



DEPARTMENT  
OF TRANSLATION STUDIES  
FA CPU in Nitra



# Tradition and Innovation in Translation Studies Research XIII: Expanding Horizons in Translation Studies – Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives



Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of Translation Studies

Tradition and Innovation  
in Translation Studies Research XIII

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Expanding Horizons in Translation Studies:  
Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives

Edited by  
Andrej Birčák – Lenka Žitňanská – Lívia Kodajová  
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Expanding Horizons in Translation Studies: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives

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## EXPANDING HORIZONS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

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### Introduction

Society and technology are rapidly evolving, each influencing the other in a dynamic interplay. New technologies emerge in response to societal needs and experience, while society, in turn, adapts to the new realities shaped by technological advancements. A similar dynamic exists between tradition and innovation. Innovation cannot emerge in a vacuum; it relies on tradition as a solid foundation of accumulated knowledge. Standing firmly on this base, we are able to pursue innovation. At the same time, new discoveries and unexpected outcomes can challenge and reshape the very foundations they grew from. A single new insight may cast traditional ideas in a completely new light. With this fresh perspective, the pursuit of innovation becomes even more compelling. Tradition and innovation are interdependent, just as society and technology are.

This interdependence inspired the subtitle of this year's volume – *Expanding Horizons in Translation Studies: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. In today's world, Translation Studies are increasingly intertwined with other disciplines, and this trend is likely to continue, deepening the mutual learning and collaboration.

This publication aims to support such exchange by providing researchers from around the world a space to share their knowledge. The presented volume is the result of the 13<sup>th</sup> annual *Tradition and Innovation in Translation Studies Research* international conference, held online on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025. The conference organised by the Department of Translation Studies at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra offers a rich variety of topics within translation studies thanks to the authors across multiple countries, balancing tradition and innovation.

The ten articles featured in this volume explore a broad range of topics in both translation and interpreting. Many are inherently cross-disciplinary, engaging not only within Translation Studies but also with fields such as didactics, inclusion and accessibility, mental health, technology, sociology, law, and history. Together, these contributions offer a rich overview of current research interests, appealing to both academic and professional audiences.

We hope that this publication will contribute to innovation not only within Translation Studies, but also on a broader interdisciplinary level inspiring future research. And when we look back at this moment in time, we may find that what once represented innovation has become part of the tradition.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-STUDY IN TEACHING INTERPRETING IN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMME

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## Abstract

This article explores the significance of self-study in teaching interpreting within a Bachelor's degree programme at the Institute of Translation Studies, Charles University, Prague. The author emphasizes self-study's historical role in interpreter training, noting that classroom instruction alone is insufficient for skill development. Drawing on the experiences of past theorists, the author outlines her approach to integrating self-study into the curriculum, tailored to meet the diverse needs of students in the French-Czech language combination.

The article details the structure of the Bachelor's programme, the challenges faced by incoming students regarding language proficiency, and the necessity for self-directed learning to succeed in interpreting courses. Specific self-study methods, including news preparation, structured résumé creation, specific semestral task and maintaining interpreter diaries, are discussed as vital tools for student development. The article concludes that as direct teaching hours diminish, self-study must remain a cornerstone of interpreting education, fostering both linguistic and professional competencies essential for future interpreters.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to describe the role and importance of self-study in teaching interpreting in a Bachelor's degree programme.<sup>1</sup>

Self-study has been an integral part of the training of future interpreters since the beginning of the professionalisation of interpreting. As early as Jean Herbert (1968) noted, universities offer only a limited number of lectures and exercises, raising questions about the importance of students practising their skills outside the classroom. This notion has been further elaborated upon by subsequent theorists and trainers, including Aldea (2008, 95-96), who emphasised the importance of practical training in addition to classroom-based learning. Peter Kornakov (2000) expands on this, emphasising that the majority of future interpreters' training occurs through self-study, with educators playing a crucial role in providing support, guidance, and exercises to facilitate independent learning.

The author of this paper has eight years of experience teaching interpreting seminars in the French–Czech language combination at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. Her knowledge of the needs of students and experience in teaching has enabled her to create her own functional system of self-study. This system reflects the individual needs of students while simultaneously developing all the skills necessary for mastering the fundamental techniques and strategies of consecutive interpreting. Mastery of these skills is a prerequisite for successfully passing of the final state exam and obtaining a bachelor's diploma.

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<sup>1</sup> This topic is part of the author's doctoral thesis, which she is preparing at the Institute of Translation Studies of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague (hereinafter referred to as ÚTRL FF UK) under the supervision of Professor Ivana Čeňková. Her research focuses on the didactics of interpreting propaedeutics.

## 2. Teaching interpreting in the Bachelor's degree programme at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University: basic context

The Institute of Translation Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague is the only university centre in the Czech Republic dedicated to teaching translation and interpreting.<sup>2</sup> It offers study programmes at the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral levels. The Institute is divided into five language sections: English, French, German, Spanish and Russian. Students study these languages in combination with Czech.

The Bachelor's degree at the Institute of Translation Studies is structured as a three-year study programme and is obligatorily a double-subject programme. Students can either choose two languages within the Institute of Translation Studies or combine one chosen language with another discipline within the Faculty of Arts. However, the number of possible combinations is limited. At this level of study, students take only consecutive, liaison, and sight interpreting, within interpreting forming an integral part of the Bachelor's state examination.<sup>3</sup>

The current policy<sup>4</sup> in foreign language teaching in primary and secondary schools in the Czech Republic places great emphasis on English, while other languages are given less priority. This has resulted in a recurring pattern in which students entering Bachelor's programmes exhibit, in my experience, an increasingly substandard level of language proficiency. The compulsory double major is also problematic. There are four Czech-French bilingual grammar schools in the Czech Republic,<sup>5</sup> and we would be very interested in graduates of these schools. However, the compulsory double major means that these excellent French speakers often do not gain admission because they do not pass the entrance exam for the second major. As a result, we often encounter highly proficient English or German speakers for whom French is a complementary language to their stronger language.

In the initial year of study, students are enrolled in a greater number of theoretical and linguistic courses. Consequently, one of the first subjects in which the absence of language skills becomes evident is interpreting propaedeutics, which is taught during the winter semester of the second year. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that, for several years now, the entrance exams for the Bachelor's degree have been held in a single round (i.e., in written form) or have been waived altogether. Therefore, it is not uncommon to observe students who possess a relatively solid passive knowledge of French, yet they demonstrate active knowledge at levels below A2 or B1. This level of proficiency is insufficient for interpreting. The variability in proficiency levels across successive years further complicates the implementation of a consistent teaching model within a single subject over multiple consecutive years. The discrepancies are such that teachers are compelled to adapt the content and pace of teaching to the specific year group. Furthermore, the Bachelor's programme allocates only two teaching hours per week in each semester for interpreting seminars. Given the limited time available, it became necessary to revise the curriculum and instil the principles of preparation and self-study from the outset, emphasising the importance of home training as an integral component

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<sup>2</sup> We are the only university-level centre in the Czech Republic that trains translators and interpreters in the comprehensive BA and follow-up MA programmes in six languages – Czech, English, French, German, Russian and Spanish. <https://utrl.ff.cuni.cz/en/who-we-are-2/welcome/>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

<sup>3</sup> INTERPRETING SKILLS: bilateral consecutive interpreting of monologic and dialogic general speeches of approximately 10 minutes, segmented into 2.5-3minute segments; sight interpreting of general text into the native language, of approximately 12 lines ([utrl.ff.cuni.cz](https://utrl.ff.cuni.cz). Accessed on: 08 March 2025).

<sup>4</sup> In December 2024, the Ministry of Education approved the new Framework Education Programmes (FEP), according to which English should be compulsory from the first grade (exit level B1 at the end of primary school) and a second foreign language should be introduced from the seventh grade (exit level A1). Pupils will be able to choose between German, French and Spanish.

<sup>5</sup> See [https://www.ifp.cz/cz/dvojjazycne-sekce#](https://www.ifp.cz/cz/dvojjazycne-sekce#/)/. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

of the course, without which students would face significant challenges in succeeding in the exams.

### 3. Application of self-study in different interpreting subjects

#### 3.1 Interpreting propaedeutics

Interpreting propaedeutics is a one-semester course that takes place in the winter semester of the second year of the Bachelor's degree. It is the first introductory course to the study of interpreting, in which students are introduced to the main aspects of the interpreting profession and learn the skills that are the cornerstone of both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. As Setton and Dawrant state in their publication, "*Initiation is a general introduction which, while installing vital pre-skills – a new way of listening and speaking – brings students into first contact with issues and challenges that will pervade all interpreting*" (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 157-158).

The 90-minute lesson is divided into a theoretical and a practical part. In the theoretical part, conducted in French, students are introduced to the fundamentals of the interpreting profession. They learn key information about the different types of interpreting, working languages, the qualities and competences of a good interpreter, ethics and working conditions, organisations that bring together professional interpreters and translators, preparation for interpreting, language services and marketing, and what aspiring interpreters should look out for. These lectures aim to provide them with a comprehensive insight into the interpreting profession, create a solid foundation for practicing practical interpreting, and, last but not least, introduce them to the basic pitfalls of the profession they will pursue in the future. "*Conference interpreting is a craft and a service to which the interpreter brings language, knowledge, skills and professionalism. The trainer's role is to guide, facilitate and encourage the development of these competencies in the student and their progressive integration in an all-round operational expertise*" (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 9).

The practical component focuses on acquiring and developing basic speaking and interpreting skills, as well as practicing consecutive interpreting without an interpreter's notation.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the semester, students focus mainly on active listening, memory exercises, summarization practice, mastering individual visualization techniques, creating memory maps, learning to segment a speech, and then interpreting it into the target language (mother tongue). Students should also continuously improve their linguistic competence in both their mother tongue and the foreign language, while continuously broadening their general knowledge. All of this occurs within a very limited time frame of twelve to thirteen weeks. A strong emphasis is also placed on presentation and speaking skills, as a good interpreter should also be an excellent speaker. For this reason, it is necessary to focus on voice work, correct breathing, the phonetic aspect of speech (eliminating hesitant sounds), and working with stress. Upon completing this course and in accordance with internal study programmes, students should be able to consecutively interpret short, well-structured, and general speeches of 1.5 to 2 minutes into their mother tongue without the use of interpreter notation.

Given the highly variable level of the students' initial knowledge, both in terms of language and general knowledge, and in order to ensure the maximum efficiency of future teaching, I decided to test the students at the first seminar. The test takes the following form: first, students

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<sup>6</sup> Consecutive interpreting without notation is a type of interpreting in which the speaker first delivers all or part of his or her speech in the source language while the interpreter listens attentively, and then, after the speaker pauses, the interpreter begins to interpret and reproduce the speech in the target language. The interpreted sections can vary in length from one sentence to several minutes (Puková 2013, 4).

are given a short text in French (about 250 words, lexically neutral language without technical terms), which they read quietly, then put down and retell in French what the article was about. Subsequently, students listen to a short recording (approximately 2 minutes, speed: approx. 120 words/minute, lexically neutral language without technical terms, lexical richness about 50%) spoken by a native French speaker without a strong accent that would make them difficult to understand, and then attempt to reproduce the content of the recording in Czech. Both performances are recorded and are used by the teacher not only to determine the initial level of each student, but also to monitor their progress later in the semester.

In addition to linguistic knowledge, I also assess students' general overview by giving them a test with 20 questions on contemporary geopolitics, culture, sports, and civilisation of the Francophone world.<sup>7</sup> The data collected, although limited so far, shows that the more general overview and deeper linguistic knowledge a student has at the beginning of their interpreting studies, the easier it is to acquire the basics of consecutive interpreting and the better the results. The initial testing allows me to objectively assess the initial knowledge and skills of each student, thereby creating an individual starting point for evaluating their progress. Of course, this is done with the understanding that the partial and final goal are the same for all – successfully meeting the requirements for the Bachelor's state exam. Indeed, students often have an unrealistic idea of how inadequate their language skills are. For example, many of them have studied at a high school in France or spent a long period of time as an au pair, but few realise that mastering a common spoken language is not enough for quality interpreting. Their speech is often full of grammatical errors and is lexically limited. However, were the teacher to correct every grammatical or lexical error, a situation can arise where the student literally shuts down and is unable to speak or interpret. Therefore, excessive criticism at the beginning of interpreting can be counterproductive (Djovčoš et al. 2021, 25-26). It is thus necessary to find methods that enable students to recognise for themselves the need to enhance their proficiency in French.

Another significant challenge is stress. Students typically approach their first interpreting lesson with a great deal of apprehension. In such cases, it is crucial to proceed with care to prevent the student from getting blocked early on, ensuring that the interpreting lessons do not become synonymous with a traumatic experience. For this reason, I have decided to include self-study into the lessons from the first semester onwards. Home preparation should be designed to motivate students. Throughout the semester, students should come to realize that the more effective and systematic their home preparation is, the faster they progress in practical interpreting, while simultaneously reducing their stress levels and general discomfort.

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<sup>7</sup> Test questions: What happened in France in 1968? Give the name of the current Pope. Give the name and nationality of the President of the European Commission. What are the names of the main political parties in the USA and what party have the last 3 presidents come from? Name the official languages in Switzerland. What do New Caledonia, Martinique and Guadeloupe have in common? In which decade of the twentieth century did the main wave of decolonization take place in Africa? In how many European countries is French an official language? What is the French national anthem called and when was it created? Name the countries of the Maghreb. What is the Comédie française? Who is the author of the symphonic poem Faun's Afternoon? In the work of which painter of the second half of the 19th century do motifs from the Antilles appear? Sarah Bernhardt is associated with the name of an important Czech artist. Which one? Name the Czech Nobel Prize winners. Who was the discoverer of polonium? When were/will be the Olympic Games in Paris? What does SNCF stand for? What is foie gras?

### **3.1.1 Self-study methods used in interpreting propaedeutics**

#### **a) Searching for and processing news related to politics, culture and sport**

For each seminar, three students prepare a news story from the past week in the fields of politics, culture and sports, which their classmates interpret into their mother tongue. This is done because a general outlook and awareness of current events are essential prerequisites for the interpreting profession. By engaging regularly with the print and audiovisual media, students not only expand their general knowledge and linguistic aptitude but also encounter the need to cultivate an interest in and to explore subjects that may not be inherently familiar, captivating, or readily comprehensible to them. Gradually, students come to recognise that effective preparation and experience are fundamental to successful interpreting and serve as a means of mitigating stress. Interpreting a message that has already been encountered in a familiar context is typically less challenging than interpreting an unfamiliar message. The delivery of such messages is intended to be spontaneous, with note-taking limited to point-by-point references. This approach fosters the development of a range of skills, including speaking, presentation, and phrasing in a foreign language.

#### **b) Creating structured résumés**

Students are assigned texts and recordings to prepare at home, from which they create structured summaries. These exercises are similar to those they encountered during the testing in the first seminar. The aim of this assignment is to enhance students' ability to comprehend and segment a speech, analyse and identify the main ideas and their interrelationships, navigate both written and spoken speeches efficiently, practise active listening and concentration, employ visualisation techniques, and reproduce the structure and argument of a speech in their own words.

#### **c) Interpreter diaries**

Interpreter diaries are a tool used throughout almost the entire Bachelor's degree program. The significant contribution of interpreting diaries to teaching is confirmed by several authors. Setton and Dawrant (2016) highlight that interpreting diaries allow students to express their experiences, formulate questions, identify problems, and set goals. In addition, interpreting diaries can serve as a tool for increasing self-confidence (Postigo Pinazo 2008). In the Central European context, the issues of interpreting diaries and self-reflection in interpreting have been most thoroughly explored by Melicherčíková (2021) and Machová. Machová (2016) views self-reflection as the process of reflecting on one's own interpreting abilities, and this is precisely what I aim to explain to students at the beginning of the course. I present interpreting diaries as a tool primarily for their benefit: the more honest they are in their entries and notes, the more benefits they will gain. Students keep either physical or electronic diaries.

Every week, I require students to write down what happened at the seminar, reflecting on the tasks they completed and how they felt while interpreting. If they encountered difficulties or were not satisfied with their performance, they are encouraged to identify the causes and seek possible solutions to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. Equally, I want students to be able to praise themselves when they do not make mistakes, encouraging them to feel pride in their achievements. In addition to documenting the progress of the lesson, students are asked to briefly describe their homework during the week, any difficulties they encountered during self-study or, conversely, any progress they made. At the end of the semester, I collect the interpreting diaries and discuss the entries individually with each student during the exam or

credit interview. In my experience, when students are honest with themselves and take the work with the diary seriously, not merely as an obligation, it becomes an invaluable support tool, particularly in moments when there is some kind of mental stagnation, when they feel that they cannot progress or will never master the necessary skills. Moreover, in this academic year, the first after the tragic events which occurred in the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in December 2023, the interpreter diary also proved to be a tool to help students cope with the aftermath of the tragedy, most notably in the class that lost a classmate. Finally, interpreter diaries also provide excellent feedback for teachers.

### 3.2 Interpreting I

Interpreting I is a one-semester course that takes place in the summer semester of the second year of the Bachelor's degree. It is a smooth continuation of the previous course, Interpreting Propaedeutics. At the beginning of the semester, students are introduced to the fundamentals of interpreting notation, beginning with a detailed theoretical explanation, followed by references to self-study materials.<sup>8</sup> Gradually, they move on to practical exercises during each class. For each lesson, one student prepares a speech, after which students interpret an average of four contributions prepared by the teacher (didactic recordings, spontaneous speeches), each lasting 3-4 minutes. All topics and vocabulary are uploaded well in advance to Moodle, allowing students to prepare thoroughly for the seminar. This semester, students have already begun interpreting into a foreign language (at least one speech out of four).

Interpreting is a complex skill that requires consistent practice and a sufficient level of attention in the individual seminars. The twelve-semester programme does not allow for a more systematic improvement of language and interpreting competences in a foreign language. However, it is essential to sufficiently develop these skills, as in the subsequent semester, students attend a seminar with a native speaker, where they interpret exclusively in a foreign language. Therefore, by the start of the third year, it is vital that the students' foreign language skills are at a level that enables them to actively participate in the seminar. The psychological aspect is also important in this regard. If students only discover at the start of the third year and about eight months before the state exam, that their active knowledge of the foreign language is insufficient, it can be demotivating, frustrating, and for many, an unfortunate reason to drop out of their studies. To address this, I have developed a semester-long home self-study assignment for this course. This will allow students to work independently at their own pace in a home environment throughout the semester, with the aim of developing their interpreting skills in a foreign language, expanding their vocabulary, improving speaking, listening, and analysis skills, mastering strategies, enhancing self-assessment abilities, and, finally, practising interpreting notation. All of this will take place in the familiar context of the students' own homes, where they will have plenty of time to find their own personalised approach, free from external pressures pushing them to excel.

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<sup>8</sup> General talk about notation:

<https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/358f9e7be09177c17d0d17ff73584307>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

The importance of links and connectors:

<https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/a714ec6796f638ba4d5792f78dccc134>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

Symbols and block usage:

<https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/fe663a72b27bdc613873fbbb512f6f67>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

<https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/47e338b3c082945eff04de6d65915ade>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

Symbol book:

<http://www.symbolovnik.cz/>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

### 3.2.1. Self-study assignment description

At the beginning of the semester, each student will be given a link to an episode of the popular educational programme *C'est pas sorcier*, which aired from 1993 to 2014 by French television on France 3, with a total of over 550 episodes. Aimed mostly at older pupils and students, the programme's hosts travel around the world, interviewing experts who explain various topics in an accessible way. These topics can be divided into six main categories: Earth and Space; Biodiversity, Agronomy and the Environment; Sport and Health; Technology, Physics and Chemistry; History, Culture and Society; and a Special Edition. Each episode lasts approximately half an hour.

Along with the link, students will receive instructions for the first half of the semester. First, students are asked to watch the show. Then, they will rewatch it, taking notes on any unfamiliar vocabulary, which they will subsequently research. Based on the episode, students will then prepare their own 3-3.5minute speech in Czech, which they will record. They will also need to attach a file containing a brief annotation of the topic and key vocabulary. The first part of the task is scheduled to take six weeks.

In this first phase, students practice their comprehension skills, working with relatively linguistically diverse material. They must be able to extract the most important ideas from the programme, enriching it with an occasional detail or interesting fact. The third skill to be practised is reformulation and the ability to create a structured speech that is not only rich in information and terminology but also contains a number of redundancies, ensuring that it can be interpreted effectively. Last but not least, students will practice speaking skills and the ability to articulate ideas clearly and distinctly as they prepare the final form of the recording. Once the students have finished the recording, they submit it to the teacher, who then uploads all the recordings to the internal Moodle system, making them permanently available to the students.

This is followed by the second part of the assignment, which also lasts six weeks, until the end of the semester. During this phase, students will gradually attempt to interpret and work with the individual recordings of their classmates at home. At the beginning of this second phase, students will receive the following instructions from the teacher:

- 1) For each recording, they will first review the annotation and vocabulary file. If they find that the topic is completely unfamiliar to them and they lack even the most basic vocabulary, they will be beginning by brainstorming, retrieving some fundamental information and creating a brief glossary.

- 2) Next, they will listen to the recording, take notes and attempt to interpret the speech into French. They will record their interpretation.

- 3) They will then replay the original and compare it with their notes and interpretation. Based on this section, they will make an objective evaluation of their performance.

- 4) Afterward, they will continue working with the recording, i.e. by looking up missing vocabulary and attempting to rephrase certain passages to make them clearer and simpler. They are advised to try interpreting the recording again, recording this second attempt, and comparing it with other individual performances.

- 5) As a last step they will be asked to complete a detailed questionnaire.

Students will receive the questionnaire at the beginning of the semester along with a link to the show and instructions. The questionnaire is divided into five parts and aims to map out the complex work involved in working with the recording. By completing the questionnaire, the teacher can easily determine whether the student has worked independently or has been "inspired" by a colleague.

In the first part, students are asked to summarise the content of the recording in three sentences. I recommend that students first make this summary orally in French and then formulate it in writing in Czech.

In the second part, students are asked to outline the structure of the paper. This part is the core of the assignment. The ability to recognise, record, and then reproduce the structure of a contribution is the key to success in consecutive interpreting. In practice, this involves students verbally outlining the key points of the speech or creating an outline using interpreting notation. In the third part, students are asked to evaluate the speaker's speech. Above all, an interpreter should be an effective speaker, capable of delivering a clear, understandable, and well-structured speech, just as they expect from their clients. This involves speaking at an appropriate pace, using formal language with a rich vocabulary and complete sentences. The speech should also be sufficiently redundant to facilitate interpretation and free from any hesitant sounds and filler words. In contrast to the Master's degree, speaking techniques are not formally taught in the Bachelor's degree programme. Rather, students practise basic speaking skills in the Interpreting Propaedeutics course, both in their mother tongue and in French. Additionally, they are taught how to prepare a structured speech. Thus, based on their knowledge and skills, students prepare a short evaluation of the speaker, assessing the pace, the manner of expression, the ability to engage the audience, and the overall formality of the speech.

The fourth part focuses on three essential questions: How was the contribution interpreted? Which passages were the most difficult, and why? What caused the problems in the interpretation? From the first interpreting seminar, students learn to objectively evaluate their own performance as well as that of their classmates. I consider the ability to critically evaluate, perceiving both strengths and weaknesses, to be crucial. By identifying and articulating challenges, students also learn how to address them. In other words, if they can pinpoint the causes of difficulties, they are better equipped to resolve them.

The final section is dedicated to self-assessment and opportunities for remediation and improvement. It is generally the case that any shortcomings, whether at the level of understanding, language, or presentation, are more readily recognised in others than in ourselves. For this reason, it is crucial that students record themselves. It is vital for students to reflect on their own limitations and shortcomings in the context of self-study. Not only should they identify these aspects, but they must also be able to describe them, define them, and consider how they can be improved or resolved.

Once the student has all the recordings interpreted and processed, they upload all the completed questionnaires into one file and submit it to the teacher. Then comes the third and final stage of the semester assignment. The teacher will study the submitted questionnaires carefully and invite each student for an individual interview. This interview typically lasts between twenty and thirty minutes and is conducted in a friendly and less formal atmosphere wherever possible. The teacher strives to give the students a safe space where they can express any negative feelings and observations they may have.

During the interview, the teacher and the student address six key areas.

- 1) Specific problems encountered by the student during the interpretation of each recording.
- 2) How the student worked with the recordings.
- 3) What the student learned from the task and what they believe it taught them.
- 4) How the student sees and perceives themselves in the middle of the study programme.
- 5) Prospects for the future (does the student plan to pursue a Master's degree in interpreting?).

In addition to the assignment described above, students keep an interpreting diary throughout the semester. An interview over the diary takes place as part of the credit interview.

### 3.3 Interpreting II

Interpreting II is a one-semester course that takes place in the winter semester of the third year. It builds on the foundation acquired in Interpreting Propaedeutics and Interpreting I. Students further develop their interpreting and speaking skills in both languages equally. This seminar is taught by two teachers: a native speaker of Czech and a native speaker of French, who alternate teaching each week. The students thus interpret exclusively into French every other week.

These classes deepen students' interpreting strategies and techniques for interpreting into a foreign language, such as greater speech segmentation, generalization, the salami technique, among others. In the seminars dedicated to interpreting from French to Czech, students learn sight interpreting in addition to improving their consecutive interpreting skills. They work with authentic speeches, mainly from the field of culture and diplomacy. The seminar ends with a board exam, which can be compared to a mock state exam. The exam is administered by both teachers and includes all the disciplines that will subsequently appear on the state exam, including sight interpreting into Czech and bidirectional consecutive interpreting of 3-4-minute speeches.

#### 3.3.1 Tasks and tools for self-study

Students entering the Interpreting II course have already mastered the basic techniques of consecutive interpreting, are familiar with common strategies and techniques, and their language level in French should be close to C1. At this stage, the main aspects to improve are accuracy of content, formal and linguistic refinement and adequacy, as well as stylistic appropriateness and presentation in the case of sight interpreting.

For this reason, I strongly encourage students to make extensive use of recording as part of their self-study routine. Thus, all papers that are interpreted in the seminar are subsequently made available on Moodle. Ideally, students should re-interpret them at home, record the interpretation, and work with the recording further. They should analyse their own performance, identifying shifts in meaning, omissions, linguistic inaccuracies and imperfections, and attempt to correct them by saying more appropriate phrasing aloud to themselves, correcting shifts in meaning, and refining their overall delivery.

Students usually have a reserved approach to recording. They indicate that having direct evidence of their mistakes is often an all too direct and stressful reminder of their imperfect speech. However, experience suggests that once a student is able to overcome this and begin recording regularly, revisiting and analysing their own performance, they often make significant progress within a few weeks. In addition to the class speeches, they should work with recordings from commonly available databases, especially Speech repository and resources such as "David"<sup>9</sup>, as part of their self-study. So-called tandem interpreting, where students meet outside the classroom, interpret in pairs and provide mutual feedback is also very effective.

The need for good presentation becomes apparent when sight interpreting. In class, I try to explain to students that a pleasant, confident presentation is already half the battle. For this reason, they are tasked with making video recordings of speeches, either analysed in the seminar or prepared as homework. Video recordings are ruthless and very quickly reveal not only flaws in presentation and non-verbal communication, but also the slightest distracting sounds, linguistic imperfections and, shifts in meaning. However, simply recording is not enough; it is also necessary to engage with the recording. The moment the student is able to

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.david.ff.cuni.cz/>, <https://speech-repository.webcloud.ec.europa.eu/>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

look at themselves without any significant emotions, to analyse their performance factually, they are again one step away from a great leap forward.

Interpreter diaries are also used in this seminar. After two semesters, students have grown accustomed to writing them, and they have become a routine part of their home preparation. In moments where students doubt their abilities, they are encouraged to go through their journals from the beginning of the propaedeutics and observe the tremendous progress they have made in three semesters. At this stage of the study, the journal is of both academic and psychological importance. Academically, students write down their observations on attempting different approaches to consecutive interpreting, interpreting notation, and sight interpreting. Psychologically, as the state exam approaches, nervousness and a sense of one's own imperfection may derail a student's preparation. It is thus all the more important to refer to the journal which serves as a tangible reminder of the students' significant progress and past successes.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, given the current trend of reducing direct teaching hours, the importance of self-study is evident, and it must form an integral part of the study programme in both Bachelor's and Master's studies. Even practising conference interpreters devote time to self-study periodically. Educational institutions and professional organisations frequently offer so-called interpreting gyms. It is therefore highly desirable that students learn the basics of this method of improving their skills during their studies, which they will then apply throughout their professional lives.

All the practical findings detailed in this paper are derived from eight years of teaching experience and in many ways can contribute in an innovative way to the effective enhancement of interpretation teaching, even at foundational levels.

Testing within the framework of interpreting propaedeutics (knowledge test and language and interpreting aptitude test) constitutes a pilot phase of research for a forthcoming doctoral thesis. The findings from this preliminary phase unequivocally substantiate the hypothesis that students with more extensive initial language knowledge and a more comprehensive general overview demonstrate greater aptitude in acquiring fundamental interpreting skills and attain superior outcomes. Nevertheless, the preliminary research was conducted on a limited group of students; therefore, it is anticipated that the results of the final research may differ.

The anchoring of these findings within the theoretical framework and existing research will be elaborated on in detail in the forthcoming doctoral thesis. Due to the limited scope of this paper and in order to benefit the reader, we have decided to give priority to the practical aspects rather than the theoretical ones.

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# TEACHING INTERPRETING IN THE CONTEXT OF STUDENTS' PERSONALITY TRAITS AND THE EFFECTS ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

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## Abstract

This paper explores the inter-disciplinary intersections between interpreter training and the field of personality psychology – specifically, personality traits of future interpreters – while focusing on the potential didactical implications. Interpreting is a complex process demanding a broad set of skills and knowledge, which undoubtedly affect the overall performance of an interpreter. However, more and more focus has been placed on the research of the influence of interpreter's personality traits on their performance as well as the effect of personality characteristics of students of interpreting on their training and decision-making process regarding their future career path (Hodáková 2022; Melicherčíková and Hodáková 2023).

The proposed paper presents the results of a survey (Kodajová 2024), carried out in the form of two questionnaires, which was distributed to students (n=53) and teachers (n=12) of interpreting in Slovakia. Based on the evaluation of the survey, this paper aims to introduce a set of recommendations for the implementation of various activities focused on the improvement of interpreting performance and reducing the levels of stress and anxiety for students of interpreting with respect to their differing personality characteristics. The paper also suggests recommendations for complementary education of university teachers of interpreting in the field of psychology with the objective of broadening their competence in providing relevant advice to their students.

## 1. Introduction

Interpreting, in its nature, stands as a complex cognitive process tied to multiple interdisciplinary research directions that have served as an inspiration for numerous studies since the origin of translation and interpreting studies to this day. The intersection between the field of psychology and interpreting as a process as well as a product sparks particular interest, not only in terms of cognitive abilities and processes but also in connection with the subject of personality traits as prerequisites for interpreter training and, subsequently, for the profession itself (Schweda Nicholson 2005; Rosiers and Eyckmans 2017; Hodáková 2022; Melicherčíková and Hodáková 2023). According to some previous studies dedicated to interpreter training (Hodáková 2022; Atkinson and Creeze 2014), especially the identification and analysis of individual students' personality characteristics holds the potential to serve as a basis for pedagogical intervention in the form of suggestions for the improvement of an individual's interpreting performance as well as preparation for the challenging aspects of the interpreter profession connected to the specifics of freelance work and market through the development of psychological skills. Furthermore, the acquisition of such skills relates to the importance of dealing with cognitive load experienced by professional interpreters and students of interpreting with differing intensity during the transfer process between two or more language codes.

This issue gains traction particularly in connection with the significance of mental health and well-being of practicing interpreters and interpreter trainees, since both interpreting and translation are considered to be demanding professions (Chen 2023) and the higher mental

illness cases rates among adolescents and university students (Evans et al. 2018).

This article presents the results of two surveys (Kodajová 2024), one of them being aimed primarily at the preferences of students regarding their interest in working with their personality traits during practical interpreting seminars, while the second survey focuses on the perspectives of educators in relation to additional educational materials or events in the field of personality psychology. The results of both surveys provide foundation for designing recommendations focused on multiple possible variants of incorporating the aspect of students' personality into their training as future interpreters as well as suggestions for complementary education for trainers of interpreting.

## **2. Literature review**

The complexity of interpreting as a process may be illustrated on multiple aspects or characteristics which influence an individual's performance as well as their potential success in this field. The aspect of personality has been observed and covered mainly in relation to requirements connected to this profession while emphasising certain personality traits. N. Schweda Nicholson (2005) lists a set of examples, such as the combination of quick speech pace with maintained accuracy, decorum and calm attitude when under pressure, the ability to concentrate and process new information in short amounts of time or analytical thinking. In earlier studies and approaches, qualities like the ability to work under pressure, teamwork, self-control, versatility or adaptability (Keiser 1978; Henderson 1980) were mentioned mainly in relation to conference interpreting. Moreover, it has also been stated that the role of interpreter entails the need to conceal their own character, opinions and outlooks in favour of those of the speaker, who is the original source of all information that is communicated to the audience. The interpreter acts merely as a channel, through which the original thoughts and views are being transferred from one language code to another. Thus, according to currently as well as no longer practicing interpreters, this process requires the subjugation of the interpreter's ego, which some individuals might perceive as frustrating (Schweda Nicholson 2005). Although this perception does not exclude anyone in terms of interpreter profession, it illustrates yet another requirement regarding the interpreter's personality traits either in the form of natural possession or the ability to process the resulting frustration.

The aspect of personality traits is also present in sign language interpreting research, namely in a global study carried out by K. Bontempo, J. Napier, L. Hayes and V. Brashear (2014) and focused on personality factors from the 'The Big Five' concept consisting of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, accompanied by concepts of perfectionism and self-esteem. These personality components were observed with the aim to examine the predisposition and competence of sign language interpreters around the world. Based on their study, this team of researchers highlighted certain personal traits, which came up as the most prevalent in competent sign language interpreters in global or region-specific context. According to the results, sign language interpreters, globally, possess higher self-confidence, openness to experience and are more emotionally stable. Additionally, they also observed slightly higher perfectionist tendencies on the global scale, while participants from US are more extraverted to some extent. In Australia, higher tendencies to conscientiousness were observed as one of the most notable predictors of competence related to sign language proficiency.

When considering interpreter education, the majority of study programmes for future interpreters lay core focus on the development and improvement of students' performance from the linguistic, technical and content-related point of view. Atkinson and Creeze (2014) identify a shortcoming in interpreter and translator education in the insufficient focus on fostering

confidence in students and raising awareness about how their psychological competencies and self-assessments influence their decisions throughout the process of interpreting as well as their occupational performance. Furthermore, fostering a supportive environment during interpreter training, while highlighting the importance of developing psychological skills, such as self-efficacy, explanatory style and locus of control is highlighted as a potential ground for pedagogical intervention with the aim to improve interpreter resilience (Atkinson and Creeze 2014).

The inter-connection between psychology and interpreting also relates to the research of stress factors present during interpreting tasks, leading to interpreting being considered as a high-stress profession (Kurz 2003). The complex and highly demanding nature of this profession raises questions around the implications for the training of future interpreters, especially regarding the increase in mental illness and mental health difficulties in adolescents and university and college students (Benton et al. 2021; Xiao et al. 2017). The emergence or worsening of multiple crises (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, Russian war against Ukraine) throughout past years has contributed to the rising occurrence and complexity of mental health disorders globally (Benton et al. 2021).

As illustrated through the abovementioned studies and theories, the aspect of personality has been subjected to multiple research studies in connection with interpreting practice as well as interpreter training. The aspect of mental health has a firm connection to the profession, since interpreting, whether it be in a community or conference context, encompasses various stress factors, which require efficient coping mechanisms. In order to prepare students of interpreting for the complexity of this profession, it is relevant to explore their opinions and the opinions of interpreter trainers on the possibility of implementing work with personality characteristics into their training. The subsequent chapters deal with research concerning this topic from the viewpoint of methodology and qualitative data analysis.

### **3. Research methodology**

In the span of December 2023 and February 2024 a survey was conducted (Kodajová 2024) with the aim to explore opinions of students and teachers of interpreting on the topic of implementation of the work with personality characteristics into the interpreter training. The focal points of both questionnaires were questions dedicated to the actual and desired coverage of this topic as well as the discovery of preferred possibilities for incorporating the work with personality characteristics within interpreter training from both target groups. The survey was carried out in the form of two anonymous questionnaires – each for one of the mentioned target research sample groups – and while it already has been published in Slovak, this article presents the most relevant results subsequently accompanied by a set of recommendations based on the outcomes of both questionnaires (see chapter 4). Distribution of both questionnaires occurred in two waves by means of social media and electronic mail.

In order to ensure the highest possible reliability of the obtained data, none of the questionnaires collected information about the university affiliation of respondents. Since the aim of the questionnaire was to map the current situation in Slovakia, the main focus of this research did not lie in comparing viewpoints of students and educators based on their university affiliation. Furthermore, the omission of such questions was intentional in order to prevent the possibility that the respondents would opt for answers they might view as desired.

Both questionnaires contained a total of seven questions with the first two questions being oriented on obtaining information about the constitution of the individual research samples. The questionnaire for students consisted of six closed questions, where the respondents could have chosen one of the suggested answers and one semi-closed question with the possibility to enter their own preferred answer. The first question explored the gender identity of students

followed by a second question aimed at classifying the respondents according to their level of study. Third question of the first questionnaire was used to determine students' opinions on the extent to which an individual's personality influences their choice of future career path. The next two questions focused on the extent to which students are interested in working with their personality characteristics during interpreting training as well as the scope to which interpreting trainers address this topic during their seminars. The sixth and seventh question aimed to explore students' viewpoints on the implementation of this topic into interpreter training, specifically, the preferred scope and form. The question devoted to identifying preferred forms of this implementation was semi-closed, so the respondents had the opportunity to suggest other options other than those that were listed.

