MOCK CONFERENCE IN PRE-SERVICE TRANSLATORS TRAINING

Leila Mirzoyeva
Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan

Aisulu Gatiat
Suleyman Demirel University, Kazakhstan

Abstract. *The given research deals with one of the most important issues related to pre-service translators' training such as both language and professional skills development in Kazakhstani settings. Thus, skills in oral translation from English into Kazakh and/or Russian and vice versa are in pretty high demand these days that is why one of the aims of Translation and interpreting internship course is to develop the consecutive translation skills of pre-service translators.*
So, to imitate the conditions of interpreters' work we conducted the mock conference dedicated to the main problems of Translation studies and Linguistics in the frame of the above mentioned course. The main idea of this case study was to involve our students into both research and professional activity as well as to develop their language and consecutive translation skills. Our research population included 47 students who worked both as presenters and interpreters in the frame of the mock conference procedure. Then we conducted the opinion survey using the online tools provided by the Moodle platform (in our case, the option of Critical incident survey had been chosen as the most appropriate one).
Keywords: *mock conference, opinion survey, pre-service interpreters and translators training, translators' professional skills.*

Introduction

One of the key issues of translators' and interpreters' training nowadays is related to such fields of translation as conferences interpreting. There are a lot of reasons to consider conferences interpretation as one of the topical problems of pre-service translators' training as well as one of the highly required spheres of translation. Firstly, conferences interpretation is related to scientific sub-language and can be considered as an evidence of science internationalization (thus, in Kazakhstan while holding conferences it is necessary to focus on such translation trends as English-Kazakh/Russian, Turkish – Kazakh/Russian etc.) Secondly, conferences are dedicated to a variety of problems, and this fact presupposes the relevance of specialization in translation. Thirdly, conference interpreting

requires a wide range of highly developed translators' competences i.e. flexibility, critical thinking, ability to choose the appropriate variant of translation etc.

Definitely, Translation studies program includes such disciplines, as Introduction to Oral translation. Consecutive Translation, Simultaneous translation, Note-taking techniques which are aimed at the development of the above mentioned translators' skills and competencies. Despite that, the need of special training for prospective conference is quite obvious, and we have used the mock conference form in order to give the opportunity to our students (1) to identify their own skills they should develop to interpret the scientific report/presentation successfully; (2) to find out their own translation drawbacks; (3) to think of their own strategy of scientific text interpretation.

So, our research aim was to observe the mock conference as a tool for interpreters' specific skills development, and to conduct the opinion research among 47 sophomore Translation studies students. Therefore, the form of case study has been considered as the most appropriate one, because it was our first experience with mock conference organization; moreover, mock conference has been considered as a part of the certain discipline curriculum (actually, it covers the last classes of Translation and Interpreting Internship as an output of the course).

Body of the Article
Research Questions

In the frame of the above mentioned approach, we have stated the following Research Questions:

1) What are the strong points of mock conferences as a tool of interpreters' skills development?

2) Which problems do students face to while participating in the mock conferences?

Firstly, those research questions allow us to summarize a wide range of opinions represented in both scientific papers and our students' responses; secondly, they presuppose the study of students' opinion concerning strong and weak points of mock conferences translation use in the process of teaching translation and specific translators' skills improvement.

Research Population

As it has been stated before, 47 2nd year students were involved in our research process. All of them took part in the mock conference both as presenters and interpreters; so they got an experience in both presenting the certain scientific topic and professional activity in the field of interpreting. Also, after completing this task, our students participated in Critical incident survey via Moodle which allowed us to clarify their attitude towards mock conference as a type of interpreters' professional training.

Limitations

While conducting our mock conference, we have faced to several types of limitations such as:

- Thematic limitations (all the reports were dedicated to the problems of linguistics and translation studies; topics were chosen by the students under our supervision);

- Age and professional experience limitations (2nd year students only participated in mock conference, and our choice was presupposed by both our curriculum and Internship program). Due to this type of limitation, we did not deal with the profound scientific researches, as our 2nd year students were not well-experienced in that field;

- Time limitations (8 hours only were dedicated to the mock conferences in both groups, so students' reports together with consecutive translation and all the possible questions took no more than 10 minutes per each).

Literature Review

As it can be observed in both theoretical studies and practical use of mock conferences, they are becoming more and more popular as a tool for translators' and interpreters' skills development. This trend roots in some XX century studies; thus, Pöchhacker (1992, 217) stated that "the key to the analysis of translatorial text processing in simultaneous interpreting is the fact that it is the interpreter's perspective on the chain of mutual assessment within the interaction network which ultimately shapes the end result in interpreting". Taking that into account, Goutondji (2014) said that "applied to interpreter training, this assertion means that the student interpreter is the most important component in the interpreting chain, whether at its early beginning (such as in a university classroom) or during a real assignment".

