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Interlingual respeaking training for simultaneous interpreting trainees: new opportunities in Media Accessibility

Abstract

Interlingual Live Subtitling (ILS) provides dual accessibility for live events offering multilingual accessibility to the content of a given source text in another language, catering at the same time for a written product for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences who might not have proper access to the audio source. ILS stands at the crossroads of audiovisual translation, media accessibility and simultaneous interpreting (ROMERO-FRESCO & ALONSO-BACIGALUPE 2022) and it is currently provided through different methods. One human-mediated mode is of ILS – or Speech-to-text interpreting (STTI) – is the technique of respeaking, which shares much common ground with interpreting itself. As previous research has shown (SZARKOWKA ET AL. 2018, PÖCHHCKER & REMAEL 2019, DAWSON 2020), interpreters as well as subtitlers are the best suited profiles to be trained for respeaking, as it is by definition an interpretation in its first stage. Given the growing demand for ILS services, it is believed it can be crucial to educate interpreters in respeaking and train professionals in this field. Simultaneous interpreting (SI) training is quite straightforward in the interlingual respeaking learning process, nevertheless aim of this contribution is to praise the benefits that SI courses can yield by including an interlingual respeaking coaching in the training, highlighting how respeaking can help strengthening some interpreters' skills.

Keywords: *media accessibility, live subtitling, Speech-to-text interpreting, respeaking, simultaneous interpreting.*

1. Introduction

Respeaking is one of the currently used methods to produce live subtitles via speech-recognition (SR) based systems. Romero-Fresco (2011) defines respeaking as “a technique in which a respeaker listens to the original sound of a live programme or event and respeaks it, including punctuation marks and some specific features for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing audience, to a speech recognition software, which turns the recognized utterances into subtitles displayed on screen with the shortest possible delay” (ROMERO-FRESCO 2011: 1). Drawing also on some of the first attempt of its definition (EUGENI 2006, 2008), respeaking is basically a simultaneous reformulation of an audio source input into a SR software, with the elicitation of punctuation marks, while still listening to the source audio and monitoring the creation of text on the screen.

As for interlingual respeaking, according to Romero-Fresco and Alonso-Bacigalupe (2022: 3) it is considered one of the most promising forms of STTI, intersecting the fields of audiovisual translation (AVT), Media Accessibility (MA) and Simultaneous Interpreting (SI) and situating between human-mediated translation and automatic language processing systems (GRECO & JANKOWSKA

2020).

In line with the demand for a barrier-free accessible to all communication, MA accounts not only for sensory but also to linguistic barriers (DIAZ-CINTAS 2005) and, in this frame, interlingual respeaking does tackle both auditory accessibility needs – including subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) features in the process – as well as multilingual accessibility given its interlingual nature.

This proposal primarily aims at shedding light on the opportunity than can be grasped in teaching to interpreting trainees the technique of interlingual respeaking, given their many similarities. Secondly, the purpose is to highlight how respeaking training can be beneficial to SI performance, sharing feedbacks from interpreting students who were tutored in intralingual and interlingual respeaking. The course was a novelty for the trainees as more than 85% of them had never approached the topic of MA or ILS and they did not know what respeaking was, suggesting how shallow awareness concerning accessibility in this field is, something even more striking in a multicultural, technological era, at an academic level and, above all, in a master's degree in translation and interpreting. The first part of this article is dedicated to the description of similarities shared by SI and interlingual respeaking in terms of competence-oriented tasks, drawing upon some recent research in the field. Then, attention is given to the positive outcomes and effects that participants to the training in respeaking at the University of Genoa detected in their interpreting performance. In doing so, some qualitative data gathered during a Doctoral research together with answers to some questionnaires submitted to the participants to the study are briefly outlined.

2. Skills and competences: from simultaneous interpreting to interlingual respeaking

Although interlingual respeaking overlaps even more with SI with the code shifting from L1 to L2, intralingual respeaking intrinsic simultaneity of cognitive tasks such as listening, reformulating, dictating, monitoring and editing while still listening also heavily draws upon interpreting skills of split attention, multitasking and memory, among others (SZARKOWSKA ET AL. 2017; ALIPRANDI & VERRUSO 2006). Albeit the focus here is placed on interlingual respeaking training specifically, reference to its intralingual variation both in terms of skills involved and training will be made. Some attempts were dedicated to thoroughly inform respeaking training design, first intralingually and only more recently also interlingually. Over the last decade research in the field has bloomed, investigating more on the relationship between respeaking and both SI and subtitling, in intralingual but also interlingual respeaking (ROMERO-FRESCO 2015A; CHMIEL ET AL. 2017, 2017A; SZARKOWSKA ET AL. 2017, 2018; DAWSON 2019, 2020; SANDRELLI 2020), trying to research and answer to the more generic question "Who are live subtitlers?" (ROBERT ET AL. 2019a) and investigating their tasks through a competence-oriented lens (PÖCHHACKER & REMAEL 2019).

