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Remote Interpreting: How Can It Change the World of Public Service Interpreting in Slovakia?

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Abstract

This article explores the use of remote interpreting technologies in public service interpreting (PSI), with a particular focus on dialogue interpreting (DI) as the most widely used and interactionally complex technique in PSI. In recent years, the PSI landscape has undergone significant changes due to the increasing adoption of remote interpreting technologies, including telephone interpreting (TI), video remote interpreting (VRI), and video relay services (VRS). While these modalities offer advantages in terms of accessibility and flexibility, they also disrupt the multimodal nature of communication typical of face-to-face interpreting. Drawing on recent research, this article compares interactional aspects of remote and in-person interpreting, highlighting challenges such as limited access to embodied resources, overlapping speech, and disrupted repair sequences. The study further maps the current state of remote interpreting use in Slovakia, a country where PSI is still developing and under-researched. By integrating theoretical insights with practical implications, the article formulates recommendations for the broader implementation of remote interpreting technologies in Slovakia. Special attention is given to interpreter training and awareness-raising among institutional stakeholders to ensure high-quality, inclusive, and technologically supported communication in PSI settings.

Keywords: public service interpreting, dialogue interpreting, remote interpreting, Slovakia, interpreter training

1 Introduction

Public Service Interpreting (PSI) is increasingly recognized as a critical tool for facilitating the communication of information in linguistically accessible ways, thereby promoting equal access to health, legal, and social services in multilingual societies. Over the past few decades, PSI has developed not only as a professional practice, but also as a distinct and dynamic field of academic research. Pioneering studies by Wadensjö (1998), Roy (2000) and Hale (2007) have fundamentally shaped the academic understanding of PSI by challenging the long-standing conduit model and

emphasizing the dialogical and interactional nature of interpreter-mediated communication. Rather than serving as neutral language transmitters, interpreters are conceptualized as active participants who co-construct meaning alongside service providers and clients, engaging in complex interactional work that includes managing turn-taking, facilitating communicative repairs and addressing communication breakdowns, and interpreting pragmatic nuances embedded in specific cultural and situational contexts (Wadensjö, 2014).

Dialogue interpreting, identified as one of the main modes of PSI, is characterized by its reliance on indirect communication: the primary participants do not address each other directly, but communicate through the interpreter, who assumes responsibility for coordinating the structure and dynamics of the interaction (Wadensjö, 1998). Effective performance in such settings requires much more than a high level of bilingual competence. It requires a nuanced ability to manage both the verbal and extra-verbal dimensions of the interaction. In particular, interpreters need to be adept at perceiving and conveying non-verbal cues – such as posture, eye contact and facial expressions – as well as paraverbal features such as intonation, pace and emotional tone. These dimensions are critical in ensuring that intended meanings are preserved and appropriately adapted, particularly in emotionally charged or culturally sensitive encounters.

This article focuses specifically on what Braun (2019) classifies as the first category of interpreting-related technologies, namely those used to deliver interpreting services. Within this category, particular attention is paid to the implementation and implications of remote interpreting (RI) in PSI contexts. The proliferation of remote interpreting technologies, particularly telephone-mediated interpreting (TMI) and video-mediated interpreting (VMI), has accelerated dramatically in recent years, driven in large part by the structural constraints and public health imperatives associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This rapid digital shift has also been driven by a broader institutional emphasis on cost-effectiveness and the need to ensure language access in under-resourced or geographically isolated areas.

While remote interpreting modalities offer several undeniable benefits – including greater flexibility in scheduling, reduced travel costs for interpreters, and expanded access to language support in remote regions – they also present several new challenges. These include technical limitations (e.g., poor audio or video quality), interaction disruptions, and limitations on the interpreter's ability to manage extra-linguistic cues effectively. Such limitations can hinder the co-construction of meaning and increase the cognitive and emotional demands placed on the interpreter. As a result, the growing reliance on remote modalities has significant implications for interpreter training, which now needs to include competencies not only in language

and culture, but also in technology use, online interaction management and digital professionalism.

