

# INTERACTION MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN TELEPHONE INTERPRETING

María Magdalena Fernández Pérez  
Universidad de La Laguna

## ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, telephone interpreting (TI) has consolidated its presence in the public services of many countries around the world, including Spain. That is why increased attention is being paid to the need for training TI professionals who are able to face the challenges that this type of remote interpreting entails. Despite TI's specificities (the use of the telephone as the channel of communication, the interpreter's physical absence from the place of interaction, the lack of visual information and the immediacy with which the interpreter is accessed), it shares many features with face-to-face dialogue interpreting, one of them being the role of the interpreter as interaction coordinator to ensure communication flow between the primary parties. Nonetheless, the way coordination is performed when interpreting over the phone necessarily differs from on-site interpreting. This article aims to identify and describe the specific skills needed by telephone interpreters to manage interaction between participants in conversation. Some of them are not exclusive to TI, but must be readapted for use with the telephone. These skills could potentially be used as the starting point to design a specific comprehensive training in TI.

**KEYWORDS:** telephone interpreting, skills, translation and interpreting competence, coordinating interaction, remote interpreting.

## RESUMEN

A lo largo de la última década, la interpretación telefónica (IT) ha consolidado su presencia en los servicios públicos de muchos países, incluido España. Por ello, se le está prestando una mayor atención a la necesidad de formar a profesionales de la IT que sepan hacer frente a los retos derivados de este tipo de interpretación a distancia. A pesar de que la IT posee características específicas (el uso del teléfono como canal de comunicación; la ausencia física del o de la intérprete del lugar de la interacción; la ausencia de información visual y la inmediatez con que se accede a la o a el intérprete), esta comparte muchos rasgos con la interpretación dialógica presencial, entre ellos, el papel de quien interpreta como coordinador de la interacción para asegurar el flujo de la interacción entre los interlocutores. Sin embargo, la manera de efectuar dicha coordinación es necesariamente diferente cuando se interpreta por teléfono y cuando se hace persona. Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar y describir las destrezas específicas que necesitan adquirir los y las intérpretes telefónicas para gestionar la interacción entre quienes participan en la conversación. Algunas de ellas no son exclusivas de la IT, pero deben ser readaptadas al uso del teléfono. Estas destrezas podrían ser empleadas potencialmente como punto de partida para diseñar una propuesta de formación específica exhaustiva en IT.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** interpretación telefónica, destrezas, competencia traductora e interpretativa, coordinación de la interacción, interpretación a distancia.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Telephone interpreting (TI) is a type of remote interpreting in which some or all of the interlocutors (interpreters and users) are physically separated from each other and use a telephone as an instrumental channel of communication. In this article, we will deal with TI as a resource to provide language assistance to foreigners who speak oral languages and need to access their host country's public services, but who are not fluent in the official language. However, it should be borne in mind that TI is also widely utilised by other types of users such as deaf individuals, as well as by private companies as a tool for their internationalisation process.

Professional TI emerged in Australia in 1973 when the government created a telephone emergency line called Emergency Telephone Interpreting Services, which could be used by the immigrant population for assistance in their own language by professional interpreters. In the following decades, TI was exported to the United States of America, where it was privatised and progressively became a global business controlled by large corporations.

In Spain, TI has consolidated its presence as a language assistance resource in public services, namely in healthcare and social services settings. In this case, providers are also private companies whose TI services have been outsourced by the government. So far, this growing TI demand in public services has barely been acknowledged in Spanish university programmes. Currently, telephone interpreter training still relies almost exclusively on the agencies providing the service. This effectively means that, although these agencies collaborate with universities by offering internships or short seminars, the only beneficiaries of comprehensive in-depth training in TI are, therefore, the agencies' own interpreters. Moreover, training offered by agencies—although in some cases of very good quality and a reflection of the professional reality of TI—is somehow limited by the needs and requirements of those demanding the service and the conditions stipulated in the tender.

In the past few years, however, there has been a remarkable increase in research studies on TI, which will surely lead to the creation of training programmes in university undergraduate or postgraduate courses.

This article points in that direction, aiming to characterise TI in order to identify the skills needed by a telephone interpreter to manage interaction, possibly the most difficult task when interpreting over the phone. We believe the skills described herein could be of use as a starting point for designing learning goals and specific activities within dedicated training in TI that could potentially be used at both university and professional level.

