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An approach to languages of lesser diffusion and public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) in Spain in the second decade of the 21st century / Estudio exploratorio de las lenguas de menor difusión y la traducción e interpretación en los servicios públicos (TISP) en España en la segunda década del siglo XXI

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Abstract: The vast diversity of contexts, the immediacy of the required response, and the variety of languages and cultures that converge in today's societies present challenges but also enable a wide range of responses. The main objective of this article is to obtain an overview of the reality of communication with migrant population, especially in languages of lesser diffusion (LLD) in Spain. Three elements will be considered: migrant population in Spain in the second decade of the 21st century, with special attention to LLD; quality of communication between the main service providers (Administration and NGOs) and migrants in LLD; and the role of technology in communication with migrant population. The methodology used is based on the critical analysis of several studies that approach the issues from different points of view and contexts, and whose results reflect the general situation of the country in relation to LLD.

Keywords: PSIT; Languages of lesser diffusion (LLD); Migration; Intercultural communication

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Resumen: La gran diversidad de contextos, la inmediatez de la respuesta requerida y la variedad de lenguas y culturas que confluyen en las sociedades actuales plantean retos pero también posibilitan un amplio abanico de respuestas. El objetivo principal de este artículo es ofrecer una visión general de la realidad de la comunicación con población inmigrante, especialmente en lenguas de menor difusión (LMD) en España. Se considerarán tres elementos: la población migrante en España en la segunda década del siglo XXI– con especial atención a las LMD; la calidad de la comunicación entre los principales proveedores de servicios (Administración y ONGs) y los migrantes en LMD; y, el papel de la tecnología en la comunicación con la población migrante. La metodología empleada se basa en el análisis crítico de varios estudios que abordan las cuestiones desde diferentes puntos de vista y contextos, y cuyos resultados reflejan la situación general del país en relación con las LMD.

Palabras clave: TISP; Lenguas de menor difusión; LMD; Migración; Comunicación intercultural

1. Introduction

According to the National Statistics Institute (or INE in Spanish), provisional data for the third quarter of 2023 indicated that the number of foreign-born residents in Spain amounted to around 18% (Lorente Ferrer, 2024). According to the Permanent Immigration Observatory (OPI), two thirds of foreign residents live in 5 out of a total of 17 autonomous communities, or regions– i.e. Catalonia, Madrid, Andalusia, Valencia and Murcia – mainly concentrated in Madrid and the Mediterranean area. 15 nationalities account for almost 75% of foreign residents, 6 of which are from EU countries, with Romania and Italy leading the way. From outside the EU, nationals from Morocco, Ukraine, China and Colombia are most prevalent, followed by African and Asian countries, whose languages are often the most common in LLD.

In the 2022 annual report on the situation of migrants and refugees in Spain, published by the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants (Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, 2023), we read, among others, the following key messages:

- It is important that public policies and actions adapt to changes in the profiles of foreigners arriving and living in the country. For example, although the majority of young people who have been granted protection are male, the migration of minors and young women is increasing; the arrival of Spanish-speaking people has decreased, but the number of people from African countries has increased; and, although the majority of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection are men, in the case of temporary protection they tend to be women.

- While the changes achieved are significant, several challenges remain in the protection of the rights of immigrants, especially those in an irregular administrative situation, and those seeking or benefiting from international protection.

- Digitalization in the Public Administration, though an advancement, has exacerbated existing inequalities among different social groups due to the digital divide, which particularly affects immigrants and applicants/beneficiaries of international and temporary protection. (Author's own translation)

Although the report points out a series of key data and shows respect for human rights, the right to effective communication is not mentioned. This is revealed by the current situation in Spain regarding the professionalization of translation and interpreting in public services (PSIT). In this 21st century, Spain is experiencing a situation similar to that which was first experienced in some countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, several decades ago. Spain is moving towards a progressive awareness but without global solutions or adequate regulation. Institutions continue to place expectations on organizations, associations, and NGOs that in most cases are unfeasible given, among other reasons, the resource restrictions and the variety of languages and cultures, making the current situation very similar to that experienced at the beginning of the 20th century:

At present, NGOs are the organizations that are contributing the most to making intercultural communication possible between those who are there and those who arrive and who do not know the language (and culture) of contact. This often involves the translation and interpretation of all kinds of documents and in all kinds of situations. [...]. However, although many of them perform translation and interpretation tasks sporadically and thanks to volunteers, very few of them offer such services on a regular basis (Valero-Garcés & Cata, 2006).

