

Invisible and unknown agents in Slovak diplomatic interpreting

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Abstract

This study examines diplomatic interpreting and translation in Slovakia with a focus on the actors involved in the translation process and the mechanisms of translation quality control at the highest state level. Drawing on sociologically oriented translation studies and the concept of "unknown agents" (Schäffner 2012), the article situates diplomatic interpreting within its broader political, institutional, and ideological context. The theoretical part outlines the specificities of diplomatic communication, core interpreter competences, issues of translational adequacy, pragmatic shifts, and the systematic invisibility of interpreters in political and media discourse. The empirical part presents partial findings based on document analysis and requests submitted to the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs during the period 2024–2025.

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1. Introduction

Cross-border communication necessarily involves multiple languages, making translation and interpreting essential to political and diplomatic interaction. Despite their central role in multilingual communication, translators and interpreters are frequently rendered “invisible”: they are absent from official photographs and rarely acknowledged by name. Diplomatic translation and interpreting pertain to meetings and negotiations involving the highest state representatives. This domain includes interpreting at events hosted by the President, the Speaker of the National Council (Parliament), ministers, foreign diplomatic missions, as well as during state visits, ceremonial audiences, and social functions attended by members of the diplomatic corps.

The importance of the interpreter in this context is underscored by the inherently sensitive nature of political and diplomatic discourse (Gumul 2010). Trust in the interpreter, together with the requirement of strict confidentiality, therefore, constitutes a central component of diplomatic interpreter’s role, particularly in situations involving classified information or the discussion of delicate and sensitive matters.¹ However, the notion of trust is not static and may be perceived differently in times of peace than in periods of heightened tension or armed conflict. All information to which interpreters and translators are exposed is treated as confidential, which also explains the limited availability of authentic material from meetings involving top-level state officials.

The sensitivity of political and diplomatic discourse in translation also derives from the fact that the surface structure of texts – namely the selection of linguistic means – may reveal subtle shifts from the source text, thereby partially modifying the stance expressed therein (Schäffner 1997). Communication functions not only as a vehicle for content transfer but also as a means of mutual influence between interlocutors. In addition to its informational dimension, communication has a relational component that is particularly salient in political and diplomatic contexts, leaving little doubt that the interpreter acts as a co-creator not only of the text but also of the relationships it mediates. In diplomacy, communication is conducted within a communication plan, that is, a strategic framework designed to achieve predefined objectives. As Rusiňák et al. (2012) observe, such communication constitutes a highly complex and multi-layered interactive relationship.

¹ Interpreters and translators are subject to professional codes of ethics, with their practice regulated in many countries and institutions by legal frameworks addressing ethical standards and information handling. In Slovakia, the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters (SAPT) has adopted a *Professional and Ethical Code*.

Diplomatic discourse transcends linguistic, cultural, socio-political, and ideological boundaries and, through processes of translation and recontextualization, necessarily undergoes transformation (Schäffner 2012). Discursive practices and viewpoints enter the target culture, where they are appropriated, reinterpreted, reformulated, and adapted in pursuit of specific (often national) objectives. Such shifts also emerge from the inherently dynamic nature of the translation process, although the actors and recipients (e.g. the general public, audiences of press conferences and briefings, or readers of news reports) are frequently unaware of them. Translation thus possesses a pronounced political and diplomatic dimension, shaped in part by power relations, interests, and strategic considerations. On this basis, Hassenteufel and Zeigermann (2019) conceptualize translators and interpreters as political actors.

Sociologically oriented research in TS, which focuses on actors within the translation process, conceptualizes interpreters and translators as individuals with specific educational backgrounds, professional experience, and translation competences. Its aim is to elucidate their role in the transfer of political and diplomatic discourse, including the translation strategies employed and the rationale behind them, as well as the translator's relationship to the speaker (or the state represented) or to the institution employing the interpreter. A recurrent assumption in this line of research is that translation actors are shaped by the institutions for which they work, notably in the distinction between internal and external translators or interpreters (Madej 2019). Moreover, their translation decisions may be influenced by their historical, social, and cultural embeddedness.

