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SPECIFICITIES OF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF ARABIC SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

The Arabic–Spanish language combination

Bachir Mahyub Rayaa

Introduction and theoretical background

It has been said that interpreting, understood as mediating between two people who do not speak the same language, is one of the oldest professions— older even than translation, given that speech pre-dates writing (Haensch, 1965). Nevertheless, the research community nowadays almost unanimously agrees that conference interpreting (simultaneous and consecutive), as we know it today, has its origins in the First World War (Baigorri, 2014: 133–164). According to Baigorri (2014: 211–246), this profession would reach maturity in the Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946).

In the case of the Arabic–Spanish language combination (AR-SP), there are important historic indications of the activity of interpreters from Arabic to Spanish dating back to the period of coexistence in Al-Andalus and the later Spanish colonization of North Africa. However, despite the notable demand for professional Arabic interpreters, which resurfaced in the 1980s, and it being fully included in Spanish university syllabi since the beginning of the twenty-first century, interpreting in this language group has scarcely been researched. Therefore, although interpreting between Arabic and other Indo-European languages commonly used in professional practice (English, French, Spanish, etc.) could serve as a perfect subject for study, until now research in the field has not contributed to solving problems in training and professional practice.

This lack of specific research could be due to the fact that, according to the Theory of Sense, interpreting is a cognitive act regardless of the linguistic combination (Seleskovitch and Lederer, 1984: 108, Déjean Le Féal, 1998: 43, among others). However, specialized literature since the end of the 1970s highlights that certain language pairs pose other formal difficulties (Longley, 1978; Wilss, 1978) and require specific strategies (Stenzl, 1989: 24). Thus the teaching of interpreting should also consider the specificities of the language combination (Ilg, 1978; Le Ny, 1978; Gile, 1995). Kelly (2003) states that, from the point of view of translation, there are regional, national, cultural and professional differences that must

be considered when planning curricula. The theoretical problem therefore also poses professional and educational consequences.

Meanwhile, specialized literature on simultaneous interpreting (SI) from or into Arabic remains extremely scarce. According to El Aamid (2006), between 1970 and 2005, only three out of 260 monographs on interpreting address this language combination. Darwish (2003) addresses the pillars of Arabic–English SI from a prescriptive approach based on his professional experience; Bessafi (2003) generally addresses language training and the relationship between linguistics, translation and interpreting, with a few examples from the AR-FR combination; and Khogali (2004) studies SI training and its introduction in the Sudanese education system. El Aamid (2006) has not included in his survey a key study on SI, i.e., Al-Salman and Al-Khanji (2002).

Since El Aamid's publication (2006), the following works have been published: Haddad (2008), Hassan (2009), Khogali (2012) and Mahyub Rayaa and Zarrouk (2013), of which only Hassan (2009) partly addresses the current issue of our study. The author criticizes the Theory of Sense, stating that the specificity of the language pair has a significant impact in practice, which should be acknowledged in training. In her intuitive analysis of AR-FR SI, the author highlights specificities, such as the difference between linguistic structures and syntagmas, and proposes a future study of the impact of variation in Arabic, terminology-related problems and cultural differences.

The impact of diatopic[1] and diastratic[2] variation in Arabic simultaneous interpreting, according to Hassan (2009), has not been empirically investigated, and has been addressed as a phenomenon that is almost exclusive to community interpreting (Feria, 2001; Taibi, 2006; Ortega, 2010). This is due to the common belief that in SI Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the only register that may be used in interpreting and, in theory, the only register used by speakers in formal situations. Only Wilmsen (2003) points out that Arabic speakers, when addressing an audience, frequently change from MSA to informal Arabic. Recently literature has begun to underline the need to bear in mind this polyglossic reality from the earliest stages in translator and interpreter training (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015; Ilhami, 2016).

Objectives

This chapter intends to carry out a three-way study between teachers, students and professional interpreters in order to:

1. obtain quantitative and qualitative data leading to an improved understanding of the situation of training and professional practice in AR-SP SI, and define future areas of empirical research;
2. analyze the linguistic, academic and professional profile of the three surveyed groups;
3. find out whether differentiating specificities exist in AR-SP SI;
4. if such specificities do exist, determine whether they require taking a different approach for teaching Arabic SI;
5. find out what educational materials are used in training, their source, and subject matter.