The second questionnaire, which was intended for interpreting trainers also consisted of seven questions with five of them being closed, two semi-closed with the option to propose a new answer, one of which offered a choice of selecting more than one option. The first question of the second questionnaire explored the number of years of interpreting experience, followed by the number of years of teaching interpreting. With the third question, the aim was to map the demand for working with personality characteristics of students perceived by the educators during interpreting seminars and subsequently, with the fourth, the aim was to examine whether the respondents consider their knowledge of psychology to be sufficient for providing answers to the students' questions. The next two questions map the educators' interest in recommendations or guidelines regarding the field of personality psychology as well as their preferred forms of these guidelines. The last question was identical to its counterpart in the first questionnaire, and it was included in the second as well in order to gain insight into the trainers' opinions on the implementation forms of work with students' personality characteristics into interpreter training or the curriculum of the translation and interpreting study programme. This question was incorporated into both questionnaires with the intention to comparatively analyse the viewpoints of students and trainers of interpreting on their preferred implementation forms.

### **3.1 Research samples**

Both groups of participants were from three universities in Slovakia with study programmes focused on translation and interpreting – Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Comenius University in Bratislava and Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The scope of students (n=53) as possible participants for this survey was restricted in terms of one criterion – that being attendance of at least one seminar devoted to interpreting prior to completing the questionnaire. Out of the total amount of respondents, 90.6% were female, while the rest selected male as their gender. The majority of the research sample consisted of participants studying a Master's programme (64.2%) and 19 students (35.8%) were at the stage of pursuing their Bachelor's degree (Kodajová 2024).

The second group of respondents (n=12) were educators in the field of interpreter training with differing amounts of years of experience as professional interpreters or interpretation trainers. In case of the former, the most frequently chosen answers included the range of 2-5 years of experience in providing interpretation services, with 50% (6) of participants selecting this option, followed by 33% (4) educators, who selected the option more than 10 years. As for the latter, 50% of trainers from the research sample has more than 10 years of experience in training future interpreters, while 42% chose the option 2-5 years of teaching experience (Kodajová 2024).

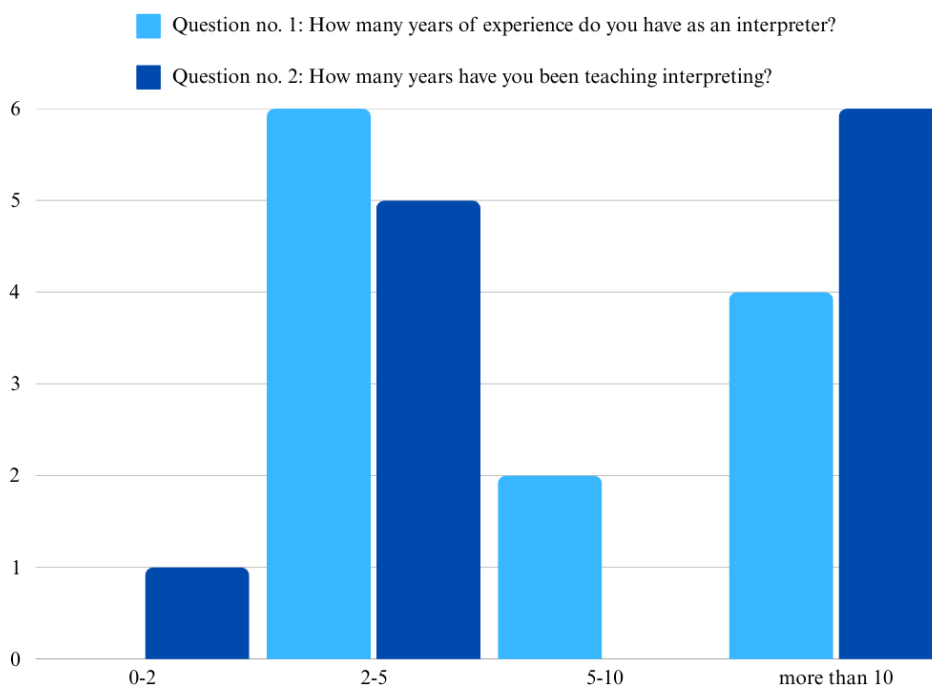


Figure 1. Educator's years of experience in providing interpretation services and teaching interpretation

The number of respondents for both questionnaires is not sufficient to serve as a justification for generalisations, however, the questionnaires were distributed with the intention of conducting an explorative survey and acquiring sufficient basis for designing a set of recommendations regarding interpreter training in Slovak university settings.

#### 4. Viewpoints from teachers and students of translation and interpreting

For the purposes of this article, solely a summary of the most relevant data from both questionnaires will be presented, since the complete quantitative and qualitative analyses have been published previously.

One of the most notable outcomes of the survey (Kodajová 2024) is 43 students (81%) stating that they would definitely want to work with their personality characteristics during interpreting seminars, while another 9 students (17%) would be interested in exploring this topic and one respondent (1.9%) would rather devote time to other aspects of interpreting. Meanwhile, 21 students (39.6%) are of the opinion that the coverage of this aspect within interpreter training is insufficient, accompanied by 12 respondents (22.6%), who find this topic to be completely lacking. On the other hand, 18 participants (34%) from the first research sample consider the coverage of personality characteristics with regard to influence on interpreting to be partially sufficient and 2 students (3.8%) perceive it as sufficient.

In comparison to the results from the second questionnaire, one may observe a slight discrepancy between the expressed students' interest in this topic and their actual inquiries recorded by the teaching staff during interpretation seminars, since a total of 7 educators (58.3%) receive questions about this topic frequently or once in a while, but 5 respondents (41.7%) had no recollection of such inquiries or experienced them very seldom. This could be attributed to the absence of awareness or knowledge among students when it comes to the link between personality characteristics and interpreter training or lack of time during the seminars.

These results, however, highlight the importance of pedagogical intervention in respect to exploring this topic and providing corresponding elementary introduction.

Analysis of the responses from both questionnaires revealed distinct differences in preferences between students and trainers (see Figure 2 and 3), most notably in the inclination toward introducing a separate subject on the topic – favoured by 15 students (28.3%) but only one educator (8.3%). This disparity lies likely in the instructors’ broader understanding of the topic as something to be integrated didactically into existing seminars, rather than dealt with in isolation. Students, by contrast, appeared to base their responses more on personal and subjective considerations. Both groups predominantly supported the implementation of this aspect in the form testing followed by brief exercises (up to 15 minutes). The popularity of this approach most probably lies in the adaptability and efficiency this option provides.

Options	Students' answers	
	No. of students	Percentage
testing and accordingly tailored short exercises (10-15 minutes) during interpreting seminars	23	43.4
separate course	15	28.3
certain amount of lessons (e. g. 2-3) within an existing course	12	22.6
I would not incorporate this topic directly in the study plan, however, I would prefer a workshop / multiple workshops	3	5.7
I would not incorporate it at all	0	0

Figure 2. Preferred forms of implementing the aspect of personality traits into interpreter training – students

Options	Educators' answers	
	No. of educators	Percentage
testing and accordingly tailored short exercises (10-15 minutes) during interpreting seminars	4	33.3
separate course	1	8.3
certain amount of lessons (e. g. 2-3) within an existing course	4	33.3
I would not incorporate this topic directly in the study plan, however, I would prefer a workshop / multiple workshops	2	16.7
I would not incorporate it at all	0	0

Figure 3. Preferred forms of implementing the aspect of personality traits into interpreter training – teachers

The majority of the research sample consisting of interpretation trainers (83.3%), precisely 10, stated that they feel completely or partially comfortable in answering questions related to the role of personality traits within interpreter training. At the same time all 12 respondents (100%) declared a definite, 9 participants (75%), or partial, 3 participants (25%), willingness or interest in receiving recommendations regarding this topic. Further in the questionnaire, the aim was to identify which forms of complementary education would be the most suitable for pedagogical staff. The highest number of educators (75%), which was 9, opted for methodological seminar followed by 8 respondents, who also chose audio/video recording of several module lectures (66.7%) encompassing various aspects of this interdisciplinary

approach to interpreter training. More than half of respondents, specifically 7, selected the option of written publication (58.3%) available in both printed and electronic formats and another equally preferred alternative was the invitation of an expert on this topic to one of seminars throughout the semester, who would provide the necessary background regarding the intersection between personality psychology and interpreting.

Options	Educators' answers	
	No. of educators	Percentage
written publication (e.g. concise handbook in both printed and electronic versions)	7	58.3
audio/video recording of one extensive lecture	1	8.3
audio/video recording of several module lectures	8	66.7
methodological seminar	9	75
inviting an expert on this topic to a seminar	7	58.3

Figure 4. Preferred forms of complimentary education in the field of personality psychology – teachers

## 5. Recommendations for interpreter training

The following section presents a set of proposed implementation possibilities with corresponding benefits and drawbacks in the context of Slovak university settings. Since these recommendations rely on interdisciplinary approach, it should be emphasized that they were created with the awareness of personal limitations of the individual departments, therefore, the implementation of this set of recommendations can be realized with the help of experts in the corresponding field, which, in this context, would be the area of personality psychology by means of inviting them to interpreting seminars.

Findings from the student questionnaire reveal a generally positive stance toward incorporating personality-focused work into interpreting training, a position further affirmed by lecturers' responses to the fourth question in the respective questionnaire. Therefore, the first recommendation would be to embed this topic both within classroom practice and the formal curriculum. Doing so would not only allow space for consistent reflection on learner personality traits but also support those students who, despite a desire to enhance their interpreting skills, may lack the initiative or confidence to engage with this aspect independently. Systematic inclusion of personality work may thus serve as both a motivational and developmental tool within interpreter education.

When designing the recommendations for varying implementation forms, the preferences resulting from the survey, specifically the question dedicated to proposed incorporation schemes for work with students' personality characteristics into interpreter training served as basis for the set of specific proposals. Practical interpreting seminars present a particularly suitable space for the designed implementation schemes. One of the proposed approaches would be initial personality test aimed at identifying students' personality types and their potential predispositions or limitations in relation to interpreting-relevant skills. These results would then serve as a basis for the selection or even creation of approximately 15-minute-long exercises tailored to systematically help students develop and improve on their weaker skills and build on their already existing strengths during seminars.

While a variety of students' personality types and their corresponding needs within a single seminar group may seem challenging to navigate, this diversity may, nevertheless, be viewed as an opportunity for mutual enrichment among students with diverse backgrounds,

personalities, skills as well as motivations. For instance, individuals who feel self-assured in public speaking may support peers struggling with performance anxiety. Other notable contrasts appear in areas such as motivation or stress response. In consecutive interpreting, training could be focused on boosting confidence through short prepared and rehearsed speeches or even spontaneous ones, in order to eliminate negative factors like stress or stage fright, when facing an audience. On the contrary, simultaneous interpreting places greater emphasis on persistence, team cooperation, and cognitive endurance, since the interpreter's performance may be affected by the speaker's rapid delivery, unfamiliar accent, or external distractions.

Potential means for mitigating these challenges could be embodied in a focus shift from performance-based approach to progress-oriented approach in interpreter training that would include strategies to avoid negative or even paralyzing effects of stress.

A second proposed form of implementation – second most popular according to students – is the introduction of a separate course dedicated to the role of personality characteristics in interpreter training and interpreting as a profession. The curriculum for the translation and interpreting study programme at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra already includes the course *Psychohygiena pre translatológov* (Mental Hygiene for Translators and Interpreters), which addresses several themes grounded in cognitive and personality-based psychology. The structure of the course consists of broad sections with each devoted to a certain theme, which are further divided into sub-topics aligned with the number of seminars per academic year. This course covers an overview of relevant theoretical frameworks combined with practical application.

The course opens with the topic of demands on the interpreter's personality for the interpreting profession and encourages self-evaluation. Further topics include the exploration of short-term cognitive load in terms of the efforts model, while also practicing exercises on memory and concentration. Topics related to long-term stress, such as eustress, distress, and stressors, are followed by coping strategies and techniques, which are particularly relevant in the context of mental health issues as well as the subsequent themes, which include burnout syndrome, its prevention, and the role of psychological resources and social support.

Currently, according to the approved study plan, it is recommended for students to enrol in the abovementioned course during the second semester of the Master's programme. In order to ensure more effective benefits from the course, an earlier inclusion into the study plan, i.e. in the final semester of Bachelor's studies could be considered as a possible solution. At this point, students would have already acquired some experience with interpreting and an earlier incorporation of these topics within their training could serve as a basis for self-reflection and an aid in preparation for the more intensive interpreting seminars at the Master's level.

The third proposed form of implementation would be an allocation of some lessons to this topic within an already existing interpretation seminar, that could provide space and time for a brief introduction to the relevant theory on the individual components of personality structure. Based on the acquired knowledge of the Slovak network of universities offering interpreting programmes, it would be possible to put this scheme into practice by means of collaboration between interpreting trainers from different universities. As mentioned, one of the universities in question offers a subject devoted to multiple aspects which overlap with the focus of these recommendations. This subject is led by a qualified expert on both interpreting and psychology, doc. Mgr. Soňa Hodáková, PhD., who could provide the fundamental introduction into this topic during the allocated lessons. When considering the Slovak context with regard to the size of the country and the number of universities, this solution could be put into practice through inter-departmental cooperation. The allocated lessons could also be utilised for specific role-play scenarios, where each student is assigned a certain role, e.g. speaker, interpreter or a client etc. with the objective to provide students with the opportunity to explore their strengths and

weaknesses in an educational environment as well as their intuitive coping mechanisms for stress or anxiety. Introduction to these situations has the potential to provide a confidence boost for students to practice similar activities on their own (Atkinson and Creeze 2014).

When designing this set of recommendations, the aim was not to suggest a one-size-fits-all approach. The objective of these recommendations lies in the emphasis on an in-depth approach with regard to particular interpretation techniques or genres, in the way of an individualized approach, especially in terms of focusing on more suitable techniques or genres, which could have a positive effect on the psychological state of mind of the students during interpreting.

The implementation of this issue during the first seminars at the Bachelor's level could be perceived as the option with the greatest positive benefit, so that students have as much space as possible to improve their skills based on their own specific needs and preferences and, thus, have the option to utilise the obtained knowledge together with various exercises aimed at minimizing the negative effects on their mental health. They would then have ample time to develop their skills in more detail at the Master's level.

Effective guidance of students in developing their interpreting skills with respect to individual personality traits requires that interpreter trainers be given the opportunity to receive complimentary training in psychology – specifically in personality psychology and its intersections with interpreting.

Based on the responses collected from the surveyed pedagogical staff, the most preferred form of such continuing education would be a methodological seminar. Its key strength lies in its practical orientation – clearly linking theory with applicable classroom methods. This seminar would enable interpreting instructors to experience and practise teaching techniques, which they could later integrate into their seminars. To ensure sustained access to the theoretical background, the seminar could be accompanied by a structured written publication as well as recorded, thematically divided module lectures. These materials would serve as ongoing references, allowing educators to revisit specific topics as needed.

Another highly valuable approach would be to involve an expert in this matter directly into the training process. Their presence in the classroom would not only provide students with nuanced feedback connecting their interpreting performance to individual psychological tendencies but also offer teachers the chance to observe expert-led instruction in real time. This type of studying could then be adapted and incorporated into their own teaching practices, reinforcing a cycle of knowledge-sharing that prioritises both professional development and student-centred growth.

## **6. Conclusion**

The complex interplay between interpreting and psychology, specifically personality psychology, plays an important role in academic research, predominantly in relation to predispositions for interpreter training or profession as well as from the point of didactic implications for training of future interpreters in diverse fields. In terms of interpreting didactics, this study laid emphasis on the relevance of individual personality traits in designing curricula and developing occupational readiness.

Through the survey conducted among students and educators from three Slovak universities, a clear interest emerged in integrating personality-focused content into interpreter training. The results also highlighted a notable gap between students' desire to engage with this topic and the actual implementation within current curricula or initiative from students themselves.

The findings support a growing body of research advocating for pedagogical approaches that reflect psychological diversity among students (Atkinson and Creeze 2014; Hodáková

2022; Melicherčíková and Hodáková 2023). By tailoring interpreter training to aid in developing psychological skills and adapting certain aspects to be more suitable for the students of interpreting. These approaches could serve as a helpful factor for the preparation of trainees for both the technical, procedural and emotional demands of the interpreting profession.

This article recommends several practical implementation forms, ranging from short personality-based exercises within existing seminars to a more systemic inclusion of a dedicated course or module. These suggestions are reinforced by positive feedback from students and an expressed willingness among educators to receive additional training in personality psychology. Importantly, the proposal to initiate personality-focused work during the Bachelor's level allows for early self-reflection and progressive development of coping mechanisms critical for interpreting under pressure. The recommendations were designed primarily with the intention to reflect the needs, requirements and preferences of both groups of the research samples, while also considering the adaptability to the familiar conditions of university education in translation and interpreting in the Slovak context.

This research advocates for a model of interpreter training, as one that integrates the development of linguistic, technical, and psychological competencies. By acknowledging and responding to the specific personality characteristics of interpreter trainees, interpreter training programmes could become more effective in preparing future interpreters for the multifaceted challenges of interpreting as a profession.

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### **Appendix 1 (The role of personality traits in pedagogical intervention regarding the training of future interpreters – students)**

1. Please, select your gender identity.
  - a) Female
  - b) Male
  - c) Other
  - d) Prefer not to say
2. What level of university studies are you currently enrolled in?
  - a) 1<sup>st</sup> level (Bachelor's)
  - b) 2<sup>nd</sup> level (Master's)
3. Do you think your personality has influence on your decisions about your future career path?
  - a) Yes, I think it has a significant impact
  - b) Probably, but the influence is only minor
  - c) Probably no, it is possible, but only in some cases
  - d) No, it has no influence
4. Would you be in favour of devoting some space during interpreter training to work with personality characteristics?

- (e.g. anxiety, stage fright, extraversion/introversion)
- a) Yes, I would definitely appreciate this initiative
  - b) Probably yes, it does sound interesting, but I do not consider it to be that important
  - c) Not quite, but I am not strictly opposed to the idea
  - d) No, I have nothing to gain from it, I would rather focus on different aspects
5. Do trainers explore the topic of personality characteristics during seminars?
    - a) Yes, sufficiently
    - b) Somewhat yes, partially
    - c) Not quite, insufficiently
    - d) Not at all
  6. In your opinion, should the topic of personality characteristics be included in training?
    - a) Yes
    - b) Rather yes
    - c) Rather no
    - d) No
  7. Were it incorporated, which form would you prefer?
    - a) testing and accordingly tailored short exercises (10-15 minutes) during interpreting seminars
    - b) separate course
    - c) certain amount of lessons (e.g. 2-3) within an existing course
    - d) I would not incorporate this topic directly in the study plan, however, I would prefer a workshop / multiple workshops
    - e) I would not incorporate it at all

## **Appendix 2 (The role of personality traits in pedagogical intervention regarding the training of future interpreters – trainers)**

1. How many years of experience do you have as an interpreter?
  - a) 0-2
  - b) 2-5
  - c) 5-10
  - d) more than 10
2. How many years have you been teaching interpreting?
  - a) 0-2
  - b) 2-5
  - c) 5-10
  - d) more than 10
3. When teaching interpreting, do you observe a demand from students for recommendations/advice that would take into account their particular personality traits?
  - a) Yes, they often ask for feedback and advice reflecting their personality
  - b) Somewhat yes, sometimes they do ask for feedback and advice reflecting their personality
  - c) Not quite, this topic is brought up only occasionally
  - d) No, I have never encountered such questions/requests
4. Do you feel proficient enough in the field of psychology to be able to answer those questions eruditely?
  - a) Yes, I think I have enough knowledge to guide students
  - b) Rather yes, I would be able to answer some questions
  - c) Not quite, my knowledge around this topic is not sufficient

- d) Not at all, I would not be able to answer those questions
- 5. Would you be in favour of some recommendations or guidelines regarding this topic?
  - a) Yes, I would definitely be in favour
  - b) Rather yes, I would consider learning more about this topic
  - c) Not quite, I do not see it as a priority
  - d) No, I do not see the point and use
- 6. If yes, which form should these recommendations/guidelines take?
  - a) written publication (e.g. concise handbook in both printed and electronic versions)
  - b) audio/video recording of one extensive lecture
  - c) audio/video recording of several module lectures
  - d) methodological seminar
  - e) inviting an expert on this topic to a seminar
  - f) other
- 7. In which form would you incorporate work with personality types into interpreter training within the study plan?
  - f) testing and accordingly tailored short exercises (10-15 minutes) during interpreting seminars
  - g) separate course
  - h) I would not incorporate this topic directly in the study plan, however, I would prefer a workshop / multiple workshops
  - i) I would not incorporate it at all
  - j) other

# LANGUAGE SERVICE PROVIDERS' VIEW OF REMOTE INTERPRETING IN SLOVAKIA

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## Abstract

Remote interpreting enables interpreting services for parties who are not in the same location. It has existed in limited form since the 1970s and has become widely accessible today. The gain in popularity of this type of interpreting came with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when there was a shift from on-site interpreting (80%) to mostly remote interpreting (95%) due to the restrictions. After the pandemic, the market stabilized and the usage between these two modes was split roughly in half.

This study investigates remote interpreting in Slovakia from the perspective of language service providers (LSPs), aiming to understand current practices and challenges. Twelve Slovak LSPs participated in an online questionnaire covering the contract types, software tools, remuneration, and interpreter roles. The results indicate that while on-site interpreting remains more popular, remote services are requested. The study also partially compares results with an earlier research on freelance interpreters (Birčák 2024), offering a broader view of industry standards.

The results provide a foundation for improving conditions within remote interpreting in Slovakia by highlighting both well-functioning and problematic aspects of current practices. The data can also serve as a baseline for future national and international comparisons.

## 1. Introduction

The article explores the position of remote interpreting as a specific type of interpreting on the Slovak market from the point of view of language service providers (LSPs). Better understanding of remote interpreting and its specifics is needed to identify good practices, as well as point out to those that still need improvement. By taking into consideration the needs of individual parties (clients, LSPs, interpreters) present during remote interpreting, the experience of each of them can be improved in various ways.

LSPs are organizations or agencies that offer a range of language-related services, including translation, interpreting, localization, and language training. They play a crucial role in facilitating multilingual communication in various sectors such as business, healthcare, law, and diplomacy. LSPs may operate on a local, national, or international level, catering to clients who require professional language support to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. These providers rely on a combination of human expertise and technology, including computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, machine translation (MT), and remote interpreting platforms, to deliver efficient and high-quality services (Pym et al. 2011). With the increasing demand for multilingual communication in a globalized world, LSPs have become essential intermediaries between clients and language professionals, adapting to emerging trends such as remote interpreting and artificial intelligence-driven solutions.

## 2. Current state

Remote interpreting has become an increasingly significant modality within the interpreting profession, particularly in response to technological advancements and shifts in market

demand. It is a wide term that can be used in various settings and scenarios. Generally, it can be defined as a situation in which interpreters are physically separated from some or all of the clients and use communication technologies for their services (Braun 2019). Spinolo (2022) adds that remote interpreting can be used both in spoken and signed languages.

Remote interpreting has undergone significant transformation since its inception, evolving from telephonic services to sophisticated digital platforms that now form the backbone of modern language service provision. It is estimated that remote interpreting services have been used since the 1970s (Tripepi Winteringham 2010; Ziegler and Gigliobianco 2018; Albarino 2019; Bond 2019). But the real expansion of remote interpreting happened during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the severe restrictions that prohibited face-to-face meetings (Hoyte-West 2022). Before the pandemic, remote interpreting was nowhere near as popular as on-site interpreting, but it was already used in certain settings, such as in health and court interpreting (Braun 2019; Devaux 2018). Up until the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, remote interpreting was used in roughly 20% of all spoken language services delivered around the world (Ait Ammour 2021). At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, interpreters working on-site had to deal with the fact that almost all their contracts were terminated globally, and future events cancelled (Liu and Cheung 2022). The pandemic and the restrictions changed the odds dramatically – remote interpreting was now the most popular form of interpreting. During the height of the pandemic, 95% of all interpreting contracts were remote (Nimdzi 2023). The restrictions posed to contain the spread of the disease prohibited face-to-face meetings and drastically changed the everyday life of almost everyone in the world. Where possible, workers moved from the offices to their homes for work. All non-essential meetings and events were cancelled, but that did not stop the desire to meet and conduct business as usual. When it was clear that the restrictions and the pandemic would not go away anytime soon, people started realizing that they could meet using videoconferencing tools. As time went on, they became increasingly popular. Gradually, almost all aspects of face-to-face meetings were transferred to the virtual world, including the need for language mediation, and thus interpreting services.

Buján and Collard (2022) mention that interpreters in their survey from 2021 voiced their reluctance to take up remote interpreting, but they quickly adapted to the new circumstances and started interpreting remotely almost overnight. COVID-19 has been the defining factor for LSPs, buyers, and freelancers both in translation and interpreting sectors according to the European Language Industry Surveys (European Language Service Industry 2020, 2021).

Remote interpreting became the dominant form of interpreting, and this changed only with the lift of the pandemic restrictions and return to the live meetings. However, things did not simply return to the pre-pandemic era. The pandemic taught the people that there is an alternative way of working – remotely. And even though many people were thrilled to return to the venues, virtual meetings were still the preferred way for some of them, especially in specific contexts. After the pandemic, the proportion of remote and on-site contracts were split in half (Nimdzi 2023).

In addition to the adoption of new technologies, the pandemic fundamentally altered perceptions of remote interpreting among both interpreters and clients. Before COVID-19, remote interpreting was often seen as a supplementary service, mainly used for emergencies or low-budget assignments (Teague 2024). However, during the pandemic, remote interpreting became a necessity across multiple sectors, including healthcare, legal proceedings, and international business. The increased reliance on remote interpreting led to a greater recognition of its advantages, such as cost efficiency, accessibility, and flexibility, but also highlighted ongoing challenges, such as increased cognitive load, reduced interpersonal interaction, and technological limitations (Skinner et al. 2018). COVID-19 and the restrictions connected to the pandemic truly acted as a catalyst for remote interpreting, with various other concerns ranging from the low reliability of many remote solutions, to cheaper, but most

worryingly also inferior working conditions (Seeber and Fox 2021; Matsushita 2022). As a result, remote interpreting has not only remained a viable post-pandemic option but has also continued to shape the future of the interpreting market (Spinolo 2022).

Remote interpreting has its specifics that need to be taken into consideration when deciding the viability of this type of interpreting for the given context. Interpreting itself is a highly cognitive demanding task, therefore adding additional strains can have a negative impact on the interpreter and their quality of interpreting (Braun 2019). Hoyte-West (2022) points out to a negative effect on teamwork in the remote setting, alongside concerns regarding data privacy. Older studies point out the dissatisfaction of the interpreters in the remote setting, especially when it comes to their mental well-being and physiological comfort, which leads to more stress, more frequent headaches, problems with concentration and overall earlier onset of fatigue (Moser-Mercer et al. 1998; Moser-Mercer 2005; Mouzourakis 2006; Roziner and Schlesinger 2010). Diur and Ruiz Rosendo (2022) mention that studies that have included clinical components have not found significant changes in stress hormone values nor increases in stress levels. The perceived discomfort could then be explained by the lack of control of the situation during the assignment. Buján (2019) mentions the absence of information during remote interpreting that would be otherwise gained thanks to gestures, proxemics, face movements etc. Their absence contributes to the uneasiness of interpreters. They then have to put more effort into observing contextual sources, which are limited or even non-existent (Ziegler and Gigliobianco 2018).

Another defining feature of remote interpreting is the reliance on specialized technological platforms, each with varying degrees of user-friendliness and latency issues. The success of remote interpreting depends on stable internet connections, high-quality audio, and efficient platform design (Braun 2019). Technical failures, such as sound distortions or transmission lags, can lead to increased interpreter fatigue and potential errors in communication (Moser-Mercer 2005).

Furthermore, the economic implications of remote interpreting are notable. While it reduces travel costs and allows for greater flexibility in service provision, it also presents new challenges in terms of fair compensation and professional recognition (Salaets and Brône 2021). Some interpreters report experiencing lower rates for remote assignments, despite the additional cognitive and technical demands involved (Spinolo 2022). LSPs, on the other hand, benefit from the scalability of remote interpreting, enabling them to reach a broader clientele across different geographical locations (Teague 2024).

The shift towards remote interpreting marks a transformative period in the interpreting profession. While it offers numerous advantages, including accessibility and cost-effectiveness, it also introduces challenges related to interpreter well-being, technological dependence, and quality assurance. As research on remote interpreting continues to evolve, it is crucial to address these challenges through improved platform design, professional training, and industry regulations to ensure the sustainability of high-quality interpreting services in remote settings.

### **3. Research design**

For the research purposes, a survey for LSPs in Slovakia was designed. The main focus of the survey was remote interpreting and its aspects in Slovakia from the point of view of LSPs. The interest in this topic stems from the expansion of remote interpreting during the COVID-19 pandemic and the following changes on the interpreting market.

The survey was distributed online. It consisted of 12 closed questions and 3 open questions. At the end of the survey, the LSPs had the opportunity to state the main benefits and disadvantages of remote interpreting from their own experience. None of the questions were mandatory, because gathering as many responses as possible was a priority. Making all the

questions mandatory could cause the respondent to abandon the survey before submitting it. 32 Slovak LSPs were addressed. Their contact information has been obtained through desktop research and internet search. The call to fill out the survey was also distributed on social media – in a private Facebook group for Slovak translators, interpreters, and editors<sup>1</sup>.

The data collection lasted for one month, after which the survey was closed. During this time, 12 LSPs filled out the survey, which would be 27% of the addressed LSPs, but it needs to be acknowledged that an unknown number of LSPs could have filled out the survey based on the call posted in the Facebook group. Therefore, it is unknown how many respondents from the desktop research filled the survey, since the answers were mixed with the LSPs that might have discovered the survey thanks to the social media post.

The possible limitations of the survey might be in the number of responses obtained from the LSPs and the sources used to acquire their contact information. A larger sample of respondents would provide a more authentic image of the current situation, but the existing sample is sufficient to make conclusions and indicate general tendencies when it comes to the trend in providing remote interpreting services in Slovakia, since the market is relatively small. Another possible limitation is that LSPs may offer remote interpreting contracts in various settings, and some of them may specialize only in specific ones, such as conference interpreting or medical interpreting. Other types of interpreting settings, for example community interpreting, might be less represented; therefore, the data from the surveys might be more relevant to specific settings. The last possible limitation is connected to the time factor. As both the trends and technologies evolve, it is possible that the results might reflect the reality of the market during the data gathering period but may not be as relevant and accurate as time goes on.

#### **4. Research questions**

While designing the survey questions, the focus was put on specific aspects of remote interpreting services in Slovakia. Since another online survey about remote interpreting services for freelance interpreters in Slovakia was already designed and distributed (Birčák 2024), there were some questions that have been reused from this survey. However, given the different character of respondents for the current survey (LSPs), some questions from the previous survey were updated or completely omitted, while some new questions were designed. See the Appendix for a complete list of survey questions.

By having some of the questions identical to the previous survey, a comparison of the results among two distinct groups of respondents was possible, which allowed to better understand their point of view on the matter discussed. Additionally, new questions enriched the scope of the research, creating a complex image about the state of provision of remote interpreting services in Slovakia, especially when compared to on-site interpreting.

Several questions have been chosen to be the main focus of the research. However, there are other more niche questions that complement the main ones and contribute to the greater picture. Gathering information like this helps to better understand how the LSPs think, work, and perceive market trends. The following questions are the main research questions that enable a better understanding of the position of remote interpreting services from the perspective of LSPs in Slovakia:

1. Do LSPs offer remote interpreting services?

The first, and perhaps the most important question, is whether the LSPs even offer remote interpreting services. It is important to identify the proportion of LSPs who offer it and those who do not. Within this research question, the aim was to also find out how

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/50917867928>. Accessed on: 10 February 2025.

often and to what extent the remote interpreting services are provided, especially in comparison to on-site interpreting. And on the contrary, it would be beneficial to identify the reasons for not providing this type of interpreting.

2. What software tools are being used during remote interpreting?  
To offer remote interpreting is one thing, but the way it is offered is a different one. Information about the choice of software solutions, types of communication, work environment etc. helps to identify the trends and tendencies of not only the LSPs but also the clients.
3. What is the remuneration for remote interpreting services, especially when compared to on-site interpreting?  
The remuneration for remote interpreting services can reveal some information about its position on the job market. Based on the results, conclusions can be drawn about its benefits and disadvantages.
4. Do the LSPs offer training for their interpreters in regard to remote interpreting?  
As the remote interpreting experienced a boom in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still relatively recent, and many interpreters may not have received a formal education about how to properly handle the remote setting. Answers from the LSPs may provide experience from a non-academic environment.

The main questions combined with the additional questions provide a solid foundation for understanding the position of remote interpreting on the job market and its specifics. The answers could be then compared with existing research and conclusions can be made about the development of this type of interpreting, and perhaps of the industry as a whole. The results could also serve as a snapshot and reference point for future research connected with this topic.

## 5. Data analysis

In the following chapter, the results of the survey are presented, including the answers to all questions as well as the main research questions.

The first question divided the respondents to those who offer remote interpreting services and those who do not. Out of 12 respondents who filled out the survey, 8 (67%) of them do provide remote interpreting services. Four (33%) do not provide any form of remote interpreting services.

N = 12	Yes	No
Do you provide remote interpreting services (in any form)?	8	4

Figure 1. Provision of remote interpreting services

The survey was further divided by the previous answer. Those 4 LSPs that do not provide remote interpreting services were asked in the next question to state their reason(s) for not providing it. They could choose multiple answers and even write their own, however, no LSP used this opportunity. All of them believe that there is no demand on the market for remote interpreting services. The other reason that two (50%) LSPs chose was the absence of the technical equipment needed.

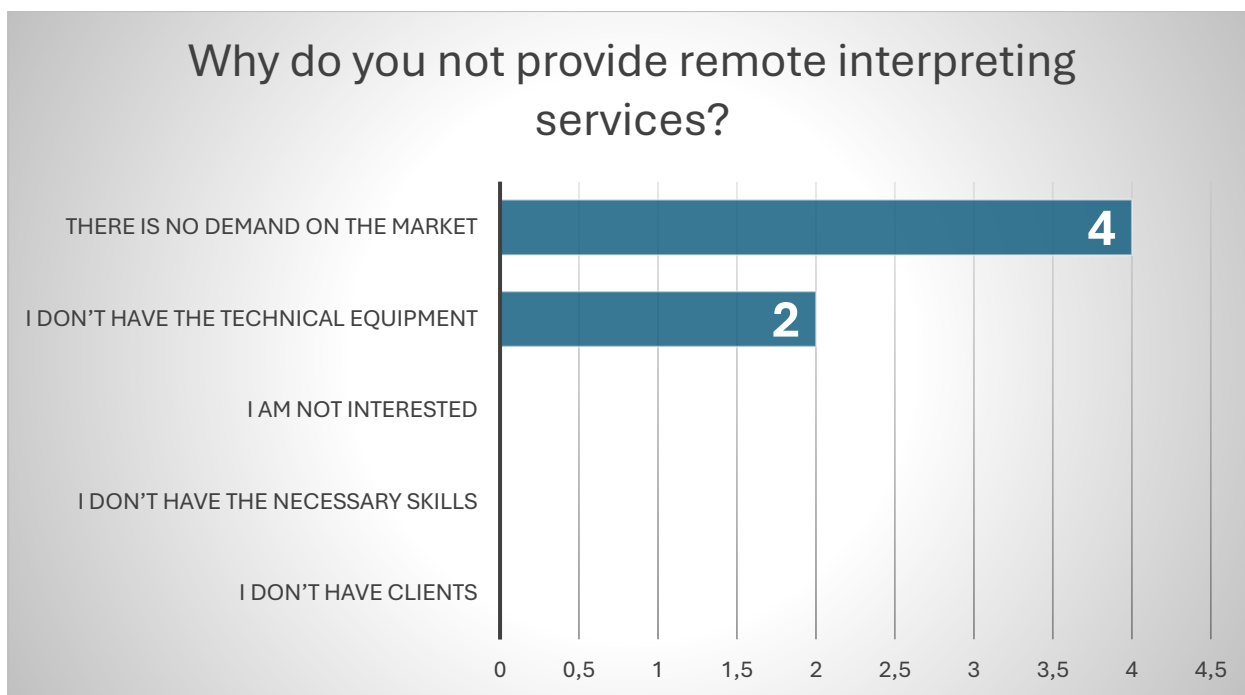


Figure 2. Reasons for not providing remote interpreting services

This was the last question for the LSPs that do not offer remote interpreting services. The survey was finished for them. The remaining LSPs who do provide remote interpreting services (n = 8) continued with the following questions.

Remote interpreting can have various forms. In the following question, the LSPs were asked what forms of remote interpreting they offer. They could choose multiple answers and even write their own. All eight of them (100%) said that they offer remote interpreting via video call. Five of them (62.5%) also offer interpreting via phone call and four of them (50%) also via specialized applications.

