

# *Interpreter Training in the Age of AI*

*Pavol Šveda and Ivo Poláček*

*Comenius University in Bratislava*

[pavol.sveda@uniba.sk](mailto:pavol.sveda@uniba.sk), [polacek12@uniba.sk](mailto:polacek12@uniba.sk)

## *Abstract*

This article offers a critical examination of the rapidly evolving landscape of interpreter training in the era of artificial intelligence. This paper draws on current academic discourse, industry reports, and original survey data to examine how AI tools are reshaping pedagogical practices, industry expectations, and professional identities. The analysis highlights diverging perspectives: while some view AI as an enabler of efficiency and innovation, others raise concerns about ethical boundaries, terminology misuse, and the erosion of human-centric competencies. Special attention is given to how interpreter training institutions can respond to these shifts through critical AI literacy, revised curricula, and public awareness strategies. The paper also explores the paradox that AI may not replace interpreters directly but may still undermine the profession indirectly through declining enrolments and institutional disengagement. Ultimately, it advocates for a balanced, evidence-based integration of AI into interpreter education – one that safeguards professional standards and ensures long-term sustainability.

Keywords: AI in Interpreting, Interpreter Training, Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI), AI Literacy, Professional Sustainability, AI in Education

## *1 Introduction*

In his book *Interpreters vs Machines* (2019), Jonathan Downie outlined four possible future scenarios describing the evolving relationship between human interpreters and technological advancements. The scenarios presented ranged from the complete replacement of human interpreters by machines, through the augmentation of interpreters' capabilities via technology, to a segmented future where human interpreters and machines clearly divide roles based on task complexity, and, finally, to a scenario involving active resistance from interpreters aimed at preserving traditional interpreting methods. Downie's analysis, while insightful and provocative, was notably conducted before two major transformative events: the global COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread public release of advanced AI models such as ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs).

Indeed, interpreting, as noted by Pöchhacker and Liu (2024), is a profession deeply shaped by technological transformations throughout its history. From the 1930s, when the advent of simultaneous interpreting was enabled by telephone and other early technological innovations, interpreting has continually adapted to technological advancements. Currently, the interpreting profession is undergoing two concurrent transformations. On one side, remote interpreting has rapidly proliferated, driven primarily by the global need induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitated through internet and videoconferencing technologies. This mode of interpreting, while solving logistical challenges and expanding accessibility, also introduces cognitive, psychological, and communicative complexities previously unknown or less prevalent in traditional face-to-face settings (see Mouzourakis 2006; Ahrens et al. 2021; Roziner & Schlesinger 2022).

At the same time, interpreters face the potentially disruptive arrival of sophisticated AI-driven tools. These emerging technologies have sparked concern within the interpreting community, where some fear a possible erosion of professional roles, while also giving rise to arguably exaggerated expectations outside the profession that AI-driven tools could eventually replace human interpreters in certain settings. The potential impact of AI-driven tools ranges from automating simpler interpreting tasks to providing advanced, real-time support in simultaneous interpreting scenarios (see Horváth 2024). This creates a technological landscape that challenges traditional notions of interpreter roles and competencies.

As these technologies evolve and capture the interest of professionals within and outside the field, the discourse surrounding their capabilities has expanded, often accompanied by significant conceptual ambiguity. One contributing factor is the institutional lag often observed in the development of professional standards and terminological clarity. For instance, it required several years for AIIC to develop and adopt its *Guidelines for Distance Interpreting* (AIIC, 2025), despite the exponential increase in the use of RSI at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. At the time of publication of these guidelines, the discourse had already shifted toward the implications of AI in interpreting, thereby underscoring the sluggish response of institutional frameworks to the accelerating pace of technological development.

