

OVER-THE-PHONE COMMUNITY INTERPRETING: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF INTERPRETED INTERACTIONS IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

PRZEMYSŁAW BOCZARSKI, PhD

Łódź University of Technology
przemyslaw.boczarski@p.lodz.pl

Abstract:

This paper examines the under-researched field of Polish–English telephone interpreting, with particular focus on the interactional environment and methods of connection. It first outlines the emergence of telephone interpreting, considers its advantages and disadvantages, and then presents a summary of findings from a corpus study conducted in 2024, in which 250 Polish–English interpreting interactions were recorded and analysed with reference to the method of connection between parties and the sectoral distribution of topics or issues discussed in those interactions. As OPI is conducted exclusively through the auditory channel, interpreters are deprived of visual cues; consequently, each method of connection presents both benefits and drawbacks, with the three-way conference call emerging as the most effective format for telephonic interactions between Polish speakers who decide to use the services of Polish-English OPI interpreters.

Keywords: OPI, telephonic interpreting, remote interpreting, public service interpreting, community interpreting, corpus analysis, Polish-English interpreting

1. Introduction

Community over-the-phone interpreting (OPI) is not a novelty in the field of interpreting or, more broadly, in Translation Studies, having been established for some time in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. However, the area remains largely under-researched in Poland, where the service is neither offered nor widely required in the market. Historically, Poland has not been a popular destination for immigrants (although this has been changing recently), and so there has never been a need for an implementation of a nation-wide system to facilitate interpreting between Polish personnel and non-Polish speakers. This gap has been partially addressed by sworn interpreters (*łumacz przysięgły*), who are universally recognised and accepted as official translators and interpreters, and who assist in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in various situations in which non-Polish speakers may find themselves. However, this system is inefficient, as it requires foreigners to book a sworn translator in advance

and schedule an appointment, which greatly complicates matters, particularly in urgent cases. Sworn translators receive their fees directly from their clients (in this case, non-Polish speakers), which may discourage some individuals, as their rates can be somewhat elevated, specifically for emergent matters.

As such, the market for telephonic community interpreters in Poland is virtually non-existent. There are, however, Polish OPI interpreters who serve other markets, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. These individuals are usually employed on a freelance basis through international agencies or language service providers (LSPs) to interpret conversations between Polish speakers – often categorised as LEP (limited English proficiency) speakers, and British or American officials in various institutional settings in the UK and the USA, respectively. This is perhaps one of the reasons why community OPI is not a popular topic of discussion or interest in academia in Poland, as there are no test subjects or practical contexts in which to conduct research.

In order to shed some lights on the under-researched field of Polish–English over-the-phone interpreting Boczarski (2025) compiled a corpus of Polish–English interpreted sessions recorded in 2023 and 2024. The corpus is a large collection of 250 interactions which were subsequently anonymised, transcribed and annotated with metadata to facilitate further qualitative and quantitative analyses. The corpus provides a substantial volume of data that offer a wide range of possibilities for systematic investigation, in-depth discourse analyses of interpreter intervention strategies, quantitative studies examining correlations between metadata parameters (such as call topic or duration) and linguistic features (including error rates or politeness markers), as well as lexical analyses which focus on terminology and register in Polish–English professional settings. The findings presented in this article are derived from analyses of the extensive datasets contained within the corpus.

2. Definition and Evolution of Over-the-Phone Interpreting

Over-the-phone interpreting belongs to a larger domain of remote interpreting (RI), which encompasses various modalities, each designed to facilitate communication between individuals speaking different languages. RI can be sub-divided into three primary types: over-the phone (telephone) remote interpreting (OPI), video remote interpreting (VRI) and web-based remote interpreting (WBI). These modalities address the needs and requirements of their users and provide unparalleled flexibility and accessibility in various interpreting scenarios. Their adoption and application also depend on other factors, such as the available conditions and infrastructure or the cost of implementation and they range from OPI being the easiest to implement and VRI along with WBI being more challenging (Ko, 2006: 327). Within the realm of telephone interpreting, Braun proposes a further taxonomy, distinguishing telephone interpreting from teleconference interpreting; however, the unifying feature across all modalities is the remote nature of participant interaction (Braun, 2011: 3).

The development of telephone interpreting within a field traditionally associated with in-person interaction represented a profound shift that ushered in a new era of long-

distance communication (Kelly, 2008: 6). The precursor to modern remote community interpreting can be linked to telephone interpretation services provided by non-professional ad-hoc speakers proficient in multiple languages. These services addressed immediate needs such as medical emergencies for vulnerable individuals, including immigrants, refugees, or people with limited proficiency in the local language. These early instances laid the groundwork for a groundbreaking transition in the way language services and the telephone, a device meant to connect people across distances, connected individuals across languages and over geographical boundaries.

Professionally, telephone interpreting was officially introduced in Australia in 1973 as a toll free service in response to the growing number of immigrants in the country (Amato et al., 2018: 12). Initially, the service was established and operated in Sydney and Melbourne as an emergency point-of-contact, however, with time it became available on more general basis nationwide. In the United States telephone interpreting was initially offered in 1981 and its introduction is credited to a team of two professionals (a police officer and a Defence Language Institute employee) who established the company Language Line Services as a charity organisation to bridge language barriers which the police faced at that time. The company quickly outgrew its original mission, however, and turned into a for-profit organisation servicing a great number of clients and spanning different fields, such as telecommunications and healthcare. Language Line Services is often considered one of the pioneering organisations that initiated the systematic and widespread provision of telephone interpreting services in a number of institutions. Currently, this company, along with many other language service providers, offers interpreting positions for both in-house and freelance interpreters (Gilbert et al., 2022: 4).