## 2. SKILLS IN PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETER TRAINING

The concept of “skill” is recurring in the literature of Translation and Interpreting Studies, namely in works related to the didactics of both disciplines. Nowadays, skills in translation and interpreting are mainly considered aptitudes that can be learnt, unlike in decades-old studies which described them as a set of



abilities, mainly innate or natural, solely owned by bilinguals, who were in fact named “natural translators” by authors like Harris and Sherwood.

As the idea of translating and interpreting as an activity that could be learnt and therefore taught gained ground, numerous research studies aimed to define what professional interpreters or translators were required to know in order to carry out their work effectively. This led to a growing interest in delimiting the concept of translation competence and subsequently, and by extension, of interpreting competence. In this regard, Kaczmarek’s doctoral dissertation is of particular interest, since it includes a compilation of the different existing models describing both competences, and then proposes Kaczmarek’s own model applied specifically to Public Service Interpreting. The author claims that much research, such as that by Gentile *et al.*, Gile or Kalina (12), describes translation and interpreting competence as a list of skills, an approach he criticises for being excessively flat and linear, which does not succeed in reflecting the complexity of the task of translating and interpreting, in opposition to other models developed, for example, by the PACTE group or by Dorothy Kelly, which reflect more effectively the dynamic and interactive nature of all the aptitudes needed to perform translation and interpreting professionally. Whereas it is not our intention to feed this discussion, Kaczmarek’s work highlights the relevance of skills in the study of translation and interpreting competence, often considered its subcomponents.

Although it can be very useful for pedagogical purposes, a theoretical approach to the study of skills poses some challenges. It is an elusive concept, difficult to delimit and is subsequently (or maybe because of this) often surrounded by remarkable terminological confusion. It is not infrequent to find terms such as “technique”, “skill”, “ability”, “capacity”, even “strategy” in interpreting literature, employed almost as equivalents. In an effort to shed some light upon this matter, we have resorted to Wilss, who conceives the translation process as a cognitive behaviour based on the duality “knowledge-skills” (knowledge and experience), which are “the pillars of information-processing procedures designed to determine the conditions for situationally adequate translation processes and to substantiate them adequately” (37). As for the role of translation skills, Wilss (148) was surprised that this concept, very much used in professional circles, had not been excessively researched in Translation and Interpreting Studies literature.

In this study we draw on the difference established by Wilss between “ability” and “skill” (149). Abilities are innate and cannot be observed; their existence can be inferred from individual behaviour. Skills, on the contrary, are acquired through a learning process, but at the same time are subject to the existence of abilities, i.e., skills cannot exist without abilities. According to Wilss (149), the concept of skill has three dimensions: it manifests itself in an observable act from which its existence can be proved; it has a predictive nature because of the possibility of repetition in similar situations and depends on individuals’ physical or mental conditions. In Wilss’ words, translation skills are of an intellectual nature and therefore very difficult to measure, since their assessment may be subject to heterogeneous criteria such as semantic accuracy, speed, problem-solving capacity, or the degree of automation.



The duality knowledge-skills is also highly recurrent in translation and interpreting research in order to describe the aptitudes required to translate and interpret as an expert or professional. This is the case of Sawyer (39), who takes Wilss' two pillars of the translation process to condense interpreter training into three basic components: skills-based components, knowledge-based components (related to the acquisition of expertise in a specific domain) and deontological components (related to the knowledge of ethical behaviour, professional identity and professional best practices). Thus, Sawyer draws on Wilss' work but places special emphasis on the importance of deontology.

Regarding the duality knowledge-skills, Kaczmarek claims that knowledge is declarative by nature, whereas skills are procedural: knowledge is related to the cognitive and mental dimension of humans, and can be accessed consciously, while skills may be developed by accessing declarative knowledge and undergo proceduralisation with time (54). For this author, however, reducing translation competence to knowledge and skills is insufficient, as translation competence does not consist of components (which are static by nature), but of dimensions in which skills and knowledge are constructs of competence, are dynamic by nature and interact with other constructs.