If we focus on a specific context, as in the case of asylum seekers and refugees, the responsibility for administering the reception program falls on the Asylum and Refuge Office of the Ministry of the Interior. This, in turn, funds certain NGOs (ACCEM, CEAR) that are present in the different autonomous communities and establishes guidelines for the reception and integration of asylum seekers in the Management Manual for Hosting Entities (Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, 2020, p. 33). Regarding translation and interpretation services, the reception program stipulates that “an interpreter will be provided in group reception sessions and when indispensable to comply with the planned itinerary,” and that it “must ensure access to information for all persons with particular hosting needs”. Despite these provisions, the AIDA report from Spain (2020, p. 40) highlights the lack of interpreters in the asylum process and the difficulties that entities experience with the current interpreters, especially in LLD, mostly due to poor training and limited knowledge of asylum processes.

Research, on the other hand, provides a considerable volume of publications on PSIT, highlighting the FITISPos group, which coordinates, in turn, a unique postgraduate training programme (MA in Intercultural Communication, Translation and Interpreting in Public Services), taught in several language combinations at the University of Alcalá (Madrid) in Spain.

The results of the research coincide in pointing out that: 1. There is a lack of language policies that bring theory and practice closer together, and, 2. It is necessary to review the importance of linguistic communication and the role of translators and interpreters. As Irigoyen (2023, p. 1) indicates, language policies make it possible to articulate linguistic rights with the exercise of other rights, such as the right to education, health, or political participation, and, at present, there is no common language policy that recognizes the important role of translators and interpreters – even more so in the case of LLD – in facilitating the participation of migrants in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

In the following pages we will draw an overview of the situation in Spain with respect to the use and treatment of LLD, based on (micro) studies from different perspectives to offer a more holistic view of the situation and also to show the complexity of dealing with this issue. The difficulty of obtaining data or the variability of results over short periods and different locations are aspects to be considered. Three elements will be explored, with

special attention to LLD speakers 1. Migrant population in Spain in the second decade of the 21st century; 2. Communication between the main service providers (Administration and NGOs) and the users; 3. Technology in communicating with migrant population.

2. Challenges of communication with the migrant population in LLD

According to the 2023 Report on Refugees in Spain and the European Union, prepared by ACCEM (ACCEM, 2022) based on data made public by the Ministry of the Interior and Eurostat, Spain registered a record-breaking 81% more applications for international protection (IP) in 2022 than in 2019. By nationality, the countries from which more applications were received, excluding Latin American countries, were Morocco, Mali, Afghanistan, and Senegal.

The CEAR 2023 report shows similar data in terms of number of applications and countries. One notable fact regarding the languages of the applicants is that the top five nationalities with the highest recognition rate were Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Mali, Eritrea, and Sudan, countries whose languages can be considered LLD in Spain owing to the small number of speakers of these as per the CEAR Report 2023: Refugees in Spain and Europe.

Two significant studies drawing attention to LLD are those by Policastro and Merino (2023), and Vigier and Relinque (2023) as well as the Erasmus+ project DIALOGOS (2022–2024).

Policastro and Merino (2023) focused their study on Cordoba, a city in the Spanish region of Andalusia and one with a higher rate of migrant population. The main objective was to show the degree of “possibility of communication” of minority groups of immigrants in the city. Based on the statistics, three elements were examined: country of origin; total number of foreigners belonging to these countries; and official and co-official language of these countries. Then, three different groups were determined according to the possibility of establishing adequate communication between both parties – administration and users. The groups were: Group 1 – foreign population with high communication capacity. This includes those people who arrive in Spain and whose mother tongue is Spanish (e.g., Latin American countries).

Group 2 – foreign population with medium communication capacity. This includes the migrant population whose vehicular language is English or French, and who may have a greater possibility of communication, since they are the more common foreign languages in Spain and often used as vehicular languages for the Administration.

Group 3 – foreign population with low or no communication capacity. It includes the migrant population whose ability to communicate without the help of an interpreter or third person is minimal, and are practically unknown in Spain, as for example many African languages and dialects. The results indicate the following: group 1 – high communication ability: 29%; group 2 – medium communication capacity: 18%; group 3 – low communication capacity: 53%.

