpreters and, even though problems arouse, SI demonstrated its utility (Baigorri-Jalón, 2015; Roditi, 1982). Colonel Dostert was a key person, acting as chief-of-interpreters at Nuremberg; later, the recently-born United Nations hired him to train a staff of simultaneous interpreters and to test the Filene-Finlay system (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021; Roditi, 1982). Even though SI faced resistance from veteran consecutive interpreters who were reluctant to switch modes (Roditi, 1982), it was established as the standard interpreting mode at the UN by 1947 (Baigorri-Jalón, 2015). In the second half of the twentieth century, SI "remained the most visible type of interpreting" (Baker & Diriker, 2019, p. 96). In the postwar period, simultaneous interpreting expanded its reach to a growing number of international institutions such as the Economic European Community (now the European Union), the COMECON, different NGOs and even some National Parliaments (Roditi, 1982).

The professionalization, institutionalization and standardization processes that took place by that time were highly significant for Conference Interpreting (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021). Interpreting schools were established around the world since the 1940s, with one of the earliest being the École d'interprètes de Genève, founded in 1941 (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021; FTI, 2024; Roditi, 1982). In the 1950s, the *Manuel de l'interprète* by Jean Herbert (1952) was published and several interpreters associations were created. Among them were the Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC) in 1953 and The American Association of Language Specialists (TAALS) in 1957 (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021; Roditi, 1982; TAALS, 2024). AIIC has played a pivotal role in these processes by publishing its Professional Standards for the profession and a Code of Ethics (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021). A feminization

of the sector also started to occur, and by the twenty-first century female interpreters are predominant at several institutions (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021).

Distance Interpreting also started to develop. Although the first instances of SI in the 20s can be considered as remote simultaneous interpreting due to the utilization of the telephone to connect contiguous rooms (Baigorri-Jalón, 1999), we can establish the beginning of remote conference interpreting with the experiments conducted at the UN and UNESCO during the 70s (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021; Moser-Mercer, 2005a; Seeber & Fox, 2021). From this time on, Distance Interpreting has been evolving along with technology. However, its adoption faced challenges, including strong opposition from some conference interpreters and the AIIC itself until recent years (AIIC, n.d.; AIIC Executive Committee, 2018; Seeber & Fox, 2021). At the same time, it has been driven by a growing demand (Baigorri-Jalón, 2015). Simultaneous Interpreting Delivery Platforms (SIDPs) began to appear on the market before the outbreak of COVID-19, but it was after this global event that a sea change took place and Remote Simultaneous Interpreting became a "consolidated format" (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022, p. 38). The AIIC Statistical Report of 2023 confirms this trend revealing that nearly half of the respondents worked from home and almost a third from a hub, and more than a quarter made use of virtual consoles to interpret in 2023 (AIIC, 2024a). As Kelly put it several years ago, "remote interpreting is here to stay" (2008, p. 92).

2.2. Distance Interpreting and other terms

Several terms, such as remote interpreting, remote simultaneous interpreting, audio-mediated interpreting, etc., have been coined to describe interpreting modalities where communication is established between speakers, interpreters and listeners in a way different of the traditional *in situ* interpreting setting. Unlike traditional setups, where all participants hear one another directly or via a Filene-Finlay-type system, and interpreters can have a clear view of the speakers as they talk, these modalities depend on alternative technological solutions.

On the one hand, Distance Interpreting is an overarching term that covers different modalities (Seeber & Fox, 2021). The International Standardization Organization (ISO) defined it as: "interpreting of a speaker or signer in a different location from that of the interpreter, enabled by information and communications technology" (2020). Among the modes that are covered

by Distance Interpreting, AIIC (2018) has established four: Videoconference Interpreting (VCI), Audioconference Interpreting (ACI), Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) and Audio Remote Interpreting (ARI) (see Figures 1 and 2) (Seeber & Fox, 2021). In the first two, the interpreter cannot directly see the speaker but has a direct view of some or all participants of a meeting, whereas in the latter modalities, the interpreter cannot directly see neither the speaker nor the other participants (Seeber, 2018). In the video modalities, the interpreter receives sound and image from the speaker; in the audio ones, no image is provided (Seeber, 2018).

An examination of three distinct settings will clarify these terms. The first one, an in-person conference, can include some ACI or VCI when a speaker joins the meeting through a telephone connection or a videocall platform and both the interpreters and the rest of the participants are in the same space. In the second one, a Zoom meeting, the interpreter is at home or working from a hub and only receives image and sound from the screen of a computer; this would be thought of as VRI. Finally, in telephone interpreting, the interpreter can be anywhere and the only connection between them and the speaker(s) happens through a phone. We can consider this ARI.

On the other hand, AIIC has established remote interpreting as being: "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" (AIIC Taskforce on Distance Interpreting, 2019). Remote interpreting would be then an umbrella term for both VRI and ARI and would separate them from the so-called teleconference interpreting modes, namely VCI and ACI (Seeber & Fox, 2021). Therefore, remote interpreting would also be a subcategory of Distance Interpreting.

Finally, Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI) is a term that has been in place since the late 1990s and can be considered as being part of ARI or VRI, depending on if image is provided or not (Seeber & Fox, 2021).

Now the two remote interpreting modalities, VRI and ARI (such as telephone interpreting), will be examined. These are the ones that most substantially change the way in which interpreters do their jobs because the working environment may no longer be a booth (Seeber

& Fox, 2021). VRI, in particular, has seen exponential growth since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (Baumann, 2023; Lázaro Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis, 2022).

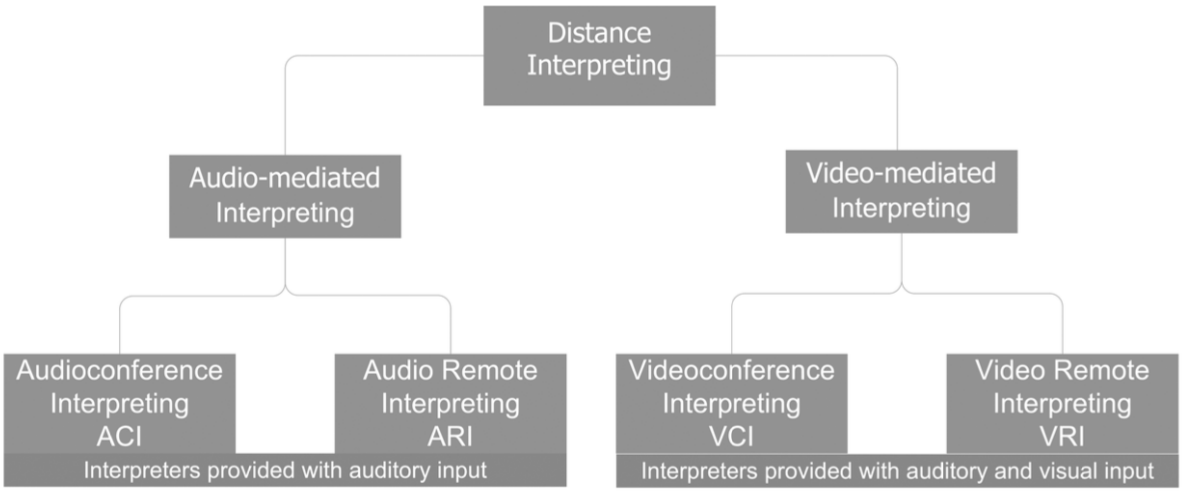

Fig. 1 DI modalities by medium of communication

Source: Seeber & Fox, 2021

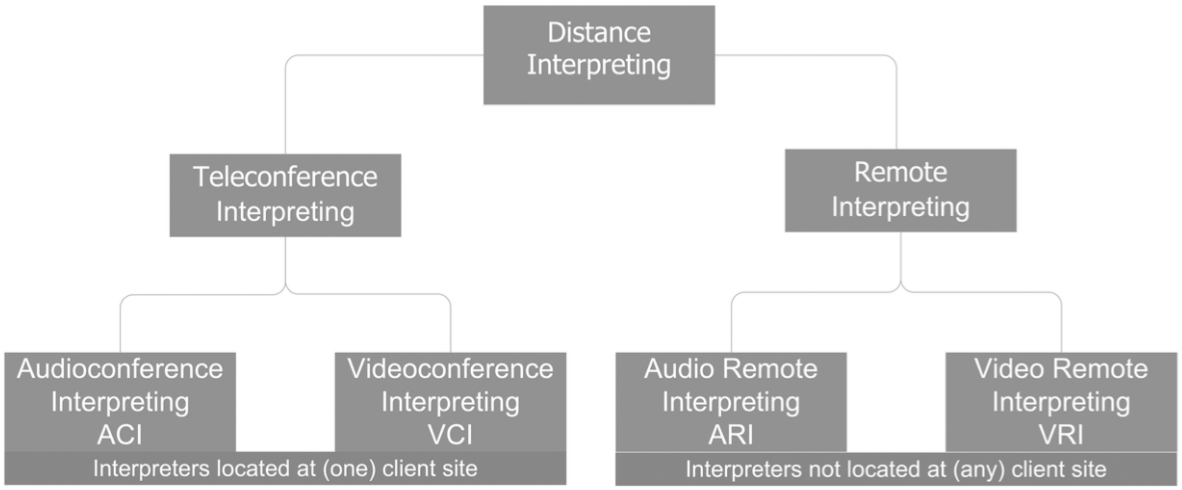

Fig. 2 DI modalities by distribution of communicators

Source: Seeber & Fox, 2021

2.2.1. Telephone Interpreting

Telephone interpreting, also known as Over-the-Phone Interpreting (OPI), was used most of all in community interpreting and represented a common way of enabling communication at places such as hospitals or governmental departments (Kelly, 2008; Lee, 2007; Ozolins, 2011). The history of this modality goes back to 1973, when the first service was established in Australia by the Immigration Department (Ozolins, 2011). Since then, it spread to other countries such as the US, the UK, the Netherlands or Sweden (Ozolins, 2011), even though in many parts of the world its implementation was much slower (Kelly, 2008). Nowadays, video telephony has overtaken OPI in sectors like legal interpreting and others (Braun, 2015; K. G. Seeber, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

Two major developments impacted on the use of OPI and contributed to increase the number of users: a) the rise of mobile telephony and the subsequent transformation of the market and, most importantly, b) the decreased price of calling. This led to a situation in which OPI was no longer prohibitive and both users and interpreters could be separated by greater distances (Ozolins, 2011). For instance, during the 1990s the demand for OPI grew widely in the US due to lower prices and steady immigration trends (Kelly, 2008). New companies and customers began to make use of this modality either as offerors or clients; notably, people with limited English proficiency benefited from the increased number of services available to them (Kelly, 2008). By the 2000s, there were many businesses providing OPI in the US and many non-private organizations started setting up call centers with their own telephone interpreters (Kelly, 2008).

Although telephone interpreters could occasionally be physically present with one of the speakers involved in the conversation (Lee, 2007), this was typically not the case (Kelly, 2008). In any scenario, the interpreter lacks visual input from at least one participant, posing a significant challenge in OPI. Unlike video-remote interpreting, OPI does not provide interpreters with access to non-verbal communication and body language from the speaker. However, both scholars and professional interpreters recognize that non-verbal cues make a big part of the message; consequently, interpreters are “only” left with voice as a source and their ability to decode any voice subtility becomes key (Gracia-García, 2002; Kelly, 2008; Moser-Mercer, 2005a).

