

# Analysis of face-threatening acts against telephone interpreters

RAQUEL LÁZARO GUTIÉRREZ  
Universidad de Alcalá. Group FITISPos-UAH

## Abstract

*Despite the growing research in telephone interpreting, there are still few studies addressing it systematically from a linguistic point of view, since the work that has been carried out focuses on aspects related to quality, the satisfaction of those involved, the working conditions of interpreters and the skills they must possess in order to carry out training proposals. The aim of this piece of research is, based on the pragmatics of language, to analyse the prevalence and characteristics of face-threatening acts addressed to interpreters. Telephone conversations constitute an example of distance communication as opposed to face-to-face communication. Besides, interpreted interactions can be considered as indirect since the recipient does not receive the source speech but the translation of it after an interpreter has rendered it in the required language. According to literature, in distance and indirect communication there is a high prevalence of face-threatening acts (FTAs). It is thus hypothesised that telephone-interpreted conversations, as an example of distance indirect communication, will contain a high number of FTAs. The high prevalence and difficulties of FTAs for telephone interpreters have been already signalled but existing studies have analysed FTAs broadly, without making speakers and addressees a variable of analysis. In this paper, we focus on speech acts that threaten the face of interpreters and describe the most frequent ones in our study.*

## Keywords

Telephone interpreting, dialogue interpreting, pragmatics, face-threatening acts, qualitative research, authentic discourse data.

The use of telephone interpreting (TI) has spread to a multitude of fields related to the provision of public and private services. Its popularity is related to its advantages, especially remarkable during the COVID-19 crisis, as TI is an ideal alternative to face-to-face interpreting. Other important factors include the improvement and spread of technology (telephones and computers are present now in all settings), cost reductions, language availability and immediacy, allowing for the provision of interpreters in a variety of languages in the fastest way possible. First used in Australia in 1973 (Ozolins 1998), TI arrived in Europe in the 1990s, particularly in the United Kingdom (Phelan 2001).

In Spain it began in 2004, when the company Dualia Teletraducciones introduced TI in public institutions. Other initiatives and companies, such as Interpret Solutions, joined later, and some innovative changes followed thanks to the appearance of smartphones, such as the Voze phone application developed by Migralingua, which allows any user to contact a telephone interpreter from their own mobile phone.

Given the recent implementation of TI worldwide, research in this field is still scarce, but it is increasing, as evidenced by the SHIFT project (<https://www.shiftinorality.eu/>) or the Galileo University-Company project “Telephone Interpreting”. Internationally, TI has attracted interest from scholars such as Oviatt/Cohen (1992), Wadensjö (1998), Rosenberg (2002), Verrept (2011), Ozolins (2011), Hlavac (2013), Castagnoli/Niemants (2018) and Russo *et al.* (2020), who focused on comparisons between telephone conversations with or without an interpreter, the training of these interpreters and the impact of technology.

In Spain, published studies focus mainly on evaluating the quality of the service through the collection of feedback from the user (e.g. Jaime Pérez 2015). The results of research developed by Martínez-Gómez (2008), Prieto (2008), Luque Martín (2008), and Murgu /Jiménez (2011), indicate a lack of knowledge about this new modality among professional interpreters. As stated by Pertusa Elorriaga (2012), telephone interpreters need specific skills to perform their tasks effectively without being physically present in the interaction. They lack information about most of the communicative situations that may occur, and technical difficulties that arise from the use of the telephone, such as the lack of coverage and connectivity, the use of deteriorated or old devices, or the incorrect use of equipment (Pertusa Elorriaga 2012).

As opposed to face-to-face communication, telephone conversations constitute an example of distance communication and, moreover, interpreted interactions can be considered indirect since a speaker’s discourse is reworked before reaching the final addressee. Some authors have already pointed at a greater occurrence of face-threatening acts (FTAs) in both distance and indirect communication (Simmons 1994; Locher 2010; Castro Cruz 2017). Telephone interpreter-mediated interactions constitute examples of both distance and indirect pieces of communication, so a high number of FTAs of different kinds are expected to be produced in them.

