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# PSIT communication, collaboration, and inclusion: needs, challenges, and current proposals

**Bianca Vitalaru**

Universidad de Alcalá, Spain

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0618-3867>

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## 1. Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has involved several changes at the social, economic, educational, health, etc. levels, brought about by events of different types, such as, for example, the constant conflicts in different parts of the world (including the Afghan conflict or the war in Ukraine), natural disasters caused by climate change, or health crises such as COVID-19 (Valero-Garcés & Alcalde Peñalver, 2024). These situations have often resulted in humanitarian crises that have involved large-scale population movements (Valero-Garcés & Alcalde Peñalver, 2024). This increase in population movements has been a challenge in itself as it has led to the configuration of new multicultural societies across the globe (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016). This new reality implies not only coexistence but also access to basic public rights and services for the host population who does not speak the main language, as well as the fulfilment of human rights (Vitalaru, forthcoming); in these different contexts, communication is essential.

One of the main characteristics regarding the construction of multicultural societies is precisely the communication between local groups and the newcomers due to linguistic and cultural distances. The foreign population must access a variety of services and carry out

different types of formalities (e.g., related to either international protection status or alien status and documentation, social services, health, education, employment, legal aid, etc.) (Vitalaru, forthcoming). In this context, Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) is essential as it makes communication between public service providers and users from different linguistic and cultural contexts (e.g., healthcare, police, legal, administrative and social or educational contexts, among others) possible (Valero-Garcés, 2024); it is also carried out in a variety of situations (translation, sight translation, consecutive interpreting, liaison interpreting, onsite interpreting, telephone interpreting, routine or crises, emergencies, etc.).

In this context of increasing interconnection between countries, multicultural societies, languages and cultures, measures are urgently needed to address the new social, political, and economic situations that arise from the coexistence of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This requires both institutional and civil or private initiatives that countries have already begun to adopt, both in the short and long term, as demonstrated by the goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda (Valero-Garcés, 2024), which include policies aimed at the integration of people from third countries (Valero-Garcés, 2019). These policies, according to the EU, should address practical issues related to the reception processes and the provision of services to people settling in other countries but also social issues, such as the response of the host society (Valero-Garcés, 2024). However, before acting, it is important to understand the needs and challenges that society, translation and interpreting (T&I) professionals in general, and PSIT professionals, in particular, have. Therefore, some of the needs and challenges raised in different studies focusing on Spain will be discussed in the next section, followed by a summary of the topics proposed in this thematic issue of the journal.

## **2. PSIT: needs and challenges in the last decade**

The very characteristics of PSIT, with its variety of contexts and situations, imply a series of challenges for different groups (users, service providers, and translators and interpreters) related to the provision and availability of services; provision and availability depend on the field in question, the availability of professionals for all the language combinations involved, the existence of training programmes, the quality of the training available, access to such training, etc. In general, at the international level, the lack of policies and structural funding in several European countries leads to unequal access to public interpreting services (Rillof & Buysse, 2015, which remain largely unprofessionalised and unrecognised, except in countries like Sweden, the UK, Australia, Canada, and the US (Valero-Garcés, 2015a). For example, in Flanders, unclear procedures limit equitable access ((Roels et al., 2015) while in Germany, most interpreters lack formal training and work part-time (Stevenson et al., 2023). These challenges have been identified through the practice of the profession as well as through more specific research and are all related in some way to professionalisation. In addition, several needs identified through these studies helped us determine the state of the art regarding PSIT as a discipline and profession aiming to achieve its professionalisation in Spain, as a major challenge that affects the three groups involved. The following four sub-sections will describe both the needs and difficulties we included in our classification of challenges, which consists of five categories.

### *2.1 Characteristics of PSIT: approaching needs and urgent measures*

The first category of challenges is based on needs regarding the definition and description of the situation of PSIT in Spain. One of the first needs identified in 2006 was to define and describe the situation of PSIT in Spain, not only at the national level but also by region. In this

first phase of research, the aim was to define the linguistic reality of the different regions of Spain. This completed the coexistence model between the local population and the population of foreign origin as a result of the migration of recent decades (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016). Another need identified in 2006 was to identify the challenges posed by this new multicultural and multilingual reality. Over the years, these needs turned into the need to update the previous information (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016; Foulquié-Rubio et al., 2018); thus, it seems that scholars have managed to both define the discipline and describe its state of the art.