2 Aim and scope

In Slovakia, RI has emerged as a topic of increasing relevance, primarily as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced numerous public institutions to adopt alternative forms of service delivery (Šveda & Djovčoš, 2022). Šveda and Djovčoš (2023, 138–139) point out that remote interpreting will need to be introduced into the teaching of interpreting. During the pandemic, a system was developed that allows interpreting to be taught remotely, but does not address the issue of teaching remote interpreting. In recent years, there has been a marked shift in scholarly attention toward public service interpreting, largely driven by evolving social and political dynamics. In parallel, technological advancements have prompted increased research interest in remote interpreting as a growing modality within the field (Djovčoš, Klabal & Šveda, 2023).

Although the international research landscape on RI has expanded significantly in recent years, the Slovak context of RI in public service settings remains relatively understudied. While there is evidence of increasing use of RI, especially in high-stakes areas such as legal proceedings and asylum interviews, empirical data on its prevalence, effectiveness, and integration into interpreter training remain scarce. Based on our observations and interviews conducted with volunteer interpreters working in Slovak public service settings, it appears that interpreters are often underprepared for the demands of technology-mediated interaction. In addition, institutional frameworks often lack the protocols, infrastructure, and professional guidance necessary to ensure the consistent and effective delivery of remote interpreting services.

Against this background, the present article seeks to contribute to the evolving discourse on remote interpreting by combining theoretical insights with practice-oriented recommendations. The overall aim is to support the development of a more inclusive, efficient, and professionally sustainable system of public service interpreting in Slovakia – one that can integrate technological innovation while safeguarding the quality of interpreter-mediated communication. In order to achieve this goal, the article has four interrelated objectives: (1) to examine dialogue interpreting (DI) as the dominant mode of PSI, with particular emphasis on its interactional complexity, the coordinating function of the interpreter, and the reliance on multimodal communicative resources; (2) to critically assess the advantages and limitations of remote interpreting modalities – especially TMI and VMI in comparison to traditional face-to-face interpreting (F2FI), with an emphasis on their impact on interactional dynamics and embodied meaning-making; (3) to map the current use and institutional adoption of remote interpreting technologies in Slovak public services, with a particular focus on legal and asylum-related contexts; (4) to formulate practical

recommendations for the expanded and effective implementation of RI in Slovakia, with a strong focus on interpreter training and professional preparation.

3 Focus on Dialogue Interpreting

PSI encompasses various interpreting modes tailored to the needs of institutional communication, especially in healthcare, legal, and social service contexts. Among these, DI stands out as one of the most widely used and extensively researched modes due to its alignment with the interactive, relational, and often emotionally charged nature of communication in these settings. Unlike monologic forms of interpreting, such as conference interpreting, which are characterized by extended, often scripted discourse with minimal interlocutor involvement, dialogue interpreting is inherently dynamic, sequential, and interactional (Roy, 2000). Roy (2000, 36–39) emphasizes the centrality of turn-taking in DI, a process that structures the flow of conversation and significantly influences the construction of meaning.

The triadic structure of DI – as defined by Mason (2001) – involves two primary interlocutors and an interpreter who mediates the exchange. Communication in this setting is indirect: the primary interlocutors do not interact directly but speak through the interpreter, who regulates turn-taking, manages repair sequences, and ensures mutual understanding. This triadic and mediated nature makes DI a complex, socially embedded communicative activity rather than a simple linguistic transfer. Wadensjö (1998) emphasizes that in DI, interpreters have to make moment-to-moment decisions about how to render utterances in a pragmatic and culturally appropriate way, especially in emotionally sensitive or high-stakes encounters. A critical challenge of DI is the fine-tuned temporal coordination of verbal and embodied cues – such as pauses, intonation, gaze and gestures – that are central to signaling conversational transitions, managing speaker roles and maintaining the rhythm of interaction (Mondada, 2016).