## 1. Theoretical framework: face threatening acts and dialogue interpreting

Goffman (1955) developed the concept of face-work, which is defined as a set of strategies that safeguard, protect and repair the face of speakers during socio-communicative interaction. Some years later, Brown/Levinson (1987) advanced politeness theory, which will be briefly discussed in this section. Politeness theory suggests there are two types of politeness: negative and positive. Negative politeness represents freedom from imposition, implies the right of individual action and is related to autonomy. Positive politeness refers to self-esteem and is linked to the desire to relate positively to others, showing awareness, involvement and commonality. The negative and positive aspects of politeness play a determining role in social interaction, and cooperation among all participants is needed to maintain everyone's face, either through positive or negative politeness. Negative face is threatened when the interlocutor's freedom of action is challenged, whereas threats against positive face occur when the speaker disregards or criticises his/her interlocutor's feelings, values, needs, opinions, or any aspect of his/her positive face. Normally, conversational partners expect their face to be respected. However, these expectations can be threatened by verbal, paraverbal or nonverbal FTAs.

Brown/Levinson (1987: 65) make a distinction between acts that threaten negative face and those that threaten positive face. Those acts that primarily threaten the addressee's negative face include: a) speech acts that put pressure on the addressee (not) to do something (orders, requests, suggestions, advice, reminders, threats, warnings, or dares); b) acts that predicate some positive future act of the speaker towards the addressee, and in so doing put some pressure on the addressee to accept or reject them, and possibly incur a debt (offers, promises); c) acts that predicate some desire of the speaker towards the addressee or the latter's goods, making the addressee think about having to take action to protect the object of the speaker's desire, or give that object to the speaker (compliments, expressions of envy or admiration, expressions of strong emotions towards the addressee).

Those acts that threaten positive face include: a) acts that show that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the addressee's positive face (expressions of disapproval, criticism, irony, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults, contradictions or disagreements, challenges); b) acts that show that the speaker is indifferent to the addressee's positive face (expressions of violent emotions, irreverence, mention of taboo topics, bringing of bad news about the addressee, boasting, raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics, blatant non-cooperation, inappropriate use of terms of address, and status-marked identifications).

We may distinguish between acts that primarily threaten the addressee's face and those that threaten primarily the speaker's. All of the above threaten the addressee's face. FTAs that are threatening to the speaker's negative face include expressing thanks, acceptance of the addressee's thanks or apologies, excuses, acceptance of offers, responses to the addressee's *faux pas*, or unwilling promises and offers. Those that directly damage the speaker's positive face

are apologies, acceptance of a compliment, breakdown of physical control, self-humiliation, confessions, admissions of guilt or responsibility, or emotional leakage. Apart from these two ways of classifying FTAs, Brown/Levinson (1987: 68) also describe some strategies for expressing them: on record (when the intention of the sender is clear to all participants) and off record (when there is any kind of ambiguity). Going on record, speakers can make FTAs without redress, or with redressive action, using mitigating linguistic mechanisms.

The concept of FTAs has been widely criticised, mainly because of the ethnocentric way in which they were described by Brown/Levinson (see, for example, O'Driscoll 2007 for an update on the subject, and Bravo/Briz Gómez 2004 on a sociocultural approach), but also expanded and studied from various perspectives, including the reactions of speakers (Harris 2001; Pérez de Ayala 2001; Culpeper *et al.* 2003, etc.). Some researchers who have studied the politeness issue in DI (e.g. Merlini 2013, 2017; Vargas-Urpí 2019), suggest combining Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework with other developments of this theory (Goffman 1955; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005) to further understand interpreters' moves but, for the purpose and scope of this article, we will stick to Brown/Levinson's (1987) approach only.

Despite the fact that TI is becoming more and more popular research-wise, there are still few studies that address it systematically and in depth from a linguistic point of view, particularly from the field of pragmatics. As explained in the introduction, the characteristics of telephone-interpreted interactions could make them more prone to the occurrence of FTAs. Therefore, in this research we intend to analyse the prevalence and characteristics of FTAs using a methodology that involves different research methods, namely focus groups and discourse analysis of a corpus of authentic conversations. With recent exceptions (see Meyer 2019), interpreted interactions have not been analysed combining a corpus analysis methodology and a theoretical framework based on pragmatics.