To address the emerging challenges posed by AI in interpreting, recent initiatives such as the *Checklist for Clients Using AI Tools in Interpreting Contexts and the AI Decision Tree* developed by the AIIC Science Hub AI Workstream (AIIC 2024a; 2024b) represent important steps in promoting client awareness and fostering greater transparency. However, these resources primarily target external stakeholders. What remains urgently needed is a broader, profession-wide effort to engage with the ethical, pedagogical, and conceptual implications of AI use within the interpreting community itself. A particularly pressing issue is the need for more consistent and accurate

terminology. As Pöchhacker (2024) argues, there is an increasing tendency to describe AI-based tools as performing “interpreting,” despite the absence of key human characteristics such as context-sensitive meaning negotiation, pragmatic adaptation, and dialogic responsiveness. Without terminological precision, there is a real risk of conflating fundamentally different processes – leading not only to public misunderstanding but also to confusion in training and professional practice. A more nuanced classification of AI-enabled speech-to-speech technologies is therefore needed – one that clearly distinguishes between simulation and genuine interpretation, and supports interpreters and interpreter trainees in developing a critical, informed, and ethically grounded approach to working with these tools.

While such calls for terminological clarity and critical reflection have gained traction among scholars, parallel visions within the professional discourse offer a more optimistic view of AI's potential. Notably, Fantinuoli (2025) proposes a “3-Phase Roadmap of AI Interpreting,” outlining a trajectory from basic automation (Phase 1) to real-time human–machine collaboration (Phase 2), and ultimately to autonomous AI-based interpreting systems (Phase 3). This phased model envisions AI as a progressively more capable partner in interpreting workflows, culminating in systems that could perform (some) interpreting tasks independently. However, this aspirational outlook must be weighed against emerging evidence of the current limitations of such technologies in real-world settings.

Indeed, the challenges of implementing AI in complex multilingual environments are already becoming apparent. A recent internal report by the World Health Organization (WHO 2025), following pilot deployments of AI-generated interpretation during institutional meetings, raises serious concerns about the reliability, accuracy, and ethical implications of using these tools. The report documents issues such as misinterpretation of key terms, loss of contextual nuance, and insufficient transparency.

This paper, intended both as an introduction to a special issue dedicated to technological advances in interpreting and as a reflective snapshot of current debates and industry perspectives, seeks to address these transformations. It aims to contextualize recent technological shifts, critically evaluate the relevance of Downie's scenarios in the post-pandemic, AI-enabled world, and identify potential pathways forward for interpreter education and practice in an increasingly technologized interpreting landscape. In addition, this special issue aims to answer critical questions about the evolving interpreting technology landscape and provide inspiration for integrating new technologies into interpreting education. Through a close examination of current attitudes and industry practices in 2025, this paper attempts to provide a snapshot of the situation and assess which, if any, of Downie's scenarios may already be taking shape.

## *2 Current State of Interpreter Training and Technological Integration*

Interpreter education has always been shaped by developments in communication technology, but the last five years have seen an unprecedented acceleration. The twin drivers of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid emergence of AI-based tools, particularly generative AI, have significantly changed both the content and delivery of interpreter training. In the broader academic debate, scholars such as Mouzourakis (2006), Roziner and Schlesinger (2010), and Braun (2019) laid important groundwork prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of generative AI by examining the pedagogical, cognitive, and technological dimensions of interpreting. More recent contributions, such as Pöchhacker and Liu (2024) and Davitti et al. (2025), have continued this exploration in light of the profound shifts triggered by remote interpreting and AI-driven tools. The shift to remote interpreting, the RSI platforms, and the growing presence of AI tools in interpreter preparation have raised questions not only about technological adaptation but also about the long-term viability of traditional training models.

Remote interpreting has been particularly prominent since the onset of the pandemic, with literature documenting the transition from on-site to online training and the associated pedagogical challenges (Čeňková 2020; Ahrens et al. 2021). These include managing cognitive load, maintaining synchrony, and ensuring equitable access to learning. The technical and pedagogical limitations of popular platforms, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, have led to the exploration of alternative solutions, such as the use of RSI training platforms (see e.g. Šveda 2025).

Artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI, has introduced a further layer of complexity into interpreter training. Recent research, such as that by Jia and Aryadoust (2024) and Defrancq (2024), has begun to explore the extent to which AI can assist or even automate certain aspects of interpreting and its evaluation. These technologies promise increased efficiency and new opportunities for both teaching and learning, but they also raise important ethical and pedagogical concerns. In this issue, Colman proposes an expanded classification of digital tools used in interpreter training by identifying generative AI (GenAI) as a fifth, distinct category, and presents piloted GenAI-based tasks that promote critical AI literacy and self-directed learning, particularly in the context of EU institutional interpreter training. Complementing this perspective, Kollárová and Tonková adopt a practitioner-oriented perspective, offering strategies for the integration of GenAI tools into interpreter preparation. In addition to practical implementation, their study also maps how LLMs have evolved in their responses to typical interpreting-related prompts over recent months, highlighting both progress and persisting limitations.

Student perspectives on AI are also increasingly being explored. Zhang et al. (2025) and Özmat and Akkoyunlu (2024) report mixed reactions: while students appreciate the efficiency and support offered by AI, concerns about skill erosion and over-reliance are widespread. Hatiarová (this issue) contributes to this discussion by presenting original research on interpreting students in Slovakia, highlighting the benefits and limitations of AI tools such as ChatGPT in real-life training environments.

The use of generative AI is not the only factor influencing the transformation of interpreter education; evolving approaches to computer-assisted interpreting (CAI) tools are also contributing to this evolution. As the distinction between human and AI-supported interpreting becomes increasingly indistinct, researchers have initiated explorations into the manner in which interpreters engage with CAI interfaces and the potential for these interactions to be integrated into pedagogical frameworks. Frittella (2024) is an example of an author who has built upon the Four-Component Instructional Design (4C/ID) model, proposing a structured and differentiated approach to CAI training. The model distinguishes between recurrent CAI skills, which are routine tasks such as tool navigation and visual aid fixation, and non-recurrent skills, which require adaptive behaviors such as strategic décalage modulation and selective processing.

Finally, Public Service Interpreting (PSI) is an area where technological disruption is particularly consequential. Existing research has shown that remote interpreting – through video remote interpreting (VRI) or telephone interpreting (TI) – can affect the multimodal and interactional nature of PSI, with significant consequences for both quality and accessibility (Braun & Taylor 2012; De Boe 2020). Building on this, Štefková and Krajčovič (this issue) examine the Slovak PSI context and identify institutional, technological, and educational factors that influence the successful implementation of remote technologies.

Taken together, these papers paint a comprehensive picture of a rapidly evolving interpreter training landscape. The shift towards technological integration – particularly through AI and remote communication – requires educators, students and institutions alike to rethink how interpreters are trained and supported. The following section explores how these changes are perceived and received by practicing interpreters, industry stakeholders and institutional actors.

### *3 Perspectives and Debates on AI in Interpreting*

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence tools has presented opportunities, but mainly uncertainties for the interpreting profession and training. In the face of this large-scale technological change, the responses of various stakeholders – interpreters, academic institutions, and language service providers – have been largely reactive,

except perhaps for those language subjects directly involved in the development or integration of AI technologies. Smaller LSPs, freelance interpreters, and even universities often find themselves adapting to tools and practices after their emergence, rather than shaping their trajectories. This section examines how these different actors perceive and respond to AI in the field of interpreting. Relying mainly on industry surveys (e.g., ELIS) and studies addressing the impact of AI on the language profession, we seek to provide an overview of the current debates surrounding AI in interpreting.

To begin, we turn to the European Language Industry Survey (ELIS), which provides consistent year-on-year data and a reliable framework for tracking developments in the sector. Among freelance language professionals, technological change and the rise of AI-powered translation and interpreting tools stand out as the fastest-growing sources of stress. While concerns such as pay rates, the economic climate, or the cost of living show relatively moderate increases, stress attributed to technological change has risen from 20% in 2023 to 56% in 2025. Similarly, anxiety related to the rise of AI-powered tools has increased markedly, from 29% in 2023 to 50% in 2025. This shift underscores the growing pressure on interpreters and translators to adapt to rapidly evolving technologies, often without clear guidance or institutional support (ELIS 2025).