3.1 Face-to-Face vs. Remote Dialogue Interpreting: Interactional and Technological Considerations

As outlined in the previous section, DI relies fundamentally on multimodal resources and finely tuned interactional coordination. These features are deeply embedded in the ecology of F2FI, where participants – including the interpreter – share a common physical space and have full access to embodied cues such as gaze, gesture, facial expression, posture, and spatial orientation (Beukeleers et al., 2020). This sensory and spatial co-presence supports the real-time negotiation of turn-taking, the initiation of repair sequences (moments when communication breaks down and needs to be reestablished), and the co-construction of meaning through subtle but consequential interactional signals. However, the transition to RDI has brought about a profound

change in the way this coordination is achieved. While remote modalities offer significant advantages in terms of reach, flexibility, and logistical efficiency, they also impose serious constraints on the interactional practices that underpin successful interpreter-mediated communication. These constraints are not merely technical inconveniences; rather, they reshape the very structure of dialogue interpreting, affecting how turns are taken, how misunderstandings are resolved, and how mutual attention is maintained.

A key challenge of remote interpreting, particularly in TMI, is the complete *lack of visual access* to embodied cues. Without visual input, interpreters are deprived of essential signals such as gaze shifts, facial expressions, and gesture onset – cues that normally support the anticipation of speaker turns and facilitate the segmentation of speech into cognitively manageable units. In such settings, turn-taking becomes more dependent on auditory cues alone, increasing the risk of overlap, interruption or delayed responses. VMI, while maintaining a visual channel, does not completely solve these problems. The interpreter's ability to perceive embodied cues remains limited by factors such as camera angle, screen resolution, and internet stability, which often result in fragmented or delayed visual input (Braun, 2017). These limitations directly affect the interpreter's ability to maintain alignment with participants and to intervene effectively in moments of confusion or miscommunication (Braun & Taylor, 2012; De Boe, 2020; De Boe, Vranjes, & Salaets, 2023).

While the absence or reduction of visual access in remote interpreting is often acknowledged, it also disrupts what Luff et al. (2003) describe as the *ecological coherence* of communication – the shared spatial and sensory environment that supports mutual orientation. According to their analysis, in cases where the interpreter is remote but the primary participants are co-located (a common scenario in PSI), asymmetrical access to visual and interactional information results in fractured ecologies. The interpreter may struggle to identify who is speaking, miss turn-taking gestures, or fail to detect subtle expressions of confusion or hesitation that would otherwise trigger a repair sequence.

These interactional difficulties are compounded by the issue of *temporality*. As Deppermann and Günthner (2015) argue, the success of human interaction depends on participants' shared understanding of when contributions are sequentially relevant – when it is appropriate to speak, respond or clarify. In dialogue interpreting, temporal sensitivity is even more critical, as the interpreter must track and mediate the timing of multiple communicative streams simultaneously (Deppermann et al., 2021). In F2FI settings, this temporal alignment is facilitated by the rich multimodal environment. In remote modalities, however, delays in audio or video transmission - even fractions of a second – can disrupt this synchrony and undermine the interpreter's ability to smoothly coordinate turns. De Boe (2020) notes that such delays significantly impair

the interpreter's responsiveness, especially in high-pressure situations where rapid exchanges and spontaneous repairs are common. Repair sequences are particularly vulnerable in remote interpreting. In face-to-face contexts, these sequences are often triggered by embodied signals such as furrowed brows, tilted heads or questioning gestures. These cues prompt the interpreter to seek clarification or initiate repair. In VMI, however, these embodied cues may be imperceptible or delayed, while in TMI they are completely absent. De Boe's (2021) simulation studies of medical consultations showed that interpreters in VMI struggled to maintain a smooth interactional flow and frequently missed opportunities for timely repair. The problem was exacerbated when interpreters engaged in note-taking, which temporarily diverted their visual attention away from the screen, reducing their ability to monitor clients' facial expressions and gestures.

The absence of eye contact also alters the *structure of attention and orientation* in remote settings. In face-to-face encounters, mutual gaze facilitates the exchange of turns, signals availability, and establishes interpersonal rapport (Bohannon et al., 2013). This visual feedback loop is disrupted in VMI and completely absent in TMI, leading to uncertainty about participation status and interpreter availability. Interpreters must then rely on explicit verbal signals or trial-and-error strategies to coordinate the interaction, which increases cognitive load and slows the pace of communication. The challenges are particularly pronounced in scenarios where there is asymmetric access to visual and auditory information. For example, when the interpreter is remote, while the service provider and client share a physical space, the interpreter's ability to track interaction dynamics is significantly impaired. Luff et al. (2003) refer to these situations as examples of *'fractured ecologies'* where the interpreter is effectively excluded from the full interactional environment, making it difficult to establish alignment or manage transitions. This problem is not only one of visibility, but also of participation rights and situational awareness.

