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Interaction of Foreign-Speaking Persons with the Public Services: Community Interpreting in Slovenia

The article presents a pilot study as part of on-going research on community interpreting. It investigates the interaction of foreign-speaking persons with officials in public service administration by exploring the settings, the participants and the characteristics of these situations through empirical survey research. Despite fair language skills, immigrants and officials often encounter difficulties in mutual understanding, whereas an impromptu interpreter may either mistakenly take control over the conversation or empower clients to exercise their rights. Above all, results show that different steps should be taken to enhance successful interlingual interaction and that employing trained interpreters for facilitating communication in the public services should become standard in order to enable equal opportunities for all, regardless of immigrant background.

Keywords: interlingual interaction, community interpreting, Slovenia, communication, public services, immigrants, officials.

Sporazumevanje tujgovorečih oseb v postopkih pred državnimi organi in javnimi službami: tolmačenje za skupnost v Sloveniji

Članek predstavlja pilotno študijo, ki je del raziskovanja tolmačenja za skupnost. Predmet empirične raziskave je sporazumevanje med tujgovorečimi osebami in uradniki v državnih organih in javnih službah. Kljub ustreznemu jezikovnemu znanju se migranti in uradne osebe pogosto srečujejo s težavami v medsebojnem sporazumevanju, pri čemer priložnostni tolmač lahko ali zmotno prevzame nadzor nad pogovorom ali pa opolnomoči stranko, da uveljavi svoje pravice. K boljšim možnostim za uspešno medjezikovno sporazumevanje lahko pripomorejo različni ukrepi, sodelovanje s šolanimi tolmači v javnih službah pa bi moralo postati standard, ki bi omogočil enake možnosti vsem, tudi priseljencem.

Ključne besede: medjezikovno sporazumevanje, tolmačenje za skupnost, Slovenija, komunikacija, javne službe, priseljenec, uradna oseba.

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1. Introduction

Globalisation and increased migration flows make immigrants a fact of today's world; everyday interaction across languages is more visible than ever and the situation in Slovenia is no different. The consequence is more frequent interlingual contacts in the public services, and this, too, is finally receiving more attention. As a means to the equal treatment of all, community interpreting and translation represent a reference point in the level of democracy by safeguarding linguistic human rights of the weakest members of society (Gorjanc 2010, 141).

The article presents a pilot study as a part of on-going PhD research and looks at immigrants' experiences with officials in public service administration in Slovenia from the point of view of community interpreting.

2. Methodology and the Research Question

Rather than setting up a hypothesis, the article poses a research question as a starting point for the exploration of interlingual communication and interpreter-mediated interaction in the contacts of foreign-speaking persons in Slovenia – predominantly immigrants who do not yet understand or speak Slovenian – with public services and their officials. The focus is on general and social service administrative offices as the least regulated fields, which at the same time encounter a high number of foreign-speaking clients. The objective is to look at the settings, the participants and the characteristics of these situations, and to finish by considering the potential consequences.

Discussion and analysis of that part of the broader research presented here primarily draw on empirical research in the form of a survey with (online) questionnaires, while the mixed methods approach (Hale & Napier, forth coming), which is employed otherwise, is here only applied complementarily.

The pilot study survey was conducted in a non-probabilistic sampling method (*ibid.*) using both snowball and especially opportunity sampling, whereby invitations were sent to groups having an expected high proportion of immigrants. Asylum seekers were not included in the sample, since while they have this status they are officially granted an interpreter, even outside their Asylum centres when it is needed. The results are, as expected, more subjective than with probability sampling; however, since the study is qualitative, the respondents' representativeness is not of the highest importance. Bilingual Slovenian-English questionnaires were mostly filled in using the online survey tool *1ka – EnKlik Anketa*¹ and also on paper, from autumn 2012 to spring 2013. In total, 128 respondents adequately filled in the questionnaire, but as not all questionnaires are complete, the proportion of valid answers is calculated for analysis.