If we think to the whole process of interpreting or respeaking, in both situations some general competence coincide, such as world knowledge – also intended as the constant update on latest news – and knowledge of the subject matter developed in the task, professional and interpersonal skills, as well as linguistic and cultural competence, and multitasking.

As for SI and interlingual respeaking specifically, some interpreting skills such as bilingual competence, or an excellent command of the working languages are to be added. Pöchhacker and Remael (2019) present the first competence model for interlingual respeaking by carrying out a descriptive analysis of the process involved in the process, bringing it down to: knowledge of respeaking task and process, research and preparation, translation, multitasking, audiovisual monitoring, and editing.

Drawing on some recent research in the field concerning a research-informed professional profile for interlingual respeakers (PÖCHHACKER & REMAEL 2019; DAWSON 2020; DAVITTI & SANDRELLI 2020; DAWSON & ROMERO-FRESCO 2021), it is attempted to highlight the common features of SI and interlingual respeaking. Image 1 below shows which skills are shared between the two in the different stages of the processes, with particular attention (in yellow) to which additional ones are required only for the latter. Before the task both interpreters and respeakers need to undergo a terminological and thematic preparation about the subject matter. In this stage, for the respeaking task the SR engine should also be prepared and trained. When performing in the task, cognitive skills are activated and Gile's Effort Models in interpreting (GILE 1992, 1995, 2015) are a consistent approach to analyze the different similar components involved such as working memory, coordination and control, and listening comprehension. To this, Pöchhacker & Remael (2019) add strategic reformulation ("Production", according to Gile) and specifically for respeaking also dictation and monitoring and correction are added. To be noticed that here "expression" is also added, in an attempt to differentiate it from strategic reformulation, with a specific focus on the ability of expressing and articulate as well as pronounce words properly in the target language (TL). At this stage, respeakers need to add dictation to the SR software, monitoring of the produced written text on the screen and, if some error is detected, editing and correction. Furthermore, they need to be aware of technical conventions and use of SDH features such as speakers' identification labels or colors, and sounds-noises description. In the final stage, after the task is completed, both interpreters and respeakers make a debriefing to highlight strengths and weaknesses of their performance. Usually, quality check is more efficiently carried out for respeaking tasks since the written output of the reformulation and the dictation are available and therefore it is easier and more reliable, but nothing prevents to carry out a check on a recorded SI performance, for example. In addition, respeakers update the SR database with new terminology.