Materials and methods

The total investigative population comprises seven SI lecturers and 43 students of Arabic, English, German and French, in combination with Spanish, from the University of Granada, the sole university in Spain that teaches AR-SP SI. After consulting different professionals,

a third group was defined comprising 12 professional interpreters that represent almost all those who occasionally or regularly work in AR-SP SI in Spain. Given the objective of this study, lecturers and student groups will be limited to AR-SP (two lecturers and seven students), although I will mention the results of the other three language combinations when relevant.

The data were obtained from three parallel questionnaires sent by email on July 19, 2010. The deadline was November 12, 2010, and 21 anonymously completed questionnaires were received by AR-SP subjects (two lecturers, seven students and 12 interpreters), meaning 84 percent of recipients responded (13 percent error rate and 90 percent level of reliability).

When drafting the first version of the questionnaire the proposals of Iglesias (2003) and Manuel (2005) were taken into consideration. The first version was subjected to peer review. The finalized questionnaire included 45 items (14 closed, 20 open and 11 semi-closed questions) divided into three sections: subject profile, education and professional practice, and use of educational materials. At the end of each section, the respondents were able to provide comments, suggestions and observations believed to be relevant.

Results

Results from the questionnaires are presented below prior to their analysis and discussion.

Questionnaire respondents' profiles

Lecturers

One hundred percent (2) of lecturers are male, 48 and 45 years of age, first-language Arabic speakers (L1) and second-language Spanish speakers (L2). Both have studied translation and interpreting at the University of Granada, to doctorate and graduate level respectively. Their experience in teaching AR-SP interpreting ranges from five to ten years. However, although they have studied translation and interpreting, neither works in SI.

Students

Of the students, 71.42 percent (5) are female and 28.57 percent (2) male, their age ranging from 20 to 30 years. Some 57.14 percent state that Spanish is their L1 and Arabic is their L2, while 42.85 percent state that Arabic is their L1 and Spanish is their L2. Three respondents also claim to have a third language (L3): two citing French and the other English.

Interpreters

Eighty-three percent (10) are male and 17 percent (2) female, with ages ranging from 25 to 60 years; 75 percent were between 35 and 50 years of age. Their professional experience ranges from five to over 20 years in AR-SP SI. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were university graduates. Of these, 42 percent had formal training in translation and interpreting, 25 percent had other university degrees (Semitic philology, Hispanic philology and political sciences) and 33 percent did not specify. Without taking into account university studies, 75 percent had had training in SI. The time spent in training in interpretation ranged from six months to four years.

Eighty-three percent state that Arabic is their L1, and 92 percent state that they interpret to and from Arabic. Fifty percent state that French is their L3, and 42 percent have L3 English. All respondents state that their L3 is passive (i.e., they only interpret from them into Arabic).

One hundred percent of simultaneous interpreters state that they have other professions apart from interpreting. Seventy-five percent work in translation, 50 percent teach translation and interpreting on an occasional or ongoing basis, 58 percent are self-employed workers, and the rest are employed by academic or public government institutions.

Therefore, we can consider that the group has extensive experience and a good level of training that will provide meaningful information for this study.

Specificities of Arabic–Spanish simultaneous interpreting

One hundred percent of the subjects state that their language combination has differentiating specificities. In the case of an affirmative response, the respondents were asked to select one or several options to explain the nature of the specificities. Results are shown in Figure 21.1.

In the 'others' section, the respondents were invited to explain the specificities, and three did so. The two first (a lecturer and an interpreter) highlighted the problem of diglossia and dialectal variation, given that speakers may use informal Arabic in formal contexts. The second explained code-switching, in which speakers change from Arabic to French or English and then suddenly change back to Arabic.