In the frame of this approach, Pérez (2021) defined a mock conference as "a type of exercise which can be carried out at a later stage of the module. It is a fictitious conference involving role play where everything taking place during the exercise is as close as possible to how a conference in real life would be; i.e., a lifelike situation in the classroom". It is pointed out here that mock conference would be dedicated to a certain topic, there would be a program and a moderator (in our case, teachers played that role due to the lack of students' experience in that field). Pablo Salvador Pérez also stated that "while the mock conference is taking place, the interpreting students will be carrying out the interpretation of what the speakers are saying. These role play exercises allow students to get closer to what they will find once they complete their studies and start working as interpreters".

Wadensjö (2014) also considered the mock conference as a kind of the role play and highlighted the following strong points of it: "Role play is a well-

established method to practise interpreting techniques, to train for interpreting in specifically challenging situations, to rehearse certain vocabulary…" Wadensjö (2014). On the other hand, supporting the idea of mock-conference as a kind of role-play, Suleimanova et al. (2013) underlined mostly a variety of tasks performed by students, and their impact to develop different professional skills: "Relying on role-play, MC (mock conference – L.M.) allows a wide range of roles such as the team leader – the chair (who distributes the roles and moderates the roundtable discussion); the team leader assistant (who is to circulate information mong the team members, makes calls, etc.); the proceedings consultant (who works on timing requirements); the role of supporter (provides evidence, arranges the data); the challenger (who is being critical); the expert (who does research into the problem)".

It should be pointed out that in our case study we did not consider such skills the pre-service interpreters need as e.g. the team leader assistant because our main focus was language and professional interpreters' skills.

The paper by Fomina (2018) is also closely related to our research focus; in her viewpoint, mock conferences "help students develop relevant communication skills relying on social setting analysis and proceeding to practicing the suggested communication patterns as well as promote their interpreting skills. The format proves to be a stimulating and beneficial experience as professional and psychological competence, strategic competence and many other non-linguistic dimensions may be better instilled at MCs than through traditional interpreting classes.

Some contemporary researches focused on the student-centered character of the mock conference as a teaching tool: "students of conference interpreting appreciated the moderately student-centered approach and assessed the learning outcomes very positively..." (Defrancq, Delputte, & Baudewijn, 2022, 39).

There are some facts which prove our statement concerning the growing interest to mock conferences as an effective instrument to both pre-service and in-service interpreters training; thus, there is an Interpretation training toolbox on the site of European Commission, and one of the modules consists in mock conferences and other practice speeches. There are also "ad-hoc videos of mock conferences filmed by interpreters to facilitate practice" (European Commission, 2020). It should be pointed out that mock conferences represented on that site are related to the most topical social, economic, and medical problems such as COVID-19 pandemic, Travel and Tourism under pandemic conditions, Technology and Social Media etc.

To sum up, all the aforementioned research works as well as managing mock conferences proves our idea concerning the imitation of real interpreters' working conditions and providing pre-service interpreters with the beneficial experience.

Data collection tools

As we chose qualitative approach in our research, two data collection instruments were used in the course of the study, namely observation and questionnaire. In our case, observation as a data collection technique refers to obtaining data through direct contact with group of students, assessing their work as interpreters and discussing the strategies they have chosen to render the content of their groupmates reports.

It is also necessary to point out that while conducting the mock conferences, we gave our students the opportunity to choose between 2 language combinations such as English-Kazakh or English-Russian translation because both pairs are popular in Kazakhstan.

Besides, the readymade form of the Critical incident survey allowed us to find out the strong points and the problems of mock conferences from our students' viewpoints. The form contained the following 5 questions designed to gather information about students' perception towards both form and content of the mock conferences:

- At what moment in class were you most engaged as a learner?
- At what moment in class were you most distanced as a learner?
- What action from anyone did you find most affirming or helpful?
- What action from anyone did you find most puzzling or confusing?
- What event surprised you most?

All the questions were open-ended, so they give opportunities to the students to express their own opinions. Moreover, we were able to take both positive and negative factors into account to improve both the procedure and the content of mock conferences in future.