In addition to visual constraints, *audio quality* poses a significant risk to interpreting accuracy. Overlapping speech – common in spontaneous conversations – can lead to audio suppression or automatic muting by conferencing platforms, resulting in key segments of speech being lost or distorted. This technical filtering disrupts not only comprehension but also turn management, especially in emotionally sensitive or legally consequential PSI contexts (Bohannon et al., 2013). Moreover, the assumption of co-presence persists in user behavior: participants often act as if the interpreter can see and hear everything, unaware of the limitations imposed by the technological medium (Hansen, 2020). This mismatch of expectations can lead to delays in interpretation, missed cues, and ultimately a breakdown in communicative trust. Telephone interpreting, while logistically convenient, presents an even more constrained environment. In TMI, interpreters must rely solely on auditory input, making it difficult to assess participants' affect, monitor reactions or adapt speech

delivery to the client's needs. While this modality is often used in emergency services or for rare languages due to its speed and simplicity, it places an immense cognitive burden on interpreters who must decipher meaning, manage turn-taking and maintain situational awareness without any visual reference. In emotionally charged or high-stakes situations – such as mental health assessments or child protection interviews – these limitations can have serious implications for accuracy, empathy and trust.

Despite these challenges, the perception of remote interpreting is not universally negative. Corpas Pastor and Gaber (2020) report that many public service interpreters view remote interpreting positively, particularly in terms of its convenience, increased accessibility, and flexibility in managing workloads. These benefits are particularly appreciated in multilingual societies and geographically dispersed regions, where face-to-face provision may be impractical or unsustainable. However, the same study shows that stress – both psychological and physical – is the most commonly reported disadvantage. According to Corpas Pastor and Gaber (2020, 60), interpreters describe symptoms such as mental fatigue, eye strain, muscular tension and frustration – conditions indicative of prolonged cognitive overload and ergonomic strain. Interestingly, interpreters' perceptions of stress vary according to the modality. While TMI is the most widely used, it is also the most controversial. Its lack of visual richness makes it unsuitable for lengthy or emotionally complex interactions, although it remains effective for short, confidential exchanges. VMI, on the other hand, is seen as the most stressful modality, largely due to its combination of technical volatility and the need for constant self-monitoring. The interpreter must remain visually present and responsive, often in unfamiliar or unpredictable environments, while managing potential disruptions such as delays, interruptions, or unclear visual cues (Corpas Pastor & Gaber, 2020, 72–74).

4 Institutional models and established practices of DRI in PSI

As the previous section has shown, RDI poses significant interactional and psychological challenges that need to be addressed through systemic and practice-based approaches. In this context, identifying and critically reflecting on good practices from established interpreting systems abroad offers valuable insights for shaping policy and institutional frameworks in Slovakia. Several countries have already developed sophisticated models for integrating RI into public service interpreting that balance accessibility and efficiency with the need for interpreter preparation, quality assurance and user satisfaction.

One of the most frequently cited examples of an integrated and institutionally embedded model is Belgium, where RI has been systematically implemented over several decades and is supported by a clear legislative and organizational framework. In the Flemish region, telephone and video interpreting services are centrally

coordinated by the Flemish Interpreter Helpline (Vlaamse Tolkentelefoon), which operates under the auspices of the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering). This public agency manages the provision of social interpreting (sociaal tolken), whereby certified professional interpreters provide oral translation services in a confidential, impartial, and deontologically regulated manner. These interpreters are used exclusively for interactions that fall within the scope of public services or social support. (Macáková, 2020, p. 59).