The development of telephone interpreting marked a significant change from the traditional, in-person model of interpreting and paved the way for the evolution of remote interpreting services. OPI, and by extension its broader category RI, have been particularly prevalent in community settings, as they offer a range of advantages, most notably access to a large pool of international interpreters who would otherwise be unavailable at the local level for on-site assignments.

Nevertheless, in-person interpreting has historically been viewed more favourably and is often regarded as a more professional service. In the past, concerns about technical glitches, reduced visual and non-verbal cues, potential distractions and the necessity for interpreters to be IT literate led to reservations about remote interpreting. Professionals argued that these factors could hinder the interpreter's ability to provide accurate interpretation, which would in turn impact the overall quality of communication (Braun, 2011: 7; Pastor et al., 2020: 61). Additionally, the absence of immediate physical presence was thought to create challenges in establishing rapport and trust between the interpreter and the participants which would in turn affect the dynamics of the interaction and decrease the quality of interpreting. Wadensjö mentions a research participant who expressed the fear of being identified by an "invisible" remote interpreter as a factor deciding against the use of remote interpreting (Wadensjö, 1999: 4). Kelly (2008: 8) explains that interpreting providers might have little concern for quality or might not have sufficient training or skills, however, she also adds that it is

a general problem related to many fields of interpreting in the United States, not necessarily to remote interpreting.

However, over the years OPI, and more broadly RI, have seen substantial advancements in high-quality video, audio technology, and software reliability. Those advancements along with research on remote interpreting helped to mitigate many of the challenges initially faced by interpreters. Additionally, the global pandemic that emerged in 2020 accelerated the implementation of remote interpreting, as increasing numbers of interpreters were either compelled or chose to engage in online practice (Przepiórkowska, 2021: 143). Eventually, despite certain limitations associated with OPI, it has become a widely used method of delivering interpreting services in many countries (Amato et al., 2018: 13). These typically include territories with multilingual populations or countries chosen by immigrants as a place of settlement, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

3. OPI Environment – Modality and Methods of Connection

As discussed previously, OPI is the simplest modality in which interpreting services are provided over the telephone (this can be both traditional phone lines as well as VOIP-based connections). Consequently, it is by far the quickest and the least expensive method as it enables rapid connections between interpreters and clients via audio link (Moser-Mercer, 2011: 74) with minimal requirements or setup. It remains a popular choice for Polish expats due to its simplicity of implementation (a regular phone line and a telephone constitute the bare minimum) and ease of use, making it suitable for various situations, including emergency calls, customer service, and telephonic medical consultations. The ease and convenience of fast connections between clients and interpreters come at a cost, though, as in this case interpreting is rendered via the auditory channel only, and interpreters are deprived of a great number of cues which are naturally available to those working onsite, on a face-to-face basis. However, there might be situations where immediate access to an interpreter is crucial and the visual context is not necessarily required, such as emergency dispatch services or customer service queries.

Regardless of the method employed – whether a traditional telephone connection, an Internet-based link, or another platform – it is essential to establish a medium that brings together the parties of an interpreting activity within a single environment that enables effective interaction. The parties involved typically include a client (such as a business entity or a medical facility), an interpreter, and a service user, who may be located in various settings depending on the need or the type of interaction. Therefore, this single environment – although it may be assumed to always consist of the voice link – can vary physically across different interpreting activities. The following sub-chapters present the findings of a study conducted by Boczarski between 2023 and 2024, in which a corpus of 250 interpreted interactions was compiled and analysed with regard to modes of connection and the frequency of different setups used in encounters between Polish expatriates and British institutions (Boczarski, 2025).

3.1. Three-way conference call

One of the most popular methods is the three-way connection, most likely due to the ease of implementing such a solution. This method involves the remote interpreter, the client, and the LEP (Limited English Proficiency) speaker all being in separate locations. A typical example of this configuration could be a remote medical consultation. For instance, a General Practitioner (GP) might dial an interpreting service to establish a connection with a remote interpreter. Subsequently, the GP dials the patient, who could be located at home, thereby creating a three-way conference connection. A visual representation is presented below.

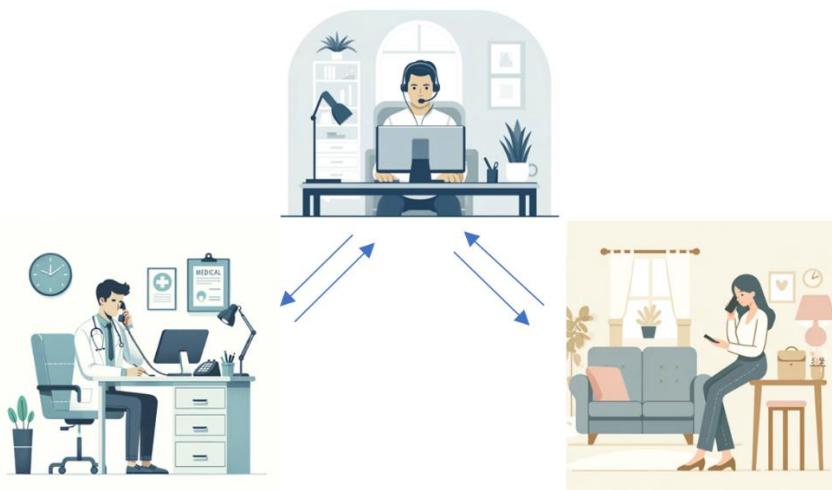


Figure 1: Typical scenario involving the use of a 3-way conference connection – all parties are located in separate places. Image generated by AI with prompts supplied by the author

