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## Book Review: The Role of Technology in Conference Interpreter Training

Francesca Maria Frittella

Shanghai International Studies University, [frittella@shisu.edu.cn](mailto:frittella@shisu.edu.cn)

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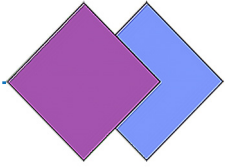
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## **Book Review: *The Role of Technology in Conference Interpreter Training***

**Francesca Maria Frittella<sup>1</sup>**

*Shanghai International Studies University*

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<sup>1</sup> Francesca Maria Frittella is a conference interpreter, conference interpreter trainer, and PhD candidate at Shanghai International Studies University. She is the co-founder of the online interpreting academy *Interpremy*. Her research on conference interpreter education focuses on the research-based design and evaluation of technology-supported instruction. Her research interests include the interpretation of numbers, in-booth CAI tool support, conference interpreter training, and instructional design and evaluation.

Correspondence to: [frittella@shisu.edu.cn](mailto:frittella@shisu.edu.cn)

## Book Review:

### *The Role of Technology in Conference Interpreter Training*

Technologies are now ubiquitous and all the more relevant in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic that has forced most worldwide education (including conference interpreter training) into the virtual realm. But information and communication technologies (ICTs) began to radically transform the way interpreters work and are trained well before this unprecedented global emergency. Technologies are now fundamental to interpreter training in two ways: as a training objective, to prepare students for the requirements of professional practice; and as a training tool, to support effective learning processes.

In the present volume, *The Role of Technology in Conference Interpreter Training*, editors María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor, Ildikó Horváth, and Kate Ferguson have collected the works of 22 authors from universities across Europe belonging to the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI) Consortium with the aim to leverage new technologies in interpreter training.

Despite the ever-increasing relevance of ICTs to interpreter training, this is, to the knowledge of the reviewer, the first edited book in Europe entirely dedicated to the topic. The volume may hence be regarded as a first attempt to unify a broad, fragmented research field. One of the main contributions of this volume may lie in the examples provided for future ICT-related pedagogical projects. In this sense, this book is a must-read for faculties already working with or wanting to introduce technologies into their teaching practice. The volume also provides a snapshot of the field's current understanding of effective technology-mediated interpreter training. Scholars may therefore find it helpful to formulate research questions, identify knowledge gaps, and detect assumptions needing empirical validation.

The volume comprises 10 chapters — all of them very clearly and professionally written — arranged into three parts. Part I comprises two chapters dedicated to new approaches in interpreter training assistance. The four chapters in Part II are centered on online resources and VLEs in interpreter training. The concluding four chapters in Part III address the topic of new methodologies and technological applications in interpreter training.

The present review attempts to highlight the value of this work and the potential benefits of incorporating ICTs into interpreter training that emerge from each chapter. It also discusses possible limitations of the studies constituting the volume. Because the main interest of the reviewer is in the research-based design and scientific evaluation of instruction, most of the critique inevitably addresses these aspects.

#### Part I

The two chapters in Part I address new approaches in interpreter training assistance. Such framework provides the reader with background knowledge about the topic and perspective over the case studies following later in the volume. Both chapters point to the potential benefits of technological tools for interpreter training and shed light on the challenges to their effective integration in the interpreting classroom.

Considering the sheer abundance of technological tools and resources available for conference interpreter training and the continuous development of new ones, the editors make a strategic choice opening the book with a chapter titled “Survey of the Use of New Technologies in Conference Interpreting Courses” by Alessandra Riccardi, Ivana Čeňková, Małgorzata Tryuk, Amalija Maček, and Alina Pelea. This chapter provides an overview of currently available technologies dedicated to interpreting, which are grouped into four categories: websites, general technologies, available and desirable equipment, and other ICTs. To show patterns and preferences in the use of such tools, the authors administered a survey to the 15 institutions in the EMCI Consortium, gathering the responses of 62 trainers. Two patterns emerging from the authors' comprehensive analysis may have particularly powerful implications for teaching practice. The first is trainers' inclination to underuse available resources, with the most frequent reason being “I haven't needed them in class yet”—although previous research has convincingly presented the potential benefits of such training tools. An example is the smartpen for consecutive interpreting training (Orlando, 2015), used only by 9 of 60 survey respondents. The second interesting pattern is the evident mismatch between the primary function of the tool and its actual use during classroom instruction. Such is the case for learning modules (like SCICtrain) aiming to support the trainer's theoretical introduction to new interpreting techniques through videos showing the skill in action or discussing

its practical implementation. Contrary to the expectations, only 31% of the respondents have used the videos in their classes before, while the remaining 69% have assigned them for individual self-study.