A close look at the results indicates that more than half of the sample have obvious difficulty in communicating with public agencies and institutions, which leads to inequality in terms of access to their services. The study also shows that, due to the low possibility of communication there is a high demand – but also an insufficient provision of professional interpreters in public services in general –, which highlights a notorious need to invest, promote and make more visible the interpreter.

The second publication by Vigier and Relinque (2023, pp. 158– 167) presents the findings of a study also carried out in Andalusia. The focus is on the main entities in charge of attending to international protection applicants, and the objective is to find out what their main interlinguistic and intercultural communication needs are and how they are met. The data were obtained through nine open interviews carried out in 2022. The results indicate that, although the needs vary depending on conflict situations, the languages for which interpretation services are required are mainly French, Arabic, English, and even Russian as vehicular languages for administrative procedures or in emergency situations when the cultural level of the person allows it.

In more complex situations, such as interviews with psychologists and lawyers, agencies tend to use the users' mother tongue with an "interpreter". There is a wide variety of languages or dialects, most of them considered LLD such as Tigrinya, Bambara, Urdu, Georgian, Armenian, Soninke, Creole, Wolof, Susu, Berber, Maliki, Somali, or Tamazight to mention just a few. The strategies used to communicate vary according to the resources available. Results by Vigier and Relinque's (2023) study indicate that, firstly, whenever possible, it is the organization's own employees who try to communicate directly with applicants for international protection. Secondly, when an interpreter is required for official procedures, external paid interpreters are hired through language service agencies or, if available, through the organization's own pool of professional interpreters. Thirdly, ad hoc interpreters are used in specific situations, such as routine accompaniment to the doctor or administrative procedures. They are usually volunteers, including university students of any degree who speak Spanish and the language of the user fluently, foreigners who have been in Spain for a long time, other refugees and, in very exceptional cases, family members and friends of the beneficiaries. Vigier and Relinque (2023) also point out that, when an interpreter was requested, the entities showed little interest in finding out about the training of interpreters and translators, whether they were requested externally, or come from their own pool of interpreters. Some of the reasons given by one of the interviewees were that they have previously worked with the interpreter; the interpreter shares the same language of the beneficiary; or because the interpreter has experience working with other entities in this field.

Dialogos. Communication in Public Service Interpreting and Translating with Languages of Lesser Diffusion, is an Erasmus+ project (2022–1–ES01–KA220–HED–000086867) aimed at addressing the communication barriers of migrants, specifically those from host countries speaking languages of lesser diffusion (LLD), for which there is a lack of qualified translating and interpreting professionals. The project's expected outcome is to develop and create a training module and material specifically for heritage and bilingual migrant speakers of LLD (with adequate bilingual and bicultural competences) who can eventually become qualified Public Services Interpreters and Translators. The three countries that participate in the consortium are Italy, Greece, and Spain. To achieve the main goals three work packages (WP) are scheduled: WP2: State of the art review/mapping of current training programmes and activities, as well as available training material on LLD. WP3: Pilot training module analysis report/research and material. Training materials in languages that are deemed necessary. WP4: Open access, blended training module to be implemented in any language in the future. Guidelines and best practices guide. The project is still in progress. For this article, we will only focus on the results pertaining to one of the objectives of WP2: Identifying communication needs and problems of LLD speakers in Spain.

Two target groups were considered: people aged 18–35 (including university students) with some LLD competence and professionals and volunteers (social, legal, healthcare workers; mediators) who are in contact with migrants.

Data were obtained from an online survey and interviews.

As for the survey, 97 students and 50 professionals answered the questionnaire.

Questions for the students were related to LLDs known; previous training in interpreting or mediation; experience of communicating with a mediator and/or with a vehicular language; communicative strategy preferred in PSIT contexts; oral and written competence in LLD; experience in translating or interpreting and interest in an interpreting/mediation training with LLD.

Results indicate the following: Regarding the LLD known, the languages/dialects mentioned were: Albanian, Arabic (including “Tunisian dialect” as it was written in a specific answer, Moroccan Arabic, specifying Darija”), Cape Verdean Creole, Chinese (one case out of four Cantonese), Greek, Koniake, Pidgin English, Romanian, Ukrainian, Yoruba, Wolof. As for training, 71% indicated that they had no interpreting training and 68.8 % no mediation training. 40.5% were interested in attending LLD training and the main reasons given for their interest were that 1. It could become a job, and 2. To help. Those who would not be interested in attending this kind of training claim that they work or study in a different field. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that the fields mentioned are relevant for PSIT e.g., social intervention, healthcare, and education. Some answers highlight the lack of time as the major cause or that the respondents felt that they are too old.