Apart from the obvious advantages of remote interpreting, an interaction via this medium can be beneficial for a number of reasons for all parties. Specifically, the lack of specialised equipment, as both parties (medical professional as well as the LEP patient) use a fixed or a mobile telephone. No specialised training is required, as communication is conducted over regular telephone lines using standard handset devices that are already used in everyday situations. Another advantage is the cost of implementation, or rather lack thereof. No specific software or application is required and communication is rendered over existing infrastructure. However, there are multiple disadvantages to using such a method, quality of the call being the most significant one. Regular phone lines can often suffer from poor audio quality, which includes issues like static, echoes, and cross-talk. Such problems can have severe consequences, such as:

- Difficulty in understanding speech: static and cross-talk can make it challenging to discern what is being said, particularly for interpreters who rely on clear audio to accurately interpret speech. This can lead to frequent requests for repetition, slowing down the conversation, disrupting the turn-taking sequencing and the flow of the interaction. It may be frustrating for both the client and the LEP individual to repeat the same piece of information to a remote interpreter.
- Fatigue and strain: poor audio quality, especially echoes and overlapping voices, can cause significant listener fatigue. Interpreters may experience increased cognitive strain as they attempt to focus and decipher spoken words, potentially reducing the overall effectiveness of the interpreting session.
- Increased chances of errors: with compromised audio clarity, the risk of misinterpretation rises. Important details may be lost or misunderstood, which could lead to errors in interpreting, potentially resulting in miscommunication or incorrect information being conveyed.
- Impact on confidentiality: there is no control over how the LEP (Limited English Proficiency) individual uses their device, particularly whether a loudspeaker is in use. Since the parties are not in the same location, this setup poses a risk in sensitive settings such as legal or medical environments. The use of a loudspeaker could lead to sensitive information being overheard by third parties, potentially breaching confidentiality. This lack of control over the communication environment can significantly compromise the integrity and privacy of the interpreted information.
- Additionally, conference calls over regular phone lines are susceptible to drops in connection due to multiple reasons (for instance, battery or service signal on the part of the LEP individual). Disconnections can disrupt the flow of interpretation and require time to re-establish connections, potentially leading to lost context. Delays can sometimes hinder the clarity and flow of interpretation. Since all parties are connected via telephone, a drop in connection on the remote interpreter's end can leave the client and the LEP (Limited English Proficiency) individual unable to communicate with each other. Such a scenario would necessitate finding a new remote interpreter, potentially causing delays and disrupting the flow of communication.

3.2. Loudspeaker

The second most popular method in the corpus is a loudspeaker. A typical scenario would involve two separate locations: the first being the site of the remote interpreter and the second, the location of the client, such as a doctor's office. A typical scenario has been presented in the illustration below.

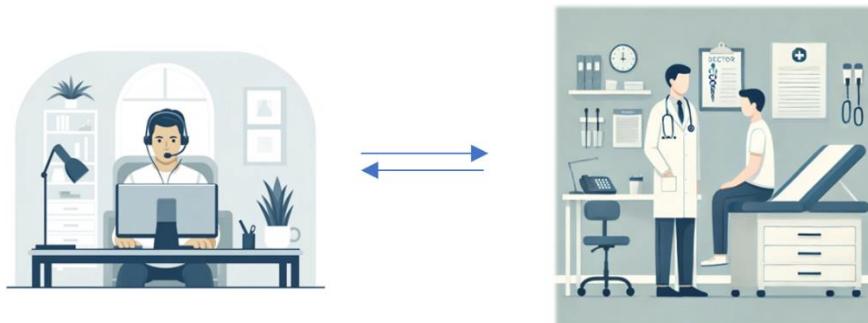


Figure 2: Typical scenario involving a medical professional and an LEP patient using a loudspeaker – remote interpreter is at a separate location. Image generated by AI with prompts supplied by the author

This setup enables the interpreter to broadcast their voice through the loudspeaker, which allows all parties present at the client's location to hear the interpreting without the need for additional equipment. This method is particularly beneficial in settings where multiple listeners are involved and where direct, person-to-person communication is essential for the context of the discussion (for instance, a panel of doctors or social workers). It can also promote a more natural interaction as the client and the LEP individual are in the same location. However, there are multiple drawbacks to such a configuration:

- Confidentiality: the confidentiality of the conversation may be compromised as the broadcast nature of a loudspeaker allows anyone within earshot to overhear the discussion. This can be particularly problematic in sensitive environments such as medical consultations or benefit-related meetings, where privacy is crucial. Another point to consider is the control over the environment – a remote interpreter has no means of finding out who is within listening range of the loudspeaker.
- Audio quality: depending on the acoustics of the location and the quality of the loudspeaker, there may be challenges in ensuring that the audio is clear and intelligible for everyone involved. Background noise, echoes, or poor sound projection can affect the clarity of the interpreting, which may result in misunderstandings or the need for frequent repetitions. Speakers at a distance may also experience issues related to poor quality or low volume as usually speakerphone systems have limited range of volume, specifically, if a plexiglass has been used between a claimant and a clerk or GP (a practice common during the COVID-19 pandemic).
 - Interaction with the loudspeaker: while a loudspeaker usefully facilitates one-way transfer of voice, it may not support bidirectional communication as effectively. For instance, in scenarios where patients are positioned at a distance from the loudspeaker, an interpreter may encounter difficulties understanding their responses. Loudspeakers generally have limited capabilities in picking up voices from afar. This limitation can

significantly hinder the flow of conversation, especially in interactive or dynamic discussions where quick and clear responses are crucial.