As can be observed, there are different views in interpreting studies around the concept of skill. However, consensus has been achieved about the possibility of acquiring skills through training. Kalina makes the same claim when describing skills as subparts of the competence needed to interpret. She states that

it should be possible to break down the vague definition of skill to be acquired into subskills that are to be mastered one after the other, in distinct, well-defined learning stages, so that a fully developed teaching method for training future interpreters can be established. (12)

Kalina (18), who also understands skills as dynamic and interactive elements, puts forward the possibility of translators and interpreters receiving general training to develop shared skills, which would subsequently be complemented with the acquisition of the specific skills of both disciplines. Both these types of skills would interact with each other.

Arumí delves into this idea by connecting skills development and acquisition to interpreting quality, claiming that "Interpreting quality depends on certain skills and strategies that need to be acquired over time, usually as part of a university training program (813)".

### 3. TELEPHONE INTERPRETING SPECIFIC SKILLS

In the previous section we have seen that only when translating and interpreting began being studied thoroughly did it become apparent that they are complex activities that require a set of skills in order to be performed professionally. By the same token, in order to identify specific telephone interpreting skills it is essential



to study this type of interpretation and to define what it consists of and what makes it different from dialogue on-site interpreting.

Since distinct features of TI have been mentioned in previous essays (Fernández Pérez, *La interpretación remota en contextos de violencia de género* 109-113), they will be referred to succinctly below:

- The use of technology. As with video-mediated interpreting, TI is only practicable thanks to technological devices, in this case the telephone. The use of the telephone as the channel of communication generates a sense of isolation in the interpreter, which has an impact on the decision-making process during the interpreting performance.
- The interpreter's location (physical absence). The interpreter is usually alone and physically separated from the rest of the users, who may either be together in the same room or in different places. This determines the way in which certain skills, such as turn-taking management, are performed.
- The lack of visual access, that is, the impossibility of the interpreter seeing what is happening, hinders his/her capacity to contextualise the interpreting assignment, correctly understand utterances, manage turns-at-talk and in general coordinate the functioning of the triadic communication, making it necessary to develop compensatory skills that allow the interpreter to perform the job correctly.
- The immediacy with which users access the interpreter (usually minutes or even seconds), which gives her/him no time to prepare the assignment. This, in addition to the lack of visual information, generates the need for the interpreter to develop ways in which to contextualise the communicative encounter rapidly and efficiently.

Once TI specific features are identified, it becomes clear that we are facing a distinctive type of interpreting, different from on-site dialogue interpreting, and therefore requiring the acquisition of a set of specific skills to be performed professionally in order to offer a quality service. The development of these skills will occur, as always with professional translation and interpreting (that is, performed by experts), through a teaching-learning process.

### 3.1. TELEPHONE INTERPRETING SKILLS CLASSIFICATION

As it is widely known, Wadensjö divides the role of dialogue interpreters into two activities: translating and coordinating the interlocutors' utterances (*Interpreting as Interaction* 105). This division can also be applied to TI, since, although performed remotely, dialogue consecutive interpreting is the most common interpreting technique employed in over-the-phone interpretation. As previously mentioned, encounters mediated by telephone interpreters and by on-site interpreters share many common features, particularly when compared to other types of interpretation such as conference interpreting, where monologic consecutive is used much



more frequently. Some of these features are, for example, the use of spontaneous and improvised language; short turns at talking; interview format; role exchanges between users (sender and receiver) and the interpersonal nature of these encounters (159-160) (although in the case of TI there is no physical proximity between users and the interpreter, the interaction between them generates an interpersonal relationship between interlocutors).

In fact, it can be said that the difference between TI and on-site dialogue interpreting lies mainly (though not exclusively) in how the interpreter manages interaction among primary parties, bearing in mind that he/she cannot see them and is not with them in the same room where the interview takes place.

One of the factors hindering coordination of interaction in TI is the absence of visual information, although it is not the only cause. The growing use of video-mediated interpreting has demonstrated that access to images of what is happening in the encounter makes interaction management easier only to a certain extent and that it is the use of technology and the interpreter's remote location that isolates and prevents him/her from coordinating the conversation smoothly. This is specifically mentioned by Braun in her study on remote interpreting in criminal proceedings (19), where she makes numerous references to the difficulties experienced by interpreters working over video conference equipment to coordinate turns-at-talk or, for example, ask for clarifications.