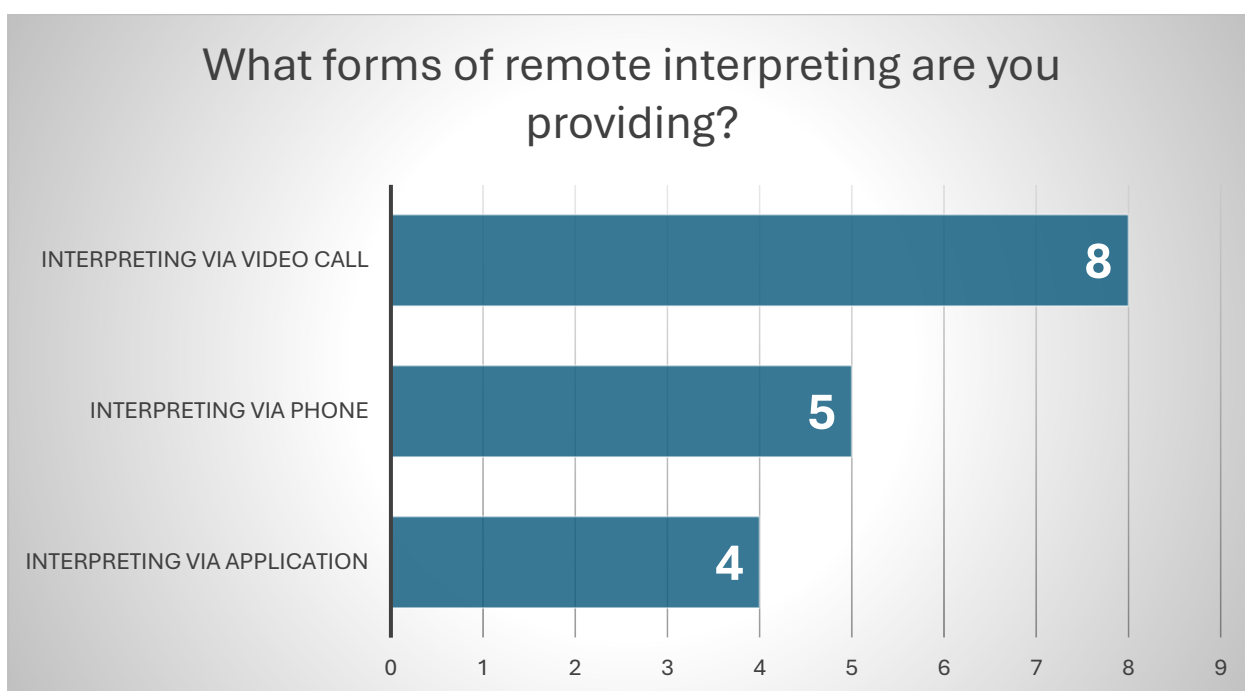


Figure 3. Forms of remote interpreting services

In the next question, the LSPs were asked about additional services while providing remote interpreting. Four LSPs (50%) stated that they only offer interpreting, e.g. the interpreters themselves. The other half stated that they offer technical support during the interpreting, with two of them (25%) further offering software solutions for the contract. One LSP (12.5%) also offers counseling before the event to limit the technical problems that may arise, and a different LSP (12.5%) also offers hardware.

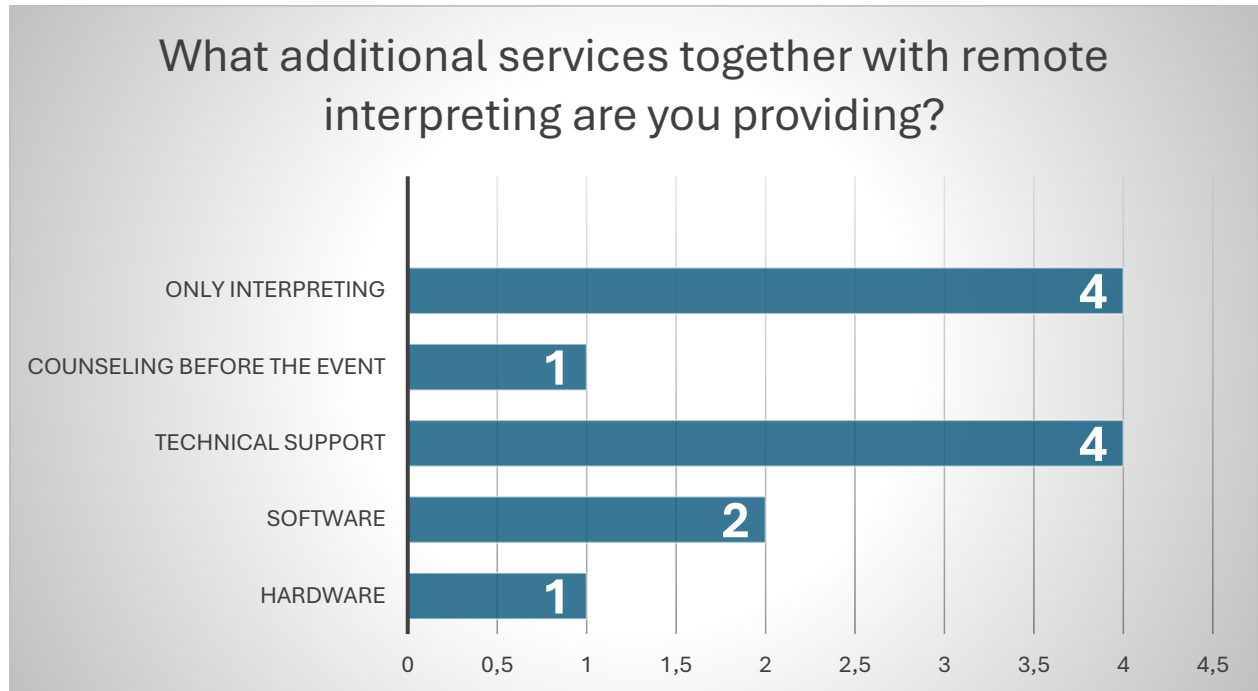


Figure 4. Additional services together with remote interpreting

The next question focused on the quantity of remote interpreting contracts. The LSPs were asked to state what percentage of their overall work, including translation jobs or any other language-related work, is dedicated to remote interpreting contracts. Seven LSPs (87.5%) said that it accounts only for 1 to 10% of all their work. Only 1 LSP (12.5%) selected 11 to 25%.

What share of all your work is represented by remote interpreting?

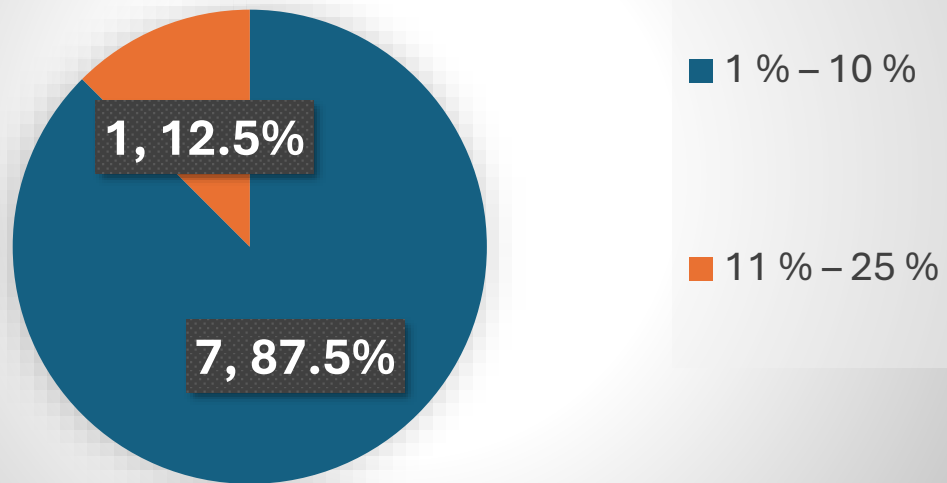


Figure 5. Proportion of remote interpreting in the overall work of the LSP

The following question was aimed at a similar topic. LSPs were to state the proportion of their remote interpreting contracts again, but this time not throughout all the work that they do, but only within their interpreting contracts, excluding translation and other language services. In other words, they were asked about the proportion of remote interpreting contracts compared to on-site interpreting contracts. Four LSPs (50%) still remained within the 1 to 10% ratio, but there was an expected increase, with 1 LSP (12.5%) selecting 11 to 25%, 2 LSPs (25%) choosing 26 to 50%, and 1 LSP (12.5%) even offering remote interpreting services more often than on-site.

What share of all your interpreting work is represented by remote interpreting?

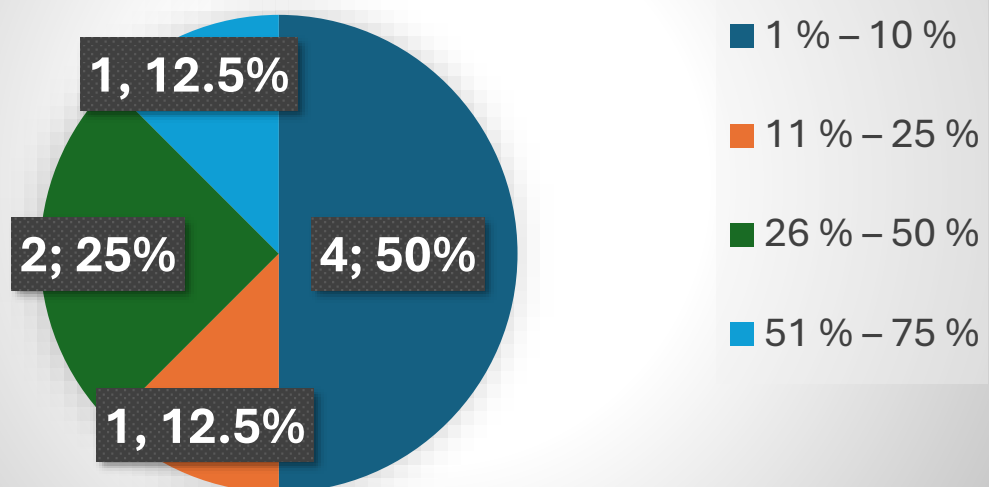


Figure 6. Proportion of remote interpreting compared to on-site interpreting

The next question focused on the software tools that the LSPs use. They could select multiple answers and even add their own, however, none of them did. None of them selected the answer *none*, which is in alignment with the results of the question focusing on the forms of remote interpreting, where all of the LSPs said they are using video calls and half of them also applications. All eight respondents (100%) selected Zoom, making it the most popular software platform. Six LSPs (75%) also use Microsoft Teams. Four LSPs (50%) are also working with Skype, Webex, and Google Meet. Kudo and Interprefy are being used by only one LSP (12.5%), respectively.

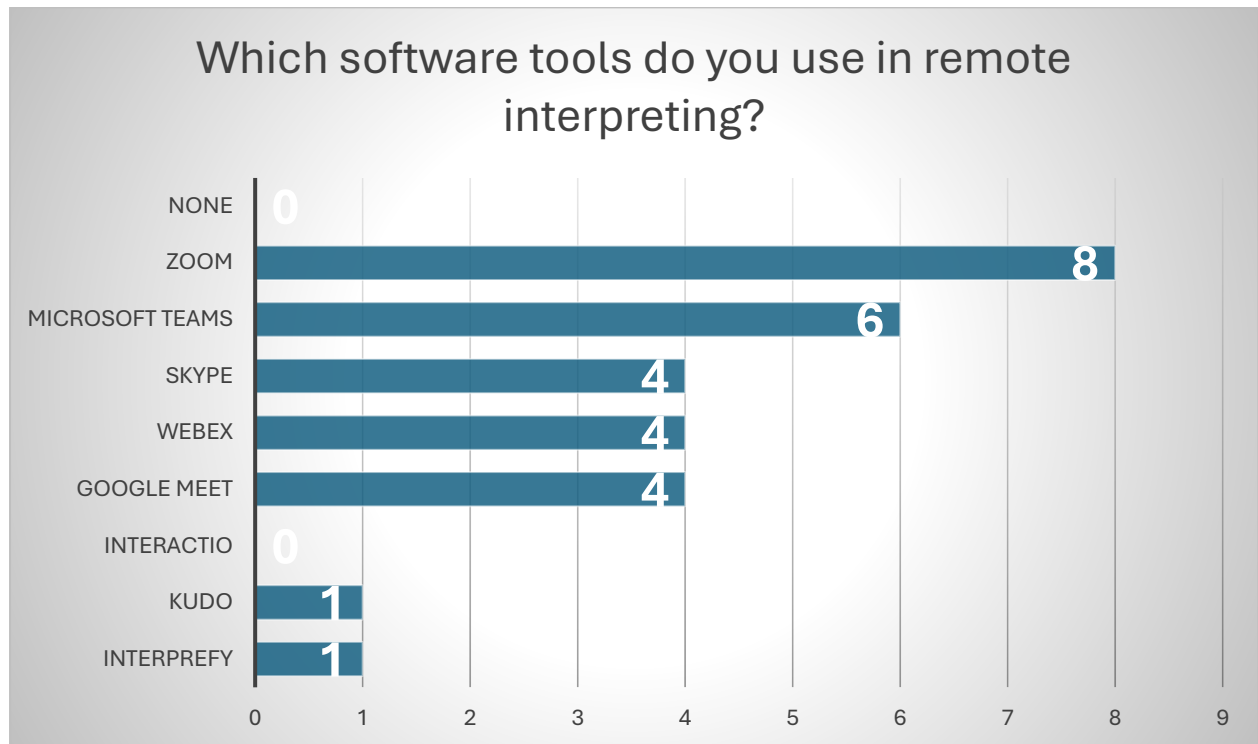


Figure 7. Usage of software tools

The following question focused on the remuneration for remote interpreting services. LSPs were asked to compare the financial reward for remote interpreting to on-site interpreting. Four respondents (50%) said that remote interpreting is cheaper than on-site interpreting. Three LSPs (37.5%) stated that both forms cost approximately the same. One LSP (12.5%) said that the prices are calculated individually, based on additional factors.

### How much money do you charge for remote interpreting compared to on-site interpreting?

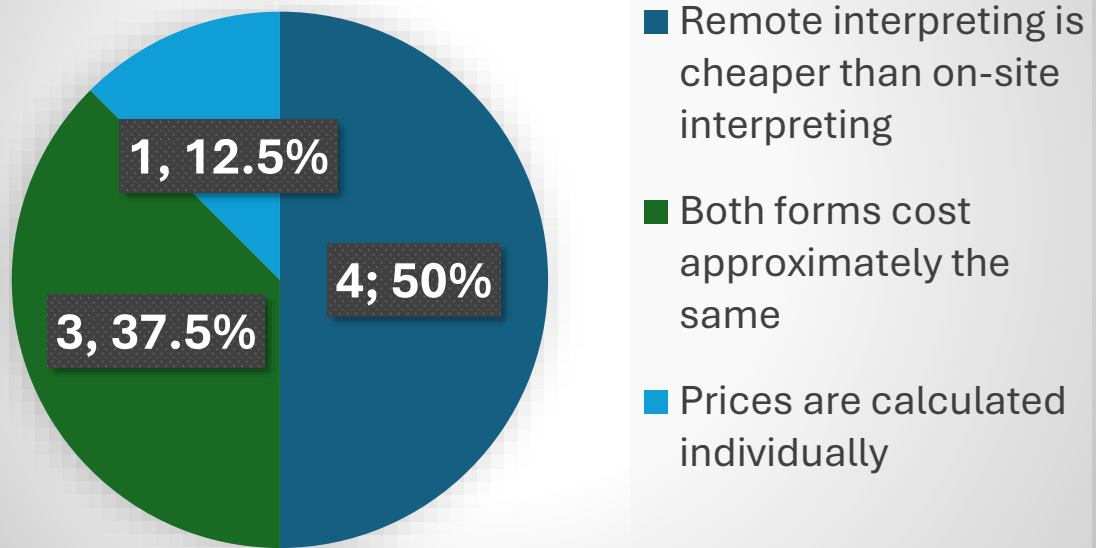


Figure 8. Remuneration for remote interpreting in comparison to on-site interpreting

The next question focused on the types of interpreters that are working for the LSPs. The respondents could choose multiple answers and even add their own answer. However, no one used this option. Six LSPs (75%) use freelance interpreters, and 2 LSPs (25%) use in-house interpreters.

### What kind of interpreters are working remotely for you?

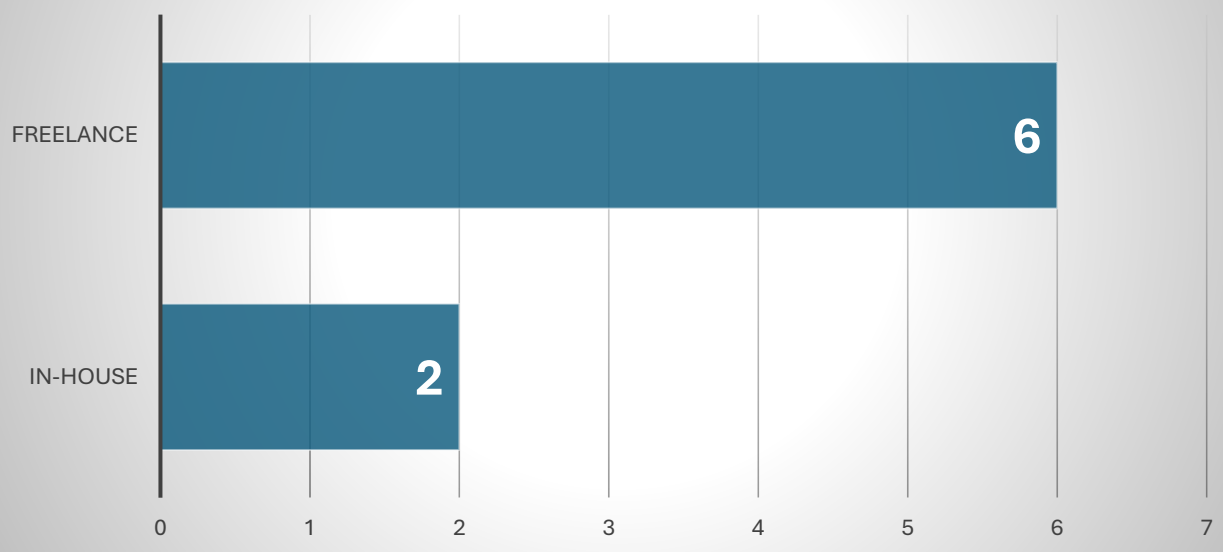


Figure 9. Types of interpreters for remote interpreting contracts

The next question focused on the location of interpreters during remote interpreting. LSPs were asked to select the place where their interpreters are located during the contract. They could

select multiple answers and also add their own. All eight (100%) agreed that the interpreters can be located at home, or any other location of their choosing. Two LSPs (25%) also stated that the interpreters can be located at the event itself or at the agency. If the interpreter is located at the event itself but isolated from other participants (either being in a different room, floor etc., or having the other participants joining only virtually), such scenario can be referred to as hybrid, which is a compromise between on-site and remote interpreting.

One of the answers was added by the respondent that said that the location of the interpreter depends on the specific requirements of the contract, and they can be located at home, at the event or at the agency.

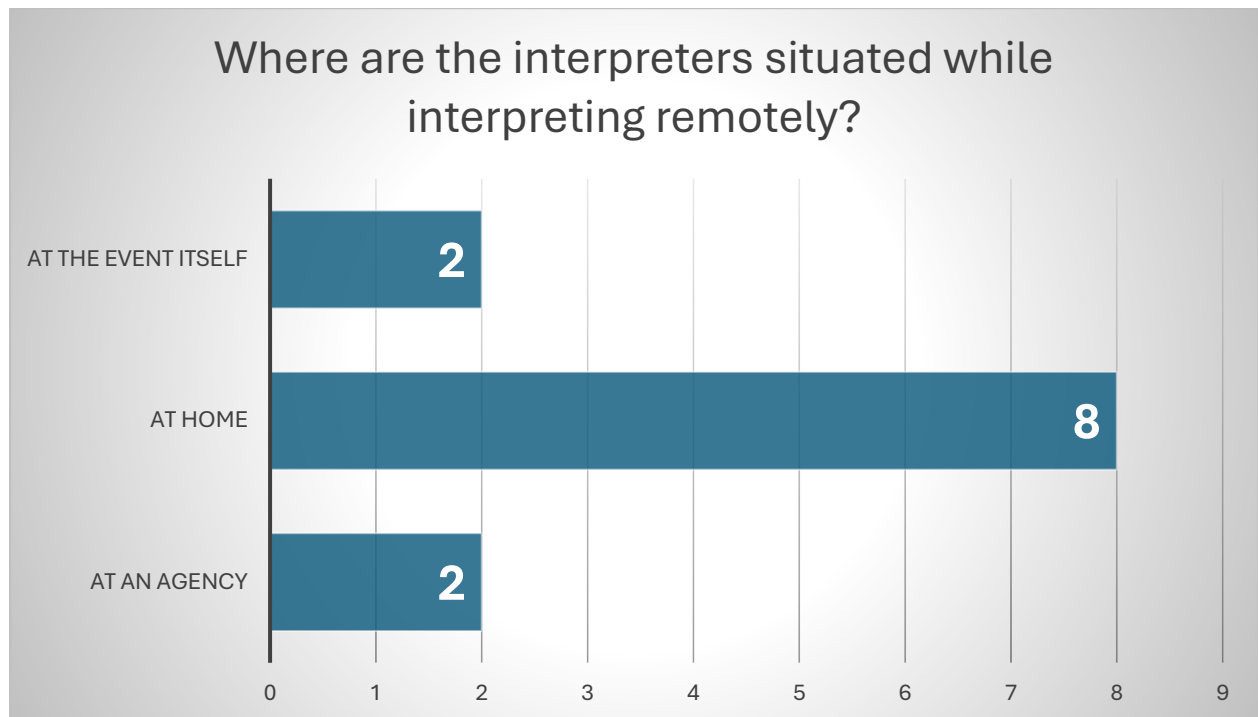


Figure 10. The location of the interpreter while interpreting remotely

The next question focused on additional roles that the interpreter might have. This question is perhaps better suited for interpreters themselves, and they were already asked this question in previous research (Birčák 2024). This issue is also worth exploring from the perspective of LSPs. Two LSPs (25%) said that their interpreters sometimes take on an additional role besides interpreting. The rest (6; 75%) answered negatively.

There was an additional open question for those two LSPs, in which they were asked to describe the role in more detail. One LSP stated that their interpreters sometimes act as hosts or moderators of a discussion. They have to manage the discussion and decide who will speak next. The other LSP mentioned the moderator's role too but also mentioned the role of a social worker who is familiar with the laws and bureaucratic procedures in a given country. The LSP also provided an example: the client goes to the bureau in a foreign country and the interpreter is helping them remotely by not only interpreting communication with the administrative workers, but also by providing guidance on the laws and how to fill out the assigned paperwork.

Do interpreters sometimes represent any other role while interpreting remotely?

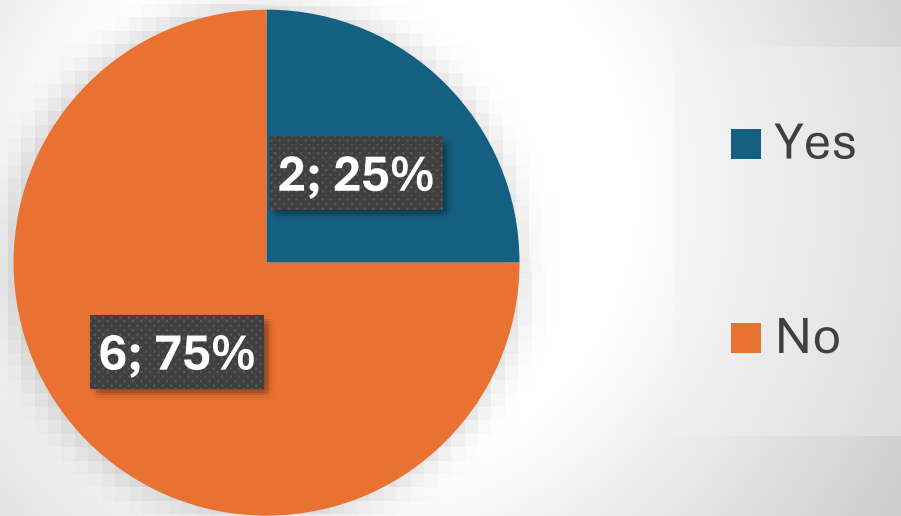


Figure 11. Additional roles of interpreters

The following question focused on training and courses that the LSP may offer to their interpreters or clients in order to improve the interpreters' performance and lower the risk of technical difficulties. One LSP decided not to answer this question. Only 2 LSPs (29%) offer some kind of training. The other 5 LSPs (71%) do not offer anything related to preparation for the remote interpreting.

In the follow-up open question that was dedicated to only those 2 LSPs that provide some form of training, they were asked to describe the training. One LSP stated that they are willing to run through the basics and show the functionalities of the given platform to an inexperienced interpreter, as well as to explain the whole process and potential issues that may arise. They also offer such guidance to the client if they are interested, which can include a test meeting to verify that everything is working as intended. The second LSP stated that their training is also only informal and includes the sharing of their know-how either with the interpreter or with the client, if they are interested.

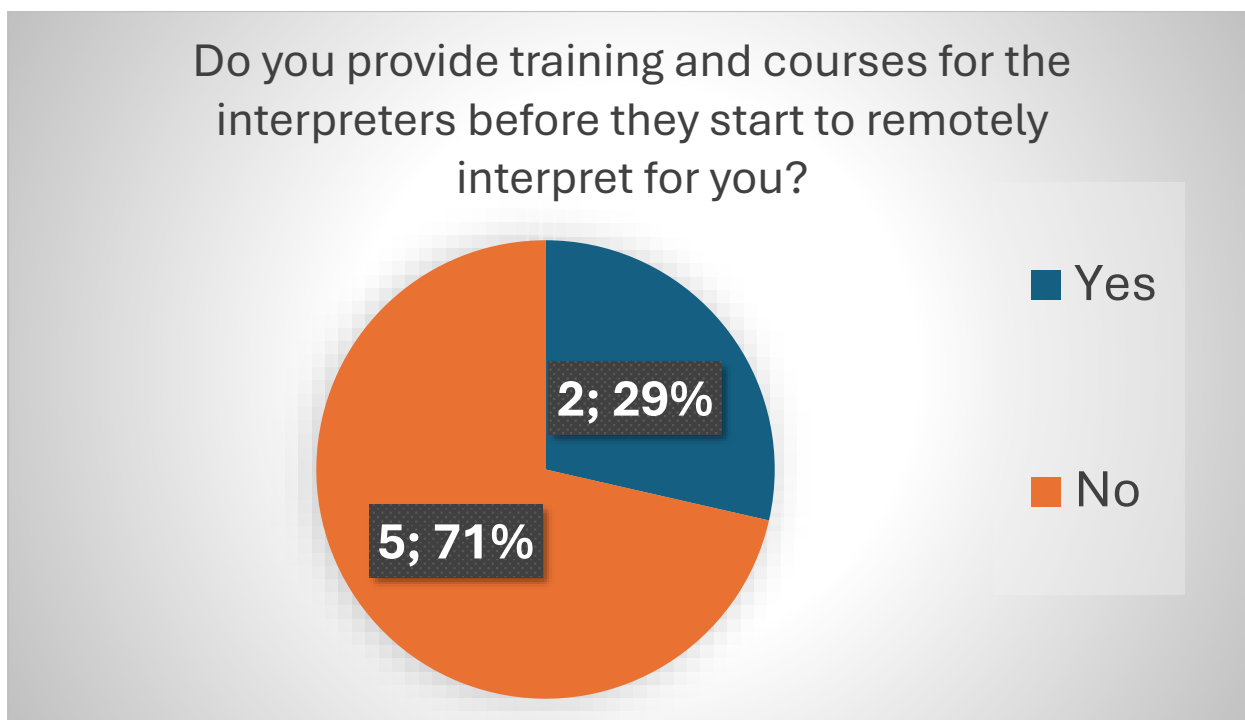


Figure 12. Providing training and courses by the language service provider

## 6. Discussion

The survey was aimed at many aspects of remote interpreting from the point of view of Slovak LSPs. Closed questions focused on specific challenges and their results serve more as statistics, while the open questions offered the respondents to freely express their opinions on the matter, providing fresh perspective. The following are the most crucial findings of the survey.

The first main research question focused on the provision of remote interpreting services by the Slovak LSPs. Even if the pandemic was the catalyst for remote interpreting worldwide, after the lift of the restrictions, the situation somewhat stabilized, and on-site interpreting returned (Nimdzi 2023). Therefore, it was worth exploring how the situation evolved in Slovakia. The results show that remote interpreting is indeed demanded, with 67% of LSPs providing it. There were additional questions connected to the provision of remote interpreting services. Four LSPs (33%) that do not provide it stated as their reasons that there is no demand on the market. Furthermore, two of these LSPs also said that they do not have the required technical equipment. Having active licenses for various software solutions could be costly, as well as having solid equipment such as headphones and microphones for their interpreters. Additionally, the LSPs do not even consider acquiring the necessary licenses and technical equipment because of their perceived lack of demand on the market. However, as can be seen from the results, eight LSPs (66%) do provide remote interpreting services, therefore it is not entirely true that there is not enough demand on the market. But at the same time, it needs to be said that remote interpreting represents a smaller portion of the LSPs' interpreting contracts. The two additional questions about the share of the remote interpreting work within all work and within interpreting work, respectively, point out that only one LSP (12.5%) provides remote interpreting more often than on-site interpreting. Two LSPs (25%) selected the range of 26 to 50%, so the remote and on-site settings are at best split in half. One LSP (12.5%) selected the range of 11 to 25%. The other four LSPs (50%) said that remote interpreting is only represented in 1 to 10% of all their interpreting contracts. Additionally, seven LSPs (87.5%) stated that remote interpreting is responsible for only 1 to 10% of all their work, when including translation or other contracts. Only one LSP (12.5%) selected the range between 11

to 25%. In this context, the reasoning behind those LSPs that do not provide remote interpreting is clear, as the demand for it is not as high as for on-site interpreting, and it would not make economic sense to actively maintain the licenses, equipment, and other requirements. In conclusion, the demand for remote interpreting services in Slovakia is present, but it is relatively small when compared to on-site interpreting. So small in fact, that some LSPs do not even consider it worth offering.

The second research question dealt with the software tools that the LSP might use for their remote interpreting contracts. While software tools are not always necessary for providing remote interpreting services (e.g. telephone interpreting), they often serve as a communication channel for the parties involved. The results show that all eight respondents (100%) work with the Zoom platform, which is the most popular one. Its popularity can be seen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. During that period, on-site meetings transferred to online space and Zoom became the popular option for many business, conference or work-related meetings. The developers of Zoom kept updating and improving the platform. An interpreting module was also added so that the meetings could be easily interpreted into multiple languages. As of today, the interpreting module within Zoom is not free to use. The user needs to have at least an active Pro license<sup>2</sup> which currently costs 15 € per month and includes various other benefits. If the user requires regular remote interpreting services, the price is acceptable, as it is relatively low. The second most used software tool was Microsoft Teams, with six LSPs (75%) selecting it. The following software solutions are used by four LSPs (50%) each: Skype, Webex, Google Meet. Interestingly enough, the three solutions that were designed for providing remote interpreting were represented the least, with only one LSP (12.5%) selecting Kudo and Interprefy, respectively. Interactio was not selected at all. The possible explanation for this could be that these solutions are more expensive than the licenses for more commonly used videoconferencing software solutions (such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc.). Another reason might be that clients that need remote interpreting services are not acquainted with these tools and therefore prefer the ones they already know and use. The LSPs also had the option to write their own answers in case the software tool that they might use was not listed. However, none of the respondents used this option. Similarly, no respondent selected the option that they do not use any software solution. That would mean that they only offer telephone interpreting. An additional question connected with the software solutions were the forms of remote interpreting. The results of this question reveal that all eight LSPs (100%) offer interpreting via video call and five of them (62.5%) also via telephone. Based on these results, a conclusion can be made that the most popular software tools for videoconferencing are also the most popular for providing remote interpreting services for their convenience.

The third research question was dedicated to remuneration for remote interpreting services. Given the fact that remote settings can save on the costs that would be otherwise spent on traveling and accommodation, it would be logical to think that remote interpreting would be offered cheaper than on-site interpreting. Based on the answers of the survey, four LSPs (50%) indeed offer remote interpreting services cheaper than on-site interpreting. However, the other four LSPs (50%) had a different opinion that is not so direct. Three of the LSPs (37.5%) said that both forms cost approximately the same. One LSP (12.5%) stated that prices are calculated individually. No LSP selected the option in which remote interpreting would be more expensive than on-site interpreting. A conclusion can be made that remote interpreting tends to be generally cheaper, but even so it has its specifics that need to be assessed before the price calculation by the LSP. Remote settings can have a lot of different scenarios and modalities concerning, for example the number of participants, location of each of them, purpose of the event, technology used and so on. It is essential to take these factors into consideration and set

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://zoom.us/pricing>. Accessed on: 08 March 2025.

the price accordingly. If there are additional costs based on, for example the required software licenses, then the price for the contract will be higher to cover them. But since four LSPs (50%) stated that they offer remote interpreting for cheaper, a conclusion can be made that they are used to specific settings and modalities of remote interpreting which they are adequately prepared for already (meaning they already have the licenses required etc.). On the contrary, another survey (Birčák 2024) that was aimed at Slovak freelance interpreters revealed that only 4% of them offer remote interpreting cheaper than on-site interpreting, while 72% stated that both forms cost approximately the same and 20% said that the prices are calculated individually based on the specific needs of the given contract.

The fourth research question focused on providing the potential training for interpreters by the LSPs. Since remote interpreting experienced a boom in demand only during the pandemic of COVID-19, there was an assumption that many of the interpreters have not received a formal education on it. Therefore, to ensure smooth operations, LSP might want to train their interpreters in remote settings. One LSP decided not to answer this question. Two LSPs (29%) offer some kind of training for their interpreters. The other five LSPs (71%) stated that they do not provide any training. This training is not necessarily aimed at interpreters, since in the additional question of the survey, the two LSPs were asked to describe the offered training. Both of them said that it is not formal training, but rather basic know-how on how to work with a given videoconferencing platform. Moreover, both of the LSPs mentioned that this training is not offered only to their interpreters, but also to the clients in the form of a pilot meeting where the LSP would explain the functionalities of the platform and explain basic principles and solutions to the potential issues that might arise during the interpreting and meeting as a whole. The pilot testing also serves as a place where the LSP, interpreters, and clients can express their expectations, concerns, and demands regarding the interpreting to minimize the potential technical and other issues during the interpreting contract. From these answers, it is clear that the training provided by the LSPs for remote interpreting settings is primarily focused on how to effectively work with videoconferencing platforms, both for interpreters and clients alike. The training provided by the two LSPs does not include guidelines on how to handle the remote setting during interpreting. Rather, it is a tool-oriented explanation. For comparison, in another survey (Birčák 2024), freelance interpreters were asked where they have gained the skills necessary for remote interpreting, and only one of the interpreters (2%) selected as the source the LSP they worked for, while 42% of them said they have not received formal education in remote interpreting.

## **7. Conclusion**

Remote interpreting as a specific type of interpreting gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Even though today's market is free of any pandemic restrictions, the changes imposed during those years made their impact. Over time, an increasing number of people started to realize that on-site meetings are not the only effective means of communication. Online meetings via phone calls or videoconferencing software tools in various modalities are now common and they are likely to stay in the future, with the prospect of expanding, since the technologies will only get better. The world is highly globalized and interconnected, which only further strengthens the position of remote interpreting, especially in specific contexts, like community interpreting or healthcare settings.

The presented research shed light on the position of remote interpreting in Slovakia from the point of view of LSPs. Research questions were satisfactorily answered and provided a deeper understanding of how some of the aspects of remote interpreting work in the Slovak context. The provision of remote interpreting and its demand is sufficient for the LSPs to offer this type of interpreting, even though its position is significantly weaker than on-site

interpreting, with a portion of LSPs even believing that there is no high enough demand for remote interpreting to provide it. The most popular software solutions for providing remote interpreting are the most popular videoconferencing tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, since the clients are already accustomed to using these. Additionally, using dedicated tools for interpreting might be more financially demanding. When it comes to finances, remote interpreting tends to be cheaper than on-site interpreting or equally expensive, depending on the additional factors of the given contract. And lastly, some LSPs offer informal training to their interpreters and clients about how to effectively work with the videoconferencing platforms to minimize the potential technical and other issues. The training is only optional and partial, as it covers the given tools, but omits the dangers of remote interpreting as a whole. The answers to the additional questions also complemented the main research questions and provided deeper perspectives on various aspects of remote interpreting.

Remote interpreting has many benefits as well as disadvantages, especially when compared to on-site interpreting. It would be unfair to compare them directly side by side, since each of them can include multiple settings and modalities, making them even more specific to the given context. Therefore, remote interpreting would be relevant even if the overwhelming majority of interpreting contracts would be carried out on-site, simply because remote interpreting offers different benefits, such as flexibility, scalability, and cut costs in numerous aspects. Remote interpreting then should be carefully studied and compared with other forms of interpreting, as well as with the events that are happening in the world to be able to predict the changes in the market. This way would provide a better understanding of how it can be further improved to enhance the experience of all parties involved.