Regardless of its drawbacks, a loudspeaker is widely used in remote interpreting applications as it creates a notion of a natural interaction, in which a client and an LEP individual are located in the same place and seemingly enjoy a regular face-to-face conversation.

3.3. Three-way personal call

The third method is a “3-way personal call”, a designation coined by Boczarski (2025) to an interaction in which a remote interpreter is present at one location, while the client and the LEP individual are both present at another, yet they both use their handheld devices to communicate. A visual representation of such a scenario is presented in the following illustration.

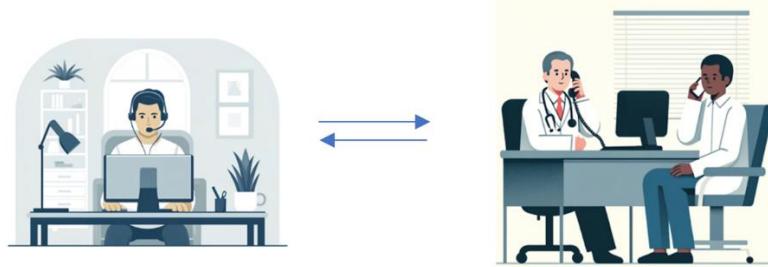


Figure 3: Typical scenario involving a 3-way conference in which an LEP patient and a medical professional are at the same location. Image generated by AI with prompts supplied by the author.

This configuration is frequently employed in settings such as Job Centres and offers several advantages. Specifically, this arrangement facilitates a more natural, face-to-face conversation as the parties can maintain eye contact while the interpreter is not physically present in the room. Additionally, unlike a loudspeaker system, this method ensures privacy for both parties. The use of handheld devices guarantees that each message is delivered to the intended recipient and that no unauthorised parties will intercept the message. However this configuration has a number of disadvantages:

- Requirement to have a mobile phone: an LEP individual must have an operational mobile device with a charged battery which a client can call at a scheduled appointment time.
- Service signal: appointments may occur in areas or buildings with poor reception, potentially challenging remote interpreters who might not hear the LEP individual clearly.

- Echo: proximity of two receivers/transmitters (the client's and the LEP individual's devices) may cause interference. A remote interpreter could hear the client's voice through the LEP individual's receiver in the form of an echo.
- Sense of natural communication: even though both parties share a physical location, the communication is rendered via telephone link which may seem unnatural as there are three parties involved (client, LEP speaker and an interpreter) who use different methods of communication. This can in turn inhibit a proper flow of conversations.

This mode of communication may seem straightforward, given the widespread ownership of mobile devices today. However, it might feel unnatural to conduct a face-to-face appointment where communication occurs through a telephone, especially with senior LEP speakers, who may find this setup very convoluted.

3.4. Four-way call

A far less popular arrangement is a 4-way call – a conference connection in which there are three parties and a remote interpreter. A typical scenario is presented in the illustration below.

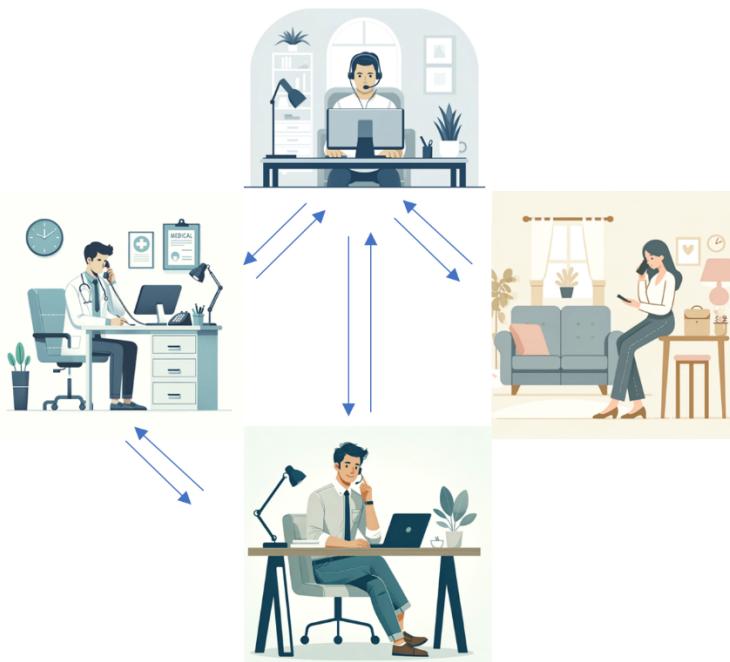


Figure 4: Typical scenario involving a 4-way conference where an LEP individual is connected to two other professionals (two distinct clients) at different locations and a remote interpreter.

Image generated by AI with prompts supplied by the author.