Sound quality can also be a problem since background noise, inappropriate equipment or poor phone connectivity may hinder the understanding of the interpreter and of the clients (Wang, 2018). Also, the frequency of telephony sound plays a significant role. In traditional telephony setups, the voiceband ranges from 300 to 3400 Hz whereas the human voice spans from 50 to 8,000 Hz (NFON, 2024). Nevertheless, in Voice over Internet Protocols (VOIPs) communication—nowadays widely used in services such as Whatsapp or Skype—the wideband employed allows for a wider frequency range of 50 to 7,000 Hz, which represents more accurately the human voice. However, for a call to be carried out in such conditions, all devices involved must support wideband audio. Otherwise, it will switch back to narrowband (NFON, 2024).

These circumstances, combined with irregular income, casual employment or working in isolation could make OPI a stressful way of interpreting (Wang, 2018). It has also been pointed out that low remuneration was present in OPI (Lee, 2007; Wang, 2018). Confidentiality may also be at stake if interpreters carry out their job in a place in which they can be heard, above all given the use of mobile phones (Kelly, 2008; Ozolins, 2011).

Interpreters could also encounter difficulties in coordinating the conversation between the speakers and themselves, a task often complicated due to the remote nature of OPI. To address this, it has been suggested that both interpreters and clients should be trained to handle this kind of situations (Cho, 2023; Wang, 2021).

On the contrary, OPI presented several advantages to be considered. For interpreters, it was an option that reduced costs associated to travel and provided them a more flexible working schedule (Lee, 2007; Wang, 2018). The absence of face-to-face interaction with clients was sometimes regarded as beneficial, as it could help avoid issues arising from biases related to differences in race, gender, religion, or culture between interpreters and clients (Kelly, 2008; Lee, 2007; Wang, 2018). Better concentration and self-satisfaction from helping others have also been mentioned as positive aspects of the profession (Lee, 2007; Wang, 2018). OPI could make easier for interpreters to maintain a professional distance and stay calm and focused in traumatic situations as well (Gracia-García, 2002). For patients, the absence of another strange person in the room and the confidentiality of a through-the-phone communication could be beneficial too (Gracia-García, 2002).

Overall, OPI proved to be an invaluable resource when other means of delivering effective interpreting services were unavailable. As Gracia-García stated "a good interpreter at distance is better than a bad one up close or none at all" (2002, p.6). It enabled the rapid deployment of interpreting services and facilitated the access to interpreters in so-called "low-incidence languages" (Gracia-García, 2002, p.7). Moreover, the large companies that provided most OPI services put in place quality control and certification programs, ensuring the general quality of the interpreting and the preparedness of interpreters (Kelly, 2008). However, as Kelly emphasizes, OPI should not be used in all kinds of situations, and on-site interpreting can sometimes be preferable depending on the context and circumstances (2008).

2.2.2. Video Remote Interpreting

The history of Video Remote Interpreting started with the Symphonie satellite experiment conducted by UNESCO for their General Conference in 1976, in which interpreters were present in Paris and Nairobi and both ARI and VRI were tested (Seeber & Fox, 2021; UNESCO, 1976). Afterwards, other such experiments were organized at several institutions such as the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 1999, the United Nations in 1999 and 2001, the European Parliament in 2001 or the Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) in 2014 (Moser-Mercer, 2003; United Nations 1999a, 1999b; European Parliament, 2001a, 2001b; Seeber et al., 2019). However, neither ARI nor VRI were implemented at these institutions, the European Commission (EC) representing a remarkable exception to this trend. The EC introduced the use of this practice during the London European Council of 2005 as a wish from the then British Prime Minister and as a way of overcoming logistical issues of the venue (Seeber & Fox, 2021). After that, the use of VRI became permanent in response to a request from the Heads of State and Government that participated in the meeting (Seeber & Fox, 2021).

In the legal interpreting sector, a mix of VRI and VCI has been put in place (Braun, 2015). However, VCI has experienced a wider spread than VRI in this field, starting in the 1990s in many anglophone countries and expanding further throughout the world during the 2000s (Braun, 2015). Nevertheless, there are several examples of the use of VRI in the legal sector: a) the central interpreter hub initiated by the Florida 9th judicial circuit in 2007, b) the hubs connected to London police stations that work in remote for the Metropolitan Police Service

of the city since 2011, c) the "Interpreters' pool project" (2007-2012), created by the European General Directors' Immigration Services Conference to provide interpreters for asylum interviews, encompassing both VCI and VRI (Braun, 2015). Since 2008, a project funded by the European Commission called AVIDICUS is in charge of evaluating remote interpreting quality in courts (Pedrouzo González, 2022).

OPI has also been employed for legal interpreting; nonetheless, it has gradually been replaced by VRI (Braun, 2015). In healthcare settings, this trend has also emerged as video-mediated interpreting became available since the end of the twentieth century (Locatis et al., 2011; Chan, 2024). Actually, many big OPI companies now offer interpretation through videoconferencing (Kelly, 2008).

Moreover, in recent years several SIDPs like Kudo, Interprefy or Interactio have developed (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022; Şengel, 2022). The increasing importance of VRI can also be measured by the number of studies on this matter, which has grown significantly since 2017, with a peak after the COVID-19 pandemic (Li, 2022). These studies have also focused on the pros and cons of VRI, which are similar to the ones OPI presents.

On the one hand, VRI offers several advantages. It allows interpreters to save time, as they no longer have to travel to offer their services (Li, 2022). In addition, VRI meetings are usually shorter than on-site ones and therefore working hours get reduced (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022). Furthermore, thanks to VRI the professional has access to more assignments and a larger market, being an important asset for interpreters living far from the main conference venues (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022). Clients also benefit from the remote nature of the service as they have a larger amount of interpreters from which they can choose, allowing the interpreter to adapt to the client's schedule rather than the other way around, as with on-site interpreting (Li, 2022). The near-instant access to interpreters and the flexibility of on-demand service are also of an advantage (Klammer & Pöchhacker, 2021). Financially, VRI reduces costs for organizations, clients and interpreters, often being less expensive than *in situ* interpreting and, in some cases, even telephone interpreting (Li, 2022). Compared to OPI, VRI provides more information to the interpreters since image is incorporated to the input they receive.

On the other hand, a handful of problems have been pointed out in relation to VRI. Moser-Mercer (2005a) famously claimed that interpreters cannot get a "realistic view of the conference room" (p. 733) with VRI. This fact—combined with problems regarding the synchronization of image and sound—impacts negatively on concentration and the cognitive load of interpreters. Given that almost two decades have passed since Moser-Mercer expressed this view, we can wonder that some of the issues related to the state of technology have improved. However, the main argument that VRI does not equate with on-site interpreting in terms of input provided to the interpreter and its processing seems to still be relevant, among other things, since delay represents a core feature of video-mediated environments (Hansen, 2020).

Braun (2013) has signaled that "cognitive processing problems" (p. 223) may be more present in RI, leading to a possible decrease in the quality of interpreting. Braun (2017) also found that RI interpreters tend to make additions and elaborations that could be produced by "cognitive overload, fatigue, stress or physical distance to the primary participants" (p. 175). Mahyub Rayaa & Martin (2022) also identified a "greater cognitive load" (p. 34) as an issue and detected that technical problems such as bad sound quality or the coordination between colleagues can be enhanced in VRI due to a lack of technical assistance. Consequently, VRI is perceived as a "solitary and alienating activity" (p. 34) since interpreters must cope with technical difficulties independently, a problem not mitigated by the multiplicity of platforms with varying technical requirements. Non-verbal communication and interaction with participants are often absent in VRI, which may lead to a diminished role for interpreters, as users may perceive interpreting as an automated process; additionally, there is a risk of copyright violations if recordings are made and distributed without consent (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022). Besides, VRI must be set up considering spatial and technical requirements of the space in which the clients are located, a clinic for instance, in order to make the best of the audiovisual communication, something which may not always be the case (Klammer & Pöchhacker, 2021). Nevertheless, in situations of limited mobility such as the COVID-19 pandemic, VRI may be the best option (Klammer & Pöchhacker, 2021).

2.2.3. Distance Interpreting since COVID-19

Constable (2015) asserted that the implementation of Distance Interpreting would represent a "Nuremberg moment" (p. 2) changing radically the profession of interpretation. In contrast, Baigorri-Jalón (2015) argued that, as of his writing, no such Nuremberg moment had taken place. Unlike the Nuremberg Trials—when simultaneous interpreting became the prevalent mode of interpreting—there had not been a specific moment that could set a boundary between on-site interpreting and Distance Interpreting. It may be claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic represented such a moment, even though the development of Distance Interpreting and its associated technologies had spanned several decades. Remote solutions such as VRI had to be adopted due to lockdowns and social distancing measures during the pandemic; consequently, professional standards were altered, all of which represented an "unprecedented paradigm shift" (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022, p. 22). As a result, interpreters had to react quickly to the new circumstances and adapt to a new working environment. For instance, at the European Institutions, SIDPs started to be used just a couple of weeks after the first lockdown (Pedrouzo González, 2022) and in the healthcare sector remote interpreting, either OPI or VRI, also gained a lot of traction along with telehealth across the globe (Bachelier & Orlando, 2024; Bernardi & Gnani, 2022; Cho, 2023; Lázaro Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis, 2022; Saeki et al., 2022).

In this period of social isolation, interpreters not only turned to the aforementioned SIDPs, but also to general videoconferencing platforms like Skype, Google Meet and Zoom (Şengel, 2022). Among them, Zoom rapidly became one of the most used platforms since the beginning of the pandemic, first by the business world and then by the interpreting community (Şengel, 2022). AIIC published several position papers and guidelines, though even before the pandemic there were working groups inside the association putting effort into helping set ISO standards for quality in DI (ISO 20108:2017) and SIDPs (ISO/PAS 24019:2020) (Şengel, 2022).

The COVID-19 crisis was an opportunity to test DI in all kinds of situations and its advantages and disadvantages could be better understood and treated. Writing at the end of 2024, with the acute phase of the emergency behind us and normality fully recovered, the impact of the pandemic for Conference Interpreting will probably be a lasting one. Even though not all interpreters were keen to switch to the remote mode, the pros of this technology and the fact that it has already been used on a massive scale and with relative success indicate that Distance

Interpreting and Video Remote Interpreting in particular will be a common feature of the working environment of present and future interpreters (Bachelier & Orlando, 2024; Lázaro Gutiérrez & Nevado Llopis, 2022; Pedrouzo González, 2022; Saeki et al., 2022; Şengel, 2022).

2.3. Training in Distance Interpreting

As Moser-Mercer (2005b, p. 77) observed: "interpreters have not yet been trained to work in remote settings and are thus still having to rely largely on consciously controlled processing". More recently, other authors have also expressed the view that more education in remote interpreting is needed (Bernardi & Gnani, 2022; Pedrouzo González, 2022; Saeki et al., 2022). For a long time, Distance Interpreting in general and specially remote interpreting have been absent from Conference Interpreting schools' curricula and have only been discussed as a theoretical issue, even though many Master's degrees have already installed a video-conferencing system (Ruiz Mezcua, 2019). We will now have a look on how Conference Interpreting has been taught during the past century and which new approaches have been developed to make place at the classroom for new technologies and modalities. This research focuses on former students of the MA in Conference Interpreting at the University of Geneva's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI). Therefore, we will briefly discuss which kind of instruction and training has been provided to these students in recent years.