Research in TS may focus either on discursive events (through the analysis of textual changes occurring in the translation process) or on the actors involved in the production and translation of diplomatic discourse. Within the latter category, a distinction is commonly drawn between actors as agents (i.e. human actors and their capacities) and actors as factors, such as institutions and organizations, including political institutions and the media. Schäffner (2012) underscores the need to examine both dimensions, as they are mutually interactive and discourse analysis alone cannot fully account for the socio-cultural processes shaping discourse actors, particularly speakers, translators and interpreters, and text producers.

Considering the foregoing, this study aims to present partial findings from research on the implementation of diplomatic interpreting in Slovakia, with particular attention to the actors involved and to the mechanisms of translation quality control within the Presidential Palace and governmental ministries. The study is grounded in the assumption that all instruments of state power should be subject to independent oversight. Given the well-documented manipulation of language in political and diplomatic contexts (see Kashima 2009, Takeda 2020), as well as manipulation effected through language, interpreting should likewise be subject to oversight (at

least on a preventive or random basis) especially in view of the significance of political and diplomatic decision-making at both national and supranational levels.

Given the specific nature of diplomatic communication (Šavelová 2024), which places particularly high demands on translators and on the adequacy of transfer, this study focuses on the actors involved in diplomatic interpreting at the highest state level – namely the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFA). The aim is to identify who provides interpreting services within these institutions, whether these actors are professional interpreters, and whether the quality of their work is subject to monitoring. The following chapter therefore opens with a brief overview of the current state of research in TS with an emphasis on diplomatic interpreting, followed by a summary of the core competences required in this domain and illustrative examples of interpreter “invisibility” and potential translation shifts, which should serve as a basis for evaluating translation quality.

2. The current state of TS in diplomatic interpreting

Research in international TS has to date focused primarily on textual transformations arising in the process of transferring messages between languages and cultures, most commonly through linguistic analysis and critical discourse analysis (e.g. Valdeón 2005; Holland 2006; Kang 2007; Loupaki 2010; Gumul 2010; Chen 2011; Onyshchak 2021, 2023a). Such studies typically aim to identify translation strategies and to assess how these strategies mitigate or reinforce political or ideological tensions, thereby contributing to shifts in the intersubjective positioning of participants in the communicative situation. However, Schäffner’s research demonstrates that conclusions regarding agency in news translation remain largely speculative unless it is clear which actors, beyond the translator, are involved in the translation process and in what capacity.

To date, TS has addressed the (mis)use of texts for political purposes as a complex phenomenon with social, psychological, textual, and other consequences only in a fragmented manner. This has been achieved through a range of methodological approaches that have further contributed to the fragmentation of research on the translation of political and diplomatic discourse (Bánhegyi 2014). Several case studies have examined translated political texts and identified the presence of translational shifts, including manipulative ones (e.g. Calzada Pérez 2001; Baumgarten and Gagnon 2005). Other studies have focused on censorship and translation strategies in totalitarian regimes (e.g. contributions in Rundle and Sturge 2010), while further research has addressed the role of translators and interpreters in situations of conflict (e.g. Baker 2006; Boéri and Maier 2010).

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Gumul (2010) investigated the extent to which explicitation of the prototext in translation may function as a tool of linguistic manipulation, identifying sixteen types of explicitation (primarily lexical and syntactic markers of ideology) that can affect both the meaning and the overall tone of the target text. In media discourse, nearly half of the analysed texts (18 out of 37) contained visible translational shifts at least partly associated with ideological modification. In only ten of the articles was the level of translator intervention minimal. These findings suggest that translator intervention, and explicitation in particular, can have a substantial impact on recipients and on the formation of their opinions. Comparable studies of translation in media contexts have been conducted by Bielsa and Bassnett (2009), Kang (2007), and Chen (2011).

Kuhuczak (2007) examined shifts in textual tone arising from the transcription of oral Holocaust testimonies into written form during the translation of non-English oral sources into English-language historical records. Research addressing translation strategies and practices within political institutions at both national and supranational levels remains relatively limited, with notable contributions in the Canadian context (Mossop 1990; Gagnon 2010) and in relation to EU institutions (Koskinen 2000, 2008)². Schäffner (2012) has devoted particular attention to this area by analysing texts produced through translation within political institutions. However, research in this domain is considerably constrained by the fact that texts published on the websites of political institutions rarely specify whether they are translations or transcripts of interpreted speech.