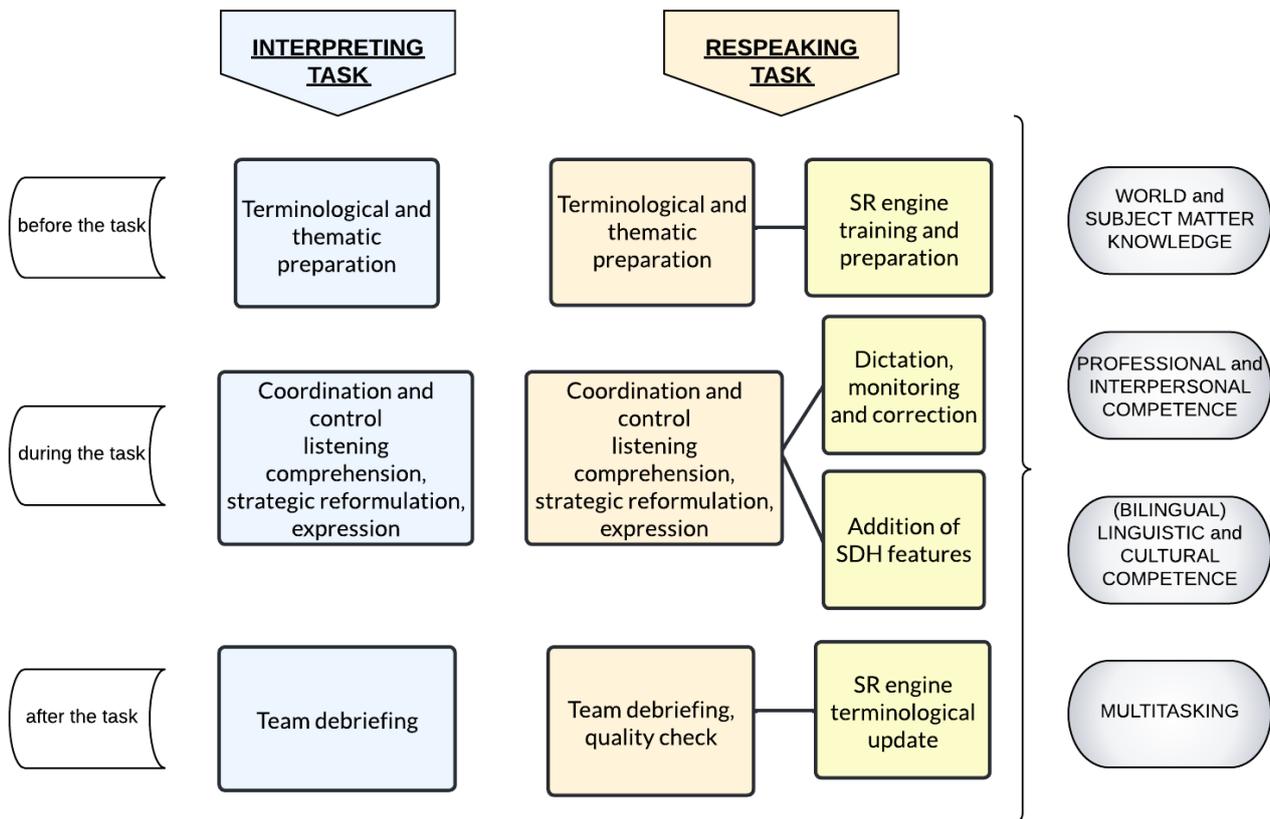


Image 1. Competences involved in SI and interlingual respeaking processes

3. But, can interpreters be better respeakers?

The competence profile outlined should serve as the starting point to design a training programme for ILS through respeaking. In an attempt to investigate the most suitable professional profiles to carry out respeaking tasks thanks to the different competences required, subtitlers and interpreters appeared to be valid candidates (SZARKOWSKA ET AL. 2018; DAWSON 2019, 2020). In both studies participants with different academic and professional backgrounds – simultaneous interpreters, subtitlers, and intralingual respeakers – were tested in both intralingual and interlingual respeaking performances.

To the question “Are interpreters better respeakers?” Szarkowska et al. (2018) reply with an investigation involving 57 participants (22 interpreters, 23 translators and 12 control participants) and point out that interpreters did consistently achieve higher scores in output assessment than other groups. Dawson (2019) tested firstly 9 participants (2 subtitlers, 3 subtitlers and respeakers, 2 subtitlers and interpreters, 1 interpreter and respeaker, and 1 subtitlers, interpreter and respeaker) suggesting that interpreters would be the best suited for the task. Afterwards (2020), another study tested 27 participants (13 with previous experience in interpreting, and 14 with some subtitling experience being all of them interpreting students) in which overall, both interpreters and subtitlers were observed to be suited for the task, although some differences were noticed in performance ratings between the two groups. The study also highlighted that an interlingual respeaking training programme needs to develop some task-specific skills, some of which inter-

preters already tame while subtitlers do not (multitasking, short-term memory to name but a few), and vice versa (e.g. SDH features, subtitles segmentation and duration, maximum characters and words per line etc.).

Overall, this allowed to shed light on the need for specific training for respeakers, drawing from both SI and pre-recorded subtitling, while specific tasks for respeaking are required such as knowledge on how the SR works, dictation to the software, and live editing. Given the many similarities shared with interlingual respeaking, it already seems reasonable as well as time and effort efficient to exploit so many specific and highly-technical skills of trainees in interpreting and seize the opportunity to train them also for accessibility through live subtitling (LS).

4. Training programmes in intra and interlingual respeaking

A recent increase in AVT and accessibility services is the result of new legislation and accessibility guidelines at a European level, such as the European Accessibility Act (2019), with the aim of increasing quantity and improving quality of SDH and AD services (ROMERO-FRESCO 2019b), as well as LS and ILS specifically. As a consequence, appropriate training plays an essential role in improving quality and setting standard requirements for the different MA services provided.