The pressure is further reflected in the actual usage patterns of generative AI tools. While the ELIS data in this area primarily concern translators, it is important to note that in smaller markets, interpreters often engage in translation. For example, in Slovakia, a survey conducted by Djovčoš and Šveda (2023) found that 0% of respondents identified as pure interpreters, and only 4.27% as primarily interpreters, compared to 14.25% who reported interpreting and translating in equal measure. According to the 2025 ELIS figures, 42% of independent professionals report using generative AI as an alternative to machine translation, with approximately 35% employing it for editing and translation quality assurance. 17% also utilize these tools for content creation, and smaller proportions for tasks such as content or terminology research, audiovisual localization, or text restyling (ELIS 2025, 21). These figures suggest that although generative AI is not yet a standard requirement from clients, most usage remains driven by personal initiative – it is becoming an increasingly common feature of professional workflows.

In parallel with mounting technological pressure, interpreters have reported a consistent decline in the perceived adequacy of their remuneration. According to the ELIS data, the percentage of interpreters who felt they earned enough as freelancers decreased from 80% in 2022 to 65% in 2025 (ELIS 2025, 22). Although causality remains unproven, and no definitive correlation has been demonstrated between the adoption of AI tools and declining earnings, the timing of this decline, coinciding with the rapid propagation of generative AI and remote interpreting technologies, is of particular interest. This finding suggests that interpreters may encounter difficulties in preserving

their negotiating power within a novel context. As we will see in a subsequent part of this paper, similar results are emerging from the Slovak market surveys.

On the other hand, among Language Service Providers, the mood has become markedly pessimistic, with many reporting a decline in both turnover and profitability (for FY 2024), according to the ELIS 2025 survey. The number of active providers is shrinking, accompanied by a decline in investment and staffing levels. Expectations for the near future remain cautious, with only modest optimism expressed in areas such as recruitment and procurement. This sentiment is reinforced by the fact that 65% of LSPs report either direct or indirect negative impacts of AI, primarily driven by client uncertainty and downward price pressure (ELIS 2025, 13). While some providers note benefits such as increased efficiency and new service options, the overall perception remains cautious (*ibid*).

On the other hand, NIMDZI – a market research and consulting firm that specializes in the language services industry (NIMDZI 2025, 7) and is known for its annual 'Nimdzi 100' ranking of the top 100 language service providers worldwide – reports that companies have largely integrated AI into their workflows and have trained staff to improve AI readiness. The report also indicates that the outlook on AI having a negative impact has improved slightly, shifting from 2024 to 2025 (NIMDZI 2025, 75–76). However, despite the widespread adoption of AI, many people still lack a comprehensive understanding of its typical roles, and its applications beyond language tasks – particularly in marketing and communication – remain relatively limited (ELIS 2025, 13). NIMDZI, though, has a different take on how companies feel about AI interpreting. The so-called machine interpreting, for example, is becoming more popular in certain situations, like internal company meetings, customer service, and some interactions with patients, such as booking appointments. This effectively opens up new markets where human interpreters were previously unavailable or too expensive (NIMDZI 2025, 77).

Similarly, AI dubbing is creating a new market, particularly for social media content, e-learning videos, and corporate presentations, by offering speed and cost-effectiveness that traditional human dubbing cannot match (*ibid*, 78). The report emphasizes that while major tech companies are integrating LLMs into their Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platforms, these solutions are not yet 'localization-ready' for enterprise purposes, creating a continuing opportunity for LSPs to provide on-demand human verification services (*ibid*, 74). Furthermore, automation and orchestration are becoming crucial for simplifying complex enterprise localization workflows, connecting language activities to strategic business outcomes like faster time-to-market and increased revenue. Despite these advancements and the blurring lines between technology and service providers, the value of human cultural and language expertise in supply chains remains more critical than ever, and success for LSPs is

increasingly defined by their scale and ability to harness and invest in technology effectively (ibid, 72).

While students continue to express interest in language-related careers, particularly within language service providers, the industry's staffing outlook remains bleak (ELIS 2025, 8). Recruitment levels at LSPs (as well as at internal language departments) are expected to decline further by 2025, with traditional language roles gradually being replaced by positions requiring AI, data, and marketing skills. Consequently, students entering the field must prepare for a new environment characterized by technological disruption and evolving expectations (ibid., 8). Despite the widespread integration of language technologies into academic curricula, particularly within EMT-affiliated institutions, there is a noticeable gap between students' exposure to these tools and their actual use, especially in areas such as generative AI (ibid., 27). Overall, students rely on their teachers for information about the industry, highlighting the important role of academic institutions in aligning student expectations with industry realities and equipping students with the necessary skills.