The second challenge of PSIT is the urgency with which T&I needs arise (e.g., in situations of health and humanitarian crises and the need for international protection) coupled with the shortage of professionals, which leads to *ad hoc*, improvised solutions, instead of planned solutions, to cover immediate needs, such as the use of volunteer translators and interpreters with no prior training (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016). This aspect goes hand in hand with multicultural coexistence in certain areas, which leads to social changes that often result in conflict situations in which the intervention of linguistic and cultural intermediaries is essential (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016).

### *2.2 Underdeveloped level of professionalisation and heterogeneous solutions*

The third challenge we can underline is the underdeveloped level of professionalisation and the heterogeneous provision of T&I services or the variety of solutions taken to facilitate communication as well as of the quality standards required. Therefore, as underlined by Foulquié-Rubio et al. (2018), due to the lack of professionalisation and limited funding, solutions vary depending on the professional field and the region of Spain concerned. They also highlight the lack of guaranteed rights to T&I services. For example, in Spain, no law guarantees the right to interpreting in healthcare settings specifically, leading to solutions such as machine translation, gestures or voluntary interpreters such as patient's relatives or even minors (Del Pozo Triviño, 2013; Foulquié-Rubio et al., 2018). This contrasts with the situation in the criminal justice field, where this right is clearly stipulated by the Organic Law 5/2015.

Other solutions used in the healthcare field, albeit in an isolated or heterogeneous manner, are the Salud entre Culturas interpreting service at the Ramón y Cajal Hospital in Madrid and telephone interpreting in Levante, an area with high rates of foreign population (Foulquié-Rubio et al., 2018) and in several hospitals, for example, at the Fuenlabrada Hospital in Madrid or at the University Hospital in Guadalajara, for Ukrainian refugees (Vitalaru, 2024a). Another interesting measure is the use of specialised multilingual operators, called *MILICITES*, who act in emergency care in the Valencia area (Alarcón-García, 2024).

Another public sphere with hardly unified solutions is the legal setting. On the one hand, we can find there are translators and interpreters in languages such as German, Arabic, French, Greek, English, Italian, and Russian who work as civil servants as part of the national body of translators and interpreters of the Ministry of External Affairs (Cuerpo de Traductores e Intérpretes de España of Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, n.d.). On the other hand, in the Ministries of Justice and the Interior, both in-house staff and staff subcontracted by T&I companies are employed. In the latter case, precarious working conditions and the hiring of untrained bilingual staff have been reported (Foulquié-Rubio et al., 2018), as well as a decline in the quality of court interpreting in recent years (Foulquié-Rubio et al., 2018).

### *2.3 Training-related challenges*

The fourth category focuses on the challenges and needs related to PSIT training in Spain. The importance of providing training aimed at the professional qualification of PSIT staff has

been recognised since scholars showed interest in PSIT and its legal professional acknowledgement (Valero-Garcés & Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016). In 2009, the need for more specific actions that would really boost PSIT training was raised; they mentioned, for example, an analysis of T&I curricula to determine the presence of PSIT in training programmes (Del Pozo Triviño, 2009). Other innovative ways of teaching PSIT, as well as gathering materials specifically designed for its teaching were also mentioned (Del Pozo Triviño, 2009). Moreover, the actions proposed reflected an intention to differentiate the teaching of PSIT from other forms of T&I, which implies a recognition of the particularities of the work of professionals in this field. Finally, scholars also showed an interest in adapting materials and forms of teaching to the country's migratory reality, since the intention was to include the languages of immigration (Del Pozo Triviño, 2009) [or languages of lesser diffusion] of Spain, as languages in which qualified professionals were really needed.