Intralingual LS has become a widely used professional practice and has begun to be recognized at an academic level over the past two decades (EUGENI & BERNABÉ 2019; ROBERT ET AL. 2019b). Intralingual LS through respeaking, more specifically, has been practiced from 2001 (ROMERO-FRESCO 2011) and the interest in the training of professionals in the field grew not long afterwards. As for intralingual respeaking, some training models were previously proposed (ARUMÍ RIBAS & ROMERO-FRESCO 2008; ROMERO-FRESCO 2012), helping to inform the skills and competences required by the job, as detailed in the paragraph above.

Nowadays at a European level few Universities offer courses on intra or interlingual LS or respeaking and, if so, they are only short modules in AVT or Conference Interpreting master’s degrees, therefore mirroring a need for better training. Among them, the University of Antwerp (Belgium), the University of Warsaw (Poland), and the University of Roehampton (UK) offer formal training in respeaking from 3 to 6 months, while the Universidad de Vigo (Spain) offers a five-month online module in Intralingual Respeaking in English, Spanish and Galician and a three-month online module on interlingual respeaking in the same languages (ROMERO-FRESCO 2018). In addition, the University of Leeds (UK), the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), and the University of Parma (Italy) provide introductory workshops on respeaking, as well as the University of Genoa (Italy), having offered a first interlingual respeaking training in 2020 (cfr. PAGANO 2022). In the EU frame are also worth mentioning the School of Applied Linguistics of the Zurich University (Switzerland) and the introductory course on respeaking at the University of Mons (Belgium) (EUGENI & BERNABÉ 2019). One last online self-paced course in intralingual LS – specifically respeaking and velotyping methods – which is worthy of note is the European project LTA¹ (Live Text Access), covering introduction to accessibility, linguistic and IT competences as well as professional skills

¹ For more information on the LTA project, please visit: <https://ltaproject.eu>.

required in this field.

Concerning interlingual respeaking, despite its complexity and technicality due to the many different tasks it involves, it was deemed feasible and promising (DAWSON 2019; MOORES 2020) also among student-level trainees (DAVITTI & SANDRELLI 2020). The first all-encompassing online, open-access training proposal of ILS dates back to 2020 by the European co-funded project ILSA² (Interlingual Live Subtitling for Access) through which the first training course on ILS was developed. Among other objectives, the project aimed at bridging the gap between intra and interlingual live subtitling as recognized professional practices (ROBERT ET AL. 2019b) by identifying the profile of the interlingual live subtitler. Moreover, through a Doctoral research that intertwined with the ILSA project (DAWSON 2020) a research-informed training model for interlingual respeaking was also investigated, only partially coinciding with the ILSA course as they differed in purpose, structure and modules, and since the latter was conceived to be integrated in Higher Education courses, providing open-access learning resources and materials. The training model instead "can be used as a guide to develop future interlingual respeaking training" (DAWSON 2020: 231). In other words, the research-informed model can help design a training to be integrated as part of a master's program, or adapted to other needs of modules on respeaking.

This is precisely what was done for the interlingual respeaking training at the University of Genoa, Department of Modern Languages and Cultures (IBID.), drawing upon both the training model by Dawson, and the ILSA course. It was the very first time that a training concerning the fields of SDH and MA through LS was provided and the chance was presented thanks to the author's -doctoral research in this field. Interestingly, students who subscribed had very little or no knowledge about audiovisual accessibility needs, neither they knew what the technique of respeaking was. They also subscribed entirely voluntarily, either because curious about the unknown topic, or because they were told at some point of the increasing demand for respeaking and it seemed to them relevant and urgent to grasp this training chance. Two trainings were delivered, the first in the academic year 2020/21 from English to Italian (15 students), and the second in 2021/22 from Spanish to Italian (5 students). Both courses were offered online throughout a three-month period (twelve weeks training plus the testing), and lasted approximately 70 hours (synchronous lessons and individual exercises). Of the 20 students, 16 of them previously attended some workshops or modules in pre-recorded subtitling or SDH, 17 had previous experience in SI, while 3 had had some experience in other types of interpretation (dialogue or consecutive) and had carried out only propaedeutic exercises to SI.