2.3.1. Traditional Training Methods

Training institutions for conference interpreters only began to proliferate worldwide in the latter half of the twentieth century, following World War II, as part of the broader movement toward professionalizing and institutionalizing the field (Baigorri-Jalón et al., 2021). At that time, there was no consensus on how Conference Interpreting should be taught and schools were anchored in the idea that knowing languages meant knowing how to interpret between them (Seleskovitch, 1999). Moreover, training institutions primarily focused on consecutive interpreting, while simultaneous training was introduced for the first time during the 1950s at the US State Department to train Marshall Plan interpreters, soon followed by the École d'interprètes in Geneva and HEC in Paris (Seleskovitch, 1999). The continued emphasis on training in consecutive interpreting at Conference Interpreting schools, based on the belief that mastery in consecutive is a prerequisite for mastering simultaneous interpreting, is viewed by

Baigorri-Jalón et al. (2021) as a legacy and a reflection of the influence that consecutive interpreters had during the early development of these schools. On the other hand, according to the AIIC Statistical Report of 2023, 48% of AIIC members who answered that part of the survey declared having done consecutive at least once that year, with a median of 8 days and claims of up to 200 days (AIIC, 2024a). However, only 868 out of 3,488 (24.88%) members answered, so the data may not be completely representative of the current market. Anyway, it seems that training in consecutive interpreting is still relevant *per se* and that its inclusion in Conference Interpreting schools' curricula is justified and not a mere relic from the past.

In the late 1950s, AIIC members, dissatisfied with the kind of teaching Conference Interpreting schools were providing at the time, considered cooperation with academic institutions. In 1959, AIIC adopted a set of teaching criteria that was proposed to several universities (Seleskovitch, 1999). For instance, they established that Conference Interpreting studies should be of a post-graduate kind. Four universities agreed to cooperating with AIIC, (Geneva, Heidelberg, Sorbonne and HEC) and AIIC recognized their degrees in Conference Interpreting in 1963 (Seleskovitch, 1999). Within AIIC a debate emerged between two camps: those who viewed interpreting as purely an innate talent that couldn't be taught, and those who recognized that while natural aptitude was important, formal training was also necessary for developing professional interpreters (Seleskovitch, 1999). In 1997, AIIC updated its criteria, advising students to possess a university degree before studying Conference Interpreting, encouraging Conference Interpreting teaching programs to be taught by practicing conference interpreters and to include external examiners to the final exams and specifying that both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting classes should be imparted (Seleskovitch, 1999). AIIC also listed 28 courses that fulfilled some or all its criteria. In fact, there were more than 60 post-graduate Conference Interpreting training courses in Europe by the first decade of the 21st century (Donovan, 2006). Nevertheless, their geographical distribution across the continent is not balanced and their teaching differ from one another (Donovan, 2006).

For decades, teaching methods have evolved and some consensus has been reached on how Conference Interpreting should be taught, even though differences persist (Sandrelli, 2016; Seleskovitch, 1999). Sandrelli (2016) has identified the commonalities shared by most interpreter training courses:

a) A high proficiency level in students' working languages is expected; an entrance test is typically organized to assess this.
b) Trainers are practicing professional interpreters.
c) Activities aim to reproduce real-life circumstances.
d) Both consecutive and simultaneous are taught.
e) Self-learning activities are a key component of the curriculum.

And according to Seleskovitch (1999), the main points of dissension are the following:

a) The length of training varies according to different student's levels, the kind of interpreting being taught and the expected results.
b) There are two main ways of understanding methodology of teaching interpreting: the Interpretive Theory of Translation, which focuses on the meaning of the speaker's speech, and the Linguistic Theory of Translation, which focuses on the meaning of the words used by the speaker.
c) These two theories are reflected into practice through different exercises proposed to the students or varied approaches of the same activity (for instance, note-taking).

A good example of consensus reached in the realm of Conference Interpreting teaching is the European Master's in Conference Interpreting (EMCI). It was launched in 1997 with European Union support through the European Commission (Seleskovitch, 1999). Initially, eight European universities elaborated a program and set certain standards to establish a common type of training (Seleskovitch, 1999; Wren, 2018); in 2024, 15 universities across the continent participate in the project (EMCI, 2024). The EU backs EMCI with the aim that future graduates will be able to work for the European institutions, and consequently, the program must maintain specific standards to meet these institutional requirements (Wren, 2018). Passing an admission test is required to enter the Master's degree (MA) (EMCI, n.d.). The curriculum comprises both theorical and practical subjects on Conference Interpreting, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting training and additional courses about European and international institutions (Seleskovitch, 1999). Furthermore, videoconferences and meetings between participating universities and with European institutions' interpreters are organized periodically (Braun, 2015). During these sessions, the students are tasked with interpreting, offering a valuable opportunity to gain insight into what Distance Interpreting (DI) entails (Wren, 2018).

2.3.2. Approaches on training in Distance Interpreting

The need of training interpreters to deal with remote modalities has been highlighted. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the strong emergence of Distance Interpreting, (Bernardi & Gnani, 2022; Pedrouzo González, 2022; Saeki et al., 2022), even though there were voices that already claimed for the necessity of training on remote before 2020 (Alley, 2012; Braun, 2015; Moser-Mercer, 2008).

Distance Interpreting in training has usually been considered within the wider spectrum of the role of computer technology in teaching (Fantinuoli, 2018; Mouzourakis, 2008; Sandrelli, 2016). Otherwise, CDs, DVDs and the Internet support an enhanced role of self-learning: tools such as the EU's Speech Repository or the UN's Speech Bank have made access to interpreting training resources ubiquitous (Mouzourakis, 2008; Sandrelli, 2016). Computers and software have also been adapted to Conference Interpreting training and have been introduced into classrooms and booths, as Moser-Mercer affirmed in an interview with OEB Insights (2015). Besides, distance learning programs have also been implemented several times, such as the ones introduced at the Vancouver Community College in Canada, the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa or the ETI project (Mouzourakis, 2008; Sandrelli, 2016). The first year of the MA in Conference Interpreting at the Canadian York University is entirely taught on-line (York University, n.d.). At EMCI, videoconferences for simulations of Conference Interpreting have also been introduced (Braun, 2015). Two projects—IVY (Interpreting in Virtual Reality) and EVIVA (Evaluating the Education of Interpreters and their Clients through Virtual Learning Activities)—have been created in the European Union to prove different technologies for training, e.g. videoconferencing and 3D virtual worlds (Braun, 2015). Actually, during the pandemic, most Conference Interpreting courses shifted to distance learning mode due to mobility and assembly restrictions that were enforced at the time, prompting some trainers to reflect on the pros and cons of this new way of teaching (for instance, Ahrens et al., 2021).

All these innovations can be considered a sort of training in DI, as the source of audio and image is no longer in the same location as the interpreter but is instead mediated through an electronic device. However, a dedicated and specific module or course focusing exclusively on DI and its challenges appears to be missing in most Conference Interpreting training programs.

Furthermore, for those that have introduced distance learning, it is important to note that remote teaching and training in remote interpreting are two different things and that one does not necessarily imply the other (Mouzourakis, 2008). A comprehensive teaching of DI and its different modalities should encompass a theorical background, explaining the different categories that fall under the umbrella term of DI, and practical training, preparing students to cope with all kind of issues related to DI modalities: use of technology in general, interpreting without visual input, dealing with connectivity problems, access and management of SIDPs, team-work in remote settings, how to prepare clients for a DI session, managing stress related to the use of technology, reducing health risks stemming from the equipment used, and so on.

2.3.3. FTI's Master of Arts in Conference Interpreting

The Master of Arts in Conference Interpreting offered at the Genevan Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) is a member of the EMCI Consortium. The primary goal of the program is to equip students with the skills needed to successfully perform consecutive interpretation of at least 6-minutes long speeches and to simultaneous interpret at least 20-minutes long speeches, and doing so with fluency, correct use of terms, proper register and preserving the original intent of the speaker (FTI, 2023a; Seleskovitch, 1999). Importantly, teachers are almost always practicing interpreters themselves (Wren, 2018).

The Genevan MA is a three-semester, full-time, in-person program (FTI, 2024). To be admitted, students must select a linguistic combination, which includes at least one mother tongue and can incorporate several active and passive languages (FTI, 2021), and pass an entrance exam. The Master of Arts is organized around six knowledge areas: interpreting theory, consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, parliamentary procedure, international institutions and a final research project on interpreting (FTI, 2020). Recently, the fields of deontology and professional practice and interpreting technologies have been added (FTI, 2023d). This program includes several weekly hours of deliberate practice, during which students are encouraged to train specific skills in either consecutive or simultaneous interpreting (FTI, 2017, 2023c). Students are provided with a guideline of "Expected Levels of Progress", that allows them to compare their own progress with established standards throughout the Master's program (FTI, 2023a, 2023b). They also receive regular feedback from teachers and peers, as Moser-Mercer stated in an interview with OEB Insights (2015). Thanks

to agreements with the relevant institutions, videoconference meetings with EU interpreters are scheduled, and visits to UN venues such as the ILO or UN Geneva headquarters and EU institutions in Brussels are organized. During these events, students have the opportunity to meet professional interpreters and gain initial experience with both Distance Interpreting (through videoconference meetings) and hands-on practice in "dummy booths" at the institutions. To obtain their degree, students must pass an exam evaluated by a jury composed of professional conference interpreters who teach in the program, external examiners conference interpreters, interpreter recruiters and representatives from international organizations (AIIC, 2024b). Most of the MA teaching staff have received teacher training, are conference interpreters, and are AIIC members (AIIC, 2024b). In 2023, the curriculum was reformed to incorporate both introductory and deepening seminars covering various aspects related to the Conference Interpreting profession. These include seminars dedicated to technology and the influence it has on Conference Interpreting, as well as several focused on Distance Interpreting (FTI, 2023c).

In conclusion, Distance Interpreting (DI) and its various modalities have been extensively researched over the past few decades, along with their development and introduction into the interpreting market. However, much of this research has focused on experienced interpreters. There is a need to broaden this perspective by reaching out to recent graduates with significantly less experience, asking them about the challenges they recognize in DI and their perceptions of their performance in DI compared to in-situ interpreting. This information is particularly relevant since new interpreters are likely to encounter DI settings early in their professional careers. Understanding the difficulties they face can help better prepare them to navigate these settings successfully. Additionally, it is important to determine whether they believe the training received during their MA in Conference Interpreting was adequate in addressing DI. Since DI became widely employed in Conference Interpreting primarily after the pandemic, research on this topic remains limited. These insights could contribute to the development of new training plans that fully address the specific needs of new interpreters in relation to DI and its associated challenges.