Additional difficulties and solutions

One hundred percent of the lecturers and 57.14 percent of the students stated that the specificities of the language combination posed additional difficulties, while 42.85 percent of the latter stated that they did not. 84 percent of interpreters stated that the specificities suppose an
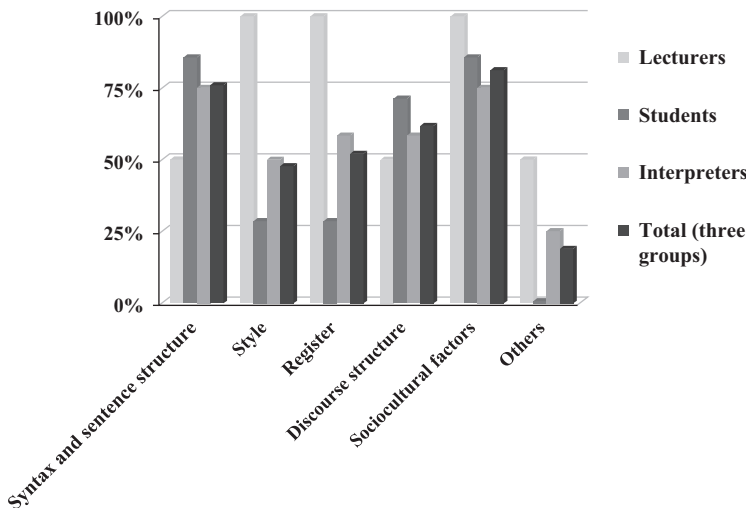

Figure 21.1 Specificities of training and professional practice of Arabic simultaneous interpreting: The Arabic-Spanish language combination

additional difficulty in the profession in comparison with other combinations that they also know, whereas 8 percent stated that they did not, and 8 percent did not respond. In the case of an affirmative response, the subjects were asked to explain how to solve the problem in an open question. The following solutions were suggested by the respondents:

(1) Teaching/learning Arabic–Spanish simultaneous interpreting:
- 'Expose the student to the largest possible number of Arabic diatopic variations when practicing SI, because not all students are accustomed to hearing speeches in variants that differ greatly from "standard" Arabic. The problem becomes more evident when the student is not a native Arabic speaker.'
- 'Carry out realistic training through the use of real teaching materials in the classroom.'
- 'Practice with suitable educational material from different Arab countries to acquire local terms and different accents. The lack of educational material is a problem for AR-SP SI.'
- 'Increase Arabic language competence.'

(2) Interpreting between Arabic and Spanish:
- 'Translate the meaning rather than the structure.'
- 'Slow interpreting down, summarize or paraphrase, particularly when the speaker uses a dialect that is difficult for the interpreter.'
- 'In literary events when very formal language or an archaic variety of Arabic is used, instead of translating, clarify the speakers' words or paraphrase.'
- 'If there is an alternation in code that poses difficulties for the interpreter, either between Arabic varieties or another language, turn to a booth colleague for help.'
- 'When interpreting to Arabic: given that numbers in Arabic are formed differently from those in Spanish, reorder them using the classic form in Arabic (e.g. "wāḥid wa tis'ūn wa tis'umia wa alf" for 1991).'

All these difficulties and solutions will be analyzed and discussed further.

Respondents' perception of AR-SP SI specific teaching approaches

One hundred percent of lecturers believe that a specific approach should be used when teaching AR-SP SI, as do 71.42 percent of AR-SP students, whereas 28.57 percent of these students disagree. As far as the interpreters were concerned—remember that 50 percent of respondents are translation and interpreting teachers—50 percent responded that a specific approach should be used, 25 percent did not feel it was necessary and 25 percent did not respond.

In the case of an affirmative response, the subjects were asked to explain the specific teaching approach and give a reason.

(1) According to lecturers and students:
The subjects (both lecturers and students) did not explain which specific teaching approach should be used, but they did justify the adoption of an approach of some kind. The following are some examples of their responses:
- 'The essence of general speech in Arabic and Spanish justifies the adoption of a specific didactic approach. A sober and concise speech of English is not the same as a flowery one in Arabic loaded with adjectives and religious references. This, in

addition to the linguistic varieties of Arabic, which comprise at least six large dialect groups', according to one of the lecturers.