That is why in this study we will place particular emphasis on skills related to interaction management and specifically four of them, which we consider distinctive of TI compared with face-to-face dialogue interpreting: managing the beginning of the encounter, coordinating turn-taking, performing non-renditions or interpreters' original utterances, and managing the end of the encounter.

These four skills are considered dynamic concepts, which relate to one another and are fundamental elements in the acquisition of the interpreting competence needed to become a professional telephone interpreter.

### 3.1.1. *Managing the beginning of a telephone interpreter-mediated encounter*

The effectiveness shown by the interpreter to manage the first seconds or minutes of a telephone interpretation is of great importance, to the extent that it can have a strong influence on the success of the encounter. An inefficient management of the beginning of the conversation inclines users to mistrust the interpreter, spreads confusion and occasionally conveys a feeling of uncertainty that can be difficult to eradicate if not dealt swiftly. TI providers thus consider it an essential skill and possibly the most distinctive of this type of interpreting.

The beginning of the telephone triadic conversation should logically be as brief as possible in order to deal with the matter that has motivated the encounter without delay. However, in TI it is usual for the interlocutors to feel confused about how to proceed during the first seconds of the conversation (N. Kelly 149, Rosenberg 73), particularly in three-way telephone calls, in which each of the interlocutors (users and interpreter) are in different locations and thus cannot see one another.



It is in this phase of the encounter that the interpreter must perform two tasks: on the one hand, introducing him/herself to both users for identification purposes and explaining the functioning of communication; on the other, contextualising the situation, considering that the interpreter faces the assignment with no previous or visual information whatsoever. In order to accomplish both tasks, the interpreter activates a set of protocols for which s/he must have prior training.

Although these protocols can differ slightly depending on the TI provider, the beginning of telephone interpreter-mediated encounters usually consists of two parts: the beginning of the conversation, usually by the public service provider, who calls the interpreter, who then ideally begins by identifying him/herself, and explaining the subject of the interview. The interpreter will then introduce him/herself following the TI company's protocols (usually including his/her name and a code number) and will carry out the "pre-session" (explaining his/her role as language mediator), according to the term used by Nataly Kelly (120). After this initial stage, the actual *body* of the call or "session" (N. Kelly 11) should take place without further delay, in order to deal with the subject that prompted the encounter.

Nonetheless, these steps are not always complied with in the way that has been described and many obstacles often occur, which must be dealt with by the interpreter. For instance, public service providers usually address the interpreter for the very first time without identifying themselves or do so in a confusing manner, either because they ignore the functioning of the TI service and take for granted that the interpreter has previous information about the interview or simply because of the haste with which they are forced to do their job. For this reason, it is not unusual for public service providers to start talking directly to the interpreter leaving him/her no room for introduction or for providing him/her any information whatsoever about the assignment, and not bearing in mind that the interpreter ignores the reason for the interview, the setting, location and institution from where the call is made, as well as any information about the participants (language, culture and country of origin, mood, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

By way of example, the following excerpt, provided by the TI company Interpret Solutions,<sup>2</sup> relays word by word the beginning of a real telephone interpreter-mediated encounter:

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<sup>1</sup> This situation does not occur in every country. In the United States of America, for example, a telephone operator usually acts as a middleperson between the public service provider and the interpreter, offering some basic information about the interpreting assignment before connecting them. In addition to not having teleoperators available, in Spain, the TI service is not yet digitised, which makes caller identification impossible and thus the origin of the call remains unknown until the interpreter takes the phone.

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank Interpret Solutions, S.L. for their valuable collaboration to this research.





*Enfermera:* ¿Hola? ¿Eres la intérprete? Mira, es que tengo aquí al otro lado de la línea a una señora que creo que es rusa, mira a ver si te puedes entender con ella<sup>3</sup>.

As can be observed, the nurse provides no space for the interpreter to introduce him/herself, offers no information about the subject of the interview and it is up to the interpreter to glean information from some textual elements in the nurse's utterances.