Schäffner (2012) places particular emphasis on translation practice and its visibility in media and political institutions, raising questions concerning the selective publication of language versions, authorship, decision-making processes, responsibility for quality control, and the retrospective editing of texts. These questions likewise motivated present author's interest in examining the institutional background of diplomatic interpreting in Slovakia. In line with Schäffner's observations, it was found that obtaining answers to such questions is extremely challenging, due to

² Although the present research focuses on diplomatic interpreting for the Presidents of the Slovak Republic and governmental ministries, it should be noted that this genre also encompasses translation and interpreting within EU institutions and comparable bodies. In the context of common EU policies, reference is often made to the so-called Eurolect, understood as a shared institutional metalanguage. Interpreters and translators working in this environment must therefore be familiar with the structure and functioning of the EU institutions and with their "internal" language, including specialized terminology, abbreviations, and the designations of groups, procedures, and document types. Each EU institution maintains its own internal translation service.

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factors such as confidentiality, reluctance on the part of institutions, and the omission of responses to certain inquiries. Hassenteufel and Zeigermann (2019) likewise emphasize the importance of interviews for gaining deeper insight into the formal discourse reflected in publicly available official documents.

Slovak TS has not followed global developments in this area to any significant extent, either in terms of scope or thematic focus. Diplomatic interpreting is most often mentioned only within classificatory frameworks, which themselves remain contested. Drawing on a typology of communicative situations, Makarová (2004) identifies diplomatic interpreting as a distinct type within the categories of "interpreting during official and working visits subject to diplomatic protocol" and "interpreting at ministries." Müglová (2009), by contrast, situates interpreting at diplomatic and political negotiations within the genre of conference interpreting, arguing that it constitutes protocol interpreting, as communication via an intermediary is required for protocol reasons even when both interlocutors share a common language. Moreover, Müglová emphasizes the need for specific interpreter competences, particularly those necessary for rendering stylistic nuances and subtextual allusions characteristic of diplomatic and political discourse. Other scholars propose a distinct category of so-called "interpreting for politics," with "protocol interpreting" as a subcategory (Vertanová et al. 2020), while others continue to conceptualize it as a form of conference interpreting (Šveda 2021).

If the social or communicative context is understood, in line with Pöchhacker (2016), as the most coherent criterion for categorizing and defining types of interpreting, it is reasonable to conceptualize diplomatic interpreting as a distinct type or genre on account of its specificity. In the Slovak context, Madej (2018, 2023) similarly argues for such a separate classification, explicitly identifying diplomatic interpreting as an independent type of interpreting because of a specific combination and density of distinguishing features.

Applied research in Slovak TS remains sporadic and thematically diverse. Madej (2023) addresses the general history, theorization, and practice of diplomatic interpreting, while Smetanová (2010) examines the position of the interpreter as a member of the administrative staff of a diplomatic mission. Fifiková (2017) focuses on the competences of interpreters working in diplomatic missions, and Moyšová (2019) analyses stylistic devices in the political language of international institutions and the specificities of their translation from English and French into Slovak. Poľaková (2020) investigates interpreting in diplomatic settings at military events, highlighting the absence of relevant terminology. Kopecký (2005, 2011), a former Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Romania and an official translator and interpreter, addresses issues of TS only marginally in his diplomatically oriented

publications. More recently, Šavelová (2024) has examined the verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal specificities of diplomatic communication in relation to translation.

2.1. Diplomatic communication and interpreting: specificities and core translation competences

In diplomacy, social customs, norms, principles, and rituals are observed to a far greater extent than in other types of discourse, with diplomatic language being shaped largely by customary law. Interpreters must therefore be thoroughly familiar with these conventions to ensure the adequacy of transfer. The communicative practices of individual states have been, and continue to be, influenced by their distinctive cultural identities and political systems, and are currently also shaped by the speaker's cultural background, linguistic conventions, and idiolect (Kadrić et al. 2022).