- 'We start from the same theoretical basis, but when applying it one must consider the differentiating characteristics of each language combination. The cultural and religious elements of Arabic speech pose unique problems.'
- 'Sentence structure in Arabic and Spanish is very different.'
- 'Arabic and Spanish have different origins, compared to Romance languages, which are relatively easier to interpret due to their similarities. When interpreting from Arabic to Spanish considerable syntactic and morphosyntactic changes must be made which need more time and cognitive effort.'
- 'Arabic, as such, consists of a mixture of Modern Standard Arabic and dialects that are often used in speech. Despite this fact, the current syllabus does not take this into account.'

(2) *According to professional interpreters:*
- 'Strengthen the ability to summarize in order to eliminate the differences in speech between Arabic and Spanish (Arabic is much more wordy) and to save time.'
- 'Provide tools to order syntactic structures and correctly order numbers.'
- 'Strengthen cultural knowledge to solve problems arising from interpreting high-level registers (the Koran and poetry).'

These teaching approaches will be discussed in depth further.

Educational materials: source and subject matter studied

When asked about the source of educational materials used, the subjects responded as shown in Table 21.1.

Three interpreters also stated that they used 'live speeches by native speakers who are invited to class to speak about their field of specialization'; 'educational material from their own experience and that of their colleagues (technical and symbol glossaries for taking notes, etc.)'; and 'UN documents and all kinds of glossaries'.

They were also asked about the subject matter addressed in education and professional practice (see Table 21.2).

Table 21.1 Source of educational materials according to the three groups

Source	Lecturers	Students	Interpreters	Total (three groups)
Media (TV, radio, etc.)	100%	100%	41.66%	66.66%
Written press	100%	71.42%	50%	61.90%
Recordings from conferences, seminars, meetings, etc.	50%	85.71%	25%	47.61%
Internet (websites of organizations and institutions, etc.)	100%	28.75%	8.33%	23.80%
Scholarly publications	100%	14.28%	16.66%	23.80%
Others	-	-	25%	14.28%

Table 21.2 Subject matter addressed according to the three groups

Subject matter	Lecturers	Students	Interpreters	Total (three groups)
Law and international relations	50%	71.42%	100%	85.71%
Politics	100%	85.71%	75%	80.95%
Cooperation and development	100%	57.14%	91.66%	76.19%
Culture	100%	71.42%	50%	61.90%
Religion	100%	71.42%	50%	61.90%
Society	100%	71.42%	50%	61.90%
Economy	-	28.57%	75%	52.38%
Science and technology	-	-	33.33%	19.04%
Others	-	-	66.66%	38.09%

In the open answer field, the interpreters added: tourism, agriculture, water resources, sports, humanities, immigration and the environment.

Complementary aspects about AR-SP SI training and professional practice

These are the observations from the final open-response section:

(1) *Arabic–Spanish simultaneous interpreting training:*
  • 'The lack of suitable realistic educational material undermines AR-SP SI training.'
  • 'A special emphasis needs to be put on acquiring language competence in modern Arabic and its dialects before starting to practice SI.'
  • 'Training requires constant realistic practice in SI.'
(2) *Arabic–Spanish simultaneous interpreting professional practice:*
  • 'Interpreting in Arabic requires a high level of cultural knowledge.'
  • 'Due to the wealth of registers and varieties of Arabic, stronger language competencies are also needed.'
  • 'Greater adaptability, because Arabic does not have the same tradition of lexical expansion as other languages, and is constantly incorporating neologisms and new fields of terminology.'
  • 'This specificity also has other requirements including promoting subject matter specialization over the training period.'
  • 'The AR-SP combination needs to include revising the period of training, improving knowledge on the theory of interpretation, abandoning the idea that interpreters are born, not created, and raising awareness of the professional-ethical aspects.'

Discussion

The results presented above will be analyzed and discussed in this section as previously stated.