Telephone interpreting (telefoontolken) is mainly used for short, practical conversations in which one or both parties do not have sufficient knowledge of Dutch or a common contact language. This modality is particularly suitable for urgent or unscheduled interactions and can be used with either local or remote clients. Interpreting is provided via a centralized telephone line, available during working hours, with the option to either pre-book a session via the agency's web portal or request a spontaneous connection during office hours. During the call, interpreters translate in the first person, and professionals are encouraged to address the client directly rather than instructing the interpreter indirectly. This practice enhances clarity and preserves the immediacy of communication. Sessions can last up to 60 minutes and are charged according to a standardized fee structure.[1]

In addition to telephone interpreting, the Belgian system also offers videotolken (video interpreting) via platforms such as Google Meet. This modality is intended for more complex or emotionally sensitive conversations, such as those in legal, medical, or psychosocial contexts. Video interpreting can be scheduled outside normal working hours, including evenings and weekends, making it a viable alternative when on-site interpreting is not feasible. Access to video interpreting requires a prior contractual agreement with the interpreting service, enrollment via webinar training sessions and a technical setup that meets specified criteria. The service is structured to accommodate both individual and institutional use.[2]

A similarly impactful case can be found in the Netherlands, where telephone interpreting has been largely institutionalized through the private provider Tolkentelefoon. With more than 49 years of experience in the field, Tolkentelefoon offers interpreting services in more than 200 languages and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The service is primarily designed to support communication in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and social services. In medical contexts – such as hospitals, GP surgeries, and mental health institutions – interpreters can be reached immediately by calling a specific number. This rapid access ensures that language barriers do not delay or compromise patient care. Similar support is provided

[1] https://integratie-inburgering.be/nl/wat-kunnen-we-voor-jou-doen/ondersteuning-voor-je-organisatie-of-lokaal-bestuur/taal/wil-je-een-beroep-doen-op-een-sociaal-tolk-of-vertaler#telefoontolken

[2] https://www.communicatiewaaier.be/sites/default/files/2023-06/Overzicht_Tolken.pdf

in the education sector, particularly during parent–teacher meetings, where accurate communication between school staff and non-Dutch-speaking parents is essential for the welfare of students. What distinguishes the Dutch model is its operational flexibility combined with national reach. Tolkentelefoon works with more than 300 municipalities across the Netherlands and provides services to various branches of central government, including legal, reintegration and occupational health services. The organization promotes accessibility not only by providing on-demand interpreting but also by allowing institutions to register as clients free of charge, thereby facilitating broad institutional uptake.[3]

A comprehensive system of RDI in PSI is in place in the United Kingdom, where the increasing demand for interpreting services – driven by ongoing migration, globalization, and evolving human rights legislation – has led to a robust integration of RI across the health, legal and local government sectors (Braun, S., 2013; Zhang, W., Davitti, E., & Braun, S., 2024). According to Connell (2021, p. 312), remote interpreting has been particularly effective in ensuring the availability of interpreters for minority languages and languages of lesser diffusion in dispersed geographical areas. Sign language interpreting via video platforms has also seen significant growth. However, the UK experience underlines that effective use of RI requires not only technological readiness but also comprehensive interpreter training and institutional protocols to ensure that ethical and communicative standards are maintained.

A relevant case study comes from Greece, where remote interpreting has been introduced into the operations of the Public Employment Service (PES). Ioannidis and Vlachopoulos (2024) identify several implementation challenges, including unstable internet connectivity, suboptimal audio quality, and elevated interpreter stress. In these contexts, interpreters were often expected to manage communication breakdowns autonomously, revealing the need for training that equips interpreters with technical troubleshooting skills and communication repair strategies. Despite these difficulties, the Greek experience shows that RI can improve access to interpreting services in underserved regions, especially for minority language users. This suggests that training and support systems must be tailored not only to the interpreters' needs but also to the structural realities of the services in which they operate.

These models illustrate the benefits of a highly structured and publicly managed approach to RI. It is characterized by professionalized recruitment of interpreters, strict adherence to confidentiality and ethical standards, clear procedural protocols, and user training to ensure effective interaction. Importantly, the system accommodates both scheduled and emergency needs, providing flexibility while maintaining quality control.

[3] https://www.globaltalk.nl/dienst/tolkentelefoon/

5 Developing Competence and Readiness for Remote Dialogue Interpreting in PSI

Building on the institutional models discussed in the previous section, it is clear that the sustainability of RDI in PSI is not only a matter of system design or accessibility, but also of human preparedness. The implementation of even the most sophisticated infrastructure and policy frameworks can falter if interpreters, service providers, and users are not adequately equipped to cope with the specific interactional, cognitive, and technological demands of remote environments. Interpreter training must therefore be seen as a structural pillar of any RDI system.