Chapter 2, “The Speech Repository: Challenges and New Projects” by Fernando Leitão, presents one of the most well-known technological resources dedicated to conference interpreter training and developed by the DG Interpretation (SCIC) at the European Commission. The Speech Repository (SR) is a collection of speeches, partly original ones and partly created by E.U. staff interpreters, categorized by difficulty according to a refined grading system. My Speech Repository (MySR) is a version with additional functionalities accessible only to partner universities. In this chapter, the author discusses the challenges in running the project, such as ensuring a consistent grading system and recruiting busy E.U. staff interpreters to record videos. The author also presents the newly launched feature “My Collection” as a potential solution to the shortage of contributors. Among other advantages, this new feature gives trainers the possibility to create and share instructional materials across educational institutions. Potential challenges are quality assurance, consistency, and, again, the incorporation of the tool into instruction. The author reports that MySR is underused by partner universities and that, in some cases, students are even prevented access to MySR, as trainers keep the speeches private to use them as classroom or even test materials—another example of a mismatch between the tool’s intended and actual uses.

## Part II

Part II comprises four chapters addressing the topic of online resources and VLEs in interpreter training. Each chapter presents a case study of technology-enhanced interpreter training, unveils the theoretical underpinning of the teaching intervention, and discusses the observations made during its implementation. One aspect that future contributions should add to the discussions is the scientific empirical investigation of proposed pedagogical methods and interventions.

The project presented in Chapter 3, “Meeting the Challenge of Adapting Interpreter Training and Assessment to Blended Learning Environment” by María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor, highlights the potential of VLEs to help achieve a coherent curriculum and support students’ learning through ongoing formative evaluation. In this chapter, the author describes the observations made during a 3-year experience designing a VLE in Moodle on consecutive and simultaneous interpreting techniques. The design of the modules focused on establishing a coherent and gradual progression along with clearly defined learning objectives. Several instruments, such as learning diaries, trainers’ logbooks, and rubrics, were embedded in the learning activities to facilitate the monitoring of students’ progress and enhance their self-assessment skills. At the end of the chapter, the author shares prescriptive recommendations on how to design similar e-learning modules based on the observed student interaction with the materials and the qualitative data generated from the assessment activities on Moodle. Regrettably, no information is provided about how data were collected and analyzed or how much evidence was gathered and processed. This prevents the reader from gauging the extent to which the recommendations can be transferred to other learning contexts.

Chapter 4 is titled “The Collaborative Multilingual Multimedia Project ORCIT (Online Resources in Conference Interpreter Training): Sharing Pedagogical Good Practice and Enhancing Learner Experience” and is authored by Svetlana Carsten, Nijolė Maskaliūnienė, and Matthew Perret. It highlights another major potential benefit of the use of VLEs: pooling the expertise of high-level professionals and making it accessible without temporal and geographic restrictions. ORCIT—another EC-funded project of great breadth and popularity—was designed to be a self-paced resource for students to fill their skill gaps through the help of exercises and, above all, introductory videos in which a “virtual coach” (an E.U. interpreter) explains in an accessible, colloquial manner the fundamental principles of interpreting and situates them in the context of high-level professional practice. The positive feedback gathered through user satisfaction surveys as well as the growing number of users and languages in which ORCIT has been localized show the popularity of the project 13 years after its launch. At the end of the chapter, the authors touch upon the challenges in conducting an objective evaluation of technology-mediated educational interventions. According to them, such difficulties have so far prevented a systematic analysis of the learning gains following the use of ORCIT.

Offering varied, authentic, and practice-relevant training opportunities, VLEs may help prepare students for the diverse settings and demands of professional practice. This potential benefit of technology is shown by Şeyda Eraslan, Mehmet Şahin, Gazihan Alankuş, Özge Altıntaş, and Damla Kales in Chapter 5, titled “Virtual Worlds as a Contribution to Content and Variety in Interpreter Training: The Case of Turkey.” The authors present the ÇEV-VİR Project, a 3D virtual world simulating real interpreting scenarios. The authors also report the findings of a study aimed at learning more about users’ perception of VLEs in interpreter training and the impact of VLEs on interpreting quality. The authors administered a survey to 20 senior-year translation and interpretation students from Izmir University of Economics and Dokuz Eylül University and 26 professional conference interpreters before and after the design of the virtual course. They also conducted a test with 17 students and five professionals to ascertain whether the virtual setting had an impact on their simultaneous interpreting performance (from

English to Turkish). The quality parameter used for the evaluation was the fluency of the delivery, defined as the number of pauses and repairs. The authors find no correlation between the interpreting setting and delivery fluency. They also register a generally positive attitude toward the VLE and optimism that it may benefit training. The authors stress the need for further improvement for the VLE to become an effective complement to in-person interpreting practice. From the perspective of the reviewer, a rigorous evaluation process would be helpful to define effective training principles and maximize the benefits of this virtual world, justifying its costly and time-consuming development.