The main challenges related to PSIT training were also contextualised by studies focused on other countries (cited in Valero-Garcés, 2019) which were also applicable to Spain: insufficient recognition and lack of compulsory training to practice as a professional translator and interpreter (Hale, 2007), scarcity of programmes considering linguistic and thematic needs (D'Hayer, 2012), questionable quality and effectiveness (Hale, 2007; D'Hayer, 2012), diversity of profiles and difficulty in recruiting trainers (Valero-Garcés, 2003; Valero-Garcés & Atabekova, 2013), and relationship between professionalisation and cooperation (Pöchhacker, 2004; Hale, 2007; Corsellis, 2009, among others).

In Spain, in the absence of specific legislation requiring a certain type of training or specific requirements as to content and duration as, for example, in Norway (see Urdal, 2024), the training landscape is sparse and heterogeneous. In this respect, it is worth noting that there are currently only three specific university Master's degrees recognised by the Spanish National Accreditation Body ANECA that encompass various fields of PSIT: the Master's Degree in Intercultural Communication, Public Service Interpreting and Translation (offered in a wider variety of language specialisations (Universidad de Alcalá, n. d.), the Master's Degree in Translation and Intercultural Mediation (Universidad de Salamanca, n.d.) and the University Master's Degree in Translation and Intercultural Studies (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, n.d.), as well as the EUTISC University Expert in Translation and Interpreting for Community Services (Universidad de La Laguna, n.d.). On the other hand, in a study focusing on interpreting training in the healthcare field, Álvaro Aranda & Lázaro Gutiérrez (2021) highlighted the diversity and heterogeneity of training in this field in Spain, showing the training options offered by different entities, which contribute to professionalisation. On the one hand, universities offer some public service interpreting and medical translation courses, especially for bachelor's and master's degrees. On the other hand, other entities also provide training, in this case, for their employees. This is the case of companies that provide courses/programmes adapted to the needs of the sector and their clients (e.g. telephone interpreting) and NGOs, which train workers and volunteers in intercultural mediation in general and in languages of lesser diffusion.

Regarding training as a requirement for employment purposes, it should be noted that, according to Vitalaru (2024b), the different types of PSIT employers (public sector through public bodies and NGOs on the one hand, and companies and freelancers, on the other) require formal training in T&I or Philology, especially in the case of more widely used languages. On the other hand, different categories of languages are differentiated and companies providing T&I services have difficulties finding professional translators and interpreters in the case of languages of lesser diffusion. For example, in the case of Ofilingua, a company providing T&I services in judicial and police contexts, among others, recruitment requirements, according to Casamayor Maaspons (2021 cited in Vitalaru, 2024b), differ

depending on the type of language. Therefore, we can find three categories of languages: type A<sup>1</sup>, type B<sup>2</sup> and type C<sup>3</sup> languages. While the first two require formal training and 2 years' experience, the third one requires high linguistic proficiency in the working languages and 2 years of experience. Advanced training courses could also replace formal training in the case of the second category of languages. Similarly, Interpret Solutions, another T&I company, offers the possibility of in-house training if the training requirement is not met for languages of lesser diffusion. This shows considerable progress towards professionalisation, although, on the other hand, ad hoc interpreters are still used in other contexts and fields, as mentioned in section 2.2 above.

It should also be noted that some attempts to bring training closer to reality and professional practice have been made, considering that PSIT is characterised by communicative exchanges in different contexts, emergencies, or stressful situations, with a high emotional charge. Therefore, the need to include in the teaching of PSIT different aspects of professional practice is underlined. These aspects should include content on the contexts in which PSIT is used, the codes of conduct or the limits of the interpreter's performance, the profiles of PSIT professionals, the coexistence of professional practices and attitudes with non-professional practices and attitudes within the labour market, the existing conflicts between the codes of conduct of the professionals involved in communication, as well as aspects related to the psychological dimension of PSIT. Moreover, aspects related to the psychological dimension of the interpreting, as well as emotions and stress management are also essential (Valero-Garcés & Alcalde Peñalver, 2024). This last aspect reflects a trend that we also find in research on PSIT in recent years in studies focused both on Spain and in other countries (Escudero Bregante, 2014; Valero-Garcés, 2015; and Geiling et al., 2021, among others). The mental well-being of public service interpreters, who often find themselves interpreting in conflictive or even traumatic situations is emphasised as well as the development of emotional and stress regulation skills; training should raise awareness about aspects such as vicarious trauma and the importance of self-care (Valero-Garcés & Alcalde Peñalver, 2024).