Diplomatic communication is conscious and deliberate, as it is planned in terms of both objectives and means, with rational considerations taking precedence and emotional expression being largely suppressed. It is also formal and social in nature, typically occurring in highly prestigious contexts and characterized by a heightened sensitivity to errors in the public presentation of its actors (Rusiňák et al. 2012). This dimension places substantial demands on the quality of translation, including interpreting competence and communicative skills. The same applies to lexical choice and semantic nuance, which must be deliberate rather than incidental, even in translation. In comparison with other types of discourse, therefore, semantics and pragmatics play a more prominent role. This view is corroborated by Nick (2001), who argues that when diplomats interpret their interlocutor's language – including individual lexical choices – they operate on the assumption that such choices are intentional and carefully considered. A similar position is advanced by Madej (2022), who notes that communicators typically enter communicative interactions following thorough preparation, with predefined topics and pre-formulated responses or communication strategies, and that they are prepared mentally, emotionally, factually, or argumentatively based on prior familiarity, whether direct or indirect.

Translators attend not only to linguistic aspects of communication but also function as cultural mediators. They adapt their performance to the communicative situation, intent, context, and recipient (including their knowledge base and socio-cultural background) to ensure comprehension and to prevent misunderstandings arising from intercultural differences. These extend beyond language and manifest in patterns of thought and behaviour; accordingly, translators anticipate the potential reception of the message within the target culture or by the target audience.

Diplomatic communication, however, constitutes a distinct form of information mediation in which both the speaker's language and its interpreting perform a representative function, potentially speaking on behalf of an entire state or international institutions. This representative dimension entails a heightened level of responsibility for translation and underscores both the importance of interpreter training and the need for systematic verification and evaluation of translation quality in diplomatic contexts.

The extent of interpreter intervention in communication is conditioned by the level of formality: the more formal the setting, the more interpreters tend to remain in the background. Diplomatic interpreting is characterized by a dichotomy between preserved and customized interpreting (Kadrić et al. 2022). Preserved interpreting is employed in situations where the target text must adhere as closely as possible to the source text in both form and content, including stylization, register, and in some cases even grammatical structure. In contexts such as negotiations or legislative procedures, individual lexical choices and their semantic nuances may be crucial and therefore require faithful preservation. In such cases, the interpreter's primary focus is the source text itself, even when it is structurally incoherent. By contrast, customized interpreting renders the source text in a manner appropriate to the specific context, recipient, and target language, for instance through explanation, modification, or reduction. Here, the emphasis shifts to the recipient, with the message being conveyed in a coherent and contextually accessible form.

The demands of diplomatic interpreting and the requirement for adequate interlingual transfer place substantial expectations on translators and interpreters and necessitate a high level of professional competence. Scholars (e.g. Gromová 2009, Fifiková 2017, Koželová 2018) commonly identify these competences as linguistic, intercultural, communicative, pragmatic, public speaking and presentation skills, professional and thematic expertise, and the ability to operate effectively under stress. Familiarity with diplomatic protocol and adherence to it in specific communicative events are likewise essential. Interpreter competence further entails a broad knowledge base encompassing the geographical, historical, and economic context of the country concerned, including the specificities of its administrative and political systems. It also requires an informed understanding of current political developments, the country's political orientation, and its position within the broader framework of international relations. In the context of negotiations, in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and of the positions adopted by the negotiating parties is indispensable. Topics may range widely, from international fisheries agreements to healthcare, digital markets, nuclear energy, and biodiversity. Accordingly, interpreters must maintain continuous awareness of current developments in both domestic and global politics.

One distinctive feature of diplomatic interpreting is that interpreters are required to render the speech of diplomats, who typically possess formal education and training in rhetoric and communication. In the Slovak TS context, however, the relevance of diplomats' educational background to their communicative strategies has received only limited attention, being briefly noted by Makarová (2004) and, more recently, by Šavelová (2024).