3. Methodology

3.1. The study

A questionnaire based on existing surveys on Distance Interpreting (Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022; Seeber, 2018; Seeber, 2021; Wang, 2018) has been developed for this research (see Appendix). The indications made by Saldanha, G. and O'Brien, S. (2014) in relation to methodologies of investigation have also been followed. The test was generated using UNIGE's Lime Survey software license and has been sent to recent graduates from the MA in Conference Interpreting of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting in Geneva. In summary, the main characteristics of the questionnaire are:

1.- It was written in English and divided in three main parts: profile of the respondents, questions about DI performance and questions about DI training.

2.- It comprised 18 questions in total, but some participants could have only encountered up to 13 since some of them only appear when a certain answer is provided (for instance, you will only be able to answer the question about the sector you work in if you select the option "freelance interpreter" in the previous question on employment status).

3.- A final section for further comments has also been added.

4.- It consisted solely of closed questions, but a field called "other(s)" was included in 9 of them so that respondents could add text to identify other options or to specify some point.

5.- Answering the whole test was estimated to take 20 minutes.

6.- The survey was sent through email to former students having obtained their degree between the years 2011 to 2024 and it was available from the 14th of November of 2024 to the 30th of November of 2024.

7.- All responses were anonymous, and an informed consent was signed by all participants before getting access to the questionnaire.

In the end, of the 153 recent graduates to which the survey was forwarded, 50 responded and 21 completed the questionnaire. 4 of them declined to participate.

3.2. Analysis of the data

Qualitative data were collected and analyzed by means of Microsoft Excel (16.92, Mac version). The respondents did not provide quantitative data about their experience, (for instance, their monthly revenue) when answering about how they perceive the task of Distance Interpreting and the training they received. So, most of the information collected was qualitative and not quantitative. Frequencies of answers and opinions were extracted from these qualitative data, thus converting them into quantitative data.

A thematic analysis has been employed in order to find patterns in the data and to answer the research questions (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). This approach allows the identification of "what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 2). Also, the flexibility of this method makes it possible to adapt the procedure in a way that better suits the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A grounded theory approach or a qualitative content analysis were not applied, as they would have not been appropriate for the type of data obtained during this research. (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014; Selvi, 2019).

To draw conclusions, all the provided data were analyzed, with a focus on identifying information that may have been repeated by different respondents. An initial coding process was conducted to classify the data, mainly making use of the categories and closed-answers of the questionnaire itself, and then codes have been grouped to discover patterns and correlations between the different answers and sets of data (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). This methodology has permitted to put together some wide-shared ideas among young interpreters on how they think and feel about the concerned topics.

Additionally, a deductive approach has been used when analyzing the data provided by the respondents (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). The analysis began with the predefined categories of various types of DI, focusing on the challenges and difficulties these modalities may present, the methods for training and teaching DI, and the essential aspects that education in this area

should encompass. In other words, the collected results have been compared with our previous assumptions about how students would tend to respond to the questions and what they would think and feel about the topics in order to corroborate or dismiss these assumptions. Nevertheless, if unexpected patterns emerged from the data, they were discussed and, where possible, reflected upon to establish hypotheses that could explain them. These hypotheses were not predicted before conducting the survey, and so it can be said that in this case the approach was an inductive one.

4. Results

Results have been divided in three sections according to the ones established in the survey, namely, profile of the respondents, Distance Interpreting performance and training in Distance Interpreting. Data are reported as means with the standard deviation as a measure of dispersion.