Most Interpreting Studies that have linked several aspects of pragmatics and interpreting have been developed in the fields of simultaneous conference interpreting and face-to-face dialogue interpreting, for instance, court interpreting (Berk-Seligson 1990; Fowler 1997; Rigney 1999; Mason/Stewart 2001; Jacobsen 2003; Hale 2004), healthcare interpreting (Merlini 2017; Delizée/Michaux 2017; Vogelee/Delizée 2017), or educational settings (Vargas-Urpí 2019). In particular, politeness mechanisms in the field of dialogue interpreting have been studied by Pöllabauer (2004) in the context of asylum interviews and by Cambridge (1997) in medical consultations. Interestingly, the latter found that there were few FTAs against patients by physicians, and concluded that this could be due to the caution of the physician, who is usually aware of the asymmetrical situation in which the patients find themselves and tends to avoid expressions that could hurt or offend them. However, in our opinion, the scarcity of FTAs could be rather due to the fact that the conversations of Cambridge's study were simulated and not real. In court settings, Gallez (2015) deals with impoliteness and uses Bousfield's (2008) theoretical model

to carry out an analysis of the defendant's verbal FTAs towards the judge, the interpreter and the counsel. She found that the interpreter tends to mitigate them, thus disempowering the addressees of the FTAs. Merlini's (2013, 2017) studies of FTAs in dialogue interpreting in healthcare settings are also worth mentioning. In her 2017 article, she devotes a section to analyse verbal politeness in an interpreted interaction in the healthcare setting using Brown/Levinson's (1987) theoretical framework and Kerbrat-Orecchioni's revised model (2005) as part of a multi-construct analytical procedure to investigate the use of face-saving acts by interpreters. She found that "face-flattering acts" co-exist with face-saving ones, even in cooperative situations, as opposed to conflictive ones. In an educational setting, Vargas-Urpí (2019) also considers Brown/Levinson's politeness theory to reflect on the modifications introduced by dialogue interpreters when rendering the discourse of primary speakers. She suggests that (im)politeness theories are useful in order to understand these moves and the contribution of interpreters on how interpersonal relations are established in conversation.

To the best of our knowledge, no study has been carried out on FTAs in dialogue interpreting over the phone. In this contribution, we will focus on analysing threats against the positive and negative face of interpreters, whether they are uttered by service providers or by users on record and without redress.

## 2. Objective

We are currently developing research on the occurrence of FTAs in telephone interpreter-mediated interactions. As mentioned above, they constitute examples of distance and indirect communication, therefore, a high number of FTAs of different kinds are expected to be produced in them. Lázaro Gutiérrez/Cabrera Méndez (2018) determined the high prevalence and difficulties of FTAs for telephone dialogue interpreters. Lázaro Gutiérrez (2017) proved that FTAs are more frequent in TI than in face-to-face interpreting. However, these studies analysed FTAs broadly, without making speakers and addressees a variable of analysis. In this paper, we focus on one of the least frequent types of FTAs in these two studies, namely threats against the face of interpreters. Our objective is to describe and illustrate them with examples from our data.

## 3. Methodology and data

This piece of research is divided into three studies, each with a different data set and methodology. First, in order to obtain data against which to compare and contrast the findings of the TI analysis, we proceeded to the examination of conversations mediated by face-to-face interpreters. For this purpose, a corpus of 25 authentic conversations (92,124 words, 785 minutes) involving natural interpreters (who have not been trained in interpreting and do not work

professionally as interpreters) (Harris 1983), was audio- or video-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The recordings took place in hospitals and health centres in the province of Madrid (Corredor del Henares) and Guadalajara, after obtaining explicit consent from all the participants. All the conversations are part of the FITISPos-UAH Group data bank.

The second study consisted in exploring the difficulties perceived by telephone interpreters in the practice of their profession. To obtain these data, within the framework of the collaboration agreement between the company Dualia Teletraducciones and the University of Alcalá, three focus groups were organised with telephone interpreters working for the company. In the first one, the difficulties faced by telephone interpreters in their daily work were widely discussed. In the second, building on the prominent presence of references to FTAs obtained in the first group, politeness and FTAs were specifically addressed, paying special attention to their shape (speaker, addressee, type). In the third, ways of dealing with FTAs in the interpreting performance were subjected to discussion and evaluation. Ten telephone interpreters of different language combinations (Spanish, and Arabic, Dutch, English, French, German, Portuguese, Polish, Romanian, Russian), both male and female, with at least 5 years of experience participated in the focus groups. Content analysis (Berelson 1952) was used to analyse and classify interpreters' comments.