One of the key findings from the literature is that traditional interpreter training often fails to prepare students for the unique opportunities and constraints of RDI. As Hlavac (2013) argues, training models have long been shaped by the norms of face-to-face interaction, leaving future interpreters unprepared for challenges such as delayed audiovisual feedback, loss of embodied cues, and platform-specific technical failures. Without targeted instruction, interpreters may lack the skills to manage turn-taking without visual feedback, detect repair-relevant cues through auditory means, or to regulate their own stress and cognitive load. In response, several scholars have called for a redesign of interpreter training programs to include remote-specific modules.

Davitti and Braun (2020) argue for the integration of authentic, recorded remote interactions into the classroom to enable students to analyze and reflect on real-world scenarios. Role-based simulation has emerged as a particularly promising training method. As illustrated by Alarcón-García (2023), role-playing can simulate emergency scenarios typical of remote interpreting contexts, such as telephone helplines. This practice allows interpreters to develop reflexive strategies for managing stressful interactions, including real-time decision-making, de-escalation, and ethical judgment under pressure. Role-playing also strengthens communicative resilience - a critical quality for interpreters working in emotionally charged PSI settings such as child protection, mental health or asylum interviews. Such experiential learning promotes not only digital and interactional literacy, but also adaptive decision-making – a key skill in high-stakes or fast-paced public service encounters.

In a controlled study, Braun (2014) showed that interpreters who had undergone structured RDI training were significantly more accurate, fluent, and confident than those who had not. These interpreters also managed interactional elements such as turn-taking and repair sequences more effectively, demonstrating an enhanced ability to cope with the unpredictable and fragmented nature of remote interaction. Trained interpreters also reported lower levels of stress and cognitive overload, highlighting that training plays a protective role for interpreters' well-being – not just for the quality of their performance.

The communicative effectiveness of RDI also depends on how well service providers understand the constraints and expectations of mediated interaction. Leanza et al. (2024) show that even brief training sessions for healthcare professionals significantly improved their ability to work effectively with remote interpreters. The success of these interventions highlights the need for cross-training approaches that involve all participants in the interpreting encounter, not just the interpreters. Mutual awareness of turn-taking protocols, visual access constraints, and communication pacing is essential to ensure a coherent flow of interaction.

6 RI in the PSI settings in Slovakia: Current Practice and Strategic Recommendations

Slovakia presents a context in which fundamental elements of the implementation of RDI in PSI remain largely underdeveloped. Based on our research, including a review of published research on PSI,[4] analysis of institutional websites, input from the Institute of Interpreting, and feedback from participants in community interpreting courses, the use of remote interpreting technologies in Slovak public services appears limited and fragmented. This means that practices vary significantly across institutions, with no unified protocols, training standards, or technological infrastructure in place. This lack of coordination underlines the absence of a coherent national strategy for RI, leading to inconsistencies not only in access and quality but also in professional accountability and user expectations.

At the level of legal institutions, one of the few structured efforts to introduce remote communication has been initiated by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic through the implementation of a videoconferencing module, specifically within the operations of the Legal Aid Centre (Centrum právnej pomoci, CPP). This system enables remote consultations between clients and legal staff, even outside formal court proceedings. However, the functional integration of interpreting services into this digital infrastructure remains marginal. The role of the interpreter is not clearly defined in the associated documentation, nor are there guidelines for ethical behavior, coordination of turns, or quality assurance in remote settings. As a result, the platform serves primarily as a communication channel rather than a fully integrated environment for interpreter-mediated legal interactions. This regulatory and procedural ambiguity puts both legal professionals and interpreters in a precarious position. Without clearly established protocols outlining interpreters' responsibilities, participation rights, and standards for remote engagement, RDI in the Slovak legal context lacks the professional safeguards found in more mature systems abroad. The