In this scenario, one client initiates a call to the interpreter, while another client (possibly from a different agency or representing a separate office) is also involved. Both speak to an LEP individual through a remote interpreter. This arrangement requires strong management and monitoring of turn-taking by a remote interpreter, as it can be confusing for an LEP individual to determine who is speaking and when. This is especially true in situations where two clients converse directly with each other without involving the remote interpreter. Also such system may pose a challenge to a remote interpreter as the focus on the management of the flow of interaction might be strenuous – a remote interpreter must juggle multiple speakers whose speech might be overlapping to ensure that misunderstandings are minimised. This requires high levels of concentration and adaptability, potentially leading to interpreter fatigue if not properly managed.

3.5. Passing the receiver

The following method is a popular approach in locations without a loudspeaker or in situations where interpreting was not arranged prior to an appointment. Essentially, it involves passing the telephone receiver between parties. Such a scenario is presented in the illustration below.

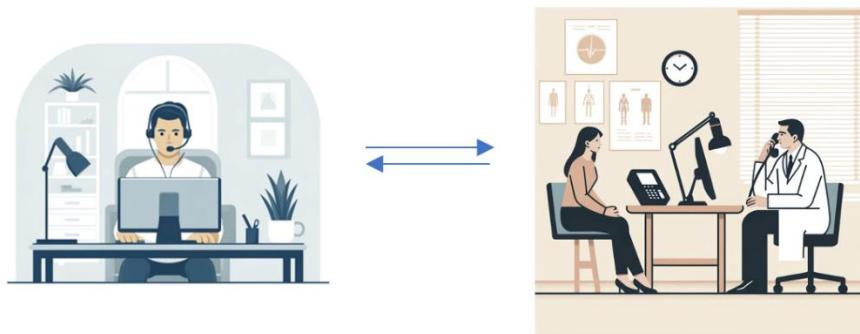


Figure 5: A typical scenario which involves a remote interpreter connecting with a client and an LEP individual, where both parties interact individually through the same telephone receiver, which is handed back and forth. Image generated by AI with prompts supplied by the author.

This method allows each party to speak directly into the telephone, thereby eliminating the necessity to utilise any type of sophisticated equipment and the risk of any third party overhearing the conversation. However, it also presents challenges, as it can disrupt the flow of communication and extend the duration of the meeting. Specifically, the constant passing of the receiver may lead to confusion and make it difficult for the interpreter to maintain a consistent thread of dialogue. Specifically, such a model would impose an artificial pause required by the act of passing of the receiver, which in turn would disrupt the natural flow of a conversation. A remote interpreter (who works from a separate location) may not know when the handheld receiver has been passed and might inadvertently address comments to

the wrong person or miss key information during transitions. To mitigate these issues, it is essential that clear communication protocols of turn-taking be established, particularly, to ensure that each party verbally confirms when they have received the receiver and are ready to speak. Such a technique would help a remote interpreter understand who is taking a turn at each moment, but it would certainly alter the perception of having a natural conversation.

In summary, the choice of connection method in telephone interpreting scenarios plays a crucial role in determining the efficiency and quality of communication. Each method has inherent advantages and limitations, which must be carefully analysed and considered to optimise the interpreting experience for all parties involved, particularly for the remote interpreter, who represents the central figure in such interactions. The choice of connection method affects not only the clarity and accuracy of the interpreting process but also the ease with which participants can convey and receive information. Technical factors, such as sound quality, latency, and the reliability of the connection, directly influence the interpreter's ability to perform effectively. Prolonged exposure to poor audio quality can lead to hearing strain and frustration for everyone involved, specifically the interpreter. When the sound is unclear, interpreters may struggle to understand messages accurately, which can increase the risk of misinterpreting or information loss. In a scenario, in which participants often have to repeat themselves, slowing down communication and sometimes causing misunderstandings, a higher risk of miscommunication arises. Over time, these issues can affect both the efficiency of the interaction and the satisfaction of all parties.

4. Statistical analysis of OPI interpreting interactions

4.1. Research purpose and methodology

Within the United Kingdom, which boasts a diverse populace including a substantial number of Polish expatriates, effective communication in Polish-English interpreting calls across various sectors is indispensable. The purpose of the corpus research conducted by Boczarski was to specify the origin and types of challenges related to telephonic interpreting in order to provide a structural underpinning of problematic scenarios which a remote interpreter needs to navigate to ensure a successful interaction (Boczarski, 2025). The collected data were used to create an initial framework – a corpus and a template of factors and conditions which may affect OPI interpreters as well as the other conversational parties within a remote audio call.

The research constitutes a quantitative analysis of a corpus of 250 phone calls received by Boczarski during 2023 and 2024 who acted in the capacity of an OPI interpreter. The number of calls was determined purposefully to ensure a representative distribution across different service sectors – interactions encompass a variety of contexts, including healthcare, administration, welfare, police, and immigration settings.

Data were collected and annotated in an Excel document, allowing for a transparent presentation of results. The statistical analysis aimed to explore various dimensions of remote community interpreting calls between UK institutions and Polish expatriates.

Of the investigated parameters in the corpus, the two following indicators are examined in this paper:

- **Sectoral Distribution:** the purpose of the analysis was to ascertain the distribution of interpreting calls across diverse sectors, encompassing benefits, welfare, social services, police, and medical institutions. Understanding the trends in each sector can highlight areas of heightened demand for interpreting services and potential avenues for resource allocation.
- **Mode of connection:** communication mode, such as calls via loudspeaker, three-way calls or calls rendered through a handset, significantly affects the dynamics of interpreted interactions and can alter the tone and nature of delivery for both the interpreter and the client/LEP individual. The study looked at each mode and draw conclusions to better understand advantages and disadvantages of each method.