To gain another perspective on these situations, a separate pilot survey was aimed at the views of the officials involved: online questionnaires were sent to

administrative offices and social work centres across Slovenia to gain feedback about language in these situations. These two settings were chosen as being less regulated and more likely to deal with a wide immigrant population. In addition, a higher reply rate was expected than, e.g., the response in health care, which was the subject of a previous study (Morel 2009), or in the police, where information is given by the central public relations office, distancing it from the practical issues of direct language contact. Also, results for Slovenia are expected to be analogous to Pöchhacker's study (1997) for Austria, in that the need for mediated communication in the general public services and health care is predominantly met informally by ad-hoc interpreting (Pöchhacker 1997, 222), while further studies in Slovenia will still be welcome to complement the data collected here for other domains. So far, the leaders or human resources managers of 48 offices adequately responded by filling in the data for their entire teams with regard to foreign language knowledge, meeting foreigners and encountering interlingual interaction in their public service offices.

3. Foreigners in Slovenia

On the surface, Slovenia has traditionally been a fairly homogenous country from a linguistic point of view: the last detailed data on mother tongue from the Population and Household Census in 2002 reported 87.75 per cent Slovenian mother tongue speakers and a total of 8.06 per cent native speakers of languages from other former republics of Yugoslavia (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2002, cf. Vertot 2009, 57).

Immigrants from former Yugoslav republics, who have been important economic migrants since the 1970s, still embody a high proportion of the 11.1 per cent of immigrants (Dolenc & Šter 2011) – inhabitants with their first domicile abroad – but so far they have not meant major communicative issues, due to the mutual history (Gorjanc & Morel 2012, 53–54)². The number of other foreigners in Slovenia has however risen increasingly after both Slovenia's entry into the European Union and the 2007 enlargement; and, despite a considerable numerical decline caused by the economic crisis, the net migration of foreigners in Slovenia is persistently positive. After two years' stagnation, the share of foreigners has risen again – to 4.4 per cent (Razpotnik 2013).

Nowadays immigrants come, frequently as asylum seekers, from very diverse and previously unfamiliar linguistic environments, and this only worsens potential difficulties in the facilitation of successful communication in the public sphere. Theoretically, this is where community or public service interpreting come into the picture, to enable the comprehension process.

In this article, community interpreting is understood in the general and broad sense as discussed by Pöchhacker (1999), meaning "interpreting in the institutional settings of a given society in which public service providers and individual clients

do not speak the same language” (Pöchhacker 1999, 126), whereby the “intra-social language contact settings are limited neither to particular institutions nor to particular language or cultural groups” (Pöchhacker 1999, 127).

4. The Legal Background and the Provision of Community Interpreting

The right to use one’s own language in front of state officials and in public services in Slovenia is by the Article 62 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia a constitutional right, and is also written in the Article 62 of the General Administrative Procedure Act.

The target group with the most comprehensively applied interpreting regulations in Slovenia is the deaf, namely through the Act on the Use of Slovene Sign Language, but as a field of its own with specific practical aspects, sign language interpreting is exempt from our research.

In Scandinavian countries the provisions for interpreting in administrative and other settings are more detailed and advanced: interpreting services are understood as part of the integration process in Finland, where they cover all basic needs (Pöllabauer 2008, 4); and immigrants in Sweden are entitled to interpreting services, which are mostly paid for by society (Niska 2004, 8). The situation is different in Slovenia, which follows a legalistic attitude to interpreting, according to Ozolins (2010). As in most European countries, it is only for specific fields, such as court interpreting (Pöllabauer 2008, 3), and particularly vulnerable groups, such as asylum seekers, that linguistic rights are explicitly regulated in the relevant acts (e.g. Criminal Procedure Act, Minor Offences Act, Courts Act, International Protection Act; cf. Kocijančič-Pokorn et al. 2009).