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### **Appendix (Providing remote interpreting services in Slovakia by language service providers)**

1. Do you provide remote interpreting services (in any form?)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. If not, what are the reasons?
  - a. There is no demand on the market

- b. I do not have technical equipment
  - c. I do not have the necessary skills
  - d. I do not have clients
  - e. I am not interested
  - f. Other
3. What forms of remote interpreting are you providing?
    - a. Interpreting via phone
    - b. Interpreting via application
    - c. Interpreting via videocall
  4. What additional services together with remote interpreting are you providing?
    - a. Hardware
    - b. Software
    - c. Technical support
    - d. Counseling before the event
    - e. Only interpreting
    - f. The interpreters
    - g. Other
  5. What share of all your work is represented by remote interpreting?
    - a. 1% – 10%
    - b. 11% – 25%
    - c. 26% – 50%
    - d. 51% – 75%
    - e. 76% – 99%
    - f. 100%
  6. What share of all your interpreting work is represented by remote interpreting?
    - a. 1% – 10%
    - b. 11% – 25%
    - c. 26% – 50%
    - d. 51% – 75%
    - e. 76% – 99%
    - f. 100%
  7. Which software tools do you use in remote interpreting?
    - a. Zoom
    - b. Microsoft Teams
    - c. Skype
    - d. Webex
    - e. Google Meet
    - f. Kudo
    - g. Interprefy
    - h. Interactio
    - i. None
    - j. Other
  8. What kind of interpreters do you deploy for remote interpreting?
    - a. In-house
    - b. Freelance
    - c. Other
  9. How much money do you charge for remote interpreting compared to on-site interpreting?
    - a. Remote interpreting is cheaper than on-site interpreting
    - b. Both forms cost approximately the same

- c. Remote interpreting is more expensive than on-site interpreting
  - d. Prices are calculated individually
  - e. Other
10. Where are the interpreters situated while interpreting remotely?
- a. At home
  - b. At an agency
  - c. At the event itself
  - d. Other
11. Do interpreters sometimes represent any other role while interpreting remotely?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
12. If yes, describe the role that they sometimes represent.
13. Do you provide training for the interpreters before they start to remotely interpret for you?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
14. If yes, describe the training you offer.
15. Based on your experience, please describe the advantages and disadvantages of remote interpreting, especially when compared to on-site interpreting.

# ARTISTIC INTERPRETING AS A CREATIVE WORK BY A STUDENT OF SLOVAK SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

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## Abstract

Artistic interpreting of singing and music aims to provide Deaf audiences with a similar experience to that of hearing listeners. The goal is to transform music into a visual image – through artistic performance, to create a visual “projection” of the content, the idea of the composition. Artistic interpreting of singing encompasses two concepts: translation and performance. Music interpreting also requires the interpreter to be emotionally open to both the composition and the audience, which can be challenging for some interpreters. The study program that prepares students for interpreting to and from Slovak Sign Language provides them with the opportunity to gain experience through the artistic interpretation of one or two compositions at public cultural events each year. This investigation centers on the process of translating a composition, encompassing performance training, the selection of sign vocabulary, and the creation of a visual image, as examined through semi-structured interviews with twelve students. During preparation, students work with a Deaf teacher and a Deaf supervisor. The nature of their cooperation is also an important aspect of this research. The research results highlight the challenging work of uncovering the composition context, as well as the possibilities for effective cooperation between the student, the Deaf teacher and the supervisor during the rehearsal and translation of the interpreted piece.

## 1. Artistic interpreting into sign language

Artistic interpreting for Deaf users of sign language is a specific type of work. It involves two types of interpreting: *interpreting theatrical plays* and *interpreting musical performers* – their songs. As Kováčová (2008) and Červinková Houšková (2008) state, neither of these activities is interpreting as traditionally defined. In both cases, the interpreter must prepare in advance. However, both cases of specific interpreting are not performed by the interpreter alone. It is always the result of an analysis of the theatrical performance, the script, or the composition. The term “artistic interpreting” includes a pre-prepared artistic translation and cooperation with the performer or actor, director, or theatre. Therefore, the interpreting that was not prepared in advance (the interpreter is present on stage, but the performance is improvised) is not included in the category of artistic interpreting. In Slovakia, there have been cases in which, during spoken parts of performances, such as benefit concerts, the interpreter interprets the spoken parts and then, without any prior preparation, also interprets the performers’ singing during the program. In such cases, the interpreters did not have the opportunity to study the song and analyse the performer’s expression in advance, so the interpreting was literal. Highly metaphorical lyrics can make it difficult for the interpreter to immediately convey an appropriate equivalent, which may interrupt the fluency of the sign language interpretation. In addition, there is a high probability that the interpreter cannot correctly deliver or portray the emotional expression of the actor.

According to Kováčová (2008) and Červinková Houšková (2008), the very term “artistic interpreting” is misleading. The authors argue that this activity consists of two consecutive activities, neither of which is actually interpreting: translation and performance. In the context of Slovak translation studies, this genre would more likely be classified as a type of hybrid

interpreting – similar, for instance, to sight translation – where the text is first translated as part of the preparation before the actual interpreting takes place (Müglová 2018).

The ability to create the translation itself belongs to the basic requirements for an interpreter. Therefore, proficiency in both spoken and sign language is essential. In addition, the interpreter must have a deep understanding of Deaf culture and the Deaf community, as quality interpretation cannot be achieved without this cultural competence (Kováčová 2008; Červinková Houšková 2008).

## **2. Study of Slovak Sign Language interpreting**

In Slovakia, since the academic year of 2020/2021, a system for training qualified interpreters has been established thanks to a four-year professionally oriented Bachelor's study program, "Slovak Language in Communication with the Deaf," at the Faculty of Education of the University of Trnava. Although the program is designed for both beginners and advanced learners, it is primarily attended by students without prior sign language experience. For this reason, they study Slovak Sign Language as a foreign language. The study program is designed so that students, as future interpreters, can acquire theoretical knowledge in fundamental areas of linguistics, sign language and Slovak language linguistics, written Slovak used by the Deaf, Deaf culture, the education system for children with hearing impairment, interpreting and translation. Students also gain practical skills through practical courses focused on acquiring Slovak Sign Language and practicing sign language interpreting, with the goal of achieving at least a B2 language proficiency level (Vojtechovský 2023).

## **3. Music and singing interpreting**

The term *music and singing interpreting* refers to two activities performed by the interpreter: composition translating and delivering it in synchronization with the performer. Although musical interpreting can be divided into music interpreting and singing interpreting, the approach is slightly different in both cases, but the goal is always the same: to provide the Deaf audience with the same artistic experience as the hearing audience.

The interpreter must thoroughly prepare for this type of interpreting. The most demanding part of the process primarily involves the preparation of the translation. However, music interpreting also requires the interpreter to be able to connect with the composition and the audience, which can be difficult for some. In our context, artistic interpreting – meaning the actual performance – is usually done by the person who prepared the translation.

Červinková Houšková (2008) states that artistic interpreting is not particularly suitable for beginner interpreters. An inexperienced interpreter is often unaware of the significant effort required to translate and perform a composition. Additionally, this form of interpreting is highly demanding. At concerts, it is common for multiple interpreters to alternate after each composition, even if there is only one performer. Even brief compositions, lasting merely one or two minutes, demand extensive preparation.

## **4. Methodology: aim and research questions**

The research focused on students enrolled in the four-year professionally oriented Bachelor's program Slovak Language in the Communication of the Deaf at the Faculty of Education, University of Trnava, which specializes in Slovak Sign Language translation and interpreting. The study examined students' knowledge, preparation processes, and motivation to address key challenges inherent in the comprehensive process of artistic interpreting preparation, culminating in a concert performance. Indirectly, the research also addressed students'

motivation for preparing artistic interpreting of music and singing, based on their knowledge acquired during their university studies.

Behind every preparation, which lasts several weeks, lies a certain motivation driving students to fully complete their work. As students prepare for an artistic interpreting performance, they also gain a deeper understanding of the translation methods used in this genre through a long-term learning process.

In investigating motivation, the method of structured interviews was chosen. A set of pre-formulated questions was prepared; the interviewer provided guidance and direction but also aimed to allow the respondent to elaborate on certain questions in an exploratory way. This type of interview is suitable in cases when the researcher has sufficient knowledge of the phenomenon or area and is able to develop comprehensive questions on the topic in advance but does not want to use ready-made answer categories that would limit the depth and extent of the respondent's statements. Thus, the students retrospectively reflected on their overall work, identifying causal connections between their motivation and the strategies that accompanied their preparation. The interviews were conducted shortly after their final performance, while the students' memories of the event were still vivid.

This research approach was selected due to the relatively small number of participants, as well as the diverse backgrounds of the students, each of whom had a unique motivation for studying Slovak Sign Language and interpreting. The research consisted of 12 students (all of whom agreed to participate in the research), who, during their university studies, had the opportunity to sign up for and participate in artistic interpreting of songs during the academic years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. At the time of the artistic interpretation, the students were in their first, second, or third year of study. Among them, three already had experience with conventional interpreting.

Answers to individual questions were documented in tables, which also included quotations from students' responses about various aspects of their translation preparation.

Notably, the research group includes the following students:

- Hearing individuals, with no prior knowledge of Slovak Sign Language before starting their studies and without Deaf or hard-of-hearing family members (referred to in the research as persons P1-P7),
- CODA individuals, i.e. children of Deaf parents, who may or may not already interpret, without consistent prior education in the field of Slovak Sign Language translation and interpreting (referred to in the research as persons C1-C3),
- Hard-of-hearing individuals or persons with a cochlear implant (referred to in the research as persons NP1, NP2).

The research questions were as follows:

- What motivates students to accept the offer of artistic interpreting?
- What literary or documentary sources do students use to understand the metaphorical content/parts of compositions?
- What are the greatest challenges in preparing the translation and interpreting of a composition for Slovak Sign Language interpreting students?
- What role do the Deaf teacher and Deaf supervisor play in rehearsing the translation of an artistic composition?

## **5. Data collection**

The interviews were conducted between February and April 2024, either in the video studio of the University of Trnava or via the ZOOM platform. The responses to the semi-structured

interview questions were entered into tables, incorporating citations of students' statements exemplifying their translation preparation.

The first question focused on the motivation for studying this field, aiming to determine whether enrolment was driven by an interest in the language itself or by a strong motivation to interpret in the future. Individuals without previous interpreting experience primarily expressed an interest in the language, while those (both CODA and hearing individuals) with practical interpreting experience emphasized the professionalization of their career. Not every student enrolls with the intention of becoming an interpreter after graduation; this was particularly confirmed among those with no prior interpreting experience. We assume this is due to their lack of practical experience in translation and interpreting.

During their studies in the field of Slovak Language in Communication with the Deaf, students do not have the opportunity to attend music and singing interpreting as standalone subjects. As part of the Introduction to Interpreting, they can acquire the theoretical foundations of artistic interpreting as such, but this does not equip them with the practical translation training and preparation for the performance of singing and music. According to students, mastering Slovak Sign Language is sufficient ( $n = 8$ ) for handling artistic interpreting, but they set certain specifications:

P6: *“Yes, but it’s not possible without a Deaf teacher or a Deaf supervisor. Without their supervision, I would not know whether it is correct or not. Their perspective is important in this respect. After my performance, a Deaf supervisor approached me and commented that the rhythm was not well incorporated in my interpreting, so I realized my mistake. Before that, I thought I was doing it correctly.”*

The assumption was that starting with artistic interpreting as a relatively unfamiliar area must, at least in a certain group of students, evoke strong motivation, which can take various forms and is an answer to the question of why they decided to take on such a challenging task. For some, it may be pride in presenting artistic signing to the audience. The assumption was confirmed that their reasoning is linked to their prior experience performing in public. P3, P4, and P5 have a background connected to years of practice with dancing and/or participation in cultural or social events in the town or village where they live. P4 also highlighted a previous week-long training back in 2013: *“The artistic interpreting course that lasted about a week gave me more detailed information about this work and how to proceed. All in all, artistic interpreting captured my interest. I feel like I have to do it, but I really enjoy it.”*

C1 and C2, as interpreters with several years of experience, wanted to try a different type of interpreting. Their motivation relates to professionalization: interpreters who want to interpret in various areas must educate themselves and gain practice and experience.

## **6. Research results**

### **1. Challenge: finding the context of the composition**

The content of a composition is related to a broader, socio-historical context, which can also serve as a starting point for the creation of a translation. The interpreter has to decide which aspects of the context will be included in the translation, and which will be not. Semantic elements of the composition that the hearing audience automatically connects to certain historical, cultural, and other social events should be preserved in the translation. For example, if a composition reflects the current period, contemporary cultural elements may appear. In other words, if the theme of the composition is hard work and the search for a job in the labour market, those topics may be projected in the composition through the burdens that accompany work experienced by both men and women.

The issue of establishing context was mentioned by all students as a necessary piece of

information they find difficult to obtain. P3 mentions that due to the nature of the song she was able to figure it out, but most students mention that when they read the text, they understood very little in relation to context, which was insufficient. Therefore, apart from frequent listening to the composition, for C1, C2, P1, P3 and P4, it was necessary to look for additional information such as the author of the composition, the reason why it was composed, what story motivated and inspired the author – whether it was related to a certain experience. If this issue persists, one must search further and look for the context. Motivation, in this context, refers to uncovering the main inspiration behind a song's creation. Without this understanding, it's impossible to move on to the next step – translation. Sometimes, videos can serve as an aid, especially when they depict a story, which makes the process easier and helps in finding the context. However, for some songs, one may only find “images” that are not helpful in this regard. Then it is necessary to conduct further research, seek information by asking the band questions, but sometimes no answers are obtained (C2).

Thus, if finding out the context of a composition proves to be problematic, the student must search for other sources to ascertain the meaning and content of the interpreted song. C1, C2 and P1 conducted an intense search for interviews with the singers, focusing on whether they could find a statement related to the song. Not every student was able to get an interview with the band regarding the song in question. P5 used a podcast interview with the band about the given song, where they commented on the song in detail.

NP1, C1 lacked a clear understanding of how to commence the work. Firstly, she needed to observe other more experienced students (who had already interpreted a song) as they began to work with a composition. Rehearsing in person with their classmates was very helpful. They saw how they reworked the expression of the lyrics artistically in a completely different way, their semiotic repertoire opened their eyes.

In the first stage of the translation process, after having acquired enough background material for translation, the interpreter “listens” to the composition repeatedly to remember it well and to get a feel for its structure.

It is quite common to use recordings that are commercially available, but this carries many risks for the interpreter. At concerts, older compositions are often played in a new rendition, and the interpreter may not be familiar with it, or they might discover it just before the concert. The intended structure of the translation has to be adjusted until the last minute, which is often accompanied by stress and uncertainty in interpretation, not to mention disruption of the whole translation. When preparing the materials, the interpreter can use the following sources to obtain the audio recording: MP4, YouTube, song lyrics, CD/DVD, archive.

Each student (n = 12) focused on obtaining music through different streaming platforms. A given song may be presented in various ways in the form of video or different concert recordings. C1, C2, P1 searched for interviews with singers, focusing on whether they could find a statement related to the song. Not every student was able to get an interview with the band regarding the song in question. P5 used a podcast interview with the band about the given song, where they commented on the song in detail.

Students used the audio recording in a variety of ways (n = 12). Most downloaded and saved them, some saved them on their smartphone. The music needs to be fully experienced so that the student, as an interpreter, can adapt to the given rhythm and pace. The pace and rhythm may change throughout the song – it is necessary to remember these changes. P5 developed a habit of listening to music first thing in the morning on the way to work or school as well as listening to music repeatedly in the evening primarily because she felt the need to internalize the song.

## 2. Challenge: working on the translation

A student's motivation – especially when overcoming challenges related to translation – should focus on understanding the main theme behind the creation of a song. Without this understanding, it is impossible to move forward to the next step: creating the visual image. The motive behind the creation of a song is often related to the metaphorical expression of the song.

It was important to establish students' understanding of how to create the image and work within the first verse (as a starting point for understanding the overall content of the piece and continuing the work on translation).

P1: *“At the beginning, it was not clear to me what the theme of the song was about. I set up three options of what the author might have been thinking about when writing the lyrics and eventually found out that the lyrics were about politics, giving orders and being a dictator. For the dictatorial theme, I did not find similarly inspired expression in sign language, some classmates gave me the idea for the theme. This helped me more in the context of creating the image. And there was one Deaf tutor who helped me to continue working on the translation.”*

N (2) had no idea how to commence with the work, they needed to see more experienced people.

NP1: *“If the first verse did not go well, then the other verses would not fit with the first one anyway. The text was about the fluctuation of life – once being up and then down – and I tried to visualise that. I wondered what feelings it evoked, putting emphasis on the emotional expression which is more pronounced. The facial expressions are important for the emotional expression; they had to be very suggestive.”*

## 3. Challenge: matching the translation to the rhythm and pace of the individual parts

Students usually already demonstrate partial rhythmising when preparing the translation. At the same time, they must start working with the pace. Interpreters must work through the whole composition so that they do not finish the performance while the music still resonates. Interpreters must rhythmise the signing to avoid a monotonous delivery of the composition. Incorporated expression is often used when interpreting music and singing. However, it is equally important to avoid cluttering the translation with an excessive proliferation of signing vocabulary or by overusing certain signs or combinations of signs. Sign elaboration is often performed in combination with a shift in left-right orientation, where the interpreter initially produces the sign with the dominant (usually right) hand, and then reproduces it with the non-dominant (usually left) hand. However, changes in left-right orientation cannot be applied arbitrarily. Their use requires the interpreter to have control over both the dominant and non-dominant hands.

NP1, NP2, P2, C2, P2, P4, P5, P7 started working with pace at the beginning. C2 highlights the statement that pace and choice of signs cannot be separated.

P2: *“Working with pace means establishing a clear connection to the lyrics from the start. Even if the text is well written, when the pace is fast, the lines go by quickly – and trying to sign at the same speed is difficult to manage. It often results in the message being lost and the overall aesthetic impression disappearing. Signing too fast makes the interpretation hard to follow for the audience, and the content can quite literally slip away. That is why it is important to choose signs that can be expressed clearly within the given rhythm. At the same time, we also looked for incorporated signs.”*

Rhythm and expressiveness also play an important role in picking up the pace. NP2: *“It is important to start working with rhythm right away, because when I enjoy music, I naturally begin to add and shape the rhythm.”*

P3: *“Of course the pace can change within a composition, so you have to adjust accordingly. Acquiring the appropriate pace can cause difficulties: about halfway through that particular translation, I started working with the pace. Translation is an extensive process up until the end. Especially at the beginning there are often changes and corrections with the translation, choosing appropriate combinations of signs. Once all the other aspects were settled, then pace was involved. And once I have engaged the pace, I make new corrections.”* P1 and P6 admitted that they had difficulty working with the pace. According to P3 and P6, the main reason was the changing pace throughout the composition.

#### 4. Challenge: fluency of signing in accordance with the rhythm and melody

How many signing expressions can fit into one stanza...? That was the fundamental question to which N8 attempted to find the answer: *“Working with the pace, for me, means taking it into consideration from the start of the translation process.”*

The choice of signing vocabulary with its expression being often incorporated affects the ability to express melody (for example, when a woman’s and a man’s gaze meet).

The fluency of the signing performance is greatly influenced by the joining of the parts into a whole when the overall image is formed. In terms of signing, imagery refers to the use of sign combinations which provide the viewer a certain image or so-called “story” behind the song. This can be illustrated on an example when a student expresses, for example, the sentence: *I am looking at the bigger stars in the sky.*

In terms of metaphorical expression, the corresponding context of the composition must be found. For instance, if the story revolves around a man and a woman and explores how they are getting to know each other, what they have in common and what makes them a good match, the household objects that fit together are mentioned in the song. In Sign Language translation and performance, interpreters seek appropriate equivalents that match the partners’ shared preferences. What is often referred to as the “beauty” of the signed performance is refined by Deaf teachers and supervisors, who are native users of the Sign Language. In creating visual imagery through signs, the involvement of both hands plays an important role. It enhances the visual dimension of the interpretation, saves time by allowing more content to be conveyed simultaneously, and helps align the signing with the musical rhythm.

The linking of multiple signs, the selection of appropriate signs, and the imagery of the signs are always adjusted by a Deaf teacher and supervisor.

The function of the supervisor and the Deaf teacher is irreplaceable, since they demonstrate how to use artistic signing. Every student agrees with this view (n = 12). They always clarify whether a sign can or cannot be omitted. *“They also explained that if I omit a sign, I am distorting the overall meaning of the interpretation of the image”* (NP1).

*“They correct everything – overall expression in sign language, composition with role reversal, movement rhythm, facial expressions, overall movement, rhythm, and at the same time the ways a person can express themselves properly. They also state whether they understand the content overall or if there is something to be adjusted, or if a certain expression fits or does not fit”* (P4).

NP2: *“Deaf teacher and supervisor have a different perspective – they have the blood of the Deaf in their veins, they truly understand what sign language is all about. I have only studied Sign Language; I can have a different perspective as well as my classmates have a different perspective. The supervisor not only ensures that the Deaf individuals will fully understand the content, but also provides corrections if I sign something incorrectly, helping me find more appropriate ways to express myself. I might choose a sign, and the supervisor will point out that it is not appropriate. I need guidance when it comes to using classifiers and specifiers as well. It is difficult for a student to get used to including the classifier and specifier*

*into the expression because it does not occur in spoken language. The supervisor helps open one's eyes to this view and points out other possible uses."*

During the preparation phase, a number of modifications to the rehearsed composition took place, the exact number of which the students understandably cannot quantify. As beginners, their aim was not to follow which part of the composition they potentially edited and how many times they did so during the difficult rehearsal process, because those edits involved every element of expression: translation and delivery of the image, emotional charge, escalation of emotional charge, dynamics, rhythm, performance in three-dimensional space, performance of the chorus.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper has outlined the fundamental principles of artistic interpreting, with a particular focus on music and song interpretation. Interpreting musical performances remains one of the most demanding and complex forms of interpreting. According to experienced professional interpreters, this specific interpreting is less suitable for novice interpreters, which is why we were intrigued by the students' motivation and willingness to take on a challenge in the form of accepting the offer to interpret a song. Their main motivation was to try something new with the experience they will have gained, and a significant number of the students had experience of performing in front of an audience that was related to music and dance.

The research focused on identifying the motivation that is associated with the various challenges of tackling the preparation of interpreting a musical performer. Clearly, according to the students, the most difficult work lies in the creation of the translation, which they have to overcome with their own efforts but also with the support of the Deaf teacher and the support from the fellow students. They clearly expressed that they would not have been able to provide the translation services without the Deaf teacher and the supervisor, because they support and guide all the components: selection of the signing vocabulary, composition of the translation, rhythm, movement, the incorporation of the signs, the creation of the image, the linking of the different parts. The initial stage, when the student or interpreter selects a composition and its text and begins to plan the translation, involves substantial work to structure the translation properly and create what are called "images". However, the overall content must always be grounded in and adjusted according to the rhythm and melody, requiring constant refinement throughout the process. Rehearsals must be repeated many times because, during a live performance, there is no possibility for retrospective correction. Unlike standard interpreting, where corrections can be made afterward, song interpreting offers no such opportunity. The interpreter must follow the rhythm and the prepared performance precisely in real time.

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# ACCESSIBILITY OF THEATRE PERFORMANCES FOR BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED AUDIENCES: SLOVAK LEGISLATION AND PRACTICE

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## Abstract

This article deals with accessibility of theatre performances for blind and partially sighted audiences in Slovakia. It analyses the legislative frameworks of the European Union and the United Nations and their application in Slovak theatres. It also maps the domestic legislation in the field and examines the extent of legislative implementation of accessibility and inclusion for people with visual impairment across the artistic and cultural context. Based on the publicly available information on internet, the article investigates the existing practice in ensuring accessibility of theatre performances for blind and partially sighted audiences. Focusing on inclusive strategies, it analyses the practice in major theatres and community theatres designed by and for the target community of people with visual impairment. The article presents an initial research investigation into the topic of the author's dissertation thesis *Theatre audio description for blind and partially sighted audiences: transfer practices and strategies in inclusive performances*. It offers an exploratory analysis on what works in the Slovak theatre context, what does not work, and whether there are any possibilities of inclusive performances for partially sighted audiences.

## 1. Introduction

When focusing on the blind and partially sighted individuals, it is important to recognize not only their impairments but also that each person in this group is a full-fledged, perceptive individual. They have the same desires as everyone else – to be educated, to attend the theatre and cinema, to access services, and to feel included in society and cultural life alongside sighted individuals. The topic of this article is therefore a current and important issue that needs to be addressed intensively. The study introduces the target audience of the theatrical audio description and provides a brief overview of visual impairments. The theoretical framework of the present study is based on general introduction to the world of blind and partially sighted (*Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovakia 2024*), the instructive manual and guide of audio description and its importance (Snyder 2020) and how audio description shall be implemented (Charlson 2000).

It is crucial to theoretically explain the concept of audio description, its importance for blind and partially sighted audiences in inclusive theatre performances and the characteristics of audio description in a given context due to the nature of the theatre's so-called "live" event. This study further elaborates on the focus of the topic of accessibility and inclusion of the target audience, analysing the issue from the perspective of EU and UN legislation (*The European Accessibility Act (2019)*), *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)* and its application in the national context of Slovak theatres. During our research, we emphasized the *National Programme for the Development of the Life Conditions of Persons with Disabilities 2021 – 2030 (2021)* that was adopted from *EU Strategy for 2021-2030 (2021)* and which intended to highlight the importance of integrative approach, measures and effective inclusion of persons with disabilities, including people with visual impairments, in society on an equal level with others. We also present the latest *Report on the implementation of the measures*

resulting from the National Programme for the Development of Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for 2023 and proposal for its update (2024). The report was based on the Government Resolution No. 595/2023, according to which the members of the Government submitted to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family a report on the implementation of the tasks resulting from the *Report on the implementation of measures resulting from the National Programme for the Development of the Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for the year 2022* with a proposal for its updating for the next period with a deadline of 31 March 2024.

## 2. Audio description and its importance

It is first and foremost the audience of inclusive theatre performances that is important to introduce. Whether the visual impairment is total (blind) or partial (partially sighted), such recipients deserve inclusive access in the theatre and everyday life. Persons with visual impairments can be divided into four groups (Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovakia 2024):

- blind – a complete loss of visual perception can at most perceive light with their eyes, but not locate its source,
- practically blind – preserved remains of sight, they perceive light, outlines and shapes of objects, but they cannot use their eyesight even with the best possible correction for work, orientation, etc.,
- partially sighted – difficulty using the vision, they have severe visual impairment but have useful residual vision that they can use effectively,
- people with disorders of binocular vision – a disorder of functional balance and physiological cooperation of both eyes, it is a disorder of vision with both eyes that results in problems in spatial perception.

Common visual impairments and diseases also include (Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovakia 2024):

- cataract,
- age-related macular degeneration,
- pigmentary retinopathy called tunnel vision,
- hemianopsia,
- diabetic retinopathy,
- glaucoma, etc.

The simplest, yet the most eloquent definition of what is audio description can be found in the publication *The Visual Made Verbal* by J. Snyder (2020). As he explains, “*audio description (AD) makes the visual images of theater, media and visual art accessible for people who are blind or have low vision*” (Snyder 2020, 44). The audio description has to convey the visual image of the action on the stage through brief, expressive and creative words. The person responsible for preparing the audio description is called “*the describer*” (Snyder 2020, 44). Snyder (2020, 182) continues that the accessibility does not involve only ramps and seats for wheelchair users, so the hall for the event is accessible. With audio description, even the event is accessible. The effort to make each performance accessible is minimal.

Charlson (2000) explains how audio description must be done in order to be useful. “*The description must be objective. The describer does not tell the story or draw conclusions for the blindness audience but narrates what a sighted audience sees*” (Charlson 2000, 7). It must be noted that the author of this study agrees on the fact that if an audio description shall have a function of helping the blind and partially sighted audiences, it has to be objective and without

any interference of personal opinion of the describer. The describers must only convey what is visible on the stage through the audio description.

Similarly to Charlson (2000), the author of this study believes that live theatre is an important element of our society, often expressing values, trends, historical or future perspectives of our culture which explains the importance of live audio description to provide the means for blind or partially sighted people and to have full accessibility and equal participation in cultural life (Charlson 2000, 8).

Integrated access occurs “*where the access professional (audio describer, signer, captioner) is not brought in at the end of the creative process as an external expert to wave their magic and solve the access challenges, but instead is involved from the start as an integrated member of the company or artistic team*” (Fryer and Cavallo 2021, as cited in Secară and Perez 2022).

Secară and Perez (2022) explain that in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, e.g. Slovakia, integrated access services for live performances and other cultural events are not so common, except for a few valuable initiatives. The need for inclusive access to theatres for audiences with any sensory impairments is in a case of major productions often unnoticed (Secară and Perez 2022).

### **3. Methodology**

The research presented in this study was divided into three phases. The first, mapping phase, focused on resources collection and evaluation on the topic of rights, accessibility and inclusion of blind and partially sighted people in a broader context from legislative frameworks of EU and UN, as well as from Slovak legislation. The following analysis phase included detailed analysis of the collected data, answering the most important questions, such as “Can we find the EU legislation implemented in Slovak legislation?” and “Does the Slovak legislation mention the inclusion and accessibility in cultural context (theatre) in practice?”. The third, verification phase, focused on the question how are the legislative frameworks implemented and visible in real life, speaking about inclusive theatre performances in Slovakia. It consisted of identification and analysis of availability of inclusive theatre performances through online web pages of Slovak theatres. The publicly available data presented in this article was collected in January 2025.

### **4. Mapping phase**

For the mapping phase we collected and studied the relevant and fundamental legislative documents which primarily deal with the topic of accessibility:

- *Directive 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services, called generally The European Accessibility Act 2019* – an Act which is setting new standards for accessibility,
- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006* – an international legally binding document presenting the basic standards for rights of persons with disabilities (including blind and partially sighted people),
- the *Directive 2017/1564 on certain permitted uses of certain works and other subject matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, partially sighted or otherwise print-disabled and amending Directive 2001/29/EC on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society* – a Directive with a goal for a better change in accessible media, such as books, e-books, journals, newspapers, magazines,

- *European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2016 on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with special regard to the Concluding Observations of the UN CRPD Committee* – this Resolution emphasizes the right for universal access to cultural performances,
- *National Programme for the Development of the Life Conditions of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030* that was adopted from *EU Strategy for 2021-2030*,
- the latest *Report on the implementation of the measures resulting from the National Programme for the Development of Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for 2023 and proposal for its update*.

## 5. Findings from analysis of legislation

Analysing phase provided insights on whether the legislation mentions clearly and extensively the rights of blind and partially sighted people and how are the EU and UN legislative frameworks implemented into Slovak legislation.

The fundamental international legislative document dealing with the topic of the rights of persons with disabilities, the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) is, in the words of European Commission: “*The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is the first international, legally binding instrument setting minimum standards for rights of people with disabilities.*” (European Commission 2025a).

This most important legal document forms a clear definition on the behalf of the discrimination in social and cultural context: “*Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.*” (United Nations 2006, 4).

The general principles of the UNCRPD include non-discrimination, accessibility, equality of opportunity and others.

The European Union and all its Member States are bound by the stipulations of the UNCRPD. The EU and its Member States are committed to enhancing the social and economic well-being of persons with disabilities, in accordance with the objectives set out in the Treaty on the *Functioning of the EU* and the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU*. It is estimated that approximately 87 million people in the EU live with some form of disability, and that this population faces numerous barriers to participation in society. In Europe, individuals with disabilities frequently encounter unequal opportunities in accessing educational institutions, employment opportunities, infrastructure, products, services and information. They are also at risk of experiencing unfair treatment (European Commission 2025b).

The European Parliament and the Council adopted *Directive (EU) 2017/1564 on certain permitted uses of certain works protected by copyright for the benefit of persons who are blind, partially sighted or otherwise print-disabled*. This Directive represents a great first impulse to change lives of blind and partially sighted people in a broader cultural context.

This Directive sets its goal to improve the availability of books, e-books, journals, newspapers, magazines and other kinds of writing, notation, not excluding sheet music, and other printed material, in audio form, digital or analogue, online or offline, in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities, in the same degree as to people without any impairments. Regarding this Directive, accessible formats include Braille, large print, adapted e-books, audio books and radio broadcasts (European Parliament 2017).

Furthermore, the European Union adopted *Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services*, known internationally as *The European Accessibility Act*, to comply in 2025. It does represent another initiative for accessible media but does not include live events, such as theatre (and live audio description).

Pasikowska-Schnass (2019) describes the European Accessibility Act as a directive that establishes a set of regulations regarding products and services designed for persons with disabilities and functional limitations. This includes electronic devices, websites, and audiovisual media services. The directive addresses several aspects of audiovisual media services, such as broadcast television and related consumer equipment, TV equipment related to digital television services, e-books, and e-commerce (Pasikowska-Schnass 2019, 3).

As stated in the briefing report *Access to cultural life for people with disabilities* by Pasikowska-Schnass (2019), “*the Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament (with the European Disability Forum (EDF) acting as its secretariat) has been defending the rights of people with disabilities since 1980. The Intergroup has contributed to Parliament’s legislative work and resolutions on relevant issues, such as the September 2015 resolution on an integrated approach to cultural heritage*” (Pasikowska-Schnass 2019, 4).

Pasikowska-Schnass then continues with an information about the *European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2016 on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with special regard to the Concluding Observations of the UN CRPD Committee*, in which the Parliament acknowledged that a disproportionate number of people with disabilities were marginalised in the digital sphere, encountering information barriers and facing challenges in accessing essential services. Furthermore, Parliament emphasised the right for universal access to cultural performances and audiovisual and other works, ensuring the availability of subtitles or audio descriptions to facilitate engagement for individuals with disabilities (Pasikowska-Schnass 2019, 4).

As it was mentioned in chapter *Introduction* of this article, this study focuses on mapping the legislative situation in Slovakia, too. This article wants to highlight the implementation of EU and UN legislation frameworks into Slovak context by the *National Programme for the Development of the Life Conditions of Persons with Disabilities 2021 – 2030* adopted from European Union Strategy for 2021 – 2030 and proposed by Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic.

The basic principles of the Slovak National Programme (2021) make a statement on who are persons with disabilities. The document defines that individuals living with disabilities include those with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments. These impairments, when considered in combination with various barriers, may prevent them from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others. In accordance with the *Programme Declaration of the Government of the Slovak Republic for 2020 – 2024*, the Government of the Slovak Republic has committed itself to the preparation of the *National Programme for the Development of the Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for 2021 – 2030* in cooperation with non-governmental organisations in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The aim of this initiative is to establish optimal conditions for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic 2021).

The measures of the Slovak National Programme are divided according to Ministries, while Ministry of Culture mentioning many helpful measures that are focused on accessibility for blind and partially sighted persons, from which we select the most important ones, such as (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2021):

- promoting the publication and accessibility of periodicals and non-periodical publications and other documents for people with visual impairments through the activities of the Matej Hrebenda's Slovak Library for the Blind in Levoča,
- through the grant system of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, create conditions for supporting the culture of people with disabilities within the separate programme Culture of Disadvantaged Groups,
- making culture and the arts accessible in formats accessible to people with visual and hearing impairments,
- making Slovak films accessible to people with hearing and visual impairments,
- implement closed captioning in live broadcasts.

While the National Programme is being dedicated to aim on the accessibility for blind and partially sighted people, it is deficient in making measures in the context of accessible theatre and inclusive theatrical performances.

The *Report on the implementation of the measures resulting from the National Programme for the Development of Life Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for 2023 and proposal for its update*, as the latest available report, is showing how the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the goals of the National Programme mentioned above in this article were implemented into culture in real life context.

Section 12 of the Report presents *Participation in cultural life, recreation, interest activities and sport (Art. 30)* with an explanation of the measurable indicator:

1. a total number of events implemented by organisations under the competence of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic,
2. a number of visitors from the target group of persons with disabilities,
3. an annual number of cultural events and activities with active participation of the target group,
4. the forms of discounts on admission fees or charges provided to visitors with disabilities and their guides (discount percentage),
5. an annual summary overview of projects supported through the grant programme Culture of Disadvantaged Groups by target groups, taking into account the specific type of disability,
6. the results of mapping the state of information and physical debarring in organizations under the competence of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (once every 5 years). This section includes a table of contents showing the total number of events realized by the organization under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic in 2023.

Unfortunately, not every organization mentioned in the results differentiate between disabilities. Therefore, we do not know how many inclusive theatre performances have been performed for blind and partially sighted audiences. The only explicit information available in this presented Report (2024) is about inclusive theatre performances for blind and partially sighted by Slovak National Theatre – *The Nutcracker* as a ballet for partially sighted children (2 performances) and *Tea at the Senator's* (included blind and partially sighted actors with adapted printing of the bulletin in contrasting resolution, 9 performances), as stated in the table of contents (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic 2024, 49).

## **6. Inclusive theatre performances in practice**

The investigation of availability of the accessible and inclusive theatre performances in the context of Slovak theatres was conducted via study of available information and advertising at

theatres websites, their archives and published future programmes of the performances. We focused on an inclusive approach in relation to blind and partially sighted audiences and we did not deal with information coming exclusively from community theatres.

This chapter presents a table of past inclusive theatre performances, with the oldest data available from 2018 and theatre performances that are prone to have performances annually (Divadelné predstavenie ku dňu nevidiacich 2022). The data analysis was collected from publicly available information and archives of the Slovak National Theatre and Theatre Lab and an article called *Divadelné predstavenie ku dňu nevidiacich (Theatrical performance for the Day of the Blind)* (2022). Slovak National Theatre is the most known major state theatre. Theatre Lab (2023) that has an experience with accessible theatre performances is not a state theatre but one created by students of the University of Performing Arts in Bratislava. The presented information about the inclusion of AD in the performance *Kurz negatívneho myslenia (Course of negative thinking)* was published by the company Teledata, dealing with production of AD (Teledata 2018).