Profile of the respondents

The results obtained from the three groups show a notable diversity in linguistic profiles. For the lecturers, L1 is Arabic and Spanish is their L2, even though they are responsible

for teaching SI from Arabic to Spanish, which is not their native language. Of the students, 42.8 percent also have Arabic as L1 and Spanish as L2. To complete the triangle, 83.3 percent of interpreters surveyed indicate that Arabic is their L1 and Spanish is their L2, although 91.6 percent of the latter group claims to carry out SI from Spanish to Arabic and vice versa.

This situation, which in my opinion could greatly influence the training of new translators and interpreters, has begun to interest researchers in this field, e.g., Feria (2014), Mahyub Rayaa (2014) and Ilhami (2016), whose works provide a number of reasons for taking the linguistic and sociocultural profile of AR-SP students into consideration when planning the syllabus for this specialty. Feria (2014: 203) warns that:

> Arabic, especially in the case of students enrolled in the University of Granada, is not always a foreign or a completely foreign language. 'More than 30% of them with Arabic as a B language come from Morocco' (Quoted in Ilhami, 2016) and they are representative of the large structural variety in Moroccan linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. For some of them, particularly for graduates from Spanish primary and secondary schools in Morocco, according to Lázaro *et al.* (2010), written MSA is not strictly speaking an A language, but rather a C language, at the beginning of their training.

According to Ilhami (2016: 224–284), over 15 percent of the remaining Spanish students have 'Arab' or Berber families, including those socialized in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, who have Moroccan Arabic and/or Riffian Berber as a heritage language, but are functionally illiterate in Arabic when they commence their training. To complicate things even more, many students have Spanish as an A language, Arabic is not their heritage language at all, and their MSA is much closer to a C than to a B language.

All in all, at the University of Granada only about 35 percent of students with Arabic as a B language declare they had an advanced level of Spanish and an intermediate or an advanced level of Arabic when they enrolled in the program (Ilhami, 2016). Practical problems arising from such student heterogeneity in Arabic translation and interpreting classrooms in Spain, and all over the world, cannot be ignored.

In professional practice, the findings suggest that several factors including unexpected demand, the minority status of Arabic as a spoken language in Spain, and the lack of native Spanish-speaking professionals have forced the demand to be covered by biactive booths, i.e., interpreters interpret into their L1 and L2. In this regard, some of the findings of Al-Salman and Al-Khanji (2002: 608–624) for SI AR-EN should be noted. Interpreters surveyed by these authors preferred to interpret from Arabic into English (their L2) and were better at it than interpreting from English into Arabic (their L1).

However, it is worth noting that these results contradict the parameters of professional and teaching praxis of supporters of the *Western model*, which highlight the ease native speakers have in interpreting into their L1 and that interpreting into L2 could undermine quality (Seleskovitch and Lederer, 1989; Thiéry 1989, among others). Nevertheless, as Gile (2005: 20) mentions, many arguments in favor of one or another position are based more on personal experiences and ideology than on scientific facts.

Another important result shown from the lecturers' profiles is that neither of them works in SI, which is not the case for the other three linguistic combinations (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015: 141–142). This issue has been debated in the academic community almost since the beginning of regulated training in interpreting. Some outstanding authors (Mackintosh, 1995: 120; Weber, 1989: 17; Iglesias, 2003: 102–103) consider that professional experience in interpreting

guarantees quality education, as it brings experience into the classroom. Nevertheless, in spite of the advantages, other authors including Pöchhacker (1992: 219) and Collados (2000: 232) argue that the teacher-interpreter profile has some serious educational limitations. If we accept that professional experience in conference interpreting is necessary for teaching, the academic community must also agree that interpreters involved in teaching should be familiarized with basic theoretical concepts of interpreting.

Specificities of Arabic–Spanish simultaneous interpreting

In the light of these results, it is clear that peculiarities are inherent to this language combination. Regarding the nature of these specificities, several differences between the three groups can be appreciated (see Figure 21.1). Below we analyze and discuss the most important specificities.