Whether or not the interpreter is explicitly provided with the information, it is necessary for him/her to procure as much information as possible about the interpreting assignment at the beginning of the encounter so that utterances can be interpreted correctly. This information covers three aspects: technical factors, human factors and situational context.<sup>4</sup>

Information on technical factors refers to the device used to make the phone call (landline or mobile phone, double set of headphones for both users, hands-free device, etc.).<sup>5</sup> This information is important for coordinating the encounter because it allows the interpreter to know if both users are sharing a physical space, as well as visual information or documents; to anticipate sound quality, which tends to be worse when a hands-free device is used; to determine whether interlocutors have to pass the phone to each other in order to communicate with the interpreter, which will have an impact on the way turn-taking should be organised.

Information about the human factor relates to details about participants in conversation, both public service providers (gender, entity where s/he works, position, etc.) and foreign individuals accessing the service (country or culture of origin, gender, age, reason for the interview, etc.).

The situational context refers to the location and setting where the encounter takes place (hospital, school, shelter).

These three aspects constitute basic information that an on-site interpreter would obtain effortlessly, simply by being in the same place as the other participants in the conversation. However, gathering this information while interpreting over the phone is not a simple task. To pause and ask the public service provider for all these details would excessively delay the beginning of the session. That is why the telephone interpreter is advised to obtain this information by consciously identifying contextualisation elements or cues in the speakers' utterances. Many of these elements (nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.) would go unnoticed in an on-site interpretation, but provide very valuable information when interpreting over the phone. In the aforementioned excerpt, for example, the noun "señora" (lady) and

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<sup>3</sup> *Nurse:* Hello? Are you the interpreter? Look, I have a lady on the other side of the line who I think is Russian, see if you can understand her.

<sup>4</sup> Terminology employed by the company Interpret Solutions.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenberg (68-72) identifies three types of calls in telephone interpreting: three-way telephone conversations, when all interlocutors are in different locations; telephone passing, when the telephone is passed from one party to another; and speaker phone calls, when a hands-free device or a speaker phone is used.





the adjective “rusa” (Russian) provide the interpreter with details about the human factor (the user’s gender, and potential language and country of origin); in addition, the expression “al otro lado de la línea” (on the other side of the line) refers to the technical factor (it is a three-way telephone call).

As mentioned before, another relevant part of managing the beginning of the encounter is the interpreter’s introduction to both users, just as in on-site interpreting. In TI, this is even more important, since the interpreter’s physical absence may generate greater confusion about the functioning of communication. That is why, besides mentioning his/her name and profession, as well as other relevant aspects of his/her role (for instance, the fact that everything said will be translated and treated as confidential), the interpreter should briefly explain how turn-taking works and clearly announce the beginning of the conversation to both users (“You may begin to talk”).

In the event that the public service provider does not offer the interpreter the opportunity to introduce him/herself, the interpreter is advised to kindly interrupt him/her and carry out the presentation to both parties. This could be done in a non-invasive manner by using the transition spaces between utterances (Schegloff 97), which can be anticipated by paying attention to descendent intonation or breathing patterns, indicating that a pause is approaching.

Needless to say, interrupting public service providers to carry out the pre-session requires considerable amounts of common sense. Even if done courteously, the information they are providing may be highly valuable to contextualise the encounter (they might be giving us details about the human or technical factor, explaining the reason for the conversation, or identifying the other user, his/her language or nationality). In this case, it is advisable to take notes of everything the public service provider says and wait until the end of his/her turn to carry out the pre-session.

### 3.1.2. *Managing turn-taking in telephone interpreting*

That the alternation of turns-at-talk constitutes the essence of dialogic communication is well known (Sacks et. al.). As Wadensjö states in *Interpreting as Interaction* when drawing on Bakhtin and Goffman’s work, turn-taking transforms the message conveyed through conversation into a shared product which is constantly renegotiated and redefined by both interlocutors. Simultaneously, interlocutors become senders and receivers of turns-at-talk, competing for the floor.

In TI, turn-taking management is a very complex activity, even more so than in face-to-face dialogue interpreting, since it goes beyond the task of reconducting the discourse flow when the alternation of turns is breached for any reason (i.e., overlapping talk or interruption). When interpreting over the phone, the mere fact of maintaining the flow of turns when the parties cannot see each other and do not know to whom or when to talk may become a challenge. Already in their study carried out in 1992, Oviatt and Cohen described telephone interpreters’ active role as turn-taking coordinators and said that “most of their initiative [...] appeared to focus on the management of information sequencing” (286).