Beyond the academic discourse and general industry trends as outlined by ELIS and NIMDZI in 2025, the perspectives of selected leading language technology companies in 2025 offer a more forward-looking view of AI's impact, often highlighting opportunities over threats. Interviews with the CEOs of companies Unbabel, Translated, and DeepL in MultiLingual Magazine, May 2025 issue, reveal a consensus that AI is evolving from a mere tool into a sophisticated "language partner." They foresee an 'autonomy era' where AI is deeply integrated into workflows, enabling automation of repetitive tasks, enhancing collaboration, and improving accessibility across linguistic barriers. This transformation is seen as unlocking a "next level of communication, not only among humans but also between humans and machines," moving towards more accurate, personalized, and real-time language solutions, including spoken language processing (MultiLingual, 35–44).

These industry representatives emphasize the strategic importance of human–AI collaboration, believing that the future belongs to professionals who can effectively 'steer the machine' and leverage AI to amplify collective abilities. They predict that AI will redefine value and workflows, leading to increased efficiency and the creation of new service options, despite some initial market uncertainties reported by Language Service Providers. The focus for professionals shifts towards understanding and integrating AI, data, and marketing skills into their competencies, moving beyond traditional language roles. Companies claim that they are actively working on delivering more customized and contextual AI solutions, transitioning from static tools to more collaborative and personalized experiences that are expected to be deeply embedded in professional workflows within the next five years. According to them, this vision highlights the need for continuous adaptation and open dialogue about how new

technologies will influence both the perception and actual demand for language services (ibid.).

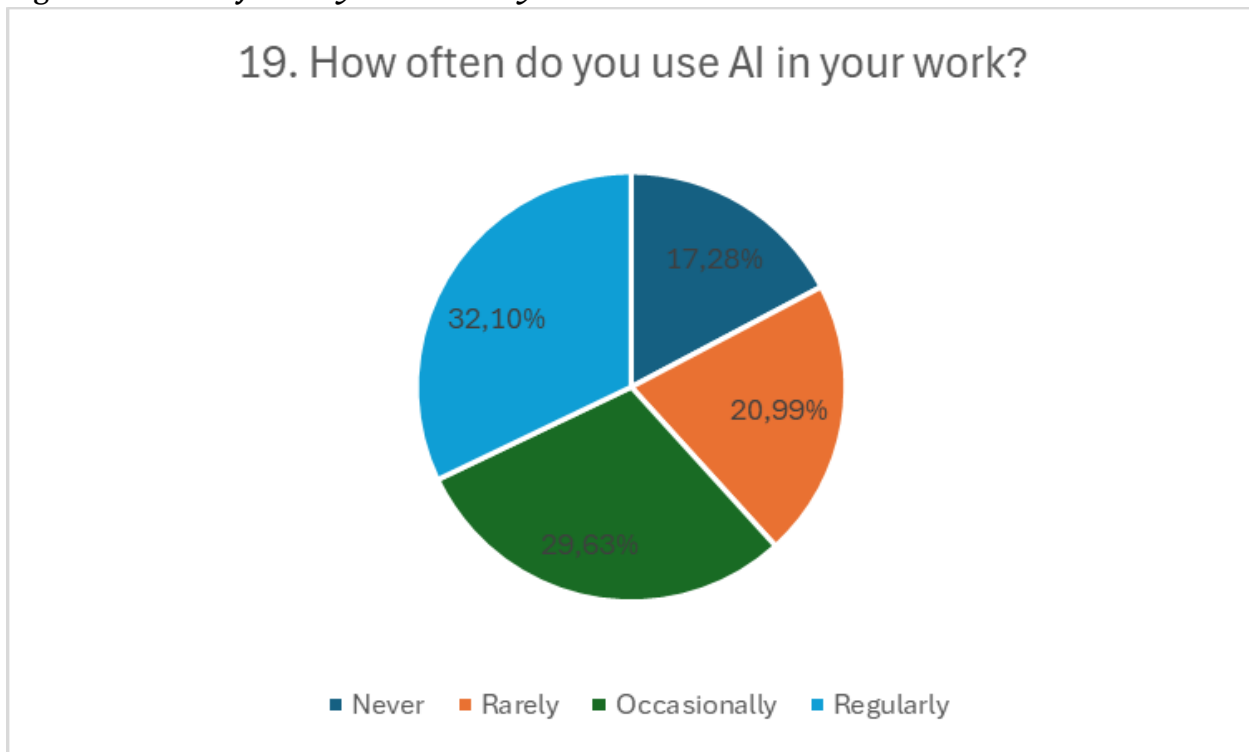
#### *4 Small-scale Survey: Slovak Interpreters and Translators' Perceptions of AI*