The Patient Rights Act ignores the issue completely, even though successful communication presents a basis for the doctors’ ability to exercise their explanatory duty, meaning that interpreting should be perceived as key to satisfactorily treating a foreign-speaking patient. Other than this, interpreting in healthcare and public services is insufficiently regulated, and only by the aforementioned General Administrative Procedure Act, which in its Article 62 vaguely states that a person has the right to follow the course of the procedure through an interpreter if they do not speak the language of that procedure, whereby the administrative body is obliged to instruct such persons of this possibility in a language the party understands. The administration of costs depends on the interest in the procedure: the authorities do not pay for procedures on a client’s demand but only for those in the public interest (Upravna posvetovalnica 2012), although this may be debatable as mutual understanding and hence interpreting is requisite for officials to perform their duty (Wadensjö 1998, 13), and this places it also in the public’s interest.

Taking into account all of the above, the right to interpreting can and should be applied on the principle of subsidiarity: the absence of a specific law (so-called *lex specialis*) suggests that the most general law, i.e. the General Administrative Procedure Act, applies, and any foreign-speaking person in Slovenia has a legal right to follow the administrative procedure through an interpreter (Morel 2009, 35).

Exact comparison to other European countries with respect to community interpreting provisions is problematic, as “many countries rely on ad-hoc solutions” and there is “a lack of complete and exhaustive data” (Pöllabauer 2008, 6.). The question whether and how this legal ground is translated into practice in Slovenia is precisely what we try to ascertain in this article.

5. Public Services – The Settings of Interlingual Communication

Interlingual interaction in the public sector in Slovenia has become the subject of academic interest fairly recently, originating mainly with integration (Medvešek & Bešter 2010; Medica et al. 2010), linguistics (Gorjanc 2010) and increasingly in interpreting studies (Gorjanc 2013; Kocijančič-Pokorn et al. 2009; Morel et al. 2012), but research is now steadily increasing. On the other hand the use of minority languages in ethnically mixed areas has a longer tradition and has received more attention but is not part of the present research.

In this respect Kejzar and Medved (2010), from the viewpoint of integration studies, focus through interviews on immigrant rights and their contacts with state administration and institution officials, and this is also the interest of Balazic Bulc and Požgaj Hadži (2013), using questionnaires to analyse, especially, the communication issues of migrants from South Slavic areas in a predetermined set of public service environments.

Our pilot study, on the contrary, has not strictly limited recounting experiences in interlingual interaction to specific situations, but has presupposed a certain logic in the occurrence of such contacts. As understood above, only legal settings regulate interpreting by not only foreseeing it, but requiring it in the procedures, thus making the arrangement of interlingual interaction in court and the police of lesser interest in this article. Also, legal interpreting and translation has been a subject of additional regulation with the Directive 2010/64/EU on the Right to Interpretation and Translation in Criminal Proceedings, obliging EU Member States to implement minimum standards.

Any immigrant to Slovenia will sooner or later pay a visit to an administrative unit: to apply for a residence permit, to arrange health insurance at the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia, to be entered in the tax register at the tax office administrative unit, and also, perhaps, to apply for financial assistance at a social work centre. Those still in the education process will deal with a school

or university enrolment office; the unemployed may come in contact with the Employment Service of Slovenia; any accidents or criminal offences will result in meeting the police and/or the courts; while contact with the health services depends on an individual's health, but eventually does mean finding a general physician in a community health centre, and even entering into hospital care or going to a medical clinic for people without health insurance. The practical implementation of these situations was questioned in our pilot study.

Results confirm the above-mentioned propositions. Multiple answers were possible. Only 9 per cent of respondents claim not to have had any contact with the public services as others arranged everything for them. The majority, 80 per cent, encountered the city administrative unit (e.g. Tobačna Ljubljana), 62 per cent visited a doctor, a community health centre or a hospital, 50 per cent went to the Tax Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, 47 per cent visited an education institution and 38 per cent the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia; for more details, see Table 1. Besides these most basic and common contact points, open answers include other potential encounter settings, mainly in the private sector, such as banks, phone companies, etc. These are excluded from this research as we can imagine that their commercial nature influences their willingness to overcome linguistic barriers as an example of positive discrimination.

Table 1: Immigrants' encounters with the public services (multiple answers possible).