A final key challenge for professionalisation in PSIT is the adaptation of educational curricula to labour market needs (Pena Díaz, 2016; Vitalaru, 2024a). From this point of view, it is essential to improve students' level of employability through training, based, in turn, on the development of several competences and training in entrepreneurship (Álvarez-Álvarez & Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2017; Galán-Mañas, 2017 cited in Vitalaru, 2024b). In the PSIT sector, it is crucial not only to develop a variety of competences but also to develop and adapt the skills required by employers, differentiating between the public and private sectors (Vitalaru, 2024b), as well as to consider the needs of the labour market by language specialisations (Vitalaru, 2022).

#### *2.4 Taking action to solve problems and professionalisation*

The analysis of the national reality resulted not only in the identification of needs but also of different forms of actions required, which also represented challenges. As early as 2006, studies underlined the need to propose practical solutions to the problems arising from multicultural coexistence. These solutions referred to peaceful coexistence but were also

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<sup>1</sup> (English, French, German, Standard Arabic).

<sup>2</sup> (Romanian, Serbian, Russian, Portuguese, Albanian, Bulgarian, Italian, Ukrainian, Polish, Mandarin Chinese, Dutch, Georgian, Japanese, Turkish).

<sup>3</sup> (other languages and dialects: Romani, Igbo, Edo, Wolof, Estonian, Dariya, Sussya, Rifian, Hassanya, Urdu, Hindi, Pashtu, Neapolitan, Macedonian, Punjabi, Pulaar, Kurdish, Tamil, Dari, Persian, Lingala, Bambara, Qintian).

meant to facilitate the participation of the immigrant population in social and institutional life (Valero-Garcés and Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016). Studies also sought to raise awareness of how PSIT could be used to solve the problems arising from this coexistence. Therefore, it was important to raise political elites and public service providers awareness regarding the importance of providing good translations to users of public services, given the repercussions that a bad translation could have on both providers and users (Valero-Garcés and Lázaro Gutiérrez, 2016).

More specifically, several actions were taken to improve professionalisation, an aspiration that ultimately has repercussions on all dimensions of PSIT (training, research, and professional settings). The great research interest and the intense and continuous activity of several research groups such as the FITISPos group (n.d.) and the MIRAS research group (n.d.) were particularly relevant as well as those of the COMUNICA Network (n.d.). The latter focused on studying the coexistence between different languages and cultures in different regions of Spain. Moreover, the tireless activity of different T&I associations such as Asociación de Universidades del Estado Español con Titulaciones Oficiales de Traducción e Interpretación (AUnETI) and its predecessor, Conferencia de Centros y Departamentos Universitarios de Traducción e Interpretación del Estado Español (CCDUTI), Asociación Profesional de Traductores e Intérpretes Judiciales y Jurados (APTIJ, n.d.) and Asociación Española de Traductores, Correctores e Intérpretes (ASETRAD, n.d.) was also essential, through initiatives, debates, reports, publications, dissemination or training, among other actions. Likewise, improvements in training and the use of current technologies were also noteworthy and important to achieve what Del Pozo Triviño (2009) proposed, i.e. to increase the effectiveness of PSIT professionals by incorporating ICT into professional practice and, more specifically, into the languages of migration. Proof of this is the multitude of studies focusing on the use of technology in translation and interpreting contexts (corpus linguistics, terminology management, assisted translation and post-editing, telephone interpreting, etc.). As far as considering the languages of lesser diffusion, a European project led by the University of Alcalá in Spain (DIALOGOS project, n.d.), is particularly relevant since it focuses on the creation of courses to train bilingual people with high proficiency in languages of lesser diffusion in PSIT. Another challenge expressed over the years was to increase the practical dimension of PSIT training with the ultimate aim of boosting professionalisation (Valero-Garcés & Alcalde Peñalver, 2024). The master's degree in PSIT at the University of Alcalá (n.d.), among others, can be an example in this sense, as it has a fundamental intensive practical component as well as a varied training in terms of professional contexts, situations, and modalities, as well as applicable techniques and strategies (see Vitalaru, 2024a and b). Although we still lack regulations regarding the profession, progress is increasingly important and PSIT's fundamental role in crises such as the ones we are experiencing nowadays is becoming more and more visible.