For interpreters to accurately grasp communicative intent, it is essential to understand the strategic objectives of the interlocutors and the overall atmosphere of the meeting, including at least a basic distinction between positive and negative stances adopted by the parties involved. When participants hold divergent views, moods, or goals, and communication is marked by controversy, disagreement, conflict, or persuasion, communicative strategies tend to involve implication, brevity, indirectness, or ambiguity. Such situations pose greater challenges for translation, particularly regarding accurate comprehension, than predominantly positive communicative encounters. The significance of interpreters' roles in diplomacy is further emphasized by Gullová (2011), who notes that interpreter failure may lead to the immediate interruption or termination of negotiations. Even a single poorly chosen lexical item may prove decisive, whereas a skilled interpreter can help resolve complex situations and facilitate the negotiation process.

2.2. Traditional adequacy, pragmatic shifts, and interpreter invisibility in diplomatic discourse

As noted above, the aim of any translation activity is to achieve adequacy in the target text, understood as extending beyond the purely linguistic level. Some theoretical approaches argue that a translation should produce the same effect on recipients in the target culture as the source text produces in the source culture. However, such a formulation may lead to problematic conclusions if it does not explicitly require the preservation of meaning, including accuracy, correctness, and completeness. Translational adequacy therefore presupposes the preservation of both meaning and communicative effect. As formulated by Kadrić et al. (2022), the target text should elicit approximately the same response from its addressees as the original statement would have elicited had they understood it, including all nuances and the same degree of suggestiveness or directness. This definition is particularly applicable in contexts marked by intercultural differences, which become most apparent in encounters between markedly divergent mentalities, as exemplified by Japanese–English communicative settings.³

³ A growing body of research indicates that translation has become an integral component of the Japanese government's strategy to obscure

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In January 2007, the United States formally requested that Japan acknowledge responsibility for the issue of comfort women, issue an apology, and accept guilt for its actions. During a meeting with President Bush, Prime Minister Abe expressed his *regret* regarding the matter, stating that he “feels regret” about the conditions endured by the comfort women. This utterance was rendered by the interpreter as an *apology*, although a formulation such as *to be sorry* would have been more semantically accurate. According to Takeda (2020), Abe was aware that his statement would be translated into Japanese and widely circulated in domestic media; consequently, he deliberately avoided issuing an explicit apology, which would have conflicted with both his political stance and personal convictions.

The lexical item employed by Abe conveyed regret but did not imply acceptance of responsibility for the acts in question and therefore did not constitute an admission of guilt. This distinction is crucial, as the Anglo-American understanding of *apology* typically entails acknowledgment of responsibility, whereas Japanese culture lacks a tradition of *apologiae* in this sense (Suzuki 1999, cited in Kashima 2009). The expressions used by Japanese politicians when “apologizing” for wartime actions do not carry connotations of self-criticism, remorse, or responsibility for wrongdoing. Takeda (2020) argues that Abe’s formulation was a strategically selected, pre-prepared expression that enabled the Japanese government to address two culturally and receptively distinct audiences simultaneously. As a result, two contradictory messages produced an apparently equivalent effect, while underlying linguistic and cultural differences led to a misunderstanding, despite the initial mutual “satisfaction” of both Japanese and American reception contexts.

A comparable instance of intercultural misunderstanding with tangible consequences for international relations occurred during the 1970 summit between Prime Minister Satō and President Nixon. When Nixon requested that Japan reduce textile exports to the U.S., Satō responded

controversial wartime actions (Takeda 2020, 2022). One illustrative example is the replacement of the original Japanese term for “former forced labourers” in mines and factories during World War II – a term previously used in both Japanese and English – with the expression “former workers from the Korean Peninsula.” Another case concerns the euphemistic literal translation of “comfort women”, referring to women forcibly compelled to provide sexual services to Japanese military units in army brothels across Asia between 1930 and 1945. A similar semantic shift is observed in the term *jinxin baibai* (literally “the buying and selling of human bodies”) which in the source text denotes impoverished individuals selling family members without explicit reference to violence, whereas its English rendering as “human trafficking” carries broader connotations, including violent and illegal practices.