None. Others arranged everything and the immigrant was not present.	9 %
City Administrative Unit (e.g. Tobačna, Ljubljana)	80 %
Doctor's; Community Health Centre; hospital	62 %
Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia	38 %
Employment Service of Slovenia	17 %
Information Point for Foreigners	9 %
Tax Administration of the Republic of Slovenia	50 %
Court	2 %
Police	23 %
Education institution (school or university)	47 %
Other:	24 %
- Bank	7 %

6. Participants in Interlingual Interaction in the Public Services

Over and above the common casual complaints about complicated procedures, endless paperwork, long delays or unfriendly officials, language may present a major obstacle for fulfilling an errand in the public services: interlingual contact adds a new dimension to the everyday social communication, especially when a

third person, e.g. an interpreter, is present for its facilitation (Wadensjö 1998). Considering that participants in these situations in the public services are officials and immigrants, sometimes accompanied by a relative or friend, let us look at what they bring to the communication process.

6.1 Public Service Officials

Previous research reports public servants as ignorant to foreigners' difficulties with the Slovenian language, as possessing overly limited foreign language skills and as finding excuses in the fact that Slovenian is the official language in Slovenia (Kejžar & Medved 2010, 101ff.). Presumably, all this will reduce opportunities for a possibly even partly successful communicative interchange to achieve the administrative goal.

Representatives of the public services agree that non-Slovenian-speaking clients are, quite frequently or at least sometimes, present: 38 per cent have daily and 13 per cent weekly experiences with them (see Table 2).

Table 2: Public servants' report on the frequency of clients with communicative difficulties in Slovenian.

Every day	38 %
At least once a week	13 %
At least once a month	20 %
A couple of times a year, very rarely	29 %

To what extent, then, can officials really communicate in foreign languages? The results are only estimates by the heads of departments, but nevertheless they show that there remains a high number of persons speaking at least elementary Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian, and that there are still people who do not speak or understand English.

These items of information correlate with a question for migrants, namely which language the public official spoke in order to help facilitate communication. Although 67 per cent of officials were reported to have spoken only Slovenian, they also used English (50 per cent), one of the South Slavic languages to help out (Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian – 10 per cent) or another language (3 per cent).

6.2 Immigrants and Their Linguistic Helpers

Respondents originate in a great variety of countries, where only a few language groups can be said to stand out, e.g. English (17 per cent), Macedonian (12 per cent) and three former-Yugoslavian languages: Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian with joint 11 per cent. Nonetheless, almost all respondents stated they can communicate in English (97 per cent); other frequently mentioned foreign

languages were French, German and Croatian (27 per cent each), Serbian (23 per cent), Spanish (19 per cent), Bosnian (18 per cent), Macedonian, Italian (14 per cent each), and Russian (13 per cent).

Despite their presumably broad language knowledge, immigrants usually arrive in Slovenia without understanding and speaking much Slovenian, verifying the results of Balažic Bulc and Požgaj Hadži (2013, 192): 74 per cent feel that they did not understand anything, 19 per cent said they had basic language skills, while only 7 per cent thought that they were at either intermediate or advanced level. Incidentally, their language skills do increase with time: only 17 per cent report remaining a complete beginner, 31 per cent claims to possess basic, 32 per cent intermediate and 19 per cent advanced language skills. Turning our attention back to those who have just arrived, 52 per cent went on an errand to a public office alone (*cf.* Balažic Bulc & Požgaj Hadži 2013, 192) and the other 48 per cent had assistance (see Table 3).

Table 3: Immigrants' report on assistance when running errands at public services.

None – went alone.	52 %
Slovenian native-speaking relative/friend.	37 %
Foreign-speaking relative/friend who speaks Slovenian better.	8 %
Foreign-speaking relative/friend who speaks English/another language better.	1,5 %
Interpreter/translator.	0 %
Interpreter/translator assigned at the public service office.	1,5 %

We can explain their seeking help (or not doing so) by realising that in administrative procedures, at the client's demand and their own interest, it is they who decide and pay for interpreting, unless the procedure is in the public interest. Customarily, as already shown in previously-mentioned data, relatives and friends are recruited for this purpose, but sometimes also volunteers from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who offer individuals, mainly refugees, psychosocial aid and assist them with integration into society.