The most common and effective way for interpreters to manage turn-taking in face-to-face dialogue interpreting is by using gestures or gaze, that is, non-verbal language: making a hand movement, addressing or averting gaze or orientating body posture towards one interlocutor. However, since lack of visual information does not allow this in TI, turn-taking management becomes a voice-based skill, where prosody reveals itself as key. In the words of Couper-Kuhlen, “Prosody can be seen as one of the resources at their disposal for handling the tasks of turn construction, sequential organisation and floor management” (178).

One of the difficulties posed by turn-taking organisation is to manage utterance density or length in easy-to-handle fragments, facilitating an accurate conveyance of content. Telephone interpreters often avoid cutting speakers’ interventions even if they are too long, due to the difficulty of interrupting the interlocutor without using gestures or gaze. That same conclusion is reached by Wadensjö in her study on TI (*Telephone Interpreting and the Synchronization of Talk in Social Interaction*), the results of which demonstrate that, of both the communicative events analysed (one mediated by a face-to-face interpreter and the other by a telephone interpreter), more words and more turns-at-talk were used during the on-site encounter, despite it being remarkably shorter and more dynamic. In their study, Oviatt and Cohen also worked on the premise that telephone interpreter-mediated conversations would not have frequent alternation of turns-at-talk “because of their high cost in loss efficiency” (279). In order to interrupt excessively long interventions in an effective and non-invasive manner, it is useful to anticipate or identify through prosody the previously mentioned “transition spaces” between utterances (Schegloff 97). These spaces are usually preceded by descendent intonation patterns, indicating that the end of an utterance or a change of topic is approaching, and are normally followed by a brief pause that can be used by the interpreter to intervene. It is also useful to interpret whenever a natural pause in breathing patterns is perceived (N. Kelly 148).

Some telephone interpreters have been observed raising their voices when competing for the floor to start interpreting, thus capturing the speaker’s attention in a way that s/he feels forced to yield the turn. This is not an advisable way to manage turns-at-talk, since it could be understood as an attempt by the interpreter to impose his/her will and take control of the conversation. However, it has to be admitted that it can be effective in some cases when users’ interventions are particularly long, dense and rapid.

When turns-at-talk alternate smoothly, telephone interpreters only have to designate change of speaker by translating each utterance into the other language, as a clear indication of the beginning and closing of the communication channel. Nonetheless, this strategy is only effective if both interlocutors are listening to the interpreter at the same time (for example, through a hands-free device or a double headset) or if one of the users has not moved away from the telephone and stopped listening (for instance, to speak to another person).

Telephone interpreters usually indicate the beginning of their interventions with a language mark, such as a simple “Hello?”, in order to verify whether they are being heard (Oviatt and Cohen 284). TI providers do not recommend this tactic, which they find quite annoying, repetitive and hampering, although admittedly



it may be useful to ensure that users are receiving information during calls where only one telephone device is available and being constantly passed from one speaker to the other.

### 3.1.3. *Carrying out non-renditions or interpreters' original interventions*

According to Wadensjö, when the interpreter merely translates the utterances in each interlocutors' turn in a fluent manner, s/he is implicitly coordinating interaction. On the contrary, each time s/he speaks to make her own comments, s/he is coordinating explicitly (1998: 109). According to this author, the interpreter's original utterances can be «text-orientated», when s/he considers talk as text and attempts to elucidate what the interlocutors said (for example, asking for clarifications) or «interaction-orientated», when they aim at assuring the compliance of conditions for communication (for example, by observing the turn-taking order) (*Interpreting as Interaction* 109, 110).

Non-renditions entail two challenges in TI: performing them in a courteous and non-invasive manner so that information flow is not interrupted; doing so without gestures, gaze or body posture; and finally, by establishing the author of the utterance (the interpreter and not the other interlocutor) without generating a feeling of confusion.