Results and Discussion

First of all, it is necessary to provide a brief description of the topics chosen by our students. Before they started their preparatory work and choose their own topics, they had to become familiar with the main idea of the mock conference and its goals. The general conference topic was formulated as The Current Issues and Trends in Contemporary Linguistics and Translation Studies, and the main goals consisted in raising students' awareness of the aforementioned trends, developing their intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, Academic English language skills, interpreting skills, creativity, information search and processing, logical thinking, presentation and problem-solving skills.

Before conducting the mock conference sessions, we dedicated two of theoretical classes to the main characteristics of scientific texts as well as the main rules and problems of their translation and show the criteria they should follow while doing their presentations and interpreting them. Thus, evaluation criteria

included such parameters as 1) coverage and structure; 2) language (grammar accuracy/complexity and vocabulary range); 3) presentation skills; 4) design and creativity. Otherwise, as it was our students first experience in both presenting their report and interpreting it, we were not able to expect anything profound.

Among the topics chosen by our students we should mention *Problems of Translating English Idioms into Kazakh Language; Technology and Translation: Exploring the Impact of Technology on Translation Industry; Error Analysis of Abstract Translation in Scientific Writing (on the material of Google Translate); International Words in English-Kazakh Translation; Problems in Translators' Professional and Everyday Life* etc. Those topics show that mock conferences stimulated students' activities in scientific work (even though at the elementary level). Thus, to make successful presentation students had to find out the appropriate sources, analyze them (under the teachers' supervision), and look over the examples they had discovered. For instance, the problem of international words translation from English into Kazakh is considered to be one of the topical issues because of the current trend to translate most of the international words like Internet (Galamtor in Kazakh) etc. Our students studied some texts containing those words, and discussed the relevance of translation.

While conducting our observation, based on such criteria as (1) the relevance of translation; (2) the structure of translators' speech; (4) we noticed some issues related to our students first work as interpreters. Thus, some of them (9 of 47 exactly) tended to be as close to the source text as it was possible at all which should not be considered as the most appropriate strategy in conference interpreting. Also, some students (6 of 47 correspondingly) tried to conduct sentence-by-sentence translation instead of using longer phrases and paragraphs. So, we clarified it for ourselves that the Syllabus of the course should also be focused on various translation strategies, and our observation showed the necessity to strengthen trainings in consecutive translation. Moreover, the observation process demonstrated the importance of such translators' skill as the ability to synthesize and paraphrase, and one of the perspectives of the further study would consist of working out of the system of exercises aimed at those skills development.

Concerning our students' answers to the survey questions mentioned above it should be pointed out that there were a lot of common ideas despite the fact that they did not have any opportunity to discuss their answers. Thus, about Question 1 (At what moment in class were you most engaged as a learner?) most of them (31 students out of 47) said that the process of interpreting itself was the most inspiring thing, and 10 more students stated that choosing the strategy of interpretation made them feel engaged as learners (we should point out that Pérez (2021, 171) also showed the importance of the relevant strategy application.
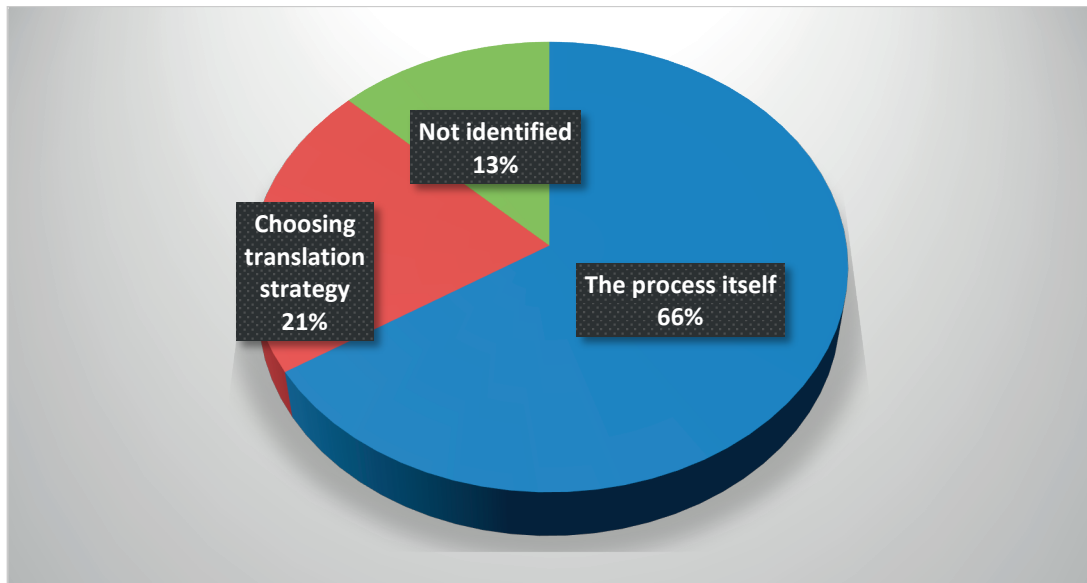
*Figure 1 **The most engaging moments of the mock conference** (made by authors)*