Only 19 per cent of respondents reported having used an interpreter, yet their replies as to who that interpreter was show that many people do not differentiate a professional interpreter from an amateur one, since also relatives, friends and colleagues from work were mentioned as interpreters.

7. Interlingual Interaction in Practice

So how do participants' characteristics affect the communication process and how successful is it in the end? Of those immigrants who freely spoke about their individual experiences, 20 per cent were positive about officials' helpfulness and felt that their English was sufficient, whereas 43 per cent reported that public

servants did not speak English sufficiently and showed a negative attitude even to foreigners who tried to speak Slovenian (6 per cent). Information is most commonly missing, due to information being scattered or taken for granted.

Despite what has already been written about language skills, leading officials claimed that language never represented an insurmountable problem and did not necessitate a repeated meeting. Yet 5 per cent of responding immigrants replied that language got in the way of a successful outcome, meaning that they could not make any arrangements and had to have another appointment. The majority of officials and immigrants, however, believe that goodwill can overcome these obstacles, whereas the rest think that language does not affect the situation that much (see Table 4).

Table 4: Perception of success in interlingual communication in the public services.

	Officials	Immigrants
Without any problems, the meeting was successful.	35 %	36 %
Language was a bit of barrier, but good will helped to solve all problems.	65 %	57 %
Language was too big a problem; the client could not make any arrangements and had to come again.	0 %	5 %
Other	0 %	2 %

The importance of goodwill has already been discussed (see Kocijančič-Pokorn et al. 2009, 177) and it recurs in some of immigrants' responses, as here:

It would help if staff didn't try to send you away or seek assistance without first trying very hard to understand what you were asking for (Immigrant comment 1).

On rare occasions, however, communication with Slovenians proved to be quite a challenge, but in my opinion, this is mostly related to lack of kindness or goodwill (Immigrant comment 2).

This is particularly important when communication has to involve two languages without an (ad-hoc) interpreter. It is the stronger participant, namely the official as the holder of the social power (Garber 2000, 16), who decides how interaction will develop and on whose goodwill it all depends. Sometimes, officials call for a more or less abrupt end of the interaction, as Pajnik (2010, 32) reports a doctor who demanded that a patient learn Slovenian before ever returning (which is especially problematic in healthcare as it questions the ethics of the doctor's profession); or an official is simply unable to speak a foreign language, as here:

In the [hospital] I asked at the information desk for directions and the response I received was "I don't speak English" and then the person turned away. I also had the same experience in the [administrative office], I was trying to complete my residency papers and the worker refused to deal with me as I didn't speak Slovenian. I had to go back with a friend to translate (Immigrant comment 3).

However, even the opposite situation may cause the same effect: a beginner in Slovenian may try their best to communicate in Slovenian but quickly encounters impatience and intolerance:

I've had some experience of trying to communicate in basic Slovenian by myself. / ... / This I found virtually impossible. In one telephone conversation the person in question hung up the phone while I was mid-sentence, asking them (in Slovenian) to please repeat what they said but slowly so I would understand better (Immigrant comment 4).

At the administrative unit I spoke Slovenian, the problem was that the official did not want to speak slowly and clearly in her own language. Communication at the administrative unit / ... / was very difficult especially because of the negative attitude of officials to foreigners. I have spoken Slovenian there from the start, but I fear every visit nevertheless (Immigrant comment 5; translation AM.).

The officials' responses regarding using other languages, on the contrary, vary somewhat, but in general they feel that while Slovenian is the official language, using foreign languages represents a non-standard procedure and is mostly used to give basic information; after which they require the presence of an interpreter.

Communication in a foreign language is first and foremost the goodwill of the public servant, when they possess more than enough foreign language skills in the profession or field of their expertise (Official comment 1; translation AM).

The official language is Slovenian. At the Department for Foreigners (and the Register Office), the legal wording on official language use regularly needs to be bypassed. If we dismiss a client for not understanding their language and telling them to come with an interpreter next time, we are instantly labelled as heartless. Officials' language skills are simply so-called added value, while it is not appreciated (i.e., paid for) by the superiors (Official comment 2; translation AM).