The data in the corpus do not contain any personal information, and no conversational party can be identified. Information for each call was annotated in the Excel document either during the call or shortly afterwards. Calls were not evaluated for quality; for the purposes of this research, only relevant statistical data were extracted.

4.2. Findings

4.2.1. Distribution of sectors – where do OPI interpreters work

The corpus of OPI calls rendered in the period of May 2023 to March 2024, with a sample size of 250 calls, yields the following results in regard to the distribution of sectors.

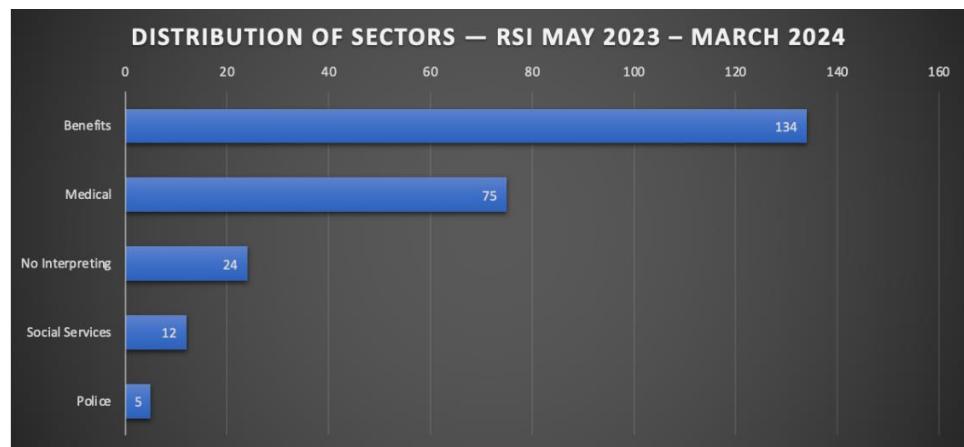


Figure 6: Distribution of Sectors

The results presented above correspond to the four essential sectors, annotated in the corpus, where LEP speakers seek assistance from remote interpreters, namely Benefits, Medical, Social Services, Police. Because OPI relies on a specific system or configuration, the categories typically reflect the types of institutions that employ over-the-phone interpreting. Consequently, they can be readily identified within the corpus. The last category in the corpus is No Interpreting, which describes situations in which interpreting did not take place for a number of reasons.

The “**Benefits**” sector constitutes the largest proportion of calls in the corpus (134 occurrences). This represents 53.6% of the total sample, indicating that the majority of remote community interpreting services are utilised for benefit-related enquiries. In his study, Boczarski demonstrates the highest number of interactions are associated with Universal Credit – a comprehensive benefit scheme rolled out in 2013 in the United Kingdom. The benefit replaced a number of other (separate) programmes as a single payment plan available to claimants who are out of work. It currently helps eligible clients to cover housing costs, child support expenses and disability allowances. As a benefit it is available to British and non-British citizens. In the latter case, an individual has to have obtained a settled status (via EU Settlement Scheme) or be a refugee. Typically, Polish nationals residing in the UK for a specified duration are often eligible for settled status and consequently qualify for Universal Credit benefits. The programme is available exclusively in English and a participation requires eligible individuals to have an intermediate level of English in order to interact with the Universal Credit agents (telephonically, in-person, or via online platform). A good understanding of the areas in which LEP speakers may require assistance is vital, as it can constitute a baseline for potential training of interpreters from multiple perspectives (for example vocabulary-wise) and resource allocation.

The category “**Medical**” is the second most numerous group in the corpus and it consists of 75 interactions out of the pool of 250 remote sessions, which corresponds to 30% of the total number of interactions. In the study, Boczarski (2025) calculates that the highest number of connections within this category is related to GP appointments, which highlights the vital role of general practice in remote healthcare. Also, the range from general practice to specialised consultations illustrates the broad spectrum of medical services available remotely, tailored to patient across different medical spectrums. This distribution also mirrors typical healthcare usage patterns, where general medical issues are most common, followed by specialised and acute care needs. Based on the analysed pool of interactions, these services predominantly facilitate communication for LEP patients in scenarios such as GP general appointments, consultations with specialists, physical therapy sessions, psychological consultations, pre-surgery briefings, emergency services, and hospital discharges. Each of these requires medical interpreters to possess a thorough understanding of specific medical terminology and procedures along with the ability to effectively communicate sensitive information. The “high demand areas”, specifically, GP general appointments and consultations with specialists likely represent the bulk of the interpreting demand,

which suggests that a significant portion of LEP patients require assistance with routine and specialised medical care. This indicates a growing need for interpreters who are not only fluent in Polish but also have a robust understanding of general and specialised medical knowledge. On the other hand, services like physical therapy, psychological consultations, and pre-surgery appointments require interpreters who are trained in the vocabulary specific to those interactions. For example, psychological consultations may require understanding of mental health terminology, awareness of what a psychological interview entails and sensitivity to the patient's emotional state (all handled in an auditory channel), while pre-surgery briefings demand precise communication of medical procedures and patient instructions. The role of OPI interpreters in emergency services and hospital discharges cannot be underestimated either, as these scenarios often involve urgent communication where the accuracy and speed of interpretation can have significant consequences on the outcomes for the patient.