Linguistic and cultural distance between Arabic and Spanish

Obviously, the lack of formal symmetry referred to by the respondents can be explained by the linguistic distance, a variable that is difficult to measure and on which, as far as I know, there are no empirical data concerning Arabic and Spanish (Borin and Saxena, 2013). In any case, here we are not interested in the distance itself, but rather its consequences, such as the absence of shared concepts between the two cultures, requiring a higher cognitive capacity on the part of the interpreter and the need to apply strategies of paraphrase and reformulation to get the message across. Beenstock *et al.* (2001) and Chiswick and Miller (2005) have examined the consequences of linguistic and cultural distance with data related to language competence in Hebrew and English between immigrants in Israel, the United States and Canada. These authors' results clearly show the consequences of distance between English and Arabic, and at the same time the difference between Arabic and Hebrew.

The respondents also point out sociocultural factors as being one of the main specificities of this language combination. This cultural asymmetry and its influence on the process of translation (Hatim, 1997) and interpretation (Al-Salman and Al-Khanji, 2002: 624; Hassan, 2009; Mahyub Rayaa and Zarrouk, 2013) has already been made evident in specialized literature. The interpreters surveyed provided a revealing insight by stressing that the cultural and linguistic differences intermingle, in the sense that cultural asymmetry gives rise to difficulties at a formal level. The subjects make specific note of the added difficulties due to the Islamic religious and legal terminology, which often has no equivalent in Spanish.

The linguistic and cultural distance between Arabic and Spanish has also been addressed in the field of community interpreting by researchers including Feria (1999) and Ortega (2010). Although this chapter addresses SI, a different modality from community interpreting, the cultural distance is underlined since we refer to the same languages and their speakers and, ultimately, to a similar process of interpretation. In fact, the above-mentioned authors indicate that, in order to guarantee satisfactory AR-SP interpreting, the interpreter should be able to manage cultural differences and adapt to the register used by the different participants in a conversation.

Language variation

Independently of the linguistic difference between Arabic and Spanish, the respondents underline the difficulty caused by a diglossic, multiglossic and pluriglossic linguistic reality

(Badawi, 1973; Youssi, 1983; Versteegh, 1997; Lamrani, 2002). The literature highlights that, although diglossia 'is not exceptional in itself, it is interesting that the distance between extreme registers (in Arabic) is far greater than that in other languages in our environment' (Ferrando, 2001: 136). This situation, as we can see, is a major problem even for interpreters with ample experience and whose L1 is Arabic.

Although code-switching between different varieties of Arabic increases with the spontaneity of speech, speakers also use it in formal speech to explain a concept they believe unfamiliar to the audience, give spontaneity and empathize with the public, employ a humoristic or ironic tone, resort to intertextuality, or play with the different meanings of a word or expression in different registers (Holes, 1993: 13–45; Bassiouney, 2006: 3–14; Moshref, 2012: 1–21). In any case, when using a formal register, diaphasic variation becomes more evident, particularly in accents, which is similar to what occurs in combinations with English or French.

Although the respondents do not mention it, not everything in the multiglossic reality is negative for interpreters, as long as they know the dialect utilized by the speaker: spontaneous dialogues in dialect are generally less dense, less redundant and more fluid than speeches in MSA, especially those that are read.

Respondents show in their answers that they believe that language variation is not an option for SI interpreters, who have to use MSA due to the formality of the circumstances in which they interpret—conferences, meetings and so on. Nevertheless, this situation is reversed in the case of consecutive and bilateral community interpreting, in which interpreters normally use informal Arabic, unless asked to do otherwise (Feria, 1999; Taibi, 2006). Consequently, in practice when employing a team of interpreters, the linguistic profile of speakers or Arabic clients and their preferences must be considered.

Terminological variation and code-switching

The respondents also highlight the difficulty of terminological variation, which in Arabic occurs both in terms representing different concepts and in concepts that are expressed differently in different countries. This issue has already been covered by Aamami (1997) regarding fisheries, Wilmsen (2003: 77) regarding agriculture and food, and Wilmsen and Osama Youssef (2009: 191–210). The latter work highlights that even though the phenomenon exists in other languages, such as English, in Arabic terminological variation affects all scientific and technology-related disciplines.