However, as explained above, it is the official's legal duty to inform the party of their right to use an interpreter, and to do this in a language that the party understands. Accordingly, speaking a foreign language cannot be regarded as simply "added value."

Let us finally look at the implications of interaction with unequal language knowledge. Immigrants as well as officials report uncertainty in mutual understanding:

We've been twice to handle registering addresses and both times, the official who helped didn't speak any English (this is quite funny because this is supposed to be the section that handles foreigners!). Even though we managed to achieve what was needed, it was difficult not knowing exactly what the official was saying, especially since this was quite an important part of the residence process (Immigrant comment 6).

At the administrative unit, we could get by with poor Slovenian/English, but we were unsure if we got the "correct" answer (Immigrant comment 7).

To some extent, this can be at least partly prevented if immigrants receive help from friends or colleagues with similar experiences, i.e., help to learn about the administrative requirements facing them, enabling them to act more efficiently:

Before going to any of these institutions I asked my native Slovenian colleagues what I would have to do there and what to expect (Immigrant comment 8).

You need to know exactly what questions to ask, in what order, and then like magic, the doors open wide and you can finally complete your errand (Immigrant comment 9).

At the same time, giving important legal instructions to persons who barely understand Slovenian (*cf.* Kejžar & Medved 2010, 103) or allowing children to act as interpreters presents difficulties for public servants as well:

When filing applications or when a client wants information, children often act as interpreters, since they have a much better command of Slovenian. But there is always a question as to whether they understood the matter correctly (Official comment 3; translation AM).

The last example is already one of the issues of using impromptu interpreters. As they are not aware of playing multiple roles (of a caring relative and a neutral interpreter), a serious risk exists of their overseeing the actual client and taking over the conversation (*cf.* Kejžar & Medved 2010, 100):

Even if you want to try to speak or understand, they just want to speak Slovenian so they all the time ask my girlfriend instead of trying to speak with me, even if I was able to understand (Immigrant comment 10).

Similarly, one of the interviewed immigrants reported feeling left out when taking her husband along to arrange papers, since public servants would only talk to him, a Slovenian native speaker. Conversely, NGO employees, who offer aid in administrative matters especially to refugees in the immigration process, report that linguistic assistance minimises officials' negative attitudes by making them aware of everyone's rights and obligations. Enabling interaction in this way is, in fact, also the purpose of community interpreting: to empower the weaker members in the conversation by allowing them to fully exercise their rights.

8. Conclusion, or: How to Enhance Successful Interlingual Interaction in the Public Services

To sum up: Increased migration draws questions of multicultural and multilingual societies closer to Slovenia, and with it the issues of interlingual interaction in the public services. Throughout the public services, officials meet immigrants and their linguistic helpers in interlingual contact, trying to arrange matters (whereby these attempts have no particular consequences on the procedure). However, according to our survey, the majority of foreign-speaking clients in the public

services feel disadvantaged, receiving unequal treatment due to their limited knowledge of Slovenian. They perceive that even access to basic information about the necessary procedures regarding, e.g., paper work in the public services, is highly restricted for foreign-speaking persons and difficult to grasp; thus the administration process is slowed down, and they are compelled to ask ad-hoc interpreters for assistance; this makes them even more vulnerable. Public servants, on the other hand, argue that their knowledge of foreign languages is not considered as part of their job qualification, which means that using it presents added value to their work.

In response to the issues presented above and with the number of such encounters rising, measures should be considered at the state-level and with long-term vision; already now, however, interim solutions should be discussed. Even though our study only focuses on selected fields of the public services where interlingual communication takes place, its practical application to the enhancement of successful communication between foreign-speaking persons and public servants can be generalised and expanded to all potential settings of this type of interaction, including the legal environment, health care, employment services, etc. If we admit that the ideal answer to the demands of the market is to systematically build up the rudiments of community interpreting – if not yet its complete professionalization –, the variety of situations in need of interpreting means that “it is practically unavoidable that ‘natural interpreting’ by family members or friends will persist at least in a number of less formal circumstances” (Pöchhacker 1999, 135). Nevertheless, single steps can be proposed to support client-oriented public services.