4.1. Profile of the respondents

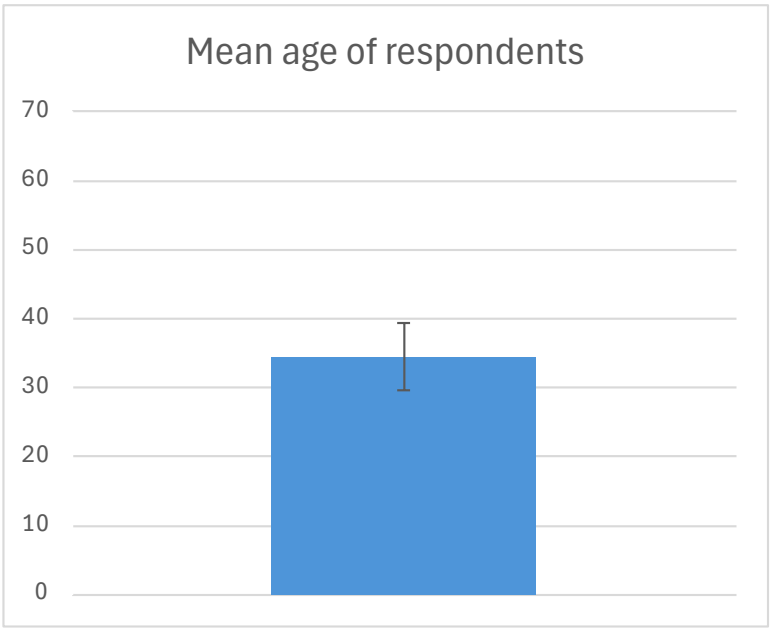

Fig. 3 Mean age of respondents

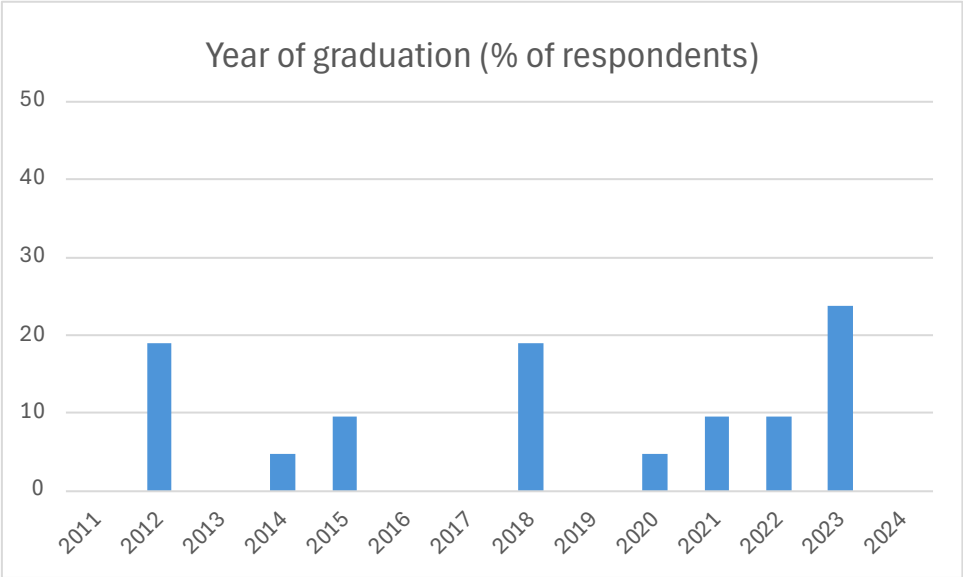

Fig. 4 Distribution of respondents' year of graduation

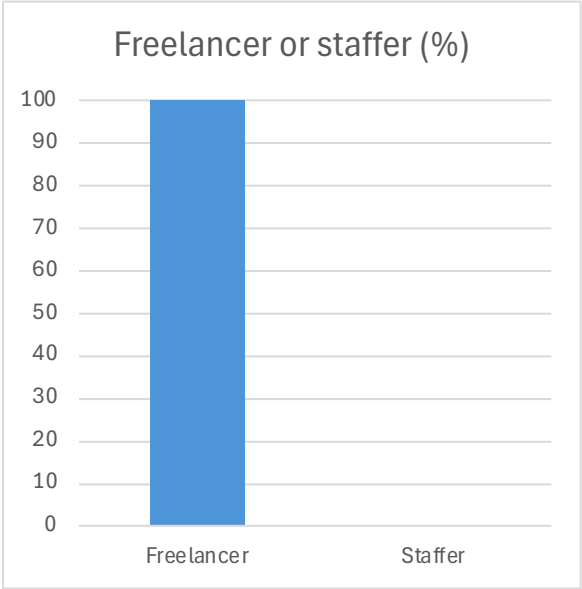

Fig. 5 Amount of freelancers and staffers

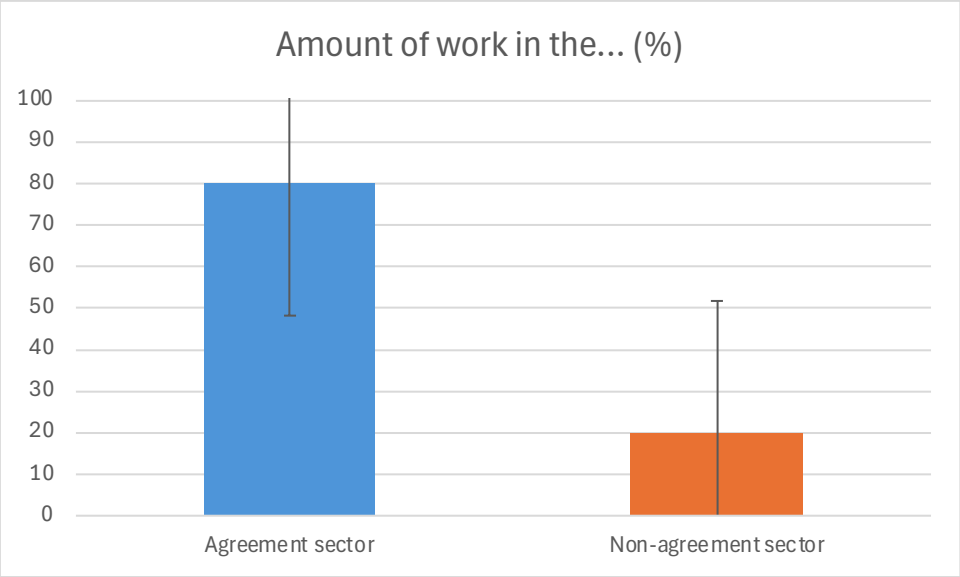

Fig. 6 Amount of work in the agreement and non-agreement sectors

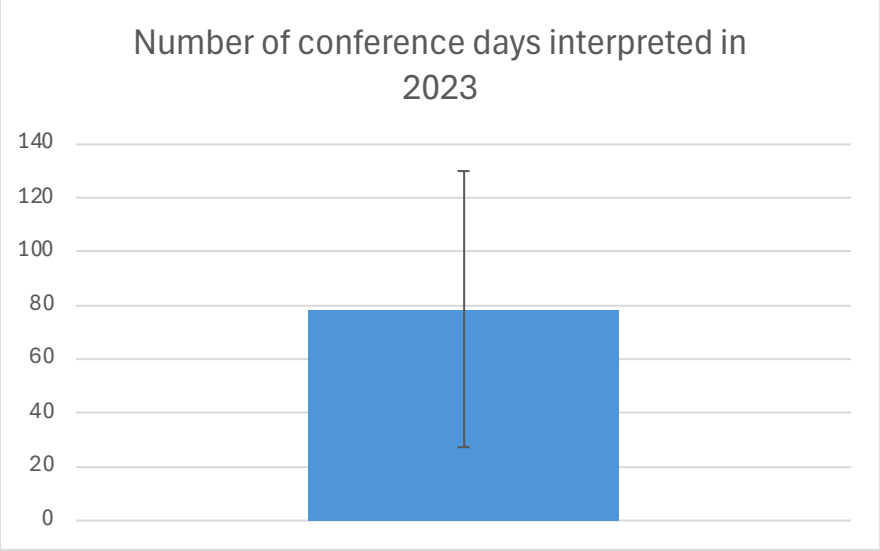

Fig. 7 Number of conference days interpreted in 2023

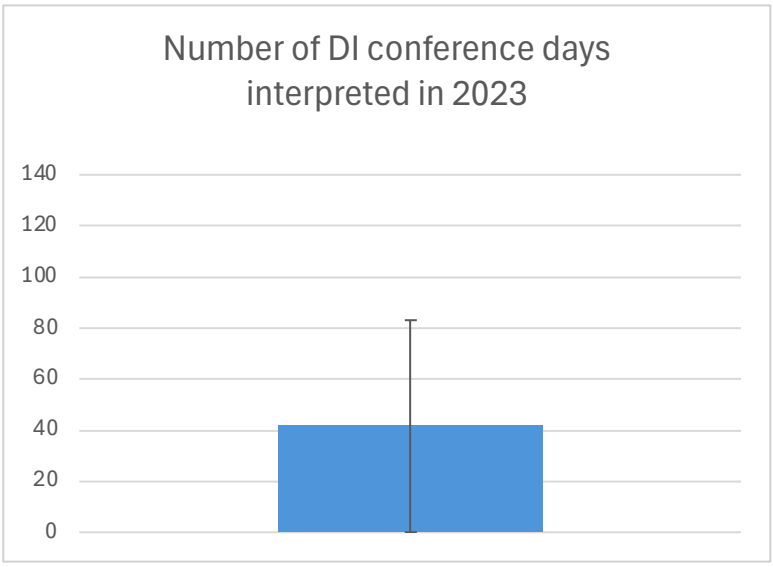

Fig. 8 Number of DI conference days interpreted in 2023

The mean age of respondents to the survey is 34 years old, the oldest being 45 and the youngest 26 (see Fig. 3). Most of them graduated from FTI in either 2012 (19.05%), 2018 (19.05%) or 2023 (23.81%), within a range from 2012 to 2023 (see Fig. 4). All of them report to work as freelancers (see Fig. 5); 80% in the agreement sector and 20% in the non-agreement sector (see Fig. 6). In 2023, the respondents interpreted an average of 78 conference days (see Fig. 7), and more than half included a form of DI (almost 42 days in average) (see Fig. 8).

4.2. Distance Interpreting performance

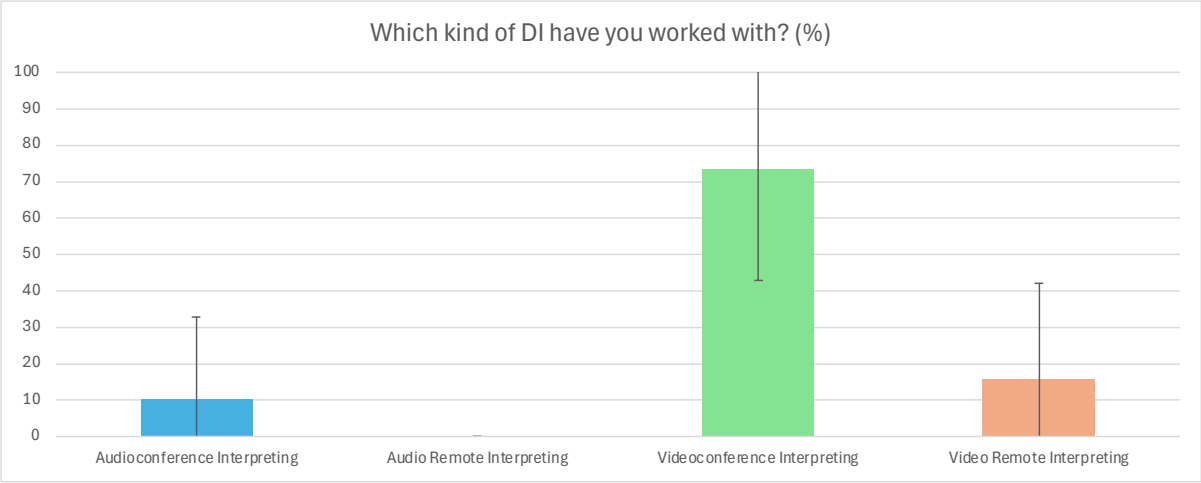

Fig. 9 Proportion of work with different types of DI

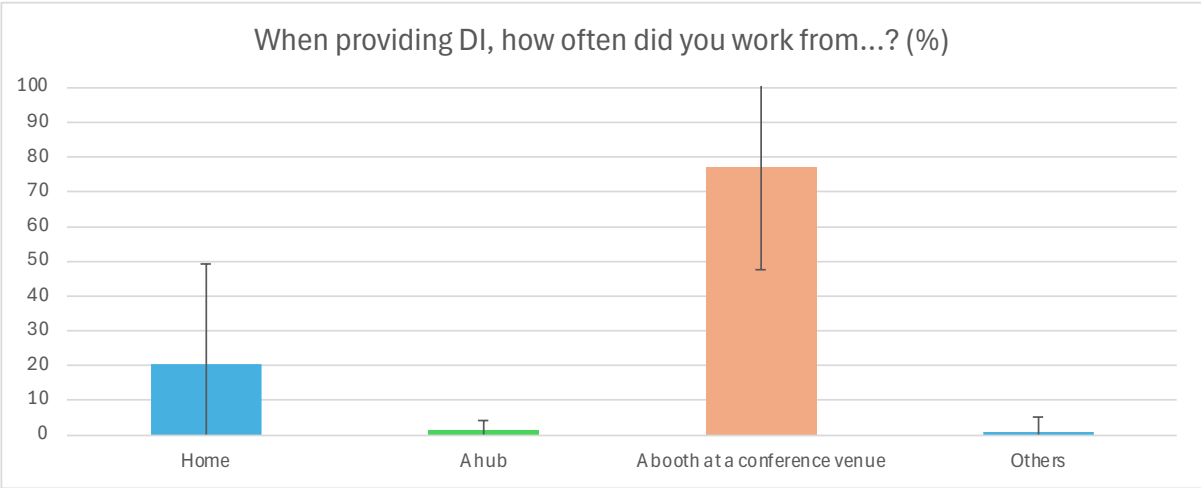

Fig. 10 Proportion of use of different workplaces

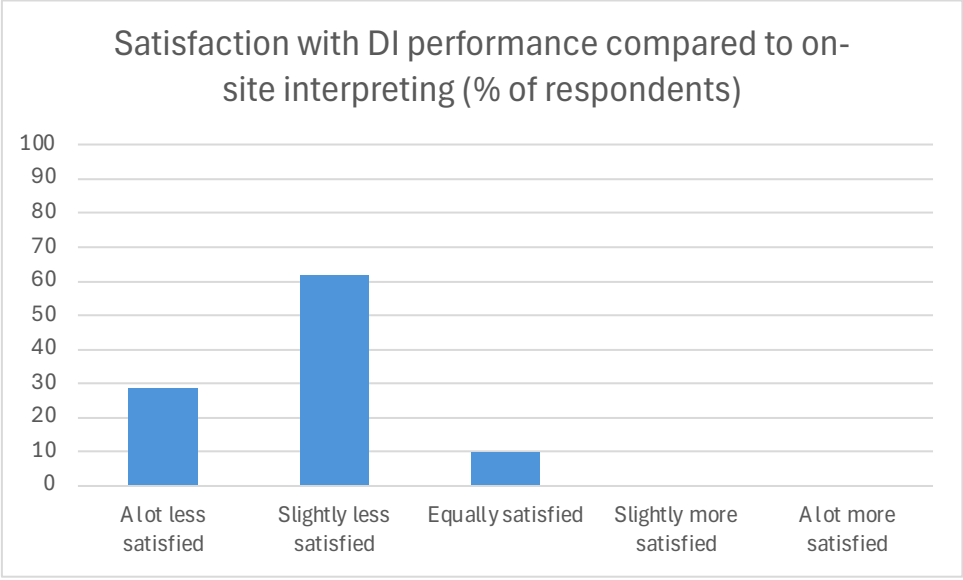

Fig. 11 Level of satisfaction with DI performance compared to on-site interpreting