Chapter 6 concludes Part II with an example of a training module offering students the opportunity to learn skills that are needed for professional practice but are not systematically covered in traditional training curricula. The authors are Kilian G. Seeber and Carmen Delgado Luchner, and the title of the chapter is “Simulating Simultaneous Interpreting with Text: From Training Model to Training Module SimTextSim (Simultaneous With Text Simulation).” The authors designed an online training module to help students better deal with simultaneous interpreting with text (SimText). Based on research findings on the impact of multimodality on interpreting and an operational definition of SimText, the authors created a skill-based model of this task, including the strategies needed to overcome recurring challenges. They then developed a training unit for each learning objective comprising a theoretical introduction using multimedia materials, such as videos and whiteboards, and a corresponding learning activity. Another innovative aspect of the training module is the interactive design with nonlinear navigation, which allows the student to choose in which order to study the materials. Such strategies are adopted with the aim to increase students’ interest and engagement, countering the notorious learner’s tendency to skip theoretical introductions and engage with the concepts only on a superficial level. It would be interesting to study the actual effectiveness of the training module on the whole and of the individual design strategies. For instance, do the innovative strategies chosen by the authors (such as the intensive use of multimedia and the nonlinear navigation) succeed in eliciting the desired learning processes? Are the types and quantity of practical activities suitable to effectively facilitate skill acquisition and transfer to contexts other than that of training? Future studies are encouraged to address these and other related questions.

### Part III

Part III comprises four chapters centered on “New Methodologies and Technological Applications in Interpreter Training.” These contributions show how ICTs can facilitate the implementation of innovative teaching approaches in the interpreting classroom and enhance students’ learning experience, although their learning impact is not rigorously explored.

Looking at the potential benefits of ICTs emerging from the chapters, it seems that technology can create opportunities for students to receive external feedback and put their current competence level into perspective. This is shown by Ildikó Horváth and Márta Seresi in Chapter 7, “Virtual Classes: Students’ and Trainers’ Perspectives.” The study was carried out during virtual classes (VCs) organized in cooperation with E.U. institutions and ELTE University, Budapest, between 2012 and 2014. The authors administered a survey to 49 students who participated in the VCs. The trainers’ view on VCs derives from the findings of an international online survey. The authors received 60 answers from 18 universities, 10 of which were not EMCI members, and four of which were outside Europe. The findings suggest that the students generally appreciated the in-depth feedback obtained during the VCs and gained awareness of the requirements of professional practice. The analysis also points to issues that may jeopardize the potential benefits of VCs: the need for training material and assessment criteria to match students’ current level of skill development, methods to help students interpret and incorporate VC feedback in a meaningful way, and applications of the feedback in students’ subsequent training. All these issues are, to date, unexplored.

The inclusion of technologies into the interpreting classroom can help build students’ B-language skills and introduce them to lifelong learning habits. This topic is the contribution of Özüm Arzik Erzurumlu in Chapter 8, “Employing Podcasts as a Learning Tool in Interpreter Training: A Case Study.” The author presents the action research study that she conducted at Istanbul 29 Mayıs University with three senior students of conference interpreting. The students were all female, age 22, and native speakers of Turkish, with English as their B-language. For 10 weeks, 20 minutes of each class were dedicated to podcast-related activities, such as listening to podcasts or completing knowledge tests (quizzes or presentations) related to podcasts previously assigned to the students. As students got familiar with this practice, they were allowed to choose their podcasts and design the related quizzes. To the reviewer, this seems to represent an interesting form of scaffolding, which could help strengthen students’ self-regulation skills. After 10 weeks, the author gathered data on students’ perception through a survey and a focus group; she reports positive feedback. Given the limited number of participants, the findings must be confined to the case study considered. It must also be stressed that the design of the study was only adequate to investigate students’ attitude but not to measure actual learning gains (Kirschner & van Merriënboer, 2013). Unfortunately, the author’s reporting of the findings

does not seem to take stock of these restrictions—for example, “It was found that lifelong learning is another skill supported by this activity” (p.194)—which may negatively affect readers’ perception of the trustworthiness of the study.