### **3. PSIT and needs in different countries and contexts: issues addressed and reflections**

Considering the previous context, this thematic issue focuses on some of the challenges faced by T&I practitioners and even by other parties involved in the communicative process. The contributions in this issue attempt to offer, from different perspectives (professional practice, training, and research), results, reflections, and actions considering the variety of PSIT situations and tasks. As this is a special thematic issue, the issue includes only interviews and articles.

On the one hand, the interview with Dr. Elisabet Tiselius underlines the importance of language rights and political actions not only to protect rights but also to defend both languages of lesser diffusion and minority languages. She stresses that PSIT has become essential in addressing the social, healthcare, and legal needs of increasingly diverse populations, driven by migration and global challenges. Countries like Sweden lead with structured PSIT systems, but the field requires reliable government support, adaptable policies, and collaboration with civil society to respond effectively to shifting demographics. Advances in digital tools and remote interpreting enhance accessibility, although in-person services remain crucial due to the nuanced, empathetic nature of PSIT work. While technologies like AI and machine translation can assist, they fall short of fully replacing human interpreters, especially in emotionally complex scenarios and for languages of lesser diffusion. Effective PSIT training now includes technology use, stress management, and ensuring that interpreters are well-prepared for the evolving landscape. By promoting linguistic diversity and upholding language rights, PSIT supports inclusion and aligns with global objectives like the UN Agenda 2030, demonstrating its central role in building equitable, connected societies.

On the other hand, we classified the eight articles included in this issue into four categories. The first category focuses on the state of the art on a particular aspect of PSIT, as well as access to T&I services and accessibility in general. Within this category, Alarcón-García reviews the legislation regulating the language services offered in 112 calls in the Valencian region (Spain) and an analysis of the most frequently interpreted situations, as well as the management of communication in such calls. The study is particularly interesting for its presentation of an effective model of emergency response through a team of specialised operators, called *MILICITES*, who are highly proficient in foreign languages. Since the handling of foreign language situations is complex, operators must not only master several languages, but also follow specific protocols to ensure adequate care and protect the safety and well-being of all citizens. Therefore, *MILICITES* are essential to guarantee the inclusion and accessibility of the foreign population in the Valencian emergency system. In short, this approach of the service allows the foreign population to communicate directly with emergency personnel, thus improving the quality of communication and the efficiency of incident resolution.

Policastro-Ponce and Merino Cabello conducted a study on the needs, challenges, and current situation of Public Service Interpreting in the province of Cordoba (Spain), focusing on the demand and the availability of resources, the measures taken, and the training of professionals, ultimately highlighting the need for professionalisation. The analysis of the results shows important challenges such as the lack of adequate resources, the need for specialised training for interpreters, and the increased demand due to linguistic and cultural diversity. The conclusions underline the importance of public policies that promote the professionalisation of interpreters in essential services such as healthcare, legal, and welfare services, and the urgency regarding the improvement of working conditions in public services in Cordoba.

Sagli and Felberg analyse patients' perceptions of interpreter performance in an interpreter-mediated cardiac rehabilitation course as a new form of health services in Norway. The study is based on a specific concept, 'access to health services', defined as a fundamental concept that includes complex factors such as availability, appropriateness, outcomes and equity. Moreover, it shows that linguistic diversity is a challenge for these services. This study is innovative because of its focus on a health service from both a learning and empowerment perspective. Indeed, through detailed observations and interviews, patients highlighted that the course provided them with new knowledge and a greater understanding of their health

problems through information sessions, physical activity, and exchange with other patients; it showed that communication through interpreters was effective.