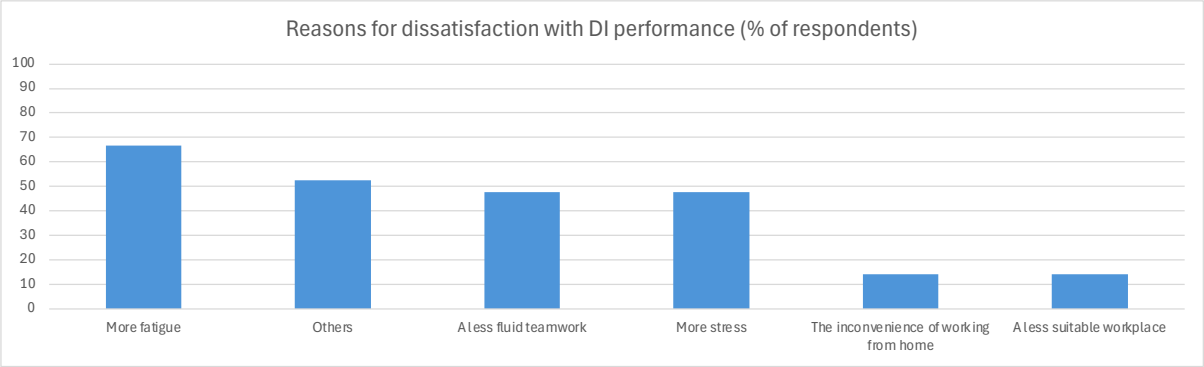

Fig. 12 Causes of dissatisfaction with DI performance

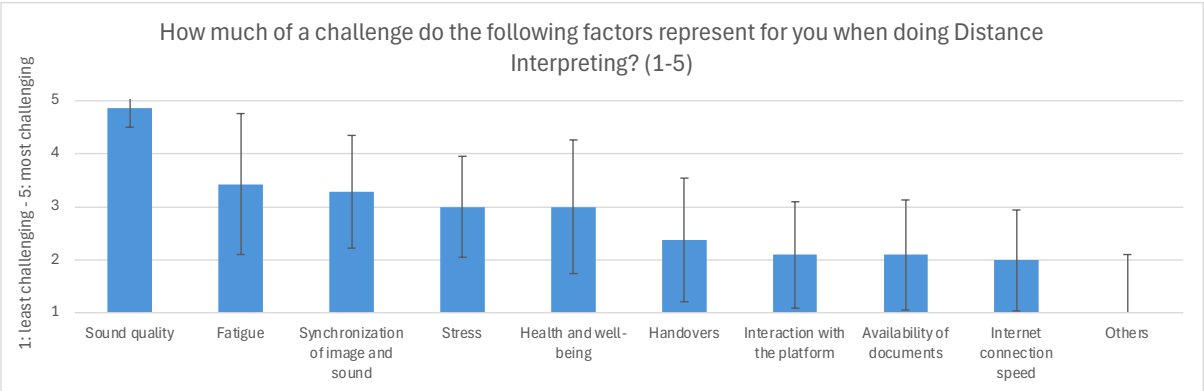

Fig. 13 Factors contributing to DI challenges

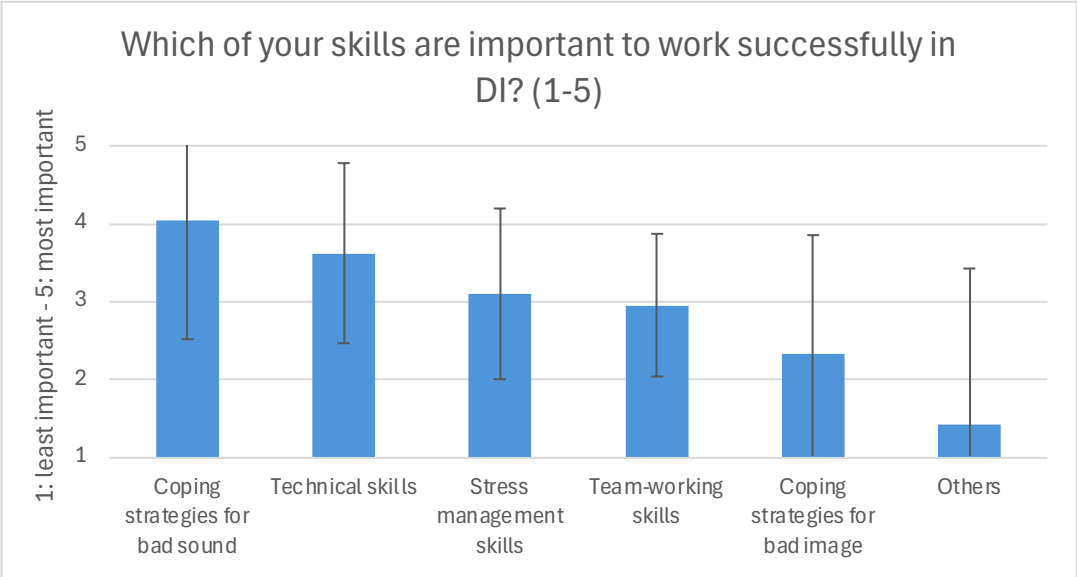

Fig. 14 Importance of different skills to work successfully in DI

Of the total sample, the majority has worked mainly with Videoconference Interpreting, accounting for almost 73.48% of the time. Video Remote Interpreting ranks second at 16.05%, followed by Audioconference Interpreting at 10.48%. No one reports having worked with Audio Remote Interpreting in 2023 (see Fig. 9). When providing some Distance Interpreting service, most of the time it was done from a booth at a conference venue (77.24%), followed by working from home (20.38%), from a hub (almost 1.43%) and others (0.95%). Notably, one of the participants referred to having worked in a TV studio (see Fig. 10). Most participants (90.47%) mention feeling less satisfied doing DI than on-site interpreting, while only 9.52% claim to feel equally satisfied. No one indicated feeling more satisfied (see Fig. 11). Among the reasons for a less satisfying DI performance, answerers chose more fatigue (66.67%), others (52.38%), a less fluid teamwork (47.62%) and more stress (47.62%). Most participants that refer to the "others" option allude to bad sound quality. Also, some comments point to less human contact both with clients and colleagues, the fear that something may go wrong when working from home, higher alienation and the damage caused to auditory health by bad sound. The inconvenience of working from home (14.29%) and a less suitable workplace (14.29%) were not considered as relevant by a major part of participants (see Fig. 12). Sound quality has been identified as the most challenging factor of DI obtaining almost a 5 in a scale of 1: least challenging to 5: most challenging. Successively, fatigue, synchronization of image and sound, stress and health and well-being obtained a 3 or more. Finally, handovers, interaction with the

platform, availability of documents, internet connection speed and others (mainly team coordination and technical management, as reported by answerers) were defined as less challenging (see Fig. 13). Respondents identified the following skills as being important for their work in DI: coping strategies for bad sound (4/5), technical skills (3.5/5), stress management skills (3/5) and team-working skills (3/5). Coping strategies for bad image (2/5) and others (1.5/5) are less important. However, the skills mentioned in the "others" section, such as multitasking, tech know-how and communicating skills were rated the highest by the respondents that mentioned them (see Fig. 14).

4.3. Training in Distance Interpreting

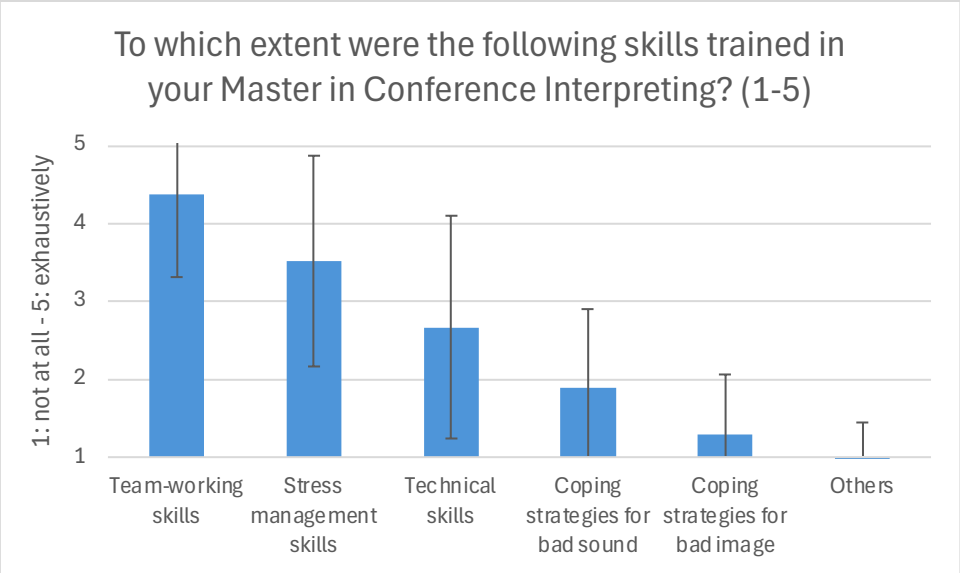

Fig. 15 Training of different skills during the Master in Conference Interpreting

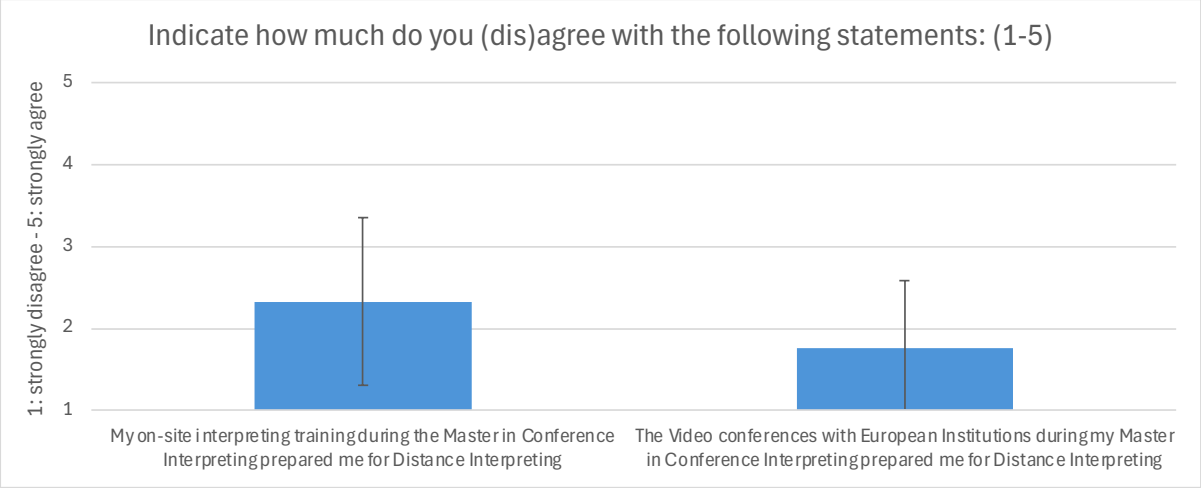

Fig. 16 Agreement or disagreement with the statements: "My on-site interpreting training during the Master in Conference Interpreting prepared me for Distance Interpreting" and "The Video conferences with European Institutions during my Master in Conference Interpreting prepared me for Distance Interpreting"

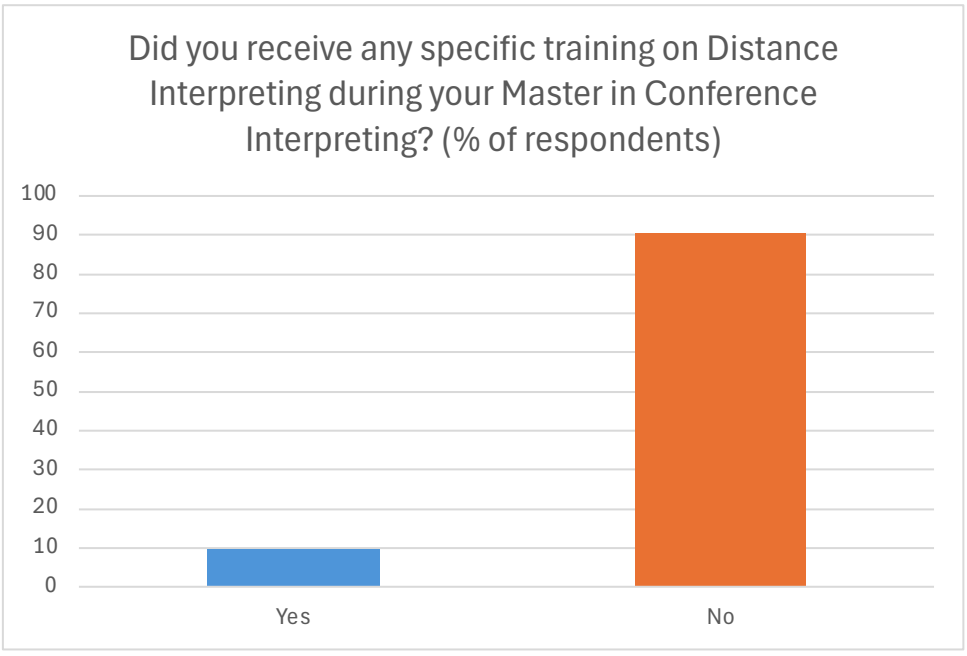

Fig. 17 Number of respondents that claimed having received specific training on DI during their Master in Conference Interpreting