The presented table also mentions if the AD was or was not included, based on the description on the website of the specific theatre. The presented information about the inclusion of AD in the performance *Kurz negatívneho myslenia (Course of negative thinking)* was published by the company Teledata, dealing with production of AD (Teledata 2018).

<b>Name of the theatre</b>	<b>Name of the performance</b>	<b>The date of the performance(s)</b>	<b>Audio description</b>
<b>Slovak National Theatre</b>	<i>The ball</i>	Annually (Day of the Blind)	Not mentioned
<b>Theatre Lab</b>	<i>Course of negative thinking</i>	22.01.2018	Yes
<b>Slovak National Theatre (in cooperation with Theatre Zrakáč)</b>	<i>Tea at the Senator's</i>	Annually (latest: 06.02.2025)	Not mentioned
<b>Theatre Lab (in cooperation with Theatre Zrakáč)</b>	<i>Animal farm</i>	Annually (latest: 11.02.2025)	Yes but not professional AD

Table 1. Accessibility of inclusive theatre performances in domestic theatres

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of the available current legislative framework confirms that both EU and Slovak frameworks follow the principles of the international legally binding *United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) that directly addresses the rights of persons with disabilities that include blind and partially sighted people.

The study pointed out crucial impulses for better accessibility in the EU, such as *The European Accessibility Act (2019)* which focuses on accessible audiovisual media. The author of this study suggests that in the future, this Act shall be an inspiration for another Act mentioning exclusively accessible and inclusive theatre performances for all persons with disabilities, including blind and partially sighted audiences.

Slovak National Programme (2021) is a legislative document in Slovakia that introduces measures on how Slovak culture can be more accessible for persons with disabilities, following the ideas of EU and UN. Nevertheless, the latest Report with inspections carried out in 2023

show information that Slovak theatres shall include more theatre performances for blind and partially sighted realized by any of the organizations under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

The investigation based on publicly available information from the websites of Slovak theatres (Slovak National Theatre, Theatre Lab) and article (Theatrical performance for the Day of the Blind) found out that the reality of the availability of accessible theatre performance in Slovak National Theatre in the period of time of the study conducted (January 2025) is rather questionable. There is just one permanent theatre performance, called *Tea at the Senator's*, that repeats annually in Slovak theatres in collaboration with Theatre Zrakáč (Divadlo Zrakáč). The offer of inclusive theatre performances is not a permanent part of the programme but rather a one-time special offer that appears on the website when the performance is approaching.

As shown in Table 1, by January 2025 we may notice a visible lack of accessible theatre performances with an integrative approach in the Slovak theatrical context. The reasons for a lack of inclusion of blind and partially sighted audiences in theatres will be a question of further extended terrain research in the dissertation thesis.

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# HELPING TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING STUDENTS TO LOVE THE EFFORT OF READING AND THINKING ON THEIR OWN

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## Abstract

This chapter is situated at the intersection between the disciplines of Translation Studies, Applied Linguistics, Language Learning and Teaching Research, and Language Pedagogy in Higher Education. It takes a cross-disciplinary approach towards language teachers' responsibility for an up-to-date language education for translation and interpreting (TI) students at the undergraduate level. The focus of the chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it makes a case for the need for a deliberately TI-oriented language education, also known as TILLT, i.e. Translation-and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching. On the other hand, of all the linguistic skills that TI students need to develop, particular attention will be given to their reading skills in times of generative AI (GenAI). Despite the availability of AI tools which students could use for their reading assignments, it will be argued that it is of critical importance that they are still able to enjoy reading and thinking on their own.

## 1. Introduction

Reading can be described as a skill that is inextricably linked to any translation activity. As regards the context of higher education, reading is something that translation and interpreting students need for virtually every aspect of their study programme, “from resourcing skills to background knowledge to linguistic competence itself” (Washbourne 2012, 38). Not only must students locate and evaluate information, but also they must make sense of it through investing mental energy “needed for the cognitive task at hand when asked to think critically” (Baron 2021, 223). In this theoretical chapter, student data are included in order to combine the perspectives of teachers and undergraduate students on reading and critical thinking in the context of translator and interpreter (TI) education. If this chapter sets out to suggest that in TI education it is our duty as higher education teachers to instil in students a love of reading and thinking on their own, then there are two main aspects that have to be addressed right away: enjoyment and legitimacy.

In order for students to enjoy their tertiary education classroom, they should experience that their teachers enjoy the activity of teaching as well. As regards foreign language teaching, Mierzwa (2019) introduced the concept of FLTE, i.e. foreign language teaching enjoyment. FLTE was elaborated on by Proietti Ergün and Dewaele (2021) who refer to it as a teacher's pleasure, happiness, and sense of wellbeing in teaching a foreign language and their ability to provide a pleasant classroom atmosphere. With a general focus on teaching in higher education, i.e. irrespective of the discipline, and on the development of an academic identity, Nixon (2008, 97) observes that “we learn how to teach by first having learnt how to learn. We are able to foster in others a love of learning because we have ourselves learnt to love learning”.

Academic identity, (foreign language) teaching enjoyment, and legitimacy are all closely related. In fact, Loughran (2009, 198), arguing from the perspective of research in disciplinary teaching in higher education, describes “scholarly teaching [...] as something carefully and thoughtfully developed over time in response to the subtleties of the specific issues, ideas, concepts, and knowledge to be taught”. When applied to the teaching context within translator and interpreter education, arguments have been raised in favour of recognising TILLT, i.e.

Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching, as both a scholarly practice and an academic discipline (Seel et al. 2023; Seidl 2023). Naturally, acknowledgment as a subfield of Translation Studies in its own right is not easily gained given that the scholarly debate about the teaching of languages for undergraduate TI students only started in the late 1990s, as Seel et al. (2023) remind us. However, for the following discussion of TI students' reading skills in times of GenAI, it is clear that TILLT teachers need to have a strong academic identity in their role as those who, at the undergraduate level, lay the foundation for how students approach close readings of texts with, most probably, a significantly higher level of difficulty than those texts that they had to read during their secondary education. This has three main implications.

First, having a strong identity as a TILLT teacher in higher education implies that TI students can expect their teachers to have expertise in language education, with a high awareness of the responsibilities of higher education language pedagogy. In addition, students should be enculturated into learning a language for their future profession as language service providers. That means that as early as in the pre-translation TILLT classroom, students should be able to imagine their possible future identities in the translation and language services industry while, at the same time, developing a service-oriented mindset (Seidl 2023). Second, TILLT teachers, including those with no professional or practical background in translation or interpreting such as myself, need to experience recognition and legitimacy as language educators within TI education (Koletnik et al. 2025). This is in line with a conception of research-mindedness as an inseparable part of professionalism in higher education language teaching. Yet, finding one's place and identity as a TILLT teacher can be a rather emotional rollercoaster in terms of a sense of non-belonging (Seidl, in print). Third, such a professional identity and professional standing depend on teachers' confidently navigating the intersection between Translation Studies, Applied Linguistics, Language Learning and Teaching Research, and Language Pedagogy in Higher Education. With respect to students' reading skills, this could imply that “[t]exts and topics brought to the classroom by teachers [...] touch upon different aspects of the profession(s) and the requirements for it” (Cerezo Herrero et al. 2021, 150). Later in this chapter, I will provide some examples of texts and topics as reading assignments for the TILLT classroom that have proven to be valuable resources when teaching the next generation of translators and interpreters.

## **2. Reading in the TILLT classroom and the impact of AI**

In the previous section, enjoyment has been considered from the perspective of higher education teachers in that they may feel a sense of meaningfulness and purpose when working with young adults in the language classroom. However, enjoyment and meaningfulness are also key when it comes to engaged reading of language learners. With particular focus on reading tasks, Derakhshan et al. (2025, 46) emphasise the crucial role of teachers' academic and social support of students. By creating meaningful and engaging reading experiences, they can foster university students' intrinsic reading motivation. Furthermore, if students perceive the teacher's attention to their progress and efforts, it can “act as an extrinsic motivator and further enhance their sense of accomplishment in L2 reading tasks” (Derakhshan et al. 2025, 63). This sense of accomplishment seems to be particularly relevant in times when students' use of GenAI for text reception might give them the impression that engaging with complex texts is only a matter of seconds (Seidl 2024, 157). For reading comprehension assignments in the TILLT classroom, a rule of thumb might be found in “selecting suitable reading materials and implementing strategies that empower students to feel more in control of their comprehension” (Derakhshan et al. 2025, 63).

Empowering TI students as skilled readers who can successfully engage in reading activities during their university studies and later on in their professional lives, even in situations when technology fails during electricity cuts or general power failure, should be one major goal of TILLT. In terms of critical engagement with a variety of texts, Massey and Kiraly (2019, 22) stress the vital role of text reception as a core aspect of translator education, involving “discussion, reading texts from different sources, comparing, talking about them, interacting with them, and not simply acquiring basic skills of how to manipulate a computer-based program or the like”. With a similarly critical view on technology, Rodríguez de Céspedes and Bawa Mason (2022, 244) argue that as much as machines speed up the translation process, they also “reduce in-depth reading and manipulation of the source text by the translator, making for less direct engagement with the nuances of meaning in a text”. The main argument of this chapter is that teachers in the pre-translation TILLT classroom can work towards fostering students’ reading skills and critical thinking skills, and, ideally, serving as role models by demonstrating a love for the effort of reading and thinking on their own, even without GenAI. In doing so, TILLT teachers better prepare students for the actual translation or interpreting classroom, which is why their selection of TI-oriented learning materials and activities can also be seen as a form of collegiality towards colleagues who teach translation or interpreting. With a deliberate focus on TI, language educators demonstrate awareness of their responsibility of linguistically preparing students, to the best of their knowledge, for the subsequent TI classrooms.

In TILLT, the above-mentioned TI-oriented textual skills (Massey and Kiraly 2019) can be developed even if no actual translation activities take place. This is due to the fact that one of the connections between the TI and the TILLT classroom lies in critical self-reflection. In the TI classroom, students are encouraged to critically reflect on how they translate or interpret and on strategies adopted. Likewise, TILLT teachers should encourage students, *inter alia*, to reflect on what they read and how often, but also on how they read, i.e. on paper or on screen, highlighting parts of a text, taking notes, paraphrasing, or summarising (Seidl 2024, 158). As students in the TI classroom reflect on differences between human-based and technology-based translations or compare their own outputs with machine-based outputs, a similar approach can be adopted for reading assignments in TILLT. The only difference is that students do not reflect on TI activities but on their experiences with reading on their own or with the help of AI tools.

Obviously, machines are capable of processing immense amounts of data in a remarkably short time, and as humans we cannot possibly compete with that capacity. However, as Rodríguez de Céspedes and Bawa Mason (2022, 241-242) observe, there is “simply no parallel with the critical intelligence a translator needs to unpack information from a source language text before reformulating the content correctly in a form acceptable to the end-user discourse community in the target language”. As such, critical engagement with reading tasks requires students to read for meaning, distinguish relevant information from irrelevant, while using metalanguage to describe distinct text traits (Carrasco Flores 2021). The development of this critical intelligence that translators need for text reception takes time. As educators of TI students, we need to make students aware of this, in order to avoid feelings of frustration when close reading of texts takes an unexpectedly long amount of time.

### **3. ‘Teaching naked’ to confront deskilling tendencies**

With the educational aim of instilling in students a love for the effort of reading and thinking on their own comes the requirement for those teaching TI students “to help [them] realise that a thorough understanding of a text requires a willingness to make an effort by working hard and spending a considerable amount of time of intensive engagement with that text” (Seidl 2024, 157). In terms of engagement with a text, what counts more than the length of a certain

text is the time spent with close reading. Bowen (2012), who advocates so-called teaching naked in the sense that technology is most powerfully used outside the classroom, making room for meaningful and enjoyable face-to-face contact and lively teacher-student and peer interaction invites teachers to consider the following:

Think carefully about the length of your reading assignments in relation to your learning outcomes. What do you want students to remember about this class in five years? Would you rather students skim a long reading or read twice a short and difficult passage and maybe be inspired to read the rest? (Bowen 2012, 132).

In TI education, students should experience something that will be extremely useful for them in their professional lives. That is to say that even a topic that, at first glance, looks boring or unattractive to them, can turn out to be fascinating once they have engaged with it more closely. Therefore, Bowen's (2012) suggestion to invite students to read perhaps only one, yet difficult part of a text might prove useful to develop an interest and curiosity about a given topic. Naturally, not only reading as such but also critical thinking takes time and requires effort. In our technology-fuelled higher education classrooms, Bowen's (2012) concept of teaching naked might seem rather anachronistic. It nevertheless is of great importance for TILLT. Critically reflecting on something previously read relies on our capacity for focused attention. Bowen (2012, 210) encourages tertiary-level educators to make paying attention a learning outcome by inviting students periodically to turn off all laptops, tablets, and smartphones in order to just think and be present. As he puts it, "[h]elping students discover the benefits of focused dialogue and reflection is as important as any content you have to cover" (Bowen 2012, 210-211).

Nowadays, there is great temptation for students to delegate their reading tasks to AI tools. Yet, if teachers allow students to display such avoidant behaviours, they do them a disservice. In fact, by letting students avoid the effort of focused, time-consuming reading, teachers deprive them of the feelings of pride and accomplishment. In their critical discussion on AI and the human spirit, Kissinger et al. (2024, 154-155) assert that a "personal experience of difficulty can instill a sense of pride once that challenge is overcome. [...] Given our human psychology, many sources of joy and contentment may well remain unchanged in the age of AI". In this context it is noteworthy that even such publications that wish to promote GenAI express words of caution. For example, the OECD guidelines on AI from 2023 warn against an increased use of technology which "could also lead to the atrophy of human skills and agency and an increased dependency on the availability of AI and other technology" (OECD 2023, 403). They suggest limiting students' time spent on digital technology, so as to ensure that "future generations can still enjoy activities that have been valued by human beings for centuries and which will help them value and continue human heritage and culture into the far future" (OECD 2023, 407). According to these guidelines, it is critically important to regularly include learning activities in students' formal education that do not involve digital technology.

With the aim of adopting these guidelines to the TILLT context, language educators in TI programmes could encourage students to value the human heritage and ancient cultural activities of reading, thinking about their readings, and engaging in critical reflections in a joint activity with others in the classroom. In a similar vein as the OECD (2023), Gimpel et al. (2023) caution against a too enthusiastic embrace of AI in educational contexts, with particular emphasis on the risk of deskilling tendencies if reading and thinking skills are not appreciated and valued as highly as they should be. They admonish that "[w]ith AI's ability to generate and provide information, there is a risk that students may become passive recipients of information rather than active thinkers" (Gimpel et al. 2023, 40). As educators, our mission is to ensure that students, despite the availability of GenAI, continue to develop skills that they need to make informed decisions in an increasingly complex world (Gimpel et al. 2023, 41). Applied to the requirements of close reading and critical thinking in the TILLT classroom, the question arises

whether it leads to “cognitive off-loading where AI performs or even outperforms at existing human skills level [and whether] it lead[s] to human skill attrition when this off-loading occurs and these skills get less exercised” (OECD 2023, 401).

#### 4. Student voices on reading in TILLT

This section is dedicated to the views of TI students in the TILLT classroom as regards reading and thinking without the support of GenAI. The teaching approach for TI-oriented language education that I have developed over the course of twenty years and that I feel most comfortable with is very much in line with Brabazon’s (2013) take on undergraduate students’ reading. She suggests that in higher education, students “must feel slightly uncomfortable most of the time” because they have to grow, they have to read, to be confused, and to grapple for understanding (Brabazon 2013, 314). However, challenging students in this way does by no means imply that teachers leave them alone in this process of learning and growing. As Brabazon (2013) puts it, it is important, particularly in first year education, that each student has a confirmation that we know their name, know that we care about them, and that we want to spend time helping them with reading, writing and thinking. Their improvement is our goal. One way to demonstrate that commitment is through sharing time (Brabazon 2013, 252).

The following descriptions are intended to trace how my engagement with students’ reading skills developed over the course of the academic years 2019 to 2024. With the intention to help students with reading and thinking but also to get a better understanding of their reading habits, in the summer semester 2019, I distributed a paper-and-pencil-questionnaire to 28 German L2 students in one of my TILLT classes<sup>1</sup>. Out of 28 students, only 9 stated that they liked to read in their spare time and only one student opted for the statement “I like to read for my TI studies”. In the following winter semester 2019-2020 with 22 students, I conducted an in-class reading experiment in which half of the students, i.e. 11, had to read a newspaper article on paper and the other half read the same article on their laptops or tablets. In a paper-and-pencil-questionnaire immediately after the reading task, they clearly evaluated reading on paper as better for a general overview of the text, for better concentration and for a much better haptic perception (Seidl 2020). These findings are in line with Baron (2021) who underscores the importance of off-line reading activities that merit one’s full attention. She argues that onscreen distractions can drain some of the students’ cognitive focus (Baron 2021, 212).

In the winter semester 2021-2022, as a homework assignment, 13 students in a TILLT class had to write a reading report in which they reflected on how they had read, i.e. on paper or on screen, a couple of specialised texts on plain language, professional identity, and specialist language. They also reported on how much time they had spent reading, whether they had taken notes, had engaged in terminology research, or what had helped them understand the main messages in the texts. One student reported, “Reading specialised literature would help a lot, but I have no motivation because it’s so difficult for me” (P#3). A similar struggle with challenging reading assignments can be seen in the following student comment.

“I always thought of myself as less intelligent, because I couldn’t understand specialised literature. But when reading it, it’s not important to understand everything immediately, but, rather, to keep on reading with lots of self-confidence and ambition” (P#8).

These student quotations illustrate that in TILLT it is not only important to give students TI-related as well as cognitively demanding reading assignments but also to encourage them to critically reflect on their reading habits or reading difficulties. Ideally, such insights into the

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<sup>1</sup> These classes take place at the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Graz, within the BA programme Transcultural Communication at the CEFR-levels B2-C1. The student comments are originally in German but quoted here in my translation to English.

student perspective allow for candid classroom discussions, where teachers report on their own challenges when reading specialised literature as well. One such example is provided by Neuman (2013), in a YouTube video in which history scholars demonstrate how they approach reading a monograph that they are not familiar with. As higher education teachers, we should not underestimate our influence on students. The behaviour that we model, including how we read, can have an impact on their reading habits (Baron 2021, 228). In the TILLT classroom, a session might also include some time dedicated to focused reading, students and teacher together, followed by a critical reflection in a classroom discussion.

As regards the selection of TI-related reading assignments in the pre-translation language classroom, in the introductory section of this chapter I referred to Cerezo Herrero et al. (2021), who advocate for texts and topics that “touch upon different aspects of the profession(s) and the requirements for it” (p. 150). The authors argue that by doing so, students can better “identify with the goals set by the programme and the language modules, make them their own and take responsibility for their own learning process” (Cerezo Herrero et al. 2021, 150). In a student reading report for the winter semester 2021-2022 as described above, but this time from the winter semester 2022-2023 with a group of 14 students, I found a confirmation for the approach to sensitise students as early as in their undergraduate years in TI education to their future profession(s). One student reflected as follows: “I found the texts that we had to read eye-opening. I realised how strongly accessible communication is needed in our society and how multifaceted the fields of work in translation are” (P#10).

The last example of how I experimented with reading assignments in TILLT is from the winter term 2023-2024. This time, I slightly changed the assignment so that students had to read an academic paper on court interpreting as well as a short text about academic reading strategies. In that semester, I taught two parallel TILLT classes with 20 and 17 students, respectively. When reading their reflective reading reports, it was rewarding to realise that many of them had adopted the suggested academic reading strategies for longer and more complex texts. Many also opted for reading on paper instead of on screen, and reported on note taking, terminology work, and a greater focus when taking off-line time for this assignment. A number of students also used metalanguage to describe what exactly had made some texts difficult to understand. Although the majority had no translation experience yet, they nonetheless stated that the chosen texts had given them valuable insights into the world of TI-related professions. In general, students reported that the assignment was cognitively challenging and very time-consuming, but that they had learned a lot, not only from reading, but also from having to reflect on their reading strategies. When it comes to students’ note taking, Brabazon (2013) stresses the importance of deliberately refraining from just highlighting parts of a text.

Students are not taking notes from what they read. Instead, they highlight text. Without note taking, it means that they endlessly return to the original source, choosing over and over again what may (or may not) be relevant. Taking notes is a moment of decision making, selecting important information [...]. Without notes, these students are locked into information obesity (Brabazon 2013, 64-65).

In this context, Bowker (2023, 142) reminds us of the similarities between text summarisation and translation in that “being able to analyze the original text and extract the key components of a message is indispensable not only to summary writing but to translation as well”. Baron (2021) suggests that teachers should restrict students in how much they are allowed to highlight or underline. In doing so, they “need to engage in active mental processing to select what is most important” (p. 60). Engaging with students on different approaches to reading can, therefore, prove valuable for the TILLT context because they learn strategies that will help them later on in the actual TI classroom.

## 5. Conclusion

TI-oriented language learning and teaching has recently changed dramatically, since the use of AI tools for text reception or text production might give students the impression that working with complex texts is only a matter of seconds. Therefore, this chapter set out to discuss the critical role of students' reading strategies in order for them to learn to trust their own reading skills independently of AI. More precisely, the chapter addressed TI students' BA-level language education from the perspective of Translation Studies, Applied Linguistics, Language Learning and Teaching Research, and Language Pedagogy in Higher Education (Pym and Ayvazyan 2017). Each of these disciplines is of vital importance for TI-oriented language learning and teaching as practiced and researched in TILLT. Out of all of the linguistic skills that students need for their future professional lives in the translation and language services industry, the focus was placed on reading skills in times of GenAI. To that end, section 4 was dedicated to reading tasks in the TILLT classroom and the impact of AI on reading which was discussed as a human heritage of cultural value. It was argued that despite the availability of AI tools for text reception, students need to develop the skills to read and think critically on their own, so that they learn to appreciate the effort and the satisfaction that comes with mastering reading tasks independently from the latest technology. This argument was elaborated further by addressing the risk of deskilling tendencies and by discussing some reading assignments in TILLT.

As TI graduates, or when working in other translation-related occupations, they will likely earn their living in a sector that requires lifelong learning in order to be able to maintain a very high level of proficiency in their working languages. In the TILLT classroom, we should therefore help students to develop a love of lifelong and also 'lifewide' learning which, unavoidably, will include critical thinking and reading skills (Jackson 2011). As higher education teachers, we are "trying to make our students into lifelong learners, so we should model this by taking courses and training" (Bowen 2012, 251). This means that teachers themselves should always continue to look for intellectual challenges and thereby serve as role models for the young adults they have the privilege to work with. I argue that TILLT teachers can intellectually challenge students while also actively supporting them in becoming critical, skilled readers on their own, without the support of GenAI. In conclusion, as educators in TI programmes, we should help students to experience the joy and the resulting enthusiasm that understanding a difficult text or even just a demanding text passage can bring. Optimally, such a teaching approach supports undergraduate TI students in learning to love the effort of reading and thinking on their own.

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# REFRAMING JOSEPH LEVENSON'S TRILOGY IN CHINESE CONTEXTS

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## Abstract

This paper examines *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* by Joseph Levenson through a comparative analysis of two Chinese translations: Zheng and Ren's version (2000) and Ji's version (2024). Levenson's work explores the tensions between Confucian tradition and modernization, raising enduring questions about the compatibility of Confucianism with modern political and cultural systems. Zheng and Ren's translation, though foundational in introducing Levenson to Chinese academia, has been criticized for omissions and interpretative simplifications. In contrast, Ji's translation offers a more faithful and context-sensitive rendering, especially in its treatment of key terms like "Confucian", variably translated as "儒教" (rujiao), "儒家" (rujia), and "儒学" (ruxue). These lexical choices reflect broader ideological positions on Confucianism's identity as religion, philosophy, or cultural system. By analyzing how each translation interprets Levenson's portrayal of intellectual rupture and cultural transformation, this paper argues that translation plays a crucial role in shaping the reception of modern Chinese thought. Ji's version, in particular, better preserves the dialectical complexity of the original, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Confucianism's fate in China's modern trajectory.

## 1. Introduction

Joseph Levenson's *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* remains a foundational work in the field of modern Chinese intellectual history. Published between 1958 and 1965, the trilogy explores the complex interplay between Confucian tradition and Western modernity, interrogating whether Confucianism could survive, transform, or coexist with the forces of modernization. Levenson's work has been praised for its dialectical structure, critical metaphors, and historical insight, yet its reception in Chinese academia has been deeply shaped by the translations through which it has been introduced.

This paper examines two major Chinese translations of Levenson's trilogy: the first by Zheng Dahua and Ren Jing, published in 2000, and the most recent by Ji Jianqing, released in 2024. While Zheng and Ren's version brought Levenson's ideas into Chinese intellectual discourse at the turn of the century, it has been criticized for its omissions and terminological inconsistencies. Ji's translation, by contrast, offers a more philologically and ideologically nuanced rendering, reinterpreting Levenson's argument within a broader cultural and political framework.

At the heart of this comparative study lies the term "Confucian", a deceptively simple word that Levenson used to evoke not only a philosophical tradition but a civilizational order. Translated variously as "儒教" (rujiao), "儒家" (rujia), and "儒学" (ruxue), the term occupies different semantic registers in Chinese, each carrying distinct cultural, historical, and

ideological implications. This study focuses on how the two translations negotiate the term's ambiguity and the broader concept of "Confucian China", revealing their respective interpretations of Levenson's intellectual vision.

Drawing on Lefevere's theory (1992a) of "rewriting" and the cultural turn in translation studies, this paper argues that the act of translation is not merely linguistic transfer but a form of cultural refraction. Through close analysis of key terminologies, translation strategies, and ideological adjustments, the paper shows how Ji's version reconstructs a dynamic and multidimensional image of Confucian China, while Zheng and Ren's version reflects the constraints and compromises of its historical moment. Ultimately, this comparative reading contributes to our understanding of how translation mediates the legacy of Confucianism in modern Chinese thought.

## 2. Literature review

Scholarly interest in Levenson's trilogy has focused largely on its significance within modern Chinese intellectual history, particularly its analysis of the cultural and ideological transformations accompanying China's modernization. Chinese-language studies such as Zheng (2000), Tian and Zhu (2004), and Xiao (2013) have emphasized Levenson's innovative interpretation of the Confucian legacy and its displacement by Marxist historicism. However, these studies tend to engage with the original English text and rarely interrogate how Levenson's arguments have been mediated through translation into Chinese.

In the field of translation studies, much attention has been paid to the ideological function of translation, especially following the "cultural turn" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990). Lefevere (1992a) highlights the role of translation as a culturally and ideologically constrained process that reshapes texts to fit the norms of the target system. Building on this, Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002) introduced what has been called the "power turn", further emphasizing translation's role in constructing and contesting power relations within global and local contexts. While these frameworks have been widely applied to literary works and political discourse, their application to historical-intellectual translations remains limited, particularly in the context of Chinese thought.

In Chinese translation studies, the relationship between translation and ideology has drawn increasing attention, evolving from a focus on linguistic equivalence to cultural adaptation and ideological rewriting. Li (2010) argues that translation is deeply embedded in power structures, and translators inevitably reflect ideological positions through text selection, terminology, and rhetorical style. Zhou (2001) and Xu (2006) further extend the "cultural turn" in translation studies by highlighting the translator's active role in the construction of cultural identity. These frameworks provide essential theoretical support for analyzing the ideological "refraction" found in the Chinese translations of Levenson's work.

In the domain of terminology translation, Liu (2003) emphasizes contextual equivalence and aesthetic regulation, while Chen (2013) views terminology as a means of epistemological reconstruction, arguing that term choices shape the target culture's knowledge structures. Fan (2021) specifically analyzes the mistranslations and cultural biases associated with "rujiao", "rujia", and "ruxue", advocating for a historically and contextually grounded translation strategy. Furthermore, the methodological framework proposed by Xu and Hu (2002) offers foundational tools for this study's close-reading and comparative approach.

Despite the importance of Levenson's trilogy, there is currently no systematic research comparing its Chinese translations and assessing how these versions reshape the concept of "Confucian China" for Chinese readers. This paper addresses that gap by bringing together translation studies and intellectual history, using Lefevere's framework to compare how two Chinese versions of Levenson's trilogy reframe the image of "Confucian China". Through

close textual analysis, the study explores how translation not only shapes reader reception but also intervenes in broader cultural discourses surrounding tradition, modernity, and Chinese identity.

### 3. Reframing the concept: from “Confucian China” to “儒教中国”

One of the most telling indicators of a translator’s interpretive position is the handling of a work’s title. In the case of *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, the translation of the term “Confucian” serves not merely as a linguistic equivalence but as a conceptual lens through which the entire intellectual edifice of Levenson’s argument is reframed. Both Zheng-Ren’s and Ji’s translations render the phrase “Confucian China” as “儒教中国”, yet this apparent uniformity masks fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of Confucianism and its role in Chinese civilization.

Zheng and Ren’s consistent choice to translate “Confucian” as “儒教” reflects the enduring influence of Western Sinological frameworks, particularly those shaped by Max Weber’s *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (1951), which popularized the characterization of Confucianism as an institutional religion comparable to Christianity. This tradition established an interpretive paradigm in which Confucianism was framed primarily as a system of ritual authority and dogma, rather than as a dynamic intellectual and sociopolitical tradition. Levenson himself engaged critically with this Weberian legacy, frequently juxtaposing “Confucian China” with the “Christian West” not to suggest doctrinal equivalence, but to illustrate how overarching value systems can structure civilizational behavior. However, the Zheng-Ren translation adopts the term “儒教” without critical elaboration or contextual clarification, assuming that this singular label adequately captures the full semantic field of “Confucian”. This unqualified equivalence risks essentializing Confucianism as a rigid religious system, overlooking the fluidity with which Levenson treated the tradition as a composite of intellectual legacy, cultural grammar, and socio-political ideology.

Moreover, the Zheng-Ren version omits key paratexts from the original trilogy, including the general introduction and authorial notes, which offer important clues about Levenson’s usage of core concepts. This absence of framing discourse exacerbates the reductive effect of the title translation: by detaching “Confucian China” from its rhetorical and historical complexity, the translation foregrounds only a singular reading, potentially narrowing readers’ understanding of the Confucian tradition’s plurality.

In contrast, Ji Jianqing’s translation demonstrates a heightened degree of conceptual sensitivity, even though it retains “儒教中国” in the title. Ji explicitly reflects on this choice in his postscript, acknowledging the possible misreading of “儒教” as a religious category in the modern Chinese linguistic context. Nevertheless, he deliberately maintains the term to ensure continuity with the earlier translation, while simultaneously reconfiguring its meaning. For Ji, “儒教” does not denote Confucianism in a theological or institutional sense; rather, it signals a normative system of cultural indoctrination, ethical governance, and intellectual authority embedded in traditional Chinese society.

Ji’s interpretive framework resonates with Levenson’s own dialectical use of terms. In his trilogy, Levenson rarely defines “Confucian” with formal precision; instead, he deploys it metaphorically and comparatively to trace historical transformations. “Confucian China” emerges in Levenson’s narrative as a civilization founded on textual reverence, moral hierarchy, and amateur bureaucratic ethos – distinct from Western forms of modernity but internally dynamic. Ji retains this open-endedness in his translation by deliberately varying his terminology to reflect different contextual nuances and by supplementing key passages with explanatory notes that clarify the polyvalence of “Confucian China”. For example, when

discussing the integration of Confucian ethics into bureaucratic governance, he glosses “儒教中国” with a translator’s note describing it as a “文化—政治复合体” (a cultural-political formation), thereby indicating that it should not be read solely as a religious system but as a historically contingent framework of moral and institutional authority (Levenson 2024, 571). This approach enables the term to function not as a doctrinal label but as a dynamic signifier of a cultural condition whose fate is under scrutiny throughout Levenson’s analysis.

This strategic recontextualization of the title aligns with André Lefevere’s view of translation as “rewriting” shaped by ideological and institutional constraints (Lefevere 1992a). According to him, translation does not merely reproduce the source text but rewrites it according to the receiving culture’s poetics and power structures (Lefevere 2000). In this regard, Ji’s translation exemplifies a conscious act of mediation: by preserving the formal structure of the earlier title while subtly transforming its conceptual resonance, he reconstructs the semantic foundation upon which Levenson’s arguments rest.

Furthermore, Ji supplements the title’s ambiguity with explanatory paratexts and footnotes, guiding readers toward a more nuanced understanding. For instance, he clarifies that “儒教” in this context is closer to a Weberian ideal type, a heuristic for analyzing social formations, rather than a system of faith. His version thereby invites the reader to view “Confucian China” not as a static historical entity, but as a problem space for exploring the collapse and reconstitution of cultural authority in modern Chinese history.

In sum, while both translations use the same Chinese phrase in the title, their underlying conceptual commitments diverge sharply. Zheng and Ren’s translation reflects a historically rooted but conceptually narrow rendering that fails to interrogate the multifaceted implications of “Confucian”. Ji’s version, on the other hand, leverages the ambiguity of the term to deepen and expand the trilogy’s interpretive possibilities. This seemingly minor rendering of a single word thus becomes emblematic of broader tensions between textual fidelity, ideological positioning, and cultural reframing in translation. Through the prism of the title alone, we begin to see how translation operates not only as a linguistic task but as a mode of historiographical intervention.

#### **4. Terminological strategies – Confucian, Confucianist and Neo-Confucianist**

At the core of Joseph Levenson’s *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* lies a persistent yet underdefined set of terms: “Confucian”, “Confucianism”, “Confucianist”, and “Neo-Confucianist”. These terms are not merely lexical choices, but conceptual markers that signal shifting perspectives on Chinese intellectual tradition, political legitimacy, and cultural identity. Their translation into Chinese presents a considerable challenge, given the layered semantic fields of candidate equivalents such as “儒教” (rujiao), “儒家” (rujia), “儒学” (ruxue), and “儒者” (ruzhe). Each term evokes distinct philosophical, institutional, or cultural associations in the Chinese context, and the translator’s selection among them inevitably reflects a broader interpretive stance.

##### **4.1 Semantic ambiguity and cultural lenses: the challenge of translating “Confucian”**

Among the central challenges in translating *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* lies the term “Confucian”, a word that resists any fixed or transparent equivalence in Chinese. Levenson employs “Confucian” not as a technical or doctrinal label, but as a flexible signifier encompassing cultural, philosophical, moral, and institutional dimensions of Chinese civilization. It refers at once to a civilizational ethos, a bureaucratic order, a moral philosophy, and a historical narrative. This semantic plurality creates significant challenges for Chinese

translators, especially given the overlapping yet distinct nuances of terms such as “儒教” (rujiao), “儒家” (rujia), and “儒学” (ruxue).

The Zheng-Ren translation uniformly renders “Confucian” as “儒教”, a choice that adheres to the established conventions of earlier Western sinology. This decision implicitly frames Confucianism as a quasi-religious system, foregrounding its ritualistic and dogmatic dimensions. However, this approach risks reducing Levenson’s nuanced and critical use of “Confucian” to a monolithic religious label. For instance, in passages where Levenson analyzes Confucianism’s embeddedness in bureaucratic morality or its function as a socio-political ideology, the use of “儒教” introduces unwanted connotations of institutional religion, potentially misrepresenting the text’s analytical intentions.

By contrast, Ji demonstrates a more sensitive and flexible approach to the translation of “Confucian”. While he retains “儒教” in the book’s title for the sake of continuity and historical resonance, he adapts his lexical choices throughout the text based on context. When “Confucian” refers to the broad value system governing traditional Chinese society, Ji preserves “儒教” to emphasize its moral-authoritative and civilizational role. However, when the term refers more narrowly to philosophical doctrines or scholarly traditions, he opts for “儒家” or “儒学”, thereby distinguishing between cultural structure, intellectual lineage, and abstract thought.

For example, in discussing the moral basis of literati governance, Ji often employs “儒教” to underscore its role as a normative framework. Conversely, when Levenson discusses interpretive debates among scholars or the evolution of ideas in the Song dynasty, Ji shifts to “儒家” or “儒学”, marking a move from institutional structure to discursive formation. This strategy not only avoids conceptual conflation but also aligns with Levenson’s own dialectical style, which resists the essentialization of Confucianism and instead treats it as a historically situated, evolving discourse.

Furthermore, Ji’s approach reflects a broader understanding of the cultural politics of translation. In the post-Mao Chinese intellectual landscape, the term “儒教” carries specific ideological weight, often associated with the “Confucian Religion Movement” (孔教运动) or with reactionary readings of tradition. Ji navigates this terrain carefully, deploying “儒教” where necessary but tempering its implications through contextual framing and footnotes. This attentiveness reveals a deep engagement not only with Levenson’s thought, but also with the discursive conditions of contemporary Chinese scholarship.

In sum, the translation of “Confucian” serves as more than a lexical decision; it is a site of cultural negotiation. Zheng and Ren’s uniform application of “儒教” reflects the limitations of their historical moment and the inertia of early sinological paradigms. Ji’s differentiated and dynamic treatment of the term, by contrast, exemplifies a more critically informed and philosophically nuanced strategy. By tailoring terminology to context, Ji not only preserves the complexity of Levenson’s analysis but also reintroduces “Confucian China” to Chinese readers as a contested, multilayered, and intellectually fertile concept.