Finally, Navarro focuses on interpreting in languages of lesser diffusion in migratory contexts in France and considers the strategies that have been adopted to meet the demand for these languages to propose ways of increasing the availability of professionals. Collaboration with universities is encouraged so that students from diverse backgrounds can consider their language skills as a valuable and promising professional resource for the future. The article is also interesting for its final reflections. Thus, providing professional interpretation services for all requested languages is a challenge for both NGOs and authorities. Moreover, strategies such as the implementation of specialised centres are used to improve efficiency and reduce costs. However, this challenge goes beyond logistics, as it affects the credibility of institutions such as the Cour nationale du droit d'asile (CNDA) and Office Française de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (Ofpra). Furthermore, the handling of rare languages and the accelerated recruitment of interpreters in the context of asylum policies under political scrutiny can be considered from two perspectives; on the one hand, it poses risks, and, on the other hand, it highlights the importance of multilingualism.

The second category encompasses issues related to the training and qualification of professional translators and interpreters. First, Urdal conducts a study on the construction of interpreters' professional identity through a qualification-oriented interpreting course in Norway. Through questionnaires and interviews with former students, the study shows that the course strengthens interpreters' confidence, independence, and understanding of their role, as well as enhances their technical skills and sense of belonging to a professional community. The article highlights that formal training (despite its short duration, considering that it's a 30-ECTS course) can have a positive impact on interpreters' self-perception and professionalisation. Moreover, the course takes place within the framework of a specific and recent law that regulates interpreting, so this is a key issue for the professionalisation of PSIT. Secondly, Reichmann et al. present a project aimed at improving the training of interpreters and healthcare staff in multilingual communication and evaluating the effectiveness of the course through surveys and feedback from participants. The project consisted of practical training sessions that mainly addressed cultural differences, different levels of healthcare training and the challenges of three-way communication. Overall, the feedback sessions showed a general sense of well-being among the trainees but also some concerns and uncertainties (e.g., regarding the performance of interpreters in complex interactions). The course contributed to the development of interprofessional skills, which could improve access to healthcare for migrants. Finally, Thomsen focuses on the population of interpreters of Spanish and Swedish in Swedish public services, to confirm whether the linguistic asymmetry and migrant background that previous studies associate with these professionals apply to this group of interpreters too. Results suggest that, although these interpreters have an asymmetrical linguistic competence (with an equal distribution between native speakers of Spanish and Swedish), they do not come mainly from a migrant background. Furthermore, this asymmetry in language competence and migration background is found to influence the likelihood of interpreters obtaining state-authorisation to practice.

The third category focuses on other T&I situations that involve challenges for translation and interpreting professionals in their role as facilitators of communication, collaboration, and inclusion. Within this category, Núñez and Clavería Artajona describe the reality of the translation profession in the United Nations Translation Service (Spanish service), identifying professional profiles, language combinations, required competencies, common problems, and tools and resources used. It also analyses the types of problems and solutions that arise in an international context, which is different from national contexts and has its particularities,



addressing the current challenges and the scarcity of information regarding the role and responsibilities of these translators.

#### 4. Conclusions

Overall, the above context underlines not only needs and challenges, but also the different facets of the important role that PSIT plays regarding communication, collaboration, and inclusion, as highlighted in several studies. Indeed, PSIT emerges as an essential tool for integrating linguistic minorities, a tool that allows for solving communication problems between public service providers and users and, consequently, avoiding conflicts that may arise from miscommunication (Pena Díaz, 2016). Moreover, PSIT guarantees the exercise of civil and constitutional rights (Wallace & Monzó Nebot, 2019), particularly the right to access public services made available to citizens, while ensuring that public service providers can make the services offered available to newcomers. In essence, the main aim of PSIT is to empower users that belong to linguistic and cultural minorities and promote their social cohesion and integration; this is related to the coexistence of the local population with the foreign newcomers (Pena Díaz, 2016) and it allows foreign users to participate in the host society (Wallace & Monzó Nebot, 2019). Therefore, when faced with the tendency to seek economic profit, PSIT must advocate for the construction of a fairer society, through actions based on the principles of sustainability, equity, and social justice.

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