

**Does AI influence perceptions of the
translation and interpreting profession?
Researching the image of translators and
interpreters in society**

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1. Introduction

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The answer to the question posed in the title of this report appears, at first glance, to be affirmative. Artificial intelligence has already begun to shape the translation and interpreting profession some time ago, as it has many other professional fields (Šveda, Djovčoš & Perez, forthcoming). This influence is manifested in the widespread adoption of machine translation systems, computer-assisted translation tools, and speech recognition and synthesis technologies (Ciobanu & Secară 2019, Secară et al. 2025), which have significantly altered established workflows and professional practices. Tasks that were previously performed exclusively by human translators and interpreters are increasingly being automated or partially delegated to AI-driven systems, leading to changes in productivity expectations, pricing models, and required skill sets (Ciobanu 2024; ELIA et al. 2025). At the same time, the growing presence of artificial intelligence has contributed to a redefinition of professional roles, with language professionals increasingly expected to engage in activities such as post-editing, quality assurance, terminology management, and the ethical evaluation of automated outputs. These developments not only affect the practical dimension of translation and interpreting work, but also have broader implications for professional identity, status, and training, as well as – we

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believe – for how the profession is perceived by the public and prospective future translators and interpreters and trainees.

Within the translation and interpreting professional community, such developments raise a number of concerns. One of the most frequently reported sources of anxiety among translators is the perceived threat associated with automation (Moorkens 2020, Sakamoto et al. 2024), which not only affects expectations regarding employability and remuneration but also contributes to shifts in professional self-perception and habitus. These anxieties are further reinforced by public discourses that frequently frame artificial intelligence as a replacement rather than a complement to human expertise (Djovčoš & Perez, forthcoming).

Against this backdrop, it remains uncertain how the general public – particularly prospective students and future clients and service users – perceives the image and the future of the translation and interpreting profession. It is unclear to what extent the public is aware of the social and economic value of translation and interpreting, what images or assumptions they associate with translators and interpreters in the contemporary context, and whether young people continue to view translation and interpreting programmes as an attractive field of study. Relatedly, questions arise as to whether language professionals will continue to be sought after to facilitate communication across cultures, languages, and contexts, and how these evolving perceptions and technological developments shape the professional habitus of translators and interpreters. These questions lie at the centre of the research project The Image of Translators and Interpreters in Society¹.

2. Project background and suggested methodology

Translation market (not only) in Europe has been well researched. Yet, the studies focused mainly on self-image of translators and interpreters reporting chronically low status of the profession (e.g., Selasheffy 2011, 1). The translation profession is extremely fragmented (Djovčoš & Šveda 2021), and in order to qualify as a full-time translator for example in Slovakia, one must be involved in plethora of professional practices reaching from translating specialised texts to audiovisual translation. External factors conditioning translation as a process and translation as a product (Holmes 1987), such as economic models, geopolitical and linguistic situations, political gestures (political interventions in translation), religious disagreements, fragmentation and discontinuity of translation and translators as agents of translation

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(Bednárová 2013), do not tell us much about the 'experienced' and 'perceived' habitus of translators and interpreters. According to Chesterman, the public image of translators consists of such elements as "discourse on translation, representation of translators in literature, customer satisfaction, feedback, rates of pay" (2006, 21).

The position of translators in society and their perception of professional status have been addressed by a range of scholars (Kurz 1991, Pym 2012, Sela-Sheffy 2008, Svahn 2020, Ruokonen & Svahn 2024). These theoretical approaches have subsequently been elaborated and adapted to the Slovak context by Djovčoš and Perez (2021) and Bednárová-Gibová and Majherová (2023). The present research project therefore aims to establish a shared theoretical framework and to adopt an "outside-in" perspective. Within this framework, we propose that the *experienced* and *perceived* habitus of translators and interpreters can be examined from three interrelated perspectives (Hostová et al. 2020, Djovčoš, Hatiarová & Perez, forthcoming):

- the perception of translators and interpreters by society in relation to their professional practices;
- the (self-)perception of translators and interpreters within their professional fields in relation to their practices;
- the perception of society by translators and interpreters.

For the first area we propose investigating the portrayal of translators and interpreters in the media, both historically and in contemporary contexts. Historically, this entails analysing magazines and public responses, while contemporary research should focus on websites and social media, with attention to the frequency and context of references to translators and interpreters in public discussions of translation. To ensure objectivity, contemporary analysis should rely on representative surveys conducted by polling agencies (e.g., in our case poll agency Ipsos), rather than anecdotal or community-internal accounts, as such evidence is currently lacking. A historical perspective is also essential to trace the evolution of translators' and interpreters' public image, particularly in relation to ideological shifts and changes in the country's international orientation (e.g. in our case post-1989). Archival research frameworks for this approach have been outlined in previous studies (Djovčoš et al. 2020, Laš & Djovčoš, 2022).

The second area can be explored through structured interviews and verbal comments provided by translators in questionnaire surveys (e.g., Djovčoš 2012, Djovčoš & Šveda 2017, 2023). Of particular interest is the relationship between translators' perceptions of their own profession and society's attitudes toward it. Crucial insights in our case come from the research by Bednárová-Gibová and Majherová (2021a, 2021b, 2023), who

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examined translators' satisfaction with their work. In the field of literary translation, they highlight a notable disparity between income—approximately half the national average wage—and both the perceived prestige and reported satisfaction with the profession, which remain high. This discrepancy has led to the characterization of translation as a so-called semi-profession, a perspective that invites critical discussion.