The third of these studies consists of the analysis of recordings of TI, obtained thanks to the agreements with companies that were signed for the development of the project "Analysis of face-threatening acts in telephone interpreting", funded by the Community of Madrid (January 2020 - December 2021. Ref. CM/JIN/2019-040). This has been achieved over several years of work and countless conversations and negotiations, which have resulted in the companies having agreed with their customers to the possibility of analysing the recordings of conversations, which are routinely made for research purposes, aimed at improving the quality of service. Since there are several companies involved in this project with different working procedures, it has been necessary to establish different data collection protocols, which vary both from one company to another and within the same company, depending on the client for whom interpreting services are provided. The resulting corpus of conversations is multilingual, with English, French, German, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish being the most frequent languages. It contains a total number of 345 recordings and 567,111 words (4,830 minutes). Corpus (pragmatics) analysis is being used to study this set of data as we aim for a future quantitative study. For the scope of this paper, examples of this corpus are extracted to examine them qualitatively.

The three sets of data present substantial differences. The first set of recordings is significantly smaller than the other two and shows the performance of face-to-face natural interpreters. The interpreters in the other sets are professionals hired by Spanish TI companies. The interpreters who took part in the focus groups work for a different TI company. Differences in data echo the difficulties encountered in their collection. Data collection protocols had to be elaborated accommodating requirements of the TI companies and the health-

care institutions in which the first set of recordings was collected. Besides, permission was not granted to record professional onsite interpreters, which meant that only natural interpreters were included in the first set. This obviously has led to a limitation of the study and a factor that needs to be taken into account when interpreting the results, but we still consider this set relevant to analyse the occurrence and shape of FTAs to describe common and divergent preliminary patterns between onsite and telephone interpreting.

Although the design of this corpus aims to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data, the analysis phase of the project is currently under development, so only preliminary qualitative data are provided in this contribution.

#### 4. Analysis and results

In this section, we will first deal with the conversations mediated by face-to-face interpreters, then with the results of the telephone interpreter focus groups, and finally with the analysis of the TI recordings.

##### 4.1. Face-to-face natural interpreters

After careful examination of the transcripts of the 25 face-to-face interpreter-mediated conversations, we found a total of 4 FTAs against the interpreters' face.

Example 1. Conversation 21.

25. D: un año. Bueno, olvidaros del dinero, olvidaros, olvidaros. Es que está que se puede morir, ¿me entiendes lo que te digo? Olvidaros, olvidaros.  
*one year. Well, forget about the money, forget about it, forget about it, forget about it. It's just that he can die, you know what I mean? Forget about it, forget about it.*

In Example 1 the doctor raises his voice, gesticulates and repeatedly uses the imperative mode, addressing both the interpreter and the patient (hence the use of the plural). The commands expressed in the imperative mode (*olvidaros*) constitute threats against their negative face. This reaction occurs in response to a patient's question about payment for surgery in a public hospital. Given the seriousness of the patient's health condition, the physician considers the question irrelevant and does not answer it, but shows anger through his verbal (including the use of repetitions), and paraverbal language, which implies a threat against their positive face, in that this conveys strong criticism and disagreement.

Example 2. Conversation 6.

61. I: [¿pero qué] significa ese (xxx) ese?

*[but what] does that (xxx) that mean?*

62. D: la tuberculosis, ¿no sabe usted lo que es la tuberculosis? Es un germen, que se transmite de persona a persona, que llega al pulmón y que, no se sabe cuándo, un día puede empezar a lesionar el pulmón y a pudrirlo hace agujeros en el pulmón, y yo yo como pediatra estoy estudiando a los padres, porque los niños, en lugar de en el pulmón [va al cerebro]

*tuberculosis, don't you know what tuberculosis is? It is a germ, that is transmitted from person to person, that reaches the lung and that, you don't know when, one day it can begin to damage the lung and rot it, it makes holes in the lung, and I as a paediatrician am studying the parents, because children, instead of in the lung [it goes to the brain]*

63. I: [ya]

*[ok]*

64. D: y les da meningitis [muy grave] ¿mmm?

*and it gives them meningitis [very serious] hmmm?*

65. I: [(xxx)]

66. D: eso ya se lo expliqué, pero explíquesele otra vez si no lo tiene claro la señora

*I already explained that, but explain it to her again if she is not clear about it*

It should be recalled that the interpreters involved in this corpus of conversations are natural interpreters, that is friends, neighbours or relatives of the patients. In Example 2, the doctor expresses her surprise that the interpreter does not understand the term “tuberculosis”. The tone of her voice seems to express surprise and a certain contempt, which constitutes a threat against the interpreter’s positive face. However, she soon provides an explanation for the interpreter, and, in turn 66, she commands the interpreter to pass this information on to the patient (*explíquesele otra vez*), threatening the interpreter’s negative face.