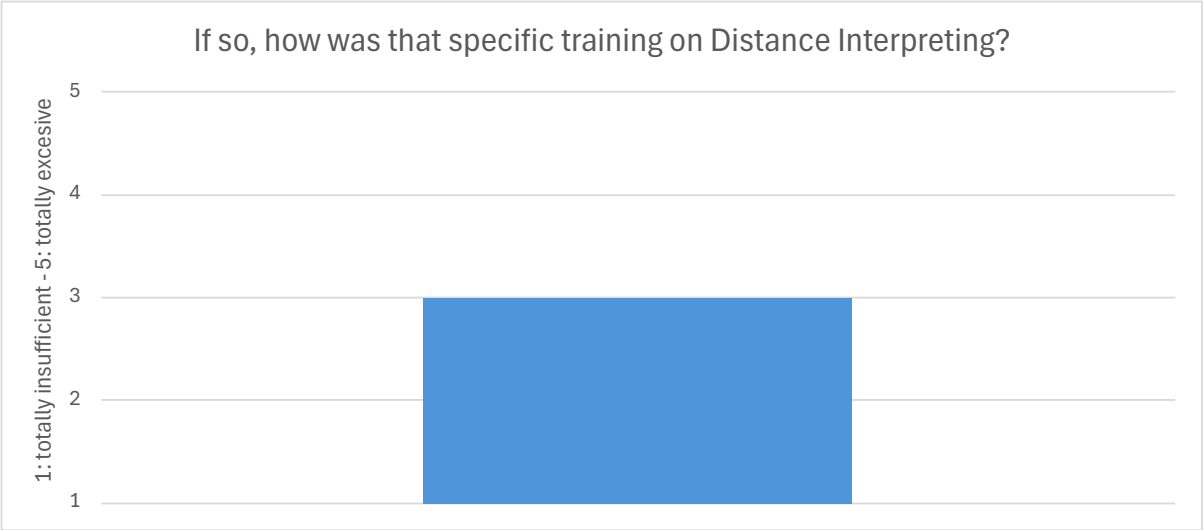

Fig. 18 Evaluation of training in DI

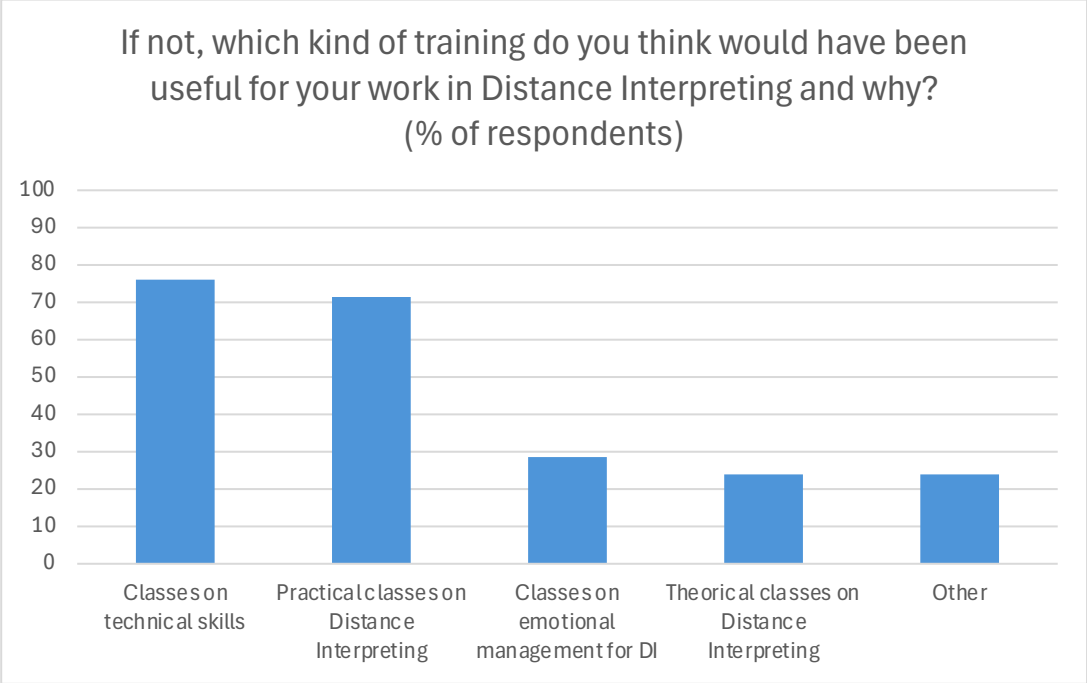

Fig. 19 Recommended Distance Interpreting training topics: analysis of responses from interpreters without prior DI training

According to recent graduates of the MA in Conference Interpreting program, their training provided more than sufficient preparation in two areas: team collaboration (4.5/5) and stress management (3.5/5), with one respondent pointing to having attended "a very good breathing and posture seminar". Technical skills (2.6/5), coping strategies for bad sound (2/5), coping strategies for bad image (1.3/5) and others (0.5/5) were not trained enough or not at all. By "others", respondents intended digital skills, communicating issues related to bad sound with listeners and multitasking (see Fig. 15). They also claim to disagree with the statements "My on-site interpreting training during the Master in Conference Interpreting prepared me for Distance Interpreting" (2.3/5) and "The Video conferences with European Institutions during my Master in Conference Interpreting prepared me for Distance Interpreting" (1.8/5) (see Fig. 16).

Only 9.52% of graduates reported receiving training in Distance Interpreting during their MA program. While they indicated that the DI training and the practical classes were adequate, the vast majority (90.48%) stated they had no DI-specific training in their curriculum (see Fig. 17 & 18). The first group refers to classes on emotional management for DI and classes on technical skills being conducted. At the same time, they also specify that practical classes on DI were part of usual language pair classes and thus not a separate subject. There was mention of an exchange year in St. Petersburg, Russia, where they had classes on bad sound and more classes on technical skills than in Geneva. Among the topics that were not covered during their training, some of the participants identify as useful theorical classes on DI (mainly on how to cope with bad sound and how to "speak on behalf of the interpreter") and classes on emotional management for DI (intending by that learning how to communicate with the client when problems arouse) while others suggest classes on technical skills (with the clarification that platforms are "mostly self-explanatory").

It should be noted that they do not point to the same type of classes and that even one of the respondents indicates that emotional management was trained and was not trained at the same time. Among the ones that did not receive any specific training on DI, 76.19% of them consider that classes on technical skills would have been useful, 71.43% point to practical classes on DI, 28.57% to classes on emotional management for DI, 23.81% to theorical classes on DI and 23.81% to others, meaning by that coping with bad sound, multitasking, work-life balance and team-working (see Fig. 19). Some respondents have specified more in depth what they would like to have trained, namely: reflecting on the challenges of DI and then putting it into practice,

handovers, the use of platforms, how to soundproof a room, using more than one device at a time, how to cope with clients and how to deal with stress, fatigue, etc.

Finally, some participants expressed through the “further comments” section that when they studied at the FTI Distance Interpreting was a “niche market” and so they did not train it; they reiterated the problems posed by bad sound and the importance of multitasking and team coordination and, lastly, one of them alluded to the difficulty of determining the amount of audioconference and videoconference interpreting done during the last year and also their doubts on what was actually meant by “technical skills”.

5. Discussion

This section analyzes the survey results in relation to both the existing literature and current training practices at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) in Geneva. The analysis will address the three initial research questions and evaluate whether the data supports or refutes our hypotheses.

5.1. What are the biggest challenges of Distance Interpreting for recent graduates?

According to our data, recent graduates claim that sound quality is the paramount issue surrounding DI. Other challenges, such as synchronization of sound and image, fatigue, stress and health and well-being have also been pointed out. These findings align with the observations of multiple scholars (Moser-Mercer, 2005a; Braun, 2017; Hansen, 2020; Mahyub Rayaa & Martin, 2022), that consider that this kind of issues are present in at least some forms of DI and that they can lead to a poorer quality of interpreting. Even in our days, it seems that the quality of the input offered to interpreters in DI cannot compare to "real life" interpreting, for instance, delay in synchronization is still present in video-mediated interpreting (Hansen, 2020). Regarding sound quality, it is worth noting that 100% of respondents reported working with a form of Distance Interpreting that primarily relies on an internet connection, rather than Audio Remote Interpreting (such as telephone interpreting). This suggests that sound quality may generally be lower, as it depends not only on the organization's connectivity but also on the internet connection of the remote delegate, which is not always reliable. Other factors, such as the kind of microphones used by the speakers are also a challenge for interpreters.

Handovers and interaction with the platform, though not rated as highly challenging by recent graduates, were nonetheless significant to them. They expressed a desire for more training in these aspects during their MA program. The fact is that most of the time they interpreted in a booth at a conference venue, and this could explain why a low score was obtained in that field. However, for interpreters with greater experience in the VRI field, these issues also appear to hold significant importance. This seems to be indirectly supported by the skills they identified as important for successful work in DI, including coping strategies for bad sound, technical skills, stress management skills and team-working skills.

The findings would confirm our initial hypothesis: recent graduates identify several significant challenges in Distance Interpreting, particularly increased stress levels, heightened fatigue, and poor sound quality.

5.2. How does Distance Interpreting affect the perception they have of their own performance?

None of the interpreters surveyed declares to feel more satisfied when working with Distance Interpreting than when doing in situ interpreting, only 9.5% claimed to feel equally satisfied and most of them affirmed to experience a higher degree of dissatisfaction when providing DI. The reasons might be found in more fatigue, more stress, a less fluid teamwork, bad sound quality, less human contact both with clients and colleagues, the fear that something may go wrong when working from home, higher alienation and the damage caused to auditory health by bad sound. These issues are closely related to the challenges we have discussed *supra* and, even though not all of them may be present in the 4 different modalities of Distance Interpreting, bad sound and subsequently more stress and fatigue is a constant concern of interpreters working with DI.

Dissatisfaction with DI is a wide-shared feeling among recent graduates. The additional challenges that characterize Distance Interpreting and which may eventually lead to a poorer quality of delivery naturally tend to make interpreters feel more uncomfortable when working with these modalities. This is consistent with the literature, including studies by Mahyub Rayaa & Martin (2022) or Moser-Mercer (2005a) that report a sense of alienation and a lack of motivation on the part of interpreters. Therefore, our hypothesis of a more negative perception of performance due to the specific burdens of DI appears to be validated.

5.3. Was the training provided during their studies in Conference Interpreting useful for Distance Interpreting?

Even though respondents claim that general skills (team-working or stress management) were rather widely tackled during the Master, they tend to disagree with the notion that on-site interpreting training prepared them for Distance Interpreting. This could suggest that recent graduates may believe specific training on DI would be useful due to the inherent challenges related to it. Also, they strongly disagree with the assertion that Video conferences with EU

institutions prepared them for DI, which seems to validate Mouzourakis' (2008) argument that distance learning does not necessarily imply learning on Distance Interpreting.

Regarding specific training on DI during the Master, 19 participants asseverated that they had not received any such training. Only 2 of them responded affirmatively and claimed that DI training was sufficient. However, based on their comments in that section of the survey, it appears that they are referring either to experiences conducted outside Geneva or to courses that addressed aspects of DI, but were not specifically focused on it. These results align with the fact that specific courses on technologies in general and DI in particular were first introduced through a curriculum reform carried out in 2023 that came into force for the class of 2025 (FTI, 2023c).

The training recent graduates wish they had received primarily focuses on technical skills and hands-on practice, allowing them to engage in Distance Interpreting (DI) within a safe, supportive environment. Key areas they identified as important for training include handling poor sound quality, team-working, and multitasking. The frequent mention of these terms throughout the survey underscores their significance to the respondents. Additionally, some participants expressed a preference for theoretical classes on DI and emotional management.