[4] https://www.justice.gov.sk/sudy-a-rozhodnutia/zabezpecenie-vzdialenej-video-komunikacie-ucastnikov-konania/

absence of such frameworks also complicates efforts to train interpreters, who must rely on ad hoc methods rather than standardized curricula tied to national guidelines.[5]

Another persistent barrier, as reported by our respondents, is the digital literacy of end users. While digital infrastructure has become more accessible, many interpreters, clients, and even institutional professionals continue to struggle with basic technological operations. This digital literacy gap directly undermines the effectiveness of remote interpreting, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as asylum interviews, legal consultations, or medical assessments. When participants are unable to confidently use communication platforms, interactions suffer from delays, miscommunication or outright breakdown – regardless of the interpreter's skills. The lack of systematic training and evaluation exacerbates the problem. Interpreters working in Slovak PSI settings – especially in migration and asylum-related contexts - often have limited access to targeted professional development in remote interpreting. As Fraňo (2023) notes, the lack of qualified interpreters for less widely spoken languages often leads to the use of unaccredited individuals, raising concerns about procedural fairness and quality of service. While RI could help alleviate geographical and linguistic limitations by broadening the pool of available interpreters, its implementation needs to be supported by a robust legal and technical framework. Without such support, the risk of compromising the integrity of sensitive proceedings increases. The limited use of RI in Slovakia's broader PSI landscape also reflects the lack of institutional incentives or mandates for digital transformation. In contrast to countries where RI is supported by legislation, coordinated infrastructure, and funding mechanisms, Slovak institutions often approach RI as a stopgap solution rather than a long-term strategy. This results in uneven service provision, with some organizations experimenting with video or telephone interpreting, while others continue to rely entirely on face-to-face interpreting or bilingual staff with no formal training.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests the potential for positive change. Our respondents reported occasional use of AI and machine translation to bridge language gaps in social services and community interpreting, particularly in areas such as asylum, integration, and employment support. Nevertheless, these practices remain largely project-based, unsystematic, and unsustainable.

As Birčák (2023) notes, the increasing hybridity of interpreting roles, particularly in remote or semi-remote settings, requires both practitioners and institutions to adapt to mixed modes of communication. This shift demands not only new skills on the part of interpreters, but also institutional flexibility, investment in digital tools, and openness to cross-sectoral collaboration. One key obstacle to broader implementation is data security. State institutions cannot afford to use unsecured communication

[5] https://obcan.justice.sk/documents/20229/0/Pouzivatelska_prirucka_RESS_IS_videokonferencie.pdf/ed6ab1ba-83f3-40c6-a385-34cefa25f455

channels in sensitive domains such as asylum, healthcare, and legal settings. This significantly limits the adoption of new technologies, as their deployment would require secure, certified platforms similar to those already in use in the judicial sector.

Building on the discussed insights from institutional practices, it is clear that successful and sustainable implementation of RDI in PSI requires not only skilled practitioners but also systemic and policy-level conditions. Training alone, while necessary, is insufficient without the structural, regulatory, and technological frameworks that enable interpreters to apply their skills consistently and effectively across service areas. First and foremost, the examples of Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Greece illustrate that *institutional coordination* is a key factor in embedding RDI in PSI. These systems differ in their organizational models – ranging from publicly managed frameworks to public-private collaborations – but share certain core features: centralized management of interpreters, quality assurance mechanisms and a single interface for service users. Centralization not only improves efficiency and the allocation of interpreters, but also enables standardization in terms of ethical practice, pricing, data security, and reporting structures.

Equally important is the existence of *regulatory frameworks* that define the scope of interpreter-mediated communication within public services. For example, Belgium's approach to sociaal tolken explicitly limits interpreting services to institutional contexts, thereby ensuring that professional interpreting remains aligned with the public interest and welfare. These boundaries help protect the role of interpreters from informal substitution and clarify institutional responsibilities. In countries where such regulations are absent or ambiguous, the risk of inconsistent service provision and role confusion increases significantly.

Another critical structural element is the *technological infrastructure*. As Ioannidis and Vlachopoulos (2024) show, inadequate digital tools and unstable internet connections can severely hamper the delivery of remote interpreting, even when interpreters are well trained. Therefore, investment in infrastructure must go hand in hand with the training of interpreters. This includes secure and user-friendly interpreting platforms, support hotlines, and IT support. Institutions also need to ensure that their staff have the digital literacy skills to operate these systems smoothly.