#### **4.2 Translating the agent: from “Confucianist(s)” to “儒者”**

While “Confucian” operates largely as an adjective shaping civilizational or philosophical descriptors, Levenson’s frequent use of “Confucianist” foregrounds the human agents who inhabit, transmit, and negotiate the values of the Confucian tradition. This term refers to intellectuals, scholars, and officials shaped by Confucian ideals – figures who embody the tradition in its lived, social, and ideological dimensions. Translating “Confucianist(s)”, therefore, entails more than identifying a practitioner of Confucianism; it involves

reconstructing the Confucian subject within specific political, philosophical, and historical frameworks.

In the Zheng-Ren translation, the rendering of “Confucianist” lacks consistency. At times it is translated as “儒家”, emphasizing school affiliation; elsewhere it appears as “信奉儒教者” (“followers of Confucianism”) or simply omitted altogether. This inconsistency fragments the identity of the Confucian subject and dilutes Levenson’s portrayal of a historical-intellectual class. The absence of terminological stability obscures the distinction between individuals, doctrines, and institutions – a distinction that is central to Levenson’s analysis of ideological transformation.

By contrast, Ji adopts a cohesive and contextually grounded strategy, consistently translating “Confucianist(s)” as “儒者”. This term has deep historical resonance in Chinese intellectual discourse, referring specifically to learned individuals who identify with or advocate Confucian values. Unlike “儒家”, which may evoke affiliation with a philosophical school, or “儒教信徒”, which suggests religious adherence, “儒者” carries a connotation of scholarly identity and moral vocation. Ji’s selection of this term effectively reconstructs the intellectual and cultural agency of Confucian figures in Levenson’s narrative.

For instance, when Levenson writes that “Confucianists took on some aristocratic colour, conceived of themselves as ends in themselves, and set out to prise open the imperial clutch,” Ji translates the sentence as: “儒者却染上了几分贵族的色彩，把他们视为自足的目的，准备撬开皇帝的铁腕统治。” (Levenson 2024, 262).

The use of “儒者” in this context marks the Confucian scholar as a distinct social actor – a bearer of values and ambitions within a shifting political order. Ji’s translation thus aligns with Levenson’s depiction of Confucian intellectuals not as passive transmitters of tradition but as historically situated agents negotiating power and modernity.

In cases where Levenson discusses Neo-Confucianists or identifies specific historical figures, Ji adapts the term into compound forms such as “新儒家学者” (Neo-Confucian scholars), emphasizing both historical lineage and intellectual subjectivity. This approach avoids collapsing different historical strata or philosophical orientations, preserving the diachronic complexity of the Confucian tradition.

The coherence of Ji’s terminological system reflects a deliberate effort to reconstitute the subject-position of the Confucian intellectual across different historical moments. This is particularly significant given that Levenson’s trilogy is concerned not just with abstract ideas but with the transformation of a moral and political class under the pressures of modernity. Ji’s use of “儒者” restores this social dimension while navigating the ideological sensitivities of contemporary Chinese discourse.

In summary, the translation of “Confucianist(s)” is a test of both linguistic precision and interpretive insight. Zheng and Ren’s inconsistent usage disperses the conceptual clarity of Levenson’s argument and weakens the coherence of the Confucian subject. Ji’s consistent and semantically rich use of “儒者” reconstructs that subject with historical fidelity and cultural specificity. It is through such careful terminological choices that Ji’s translation achieves not only textual clarity but also philosophical resonance.

### **4.3 Neo-Confucianism and historical specificity**

Among the many conceptual layers embedded in Levenson’s trilogy, his treatment of Neo-Confucianism is particularly nuanced. The term refers not merely to a historical period or a revival movement, but to a complex philosophical reformulation that redefined Confucian thought from the Song dynasty onward. In Levenson’s analysis, Neo-Confucianism occupies a pivotal position in the long arc of Chinese intellectual history: it marks the absorption of

metaphysical speculation into Confucian moral discourse, the institutionalization of scholarly orthodoxy, and the consolidation of literati culture under imperial rule. Translating this term into Chinese thus requires a high degree of historical sensitivity and terminological precision.

In the Zheng-Ren translation, the handling of “Neo-Confucianist(s)” often lacks clarity and specificity. In some instances, the term is rendered as “新儒家”, in others simply as “儒家学者”, without adequate contextual differentiation. Such ambiguity blurs the distinction between Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism and the modern “New Confucianism” (also translated as “新儒家”) associated with 20th-century thinkers such as Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, and Xu Fuguan. Without careful framing, the term “新儒家” risks being misread in the context of contemporary intellectual debates, detaching Levenson’s historical references from their proper lineage.

Ji avoids this confusion by adopting the more precise formulation “新儒家学者” (“Neo-Confucian scholars”) when translating “Neo-Confucianist(s)”. This compound structure emphasizes both the philosophical orientation and the scholarly subjectivity of the historical agents in question. By including the word “学者”, Ji ensures that the term points specifically to the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasty intellectuals who shaped orthodox Confucian metaphysics, such as Zhu Xi (the principal architect of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy who systematized the metaphysical foundations of Confucianism by integrating elements of Daoist cosmology and Buddhist epistemology) and Cheng Yi (a key forerunner of Zhu Xi who emphasized moral introspection and the cultivation of human nature), rather than to later ideological reformers. This distinction is not trivial: it preserves the historical contour of Levenson’s argument and avoids conflating fundamentally different intellectual movements.

Consider, for example, Levenson’s discussion of the post-Song Confucian state’s ambivalent relationship with family and clan structures. His account relies on an understanding of Neo-Confucianism as a social philosophy integrated with bureaucratic ethics. Ji renders these passages with terminological consistency, maintaining “新儒家学者” to refer to the historical thinkers who helped codify these practices. In doing so, he preserves the historical specificity of Levenson’s analysis and avoids the anachronistic slippage that often occurs in discussions of Confucian revivalism.

Ji’s approach also reflects a deeper historiographical awareness. In modern Chinese discourse, the label “新儒家” carries considerable ideological weight, often associated with attempts to re-legitimize Confucian values in the post-Mao period. By disambiguating the Song-Ming Neo-Confucians from this modern movement, Ji insulates Levenson’s text from unintended political associations and guides the reader toward a more accurate understanding of its intellectual genealogy.

Moreover, Ji’s treatment of Neo-Confucianism exemplifies his overall strategy of contextualized translation. Rather than applying a single term mechanically, he reads each instance within its narrative and philosophical frame, selecting language that preserves both conceptual integrity and historical resonance. This approach reflects Lefevere’s notion of translation as “refraction”: the translator does not simply mirror the original, but reshapes it in light of the receiving culture’s discursive norms and ideological frameworks (Lefevere 2000, 240).

In summary, the translation of “Neo-Confucianist(s)” is a test of historical discernment. The Zheng-Ren version, though pioneering in its time, fails to maintain terminological clarity, allowing different Confucian movements to bleed into one another. Ji’s careful use of “新儒家学者” not only clarifies historical reference but also aligns with Levenson’s own efforts to trace ideological continuity and rupture across dynastic transitions. Through such precise calibration, Ji enables Chinese readers to engage with Levenson’s intellectual history without semantic distortion or political misreading.

## 5. Rewriting and ideological mediation in translation

Translation is never a neutral act. As Lefevere (1992b) argues, translation is one of the most powerful forms of “rewriting” through which texts are adapted to fit the ideological, cultural, and institutional constraints of the target system. In this sense, every translation becomes a site of negotiation, not only between languages but also between worldviews, political expectations, and interpretive communities. Levenson’s *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, with its probing metaphors, critical vocabulary, and dialectical structure, poses unique challenges to translators operating within ideologically sensitive contexts.

This part explores how Zheng and Ren’s version and Ji’s translation mediate Levenson’s ideas through distinct rewriting strategies. While the Zheng-Ren translation reflects significant omissions and rhetorical adaptations shaped by the political atmosphere of its time, Ji’s version balances rhetorical fidelity with cultural sensitivity, carefully adjusting specific terms and metaphors to align with contemporary discursive norms.

### 5.1 Omission and adaptation: the rewriting of Levenson in the Zheng-Ren translation

The 2000 Chinese translation of *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* by Zheng and Ren represents the earliest comprehensive attempt to introduce Levenson’s trilogy to a Chinese-speaking readership. Despite its historical significance, the translation has been criticized for extensive omissions and adaptations that significantly reshape the original text. These modifications, whether through deliberate excision or rhetorical softening, reflect not only the translators’ interpretive choices but also the ideological and institutional pressures surrounding the publication of Western intellectual works in post-reform China.

One of the most notable examples of rewriting through omission is the exclusion of the “General Introduction” and the individual prefaces to each volume. These paratextual elements are not ancillary; they serve as crucial framing devices through which Levenson outlines his methodological approach and philosophical premises. Their absence deprives readers of a roadmap for interpreting the trilogy’s conceptual tensions, particularly the dialectic between values and history, or the tension between Confucian amateurism and modern professionalization. As a result, the Chinese version begins abruptly, without the theoretical scaffolding that shapes Levenson’s distinctive historiographical voice.

In addition to paratextual omissions, the Zheng-Ren translation also demonstrates consistent rhetorical adaptation within the main body of the text. Terms with potentially politically sensitive connotations, such as “autocrat”, “despot”, or even “crisis”, are often rendered in neutral or euphemistic terms. For instance, Levenson’s sharp critique of imperial authority, described as “autocratic rule”, is translated more mildly as “统治者” (ruler) or “领导人” (leader), thus dulling the force of his political analysis. This lexical dilution mirrors a broader pattern in which the critical edge of Levenson’s language is softened to avoid friction with dominant ideological narratives.

Another example is the selective omission or simplification of footnotes and intertextual references, especially those engaging with Western philosophy, comparative religion, or Marxist theory. These footnotes often reveal Levenson’s broader intellectual network and help contextualize his framing of Confucian China as a conceptual category. Their exclusion not only narrows the reader’s access to the theoretical richness of the original, but also aligns the translated text with a more self-contained and ideologically cautious discourse.

These patterns of omission and adaptation correspond closely with what Lefevere identifies as the workings of patronage and ideological constraints in literary systems. According to Lefevere (2000), translations often serve the values and interests of the receiving culture’s dominant institutions, whether these be political regimes, publishing authorities, or disciplinary

gatekeepers. In the case of the Zheng-Ren translation, the decision to publish through China Social Sciences Press (an influential and state-affiliated academic publisher) likely introduced additional layers of editorial oversight and political sensitivity. The result is a translation that, while instrumental in disseminating Levenson's work, ultimately presents a filtered and ideologically tempered version of his thought.

To be sure, the translators were operating within specific historical limitations. In 2000, scholarly engagement with Western critical theory was still in flux, and the political space for direct confrontation with Confucianism's decline or its entanglement with Communist ideology was considerably narrower than it is today. From this perspective, Zheng and Ren's translation may be understood as a form of "pragmatic rewriting" aimed at making the text publishable and readable in a restricted discursive environment. However, such compromises also come at a cost: they reduce the complexity, dialectical tension, and theoretical ambition of Levenson's original project.

In sum, the Zheng-Ren translation exemplifies a form of rewriting shaped by both ideological caution and institutional constraint. Through omission, euphemism, and conceptual flattening, the translation filters Levenson's critical voice and repositions his work within a more politically acceptable framework. While this strategy may have facilitated the trilogy's initial entry into Chinese academic discourse, it also highlights the stakes of translation as an act of ideological mediation. Understanding these choices is essential for assessing the impact and limitations of early attempts to translate Western intellectual history into Chinese contexts.

## 5.2 Rhetorical fidelity and strategic adjustment: Ji's contextual rewriting

In contrast to the Zheng-Ren translation's strategy of omission and euphemism, Ji's 2024 version of *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* exemplifies a more sophisticated form of rewriting. It balances rhetorical fidelity to the original text with careful adaptation to the ideological and cultural constraints of the target system. Rather than minimizing Levenson's critique or excising sensitive passages, Ji retains the complexity of the original prose and uses strategic adjustments, such as lexical substitution, contextual footnoting, and controlled paraphrasing, to negotiate tensions between intellectual honesty and contemporary readability.

One of the most notable features of Ji's translation is his treatment of politically sensitive terminology. Levenson often refers to China's imperial and modern leadership using terms such as "ruler", "autocrat", or "centralized authority". These expressions carry strong political connotations, especially in a Chinese context where terms like "专制" (despotism) or "独裁" (dictatorship) can provoke institutional resistance or ideological discomfort. Ji avoids direct confrontation by translating "autocrat" as "领导者" (leader) or "领袖" (head), terms more commonly used in contemporary Chinese political discourse. Yet he does not neutralize the critical tone entirely. Through contextual elaboration within the main text or via explanatory footnotes, he maintains Levenson's analytical intent while subtly disarming its rhetorical threat.

An illustrative example can be found in Ji's rendering of the metaphor "Les poiriers sont coupés" ("The pear trees are cut down") – a phrase that Levenson uses near the end of the third volume as an allusion to the decline of Confucian authority (Levenson 1968, 43). This metaphor draws on both Western intertextuality and classical Chinese imagery, referencing the *Book of Songs* and the tradition of Confucian governance under the pear tree. Rather than replacing the metaphor with a domesticated idiom or ignoring its allusive depth, Ji retains the French original and supplements it with a footnote explaining its Chinese intertextual resonance: "甘棠被砍掉了" ("The sweet pear tree is cut down"). This dual-layered strategy preserves the metaphor's poetic and philosophical undertones while ensuring that readers can

grasp its significance within both cultural frameworks.

Ji's treatment of paratextual material further demonstrates his commitment to rhetorical fidelity and intellectual transparency. Unlike Zheng and Ren, Ji retains the original trilogy's general introduction, prefaces, and scholarly notes. These materials are essential not only for contextualizing Levenson's work but also for tracing its comparative and dialectical methodology. By preserving these framing texts, Ji re-establishes Levenson's intellectual voice and guides the reader through the interpretive architecture of the trilogy.

What emerges from Ji's translation is a subtle but powerful form of rewriting, which does not erase the ideological challenges posed by Levenson's text, but rather reframes them in a way that resonates with contemporary Chinese scholarly discourse. His strategies align with what Lefevere (1992b) calls "ideologically motivated rewriting within discursive limits", in which the translator acts as both cultural negotiator and ethical intermediary. Rather than retreating from Levenson's critical stance, Ji mediates it by transforming Levenson's foreignness into a productive tension within the target culture.

This is particularly evident in Ji's consistent handling of rhetorical and conceptual oppositions that structure Levenson's historical argument: history vs. values, amateur vs. professional, continuity vs. rupture. These tensions remain intact in Ji's translation, even when he rewords specific formulations to align with linguistic and political conventions. His rewriting, then, is not a flattening of content but a recalibration of form, preserving the author's dialectical style while adapting its rhetorical delivery.

In sum, Ji Jianqing's translation embodies a model of contextual rewriting that is both faithful and transformative. It demonstrates that fidelity in translation need not preclude adaptation, and that strategic modulation of tone, metaphor, and terminology can serve to preserve rather than suppress the philosophical and ideological complexity of the original text. In doing so, Ji offers not just a readable version of Levenson's trilogy, but a culturally intelligible and intellectually resonant one, which reanimates "Confucian China" as a living problem in Chinese historical consciousness.

## **6. Reconstructing "Confucian China" through conceptual reframing**

The term "Confucian China", which stands at the center of Joseph Levenson's trilogy, is not a mere civilizational label, but a historically layered and ideologically charged conceptual construct. It encapsulates a particular configuration of cultural norms, political institutions, ethical values, and historical consciousness, a configuration that Levenson sought not only to describe but to interrogate. In translation, the fate of this term is intimately tied to the translator's ability to preserve, reframe, or reconstruct its multiple dimensions. This chapter examines how the two Chinese translations reshape the image of "Confucian China" through their respective linguistic and conceptual strategies.

### **6.1 Zheng-Ren's simplified rendering: a flattened conceptual field**

In the Zheng-Ren translation, "Confucian China" is consistently rendered as "儒教中国", a term that foregrounds the notion of Confucianism as a religious institution. While this rendering aligns superficially with the English term, it imposes a singular interpretation that downplays the multidimensional nature of Levenson's concept. The translation does not distinguish between Confucianism as a civilizational ethos, an intellectual tradition, or a mode of governance. Instead, "儒教中国" is treated as a static entity, often stripped of its historical dynamism and internal contradictions.

The flattening of the concept is further reinforced by the translation's lack of terminological variation and its omission of contextual framing. For instance, in discussions of

Confucianism's institutional entrenchment in the imperial bureaucracy, the translation maintains the use of “儒教” without clarifying whether it refers to doctrine, ideology, or a symbolic order. This uniformity limits the reader's ability to perceive how Levenson viewed “Confucian China” as an evolving and contested formation – one that, far from being monolithic, was historically reconstituted through conflict, adaptation, and negotiation.

As a result, Zheng and Ren's translation reifies “Confucian China” as a closed historical object, rather than presenting it as a critical category through which modern Chinese identity and political legitimacy could be analyzed. The image that emerges is one of a bygone cultural-religious system rather than a dynamic discourse with lingering influence in contemporary thought.

## **6.2 Ji's dialectical reconstruction: Confucian China as a living framework**

By contrast, Ji Jianqing treats “Confucian China” not as a fixed referent, but as a dialectical concept subject to historical reconstruction. While he retains the term “儒教中国” in the title for continuity, Ji actively dissects and reassembles its semantic layers throughout the translation. Drawing on his nuanced use of “儒教”, “儒家”, “儒学”, and “儒者”, Ji presents Confucian China as a hybrid formation – at once ideological, philosophical, political, and cultural.

In Ji's translation, “Confucian China” is consistently contextualized in relation to historical processes such as the transformation of the literati class, the decline of the imperial system, and the rise of Communist modernity. Rather than freezing the term in a religious register, Ji uses it as a conceptual lens through which competing modernities – Confucian, Western, and Marxist – are juxtaposed and evaluated. This framing captures Levenson's intention to position Confucian China not merely as a historical stage, but as a civilizational narrative that continues to inform Chinese self-understanding.

Moreover, Ji's translation foregrounds the internal tensions that define Confucian China: the conflict between amateurism and bureaucratization, the shift from moral governance to legalist statecraft, and the fragmentation of Confucian values in the face of modern ideologies. These dialectics are preserved through careful lexical variation and rhetorical fidelity, allowing “Confucian China” to emerge not as a static label but as an evolving matrix of meaning.

A striking example of this approach can be seen in Ji's rendering of passages where Levenson contrasts Confucian legitimacy with Communist revolution. Instead of avoiding the ideological stakes, Ji emphasizes how remnants of Confucian values, such as cultural unity, moral cultivation, and historical continuity, resurface in new political forms. His translation thus invites the reader to view “儒教中国” not as a relic of the past, but as a latent force whose rearticulation continues to shape Chinese intellectual discourse.

## **6.3 From translation to conceptual intervention**

Through these divergent strategies, the two translations enact different kinds of conceptual intervention. Zheng and Ren introduce the idea of “Confucian China” into Chinese scholarly discourse, but their simplified rendering positions it as an externalized and essentially concluded phenomenon. Ji, by contrast, reconstructs it as an open-ended and contested term, which demands reexamination in the context of modern Chinese identity, memory, and political thought.

In doing so, Ji's translation does more than clarify Levenson's original argument; it revitalizes “Confucian China” as a category of reflection within Chinese intellectual life. His choices re-inscribe Levenson's questions – Has the Confucian order truly ended? Can its values be reconciled with modernity? – into contemporary debates about national tradition, moral

education, and cultural continuity. This is not simply a matter of accuracy, but of intellectual agency: Ji's translation functions as a medium through which the past is re-read in light of the present.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the complex ways in which Joseph Levenson's *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* has been received and reinterpreted through Chinese translation, focusing on two key versions by Zheng Dahua and Ren Jing (2000), and Ji Jianqing (2024). Through comparative analysis of terminology, rhetorical strategy, ideological mediation, and conceptual framing, the study has shown that translation is not merely a vehicle for linguistic transfer but a powerful instrument of cultural negotiation and historical reconstruction.

Zheng and Ren's translation, though pioneering in its time, exemplifies a mode of rewriting shaped by ideological caution and institutional constraint. Its terminological inconsistency, rhetorical simplification, and notable omissions flatten the multidimensional image of Confucian China, presenting it as a static and concluded historical entity. In contrast, Ji's translation offers a model of contextual sensitivity and intellectual precision. Through consistent terminology, rhetorical fidelity, and strategic adaptation, Ji reconstructs "Confucian China" as a dynamic and dialectical construct, which bridges past and present, philosophy and politics, cultural tradition and modern reinvention.

By situating these translations within the broader framework of translation studies, especially through the lens of Lefevere's theory of rewriting, this paper highlights the translator's dual role as both interpreter and cultural agent. Ji's translation does not merely transmit Levenson's ideas to a Chinese readership. It reframes them, embedding them within ongoing discourses on cultural identity, intellectual continuity, and the legacy of Confucianism in modern China.

Ultimately, Levenson's trilogy continues to provoke essential questions: Can tradition survive modernization without distortion? Does cultural continuity necessitate ideological compromise? Can a modern China truly dispense with its Confucian foundations? These questions are not answered once and for all in Levenson's work, nor in its translations, but they are made newly visible and newly urgent through the act of translation itself. In this sense, translation becomes both a mirror and a lens: reflecting existing tensions while also refracting them into new conceptual possibilities. The evolving image of "Confucian China" in Chinese translation is thus not only a matter of textual fidelity, but of intellectual inheritance and cultural reimagination.

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**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER'S NAME  
IN *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON*  
AND ITS SLOVAK AND FRENCH TRANSLATIONS**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the translation of humour in children's literature through a comparative analysis of the main character's full name in Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* and its Slovak and French translations. The study examines how essential elements of the proper name, including its semantic meaning, phonetic qualities, cultural references, and tonal effects, are maintained or transformed in the process of translation. Employing a qualitative comparative approach, the research draws on translation strategy taxonomies (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958; Newmark 1988; Nord 1997; Chesterman 2016) and humour translation frameworks (Delabastita 1996; Zabalbeascoa 1996; Chiaro 2010), as well as Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignization model. Findings indicate that the Slovak translation maintains a high degree of semantic and tonal equivalence, using domestication and alliterative adaptation to reproduce the original's humorous effect. In contrast, the French translation demonstrates a greater reliance on simplification and substitution, often resulting in a loss of the source text's layered humour. The study aims to contribute to ongoing research in translation studies by highlighting the functional role of proper names in children's literature and the importance of context-sensitive strategies in preserving humour across languages.

**1. Introduction**

The translation of proper names remains a contested and complex area in translation studies. Early prescriptive models, such as those proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) outlined practical techniques such as modulation, equivalence, and transposition to guide translators in addressing cultural and linguistic gaps. Newmark (1988) often advocated the non-translation of names in order to preserve lexical fidelity to the source text while Venuti (1995) introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization as ideological poles within translation strategy. However, more recent scholarship has emphasized context-sensitive and functional approaches, which consider the communicative role and cultural significance of names in the target language (Nord 1997; Fernandes 2006).

Humour translation, particularly in children's literature, presents additional challenges due to its reliance on linguistic creativity, cultural allusions, and situational incongruity (Chiaro 2010; Vandaele 2002). These features often resist straightforward translation, leading to partial or complete loss of humour if not adapted thoughtfully. Scholars such as Delabastita (1996) and Zabalbeascoa (1996) classify humour translation strategies into substitution, transcreation, and omission, each carrying different implications for tone and meaning.

In children's fantasy literature, proper names frequently serve a dual role: they contribute to world-building while simultaneously conveying humour through exaggerated, ironic, or playful constructions (Fernandes 2006; Davies 2003; Nikolajeva 2005). The translation of such names requires careful negotiation between preserving the source text's stylistic and narrative function and ensuring accessibility for the target readership.

This study contributes to these ongoing discussions by examining the translation of humour embedded in proper names within children's literature. Using Cressida Cowell's *How to Train*

*Your Dragon* (2003) as a case study, it investigates how the protagonist's full name and associated titles are translated in the Slovak and French versions. The analysis seeks to evaluate which strategies best preserve the original's comic tone and characterisation.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper uses a qualitative, comparative methodology grounded in close reading and textual analysis. It draws on theoretical frameworks developed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Newmark (1988), Nord (1997), and Venuti (1995), and applies models of humour translation proposed by Delabastita (1996), Chiaro (2010), and Zabalbeascoa (1996).

The analysis focuses on six expressions related to the protagonist's name, each examined through the lens of semantic accuracy, phonetic consistency, cultural accessibility, and tonal effect. Translation strategies are identified and evaluated in each case to determine how humour and character function are transferred or transformed. Although the scope of the analysis is narrow, it offers a detailed lens through which the mechanisms of humour translation can be understood. This micro-level focus aligns with methodologies found in disciplines such as microhistory, where close analysis of a small subject can yield broader insights into systemic practices.

## **3. Research aim and objectives**

This paper aims to investigate how humour embedded in proper names is translated in children's literature, focusing on the extent to which the original comic tone and characterisation are retained or transformed in translation. The central objective is to evaluate the translation strategies employed in the Slovak and French versions of Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon*, specifically those pertaining to the name and titles of the protagonist.

## **4. Research questions**

The paper addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent is humour, as encoded in the protagonist's name and epithets, retained or altered in the Slovak and French translations?
- What translation strategies are used to render the name-based humour?
- How do these strategies reflect broader ideological or functional translation choices, such as domestication or foreignization?

## **5. Analytical approach**

The research adopts a qualitative comparative approach, using close reading and textual analysis as primary methods. The analysis is guided by translation strategy taxonomies developed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Newmark (1988), Nord (1997), and Chesterman (2016), as well as humour translation frameworks proposed by Delabastita (1996), Zabalbeascoa (1996), and Chiaro (2010).

Each instance of name translation is assessed across several criteria:

- Semantic equivalence: the preservation of meaning and referential content,
- Phonetic correspondence: sound patterns, alliteration, and rhythm,
- Cultural accessibility: adaptation to target-language norms and references,
- Tonal effect: retention of humour, irony, or playfulness.

The study also considers the ideological orientation of each translation (domestication vs. foreignization), following Venuti (1995), to understand the broader cultural implications of the translator's choices.

## 6. Justification of scope

While the corpus is limited in scale, the selected examples are representative of broader trends in children's literature, where names often serve as narrative tools that convey humour and character identity. The focus on a single character allows for detailed micro-level analysis, where depth takes precedence over breadth in exploring translation phenomena.

## 7. Corpus

The corpus comprises six name-based expressions drawn from the English edition of *How to Train Your Dragon* (Cowell 2003) and their Slovak and French translations. These expressions include the protagonist's full name and epithets, which encapsulate key aspects of Cowell's humorous style, narrative irony, and character construction.

The English edition, published by Hachette (2003), is compared with two target language editions: the Slovak translation *Ako si vycvičiť draka*, translated by Otakar Kořínek (Slovart 2019), and the French translation *Comment dresser votre dragon*, translated by Antoine Pinchot (Casterman 2018).

The central focus is the protagonist's full name and associated titles, which serve as rich examples of phonetic play, narrative exaggeration, and cultural reference. These elements contribute significantly to both the character's development and the text's comedic framing, making them ideal for examining how humour is preserved, transformed, or lost in translation.

The specific examples analysed are:

- **English:** *Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, the Hope and Heir to the Tribe of the Hairy Hooligans* (written by Cressida Cowell, Hachette 2003),
- **Slovak:** *Štikút Strašný Štukovec III., nádej a následník kmeňa Chlpatých Chuligánov* (translated by Otakar Kořínek, Slovart 2019),
- **French:** *Harold Horrib' Haddock, troisième du nom, héritier des Hooligans Hirsutes* (translated by Antoine Pinchot, Casterman 2018).

These expressions were selected for their complex layering of phonetic humour, narrative irony, and cultural nuances, providing a valuable lens for exploring the translation of humour across languages and cultures.

## 8. English naming strategies in *How to Train Your Dragon*

In the original English text, names like Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III are not only central to character identity but also rich in comic function and social commentary. The name *Hiccup* is overtly humorous, grounded in the incongruity theory of humour (Attardo 1994), where laughter arises from a mismatch between expectation and outcome. A hiccup is an involuntary bodily reflex, inherently undignified and erratic, comically undercutting the expectation of a noble Viking hero. This aligns with Bergson's (2012) theory that humour emerges from mechanical interruptions in human behaviour.

Phonetically, *Hiccup* mimics the sound of the condition it denotes, a technique of phonetic iconicity discussed by Crystal (2003), which intensifies its comic effect. The name's consonant structure, marked by a clipped and halting rhythm, reflects the sound pattern of an actual hiccup and enhances its auditory humour. Semantically, the irony lies in a protagonist bearing a name suggesting ineffectuality, amplifying the humour through semantic dissonance (Raskin 1985).

The middle name Horrendous furthers this ironic distance. It is a grandiose, Latinate adjective implying something awe-inspiring or terrifying, and its pairing with *Hiccup* compounds the incongruity. The juxtaposition operates as parody, mocking the heroic lineage trope, and exemplifies what Eco (1979) would describe as semiotic play, i.e. playing with cultural codes and expectations. The repetition of the “H” sound with *Hiccup*, *Horrendous*, and *Haddock* also produces alliteration, which Leech (1969) suggests is often used for rhythmic humour and memorability.

The surname Haddock, denoting a fish, undercuts the heroic tone further. It introduces a semantic script shift (Raskin 1985) from warrior nobility to something mundane and comical. It creates bathos, an anti-climactic letdown that is often funny (Lefevere 1992). The final element, III, invokes aristocratic lineage. When paired with a ridiculous name, it ridicules the concept of inherited nobility, employing irony for comic effect (Delabastita 1996; Oittinen 2000).

The title *The Hope and Heir of the Tribe of the Hairy Hooligans* continues this pattern. *Hope and Heir* suggests gravitas and legacy, which is immediately undermined by the absurd tribal name. *Hairy Hooligans* features rich alliteration and hyperbolic imagery, invoking chaos and unruliness. According to Chiaro (2010), such exaggeration and playful phonetics are core to juvenile and family-oriented humour.

These naming conventions employ domestication in the sense that they are entirely embedded in the cultural and linguistic norms of Anglophone children’s literature. The use of familiar comedic techniques such as sound mimicry, irony, and alliteration serves both to characterize the protagonist and to entertain, making the hero more relatable through humour.

## 9. Slovak naming strategies and adaptations

The Slovak translation of *Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III* as *Štikút Strašný Šťukovec III.* uses a highly domesticating strategy (Venuti 1995), emphasizing cultural and linguistic accessibility over foreign fidelity. Each element of the name is reinterpreted to preserve or adapt the humour within Slovak phonetic and semantic structures.

*Štikút* derives from *štikútka*, a hiccup, preserving the original’s semantic and humorous essence. While the English *Hiccup* is more commonly recognized as a noun, the Slovak term leans into verb-derived wordplay. This supports Newmark’s (1988) notion of semantic translation, where meaning is kept intact through equivalent lexical items. Phonetically, *Štikút* reproduces the abrupt consonantal sounds and rhythmic staccato of *Hiccup*, thereby retaining the comic phonological structure.

*Strašný*, meaning “terrible” or “frightening,” serves as a close functional equivalent to *Horrendous*. Though slightly less exaggerated than the English term, it supports cultural accessibility and maintains the ironic distance between the protagonist’s meek persona and his bombastic name. Alliteration is preserved, echoing the “H” structure of the English version with repeated “Š” sounds.

*Šťukovec*, a type of local fish, replaces *Haddock* through ecological adaptation (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958), preserving the semantic field of mundane aquatic animals. This reinforces the comic incongruity through cultural familiarity, making the humour more intelligible to Slovak readers. The effect is humorous in a culturally adapted way, using familiar flora and fauna to evoke the same semantic mismatch as the source.

The Roman numeral III. follows Slovak orthographic conventions, thus representing a minimal cultural adjustment while preserving the satirical commentary on inherited nobility.

The full title *Nádej a následník náčelníka kmeňa Chlpatých Chuligánov* (Hope and Successor of the Chief of the Tribe of the Hairy Hooligans) maintains both semantic and tonal features. The alliteration in *Chlpatých Chuligánov* mimics the playful effect of the

English, though *následník* (successor) broadens the semantic scope compared to *heir*. The humour is somewhat softened, but the phrase retains rhythm and exaggeration (Delabastita 1996), allowing it to function as a humorous parody of tribal grandeur.

This translation is predominantly domesticating, aiming to recreate the humour using Slovak cultural references and linguistic play. It retains semantic equivalence, phonetic correspondence, and tonal irony effectively, with minor shifts for cultural specificity.

## 10. French naming strategies and adaptations

The French translation takes a hybrid approach, balancing domestication and foreignization in line with Venuti's (1995) model. The name becomes Harold Horrib' Haddock, troisième du nom, which reorients the humour away from phonetic mimicry and bodily humour toward situational irony and incongruity.

Harold, replacing *Hiccup*, marks a clear loss in semantic equivalence. The name bears no reference to involuntary bodily functions and thus lacks the comic literalism of the original. However, it introduces a different kind of irony: *Harold* is a heroic-sounding, old Germanic name that jars with the character's clumsy persona. According to Zabalbeascoa (1996), such contrasts can also create humour, particularly when audience expectations are subverted by character behaviour.

Horrib', a truncated and colloquial form of *horrible*, reduces the bombastic tone of *Horrendous*. This aligns with Chiaro's (2010) observation that humour must often be culturally recalibrated; the softening here reflects French preferences for linguistic subtlety over hyperbole. It remains humorous, though less so through grandeur and more through ironic understatement.

The name *Haddock* is retained without alteration, representing a clear foreignization strategy. While it maintains phonetic correspondence, it loses semantic transparency, especially if the reader is unfamiliar with the fish. This is consistent with Toury's (1995) principle that foreign elements may remain untranslated if they do not obstruct coherence. The choice could be interpreted as evoking cultural flavour rather than humour.

The numeral troisième du nom explicates the Roman numeral, making it accessible to French readers unfamiliar with English naming conventions. While this adds a layer of clarity, it also removes some of the formal absurdity present in the English.

The tribe's name is Tribu des Hooligans Poilus, which maintains alliteration (*Hooligans / Poilus*) and cultural strangeness. The term *Poilu*, meaning "hairy" or colloquially "grizzled veteran", adds a layer of cultural specificity that slightly shifts the humour. This can be seen as a form of modulation (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958), where the translator adapts the original to resonate with the target audience's cultural context.

Overall, the French translation's humour is more culturally reframed than retained. It sacrifices phonetic and semantic equivalence in favour of tonal adjustment and accessibility. It is only partially successful in recreating the original's comic force but compensates by employing irony and lexical familiarity.

## 11. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the character name Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III and its translations into Štikút Strašný Šťukovec III. (Slovak) and Harold Horrib' Haddock, troisième du nom (French) highlights significant differences in the translators' approaches and their impact on the target audience's perception of character, tone, and narrative humour.

From the perspective of semantic equivalence, the Slovak translation can be considered more effective. By translating *Hiccup* as *Štikút*, a solution that is both phonologically plausible

and semantically meaningful, the Slovak version achieves a domesticated rendering that retains the original's literal sense as well as its humorous undertone. The French version, on the other hand, departs entirely from the core semantics by replacing *Hiccup* with *Harold*, thus erasing the original referential humour linked to bodily functions, which Delabastita (1996) identifies as a frequent source of juvenile comedy in children's literature. This semantic loss dilutes the original's layered irony and disrupts the character's comedic dissonance.

In terms of phonetic correspondence, English achieves a high degree of cohesion through strong alliteration (H-H-H), echoing the traditions of heroic naming conventions while undercutting them with absurd content, thus maximizing comic contrast (Chiaro 2010). The Slovak version adapts this strategy through alliterative substitutes (Š-Š-Š), preserving rhythm and recognizability. In contrast, the French translation loses much of this phonetic playfulness due to truncation (*Horrib'*) and a less cohesive name structure, weakening the auditory humour that is so effective in the source text (Zabalbeascoa 1996).

On cultural accessibility, both target translations perform reasonably well. The Slovak version adapts references (e.g., replacing *Haddock* with *Štúkovec*, a more regionally familiar freshwater fish), aligning with Nord's (1997) functionalist notion of translation as a culture-sensitive act. This domestication (Venuti 1995) makes the name intelligible and relatable to Slovak children while maintaining its narrative function. The French translation employs partial domestication through explicitation (*troisième du nom*) and phonetic truncation, but by retaining *Haddock* and adopting *Harold*, it straddles the boundary between accessibility and unnecessary foreignization.

The tonal effect, which is crucial in humorous literature, is best preserved in the Slovak version, as it closely replicates the original's irony and playfulness. The strategic use of hyperbolic and incongruent naming, described by Bergson (2011, 2012) as a core generator of comic effect, is maintained in both form and content. The French version, while inventive in some respects (*Horrib'*, *troisième du nom*), neutralizes much of the original's humour through semantic simplification. Chiaro (2010) underscores that humour is often language- and culture-specific, but it must still function within its new context; in this case, the French version fails to adequately replicate the source's playful self-parody.

From a strategic perspective, the Slovak translator clearly employed modulation and adaptation (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958), emphasizing cultural resonance and readability, while preserving comedic and narrative effects. This results in a highly localized, culturally coherent rendering. The French translation, however, leans toward substitution and stylistic adaptation (Chesterman 2016), but without a consistent comic payoff. While the truncation of *Horrib'* might be seen as a creative reduction, it also fragments the rhythm and reduces impact, indicating a potential loss in narrative cohesion.

Finally, from the ideological standpoint, the Slovak version adopts a domestication strategy (Venuti 1995), effectively integrating the names into the target culture. The French version exhibits a hybrid orientation, oscillating between foreignization (e.g., retaining *Haddock*) and domestication (e.g., explicating lineage), resulting in an uneven tone and partially compromised humour.