To complement the academic, professional, and industry perspectives discussed in the previous sections, this paper also presents original data from the professional field. A small-scale survey was conducted by the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters (SAPT), the largest professional organization representing over 250 full-time language professionals in Slovakia. Membership of the SAPT is restricted to practicing professional translators and interpreters, and students of translation and interpreting, thus ensuring a high degree of professional relevance in the respondent group and effectively excluding amateurs or occasional practitioners.

Data collection took place in February and March 2025 via an anonymous online questionnaire distributed to association members. Of the 254 SAPT members, 81 responded. The survey was part of SAPT's regular internal monitoring of remuneration and workload within the profession. In addition to standard questions about working conditions, two new questions were added this year to explore the community's perception and use of artificial intelligence.

The first question, "How often do you use AI in your work?" provides information on the extent to which AI technologies are currently integrated into professional practice. The distribution of responses reveals a professional community in which the use of AI is steadily gaining ground:

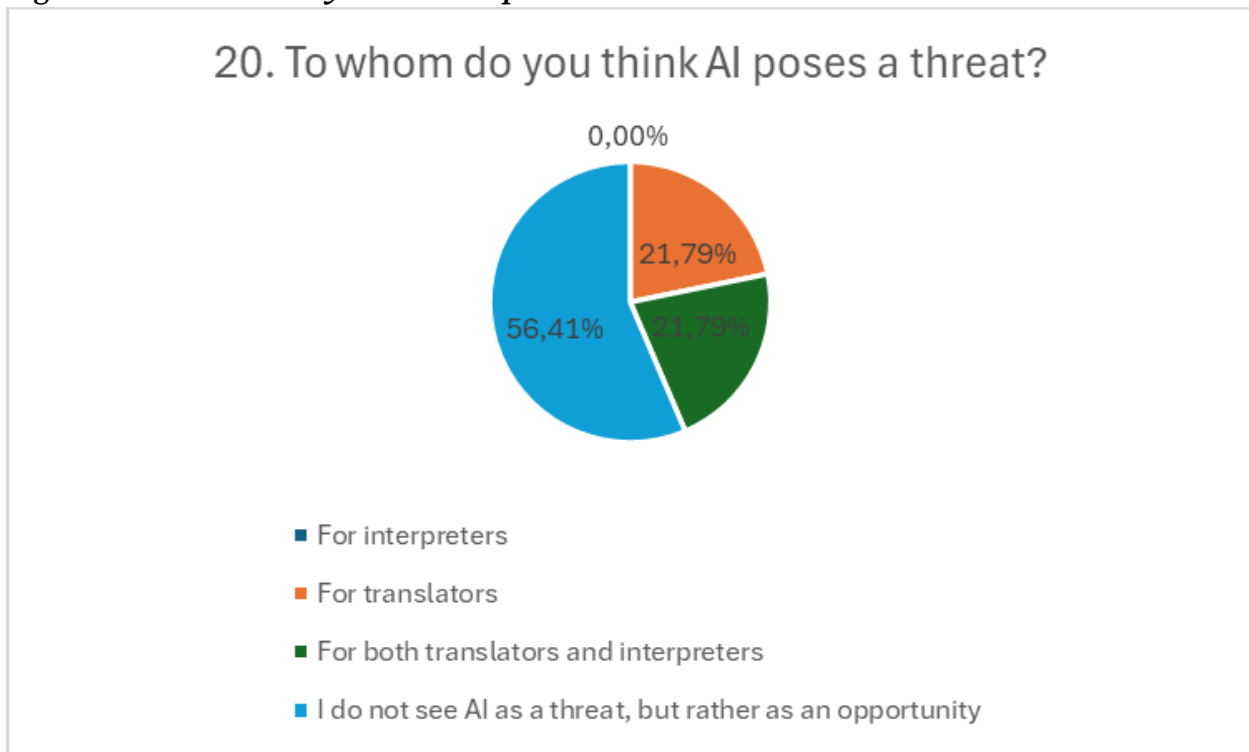
Figure 1. *“How often do you use AI in your work?”*