The category "**Social Services**" is the third most numerous group of 12 remote interactions which corresponds to 4.8% of the total number of interpreting sessions in the corpus. Although not numerous, the remote interactions recorded under the subcategory of Social Service demonstrate that remote interpreters may be tasked with interpreting of such nature. This highlights the critical role of remote interpreters in ensuring that communication barriers do not impede access to essential services for LEP individuals. Effective interpreting is vital not only to convey information accurately but also to ensure that LEP individuals can effectively navigate the legal and procedural aspects of their lives abroad. As such, OPI interpreters must be adept at managing a wide range of topics, from legal terminology to personal and sensitive content to terms related to daily lives, which underscores the importance of specialised training and expertise in the field of social service.

The "**Police**" sector, with 5 calls, constitutes 2.0% of the total number of interactions in the corpus. This is a relatively small proportion, however, it emphasises the essential role of interpreting in legal and safety-related contexts. The level of preparation required of remote interpreters should not be underestimated. These calls often involve complex legal terminology, sensitive situations, and potential crises that demand a high degree of accuracy and emotional resilience. Remote interpreters must be well-prepared to interpret in such challenging scenarios while managing the emotional and psychological stress that may arise during such interactions.

There are 24 instances in the category "**No Interpreting**", equalling 9.6% of the total number of calls in the corpus, where no interpreting was rendered for various reasons. Among these, Boczarski notes 11 calls that were routed to voicemail and 4 calls that disconnected before interpreting could take place (technical glitches).

In conclusion, the data collected in the corpus present a clear dominance of interpreting services required for "**Benefits**" and "**Medical**" sectors within OPI settings. The relatively smaller values for "**Social Services**" and "**Police**" indicate slightly lower-demand areas where such services are critical but less frequently requested based on the analysed pool. The figure for "**No Interpreting**" is representative of technical or human errors related to the handling of technology or interpreting protocol. These findings can be vital from the perspective of resource allocation and training for remote interpreters to better serve the

predominant sectors while also acknowledging the importance of availability across all areas.

It is also important to note that, unlike in Poland (where the service does not exist, essentially), LEP speakers in the UK do not incur any direct costs when accessing interpreting services provided through public institutions. This arrangement reduces the enormous financial barriers for service users, ensuring more equitable access to essential services such as healthcare, social welfare, and legal support. Additionally, as most interpreters work on a freelance basis and do not need to be physically present, their availability in OPI settings is considerably greater than in traditional, in-person interpreting contexts. Furthermore, the burden of finding an interpreter falls upon an institutions and individuals are not responsible for this process, which can be a significant psychological relief.

4.2.2. Method of connection

As discussed previously, remote interpreting is based on the employment of a particular technology, specifically platforms, telephones or services. The analysed corpus of 250 remote sessions was handled via a telephone link and a professional headset with a microphone boom (Jabra Evolve 40) on the interpreter's end and a combination of equipment on the client's and LEP speaker's end. The breakdown of each technology is presented in the following chart.

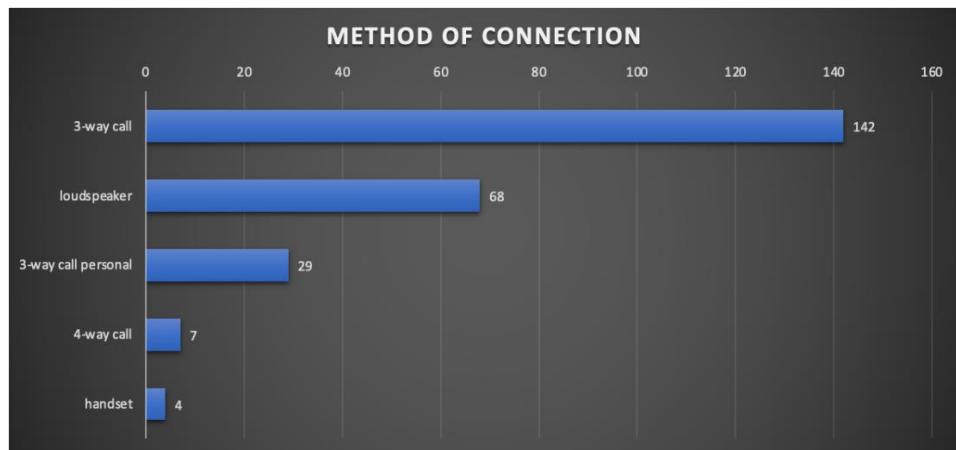


Figure 7: Method of Connection

The distribution of the presented methods of connection is a crucial factor from the point of the quality of interpreting, as the selected method can affect the way the interpreting is delivered to all the involved parties. Particular connection methods offer different levels of audio clarity, delay, interaction capabilities, and ease of use, all of which directly impact the effectiveness of communication during the interpreting process.

The most popular method – likely due to its ease of implementation and use – is the three-way call, which accounted for 142 sessions, representing 56.8% of all connection methods in the corpus. The second most common scenario involves

the use of a loudspeaker, which occurred in 68 sessions, constituting 27.2% of the total calls. The third method, a “three-way call personal,” has 29 connections, representing 11.6% of the total number of the calls recorded in the corpus.

A far less frequently used arrangement is the four-way call – a conference connection involving three parties and a remote interpreter. This scenario occurred in only 7 interactions, representing 2.8% of the total calls. The handset method accounted for just 4 calls (1.6% of all interactions) and is typically used in locations without a loudspeaker or in situations where interpreting was not arranged prior to the appointment, involving the manual passing of the telephone receiver between parties.

