

## ONLINE INTERPRETING LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

**Reyna Vidyantari**

University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia  
reyna.vidyantari@gmail.com

Accepted: 2021-06-15, Approved: 2021-07-01 , Published: 2021-07-05

### ABSTRACT

*Studying interpreting is challenging, and even more when done online. This paper studied five students' experiences when underwent an online interpreting course. Data is collected through interviews; this article described some problems that emerged from online interpreting learning in Indonesia. The author found that there were several internal and external factors that caused some problems during online sessions. Although the subjects were satisfied with online learning, all of them prefer to do face-to-face learning. This article was initial research in the online interpreting field. It is expected that there will be further research to find effective strategies for implementing online interpreting learning.*

**Keywords:** Online class; interpreting; pandemic; language; learning; students.

### INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic that occurred in 2020 had given a great impact on the world, including Indonesia. One of the most affected aspects was teaching and learning process. Educators (teachers, lecturers, and tutors) and students were forced to study remotely via online media. Teachers should find new ways to share their knowledge through video conferences, videotaping, or giving online assignments. Nevertheless, students were burdened with all of the online learning activities and experienced technical difficulties during their studies.

As linguistic students who were obligated to take an interpreting course as a part of the curriculum, the participants thought that online learning had both positive and negative sides. One of the courses that required a lot of adjustment was the interpreting course. Interpreting is an activity of translating speech from one language into other language and orally performed in real-time. Interpreting was divided into two

types, namely consecutive and simultaneous. In general, interpreting learning began with practicing public speaking, retelling a story, note-taking for consecutive interpreting, and deducting ideas of speech for simultaneous interpreting. From the learning series, the teacher added sight translation training before entering simultaneous interpreting learning. Some abilities needed in interpreting learning are listening skills, memory retention, and the ability to capture messages of speech; foreign language proficiency was not a determining factor in one's success or failure in interpreting (Obler, 2015).

Unlike other courses, online interpretation learning was relatively harder to do than face-to-face learning. Face-to-face interpreting learning was more helpful in honing public speaking skills. Teachers could easily provide input on student posture, intonation, articulation, and gestures. However, the learning was forced to be online via video conference due to pandemic. The process is similar to remote interpreting. Remote interpreting was not something

new in the interpreting world. O'Hagan (2019) defined it as a situation when the interpreter and the client were in different places. Technological assistance was needed to conduct remote interpreting during pandemic. Now there is a standardization for remote interpreting. It was merely formulated by AIIC (2020) a standard for Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI) for this pandemic situation.

However, there was no standardization for the implementation of remote interpreting learning yet. Nevertheless, interpreting lecturers had found a way to perform online interpreting courses at the University of Indonesia. They used full video conference media such as Zoom for teaching and learning process. Professional Zoom application had provided an RSI mode.

## METHOD

The subject of this paper was five postgraduate students majoring in linguistic at the University of Indonesia, class of 2019. They were asked nine questions regarding their online interpreting study experience together with the author. In early 2020, the subjects took Foreign Language to Indonesian Interpreting course. It continued to the end of 2020 with the Indonesian to Foreign Language Interpreting course. Both of them were taught by professional certified interpreters. They were professional lecturers and interpreters with many years of experience. Both courses had been conducted online via Zoom, a video conference application.

The courses followed the same learning stages for professional training. It began with practicing public speaking, improving memory by retelling a story, practicing effective notetaking for

consecutive interpreting, sight translation, and ended with practicing simultaneous interpreting. The learning process also included literature study as well as research study to find out the world of interpreting globally. Guest lecturers were also invited to provide an overview of professional interpreting practice in the field, including conferences and community interpreting (in the scope of courts and health facilities).

The students in the courses were lucky enough that the lecturers had provided the opportunity to experience RSI system through Zoom application. RSI was a simultaneous interpreting activity using a video conference application. Interpreters worked in pairs and must communicate privately without being heard by the audience. It was very complicated and required multitasking ability since the two interpreters were not in the same place. However, it could be done well with intense training.