On the other hand, for the Question 2 (At what moment in class were you most distanced as a learner?) some of them (9 students out of 47) supposed that some of their groupmates presentations were not interesting for them; despite that other students did not answer that question, or just gave short answer like *No such moments*.
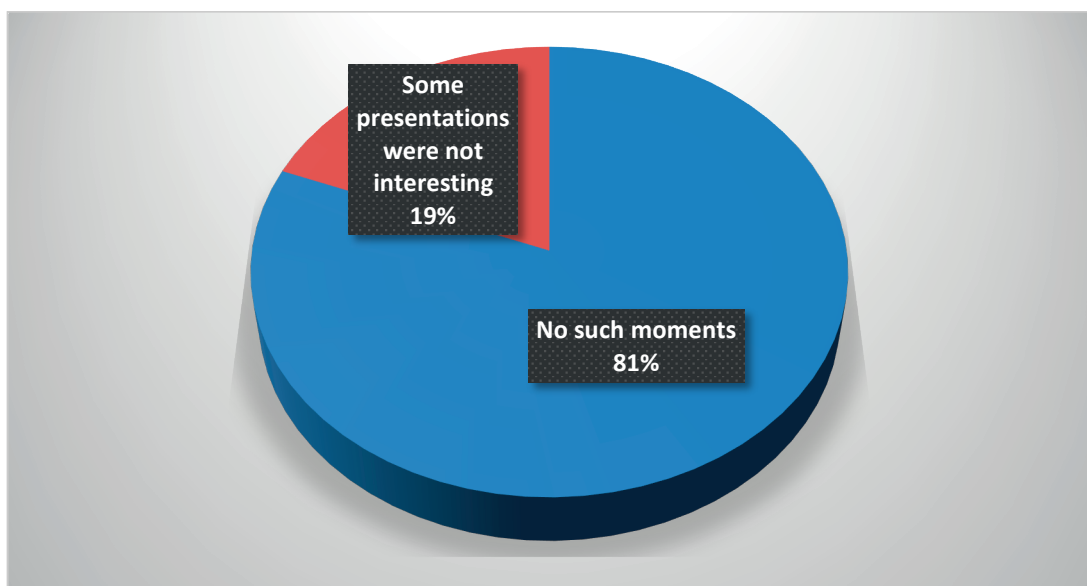

*Figure 2 **The feeling of being distanced during the mock conference***
(made by authors)

Concerning Question 3 (What action from anyone did you find most affirming or helpful?), we were surprised to see that other students' questions

about the content of the presentations as well as their remarks were considered the most helpful actions by 33 students (72% of the whole number); other students considered the careful listening as the most helpful factor.
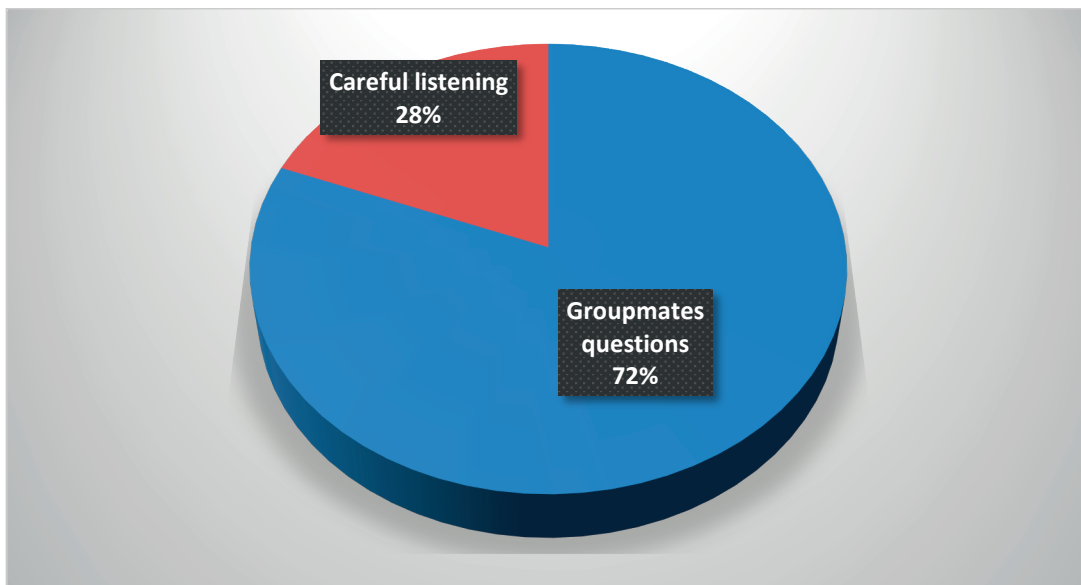