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# TRANSLATION AS AN ACT OF WORLD-MAKING

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## Abstract

This paper explores translation as a dynamic act of world-making, drawing on Nelson Goodman's constructivist philosophy (1996) and Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (1990). Goodman's five tools of world-making – composition and decomposition, weighting, ordering, deletion and supplementation, and deformation – serve as analytical lenses to examine how translation contributes to both macro-level and micro-level. Even-Zohar's theory frames translation as a central force within smaller literary systems, such as Slovakia's, where it plays a formative role in cultural development. Through examples and a case study of the student civic association *Sa zobud'!*, the paper illustrates how grassroots initiatives can contribute to redefining educational models and civic values. By analysing the influence of translation on the Slovak literary polysystem and examining student-led activities, the paper highlights the reciprocal relationship between large-scale cultural change and localized educational practices.

Ultimately, the study positions translation as a creative and political intervention that reshapes the worlds we live in. Rather than existing on the margins, translation is shown to be one of the central forces in constructing the narratives through which we understand ourselves and others.

*“We can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols”* (Goodman 1978).

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to examine how translation (primarily, but not exclusively, literary translation) is shaping the world and how grassroots initiatives could influence the translation world. The position of translation as a dynamic world-building process offers a perspective that considers it not only as transferring text from one language to another but also as actively shaping and reshaping entire cultures. Drawing on Nelson Goodman's world-making philosophy (1996) and Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (1990), this study proposes a conceptual framework that sees translation as a creative and systemic intervention involved in the ongoing creation of cultural and symbolic realities. Polysystem theory, concerning translation, highlights the dynamic and diverse nature of cultural and literary systems where translation plays a crucial role (Zhang 2014; Even-Zohar 1990).

In the first, theory-focused part of the paper, Goodman's philosophy (1996), particularly his notion of world-making, is explored. It provides a set of tools for understanding how symbolic systems generate meaning. His five tools – composition and decomposition, weighting, ordering, deletion and supplementation, and deformation – serve as analytical instruments that help in recognizing the processes through which translation reshapes not only texts but also cultural values, social structures, and norms. To see Goodman's world-making as a practical method (not just a broadened epistemology), Leeten's (2012) reflection on Goodman's work is used. Leeten (2012) presents Goodman's tools not just as a theory, but as means to build and navigate worlds.

Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (1990) provides a systemic perspective on translation's position and function within a target culture, particularly in smaller literary systems, such as that of Slovakia, where translation often assumes a central rather than peripheral role (Djovčoš and Laš 2022).

In the second part, this paper brings these two perspectives together to explore how translation contributes to what I term macro-world-building and micro-world-building. The former explores how translators co-create and reshape cultural worlds; the latter examines grassroots initiative. For the paper's purpose, the focus is on the student civic association *Sa zobud'!* (Wake up!), and the association's impact on students' practice.

Macro-world-building demonstrates that translations shape culture, while micro-world-building reveals that translation students contribute to shaping their training. This paper also analyses how *Sa zobud'!* participants view their future roles as translators, as they are the ones who will co-shape the cultural world in the future.

## 2. Theoretical background

Nelson Goodman (1906–1998) was a renowned American philosopher. His works radically reshaped the discipline, and he made significant contributions to various fields, including the philosophy of language, aesthetics, philosophy of science, and mereology (Elgin 2001). For this paper's purposes, his work *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978, Czech translation by Vlastimil Zuska 1996) is crucial. In it, he developed his tools of world-making, which would be applied not only to translating itself but also to analysing the grassroots initiative *Sa zobud'!*

Goodman proposed a constructivist approach to reality: instead of reality being objectively created on its own, Goodman argues that we are creating reality; it does not arise independently of us (Guczalski 2021; Elgin 2001; Goodman 1996). He believed that people cannot observe reality in its entirety; instead, our perception of reality or description of it is mediated by how we, ourselves, interpret the world. Worlds are not discovered, they are made (Elgin 2001; Goodman 1996). In other words, reality is not simply perceived or reflected through language or symbols but constructed and continuously reorganized through symbolic systems such as language, science, art, and others, including translation.

According to Goodman (1996), there is no single, objective reality or world to be uncovered; rather, there are multiple possible worlds or realities. Each one of them is generated through distinct ways of organizing and interpreting symbols. These worlds are not independent of human cognition or culture; they are shaped by it (ibid.).

As explained by Goodman (1996), truthfulness and objectivity are shown to us through our reference frames. What is true and objective for one person is not true and objective for another – each system of description has its own rules by which it is 'measured'. Objectivity, although it is not universal, exists, but only within each reference frame, if there is consistency and compatibility within a given frame (Goodman 1996).

Goodman (1996) offers a rather plain, but for the paper's purposes, sufficient example to help visualize the concept: within the context of our solar system, the Sun appears stationary at the centre. Yet from the broader perspective of our galaxy, the Sun itself is in motion, orbiting the galactic core. These statements, though seemingly contradictory, are both valid within their respective frames of reference. There is no absolute, external "true world" from which to declare one view as objectively and 100% correct. Rather, each version of reality emerges from the symbolic and structural systems through which we interpret the world. Every perception of reality is mediated by our interpretation (Goodman 1996). Just as there is no single correct way to describe the Sun's movement (it depends on which frame of reference we use), there is no single "correct" or "objective" cultural or linguistic reality in translation. Translators, by

choosing what to include, exclude, emphasize, or transform, construct their own “versions of reality” for the target audience. Thus, they are becoming the frame of reference for the readers.

To demonstrate how the world we live in is shaped, Goodman proposes a few world-making tools. Leeten (2012) reminds us that Goodman calls his symbol theory “an instrument for clarification”. In other words, the merit of those five tools (composition, weighting, ordering, deletion, deformation) lies in their use rather than in any claim to mirror a “true” ontology. Goodman’s five tools are seen as practical devices for world orientation. The list is not finite, and as Goodman (1996) states, not unchangeable:

TOOLS	EXPLANATIONS
Composition and Decomposition	Act of breaking down wholes into parts and forming new wholes. When world-making, we break complex systems (like texts or cultural frameworks) into parts, reframe them, and rebuild them into new wholes.
Weighting	Selective emphasis on certain elements over others. Not all elements in the system carry the same significance. Weighting means choosing what to highlight, what to downplay, and what to leave neutral.
Ordering	Imposition of hierarchical or structural relationships among elements. This tool involves the arrangement of elements into structures or hierarchies. It is about deciding what comes first, what dominates, and what is backgrounded.
Deletion and Supplementation	Removal of certain elements and the addition of others to meet the needs of the new context. Every world is defined not only by what is included but also by what is excluded or added.
Deformation	Transformation of distortion of elements to fit new symbolic and cultural contexts. It refers to the inevitable reshaping or distortion of elements when they are moved into new symbolic worlds.

Table 1: Tools of World-Making (Goodman 1996)

To support this paper’s purposes, Itamar Even-Zohar’s theory is proposed. He is best known as the creator of the polysystem theory, a theoretical and methodological framework (Zhang 2014; Sales Salvador 2002; Even-Zohar 1990). The theory is based on Russian formalism and Czech structuralism (ibid.).

Based on his works, literature is not a closed hierarchical canon, but a dynamic, stratified system composed of multiple interrelated webs of subsystems. In his book *Polysystem Studies* (1990), he argues that translation plays a crucial and often formative role in the development of literary and cultural systems, particularly in smaller literatures, such as that of Slovakia (Djovčoš and Laš 2022; Even-Zohar 1990).

According to polysystem theory, literature is not a homogeneous entity. Still, it consists of competing and cooperating subsystems – genres, styles, movements, or translated and original texts – which occupy different positions within a shifting centre-periphery structure (Even-Zohar 1990). Even-Zohar stated that polysystem theory arose out of the need to address specific problems related to translation theory and the complex historical structure of Hebrew literature (ibid.). Within the framework of translation, polysystem theory is concerned with how the position of translated literature in a literary polysystem affects the selection of translated works and translation strategies (ibid.). The relative position of translated literature within this system is not fixed. It may occupy a central role, actively shaping literary norms and introducing new models, or a peripheral one, merely reflecting established domestic conventions (Djovčoš and Laš 2022; Even-Zohar 1990).

Building on this systemic approach, Johan Heilbron (1999) extends the scope by introducing the notion of book translation as a cultural world-system. Drawing from world-systems theory and Bourdieu's sociology of culture, Heilbron maps global translation flows and demonstrates how they form a hierarchical structure, similar to Even-Zohar, with core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral languages. Heilbron says that translations construct global cultural hierarchies and shape what gets to be part of the "global conversation" (Heilbron 1999).

Even-Zohar (1990) outlines two main ways in which translation interacts with and transforms the target culture:

1. Selection of texts for translation: The act of choosing which foreign texts to translate is never neutral. It reflects the ideological, aesthetic, and political needs of the target culture. Societies do not translate everything. Instead, they translate what they find meaningful, desirable, or necessary.
2. The selection process thus mirrors and reinforces dominant values, literary preferences, or systemic gaps in the target culture. Normative influence on the target system translations does not merely enter the literary system – they interact with existing norms, sometimes adhering to them, but often transforming them. A translated text may introduce new genres, themes, or stylistic innovations that challenge or enrich the domestic canon. In moments of cultural change or literary stagnation, translation can serve as a vehicle of innovation, as translated works introduce fresh forms and perspectives (Even-Zohar 1990, 46).

In the Slovak context, Even-Zohar's theory offers a powerful explanation for the dominance of translated literature in the literary market. As seen in contemporary Slovak publishing, translations often occupy central positions in bookstores and cultural discourse. The number of translations exceeds 1000 per year, with up to 70% of the works translated into Slovak from English and Czech (Ministerstvo kultúry SR 2023). It is not a surprising fact, Heilbron (1999) in his model discovered that English is, as he calls it, a hyper-central language and forms around 40% of all book translations being made. They work as a cultural export, while other cultures import them, but barely export anything back (Heilbron 1999).

Since polysystem theory emphasizes that translation is not a secondary or derivative practice, but an active agent of cultural formation, structural asymmetries like English being the main source language, influence which voices are amplified or marginalized, embedding translation within a broader web of symbolic power and cultural inequality (Even-Zohar 1990; Heilbron 1999).

Translated texts become part of the target culture, helping to share its cultural identity, social values, and literary innovation. In this way, Even-Zohar positions translation as a key force in the creation and reconfiguration of cultural worlds, a view that aligns closely with Goodman's constructivist philosophy and supports the idea of translation as a world-making act.

### 3. Research Aim

This study aims to explore how translation works as a creative process at two levels. Initially, macro-world-building is introduced, with an emphasis on translation as a tool for building and changing cultural worlds. At the macro level, an analysis will be proposed on how published translations restructure the national literary system, examining which works gain prominence, which genres emerge, and which ones are censored. Only then will macro-world-building be examined by analysing how the student association *Sa zobud'!* constructs new “worlds” within the broader Slovak translation ecosystem. The association’s activities will be examined to demonstrate how grassroots initiatives can contribute to the transformation of educational practices. By doing so, the research aims to underscore the role of individual and collective agency in reshaping the world around us.

In the next sub-chapter, the paper examines the manifestation of Goodman’s five world-making tools in Slovak literary translation by identifying illustrative instances of each tool in practice. This analysis will reveal the mechanisms by which translation choices can actively reshape cultural hierarchies and literary norms. The examples provided are not necessarily related to one another and serve only as examples of how translation influences the target culture.

Later, investigation of how the student association *Sa zobud'!* leverages Goodman’s world-making tools to contribute to the transformation of both translation pedagogy and emerging professionals’ self-conceptions. The paper will demonstrate how student-driven initiatives can assist in the reconfiguration of traditional educational models and foster the development of active, professionally oriented identities among aspiring translators.

Finally, the paper examines the interplay between micro- and macro-world-building by assessing voluntary participation in the main *Sa zobud'!*’s event, the *Winter School of Translation*. A survey<sup>1</sup>, conducted by an independent body, DEMDIS, to gauge beliefs about the relationship between translation, democracy, and human rights was undertaken. This analysis will explore the bidirectional relationship between civic mindset and translation activism.

Together, these three areas establish a comprehensive bridge between macro- and micro-world-building. Initially, an analysis of how translation reshapes the Slovak literary polysystem as a whole will be presented. Then, the demonstration of how those exact world-making mechanisms are enacted and adapted by students in *Sa zobud'!* to transform educational models and their professional identities will be explored. And finally, the reciprocal connection is examined, whereby student activism (at the micro-level), grounded in democratic values, may in turn influence macro-level translation decisions.

### 4. Macro- and micro-world-building

The theoretical background above provides the conceptual foundation for introducing a dual framework of macro- and micro-world-building. Building on Goodman’s theory of world-making and Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory, this approach suggests that translation reshapes entire literary and cultural systems (macro-world-building) while also enabling localized change through grassroots, student-led initiatives (micro-world-building).

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<sup>1</sup> More complex results to be published in a future paper *Towards a sociocentric approach in translator and interpreter education* by Djovčoš (2026) in the forthcoming publication *Confronting Digital Dilemmas in Translator and Interpreter Training* (Šveda, Djovčoš and Perez 2026).

## 5. Macro-world-building

Building on Goodman's theory of world-making and Even-Zohar's polysystem model, translation can be understood not merely as transferring words but as a cultural act that reshapes entire symbolic systems. Each translated text interacts with the target culture's literary polysystem, contributing to its ongoing construction. Goodman's five world-making tools offer a clear framework for understanding these processes:

### 1. *Composition and Decomposition*

Goodman's concept of composition and decomposition involves breaking down existing wholes and forming new ones. This is clearly mirrored in the functioning of the literary polysystem. Each translated work does not exist in isolation; it interacts with the surrounding system, adding new structures or displacing existing ones. For instance, when a new genre or literary style is introduced through translation, it may reconfigure the relationship between texts in the target system. For example, during socialism, often Western literature was removed and replaced with translations from the Eastern Bloc (Bednárová 2015; Tyšš 2017). This act reshaped literary polysystems by prioritizing ideological alignment over diversity. The polysystem is therefore in constant flux, continuously reshaped by the inclusion (composition) and exclusion (decomposition) of translated works. Composition and decomposition in translation can be understood as powerful levers for both democratic and anti-democratic practices. The socialist-era practice in Slovakia of replacing Western literature with approved Eastern Bloc texts is a clear example of the use of decomposition serving anti-democratic ends.

### 2. *Weighting*

Weighting refers to emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others. In translation, this occurs at multiple levels: through the selection of texts, the translation strategies used, and the publishing or promotional contexts. Some themes, voices, or ideologies from the source culture may be retained and bring new elements to the target culture, while others may be neutralized or adapted. The effect is a selective spotlight: translated texts highlight what the target culture chooses to see in the source culture and what it chooses to ignore. For instance, 67% of the translations published in Slovakia in 2022 are from the English language (ZVKS 2023). This may limit the visibility of other languages and cultural perspectives. Heilborn (1999) also states that the hyper-centralization of the English language in translations causes uneven flows that reflect the symbolic hierarchy embedded in global cultural exchange, thus making translation a mechanism not only for constructing new meanings but also for reproducing global inequalities (Heilborn 1999).

### 3. *Ordering*

Even-Zohar (1990) understands literary and cultural polysystems as dynamic structures in which elements (texts, genres, authors) are arranged in hierarchies. Through ordering or structuring, symbolic elements are arranged into new hierarchies and structures. In the literary polysystem, translations influence this ordering by altering the balance between the centre and the periphery. Texts and their genres at the centre of the polysystem are considered dominant and normative, while those at the periphery do not have a significant influence on literature and culture. Texts and genres are not randomly located at the centre. Their arrangement is the result of cultural, political, and aesthetic decisions made by a given society, and it may not be a conscious decision. When translations enter the target culture, they can change the ordering of dominant relations. For example, Gabriel García Márquez's work introduced magical realism, which has had a significant impact on other global literatures (Bell-Villada and López-Calvo 2022). The influence of Latin American magical realism and the impact of Gabriel García Márquez's work on Slovak literature emerged in the 1970s, a period marked by significant novels with dramatic stories set mainly in historical contexts (Mihálová 2003).

#### 4. Deletion and Supplementation

Every act of translation entails deletion and supplementation. No translation can capture every nuance of the original text, and no target culture translates everything from the source culture. Decisions about what not to translate are as important as those about what to include. Texts, genres, or entire literary traditions may be excluded from the target culture's awareness, thus constructing a partial or distorted image of the source culture. Supplementation, on the other hand, may appear in paratexts or through adaptations. As mentioned earlier, during socialism, certain texts were forbidden from being translated or were altered to make them suitable for translation. Such practices significantly shape readers' perceptions of foreign cultures and historical events. A notable case in Slovakia is the book *Anne of Green Gables*, written by Lucy M. Montgomery, which was censored during socialism by removing religious and capitalist elements from the text (Grozaničová 2014).

#### 5. Deformation

Finally, deformation refers to the transformation or distortion of symbolic elements to fit new contexts. In translation, this is inevitable. Every translated text is to some extent a reinterpretation, influenced by the translator's choices, the target language's constraints, and the expectations of the receiving audience. This deformation is not a failure; it is a necessary condition of world-making. Through this process, new symbolic worlds are created. A translated work becomes part of a new cultural ecosystem, and its meaning is no longer identical to the original. It acquires new layers of significance, shaped by local ideologies and historical conditions.

In sum, these five world-making tools reveal translators' profound capacity to shape, and, at times, to constrict, the symbolic contours of a national literary system and thus the entire culture. This chapter aims to trace the mechanisms by which translation interventions actively reconstruct cultural hierarchies and literary norms. Each translation is a site where culture is interpreted and restructured. When viewed through this lens, translation emerges not as secondary or derivative, but as a creative, political, and deeply cultural intervention. One that participates in shaping the literary and symbolic landscapes of entire societies.

### 6. Micro-world-building

While macro-world-building focuses to some extent on the text, literary and cultural structures, micro-world-building, in this case, focuses on smaller-scale, localized initiatives that enact symbolic and social change. These acts may not reshape entire literary systems, but they try to challenge existing norms, disrupt conventional hierarchies, and propose alternative models of practice and engagement. One such initiative is the student civic association *Sa zobud'!*. This project was selected due to the author's active participation in it, which allowed for deeper insights.

The student civic association *Sa zobud'!* is an initiative that brings together students of translation and interpreting from across Slovakia, with active involvement from academic institutions including Comenius University in Bratislava, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, and the University of Prešov. There are 25 students from every Slovak university that has a translation and interpreting programme in the association. It collaborates with the European Commission and various professional organizations (SAPT, DoSlov, etc.). The association was founded with the goal of fostering a sense of community and motivation among future translators and interpreters, focusing on bridging the gap between academic theory and practical application.

*Sa zobud'!* organizes various student-led events, including a three-day conference, *Winter School of Translation* (Zimná škola prekladu), student discussions, *From Desks to Practice* (Z lavíc do praxe), and other community-based activities. The last *Winter School of Translation*

(2025) had 214 attendees from various fields (mostly students, but also academics and professionals) and various corners of Slovakia.

It is an entirely student-led movement, with students organizing events voluntarily and receiving no financial reward. Through its dynamics, *Sa zobud'!* serves as a platform for student empowerment and collaboration between professionals and students.

The activities of *Sa zobud'!* can affect changes in the symbolic and institutional structures that challenge the way translation is taught and practiced, as illustrated through Goodman's five tools of world-making. Through its activities, such as the *Winter School of Translation*, public student discussions, and project-based learning, *Sa zobud'!* may contribute to reshaping both the educational experience and the cultural identity of translation and interpreting as a profession.

### 1. *Composition and Decomposition*

By founding *Sa zobud'!* as a student-driven movement that offers hands-on translation practice, (not only) peer-led workshops and seminars, and trying to make the profession more visible to the general public, members deconstructed the passive student role imposed by traditional curricula and reassembled themselves as active contributors of both their education and the field itself. This shift did not imply any failure on the part of educators; rather, it represented an extension of the teaching process, in which students take ownership of practice and professional outreach.

Studies show that active involvement gives students many benefits:

- “Engaged students are more likely to earn a degree, do it faster, and do it better” (Svanum and Bigatti 2009).
- “Student engagement, measured by active and collaborative learning and support for learners, is a positive predictor of college completion” (Price and Tovar 2014).

This is also confirmed by students' feedback collected after the last *Winter School of Translation* (2025):

- “So, first of all, I want to thank you for what the *Sa zobud'!* does for others, but especially for what it has done for me, what motivation and meaning it has given to my studies” (member of the association).
- “I am thankful that there is an association in Slovakia that is doing great things that make sense. Besides raising the profile of the profession, it brings motivation and inspiration to (not only) young people” (member of the association).

### 2. *Weighting*

*Sa zobud'!* shifts the focus of translation from a purely technical skill to a socially engaged practice, highlighting the role of translators in shaping public discourse. Initiatives such as the *Winter School of Translation* and student discussions, *From Desks to Practice*, shift the focus from purely theoretical knowledge to critical thinking and civic responsibility. Since participants in these events not only discuss the profession but also address social responsibility and current societal issues, they foster a deeper understanding of the profession's role in society. For example, at the most recent *Winter School of Translation* (2025), attendees participated in a public discussion with Samo Marec, a publisher, writer, and translator, to debate Slovakia's political situation. This rebalancing of attention, from theory to societal issues, from individual to collective, reflects Goodman's idea of weighting: selectively emphasizing certain elements over others.

### 3. *Ordering*

Within each *Sa zobud'!* event, the association deliberately inverts traditional authority structures. Students serve as session moderators, leading discussions alongside experienced translators and academics. This reordering of roles places student voices at the centre of decision-making and learning, redistributing expertise so that authority flows horizontally rather than strictly top-down.

#### 4. *Deletion and Supplementation*

As mentioned before, *Sa zobud'!* focuses on socially relevant topics, addressing urgent societal and translation-related challenges while excluding the theoretical aspects of traditional education, which students can learn in school. The *Winter School of Translation* supplements standard academic curricula by introducing societal discussions and networking opportunities, enriching translation education with practical and civic insights. This process aligns with Goodman's deletion and supplementation, which involves the strategic removal of certain symbolic elements and the introduction of new ones to adapt a system to contemporary needs.

#### 5. *Deformation*

Deformation is the process of changing an existing structure to create something entirely new. Students act as active agents, shaping the content and format of their education by deciding what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. They shape the conference based on their interests and organize discussions with peers to explore how others perceive translation and interpreting studies, as well as how they entered the field of practice. They also run their podcasts on topics they care about, involving professionals, academics, and fellow students.

This shift challenges traditional hierarchies in which students were in a more passive role in education. That does not mean that teachers did not engage in dialogue with students, that students never organized anything, or that their input was never considered. The association simply provided them with the opportunity and space to become co-organizers of their own education. Many students were already active before the association was formed and would continue to be so without it; however, a structured student network offers greater opportunities and more space for self-realization. Students proposed an alternative vision: one in which education is co-creative, socially engaged, and collective. Using Goodman's world-making tools, *Sa zobud'!* stands out as an example, certainly not the only one, of small-scale cultural change. Its efforts to rethink translation education demonstrate that symbolic world-building need not only occur at the level of national literary systems or grand ideological shifts. It also takes place in classrooms, universities, and civic spaces, where people come together to reimagine what translation can mean.

### **7. Macro-world-building influences micro-world-building and vice versa**

The interplay between macro- and micro-world-building was examined through a survey conducted at the 2025 *Winter School of Translation*, the main event of the student association *Sa zobud'!*. A structured discussion was facilitated using the independent digital platform DEMDIS, specifically designed to promote democratic discussions. Participants (N = 61) voted on a series of prepared statements (agree, disagree, abstain) and subsequently proposed additional statements, which were then subject to peer voting. Behind the scenes, advanced statistical methods, specifically principal components analysis (PCA) and k-means clustering, were employed to identify organically emerging opinion groups and statements that received broad majority support.

The DEMDIS survey revealed that participants strongly aligned translation practice with democratic values. Firstly, translation was predominantly seen as a value-driven craft, understood as a mission undertaken by those who perceive translation not merely as an economic activity, but as a mean to uphold democratic principles.

Participants viewed translation as fundamentally bridging two languages and two cultural worlds. Importantly, students acknowledged the translator's explicit moral obligation to uphold values such as democracy, human rights, and dignity. Furthermore, participants rejected the notion of translation neutrality, noting that neutrality was largely illusory, as every translator's work inevitably bears the marks of their cultural and ideological background. This aligns with

the findings that students think that translators should be keenly aware of their own convictions, enabling them to responsibly refuse translation/interpreting that conflicts with core democratic values.

Beyond translation-specific views, the survey also assessed broader political attitudes. Notably, 87% of the participants identified Russia as the aggressor in the Russia–Ukraine war, which significantly exceeds the 40% figure found among the general Slovak public (Zbytniewska 2025). Similarly, a strong consensus (92%) emerged in favour of Slovakia’s continued membership in NATO and the European Union, surpassing the national average of 72% (Silenská 2025).

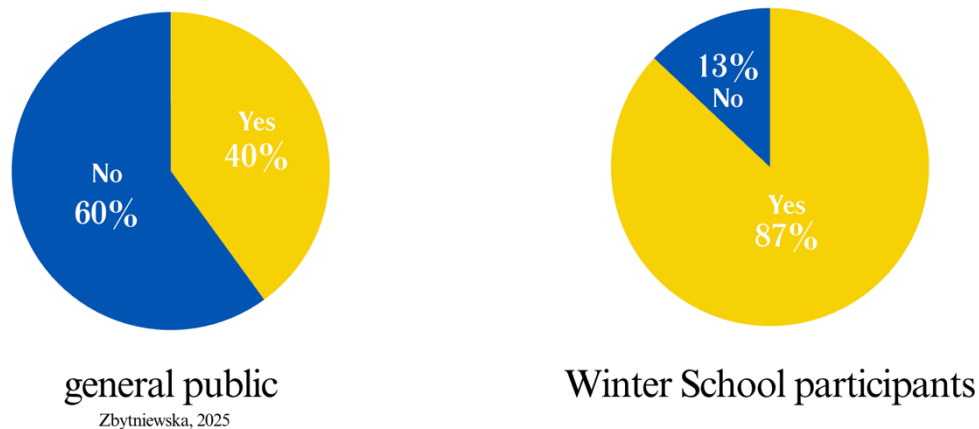


Figure 1. Perception of Russia as the aggressor among *Sa zobud'!* participants versus the general Slovak public

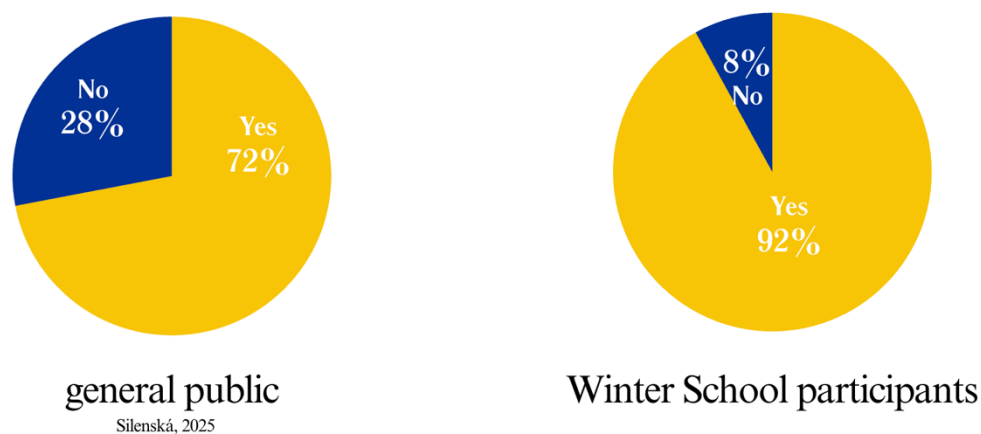


Figure 2: Support for Slovakia’s continued membership in NATO and the EU: *Sa zobud'!* participants vs. general Slovak public

The DEMDIS survey shows that students actively participating in *Sa zobud'!*'s events hold more democratic and engaged views than the general Slovak public. While this may partly reflect their university education and initial civic interest and active attitude, the association’s activities may themselves reinforce and deepen these democratic values. By engaging in discussions that encompass not only professional translation but also current societal issues, students enhance their civic awareness and strengthen their democratic attitudes.

This interplay connects micro-world-building with macro-world-building because active student participation in small-scale initiatives, such as *Sa zobud'!* can gradually shape broader

societal attitudes and norms. Through activities that integrate translation education with discussions on civic responsibility and contemporary social issues, students not only internalize extant democratic values but also actively uphold and disseminate them, also through their practice in translation and interpreting.

The DEMDIS survey results demonstrate a deep connection between micro- and macro-world-building. At the micro level, students in *Sa zobud'!* engage in activities that shape their professional identities and civic attitudes, fostering a sense of democratic responsibility and ethical commitment in their future translation practice. This internal development reflects micro-world-building as students construct new professional and personal “worlds” grounded in democratic and civic values.

At the macro level, these individual and collective shifts have the potential to influence broader cultural and societal frameworks. As future translators and interpreters, these students will not only participate in but actively shape the cultural narratives and symbolic structures that define the Slovak literary polysystem and beyond. By rejecting the idea of translation as neutral and embracing it as a value-driven, culturally engaged act, they prepare to intervene in larger cultural and political discourses, thereby contributing to macro-world-building.

The reciprocal relationship between these two levels is crucial. The micro-level initiatives of *Sa zobud'!* cultivate a generation of translators who are more civically engaged and ethically aware, which can lead to translation practices that support and reinforce democratic values at the macro level. In turn, a culturally enriched and democratically oriented literary system can inspire and sustain further micro-level engagement among students and professionals. In this way, the survey findings illustrate that micro-world-building (students’ civic and professional formation) and macro-world-building (translators’ impact on society and culture) are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that translation is far more than a technical act of transferring meaning between languages; it is a dynamic and creative process. Drawing on Goodman’s constructivist theory of world-making and Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory, the analysis has shown that translation operates simultaneously on macro and micro levels, each deeply interconnected.

At the macro level, translation contributes to the ongoing construction and transformation of national literary systems and cultural frameworks. In a democratic world, translators, through their decisions, shape which narratives and voices gain prominence and which remain marginalized. In this way, translation emerges as a crucial agent in defining collective cultural identity and maintaining or challenging dominant norms.

At the micro level, the activities of the student association *Sa zobud'!* illustrate how grassroots initiatives can reshape educational practices and professional self-perception among future translators. By engaging in co-creative and socially oriented projects, students move beyond being passive recipients of knowledge to become active agents in their professional development. The DEMDIS survey results further suggest that such participation fosters stronger civic awareness and a commitment to democratic values.

The interplay between macro- and micro-world-building highlights a reciprocal dynamic: student-driven micro-level activities can cultivate a generation of translators who are more socially and ethically engaged, and these translators, in turn, can influence macro-level cultural and literary structures. This relationship highlights the transformative potential of translation as both a social and educational practice.

Ultimately, this study aims to reaffirm the central role of translation as an act of world-making. Recognizing translation as an active and formative cultural force invites both

practitioners and educators to approach it with greater awareness of its social and political dimensions. In doing so, translation can contribute to the creation of democratic cultural worlds.

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# THE ACT NO. 382/2004 COLL. ON APPRAISERS, INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS: INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICING SWORN TRANSLATORS IN SLOVAKIA

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## Abstract

The *Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators (Zákon č. 382/2004 Z. z. o znalcoch, tlmočníkoch a prekladateľoch)* regulating the profession of sworn translators in Slovakia has remained unchanged for over two decades, failing to reflect the obvious evolving demands of the profession in subject (e.g. rapid technological advancements, economical changes such as inflation etc.). The *Act No. 382/2004* lacks a definition of sworn translators' competences and omits specific requirements for the creation of legal translations.

In the Slovak research, there are relatively few studies focusing on the competences of the sworn translator (Štefková 2013, 2018; Lörinczová 2014; Rakšányiová 2015). However, these were carried out about a decade ago and thus, lose their relevance over time. The long-term research aim is to propose an up-to-date competence profile of a sworn translator in Slovakia that would reflect the actual requirements and specifics of the current market in the Slovak context and thus fill in the gaps in the domestic translation research and legislative context.

The aim of this paper is to introduce partial findings from the survey conducted in 2024 among 155 practicing sworn translators in Slovakia. The survey was conducted in form of an online questionnaire and focused not only on six subcompetences of legal translators (based on the competence model of legal translators proposed by Scarpa and Orlando in 2017), but also on educational activities provided by interpreting institutes that train and educate future sworn translators in Slovakia, curricula of Translation Studies programmes and *Act No. 382/2004*.

The findings of the survey revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the current legislation, particularly regarding remuneration, the absence of competence definitions, and the lack of professional guidance. Most participants expressed a strong demand for legislative updates. To contextualize these findings, the Slovak legislation will be compared with legal frameworks from German-speaking countries, where the requirements for professional performance and the creation of legal translations are clearly defined. This paper aims to point out key areas where the update of the *Act No. 382/2004* could contribute to the improvement of the conditions of sworn translators in Slovakia and thus ensure higher professional standards in the legal translators' training.

## 1. Introduction

The presented paper examines the *Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators*, which regulates the activities of sworn translators in Slovakia, and explores its impact on these professionals through their insights. The paper presents partial findings from ongoing doctoral research, which is focused on proposing an up-to-date competence profile of a sworn translator in Slovakia that would reflect the real requirements and specifics of the current market in the Slovak context and thus fill in the gaps in the domestic translation research and legislative context.

In the Slovak translation research, there are relatively few studies focusing on the competence profile of the sworn translator which were carried out about a decade ago (Štefková 2013, 2018; Rakšányiová 2015; Lörinczová 2014) and thus lose their relevance over time.

A competence profile of a sworn translator is being proposed by mapping the current state on the translation market, the competences relevant for sworn translation as well as the insights of practicing sworn translators on the current legislation.

Translation is increasingly recognized as a dynamic and evolving discipline (Göpferich 2009), shaped by both technological and economic factors. For instance, the emergence of AI-powered tools such as machine translation engines (e.g. DeepL, Google Translate) and large language models has transformed translation workflows as well as translator roles (Ragni and Vieira 2021; Huang and Liu 2024). Global economic situation, such as rising inflation, have also impacted translation service pricing, working conditions, and client expectations (Sakamoto et al. 2024).

Although the translation field has evolved rapidly due to the aforementioned factors, the Slovak legislation governing sworn translators has seen little to no change since 2004. The *Act No. 382/2004 on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators* has not been updated for more than two decades, that is why it is failing to reflect the obvious evolving demands of the profession in question. The act also lacks a definition of sworn translators' competences (Žitňanská 2024, 146) and omits specific requirements to produce sworn translations. These pitfalls of the legal framework imply that the *Act No. 382/2004 Coll.* fails to reflect the evolving demands of the profession, particularly in defining the competences of sworn translators and outlining specific requirements for sworn translations, which can lead to undesirable phenomena such as low-quality translations (inadequate translations strategies, terminological inaccuracies etc.) and misunderstandings that could affect legal proceedings. The objectives of this paper are the following:

1. to provide a brief overview of the *Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators* and other acts that regulate the performance of sworn translation activities in Slovakia,
2. to introduce partial findings from the 2024 survey focusing on practicing sworn translators in Slovakia and their insights on the *Act No. 382/2004*,
3. and to propose ways to ensure higher professional standards in sworn translators' training in Slovakia.

## 2. Legal framework of sworn translation in Slovakia in a nutshell

Sworn translators in Slovakia are bound by several legal regulations in the performance of their activity. The activities of a sworn translator in Slovakia are governed by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic.

Since the individual laws regulating the activity of a sworn translator in Slovakia have already been introduced several times by e.g. Guldanová (2015), Štefková (2020) and Wrede (2014), this chapter will focus only on a brief characterization of the individual laws that are crucial for the research.

### 2.1 Legal framework regulating proceedings with a foreign language party

To begin with, it is necessary to mention the acts that do not regulate the activity of a sworn translator directly, the sworn translator is marginally mentioned in them (even the term *sworn translator* is not explicitly mentioned in the acts):

- *Act No. 460/1992 Coll. – the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Ústava Slovenskej republiky)* which lays down the conditions for communication in official relations and the conditions for communication in a foreign language through an interpreter (*Article 6 and Article 47 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic*),

- *Act No. 301/2005 Coll., Criminal Procedure Rules (Zákon č. 301/2005 Z. z. Trestný poriadok)*, which regulates the appointment, circumstances of the appointment of a sworn interpreter or translator and the compensation and remuneration (§ 28 and § 29 of the Criminal Procedure Rule),
- § 51(1) of *Act No. 543/2005 Coll. on the Administrative and Clerical Rules for District Courts, Regional Courts, Special Court and Military Courts (Vyhláška č. 543/2005 Z. z. o spravovacom a kancelárskom poriadku pre okresné sudy, krajské sudy, Špeciálny súd a vojenské sudy)*,
- and § 18 of *Act No. 99/1963 Coll., the Code of Civil Procedure (Zákon č. 99/1963 Zb. Občiansky súdny poriadok)*.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 Legal framework regulating the activity of sworn translators in Slovakia

The activities of sworn translators are directly regulated by the following legislative acts:

- *Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators (Zákon č. 382/2004 Z. z. o znalcoch, tlmočníkoch a prekladateľoch)*,
- *Decree No. 228/2018 Coll., implementing Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Experts, Interpreters and Translators and on Amendment and Additions to Certain Acts, as amended (Zákon č. 228/2018 Z. z. ktorou sa vykonáva zákon č. 382/2004 Z. z. o znalcoch, tlmočníkoch a prekladateľoch a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov v znení neskorších predpisov)*,
- and *Decree of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic No. 491/2004 Coll. on the Remuneration, Reimbursement of Expenses and Compensation for Loss of Time for Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators, as amended (Zákon č. 491/2004 Z. z. o odmenách, náhradách výdavkov a náhradách za stratu času pre znalcov, tlmočníkov a prekladateľov)*.