with *zensho shimasu*, literally meaning “I will handle it properly.”⁴ While the utterance carries this literal meaning, in political discourse it is often used to imply that no action will be taken, a pragmatic interpretation shared by Japanese interlocutors. Satō’s statement was translated as “I will take care of it,” which initially satisfied both parties, as each side interpreted the response in line with its expectations. However, when the situation remained unchanged over time, Nixon felt misled, having anticipated concrete measures on the part of the Japanese government. This divergence in interpretation ultimately caused significant strain in Japanese-American relations (Kondō 2004, cited in Kashima 2009; see also Delisle & Woodsworth 2012). This case underscores the necessity for translators to be sensitive to culturally embedded communicative conventions (see also Onyshchak 2023b). As demonstrated, lexical choice is crucial in translation, as words carry different connotations across contexts. Such differences may be strategically exploited for political purposes, not only to obscure facts but also to serve broader propagandistic aims when particular expressions evoke certain associations.

The media’s tendency to render translators and the translation process invisible is illustrated by Schäffner (2012) through interpreting delivered at the White House during the award of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2011. At the state dinner, Merkel read her speech in German, which was interpreted consecutively. The speech was published on the German government’s website in both German and English, while the White House website provided only the English version, marked with the note “as translated.” A comparison of the English versions reveals minor differences: the German government’s version is a relatively literal translation, reproducing even punctuation such as dashes, whereas it does not indicate that the English text is a preliminary translation, nor does the German text include the disclaimer “check against delivery” (Schäffner 2012).

The transcript published on the U.S. website⁵ displays features characteristic of spoken discourse, including colloquial elements, an interpreter’s mistake (“apology”), and non-verbal cues indicating the emotional tone of the speech (“laughter”). Released immediately to the public under the heading “For Immediate Release,” the transcript was subsequently used by *USA Today*, which reproduced an excerpt from Merkel’s interpreted speech verbatim and presented it as a direct quotation in a news article. This resulted in a distorted representation of the event, as the journalist evidently did not recognize that the text was an interpreted

⁴ The sentence carries a pragmatic meaning comparable to the Slovak expression used in job interviews, “We will get back to you,” which typically functions as a polite formula signalling that no further contact will follow.

⁵ See <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/07/remarks-president-obama-and-chancellor-merkel-exchange-toasts>.

rendition and that the error originated with the interpreter rather than with Merkel herself. Consequently, readers were likely left with the impression that the mistake had been made by the speaker.

Although such inaccuracies are not of major consequence, they are indicative of how translation and interpreting are perceived within the media and political institutions. The translation process remains largely invisible in mass media reporting, as does the role of the interpreter. Schäffner (2010) had already demonstrated in earlier research that journalists often reproduce interpreted utterances verbatim, including translation-specific features such as hedging, paraphrasing, and other strategies used to expand or adapt the text. Similarly, Onyshchak's (2021) analysis of translation strategies in the rendering of a U.S. presidential inaugural address shows that political discourse undergoes substantial interlingual transformation, with messages frequently being syntactically restructured in order to preserve their communicative function in the target-language text.

3. Practice of diplomatic interpreting in Slovakia

As demonstrated above, there exists considerable scope for further research aimed at gaining deeper insight into the translation of political and diplomatic discourse, as well as into the institutional and media practices and strategies that shape it. From a socio-pragmatic perspective, interdisciplinary research is also needed to examine whose voices are represented in the media and how frequently they appear in comparison with those of other political actors. TS likewise address questions such as why journalists rarely acknowledge that the excerpts they cite are products of translation or interpreting, or whether they are even aware that they are not reproducing politicians' original utterances.

Such comprehensive research could clarify who is responsible for translating texts and under what conditions, whether translation is carried out by professional translators or interpreters, and whether textual changes are intentional or accidental (Puurtinen 2003). It could also elucidate how these actors shape the public image of individual politicians, nations, or states. However, research into intentionality – that is, deliberate intervention in the metatext – necessarily requires an interdisciplinary approach (Gumul 2010). Although it may be hypothesized that the media handle translational shifts differently from political institutions, no such research has yet been conducted in Slovakia, nor has text manipulation within political institutions been systematically examined. A major limitation in the domestic context remains the lack of accessible sources, including texts, transcripts, and audiovisual recordings, as well as the limited availability of information from relevant institutional actors.