This paper aimed to discover the problem that emerged in online interpreting learning during the pandemic. The situation described in this paper was the learning situation in Translation Studies class of 2019, Masters of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia. Observations were conducted by comparing 1.5 months of face-to-face and 7 months of online courses. Before attending this course, the subject had never received interpreting training at all. The author expected that this article could provide a new perspective on online interpreting learning from student's points of view.

Several previous studies discussed interpreting learning. Nevertheless, all of them only focused on the teacher's point of view on face-to-face learning. In some countries, online interpreting teaching had been

conducted for a long time. Whereas, in Indonesia, it had been conducted just as the pandemic hit the country. In contrast to other countries that had previously conducted online interpreting training, Indonesian technology was left behind, therefore, online learning was not yet common. In several Asian countries, online interpreting learning was conducted by combining writing on a blackboard, online messages (chat), audio and video recordings, and online discussion (Wang & Chen, 2012). Meanwhile, in South Korea, Lee & Huh (2018) found that students who learned online interpreting felt more satisfied.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interpreting learning had its challenges for students who were not English native speakers on understanding differences in grammar structures, capturing ideas of speech, listening to speech in an accented or fast speech of foreign languages (Yamada, 2019). In his research, Obler (2012) said that interpreting was an extreme use of language. The cognitive ability of a simultaneous interpreter was forced to work hard. They had to listen, remember, and find the main idea of the speech then reproduce it into another language in a very short time. Brain fatigue was something an interpreter should be aware of. A conference simultaneous interpreter was suggested to take turns with their partners every 30 minutes. Meanwhile, the main problem in consecutive interpreting was writing an effective note.

Based on the interviews with 5 interpreting students, the author founded:

1. Interpreting learning can be done without any significant issues. The learning method of interpreting is the

same whether online or face-to-face class.

2. However, the subjects experienced several obstacles caused by internal and external factors when online interpreting learning occurred:

a. When practicing public speaking, the mental tension while standing in a classroom with online meetings was not the same.

Some of the students indicated that face-to-face meeting was more thrilling, however, other students indicated that performing public speaking online was much more challenging. The author argued that public speaking required careful practice and preparation beforehand, meanwhile being a speaker at video conferences was more relaxed since the interaction was less direct to the audience. This problem was considered an internal factor. To improve public speaking skills, Heinz (2013) through his research found that practicing impromptu speaking was able to help. In a face-to-face course, the lecturers were able to correct the posture, intonation, and gestures of the students, but during online class, only the upper body part can be seen by the audience. In online interpreting, the speaker was able to see the audience's faces, but there was a lack of connection with the audience.

b. Translation students were accustomed to translating documents and texts, looking for word equivalents, and conducting research for a long time.

When they have to switch to learn to interpret, students faced obstacles in changing their thinking patterns. Due to the time limitations in interpreting, students were required to abandon the desire to translate word to word and started to translate

ideas. This problem was an internal factor that happened both in an offline and online class. Interpreting was performed in a short period, thus looking for word equivalents was not important anymore, interpreters did not need to maintain utterances' lexical structure. If the interpreters thought for a long duration, they would lose the moment resulting in the lateness in producing utterances in the target language, and then lead to difficulties following the next conversations (Yamada, 2019). To change this translator mindset, students learned sight translating. Sight translation is reading an article in the source language and directly interpreting it into the target language. Students needed to learn to skim and find sentence ideas quickly to be reproduced in the target language (Lee, 2012).

c. The subjects were unable to fully concentrate on online learning.

Concentration in learning interpretation was crucial. One of the reasons for low concentration was the long duration of online teaching. The students became more exhausted due to sitting and staring into a laptop or a device for a long time. Thus, this problem was considered as an external factor but not exclusively occurred in online learning. However, it became an unavoidable condition while people working or studying from home. One way to avoid any distractions was preparing a certain room to work or study and restrict anybody from entering the room while the teaching or interpreting process was in progress. A quality headphone was also recommended to block outside noise.

d. Internet connection in Indonesia was not good enough.