Questions for professionals and volunteers were intended to identify if they had previous training in interpreting or mediation. These addressed aspects such as frequency, accessibility, and problems of interaction in PSIT with LLDs speakers; organization of interpreting or mediation services, and strategies to overcome linguistic gap.

Results indicate the following: 45.8% had various jobs, and only 6.7% indicated Lawyer/Doctor. As for training, 51% had not received any training in interpreting and 49 % no mediation training. Strategies used to face the language barrier (38 answers) were: 57.9 % automatic translation tool (mainly Google Translator); 57.9 % family friends on site almost half of them; and 42.1% bilingual staff and professional interpreters on site.

When asked about the most effective strategies (29 answers), mediators/translators and interpreters were mentioned first. This was followed by automatic translation, with Google Translate being the most frequently mentioned tool. Next were ad hoc interpreters/mediators, such as family members, friends, or staff. Finally, the use of a vehicular language was mentioned, with Spanish, English, and French specified in this order.

As for the least effective strategies (22 answers), first, ad hoc interpreters/mediators such as family members were mentioned, followed by automatic translation tools. Next were gestures and drawing, then, remote mediators (because they are not immediately available), and finally, an official language (even if adapted) that the user is not proficient in.

Some suggestions to improve accessibility were also given, in order of relevance, are as follows: first, mediators, translator, interpreters; followed by multilingual materials and documents (Internet sites included); then, public service staff being trained to carry out interlinguistic communication; and finally, translation apps and digital tools.

The main conclusions derived from this data suggest the following: (prospective) students have skills in a wide variety of LLD (e.g., Albanian, Chinese, Ukrainian, Wolof); experience of mediation in informal contexts is quite common (many times and sometimes 78.8%); there is little training in interpretation and mediation; translation into the native (LLD) language is the most effective tool for communicating in PSIT with LLD speakers; and there is certain interest in attending an interpreting/mediation training.

Eight interviews were conducted with professionals working with migrants. The highlights from the interviews are:

Communication issues: People who are thought to experience the greatest difficulties in accessing and communicating with services are: migrant and refugee newcomers from underprivileged backgrounds, more specifically: 1. illiterate or poorly educated people, and 2. elderly people. The reasons why these people experience difficulties are: poor linguistic competence; lack of basic knowledge on the healthcare and legal system procedures; cultural background. And the main barriers are due to difficulty in accessing public service interpreting or mediation resources; lack of professional interpreters or translators in LLD; excessive bureaucracy; lack of knowledge on technical vocabulary by LLD; scarce cultural sensitivity (prejudices and racism) and low foreign languages' proficiency amongst professionals.

The settings that are perceived as the most difficult ones concerning communication are the following: legal (including administrative procedures, civil register, international protection), healthcare; emergency crisis; educational and tax-related and job-related matters.

The communicative activities that are perceived as most difficult without an interpreter-mediator are: explaining medical procedure (informed consents, arranging an appointment); mental health counselling; disclosure of sensitive or distressing information; and preparing minors for the Territorial Commission for International Protection Hearings.

Communication needs of migrant people are generally perceived to be poorly addressed, except some best practices, for example, in some hospitals and schools. Although professional translators and interpreters and culturally competent professionals are said to be provided by the services when needed, their presence is considered occasional, insufficient, and not always provided by people with sufficient training, according to the interviewees.

Interviewees also confirm that tools and strategies that improve communication provided by the users (migrants) include relatives, friends, community members, and religious leaders who speak the national language and an LLD; use of translation apps; and the use of common languages, such as English and French.

Ways to improve communication in services according to the interviewees are hiring trained mediators on a permanent basis (especially in the healthcare settings); availability of staff competent at least in English and French in public offices; offering professional lifelong learning and training.

Interviewees also agree that the most effective strategy in facilitating communication is the involvement of trained interpreters and mediators because of their language proficiency and cultural competence, including knowledge of different areas such as pragmatics (gestures, politeness), religion practices (mysticism, evil eye, food norms), or family practices (polygamy and jealousy among children of different mothers). Interviewees also value the professional In&Tr contextual understanding of the situation, knowledge of subject-specific terminology, and trust-building relationships between the participants (for example, a mediator can help the user feel at ease, orient him/her, etc.).