The following sections will provide a brief definition and description of these acts.

### 2.2.1 Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators

The *Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators* entered into force on 1 September 2004. The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Act, exercising supervision and control over registered sworn interpreters and translators. The Ministry of Justice also runs an online register – the list of sworn interpreters and translators (JASPI). The register is freely accessible on the official website of the Ministry of Justice: <https://www.justice.gov.sk/>.<sup>2</sup> Based on the database of translators, clients can search for a sworn translator, for example, by language combination or location.

This legislation plays a crucial role in governing the field of sworn interpretation and translation by establishing requirements for the performance of these activities (§ 5(1) of *Act No. 382/2004 Coll.*). The Act includes the rights and obligations of sworn interpreters and translators, however, it only mentions general duties for sworn translators, such as completing translations duly, within the specified timeframe, to good purpose and in an economical and fair manner (§ 22 of the *Act No. 382/2004 Coll.*).

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on legal framework regulating proceedings with a foreign language party see Guldanová (2015, 56-67).

<sup>2</sup> The legislation distinguishes between the term *translator* and *interpreter*. The Ministry of Justice therefore keeps two separate registers – one for (sworn) interpreters and one for (sworn) translators.

The Act also addresses the requirements for interpreting institutes that train future and practicing sworn interpreters and translators (§ 25 of *Act No. 382/2004 Coll.*). Currently there are five interpreting institutes in Slovakia – Interpreting Institute of the Faculty of Arts at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Interpreting Institute of the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University in Bratislava, Interpreting Institute of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Prešov, Interpreting Institute of the Faculty of Arts at the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice and Interpreting Institute ATLPRENES (Association of Sign Language Interpreters of the Deaf of Slovakia).<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary to mention that the legislative framework governing sworn translations in Slovakia lacks explicit requirements related to translation strategies for legal translations, as it does not provide concrete guidance on how sworn translations should be executed in terms of translation strategies.<sup>4</sup> However, it does not impose specific requirements regarding translation strategies, terminology consistency, or the handling of legal-specific elements such as abbreviations and institutional names. While some scholars (e.g. Ďuricová 2016; Guldanová 2019) have discussed recommended translation strategies for sworn translations, the absence of legally binding guidelines could lead to inconsistencies in practice. The lack of uniform translation strategies may result (among other things) in variations in terminology use, which could affect the clarity of sworn translations.

### **2.2.2 Decree No. 228/2018 Coll., implementing Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Experts, Interpreters and Translators and on Amendment and Additions to Certain Acts, as amended**

The *Decree No. 228/2018 Coll.* regulates the details of the scope, manner and content of the minimum professional qualification, the verification of professional competence and the course of certification examination of interpreters, translators and appraisers.

### **2.2.3 Decree of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic No. 491/2004 Coll. on the Remuneration, Reimbursement of Expenses and Compensation for Loss of Time for Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators, as amended**

*The Decree No. 491/2004 Coll.* governs the remuneration, reimbursement of expenses, and compensation for lost time for experts, interpreters, and translators in Slovakia. This decree outlines the fees and compensations these professionals are entitled to for their services. § 10 of the Decree regulates the tariff remuneration for the sworn translation. Even though the Decree dates from 2004, the remuneration per standard page (1,800 characters) has remained unchanged to date.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.justice.gov.sk/sluzby/tlmcnici-a-prekladatelja/informacie-pre-verejnost/>. Accessed on: 03 April 2025.

<sup>4</sup> “The translation with numbered pages shall be stapled, bound with a blue – red – white tricolour with the translated original (which is placed before the translation), shall contain an introductory part identifying it as “translation” and the translator’s clause attached at the end” (§ 23 of the *Act No. 382/2004 Coll.*).

<sup>5</sup> The remuneration per standard page between the Slovak language and other European languages is currently 19,92 €.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Methodology

The theoretical basis for the questionnaire design is based on the study of relevant Slovak literature (Rakšányiová 2015; Lörinczová 2014; Štefková 2013, 2018) and studies that focus on existing competence models of the legal translator (Kelly 2002, 2005; Prieto Ramos 2011, 2024; Piecychna 2013; Soriano-Barabino 2016; Scarpa and Orlando 2017). It was also necessary to study the Slovak legislation that regulates the activity of sworn translators, namely the *Act No. 382/2004* and the *Act No. 228/2018 Coll.*

The questionnaire design was preceded by an analysis and comparison of the competence models of legal translator developed so far (Kelly 2002, 2005; Prieto Ramos 2011, 2024; Piecychna 2013; Soriano-Barabino 2016; Scarpa and Orlando 2017). Based on the analysis and comparison, common features and differences of the proposed models were identified (Žitňanská 2024, 129-153).

The questionnaire is primarily based on the competence model proposed by Scarpa-Orlando (2017), whereby the competence of a legal translator was divided into six subcompetences: 1. *linguistic competence*, 2. *(inter)cultural competence*, 3. *thematic competence*, 4. *technological competence*, 5. *information mining competence*, and 6. *translation services competence*. In addition to the individual subcompetences of a sworn translator, the questionnaire also focused on methodological aspects of legal translation (selected specifics of legal translation and preferred translation strategies, e.g. translation of non-equivalent terminology and abbreviations), as well as on the current legislation that regulates the activity of a sworn translator in Slovakia (*Act No. 382/2004 Coll.*). The presented paper aims to demonstrate the insights of Slovak sworn translators on the current legislation.

The aim of the structured questionnaire was to map the requirements placed on sworn translators in terms of the real needs of the translation market and to investigate the current state of competences necessary for the activity of sworn translators. To obtain relevant data, a survey was conducted in the form of an anonymous online questionnaire, which was distributed via Google Forms.

Before conducting the survey, a database of contacts of practicing sworn translators in Slovakia was created. The addresses were collected on the website of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic. The database contained 855 e-mail addresses of active sworn translators in Slovakia for various language combinations.

Prior to the distribution of the online questionnaire, a pilot testing was conducted from 09 April 2024 to 12 April 2024. After correcting the shortcomings resulting from the pilot testing, the questionnaire was sent out with the accompanying text to 855 Slovak sworn translators in the first phase of distribution, but after sending it, about 100 e-mails were returned due to the invalidity of the e-mail address listed in the database on the Ministry's website. A second e-mail was sent to the sworn translators on 16 May 2024. The collection of the necessary data was carried out in the timeframe from 19 April 2024 to 23 May 2024. During this period, 155 valid responses were obtained.

The anonymous questionnaire consisted of 34 semi-closed and open-ended questions (which in some cases included sub-questions depending on the answer chosen by the respondent), with single or multiple-choice questions. To obtain complete information, all items were marked as mandatory.

## 3.2 Insights of practising sworn translators

In this section, the findings of the questionnaire are presented. The section contains six selected questions focusing on the insights and comments of practising sworn translators in Slovakia on the current legislation regulating the activity of sworn translators.

### 3.2.1 Definition of the sworn translation competences

**Question 1:** *How do you perceive the fact that the current legislation regulating the activity of the sworn translator does not provide a definition of the competences of the sworn translator?*

**Aim:** The definition of a comprehensive competence profile of a sworn translator in the Slovak translation and legislative context (except for Štefková's competence model from 2013 and 2018) is absent. Although the specific status of sworn translators in Slovakia is regulated by the *Act No 382/2004 Coll.*, the competences for the performance of this activity are not defined in the legislation. For this reason, the question how respondents perceive the fact that the current legislation does not provide for a more detailed definition of the competences of a sworn translator was included in the questionnaire.

**Findings:** The largest proportion of respondents (36%, n=56) indicates that they have not thought about the issue of competences so far. Meanwhile, 26% (n=40) believe that guidelines on the competences of sworn translators should be added to the Slovak legislation to better prepare future professionals. Another 15% (n=23) support a broader legislative change to reflect the current requirements for sworn translators. In contrast, 10% (n=16) think there is no need for legislative changes, even though the absence of a definition may lead (among other things) to varying standards. Only 5% (n=8) do not see the absence of a definition as a problem. 8% (n=12) chose the option "Other" and commented on the given question. Four answers were selected from the category "Other":

- "I think something should be done about the prices for sworn translations which have remained unchanged for years, while the prices for other services have increased severalfold. It is absurd that nothing is being done about this."
- "The legislation has not regulated the remuneration per standard page for 21 years, so it is impossible to expect a meaningful solution..."
- "It's 2024, i.e. 20 years without neither legislative nor financial change..."
- "Prices need to be raised; they haven't increased since 2004."

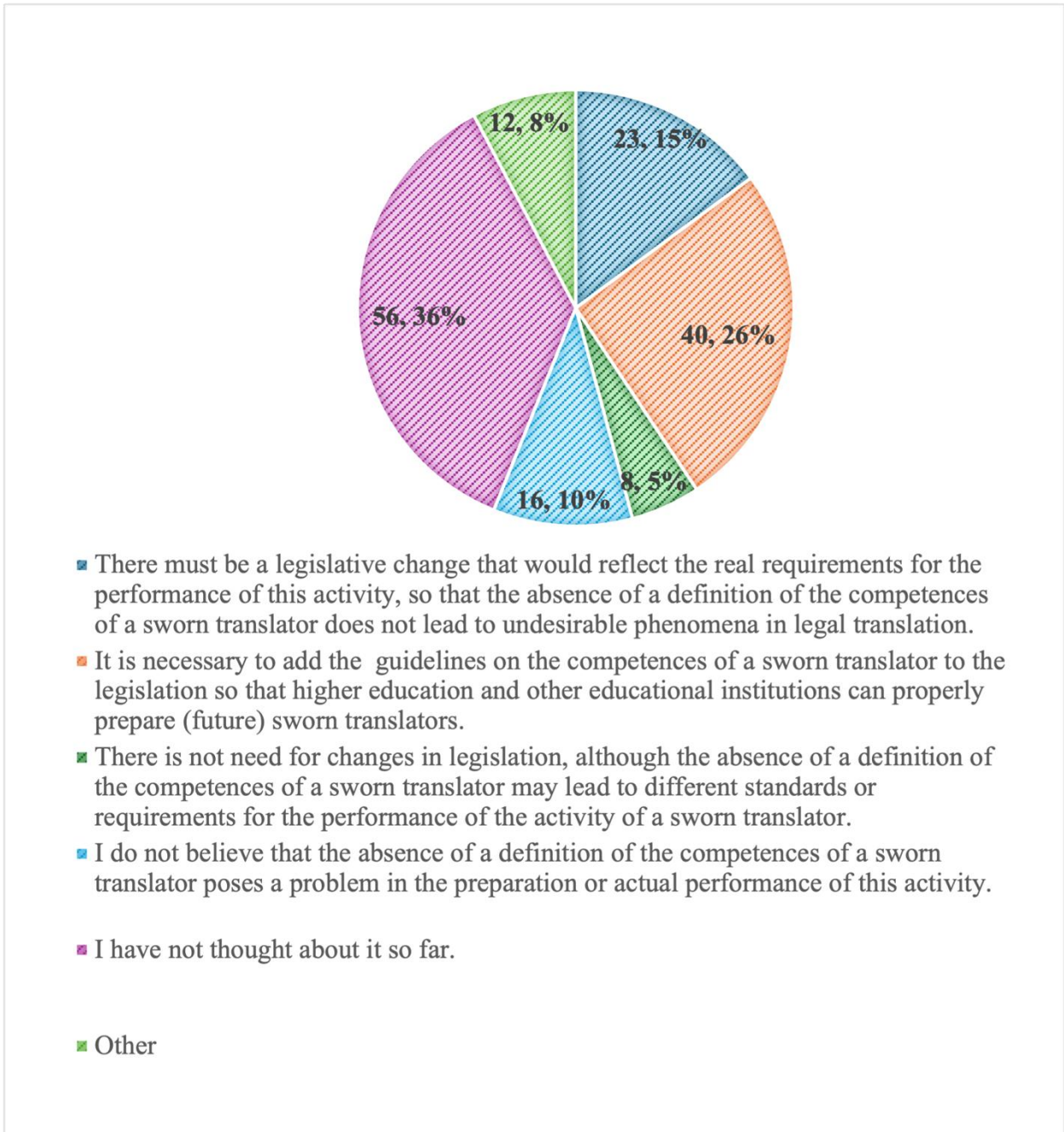


Figure 1: How do you perceive the fact that the current legislation regulating the activity of the sworn translator does not provide a definition of the competences of the sworn translator?

### 3.2.2 Remuneration

**Question 2:** Do you consider the remuneration established by the Act No. 382/2004 Coll. as adequate?

**Aim:** Since the tariffs to produce sworn translations have not changed over the last twenty years, it was reasonable to ask whether the respondents still perceive the remuneration provided for by the Act No. 491/2004 Coll. as adequate. As stated above (see section 2.2.3 Decree of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic No. 491/2004 Coll. on the Remuneration, Reimbursement of Expenses and Compensation for Loss of Time for Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators, as amended), the remuneration for a Slovak sworn translator for one standard

page of a legal document (which represents 1,800 characters including spaces) is currently 19.92 €.

**Findings:** The findings from the questionnaire indicate that up to 90% (n=139) of respondents consider the price per standard page to be inadequate. Only 10% (n=16) perceive the remuneration for this type of translation task as reasonable.

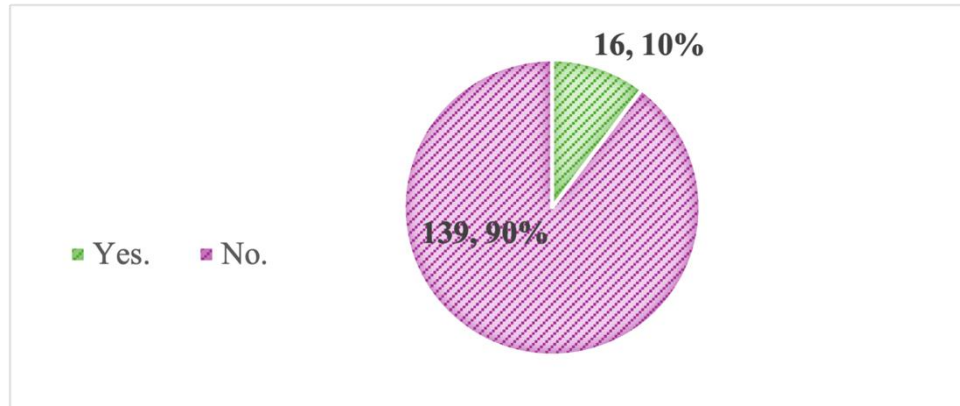


Figure 2: Do you consider the remuneration established by the Act No. 382/2004 Coll. as adequate?

### 3.2.3 (Further) education and interpreting institutes

**Question 3:** Do you continuously update your professional education (§ 30(1) of Act No. 382/2004 Coll.)?

**Aim:** The legislative requirements (§ 30(1a) of Act No. 382/2004 Coll.) imply that sworn translators are obliged to continuously educate and train themselves and improve their qualifications. The aim of this question was to find out whether they fulfil their legal obligation.

**Findings:** Most respondents (77%, n=120) indicated that they continuously update their professional training and education, while 23 % (n=35) of respondents answered negatively.

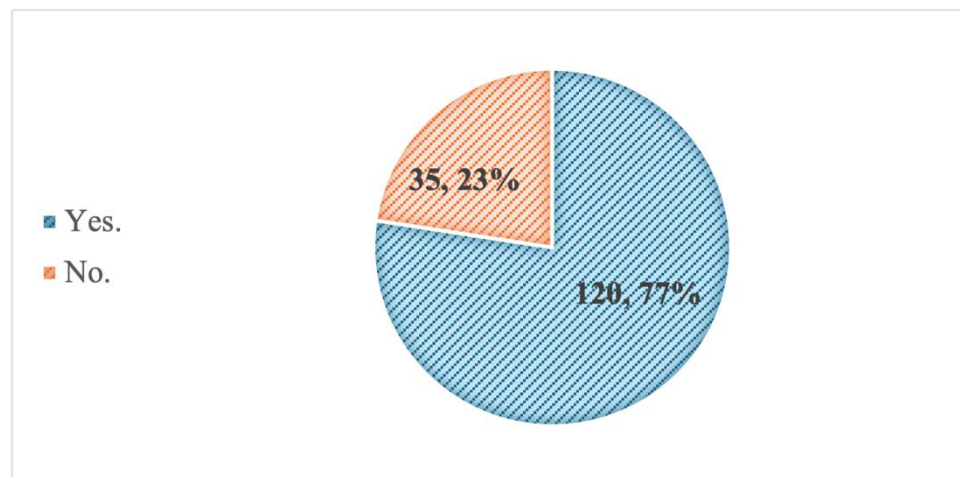


Figure 3: Do you continuously update your professional education (§ 30(1) of Act No 382/2004 Coll.)?

**Question 4:** Interpreting institutes offer...

**Aim:** The main role of an interpreting institute is to provide minimum professional qualification and specialized education in the relevant fields of interpreting and translating in the scope and content determined by the Ministry of Justice and to conduct certification examinations for interpreters and translators, verify the professional competence of interpreters

and translators, control activities, educational activities, methodological activities and consultancy activities (§ 25 of *Act No. 382/2004 Coll.*). The interpreting institutes therefore organize educational activities for practising and future sworn translators, e.g. terminological seminars and specialised workshops.

The question aimed to determine whether the offer of educational activities at interpreting institutes meets the expectations and needs of sworn translators.

**Findings:** 58% (n=70) of the surveyed sworn translators perceived the number of educational activities offered by interpreting institutes in Slovakia as insufficient. 42% (n=50) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the educational activities offered.

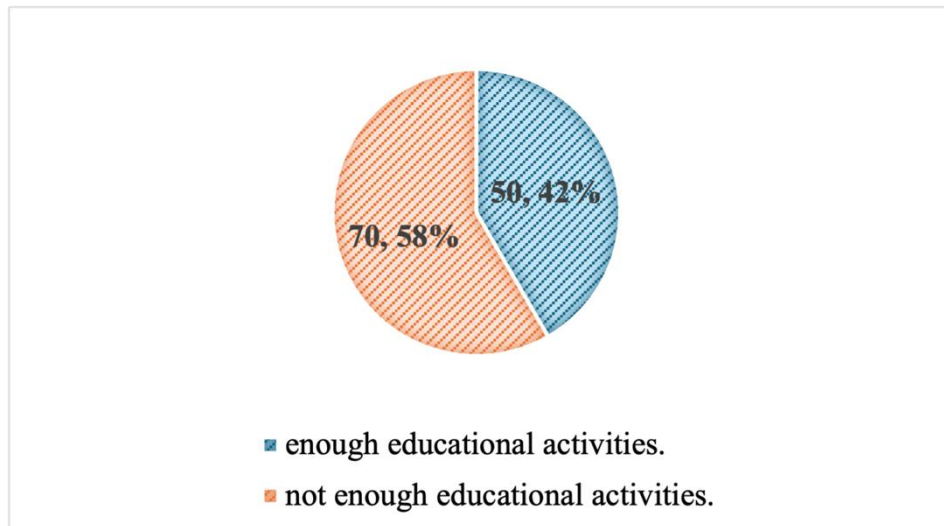


Figure 4: Interpreting institutes offer...

### 3.2.4 Certification examination

**Question 5:** *Do you think that the current form of the certification examination sufficiently tests the competence of a sworn translator?*

**Aim:** The aim of the question was to obtain respondents' views on whether the current form of the certification examination adequately tests the competence of a sworn translator to produce sworn translations.

**Findings:** The results show an even split, with 41% (n=64) of respondents answering "Yes" and 41% (n=63) indicating "I do not know." Meanwhile, 18% (n=28) believe the examination does not adequately assess the required competences.

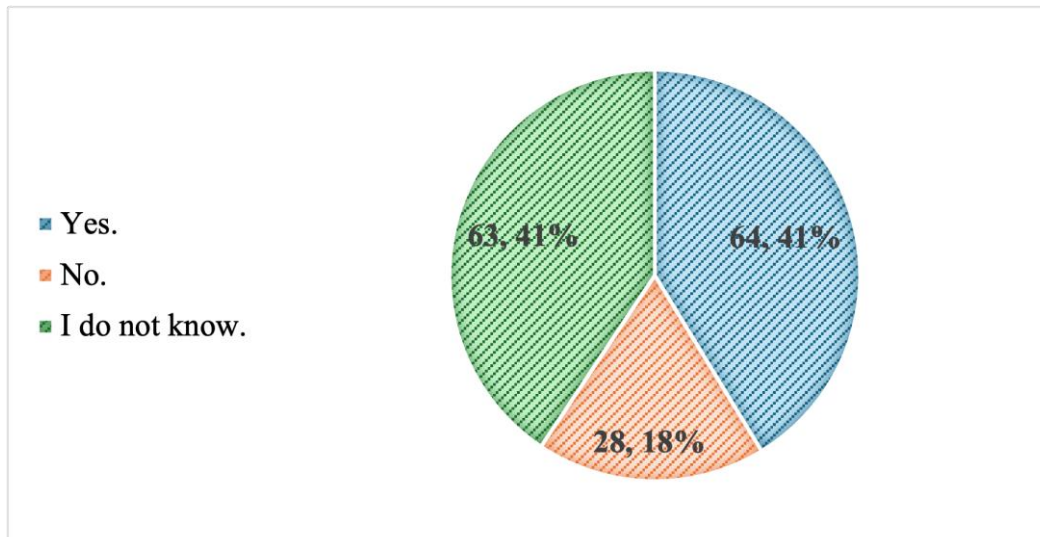


Figure 5: Do you think that the current form of the certification examination sufficiently tests the competence of a sworn translator?

**Question 6:** *What else should the certification examination include to comprehensively test the competence of a sworn translator?*

**Aim:** Question 6 sought to find out what respondents thought the certification examination of a sworn translator should include. Certification examination consists of three parts – a test focusing on legal knowledge, written part (translation of a legal text from Slovak language to foreign language and vice versa) and oral part (discussion with the members of the commission about the translated texts). The applicant has 20 minutes to complete the test. At least 30 points are required for the committee to admit the applicant to the next part of the certification examination (translation of two legal texts). Once both translations have been successfully completed, the candidate is admitted to the oral part, which will be marked out of a maximum of 20 points. If the applicant obtains at least 15 points in the oral part of the certification examination, the result of the examination will be graded as pass. The applicant is allowed to use dictionaries, literature and notes. The use of computers is strictly prohibited.

**Findings:** 32.9% (n=51) of the total number of respondents said that the certification examination should test basic knowledge of law, and the same percentage selected the option of “preparing different types of exercises (e.g. focusing on language collocations, abbreviations, terminological (non)equivalence, etc.)”. 30.3% (n=47) of the respondents thought that the examination should include a test of practical knowledge related to the performance of the activity of a sworn translator. 28.4% (n=44) chose the verification of translation methodology knowledge and 12.9% (n=20) said that the examination should include working with translation tools and the post-editing of the translation. 21.3% (n=33) of the respondents chose the option “Other”. The following responses were selected for illustrative purposes:

- “On the contrary, it needs to be simplified purely to translation.”
- “Testing of linguistic knowledge – not theoretical, i.e. acquired through preparation at the faculty, but from real life.”
- “I think the examiners are conscientious enough to test the knowledge needed for the performance of this activity.”
- “The use of computers while translating.”
- “Practical explanation of what the profession entails, ethical code etc.”
- “A substantial part of the content and especially the way the exam is conducted has to be changed.”

- “The examination is insane.”
- “We could easily mark all the options; for me the best teacher was the practice (before the certification examination, before I became a sworn translator, I had worked as an in-house interpreter and translator in a multinational company). Practical knowledge of the activity of a sworn translator is probably non-existent or minimal in the exam; CAT tools are not used by everyone, but they can help.”

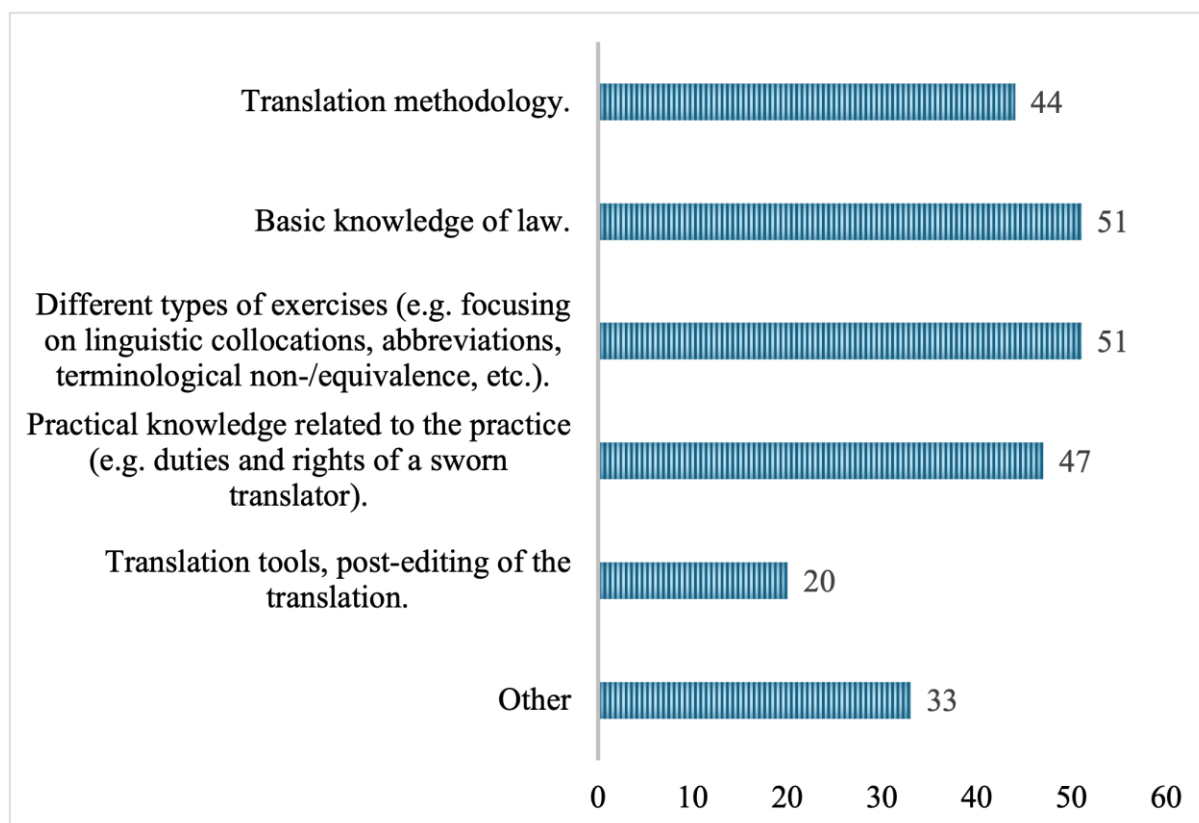


Figure 6: What else should the certification examination include to comprehensively test the competence of a sworn translator?

#### 4. Discussion

The findings from the question 1 (How do you perceive the fact that the current legislation regulating the activity of the sworn translator does not provide a definition of the competences of the sworn translator?) suggest that there is a notable support for legislative or guideline changes to clarify the competences required for sworn translators. The addition of guidelines on competences is necessary so that educational institutions (such as universities or interpreting institutes that train practicing and future sworn translators) can properly prepare future sworn translators for the performance of the activity in question and so that the absence of a definition of competences does not lead to undesirable phenomena in sworn translation (e.g. poor-quality translations, terminological inconsistencies, legal systems discrepancies, cultural differences etc.).

The absence of guidelines on creation of sworn translations in Slovak legislation has already been outlined in the section 2.2.1 *Act No. 382/2004 Coll. on Appraisers, Interpreters and Translators*. In addition to the previous paragraph, it is also necessary to introduce uniform and clear guidelines (translation strategies) on the production of sworn translations such as those introduced by the German translation associations (e.g. *Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer – BDÜ* and the *Deutscher Verband der Übersetzer und Dolmetscher – DVÜD*)

to create precise and high-quality sworn translations. These general guidelines aim to establish a standardized approach across sworn translators and jurisdictions. This approach helps sworn translators to ensure clarity, uniformity, and usability of translations in legal and administrative contexts.

Some of the key translation strategies outlined in these guidelines (Allgemeine Leitlinie für die Anfertigung von Urkundenübersetzungen in Bayern 2025) include:

- *Translation of abbreviations*: Abbreviations should be expanded and translated where possible to avoid ambiguity,
- *Translation of institutional names*: Institutions should remain in their original language, supplemented with an explanatory note or an equivalent in brackets if no direct equivalent exists,
- *Document layout*: The layout and formatting of the source document should be replicated as closely as possible, including tables, stamps, and logos, to maintain the original document's structure and legal validity,
- *Numerical data*: Consistency and proper formatting of numerical data should be maintained to prevent misinterpretations,
- *Legal terms*: When no direct equivalent exists in the target legal system, explanations in brackets or footnotes should be provided, or the sworn translator should explicitly note the absence of an equivalent concept (e.g. a note by the translator "*The term has no equivalent in the legal system of the target language.*"),
- *Binding multi-page translations*: To prevent separation and ensure the integrity of the translated document, all pages must be securely bound.

These clear established guidelines contribute to a more standardized approach to sworn translations, which helps to reduce discrepancies in sworn translations. Such binding regulations could be also introduced in Slovakia to avoid inconsistencies and potential legal uncertainties.

The findings from the questionnaire also revealed strong dissatisfaction with the remuneration for a standard page (question 2). Whereas a majority (62.5%) of sworn translators considered the rate per standard page to be adequate a decade ago (cf. Rakšányiová's 2015 survey), up to 90% expressed dissatisfaction with the remuneration set by the *Act No 491/2004 Coll.* nowadays. One of the legitimate reasons for the expressed dissatisfaction with the remuneration could be the fact that the remuneration for one standard page has remained unchanged since 2004. This 21-year stagnation means that their compensation has not kept pace with e.g. inflation or the rising costs of living and other essential goods. As a result, the real value of their earnings has decreased significantly over time. The fixed rate of 19.92 € per standard page certainly does not reflect the current economic situation, where costs have escalated while sworn translators' income has remained static. This disparity can lead to financial strain and a sense of undervaluation among sworn translators, who feel that their specialized skills and expertise warrant better compensation. The lack of adjustment to the remuneration structure can undermine the financial stability and overall satisfaction of sworn translators in Slovakia. It also raises concerns about the sustainability of the profession, as the financial incentives may not be sufficient to attract and retain sworn translators. The findings explicitly show that it is crucial to revitalise the act regulating the remuneration for sworn translators in Slovakia and thus ensure fair remuneration that aligns with the current economic realities and reflects the value they bring to the legal (and administrative) processes. The need for a review and potential increase in the remuneration for sworn translators is truly pressing, which also highlight the findings (section "Other") from the question 1.

To the question, whether the respondents continuously update their professional training (question 3), up to 77% of respondents answered positively. This percentage indicates a high

level of professional responsibility and willingness of sworn translators to develop their professional competence. However, the respondents in the survey pointed to a lack of educational activities at interpreting institutes (question 4). The interpreting institutes can expand their offer of educational activities and focus more on professional seminars, lectures or practical workshops. Such educational activities should provide future or already practising sworn translators with relevant and up-to-date knowledge in the field of sworn translation, which they can utilise in practice.

The respondents were asked whether they think that the current form of the certification examination defined in the legislation sufficiently tests the competence of a sworn translator (question 5). The findings showed that a significant portion of respondents were uncertain, but a smaller but notable group (18%) expressed dissatisfaction with the current form of the certification examination. The certification examination was further reviewed to determine what additional components should be included to comprehensively test the competence of a sworn translator (question 6). According to the respondents, the certification examination for sworn translators should be comprehensive, covering not only legal and linguistic knowledge but also practical skills and technological proficiency. The respondents highlight the need for exercises that simulate real-world translation challenges (translation of linguistic collocations, abbreviations and non-equivalent terminology etc.) and the integration of computers during the certification examination (since the use of computers is strictly prohibited). Some respondents emphasized that ethical codes and practical explanations of the profession could enhance the examination's relevance. On the other hand, several respondents commented on the difficulty of the certification examination: "the examination is insane" and "on the contrary, it needs to be simplified purely to translation".

To illustrate the differences, the certification examination in Slovakia (see section 3.2.4 *Certification examination*) was compared with the examination in Bavaria, Germany, which is considerably more complex and demanding in terms of both content and duration. In Bavaria, the certification examination of a sworn translator is regulated by the Examination regulations for translators and interpreters (*Prüfungsordnung für Übersetzer und Dolmetscher* 2001) and it consists of written and oral part. The written part of the certification examination comprises of the following written tests:

1. Essay in the foreign language on one of at least three topics of the translator's choice on the regional studies of the language area (three hours),
2. Translation of a challenging text of a general nature from German into the foreign language (90 minutes),
3. Translation of a challenging text taken from the chosen subject area from German into the foreign language (90 minutes),
4. Translation of a challenging text of a general nature taken from the chosen subject area from German into the foreign language (90 minutes),
5. Translation of a challenging text from the chosen subject area from German into the foreign language (90 minutes) (§ 14 *Prüfungsordnung für Übersetzer und Dolmetscher* 2001).

The oral part of the translator examination comprises of the following tasks:

1. A conversation in foreign language and in German on various areas of general regional studies, in which the candidate must demonstrate knowledge, in particular of the political, legal, economic and cultural conditions of the foreign language area and of Germany, especially Bavaria (25 minutes),
2. An impromptu translation from the foreign language into German based on a short text (from a newspaper, magazine, letter or other document) (10 minutes),

3. An impromptu translation from German into the foreign language based on a short text (from a newspaper, magazine, letter or other document) (10 minutes),
4. Linguistic, technical and specialised explanations in the foreign language and in German, based on the texts translated, whereby the candidate must demonstrate comprehensive basic knowledge of the terminology and factual contexts of the chosen subject area as well as sufficient knowledge of linguistically and technically relevant aids (30 minutes) (§ 16 Prüfungsordnung für Übersetzer und Dolmetscher 2001).

While the respondents expressed concerns about examination difficulty (see question 6), the Bavarian model demonstrates a significantly more comprehensive approach that spans approximately 8.5 hours of testing across multiple competency areas, including cultural and thematic knowledge, and terminology expertise. The comparison of the Slovak and Bavarian certification examination model suggests that the Slovak examination, despite perceived as challenging by some candidates, could actually benefit from selective enhancement rather than simplification. Even though the findings from the questionnaire suggest that the current structure of the examination provides a solid foundation (see *Figure 5*), incorporating some suggestions, e.g. permission to use technologies while translating, exercises focusing on language collocations, terminological (non)equivalence, etc. and a test of practical knowledge related to the performance of the activity of a sworn translator (see question 6 and *Figure 6*) could better prepare sworn translators for the demands of their role.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings from the questionnaire focused on the current state of legislation regulating sworn translation in Slovakia revealed significant dissatisfaction among practicing sworn translators due to outdated legislative frameworks and institutional shortcomings. The legislation framework has remained unchanged for over two decades, failing to address the evolving needs of the profession.

The findings show that the respondents (practicing sworn translators) call for legislative changes and institutional improvements such as the clear definition of sworn translators' competences and higher remuneration per standard page. Such definitions are essential for training (not only future) sworn translators at universities and interpreting institutes, as they provide a framework for preparing candidates for certification examination and ensuring the production of high-quality sworn translations. The absence of a clear definition of sworn translators' competences could pose a risk of inconsistency not only in the training process but also in the quality of translations produced by sworn translators.

Another issue is the absence of standardized guidelines to produce sworn translations. Even though some general recommendations regarding the creation of sworn translations were presented in academic publications (Đuricová 2016; Guldanová 2019), the official guidelines are missing. The lack of uniform recommendations could lead to discrepancies in translation practices (e.g. translation of non-equivalent terminology stemming from the legal and cultural asymmetries, translation of abbreviations, names of institutions etc.), which could create challenges in ensuring the accuracy of sworn translations. Establishing clear, uniform guidelines, such as those implemented by the German association BDÜ and DVÜD in Bavaria, Germany (see section 4. *Discussion*), could ensure greater consistency in sworn translation.

The findings from the questionnaire imply that remuneration remains a major point of contention among sworn translators. The current standard rate of 19.92 € per standard page is widely viewed as inadequate (as expressed by 90% respondents), failing to reflect the level of expertise required and the increasing economic demands (e.g. inflation). Although sworn translators and the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters have made repeated attempts to address this issue by sending official letters to the Ministry of Justice, these efforts

have often been unsuccessful. Revising remuneration rates to align with the complexity of the work and the professional qualifications involved is crucial for ensuring fair compensation, maintaining the quality of services provided, as well as maintaining the prestige of the profession and therefore attracting new sworn translators.

Respondents also point out that educational opportunities for practising sworn translators are insufficient. According to the findings from the questionnaire, many translators lack education activities organized by interpreting institutes, e.g. specialized workshops and seminars. Expanding these activities would not only help sworn translators refine their skills but also facilitate networking and adaptation to evolving market demands.

In conclusion, the current legislative framework for sworn translation in Slovakia is perceived to be outdated and inadequate to meet the demands of the sworn translation profession in 2025. This shows that addressing the aforementioned issues through comprehensive legislative reform is considered vital.

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