*Figure 3 **The most helpful groupmates actions** (made by authors)*

Otherwise, 14 students out of 47 (30%) stated that those questions were puzzling and confusing (Question 4). Finally, the for the last question about the most surprising event 22 students did not give any answers whereas others mentioned their own successful work as interpreters.
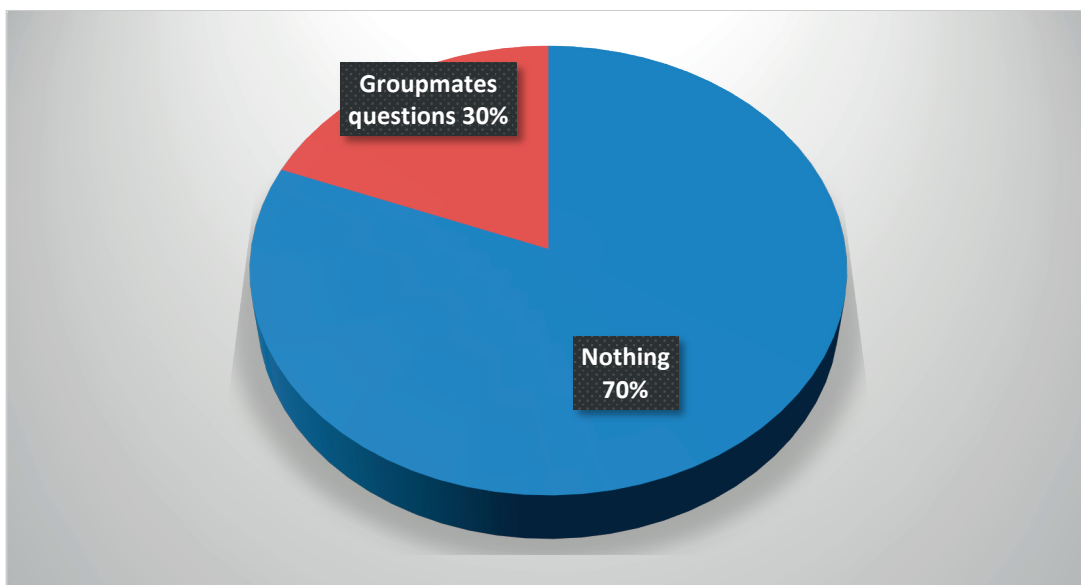

*Figure 4 **The most confusing groupmates actions** (made by authors)*

To sum up, our students' reactions show mostly positive attitude of our students for such a complicated interpreters' activity as conference translation. So, it is possible to implement mock conferences into professional interpreters training.

Conclusions

Taking all the above mentioned into account we can conclude that the findings of this case study show rather positive students' perception concerning mock conferences; thus, students focused on the opportunities for professional development and working out of the interpreting strategies as well as working as a consecutive interpreter in the modelled conditions. Partially, we followed the mock conference procedure proposed by Pérez (2021). Thus, students "were told that they would be taking different roles; they would be interpreters but also speakers. The intention of this was to get students closer not only to what interpreters feel during a real conference but also to get them to try and understand the role of speakers in a better way" (Pérez, 2021).

To summarize, the strong points of mock conference application in translators and interpreters training consist in modelling the situation of the real interpreters' work. Also, mock conferences provide both the instructors and the students with the opportunity develop their language and interpreters' skills as well as their research skills to some extent.

In our case study, such qualitative research techniques as observation and Critical incident survey were used. So, further perspectives of research lie in the application of some measuring techniques to analyze the impact of mock conferences on pre-service interpreters' professional development.

On the other hand, there are some issues which should be taken into account and managed for better work of mock conference as a tool for interpreters' professional development. Thus, the conference topics should not be limited by linguistic and translation problems only. Probably, it would be really effective instrument used for the purposes of interpreters' skills development in such popular fields as Oil and Gas industry (the topical problems in Kazakhstani conditions); Media industry etc.

Finally, we consider the mock conferences as effective tools for pre-service interpreters training due to its creative potential and student-centered approach.

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