The data suggests that the Conference Interpreting curriculum would have better served graduates had it placed greater emphasis on Distance Interpreting training. This is supported by the graduates' own assessment of their education, and notably, it aligns with previous scholarly recommendations for incorporating Distance Interpreting into interpreter training programs (Alley, 2012; Braun, 2015; Moser-Mercer, 2008). It must be noticed that before the COVID-19 pandemic Distance Interpreting was in the rise (Baigorri-Jalón, 2015; Kelly, 2008), but it was not as common as it has come to be after 2020, as some participants and authors have indicated (AIIC, 2024a; Bachelier & Orlando, 2024). This can be viewed, alongside the cautious attitude towards most Distance Interpreting modalities expressed by certain individuals and organizations like AIIC (which only began to change its stance in 2018) (AIIC, n.d.; Seeber & Fox, 2021), as one of the reasons why the MA program was not adapted in those years to address emerging trends. Remarkably, the participants who reported receiving any training in Distance Interpreting belong to the 2022 cohort, which may indicate a shift in the approach of instructors in response to these evolving needs.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to determine how recent graduates deal with DI and to ascertain what skills they employ to overcome the hurdles related to these modalities. In addition, we wanted to bring to light their viewpoint on the training they received during their studies on Conference Interpreting at the Genevan FTI, considering their perspective of several years of experience in a market in which DI has become commonplace. This knowledge can help us better understand the main challenges related to DI and how we can better prepare and train young interpreters for the future of Conference Interpreting.

It can be concluded that DI is generally perceived by recent graduates as a more demanding and unpleasant task than on-site interpreting. This seems to be due mainly to the recurrent factors to be found in this kind of interpreting: above all, bad sound—the most recurring complaint among recent graduates and crucial for a quality delivery—but also other related issues such as synchronization of image and sound, team-working, multitasking, use of platforms, etc. That being said, it must be recognized that not all 4 types of Distance Interpreting as established by AIIC (2018) pose the same challenges, and notably ARI and VRI are the ones that originate a deeper variance in working conditions. AIIC has developed guidelines (AIIC Taskforce on Distance Interpreting, 2019) and ISO standards (ISO 20108:2017; ISO/PAS 24019:2020) (Şengel, 2022) that, if respected, can mitigate the negative aspects of DI such as bad sound or a more complicated team work.

Moreover, it appears that specific training in DI could help interpreters reduce their feeling of dissatisfaction and reassure them, so that they deliver a better performance. In particular, practical classes on how to cope with bad sound, navigate through a SIDP or the organizing of mock conferences in remote mode could be an asset to upskill students. In this regard, data shows that recent graduates acknowledge that the training they received at FTI in the period 2012-2023 lacked time dedicated to Distance Interpreting (both in the practical as in the technical aspects of it). Respondents also report that some skills that are needed for DI such as stress management and team-working were indeed trained during the Master. Although EMCI training courses had already introduced virtual classes with EU institutions (Braun, 2015), interviewees indicate this proved inadequate preparation for Distance Interpreting. Nevertheless, DI was not as developed and present as it is today before the pandemic took

place, above all in the Conference Interpreting market in which the Genevan FTI is specialized (Braun, 2015). It was difficult to anticipate the imminent change and its enduring impact on the profession. Besides, organizations such as AIIC have been defending for years that at least some modalities of DI were not desirable for interpreters (Seeber & Fox, 2021). In light of this, there seemed to be no perceived need to adapt the curriculum until a defining moment occurred—"a Nuremberg moment for our time" (Constable, 2015). Following the pandemic, however, FTI has updated its curriculum to expand coverage of technological developments in conference interpreting, specifically adding multiple seminars on Distance Interpreting (FTI, 2023c).

On another note, some limitations to this study must be appointed. Firstly, the amount of people that answered to the questionnaire (21) represents only about 14% of the 153 FTI's recent graduates from 2011 onwards. The described trends allow us to extract some conclusions, since they seem to appear clearly delineated in the data, but a wider sample could enhance their accuracy. This study could be extrapolated to other EMCI programs too since circumstances and perceptions may differ.

Secondly, FTI's curriculum was reformed to include seminars on technology and DI in 2023 (FTI, 2023c), that is, after respondents obtained their degree. The impact of these new courses could not be assessed. In addition, this research has not focused on differences in performance due to age or depending on the type of DI. These two factors could impact the way in which interpreters cope with various difficulties and challenges and how successful they are in their deliveries.

Finally, we have tackled the subjective perception of interpreters of their own performance and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it. Nevertheless, more objective and measurable indicators could be developed to compare certain parameters (v. g. fatigue or stress) between DI and on-site interpreting in a more empirical way.

On balance, we suggest that further research focus on how age influences interpreters' adaptation to DI environments and examine the differences and similarities in performance (and perceived performance) across various DI modalities. In closing, this study primarily analyzed a pre-pandemic Conference Interpreting training program and compared it to the perceptions of post-pandemic conference interpreters working with DI. It would be valuable to

conduct a similar survey in 5 to 10 years, since this would help assess how the new changes in the program influence the performance and its perception among future graduates. Such an approach could serve as an additional tool to enhance the quality of the Master's program and ensure it remains aligned with market demands.

7. References

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8. Appendix

8.1. Questionnaire

Study on Distance Interpreting and Training

We're inviting you to take a survey for research. This survey is completely voluntary. There are no negative consequences if you don't want to take it. If you start the survey, you can always change your mind and stop at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

We want to understand the biggest challenges posed by distance interpreting and the extent to which your training program has equipped you to overcome them.

What will I do?

This survey will ask questions about your professional experience and your training experience. The survey will take about 20 minutes.

Possible risks:

Given the nature of the project, we are unaware of any risks it may hold.

Confidentiality and Data Security

All data will be collected and stored anonymously. Only aggregate data will be published.

Where will data be stored?

All data will be archived at University of Geneva and destroyed after 10 years.

Who can see my data?

The lead researcher and his advisor will have access to all anonymous data for analysis. Aggregate data may be shared in publications or presentations.

Questions about the research, complaints, or problems: Contact Prof. Kilian Seeber at kilian.seeber@unige.ch

Agreement to Participate

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.

To take this survey, you must be at least 18 years old.

If you meet these criteria and would like to take the survey, click the button below to start.

(All questions are mandatory unless otherwise indicated)

Profile of the respondent

1. Please, indicate your age

2. When did you complete your Master in Conference Interpreting? Please indicate the year

3. I currently work as a…
- Freelance interpreter
- Staff interpreter

(This question only appears if "Freelance interpreter" is selected in question 3)
4. Please, indicate the proportion of work you do in the: (must add up to 100%)
- Agreement sector (institutions/organizations)
- Non-agreement sector (private market)

5. Please, indicate how many conference days you interpreted in 2023

6. Please, indicate how many of these conference days were or included a form of Distance Interpreting. That is, the interpretation of a speaker in a different location from that of the interpreter, enabled by information and communications technology

Questions about Distance Interpreting performance

7. Which kind of Distance Interpreting have you worked with? Please, indicate the proportion of time you have worked with each modality in 2023 (must add up to 100%)
- Audioconference Interpreting (Distance Interpreting with a direct view of at least some of the participants and only audio provided for the participants that are not present)
- Audio Remote Interpreting (e.g. Telephone Interpreting)
- Videoconference Interpreting (Distance Interpreting with a direct view of at least some of the participants and both audio and image provided for the participants that are not present)
- Video Remote Interpreting (e.g. Online Interpreting Platforms)

8. When providing Distance Interpreting, how often have you worked from…? Please, indicate the proportion (must add up to 100%)
- Home
- A Hub
- A booth at a conference venue
- Others (please specify and indicate the proportion)

9. In general, how satisfied were you with your performance in Distance Interpreting as compared to on-site interpreting?
- A lot less satisfied
- Slightly less satisfied
- Equally satisfied
- Slightly more satisfied
- A lot more satisfied

(This question only appears if "A lot less satisfied" or "Slightly less satisfied" are selected in question 9)
10. If you felt less satisfied overall with your performance, please indicate the reasons why: (multiple answers possible)
- More stress
- More fatigue
- The inconvenience of working from home (bad connectivity, no dedicated workplace, etc.)
- A less suitable workplace (no right equipment, etc.)
- A less fluid teamwork with colleagues (handovers, etc.)
- Others (please specify)

(This question only appears if "A lot more satisfied" or "Slightly more satisfied" are selected in question 9)
10. If you felt more satisfied overall with your performance, please indicate the reasons why: (multiple answers possible)
- Less stress
- Less fatigue
- The convenience of working from home (no need to commute, etc.)
- A more suitable workplace (connectivity, dedicated workplace, etc.)
- A more fluid teamwork with colleagues (handovers, etc.)
- Others (please specify)

11. Please, indicate how much of a challenge the following factors represent for you when doing Distance Interpreting: (in a scale of 1: not at all challenging - 5: most challenging)
- Stress
- Fatigue
- Sound quality
- Handovers
- Interaction with the platform
- Internet connection speed
- Availability of documents
- Health and well-being
- Synchronization of image and sound
- Others (please specify)

12. Which of your skills are important to work successfully in Distance Interpreting? (In a scale of 1: least important – 5: most important)
- Stress management
- Technical skills
- Coping strategies for bad sound
- Coping strategies for bad image
- Team-working skills
- Others (please specify)

Questions about training in DI

13. To which extent were the following skills trained in your Master in Conference Interpreting? (In a scale of 1: not at all – 5: exhaustively)
- Stress management

- Technical skills
- Coping strategies for bad sound
- Coping strategies for bad image
- Team-working skills
- Others (please specify)

14. Indicate how much do you (dis)agree with the following statements: (in a scale of 1: strongly disagree – 5: strongly agree)
- My on-site interpreting training during the Master in Conference Interpreting prepared me for Distance Interpreting
- The Video conferences with European institutions during my Master in Conference Interpreting prepared me for Distance Interpreting

15. Did you receive any specific training on Distance Interpreting during your Master in Conference Interpreting?
- Yes / No / No answer

(This question only appears if "No" is selected in question 15)
16. If not, which kind of training do you think would have been useful for your work in Distance Interpreting and why?
- Theorical classes about Distance Interpreting
- Practical classes on Distance Interpreting
- Classes on emotional management for Distance Interpreting (stress, fatigue, etc.)
- Classes on technical skills (use of platforms, etc.)
- Other (please specify)

(This question only appears if "Yes" is selected in question 15)
16. If so, how was that specific training in Distance Interpreting?
- Totally insufficient
- Insufficient
- Sufficient
- Excessive
- Totally excessive

(This question only appears if "Yes" is selected in question 15)
17. Which of the following were covered in that training?
- Theorical classes about Distance Interpreting
- Practical classes on Distance Interpreting
- Classes on emotional management for Distance Interpreting (stress, fatigue, etc.)
- Classes on technical skills (use of platforms, etc.)
- Other (please specify)

(This question only appears if "Yes" is selected in question 15)
18. Among the ones that were not covered, which ones do you think would have been useful for your work in Distance Interpreting and why?
- Theorical classes about Distance Interpreting
- Practical classes on Distance Interpreting
- Classes on emotional management for Distance Interpreting (stress, fatigue, etc.)
- Classes on technical skills (use of platforms, etc.)
- Other (please specify)

19. Further comments (optional)

Thanks for participating!