This variation dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Middle East and Egypt began the modernization of Arabic and the coining of terms for modern science and technology (Abdul Aziz, 2003; Crozet, 2003). The situation worsened throughout the twentieth century under the influence of colonial languages, and although efforts were made to normalize the terms and neologisms (e.g., the Jordan Academy of Arabic, 2012–2015[3]), there is nothing to indicate that the problem is likely to be solved in the short term.

A consequence of this variation is the use of Arabic terms combined with their equivalents in a foreign language, mentioned by one of the respondents. This type of code-switching was noted both in the formal and informal variety and allows speakers, often with specialized training in English or French, to avoid the uncertainty caused by terminological variation in Arabic. The phenomenon has been described by Abulghar (2003) in the field of medicine and is documented in real speeches interpreted in Mahyub Rayaa and Zarrouk (2013: 23–43).

Respondents' perception of AR-SP SI specific teaching approaches

The perception of respondents who have received training in SI or who currently teach it and at the same time work as simultaneous interpreters, supports the view that educational activities should take the specificities of this linguistic combination into account. Ultimately, their responses reflect the findings in all specialized literature including Al-Salman and Al-Khanji (2002) and Haddad (2008), who call for the adaptation of exercises used in postgraduate programs in interpreting in the University of Ottawa (Canada) for those used in Syrian universities;[4] Hassan (2009) supports the adaptation of training in SI for the AR-FR combination, and Feria (2014), Mahyub Rayaa (2015) and Ilhami (2016) call for the adoption of a specific approach for teaching AR-SP translation and interpreting, which considers its surrounding linguistic, sociocultural and professional reality.

For AR-SP, it is especially important to strengthen the technique of syntactic and semantic anticipation from contextual and extra-linguistic clues and phrasal units. The greater the interpreters' linguistic competence, the greater their ability to anticipate speech structures and to gain knowledge of the type of text and communicative situation (such as a conference), enabling them to carry out extra-linguistic anticipation based on speaker profiles, the needs of the public, their interest and position on the topic (Wilss, 1978: 343; Gile, 1995: 178).

Such a specific training approach, which would take into account the peculiarities of the Arabic language and its interpretation into other languages belonging to a different language family, could also be extrapolated to other combinations including Arabic and other Indo-European languages (AR-EN, AR-FR, AR-DE, etc.), given that, in principle, they have similar asymmetries, as pointed out by authors including Hassan (2009) for AR-FR, and Khogali (2012) for AR-EN.

Learning materials

The lack of specific materials for teaching and learning AR-SP SI is an aspect that both teachers and students point out. The lack of learning materials, particularly in audiovisual format, leads to the frequent use of the written press in this combination (see Table 21.1). This has certain disadvantages, given that newspaper articles in Arabic have specific characteristics and are not written to be read aloud in public. Audio recordings are also used, but these do not give the learner visual contact with the speaker or the possibility of interaction with their body language (Harris, 1992: 264; Gile, 1995: 154).

It therefore seems innovative that current SI training has adopted the functionalist approach of 'the communicative event as hypertext' (Pöchhacker, 2004), as this requires the introduction of realistic speeches that cover all communicative situations occurring during professional practice. However, further research is required regarding the homogenization of difficulty parameters in these educational materials and their gradation in line with learning stages (Manuel, 2005: 150–154).

The subject area dealt with in both training and professional practice is characterized by its wide variety. As lecturers do not work in SI, the selection of topics in the training phase may be a result of more subjective criteria or criteria of other language combinations taught in the same faculty. It is worth noting that during the training period neither the topic of science and technology nor the topic of economy are covered. The data collected do not shed light on the exact reasons why these areas are not covered.

However, in professional practice, which is equally variable, there is often demand for work on economic and scientific-technological topics, suggesting that their absence from AR-SP SI

training is not justified. Mahyub Rayaa and Zarrouk (2013: 48–65) give samples of realistic speeches which have been interpreted and deal with economic and scientific-technological areas. These areas require specialized training which, in the light of the results shown here, has not been provided.