Taken together, almost a third of respondents use AI tools regularly, and over 60% use them at least occasionally. This suggests that AI has already entered the routine workflows of a significant proportion of Slovak language professionals, especially in translation-related activities.

The second question, “To whom do you think AI poses a threat?” gave the following results:

Figure 2. “To whom do you think AI poses a threat?”



The data suggest a cautiously optimistic attitude towards AI. While around 43% see AI as a potential threat to some segments of the profession, a clear majority (over 56%) see it as a professional opportunity. Notably, none of the respondents identified interpreters alone as the most at risk, suggesting that concerns are either broader (affecting both translators and interpreters) or mitigated by perceived benefits. This finding is consistent with the growing trend of cautious experimentation and adoption of tools observed in other parts of Europe, and complements the findings discussed earlier in this paper.

These findings offer insight into how Slovak professionals currently perceive and engage with AI in their work. They indicate a community that is increasingly integrating AI tools into its workflows and approaching these changes with interest and a generally balanced outlook. At the same time, the results of question 20 – where more than half of respondents viewed AI as an opportunity – might seem somewhat surprising when compared with other survey data. Specifically, the average number of interpreting days reported by respondents decreased from 34.22 in 2021 to 25.86 in 2024, and interpreting rates remained largely static during this period. Although this decline cannot be directly attributed to the introduction of AI, based on the available data, and may be linked to wider political and social shifts, it does reflect a broader negative trend in the interpreting market. These developments underscore the importance of continued monitoring and open discussion about how new technologies may influence both perceptions of the profession and the actual demand for interpreting services.

## *5 Conclusion: Navigating the AI Turn in Interpreting and Interpreter Training*

This introductory article explores the multifaceted and evolving relationship between interpreting, interpreter training, and emerging technologies, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence. Drawing on the latest academic discourse and survey-based insights from professional practice, the paper attempts to provide a snapshot of the current situation, which is characterized by experimentation, uncertainty, and conflicting visions of the future. Although technological innovation in the field is nothing new – interpreting has long been shaped by tools that extend its reach and performance – the current wave of AI-driven developments raises fundamental questions about professional identity, ethical boundaries and the nature of interpreting itself.

The academic perspectives selected and discussed in this introduction suggest a growing awareness of the opportunities and limitations of AI. For example, scholars such as Pöchhacker (2024) caution against anthropomorphizing technology by using terms such as 'machine interpreting' to describe processes that lack key features of human interpretation. Therefore, a more precise and cautious approach to terminology is needed, one that acknowledges the capabilities and limitations of AI tools. Other contributions explore how AI tools can support interpreter training when they are well understood and critically employed, offering new forms of feedback, simulation, and preparation. We believe that this special issue will further this approach. The overarching message from academia should be: integrate, but do so wisely.

Recent ELIS (2025) and NIMDZI (2025) reports suggest that the industry displays a more uneven landscape. On the one hand, some language service providers and tech-forward companies are embracing AI to streamline their services and redefine their value propositions. The increasing availability of AI-powered tools for speech-to-speech translation, automatic subtitling, and low-risk AI-enabled interpreting in specific areas demonstrates how certain sectors of the industry are embracing automation, not with the intention of replacing human interpreters, but rather to expand service offerings. Conversely, smaller providers and independent professionals often find it challenging to position themselves in this evolving environment, prompting concerns about sustainability and redefining their roles.