In addition to technical and legal provisions, the integration of RDI into PSI requires mechanisms for the *recruitment and continuous professional development* of interpreters. Interpreter pools need to be diversified to include a wide range of languages, including lesser-used ones, while at the same time maintaining strict standards for admission – such as language certificates, prior experience, and background checks for work in sensitive areas (e.g., asylum, mental health, legal proceedings). As seen in the Netherlands and the UK, such systems are more resilient when recruitment is coupled

with access to flexible, ongoing professional development that allows interpreters to adapt to evolving technological and interactional demands.

An often overlooked but essential condition for sustainable implementation is *systematic evaluation*. Secured systems could consistently monitor interpreter performance, client satisfaction, or interaction outcomes in remote contexts in order to improve service quality and support interpreter development. In addition, secure recording of remote sessions, with informed consent, should be made possible for the purposes of feedback, evaluation, and targeted training. Such recordings can be used to identify both strong and weak aspects of interpreter performance, and subsequently inform the design of condensed, practical training modules focused on recurring challenges in real-life practice. These data are essential for evidence-based policymaking and service improvement. Furthermore, involving interpreters in the evaluation process – through debriefings, peer exchange forums, or anonymous reporting mechanisms – can help identify and address issues that would otherwise remain invisible.

In smaller countries such as Slovakia, where resources and institutional capacity may be more limited, the implementation of remote interpreting systems must be approached gradually and pragmatically. A promising strategy lies in the development of communities of practice, which can emerge through local initiatives such as community centers, NGO-led services, or municipal integration programs. Sharing knowledge, best practices, and locally relevant information within these networks can help build a more cohesive and adaptive ecosystem for remote interpreting. Importantly, the implementation of remote interpreting would make it possible to provide interpreting services across the entire country, including in regions with limited access to trained professionals, without requiring the physical presence of the interpreter. This can significantly reduce logistical barriers, particularly for urgent or short-term interpreting needs in rural or remote areas.

7 Conclusion

While remote interpreting holds great potential for improving accessibility and coverage of PSI in Slovakia, the shift from embodied, multimodal interaction to a technologically mediated form of communication demands a reconceptualization of interpreter training and interactional norms. The evidence presented by De Boe (2020) suggests that remote interpreting is not simply a logistical change, but a transformation that alters the very fabric of interpreter-mediated communication. If the Slovak public service sector is to embrace remote interpreting, it must do so with a clear understanding of these interactional complexities and a commitment to mitigating their effects. The Slovak context stands to benefit from international models and

practices, but not through direct replication. Rather, lessons should be adapted to reflect the specific legal, linguistic, and infrastructural conditions in Slovakia.

Although some initial initiatives exist, remote interpreting has not yet been systematically incorporated into interpreter training for public service settings. Previous efforts have been largely ad hoc, short-term, and project-based, often lacking sustainable funding and curricular integration. We argue that both PSI and RI in PSI settings must become an integral part of university-level interpreter education. This requires not only curriculum change but also increased awareness and training opportunities for interpreters, many of whom currently lack information and guidance on how to effectively use interpreting technologies and perform in remote settings.

Key steps may include:

- developing national guidelines for remote interpreting in public services;
- establishing pilot projects in high-demand sectors (e.g., legal aid, asylum services, emergency healthcare);
- designing interpreter and provider training programs that reflect local realities;
- ensuring that interpreting technology is integrated with existing digital platforms used by public institutions.

These measures must be embedded within a broader policy commitment to language access and communication equity in public services. Without such commitment, remote interpreting risks being treated as a temporary fix rather than a durable component of a modern, inclusive PSI system. By combining technological readiness with interactional awareness and proactive interpreter conduct, the public service sector can ensure that remote interpreting becomes not a barrier but a bridge toward inclusive, equitable communication for all service users. In addition to training, simple informational brochures and user guides – similar to those developed in Belgium – could help bridge the knowledge gap. However, this would require more in-depth research and engagement with relevant institutions.

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