Conclusions and future research perspectives

The main conclusions of the exploratory study according to the objectives proposed are as follows:

Profile of the respondents

1. The sample of the three groups surveyed is highly representative of the reality of teaching and working in AR-SP SI and comprised lecturers, students and professional interpreters with extensive experience, some of whom also have experience as teachers.
2. The linguistic profile of the three groups is heterogeneous, with the combination L1 Arabic, L2 Spanish and L3 French and English (in this order) being that of the majority.
3. Training in AR-SP SI is taught by lecturers who do not work in SI professionally.
4. All AR-SP interpreters practice other professions in addition to interpreting.

Specificities of Arabic–Spanish simultaneous interpreting

5. The subjects clearly agree that AR-SP SI has specificities due to different types of asymmetry, which also notably occur in the professional environment.
6. The subjects consider that the asymmetry in the AR-SP combination affects linguistic and sociocultural levels that intertwine, and that this asymmetry is more accented in the AR-SP combination than in the SP-EN and SP-FR combinations that interpreters work in.
7. The subjects highlight the following specificities: linguistic distance, language and terminological variation (diatopic and diastratic variation and code-switching between Arabic, English and French), Arabic intertextuality (Koran and poetry) and cultural distance.
8. The subjects' opinions, apart from being credible due to their extensive professional and teaching experience, coincide with all previous literature on AR-EN and AR-FR combinations.

Training approaches

9. The subjects with training and teaching experience agree that, contrary to the views defended by the Theory of Sense, these specificities should be taken into account in training, which should be adapted to each language combination.
10. The previous conclusion requires the definition of a specific theoretical-teaching framework for Arabic SI. There is an acute need for such a specific framework, currently lacking in interpreter training, with a special focus on asymmetries, in line with proposals in the literature for other asymmetric language pairs.
11. The previous conclusion could also be extrapolated to other linguistic combinations that include Arabic and other Indo-European languages (AR-EN, AR-FR, AR-DE, etc.), given that in principle they show similar asymmetries.

Learning materials

12. Learning materials for AR-SP training are scarce and outdated, meaning that written press has to be used with the disadvantages that this source implies when teaching SI.
13. There is an urgent need to compile learning materials that are specific to Arabic SI training and that address the peculiarities mentioned by the respondents and the specificity of the educational approach.
14. Given the particular importance of variation in Arabic as a specific difficulty, students should be taught AR-SP SI using spontaneous speeches that familiarize them with different Arabic accents and registers.
15. In both training and professional practice, a high level of heterogeneity is observed in topics covered.
16. Scientific, technological and economic topics are not addressed in the AR-SP training phase, although they occur with relative frequency in professional practice. Given their additional degree of terminological and conceptual specialization, their inclusion in training new interpreters is recommended.

Most of the above conclusions support previous literature (Wilmsen, 2003; Feria, 2014; Ilhami, 2016, etc.), which calls for a revision of the syllabus in line with the suggestion of Hassan (2009). The peculiarities observed in the profile of the three groups (lecturers, students and interpreters) also seem to support these findings.

Finally, the findings described above open up various lines of empirical research in the future, such as the following:

1. To measure the effect of Arabic–Spanish linguistic distance on real SI, in order to validate or reject the claims made both by the respondents and in the specialized literature regarding word and phrase order and differences in discourse.
2. To measure the real index of variation and alternation of codes between Arabic speakers in formal SI contexts and their effect on real interpreting.
3. The previous conclusion [11] may lead to research on asymmetries in other language combinations with Arabic and other Indo-European languages that are not included in the cultural area of the Islamic world.
4. To study the parameters of difficulty in Arabic speeches used in teaching SI and propose a progressive scale, on the basis of which a corpus of real speeches in Arabic could be compiled for SI training. From these parameters, collect and propose a corpus of real speeches in Arabic to teach interpreting.

Notes

1 Variation according to place or geographical variation.
2 Variation according to social class or to the social group to which a speaker feels they belong.
3 See: http://goo.gl/nKnd3p.
4 By adopting some training stages (memory, sight translation and sight interpretation) from the screening instruments used to select applicants for the Graduate Diploma Program at the University of Ottawa, appropriately locating them on the different rungs and specifying their aims (Haddad, 2008: 31).

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