The perceived usefulness of receiving training varies depending on individual perspectives and needs. For professionals operating within public service settings, the perceived usefulness is related to enhancing their ability to improve service provision. For LLD speakers who are not professionals in public services, the perceived usefulness is linked to career development and matters of inclusion. Helping others to access and use a service, to learn how to be more empathic and efficient and be able to have different ways of communicating (accommodating the user's preferences) are mentioned as well.

3. Communication between the main service providers and users

The second key point to discuss concerns communication between the main service providers (Administration and NGOs) and users. Consequently, four studies are addressed in this section: Foulquié and Sánchez-Pedreño (2019); Jiménez-Andrés (2020); Vitalaru (2023) and Ruiz-Cortés (2021).

Foulquié and Sánchez-Pedreño (2019, pp. 105–110) focus on a specific area in south-eastern Spain, Murcia, where the rate of migrant population is relatively high. They start with the consideration that the Third Sector of Social Action (TSSA), which includes NGOs, plays a fundamental role in the care of vulnerable people with specific needs (Fresno and Rauchberger, 2016). In Spain, TSSA are responsible for providing some services which are mainly social, educational, health and international cooperation services. These services are frequently carried out by volunteers who offer their time, knowledge, or part of their economic resources to ensure the achievement of the institutional task (Ayuda en Acción, 2019). Many of these associations do not have their own funds but obtain funding from different agencies through grants for specific projects – among which translation and interpretation are not usually included, making it difficult to hire professional interpreters and translators.

The corpus consisted of 24 selected NGOs that were analysed according to two criteria: 1. NGOs whose main headquarters and/or field of action are in the municipality of Murcia; and 2. NGOs whose services to the migrant population include translation, interpretation and/or mediation. Results indicate that none of the NGOs analysed in the study have specific translation and interpreting programs or related projects with public or private funding. Some responses reflected that knowledge of languages is part of the skills inherent to the job, but no training is required, and that mediation services – which included linguistic abilities and therefore covered to some extent these communicative deficiencies, have been eliminated.

As communication strategies, they identify the use of ad hoc interpreters – who also perform the functions of translators when required – as other studies also reflect (Abril Martí, 2006; Valero-Garcés & Cata, 2006; Valero-Garcés, 2009; Las Heras Navarro, 2012; Burdeus et al 2020; Castillo Bernal & Estevez Grosi 2022; Valero-Garcés, 2023; 2024). These ad hoc translators and interpreters are usually volunteers either on their own initiative or at the request of the user or the NGO to perform functions for which they do not usually have training.

Foulquié and Sánchez-Pedreño (2019, p. 108) identify four types of ad hoc interpreters:

- Family members or friends of the users, especially in cases of LLD.
- Other LLD users, especially residents in sheltered housing.
- Hired bilingual people or people with a basic knowledge of the language of the users who are called “itinerant interpreters”. These are people hired who are fluent in at least

one language other than Spanish and who travel to perform interpreting tasks according to the needs of each territory in which the entity has its scope of action. Language proficiency and translation training is not required.

- Volunteers from different entities and with different profiles. They are usually people of foreign origin, native to LLD and fluent in Spanish.

Other strategies to meet communication needs include:

- Use of gestures and non-verbal language;
- Use of a lingua franca, even though users do not always have mastery of these languages as they do with their native language, especially when they have not attended school;
- Non-professional telephone interpreting by calling a volunteer available to act as an interpreter through the speaker phone;
- Use of online machine translators;
- Referral to other entities that have interpreters available.

As for professional Tr&In services, the authors of the study indicate that the main answer is that these services have mainly disappeared, are incomplete or show a lack of human and/or economic resources.

Foulquié and Sánchez-Pedreño (2019, p. 110) conclude with some suggestions: improving collaboration and communication between public services and NGOs; coordinating the provision of interpreters and their recruitment; insisting on the need to develop projects and the promotion of training courses for bilingual workers, as well as courses on how to work with interpreters designed for the workers on the TSSA and specially in those communicative contexts in which the migrant population is assisted.

The second article dealing with communication between service providers and users is that by Jiménez-Andrés (2020). She focuses on the linguistic accessibility of asylum seekers and refugee and third sector entities (TSSA). Data were obtained from interviews conducted between May and September 2020 with NGO workers with different profiles: social workers, nurses, psychologists, and managers. One of the main conclusions refers to the substantial workload of professionals, which, according to the interviewees, has an impact on the quality of the services they provide and their interaction with users. They also complained of the scarcity of resources, despite the growing demand for their services.