Initial information about administrative procedures in the public services for foreign-speaking persons can be improved. Additional research will be necessary to find out why the existing information does not suffice; such research may be carried out both online and using printed sources, as prepared by the Info Point for Foreigners³ in form of different leaflets in various languages. A possible explanation may be the problems involved in their distribution and elimination.

As explained above, the official has to inform the party of their right to use an interpreter in a language that the party understands. Consequently, the need for public servants to speak foreign languages should not only be acknowledged, but also required and continuous language learning appropriately stimulated. As Bešter (2003, 84) points out, integration is, or should always be, a reciprocal process, involving adaptation both on the part of immigrants as well as on the part of the majority. In this respect, public servants should be specially trained for interlingual communication as the users of interpreters. In this way, they will not only understand interpreters’ work better, but also understand the nature of each situation and be thus able to react suitably.

This can best be performed by interdisciplinary cooperation, as is for example pointed out by Corsellis (2006), to connect researchers, trainers and practitioners.

Let us just mention two best-practice examples in this area, both of which come from the field of interpreting studies research.

First: Perez and Wilson (2011) of Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, cooperated with the Scottish Police in reciprocal training, on the one hand offering practice in interpreting to students, and on the other hand providing the police officers with knowledge about the nature of, and raising their awareness about, the participants' roles in interpreter-mediated interaction.

Second: a government project in Norway (Radanović Felberg 2013, 57) showed that those who used interpreting in the public services expressed the need for more information on using and working with interpreters in everyday situations; this resulted in various ad-hoc training sessions being conducted all over Norway, and also in specific shorter, on-the-job training courses for public officials run by the Oslo and Akershus University College for Applied Sciences. The development project Communication via Interpreter for Public Service Employees enabled the synchronisation of interpreters' and interpreter-users' training, so that their functions would not be contradictory, but result in "a shared understanding of their areas of responsibility", contributing to better job satisfaction for all the parties involved (ibid.).

Regrettably, the Slovenian environment only rarely enables the employment of professional interpreters; many times the circumstances do not allow this, be it for emergency reasons, a lack of funds, or the non-availability of an interpreter for a specific language. In these cases, it is relatives, friends, acquaintances, colleagues or other public servants who enable basic conversation by acting as ad-hoc interpreters. Therefore basic steps should be taken to make things easier: on the officials' side, they should allow clarification questions and with allowance for extra time, while maintaining control over the meeting and giving information. Especially in interaction with untrained interpreters, shorter sentences and checks on understanding with the client are helpful. The ad-hoc interpreter, on the other hand, should be aware that this role requires respecting some simple rules (adapted from the IMIA Medical Interpreting Standards of Practice⁴): to translate everything to everyone concerned without filtering any information; to try to be as neutral as possible to both the client and the official; to say if certain words are not understandable, and especially when they are crucial for the procedure – in which case it is better to check together online, etc., rather than using a wrong word; and to keep the content of the meeting confidential for the participants alone. Using ad-hoc interpreters who may be available should however be considered as an emergency strategy only.

Engaging trained interpreters for errands in the public services, i.e., in community interpreting, not only as is already expected in conference and court interpreting, but also, especially, in healthcare, mental health and all other complex professional settings, will allow fair interaction and enable equal possibilities for all in society.

Notes

- ¹ "Ika" is an online tool for designing web surveys, established by Social Informatics at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. For more see website <http://www.ika.si>.
- ² For more on the status of South Slavic languages in Slovenia, see Balažič Bulc & Požgaj Hadži (2013, 187–188).
- ³ Info Point for Foreigners is a part of the project "Promotion of Employability, Education and Social Integration of Migrant Workers and Their Families", run by the Employment Service of Slovenia with the objective to increase job opportunities, enhance their work effort and facilitate entrepreneurship to foreign workers and their family members. Online information is provided in five most commonly used foreign languages. Information for foreigners in different languages is also available on a special website prepared by the Ministry of the Interior at <http://www.infotujci.si>. For more see Employment Service of Slovenia (2008).
- ⁴ For more on these standards see International Medical Interpreters Association (1995).

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