Students were introduced to the interlingual respeaking technique gradually, as a combination of both subtitling and SI. As regards the modules, the structure was the following: theoretical introduction on MA, accessibility and LS methods; introduction to subtitling and SDH; review of SI technique; introduction to the SR software use and intralingual respeaking practice; interlingual respeaking practice. The first introductory part was deemed not only necessary but very useful, since students can benefit greatly in seeing accessibility itself as a critical component to media creation rather than an afterthought (YOUNGBLOOD, TIRUMALA & GALVES 2018). Therefore a top-

² For more information on the ILSA project, please visit: <http://galmaobservatory.eu/projects/interlingual-live-subtitling-for-access-ilsa>.

down approach from the generic to the specific (audiovisual accessibility, auditory impairment, MA through LS, ILS, intralingual and interlingual respeaking techniques) instead of a bottom-up methodology (learning how to subtitle and only after integrating SDH features or LS concerns, and try to understand why and how they can cater for accessibility needs) was adopted. Then, why is it important to train interpreting trainees for accessibility?

4.1 The experience at the University of Genoa

At the end of both courses in interlingual respeaking, the participants were asked to complete two anonymous questionnaires via Google Forms³. One was a satisfaction questionnaire and aimed at gathering feedbacks and thoughts on the recently completed training experience, while the second wanted to monitor students’ improvement in terms of preparation and awareness in the field of respeaking and MA respectively.

Some questions sought to receive feedbacks on the training and also to find out about the future intentions of the students in continuing their training in interlingual respeaking, and whether they would advise colleagues or classmates to enroll to a similar training; if the answer was positive, they were asked to briefly comment on why. All of the 20 students who participated to the course marked ‘yes’, though only some of the comments on this are reported below (all answers were given in Italian, the following are the author’s translations of the original versions):

1. It is a relatively unknown branch of the linguistic services field; it is useful for strengthening SI; in the future it could supersede SI, or at least radically change conference interpreting as we know it.
2. The workshop allows for deepening knowledge of a relatively unknown use of SI [respeaking] through which content is made accessible. I do think this is a very gratifying task at a personal level.
3. This experience offers the opportunity of learning and being confronted with a new practice that is not included in the standard master’s course [at our University].
4. The training is particularly interesting for those who already are interested in SI. [Through it,] you can discover a discipline that has never been approached before [at our University], and that can be refined for professional use in the future.
5. [The course] offers the chance of acquiring new skills, discovering a new field which is still relatively unknown, and improving one’s SI abilities.

³ All reference questionnaires from both the interlingual respeaking trainings (2020/21 and 2021/22) are available at: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VDDt0m7v8JXdzvnPkN3FbydY2-PD0gaQ?usp=sharing>, together with pre-workshop and post-experiment questionnaires of the Doctoral research (cfr. PAGANO 2022).

6. [Respeaking] is unfortunately still in its infancy and not widely acknowledged, but it can be very useful in improving one's SI abilities.
7. It is an insightful workshop that introduced a method of subtitling that I did not know about. It allowed me to develop new skills and improve my speaking competences.
8. I find it an amazing opportunity to learn something new and to acquire new skills, something particularly useful from a professional perspective. [It is also useful to] learn how to use new software.
9. I believe it is a useful workshop for anyone who wants to study languages since it widens horizons and offers new opportunities. It allows to use in full one's abilities and it is also quite enjoyable since you learn how live subtitles work, you learn how to deal with obstacles and to grasp the essential meaning to translate during an interpreting task. It is very stimulating and fruitful.

Several insights on the relation between and the common ground shared by SI and interlingual respeaking can be grasped by these comments. First, in almost all the iterations students highlighted that respeaking is still very little known – or not as widely as it should – and that they did not know it since it is rare to find a training on it at a higher-education level. Second, they emphasized the similarity between interlingual respeaking and SI (more than subtitling), suggesting they could greatly benefit from a combined training in which both techniques are taught. Third, it is stressed how interlingual respeaking training allows for acquisition of new skills while, at the same time, strengthening and training many others already gained that are useful for their academic curriculum. Last but not least, as for professional opportunities, many touched on respeaking as a natural evolution of SI as it is, and of Conference Interpreting as a whole.

Students were also asked about any competences they felt they had acquired or enhanced thanks to the modules they completed and, again, many pointed out improvements in their SI technique thanks to the several skills it shares with respeaking. Among them, trainees indicated split attention, working under pressure, multitasking, problem solving, IT and specific software competences, proficiency improvement in L1 and L2, advance in active listening comprehension, and expression (production). As newly acquired and enhanced skills they identified:

- dictation and segmentation;
- audiovisual monitoring to allow for editions and corrections on screen, if needed;
- a higher-level multitasking (not only listening, comprehending and producing, but also monitoring and editing), and strengthened cognitive skills (short-term memory and split attention) due to the complexity of the process;
- the importance of output quality check.