Internet connection problems could happen due to bad weather. Thus, it would affect online learning. Moreover, not all students have fast Wi-Fi connections, and they tend to rely on cellular provider connections. This problem was considered an external factor. Although the government has provided free mobile data quota for all students during this pandemic, the use of mobile data quota was merely limited to several learning applications. Moreover, the signal strength of the internet service provider was not evenly distributed which led to poor connection quality. Most students were experiencing lost connection, unstable connection, unable to share screens, unable to display video, and others. A stable internet connection was essential for online interpretation; thus, it was advisable to use a landed internet service provider.

e. Lastly, technical problems might occur.

For instance, online conference applications that have not been updated, audio of lecturers and students who were out of sync, difficulties in sharing screens, and others. To learn interpreting, audio quality and good devices were important so that students can hear clearly, but it was not accessible to all. Eventhough students were not obligated to have the most sophisticated device or buy a premium application license, but it was better to sharpen students' listening and memory skills.

From the various problems mentioned above, the most significant ones were technical factors such as internet connection and proficiency in using devices and applications; it could be learned over time. Meanwhile, basic interpreting skills, such as memory

retention, hearing, and the ability to grasp speech ideas were needed to be trained continuously (Obler, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

Online interpreting learning during pandemic has brought new things to the world of language learning. The author found that there were not many differences in the core of the interpretation learning. The stages that were passed in online and face-to-face learning were the same; starting with practicing public speaking, retelling stories, note-taking for consecutive interpretation, sight translation, and simultaneous interpretation. The fact that conference interpreters could not be seen directly by conference attendees (interpreters work from behind the booth), and that RSI interpreters could not show their faces on video indicated that the two situations were similar, whether it is online and face-to-face. However, due to the changes in learning media, technical problems arose, such as internet and device problems, this research subject unanimously preferred face-to-face learning.

This article is limited to the learning condition in Indonesia. Different results might occur when applied to different subjects and lecturers. The author expected further research for remote-learning strategies in interpreting. The author hoped that in the future, there will be a standardization for online interpreting learning. When a structured online learning method had been found, everyone who was interested in learning interpreting can easily access the best facilities from anywhere, even after the pandemic has gone. The easy access to interpreting learning courses will increase the number of quality interpreting practitioners in Indonesia.

However, internet connection problems are still a major obstacle in Indonesia. The author hopes that internet services in Indonesia can be improved to increase to quality of online learning and remote interpreting practices in Indonesia. Future research is expected to find effective strategies in implementing online interpretation learning.

## REFERENCES

- Heinz, M. (2013). Impromptu speaking and interpretation studies: A preliminary study. *Journal of International Education Research*, 9(4), 387-396.
- Lee, J. (2012). What skills do student interpreters need to learn in sight translation training?. *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal*, 57(3), 694-714.
- Lee, J., & Huh, J. (2018). Why not go online?: A case study of blended mode business interpreting and translation certificate program. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 12(4), 444-466.  
doi:10.1080/1750399X.2018.1540227
- Li, S. (2014). A case study of interpretation learning strategies employed by successful interpretation learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(6), 1303.
- Obler, L. K. (2012). Conference interpreting as extreme language use. *The International Journal of Bilingualism : Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Linguistic Studies of Language Behavior*, 16(2), 177-182.  
doi:10.1177/1367006911403199
- O'Hagan, M. (2019). *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and*

Technology. New York:  
Routledge.

- Wang, Y., & Chen, N. (2012). The collaborative language learning attributes of cyber face-to-face interaction: The perspectives of the learner. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 20(4), 311-330. doi:10.1080/10494821003769081
- Yamada, H. (2019). A direct application of simultaneous interpreting training without prior consecutive interpreting work in a university course. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(4), 353-363. doi:10.17507/tpls.0904.01