Hale (203) compiles the reasons why interpreters interrupt interaction to make their own comments.<sup>6</sup> We will place particular emphasis on those recommended by public service interpreting professional standards: to ask for clarifications; to finish interpreting a previous, interrupted utterance; to protest at being interrupted (and to return to interpreting).

We could add three more reasons why telephone interpreters interrupt: to redirect turn-taking (for instance, in the case of overlapping speech); to clarify any cultural misunderstanding that may affect communication; to verify information accuracy; to correct an interpreter's mistake; and, specifically in TI, to solve technical problems that have an impact on the interpreter's performance.

The strategies needed to carry out these interventions in TI are the same as those recommended for turn-taking management: using prosodic elements such as natural pauses or breathing patterns to intervene with minimum disruption for the interaction between primary parties (N. Kelly 121, 148). Besides that, it is recommended to interpret as in face-to-face encounters, announcing interpreter's own comments in indirect speech and then speaking in direct speech for the rest of the intervention.

As for TI, special relevance should be placed on interruptions to confirm the correct comprehension of an utterance before translating it, since telephone

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<sup>6</sup> Hale's work refers to interpreting in legal settings, but this description of the interpreter's reasons for interrupting is easily comparable to public service interpreting in general



interpreters often need to clarify references to extra textual elements that cannot be seen or are mentioned solely through deictics (“Does it hurt when I touch you *here?*”). Interruptions to solve technical incidences are also particularly important. TI providers usually train their interpreters to detect problems of this kind in order to attempt to solve them. A way to anticipate them is to obtain information about the device that is being used during the call, since, as Rosenberg points out (247), hands-free devices often capture more background noise, making the interpreter’s task more difficult (although, as this author admits, noise is to some extent unavoidable in TI). Interpreters may ask for interlocutors’ collaboration to solve the incidence if appropriate (for example, by moving the telephone away from the source of noise or from their mouth if the sound of their breath is preventing the interpreter from hearing). Any other technical problem exceeding the interpreter’s competencies should be referred to the company responsible for the service, and the call should be cancelled if necessary.

### 3.1.4. *Managing the end of a telephone interpreter-mediated encounter*

The end of a telephone interpreter-mediated encounter, or “post-session”, follows certain specific protocols that go beyond conventions of monolingual telephone conversations. Before finalising the phone call, the interpreter should ensure that neither of the primary parties wishes to intervene again, since, once the telephone receiver has been replaced, it is not always possible to resume the interview with the same interpreter. Moreover, if one of the parties leaves before the conversation has finalised it is more complicated to locate him/her without being in the same room as her. This is something that occasionally occurs in TI: for instance, a doctor has finalised her last turn-at-talk and leaves while the interpreter is still translating her words to the patient, who will not have the possibility to react. Although it is sometimes the public service provider who ensures that the other party has no further questions or comments, it does not always occur in that way. For this reason, it is useful for the interpreter to anticipate the end of the conversation, which can be preceded by descendent intonation or by certain expressions (examples in Spanish could be “Bueno, pues nada más, entonces”; “Vale, muchas gracias”<sup>7</sup>), by asking the parties if they wish to make some final remarks.

Generally speaking, telephone interpreters use a formal ending consisting in several sentences provided by TI providers, mentioning the name of the company, the interpreter code number, followed by a customer service expression (“Thank you for choosing our services”). This ending should be repeated in both languages.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Well, that’s it for the moment’; ‘OK, thank you’.



#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a type of interpreting that has only relatively recently been the subject of researchers' attention, the study of telephone interpreting is still in its infancy, particularly with regard to the development of pedagogical methodology for professional training. The aim of this article is to offer a starting point for specific training in telephone interpreting, by identifying and defining the skills an interpreter needs to acquire and develop to manage interaction between interlocutors, that is, skills related to the dialogue interpreter's activity of coordinating talk. These skills can also be used as learning goals when designing role-play activities that allow trainees to focus on each of them separately, thus facilitating their acquisition (Fernández Pérez, *Designing Role-play Models for Telephone Interpreting Training*). It should be noted, however, that comprehensive training in TI would also need to include skills related to the activity of translating, once more drawing on Wadensjö's dichotomy (*Interpreting as Interaction* 145). These would include, for example, skills needed for using direct or indirect speech in TI or how the use of the telephone as the channel of communication impacts on note-taking.

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