Thanks to dictation they noticed as a result a better articulation and pronunciation of words on their side, to allow the SR software to properly recognize them, while segmentation allowed to shed light on the need for pauses between idea units, therefore leading to a good prosody and intonation when speaking. One participant notably pointed out that it was fundamental to "try to create in the first place an output that is as clear as possible, in order to intervene as little as possible on the TT". Another one lauded the acquisition of the ability to "deliver a performance with as few false starts and hesitations as possible". In respeaking, the voice output is taken through dictation by the SR software that transcribes anything it can grasp, therefore any false start, hesitation or mumbling results in one more word to be monitored and corrected on screen, hence more cognitive load and work to do. Clearing out the feed of such oral features and speech fillers helped students to do the same also in SI. As a result, their feed could be more pleasant and clearer to be listened to by the audience. It goes without saying that all such features can be a great gain for SI as well in managing output.

Audiovisual monitoring together with edition and correction is interconnected with the higher-level multitasking, the latter depending not only on listening, comprehending and expressing, but also checking the screen in search for errors and correcting them, if needed. One student also mentioned an enhancement in their anxiety management in working in front of other people and with new techniques and tools: as the different tasks need to be carried out, once accomplished the more complex assignment of interlingual respeaking, interpreting can be performed with reduced working anxiety and stress. As substantial gain both for both SI and ILS, reduction in reaction time was also detected due to the speed required. During the demanding and rapid task of interlingual respeaking, indeed, they highlighted the importance of selecting information, grasping the most relevant information in a speech, reformulating and reducing strategically, an aspect that can quite straightforwardly be beneficial to SI as well, leading to a neater and more accurate output as well as to a reduced *décalage*. It also seems relevant to highlight one given answer where a participant pointed out: "I undoubtedly improved my SI skills since I understood which essential parts must be transmitted to the audience, without 'being afraid' of saying too little". With this, together with previous comment 9 ("you learn how [...] to grasp the essential meaning to translate during an interpreting task") participants express the need in interlingual respeaking to condense some information in order to keep up with the multitude of tasks and the ST pace, suggesting that sometimes 'less is more' – in other words, it is better to do less but to do it right, i.e. respeak less information but make sure it is transcribed correctly, rather than produce nearly the whole but unintelligible content, also in SI.

Lastly, during the training their performances in interlingual respeaking were analyzed collectively in the class concerning linguistic accuracy by applying the NTR model (ROMERO-FRESCO & PÖCHHACKER 2017). Thanks to this, students also acknowledged an improvement in their linguistic analysis ability, stressing they increased self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in both SI and respeaking especially for the impact omissions, additions and substitutions of content can have on the audience.

The following Image 2 summarizes the benefits that newly acquired and enhanced skills through interlingual respeaking training (left side) can have on some frequent obstacles encountered by SI

trainees (on the right in light orange), with their subsequent positive effect (far right).