5. Summary

In the study conducted in 2025 Boczarski analyses a corpus of interpreted interactions to highlight the actual scenarios in which OPI interpreters are utilised and to illustrate how and under what circumstances these interpreters are deployed across different service sectors. While it is true that, in certain cases, face-to-face interpreters may be better suited to address specific communicative needs – such as situations requiring visual cues, complex negotiation or court cases – the corpus data indicate that OPI provides a practical and efficient solution in the majority of routine interactions, particularly where immediacy and accessibility are critical. However, the dependence on auditory information alone and the absence of a visual channel may pose challenges in certain situations, such as physical therapy sessions, psychological consultations, or patient–physician interactions. In daily interactions, humans naturally rely on non-verbal cues, which are not available in OPI scenarios. In other words, there appear to be significant disadvantages to relying solely on OPI interpreters (some of those were mentioned in this paper).

On the other hand, OPI offers several advantages. Interpreters are widely available, the service typically incurs virtually no cost to the end user, and organisations face minimal logistical challenges. If we accept that OPI interpreters are impartial professionals (with everything that it entails), their availability becomes a definite benefit, particularly compared with ad hoc arrangements – as opposed to the complexity of the availability of interpreters/translators in a country like Poland in which the only assistance may be rendered by sworn interpreters. Indeed, there are numerous documented cases in which friends or family assisted with interpreting in medical settings regardless of the identified risk concerning such scenarios (Ho, 2008: 224). The question remains, then, whether it is better to rely on a friend or family member, wait for an in-person interpreter, or make use of the service provided by an invisible (yet audible!) interpreter “on the phone.”

It is challenging to determine whether OPI should be considered a “necessary evil.” Telephonic interpreting *does* constitute a method of bridging linguistic gaps – research conducted by Boczarski indicates that OPI (more often than not) involves intimate and private matters concerning patients, claimants, and victims – people who require assistance, and ultimately, it should be those individuals who assess whether the service genuinely meets their needs.

For the time being, however, the service is being used by those in need and it is being provided by a steadily growing number of language service companies, which in itself serves as evidence of the effectiveness of OPI interpreters. Perhaps, to clarify the issue, one should ask oneself: if I were in an emergency in a foreign country whose language I did not understand, would I endure the hassle of booking an interpreter in the unfamiliar reality of a new place, in a language I do not know, or would I choose to use one provided to me immediately, free of charge, over the phone?

References

Amato, A., Spinolo, N., Rodríguez, M. J., & González, M. J. (2018). *Handbook of remote interpreting – SHIFT in orality* (pp. 1–169). <https://doi.org/10.6092/unibo/amsacta/5955>

Boczarski, P. (2025). *Remote community interpreting – Perception and challenges* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Łódź]. University of Łódź Repository.

Braun, S. (2011). Remote interpreting. *Handbook of Translation Studies*, 2, 131–134. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hts.2.rem1>

Gilbert, A. S., Croy, S., Hwang, K., LoGiudice, D., & Haralambous, B. (2022). Video remote interpreting for home-based cognitive assessments. *Interpreting: International Journal of Research and Practice in Interpreting*, 24(1), 84–110. <https://doi.org/10.1075/intp.00065.gil>

Hilder, J., Gray, B., Dowell, A., MacDonald, L., Tester, R., & Stubbe, M. (2017). “It depends on the consultation”: Revisiting use of family members as interpreters for general practice consultations – When and why? *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 23(3), 257–262. <https://doi.org/10.1071/PY16053>

Ho, A. (2008). Using family members as interpreters in the clinical setting. *Journal of Clinical Ethics*, 19(3), 223–233.

Kelly, N. (2008). *Telephone interpreting: A comprehensive guide to the profession*. Trafford Publishing. <https://www.languageline.com/interpreting/on-demand/over-the-phone>

Ko, L. (2006). The need for long-term empirical studies in remote interpreting research: A case study of telephone interpreting. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, 5, 325–338. <https://doi.org/10.52034/LANSTTS.V5I.167>

Moser-Mercer, B. (2011). Remote interpreting. In Y. Gambier & L. van Doorslaer (Eds.), *Handbook of translation studies* (Vol. 2, pp. 131–134). <https://doi.org/10.1075/hts.2.rem1>

Pastor, G. C., & Gaber, M. (2020). Remote interpreting in public service settings: Technology, perceptions and practice. *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation*, 13(2), 58–78. <https://wlv.openrepository.com/handle/2436/624259>

Przepiórkowska, D. (2021). Adapt or perish: How forced transition to remote simultaneous interpreting during the COVID-19 pandemic affected interpreters’ professional practices. *Miedzy Oryginalem a Przekładem*, 27(4), 137–159. <https://doi.org/10.12797/MOaP.27.2021.54.08>

Wadensjö, C. (1999). Telephone interpreting and the synchronization of talk in social interaction. *The Translator*, 5(2), 247–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.1999.10799043>

Przemysław Boczarski is an academic lecturer (Lodz University of Technology), sworn translator, and OPI interpreter with over 10 years of experience in medical and community interpreting in both the Caribbean and Poland. His interests lie in juxtaposing the reality of day-to-day practice with the theoretical framework, particularly concerning the stereotype of impartiality in interpreters and translators.