The third area can also be explored via structured interviews with translators, focusing on their perception of society as a whole through the prism of their own personal experience. In this area, we are interested in the possible discrepancy between their own perception of themselves, of society, and society's perception of translators/interpreters.

Our project aims to identify and define the components of the translation and interpreting profession and to assess their contribution to the social status of translators and interpreters. By applying rigorous sociological methods, it seeks to address a significant gap in translation sociology in Slovakia.

3. First findings

Using a professional polling agency (Ipsos), we investigated how Slovak society perceives translators and interpreters and what it expects from them, particularly in the context of emerging artificial intelligence. In parallel, a questionnaire distributed to translators and interpreters through Slovak professional associations (SAPT, DoSlov) explored how practitioners perceive themselves and society, taking into account cognitive biases such as the availability heuristic, availability bias, and negativity bias (Pinker 2018, 2021). The conducted research aimed to answer following key questions: What constitutes the social image of translators? How can it be measured objectively? And what is the relationship between society's perception of the profession and translators' self-perception? The answers provide essential insights for taking concrete, evidence-based steps to enhance the status of translators and interpreters and increase their visibility.²

Although there is no single comprehensive methodology for investigating all aspects of the translation and interpreting profession, our studies were designed to allow a degree of comparability across research findings. Based on correlation-comparison analyses, we were able to confirm, challenge, or refine some traditional assumptions about

² These are key questions, especially at a time when the dissemination of misinformation (especially through translations from foreign sources) is contributing to the destabilisation of society and the undermining of the democratic system in Slovakia.

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translators and interpreters in society, many of which had not previously been scientifically substantiated. The findings enabled us to construct a more comprehensive social image of translators and interpreters and to assess whether young people are likely to pursue this profession in the future. This project represents an important step forward in translation sociology in Slovakia and provides valuable insights into the translation and interpreting habitus.

Thus, we decided:

1. To find out how society perceives translators and interpreters (according to the individual components identified in point one) based on research on a representative sample through a survey agency and to correlate the results with demographic indicators and current societal developments;
2. To define, characterize, and classify contexts that improve the visibility and social status of translators and interpreters (e.g., increased visibility of sign language interpreters during a pandemic);
3. To determine how society's perceptions of translators and interpreters have changed over time and in light of changing ideological orientations in society (through archival research, structured interviews and research on contemporary materials - e.g., the archives of the state police);
4. To statistically accurately determine the relationship between the perception of translators within the community and the perception of translators by society;
5. To identify the components that influence the perception of the prestige of the translation and interpreting profession;
6. To identify what society expects of translators and interpreters in the advent of AI and how this changes society's view of the work of translators and interpreters;
7. To find out to what extent the prestige of the profession influences students' motivation to enter translation studies.

Survey conducted by polling agency Ipsos ($n = 1,000$) examined how Slovak society perceives translators and interpreters, focusing on social prestige, gender associations, and expectations for the future of these professions. At this point, the survey indicates several notable findings, which, however, are currently undergoing deeper analysis and interpretation. Preliminary results suggest the following:

- **Social Prestige:** Translators and interpreters are viewed as moderately prestigious professions, ranking below traditional high-prestige occupations such as doctors and lawyers, but above many technical and creative fields. This reflects recognition of professional value, though not at the top of the social hierarchy.

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- **Gender Associations:** Translation is predominantly associated with women, while interpreting is seen as more gender-neutral, indicating the persistence of professional stereotypes.
- **Future Expectations:** Respondents generally expressed optimism about the continued relevance of both professions, while noting potential challenges related to artificial intelligence and technological change.
- **Qualitative Associations:** Open-ended responses revealed that “translator” and “interpreter” evoke meaningful associations with communication, cultural mediation, and professionalism, suggesting that these professions hold a distinct and recognizable social role.

These findings provide an initial, evidence-based overview of public perceptions, serving as a foundation for further analysis and for informing future research, professional policy, and visibility initiatives for translators and interpreters in Slovakia. At the same time, we believe that the proposed methodological design, as well as the potential findings, could inspire replication across multiple countries in order to provide, in the future, a more comprehensive picture of perceptions of our profession.

4. Future steps

Building on the preliminary findings, the next phase of the project will focus on deeper analysis and interpretation of the survey data, integrating both quantitative and qualitative results. This will include examining correlations between social perceptions of translators and interpreters and demographic variables, such as age, education, cultural capital, and regional differences. Additionally, we will explore the impact of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, on public expectations and professional self-perception. The goal is to identify the components that most strongly shape the social prestige of translation and interpreting, as well as to understand how these perceptions evolve in response to societal, technological, and ideological changes.

Simultaneously, the project will expand its methodological scope to include archival research and structured interviews with practitioners. Historical materials, contemporary media, and professional narratives will be analysed to trace changes in the public image of translators and interpreters over time, including shifts following major societal events or technological innovations. Insights from this work will support the development of practical recommendations to enhance the visibility, perceived value, and attractiveness of the profession, particularly among prospective students and young professionals. Together, these steps will provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the translation and interpreting habitus in Slovakia and inform strategies for professional recognition, education, and policy development.

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