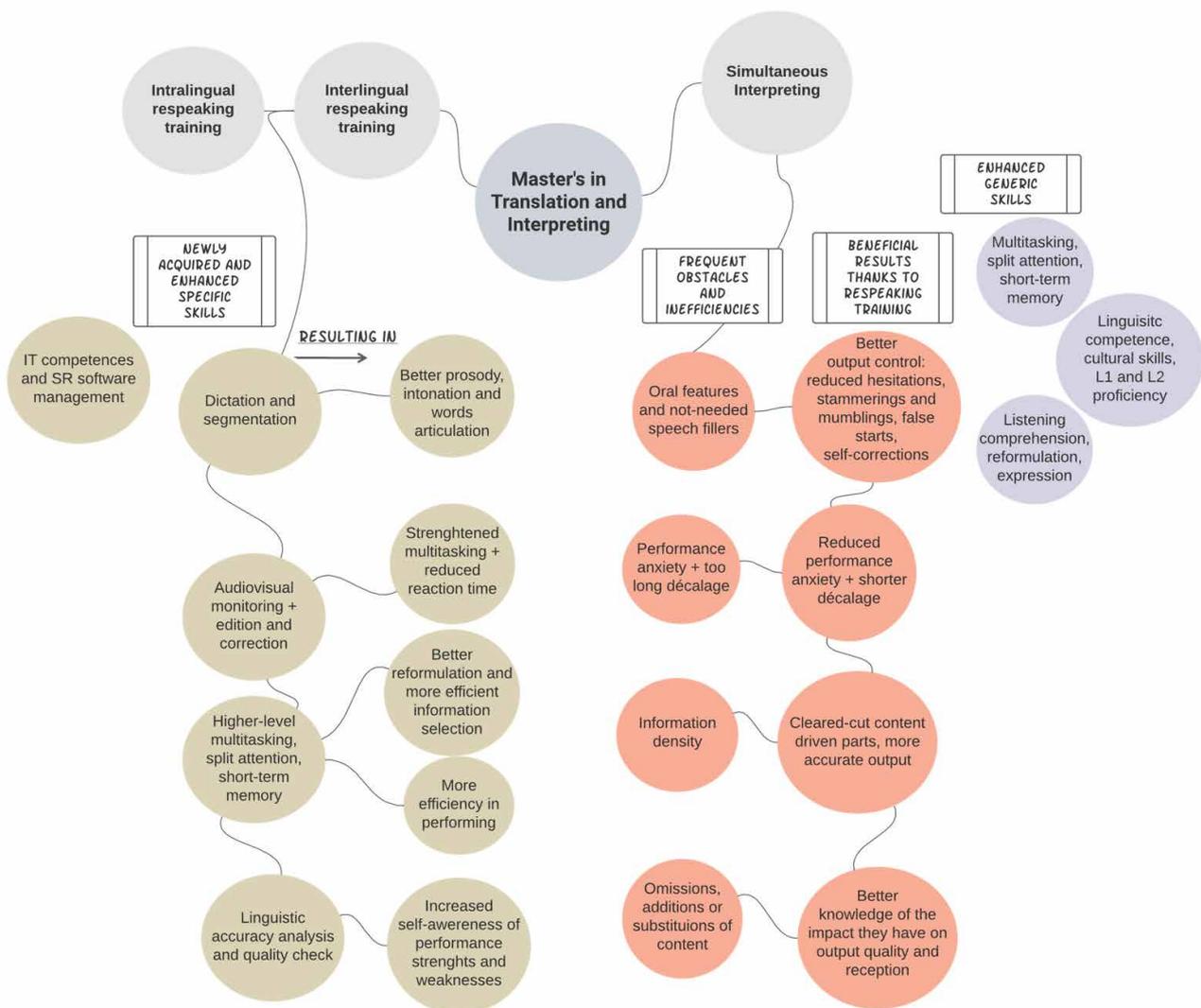


Image 2. Gains and benefits in SI through interlingual respesking training

5. Educating simultaneous interpreters for accessibility: conclusions

It must be stressed that SI performances were not closely monitored after the interlingual respesking training to detect and quantify the trainees' improvement curve in the highlighted skills. Nevertheless, the results obtained in the final testing on both courses completion in which students performed as interpreters, intralingual or interlingual respesking (cfr. PAGANO 2022) were quite satisfying, suggesting a substantial improvement.

Their background in simultaneous interpreting, translation competences and, in some cases, subtitling skills can be easily exploited in educating students in MA through respesking. If trained on how to interact with the SR software (specifically dictation, punctuation enunciation and segmentation) simultaneous interpreters have great potential in refining their interlingual respesking skills. Finally, if trained on how to cleanse their outputs of oral hindrances such as hesitations, re-

formulations on the go, false starts, and so on, ASR systems could process their audio inputs more easily in the speech-to-text process.

Although the answers and the qualitative data proposed refer to a quite small sample of participants – and therefore this work cannot be intended as exhaustive or comprehensive – the proposal can provide some relevant suggestions on training in this field through the trainees' opinions. Given that the better suited profiles for respeaking are both simultaneous interpreters and subtitlers, and the many similarities between the two techniques, it would be advisable to envisage a combined training in both SI and interlingual respeaking in Translation and Interpreting master's degrees. Academic courses in this area already train several – if not all – useful skills it is about time to gain the momentum and take a huge step forward towards a more inclusive and accessible audiovisual awareness.