Contemporary international research in TS no longer focuses solely on translational adequacy, but increasingly situates translation within its

broader social, cultural, historical, and ideological contexts in order to critically examine communicative practices and strategies. Scholars working in international settings frequently point to the accessibility of online resources and the extensive availability of audiovisual recordings and transcripts of interpreted discourse. The situation in Slovakia, however, differs markedly.

Diplomatic discourse, including press conferences and texts from official presidential and other state visits, is generally not published in full. Although the website of former President Čaputová previously provided audiovisual records of official visits—mainly public segments of speeches—complete texts and records of private communication are not made available, primarily for reasons of confidentiality, as is also common in other countries. While these audiovisual materials were still accessible in February 2024, they have since been removed from the website. Moreover, even when available, the materials were published exclusively in Slovak, which precluded verification of the original source-language wording and, consequently, assessment of the quality of the Slovak translations.

This study presents partial findings on diplomatic translation and interpreting within selected political institutions. In addition to examining translation practices themselves, the research also investigates whether any mechanisms of translation quality control are in place. In the case of the Presidents of the Slovak Republic, particular attention is paid to identifying who prepares or prepared their foreign-language speeches (whether professional translators were involved), and whether the translations/interpreting are subject, at least on a random basis, to verification by native speakers.

On the basis of a request submitted under the Freedom of Information Act, we contacted the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic on 4 March 2024 and obtained information on translation and interpreting practices at the Presidential Palace. Translation and interpreting services are outsourced to an external provider selected through a public tender. English-language texts for former President Čaputová were prepared by staff of the Office's political department and presidential advisors and were not proofread by native speakers. Owing to the confidential nature of international visits and meetings, no audiovisual recordings or transcripts of interpreted speeches were produced. Interpreters for state visits, meetings, and press conferences were selected by the contracted agency, while the Office of the President determined the mode of interpreting. Interpreting performance was not monitored. Background materials were provided to interpreters on an ad hoc basis and exclusively in Slovak.

Based on the information obtained, it can be concluded that the Office of the President did not employ in-house interpreters. During the presidency of Čaputová (from 15 June 2019 to 15 June 2024), translation was not treated as a highly specialized professional activity, as English-

language texts were prepared by staff of the political department and presidential advisors. The precise procedure of text production remains unclear, namely whether texts were first drafted in Slovak and subsequently translated or written directly in English; in either case, linguistic and intracultural adequacy was not verified by native speakers. From a TS perspective, the absence of any monitoring of interpreting performance constitutes a fundamental shortcoming which, in light of the examples discussed in this study, appears insufficient and raises concerns regarding quality assurance. Equally problematic is the lack of any possibility to verify translational shifts that could, for instance, be politically motivated. On a more positive note, the provision of background information to interpreters is acknowledged.

Peter Pellegrini is President of the Slovak Republic since 15 June 2024. On 28 October 2025, we therefore requested information on translation and interpreting practices at the Presidential Palace. The Office of the President has contracted Linguity, s.r.o. under a framework agreement for the provision of translation and interpreting services, with Article 1 specifying their scope. However, the Office did not respond to questions concerning revision and quality control, nor to inquiries regarding the preparation and translation of the President's foreign-language speeches. As a result, it remains unclear whether these texts are produced by professional translators, native speakers, advisors, or other staff, and the overall process of text creation and translation cannot be determined.

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFA) primarily relies on its own internal resources for foreign-language communication. Where highly specialized translation or interpreting is required – for example in connection with specific texts or events – these services are provided by the special-purpose contributory organization linked to the ministry's budget ("SÚZA") based on an annual contract. Pursuant to Article 3 of the contract, translation and interpreting services are delivered on an ongoing basis in accordance with the current needs of individual organizational units of the Ministry. The MFA does not maintain a separate organizational unit responsible for the revision or quality control of translations. Outputs of translation and interpreting services are used exclusively for internal purposes and are not published on the Ministry's website or elsewhere, as there is no legal or internal regulatory obligation requiring the publication of such materials.