In terms of communication practices between providers and users, Jiménez-Andrés' study reveals three options in order of preference: 1. remote communication mostly through WhatsApp (even in face-to-face situation). 2. users' visit to the NGOs office, and 3. communication via e-mail, in decay as does not offer immediate or oral communication.

As for the first option, all organizations use WhatsApp because, according to the interviewees, it is a well-known and easy-to-use tool that does not require a large amount of data, and it is very versatile as spoken text messages can be used that they can send directly to the Google translator.

However, some interviewees also attribute adverse effects to the use of WhatsApp, mainly: a) difficulty of disconnecting from work; b) invasion of NGO staff's private spaces as most of them use their personal phones; c) risks associated with sharing personal and confidential documentation through this tool.

Regarding the use of languages in communication with users, the data reveal great disparity and a total lack of language policy. Each organization adopts different practices: some communicate in local languages and some others through language mediators, whether they are trained interpreters and translators, untrained volunteer interpreters or cultural mediators or volunteers.

Organizations that use local language(s) as a requirement for access to their services, according to interviewees, use easy language, which they refer to as “quiet language” and “street language,” and posters that they disseminate via WhatsApp in the official languages of the territory, or send the user a message via WhatsApp so that they can translate it with Google translator. In the case of the use of easy language, although this practice is recommended for accessibility purposes, in fact it is used as an ad hoc and informal resource when NGO staff and users do not share the same language.

As for the entities that use the Tr&In services, the study reveals that their use has been reduced to a minimum due to budget cuts and an increase in bureaucracy that requires staff to justify the use of interpreters by preparing a report stating the reasons why such a service is needed. As a result, communication between NGO staff and users is often in Spanish or vehicular languages, such as English, French, Arabic. In the case of the use of interpreters, as in Vigier and Relinque´s study (2023), there is no interest in knowing the language proficiency or specific Tr&In training of those hired.

The third study of interest is that penned by Vitalaru (2023). Vitalaru studies the availability of information materials accessible to users in their own language. A total of 262 texts were collected from 20 main sources. The institutions that published these materials were classified into three types: 1. public government institutions, 2. hospitals, 3. associations and foundations, e.g. Spanish Association of Cardiology Nursing (AECC in Spanish), or the Spanish Liver and Kidney Association (AEHR in Spanish). The topics are diverse, being administrative procedures (4%) and awareness and action (3%) the one with the lowest rate. As for the languages of the translations, the highest percentage corresponds to the vehicular languages or those with a higher percentage of migrant population: French (80 %), English (78 %), Arabic and dialectal Arabic (75 %), Chinese (60 %), Romanian (52 %), Russian (13 %), Urdu (6 %), Bulgarian (4 %), Wolof (3.4 %), German (3 %), Ukrainian (2.6 %), Portuguese (1.5 %), Polish (0.76 %), and Tagalog (1 ; 0.38 %) (Vitalaru 2023, p.73).

Vitalaru concludes that the general trend is inclusive and points out to some examples of good practices with respect to the variety of topics and languages, as well as the important work done especially by associations and foundations. Regarding the Administration, she also indicates a positive change compared to the findings of the earlier study written by Sandín Vázquez *et al.* (2012, p. 40) related to the accessibility of translated materials. However, the level of representation of the different languages and text types as well as coordination remains unequal in the different institutions at local and national level.

At this point it seems relevant to mention another important issue in relation to the resources that the Administration makes available to migrants and in which languages. This leads us to the fourth study by Ruiz-Cortés (2021). She analyses the digital resources related to migration procedures in Spain (application forms, information brochures) available on the website of the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration. Three trends were observed: 1. Not all documents related to the same procedure are translated. 2. When translated, the languages into which the resources are made available on the ministry's website are not homogeneous. 3. The texts that benefit most from translation are the procedures related to the Spanish Law 14/2013 (Law 14/2013) on support for entrepreneurs

and their internationalization (commonly known as the Entrepreneurs' Law), a law that allows large fortunes to invest in Spain (Ruiz-Cortés, 2019, pp. 229–232). The same tendency continues in 2023, as research by Valero-Garcés (2024) indicates. This leads us to the conclusion that, although the Ministry is aware that translation favors the understanding of foreigners' procedures by immigrants, its policies only favor those migrants who bring more income to the public funds (that of investors in the Entrepreneurs Law) and where LLD are left out.