Technologies can facilitate the implementation of interactive, learner-centered teaching methods, as presented by Elena Aguirre Fernández Bravo in Chapter 9, “The Impact of ICT on Interpreting Students’ Self-Perceived Learning: A Flipped Learning Experience.” The chapter presents the results of a survey conducted with 108 undergraduate students in T&I, who completed two introductory interpreting courses (six European Credit Transfer System points each) taught with the flipped learning teaching methodology during the academic years 2016–2018 and 2017–2018 at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas. These modules are Interpreting I: Oral Communication and Discourse Analysis and Interpreting II: Intercultural Mediation Techniques. Each module combines a theoretical introduction (in the form of written and audiovisual content partly developed by the authors) and practical learning activities. The analysis of survey data seems to point to an improvement in students’ perceived learning experience following the proposed methodology. However, the discussion does not clearly distinguish between the benefits following the use of technology and the approach itself. Furthermore, by the author’s own admission, the confidence in the effectiveness of the intervention may have introduced some elements of bias in the study: “[S]ince we were interested in verifying whether students agreed with the potential benefits of the methodology outlined by the original authors, we presented the statements as positive affirmations. Providing a space for students to point out negative aspects of FL would probably contribute to further enriching the debate on the issue” (p.217).

Finally, technologies can make interpreter training more inclusive. This is shown in Chapter 10, “New Technologies in Teaching Interpreting to Students With Visual Impairments” by Wojciech Figiel, a blind interpreter trainer himself. The chapter is based on a research project carried out in Poland in 2014–2016. Because no previous account of visually impaired interpreters’ and translators’ learning experience was available, the study has an exploratory nature, and a qualitative methodology was adopted. The author conducted 15 in-depth interviews with visually impaired translators and interpreters from or working in Poland. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. Three of the 15 participants were more than 60 years old, which gives a bit of a longer dimension to the reconstruction. The chapter provides a humbling account of the difficulties encountered by visually impaired translators and interpreters during training and professional practice, how they dealt with such difficulties in the past, and how technology can now better serve them in training and professional practice.

## Conclusion

Overall, the book provides plenty of food for thought and is worth the time and attention of readers. All contributions in this book add some elements of knowledge to our understanding of the technological solutions currently available for interpreter training and underscore the potential gains following the successful integration of technologies into classroom instruction and self-learning. The proposed interventions, such as new approaches and training modules, address an existing pedagogical gap and may represent a starting point for further innovative initiatives. The editors of this volume and the individual authors are to be strongly commended for their contribution in knowledge, creativity, and innovation to conference interpreter training.

The most significant potential benefits of the inclusion of ICTs in interpreter training emerging from the review are (a) increasing the internal consistency of the curriculum, (b) making the expertise of high-level professionals accessible to students around the world without temporal and geographical restrictions, (c) supporting students’ self-study, and (d) enhancing students’ learning experience by making classrooms more interactive and training more realistic and relevant. A further potential benefit that is not explicitly discussed in the book but that may be regarded as both its premise and its aim is the possibility to leverage inter-institutional synergies. Technology has opened the opportunity to collaborate without geographical restrictions, which has the potential to become a major factor in promoting educational excellence.

The shortage of scientific empirical evaluation must be noted as a limitation of the volume, which constrains the application of proposed methods and interventions to other educational contexts and the abstraction of general principles from the particular case studies presented. Evaluation is the means through which we can identify how specific characteristics of our instructional design, interacting with variables related to the educational context, successfully support learning processes conducive to desired training objectives. In other words, evaluation provides an explanation—a “theory”—of how a certain intervention should be designed and implemented to achieve our pedagogical goals. The aim of evaluation is not simply to “prove” that an intervention works but rather to unveil the conditions and constraints of its successful implementation. It should make it possible to identify ways to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention and adjust it to students’ progress. The relevance of scientific evaluation is, hence, in generating reliable knowledge informing the continuous improvement of

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the intervention, the development of new solutions, and the appropriate implementation of proposed interventions by other trainers. In a way, we could say that evaluation is a means to put our individual pedagogical experiences to a larger use.

Some authors argue that, to date, conference interpreter training is still heavily reliant on trainers' intuition and rarely incorporates research outputs (Seeber & Arbona, 2020, p.2). In the view of the reviewer, evaluation assumes a particularly important role in the present stage of the development of conference interpreter training. The inclusion of technology into our training practices is prompting the field to innovate and enhance its methods, as the contributors to *The Role of Technology in Conference Interpreter Training* have done. A synergy between educational practice and research in this decisive moment may contribute to the field's development of a common body of pedagogical knowledge, helping the field reap the benefits of ICTs while advancing the state of conference interpreting pedagogy.