As all contracts concluded by state authorities are published in the Central Register of Contracts maintained by the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, it is possible to verify that the agency in question has concluded contracts for interpreting services with several state institutions. These include the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic (3 March 2025; 12 April 2023; 12 April 2021), the Ministry of Health (13 February 2025), the Ministry of Economy (18 December 2024; 18 October 2023), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Addendum No. 3 of 9

March 2023; Addendum No. 2 of 17 February 2022; Addendum No. 1 of 16 April 2021), and the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (28 February 2023).

The company's managing director is Martin Mázik. The company has operated under its current name since 1 February 2021, having previously used different business names. Between 14 April 2021 and 15 February 2023, its registered business activities included translation and interpreting services in a wide range of languages, namely Croatian, Serbian, Spanish, Romanian, Dutch, English, Russian, Czech, Greek, Polish, Slovenian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, German, Chinese, Italian, French, and Arabic. Since 11 March 2023, only English and German have been listed, and since 14 November 2023, the company's registered activity has been limited to the provision of translation and interpreting services.

As the monitoring period commenced in 2024, the list therefore needs to be supplemented with additional agencies that provided interpreting services to ministries and other state institutions in 2024 and 2025 (Table 1):

Political Institution	Translation Agency	Date of Contract Conclusion
SÚZA	LEXMAN s.r.o.	14 May 2024
Ministerstvo financií [Ministry of Finance]	Mgr. Michal Štrpka – ACTA	23 May 2024
Ministerstvo pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka [Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development]	LEXMAN SE s.r.o.	16 July 2024
Ministerstvo životného prostredia [Ministry of the Environment]	LEXMAN TEN s.r.o.	14 August 2024 (Addendum No. 1)
Úrad pre dohľad nad zdravotnou starostlivosťou [Health Care Surveillance Authority]	LEGALTRANS, s.r.o.	11 September 2024
Ministerstvo obrany [Ministry of Defence]	ACTA-preklady a tlmočenie, s.r.o.	15 August 2025
Kancelária Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky [Office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic]	Traducta s.r.o.	17 October 2025
Ministerstvo školstva, výskumu, vývoja a mládeže [Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth]	Prekladateľské služby – RSI konzorcium RSI Solution s.r.o.; LEXMAN, s.r.o.	4 November 2025
SÚZA	LEXMAN, s.r.o.	7 November 2025

Table 1. Additional agencies providing interpreting services to ministries and other state institutions in 2024-2025

4. Conclusion

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The present research remains partial and primarily covers the period 2024-2025, during which the offices of two presidents were examined. Nevertheless, based on contract frequency, it can be concluded that a limited number of companies (most notably Linguity, s.r.o., and LEXMAN, s.r.o., each with three contracts) held a dominant position in the provision of interpreting services to the highest state authorities. While this suggests that these agencies possess relevant experience and operational practice, no specific information is available regarding the individuals who performed the interpreting or their professional qualifications. Considering additional links identified across agencies, including shared managing directors and minimal changes in business names as recorded in the Slovak Commercial Register and the Central Register of Contracts, this issue will be examined in greater detail in a separate study.

Based on information obtained from the MFA and the Offices of the President, translation is primarily treated as a professional service provided by external agencies, while the authorship of key texts remains insufficiently transparent. Under former President Čaputová, texts were prepared by staff of the political department and advisors, suggesting that translation was not regarded as a professional activity – this phenomenon may therefore be described as the invisibility of the translator. In the case of President Pellegrini, no detailed information about authorship and text production is available. The provision of background materials for interpreting is assessed positively. Conversely, the absence of monitoring of interpreting performance, together with the unavailability of audiovisual materials (even in partial form) must be viewed critically, as such materials would allow at least basic verification of source texts and their translations. Many of these findings align with the “unknown agents” identified by Schäffner (2012) and underscore the need for further research, including an extended time frame, closer examination of contractual arrangements, and analysis of inter-agency links, to provide a more comprehensive mapping of diplomatic interpreting practices and quality assurance mechanisms in Slovakia.

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