Eloquently, answers to the questionnaires demonstrate particular enthusiasm by all the students that were interested in the subject matter, and this can be viewed as a call for accessibility in a field that already embraces it, and in which both could thrive. Furthermore, respeaking training can better educate students in the MA field and, specifically, in DHOH accessibility needs, raising most urgent awareness that, as shown, tend to lack in still so many academic landscapes, albeit strictly related to the topic. In this regard, it was striking how little students and participants knew about either SDH and MA: as seen, almost nobody knew what real-time subtitling for accessibility of non-hearing people entailed, still they sought more knowledge on it. On completion of training, they were more acquainted with the topic, but they were still eager to continue some form of training about it. To conclude, training interpreting students in interlingual respeaking could be very effective, and it is at the same time hoped that it could be fertile ground to raise awareness of the topic and train some much-needed professionals and experts in this field (GRECO 2019b), creating new job opportunities in the landscape of MA for interpreting trainees.

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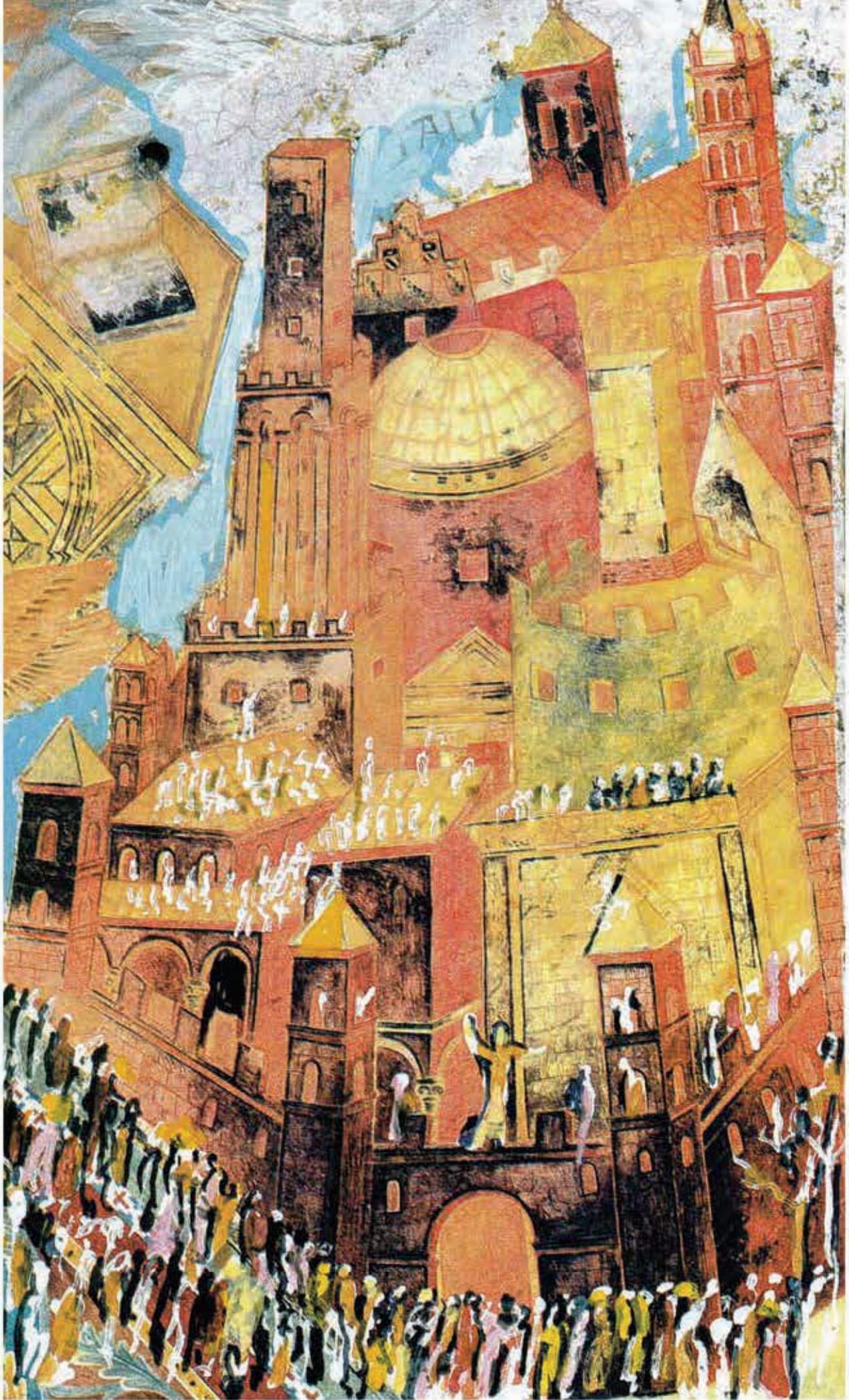
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