The Slovak professional survey provides valuable insights into how practicing interpreters perceive and use AI. Although over 60% of respondents reported using AI at least occasionally and the majority viewed it as an opportunity rather than a threat, concerns specific to interpreting remain. Notably, none of the respondents identified interpreters as being the main group at risk, suggesting that, perhaps due to the inherently dialogical and high-stakes nature of their work, interpreters perceive AI more as a tool than a direct competitor. However, the decline in the number of reported

interpreting days between 2021 and 2024, alongside stagnating rates, suggests a shrinking market that requires careful monitoring. While this trend cannot be causally linked to AI based on current data, it illustrates the broader pressures currently reshaping the field.

Looking ahead, this analysis yields several recommendations. Firstly, it is crucial to avoid anthropomorphizing AI and to refrain from using terminology that attributes human-like capacities to systems which fundamentally lack them. This not only distorts public understanding, but may also foster unrealistic expectations among clients, institutions, and students. Instead, discourse should focus on the actual capabilities and limitations of these tools.

Secondly, interpreter training programs must evolve to include AI literacy, not as an endorsement of new technologies, but as an essential, reflective part of interpreter education. This should involve familiarizing students with speech-to-text and text-to-speech systems, introducing them to critical scenarios involving generative AI, and incorporating ethical and professional discussions into the curriculum. Future interpreters must be competent language professionals and informed, cautious users of AI tools.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need for public awareness strategies that communicate the role of AI in interpretation and translation more accurately. These strategies should inform clients and end users about situations where human expertise is indispensable, areas where AI can be used reliably, and instances where AI still falls short. Promoting an attitude of informed skepticism, rather than techno-optimism or fear, will be key to ensuring that AI is deployed in a responsible and effective manner.

When viewed through Downie's scenarios, the developments discussed in this article show that elements of multiple pathways are already emerging. Clearly, we see signs of the "divide" scenario, where the profession is splitting between interpreters who quickly adopt and embrace the technologies and those who believe that the end of the profession is near. At the same time, aspects of the "marginalization" scenario are also apparent. The reported stagnation in interpreting rates and the decline in average interpreting days suggest a shrinking market. Although these changes cannot be solely attributed to AI, they reflect increasing structural pressures that threaten to push parts of the profession into precarity or obsolescence.

Importantly, this erosion is taking place at a time of broader societal uncertainty. The period of rapid technological advancement coincides with economic turbulence, growing protectionism, and the weakening of the international, rules-based order that once provided the interpreting profession with many of its core institutional clients. Within this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that some interpreters feel threatened – even if the actual technological capabilities of current AI systems do not yet justify the level of anxiety or the sweeping promises often made by marketing narratives. In fact,

at the time of writing, the hype surrounding AI in interpreting seems to exceed its current technical maturity. Nevertheless, the perception of threat – whether grounded or exaggerated – can reshape student choices, institutional priorities, and client expectations in ways that may contribute to the marginalization of the profession.

A more pressing and underexplored risk may therefore lie not in the hypothetical replacement of interpreters by AI, but in the gradual erosion of the profession itself due to declining interest and institutional disengagement. If prospective students, influenced by media narratives and misconceptions, come to view interpreting and translation as outdated or non-viable career paths, enrolment in academic programs is likely to decline. In turn, universities may begin to scale back or discontinue interpreter training altogether. In such a scenario, AI-driven tools could become the default solution – not because they surpass human performance, but simply because there are no longer enough qualified professionals to do the work. This self-fulfilling prophecy underscores the urgency of actively promoting the relevance and value of expert human interpreters, and ensuring the long-term viability of interpreter education.

Ultimately, AI is neither an existential threat nor a universal solution. It is a transformative force that requires critical, thoughtful, and inclusive engagement. As this special issue demonstrates, adopting a balanced approach that is anchored in evidence, dialogue, and professionalism can enable the interpreting profession and its training institutions to respond with agility and integrity to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

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