Example 3. Conversation 5.

3. D: póngamelo aquí hay que pedir cita ¿eh? Porque si no te lo no es un desbarajuste no quiero trabajar de (xxx) es un lío. Dígame qué le pasa, dígame qué le pasa

*put it here you have to ask for an appointment uh? Because if you don't, it's a mess, I don't want to work as (xxx), it's a mess. Tell me what's wrong, tell me what's wrong*

In Example 3, the doctor expresses anger because her patient has come for a consultation without an appointment. This is a paediatric unit where a large number of patients are seen every day and there is usually no time for spontaneous visits. The imperatives, the abrupt tone of voice, the high volume, the repetitions (which convey insistence and haste) and the reproach about not having made an appointment are combined with the direct expression that she does not want to work in this way. This excerpt constitutes an example of an FTA against the negative image. The characteristics of the Spanish language prevent us in this case from determining whether the imperative “dígame qué le pasa” is addressed

to the patient or to the interpreter, since the pronoun “le” can refer to “she”, in which case it would be addressed to the interpreter, or to “you”, directly to the patient.

In Lázaro Gutiérrez (2017), through the comparative analysis of 25 conversations with face-to-face interpreters and another 25 with telephone interpreters, it was found that, in general, the incidence of FTAs was higher in TI (6 FTAs in face-to-face interpreting versus 38 in TI). Focusing specifically on threats against the interpreter’s face, even if quantitative data is not fully available yet, preliminary results from the analysis of our corpora lead us to believe that in face-to-face interpreting, they are the rarest of all, and it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the threat is directed at the user, the interpreter, or both. In terms of their characteristics, these are mainly FTAs against the interpreter’s negative face, since they are mostly orders and exhortations.

#### 4.2. Focus groups

The second study surveys interpreters working for the Spanish company Dualia Teletraducciones by means of focus groups. The prevalence of FTAs was noted as a difficult and problematic element in the performance of TI. The examples of FTAs against the interpreter’s face that came up were very numerous, so only a few representative samples are commented on here.

Example 4. Client: 112 health emergencies, English-Spanish  
Situation: Before giving his diagnosis, the doctor asks the interpreter if he is a doctor. The interpreter replies that he is not a doctor, but has a degree in translation and interpretation and the doctor replies: “Well, I thought you were professionals”.

In Example 4, we find a clear FTA against the positive face of the interpreter. It is a conversation between a doctor and a patient on the 112 emergency line. At the beginning of the interaction, the doctor initiates a conversation with the interpreter, during which he asks him if he is a doctor. After the interpreter’s response, the doctor uses irony to threaten the interpreter’s positive face.

Example 5. Client: Outpatient appointment service, English-Spanish.  
Situation: A patient calls to make an appointment for her husband to be seen by the family doctor and the operator asks for her husband’s Social Security number. The lady cannot find it and when told that without the number she cannot get the appointment, she shouts back: “I hope he dies right now so his death is on you”.

Situations in which TI is used are sometimes tense and urgent. In this case, the person calling to obtain a service is very nervous and, not seeing her request sat-

isfied immediately, addresses the interpreter, raising the tone of voice considerably and trying to involve him. During the focus groups, this interpreter explained that this is an example of the end-user trying to provoke in him feelings of guilt for the possible consequences of not having attended to her request with sufficient speed. This too constitutes an FTA against the interpreter's positive face.

Example 6. Client: 112 health emergencies, Arabic-Spanish

Situation: Alerting caller phones to request an ambulance for his 14-year-old son with a temperature. The operator indicates that that is not an emergency and that he should take the child to the hospital by his own means. The alerter shouts at the interpreter: "You're a traitor! You've become a Christian bitch!".

In Example 6 we witness once again the nervousness of the users of an emergency service. In this case, the anguish and helplessness of a father seeking help for his son translates into a rise in the volume of his voice and very serious insults against the interpreter when his request is not answered. The speaker is able to identify the interpreter as a native speaker of Arabic and assumes her Muslim background. This is thus an FTA against the interpreter's positive face, who is being accused of having abandoned her customary religion.

Example 7. Client: 112 health emergencies, Russian-Spanish

Situation: Russian alerter calls to complain that the police have confiscated his dog and shouts: "Give me back my dog or I'll go out to the square with a can of gasoline and burn myself on the spot! You know I'll do it because I'm Russian like you!".