As for oral communication with the Administration, the scarce or non-existent multilingual linguistic policy does not always facilitate overcoming language barriers and migrant users continue to have to resort to spontaneous non-professional interpreters such as friends, relatives, etc. Besides, the model used by the Administration of outsourcing to language service provision does not always meet the expectations of effective resolution of communication problems. This form of management also indicates a chronic lack of recognition of Tr&In in different areas, for instance, hospitals, courts, and schools (Valero-Garcés, 2023).

4. Translation technologies in migratory environments

The third point to be discussed deals with technology used to communicate with the migrant population. Technology is present in our daily lives in a thousand and one ways and is applied in all fields. Given this scenario, it is worth asking whether technology is also useful in the field of communication with the migrant population. Rico (2023, p. 12), in her monograph with the significant title of *Tecnología de la traducción en el ámbito de las migraciones* aims to cover “the space that remains open between translation technology and intercultural mediation in migration processes” (author's own translation) and provides guidelines on how to make the most of the existing resources in different organizations, and how to renew and adapt them to the emerging linguistic needs. She acknowledges that much remains to be done and that there is still a lack of research in this area.

Some studies that call the attention to the use of technology as a practical solution in the different studies of the migration process, including some LLD, are Ricart Vayá and Jordán Enamorado (2022), Sottile (2019), Tesseur (2022), Sánchez Ramos & Rico (2020), Rico (2023), Stengers *et al.* (2024), and Valero-Garcés & Kemp (2024).

Ricart Vayá and Jordán Enamorado (2022) evaluate in their study the effectiveness of machine translation (MT) in a humanitarian emergency context (the outbreak of the war in Ukraine). Data come from interviews to Ukrainian refugees using Google Translate (GT). The GT voice recognition tool was used in its PC version. The interviews were recorded with the Xbox application, which allows recording of the computer screen and external sound. During the interviews, the researchers spoke in Spanish and the interviewees spoke in Ukrainian. Content was related to the participants' personal information and their daily experiences since their arrival in Spain. The questions varied in accordance with the information provided by each participant.

After the interviews, participants were asked to review the transcriptions made by the GT speech recognition system for accuracy. Transcription errors were detected in only 15% of the interventions. The errors detected were mainly the inability of GT to recognize that a question was being asked or the interventions contained several sentences; error in the assignment of gender, with a tendency to use the masculine gender; or inconsistent use of punctuation marks of certain words.

Two criteria were used for the analysis: fluency and intelligibility. According to the authors, both criteria are interconnected as grammatical errors can hinder comprehension, and the high or low quality of fluency will have an impact on intelligibility. Results indicate that more than 60% of the translation performed by GT was perfect or almost perfect; about 30% allowed understanding fragments of the original information, and only about 10% of the interactions were completely erroneous. The authors pointed out that intelligibility was slightly higher than fluency, but that did not hinder comprehension, given that usually the reader of a translation could infer the meaning even if it contained some grammatical errors without much relevance. According to the researchers, despite the errors noted, in all the interviews it was possible to maintain a fluid dialogue in which information was exchanged on a variety of topics.

The authors conclude that a decisive factor when evaluating the quality of a translation, whether human or automatic, is its purpose, i.e., the purpose for which the translation has been requested. Therefore, it can be stated that a translation that could be considered of low quality in one context could be of sufficient quality in a different context, depending on the user's purpose.

Along the same lines of the use of MT in immigration contexts, there are several studies that bring attention to its use as a practical solution in the different stages of the migration process, even in some LLD (Sotile 2019; Tesseur 2022; Sánchez Ramos 2020, Rico 2020; 2023; Valero-Garcés & Kemp 2024).

However, as Rico (2024) warns, the indiscriminate use of this technology could lead to a breach in the communication flow or even, at some point, to a significant risk depending on the type of content to be translated. She argues that defining criteria for assessing the impact of automatically translated content in response to the multilingual needs of migrants is a factor that should be studied in greater depth. Cultural references, for example, are an issue to be considered, given that they are not adequately addressed, especially in the case of distant languages and cultures, as is often the case with LLD. Some examples of mistranslation are often found in texts useful for the migrant population that have been translated using MT, even in vehicular languages. Rico Pérez (2023) points out some types of text and contexts that need more research:

- a) Official documents and laws that do not have a direct correspondence in another language.
- b) Issues related to geographical division such as, for example, in Spanish *provincias* or *comunidades autónomas*.
- c) Different equivalences in different languages for the same concept. This is the case, for example, of the Spanish word *residencia* and its French translation (*domiciles*, *residence*, or *séjour*); or the Spanish word *ocupación* (employment), which out of context may be automatically translated with the meaning of *invasion*.
- d) Translation of acronyms such as, for example, in Spanish *Unidad de Grandes Empresas y Colectivos Estratégicos* (UGE-CE) (Large Companies and Strategic Collectives Unit, literally in English) for which the automatic translation generates a literal translation into French *Pôle Grandes Entreprises et Groupements Stratégiques* (CGU-CE).
- e) Words with a strong cultural reference such as in Spanish *pareja de hecho* that include the possibility of being (or not) married, which in other cultures necessarily implies the need for marriage (as is the case, for example, in Arabic).

f) Obligation to mark the first and second surnames on the forms, whilst only the first one is common in other countries.

g) Acronyms on the forms such as, for example, in Spanish those referring to sex (H *hombre* (man) and M *mujer* (women), or the corresponding to marital status (S (*soltero/a*) (single), C *casado/a* (married), V (*viudo/a*) (widow), D (*divorciado/a*) (divorced), Sp (*separado/a*) (separated couple) or N.I.E. (*Número de identidad de Extranjero*) (Foreigner Identity Number) (Rico 2024).

5. Conclusions and reflexions

The migrant population in Spain continues to grow and a part of this population brings with them unfamiliar languages and cultures (LLD), which increase communication barriers. In this article we have addressed three main points: 1. challenges caused by the increase in the migrant population with LLD; 2. analyses of the quality of communication between the main recipients of migrants (Administration and NGOs), and their users; 3. advances in the use of technology with migrant population.

Through the analysis of a series of recent research studies, the general conclusions indicate that: 1. There is a greater awareness of the importance of languages, but also a lack of language policies that could bring closer theory and practice. 2. There is also a need to review the importance of linguistic communication as well as the role of the interlinguistic intermediaries in LLD. So, we continue to find the same strategies and lack of resources as at the beginning of the 21st century: a) family members, friends or bilingual volunteers who know LLD and Spanish acting as Tr&In without any testing of language(s) proficiency or training in Tr&In. b) support on verbal language; c) use of a lingua franca; d) use of easy language; e) advance in the use of technology, but it is not risk-free; f) lack of available training (for Tr&In in LLD, but also for Administration and NGO staff, firstly, to recognise the importance of communication barriers and the use of language professionals, and secondly, to know how to work with these language professionals).

In short, these studies show the plurality of practices and profiles of those who facilitate communication in the Administration or third sector organisations, and the lack of funding and planning of language services in these organisations.

After a critical analysis of several recent research studies in different contexts and approaches mainly focused on LLD, I would like to conclude with three final thoughts:

1. Migration policies do not currently take language planning into much consideration. A clear language policy will make it possible to articulate language rights as a human right and to recognise the important role of translators and interpreters in facilitating the participation of users in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies and in access to public services.

2. Nowadays society indicates that the prevailing philosophy in many institutional and private settings is rather to maximise profit at all costs without thinking about mutual support between all actors involved in migration and humanitarian action.

3. There is a growing interest in the role of translation and interpreting and multilingual communication in humanitarian action. Research demonstrates the usefulness and necessity of multilingual texts as a necessary tool for integration in LLD. However, it also provides information about the importance of technology in the dissemination of information in

networks; the need to provide training or the development of technological resources for effective communication; and the importance to explore the benefits of technology in limiting excessive bureaucracy. Some ongoing projects and initiatives whose objectives respond to these needs are for example, Mentalhealth4all: Development and implementation of a digital platform for the promotion of access to mental healthcare for low language proficient third-country nationals in Europe/MHEALTH4AL (AMIF-2020-AG-CALL-02, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, DG HOME, 2022-2024); Communication in Public Service Interpreting and Translating with Languages of Lesser Diffusion (DIALOGOS) (Erasmus+, KA220-HED-BECE1AF1, 2023-2024); or Research and Training with/for migrant women speakers of Languages of Lesser Diffusion (FEIMEM), a national project by the Spanish Ministry of Equality (PAC 2'023. Expediente 22-2ACT-23). Achieving the collaboration of all the entities involved in the migration process and applying a more cosmopolitan policy would help to take a further step towards a more inclusive society and the professionalisation of the PSIT and recognition of the need to pay more attention to LLD.

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