The user in this example produces several FTAs, both against the service provider and the interpreter. The order he first utters asking for the return of his dog is enunciated in the plural, encompassing both the police and the call takers, including the interpreter, as the latter explained during the focus groups. This order constitutes an FTA against the negative face of both the addressees. It should be noted that the service receiving the call is not directly related to those who confiscated the animal; however, the caller seems to establish a certain connection, perhaps because both services are public and depend on the State. The second FTA uttered by the user is a warning: "I'll go out to the square with a can of gasoline and burn myself on the spot!". It is another example of an FTA against the negative face of both the interpreter and the call taker. The last sentence is clearly addressed to the interpreter, threatening his positive face by means of a dangerously emotional topic. As in Example 5, the user's objective seems to be to arouse guilt in his interlocutors, particularly in the interpreter, who he identifies as a compatriot.

Example 8. Client: Red Cross, French-Spanish

Situation: Caller of Senegalese nationality insistently reminds the interpreter that his job and duty is to translate what he tells him, and that he (the caller) has the right to have this service provided for him.

While most of the FTAs that come up in the focus groups are against the positive face of interpreters, in this case we find another one against his negative face, as the ones illustrated in Example 7. Indirectly but insistently, the user orders the interpreter to translate everything and nothing than what he says, and argues that it is his right for this to be done.

Data collection through focus groups is very different from the systematic analysis of conversations, since in the first case, the information about the occurrence of FTAs is provided by those to whom they were addressed. It is possible, therefore, that the examples given by the informants are exaggerated or simply interpreted through their feelings and perceptions. In any case, the primary objective of the focus groups is to validate the hypothesis that FTAs present problems for interpreters, something that has been amply proven by our examples. Moreover, from the examples provided by the interpreters, a new hypothesis is drawn, which is that, in TI, FTAs against the face of interpreters seem to be more frequent than in face-to-face interpreting, where they were very rare. This is the starting point for the next stage of our analysis, in which we will analyse recordings of authentic conversations mediated by a telephone interpreter to verify the prevalence of FTAs against the interpreters' face.

#### 4.3. Telephone interpreters

The third of these studies consists of the analysis of recordings of professional TI. In this section, some examples of FTAs against the interpreter's face are given.

Example 9. Subcorpus Spanish-English

I. Ya... Well, the thing is that everything [INAUDIBLE] the file was opened on 19th... On April 19th. But we got all the information on May 15th, so... I mean, it's just 3 days ago. And... You know, these things take their time to process.

C. But, how long? ¿Cuándo? ¿Cuándo? *When, when*

The conversation from which Example 9 is taken is highly repetitive, with the client asking the same questions many times and insisting that the claim she is complaining about must be settled. Despite the fact that the interpreter systematically translates the questions she repeats, the client keeps asking and, at times, tries to communicate directly with the operator in Spanish, apparently uncomfortable with or annoyed by the presence of the interpreter. This is a threat against the interpreter's positive face, as it constitutes an example of blatant non-cooperation in the exchange of interpreted turns.

Example 10. Subcorpus Spanish-English

- C. And I'm in Monumento de Campesino's carpark. Monumento de Campesino.
- I. ¿Monumento? Can you spell that for me?
- C. It's a Spanish word. Monumento.
- I. Yes. Monumento. Yes.
- C. [De Campesino.]
- I. [Cam...]
- O. Monumento de Campesino.
- I. Campesino.

This conversation involves an interpreter who has great difficulty in hearing the client, as he is in a windy environment, which causes noise. This circumstance, coupled with the client's pronunciation, causes the interpreter great difficulty in understanding the Spanish name of a particular landmark. The client's irritation, which had increased throughout the conversation, causes him to ironically point out that what he is pronouncing are Spanish words, calling into question the interpreter's skills and thus threatening her positive face by ridiculing her command of Spanish. At the end of the conversation, the interpreter justifies herself to the operator, explaining that the sound that reaches the interpreters is of lower quality than the sound that reaches the operators.

The examples of threats against the face of the interpreters found in the corpus of conversations are subtle, compared to the examples that the interpreters themselves offered in the focus groups. They are more often produced against the positive face, in contrast to the FTAs from the face-to-face interactions, which mostly threatened the negative face of the interpreters. The use of irony is widespread, as can be seen in Example 10, and to detect it, it is essential to closely examine the audio of the conversations in order to listen to the intonation of the speakers. After analysing the discourse of telephone interpreter-mediated conversations we found a great occurrence of FTAs against the interpreters' face. This corpus is large and quantitative analysis is still in progress. However, taking as a sample an equivalent number of words to the ones in the first study (92,124 words), we found an occurrence of 38 FTAs, 21 of them were against the interpreters' face (18 against the positive face and 3 against the negative face).

## 5. Discussion of the findings and conclusions

The methodology of this piece of research is exploratory and links together three different studies to investigate the occurrence and nature of FTAs (threats against the positive or negative face of interpreters) in dialogue interpreting. The results of the first study presented in this contribution, consisting of the analysis of a corpus of face-to-face natural interpreters, help us to establish a comparison

between the occurrence of FTAs in face-to-face and telephone dialogue interpreting. Because telephone interpreter-mediated interactions are an example of distance and indirect communication, the hypothesis was that more FTAs would appear there. The difficulties in obtaining access to authentic interpreter-mediated conversations made it impossible to record the performance of professional face-to-face interpreters. For this reason, only natural interpreters appear in this corpus, which is a limitation in order to establish a comparison with the results obtained from the corpus of professional telephone interpreter-mediated conversations. Taking into consideration that the characteristics of the interpreters differ, we found that the occurrence of FTAs against the interpreter's face seemed to be reduced. Comparative quantitative considerations cannot be made yet, as the telephone interpreter-mediated corpus is still under scrutiny, but we can already show examples that represent the kind of FTAs (against the positive or negative face of interpreters) that have been found. Data from our first study shows a reduced occurrence of FTAs against interpreters and a predominance of threats against their negative face.

The second study consists of the content analysis of focus groups organised with professional telephone interpreters. We wanted to find out if FTAs were a concern in their daily practice. To do so, we registered all the FTAs reported by interpreters and classified them following Brown and Levinson (1987). Results from the focus groups revealed that FTAs were, in fact, a frequent challenge for interpreters. Most of the reported FTAs were against the positive face of interpreters. Results from focus groups reflect subjective perceptions by interpreters, and another stage (our third study) is necessary to objectively observe this occurrence and better describe FTAs.

After analysing the discourse of telephone interpreter-mediated conversations we found a great occurrence of FTAs against the interpreters' face. As mentioned above, this corpus is large and quantitative analysis is still in progress. However, taking as a sample an equivalent number of words to the ones in the first study (92,124 words), we found an occurrence of 38 FTAs, 21 of them were against the interpreters' face. Whereas in face-to-face interpreting, FTAs were mainly against the negative face of interpreters (1 against the positive face and 3 against the negative face), in TI they were mostly against their positive face (18 against the positive face and 3 against the negative face). In face-to-face interpreting, FTAs are usually produced by service providers and many times addressed jointly to both interpreters and end-users. In the case of TI, we have found a high number of FTAs produced by end-users and some of them are aimed at interpreters and service providers at the same time. We could argue that many of the FTAs produced against telephone interpreters are related to customer or client expectations about the interpreter's alignment with one of the main speakers or the institution or social group they belong to (see Angelelli 2004; Aguilar Solano 2012), and that they may function as an attempt to establish links and provoke feelings of empathy, pity and guilt.

As mentioned above, the results presented in this contribution are qualitative snapshots of a developing study that aims to analyse a large volume of data systematically and quantitatively. Brown/Levinson's (1987) classifications of FTAs

(positive and negative, and addressed against the speaker's or the addressee's face) is used as a base and give rise to a four-way grid which offers the possibility of cross-classifying FTAs. This classification is, however, complex and may contain overlaps in the consideration of each FTA, which implies a limitation of this study in its future quantitative phase. In fact, the great complexity of FTAs has already been described as a challenge when conducting quantitative research on them (Clancey/O'Keeffe 2019). However, in spite of the methodological challenge, we believe in the worthiness of this kind of studies, and agree with Mason/Stewart (2001: 51) in that "issues of politeness and other interactional pragmatic variables are crucial to an understanding of what is involved in dialogue interpreting events". Knowing that FTAs are a concern for interpreters our research could contribute to a better understanding of the occurrence of FTAs and after the findings of our research, training materials or recommendations could be developed.

### Transcription conventions

(xxx) – Inaudible

[] - Overlap

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