

**THE PROFILE OF THE EMPLOYED
CROATIAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER**

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Abstract

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This study addresses key questions concerning the profile, education, professionalization, and challenges faced by Croatian sign language interpreters proficient in HZJ (Hrvatski znakovni jezik), the local sign language. To uncover the characteristics of employed HZJ interpreters, the study portrays a typical interpreter as a 40-year-old married female residing in Zagreb with native Croatian proficiency and informal HZJ exposure from interactions with deaf family members. She has limited informal training, a decade of experience, and a fixed-term contract. Her primary role involves interpreting from Croatian to HZJ. While this study explores the educational paths of HZJ interpreters, it underscores the need for formal interpreter training programs at universities and continuous professional development initiatives. The implications of the findings highlight the importance of equitable interpreter distribution, tailored training, gender diversity, and fair compensation. The study recommends integrating HZJ interpreting into established academic programs, ensuring precise terminology, and addressing compensation issues. It also suggests future research directions, such as investigating sources of funding and overlapping between HZJ interpreters working in associations and educational settings. Despite limitations inherent to online questionnaires, this study lays the groundwork for decision-making and interventions to enhance the professionalism and accessibility of HZJ interpretation services in Croatia.

Keywords: HZJ interpreter, sign language, interpreting, Croatia, education, professionalization, compensation, accessibility, qualitative research.

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis embodies the results of my own work and has been composed by myself. Where appropriate within the thesis, I have fully acknowledged the work and ideas of others or have made reference to work carried out in collaboration with other persons. I understand that as an examination candidate, I am required to abide by the Regulations of the University and to conform to its discipline and ethical policy.

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1. Introduction

The Tower of Babel narrative, a widely recognized account, recounts the emergence of diverse languages through divine intervention, resulting in mutual unintelligibility among people. While the historical accuracy of this account may be a subject of debate, it is undeniable that the world is home to numerous languages. Consequently, the need for intermediaries to facilitate communication and enhance accessibility has given rise to the profession of interpreting.

In the early stages of the European Union Master in Sign Language Interpreting (EUMASLI) program, Professor Hessman employed the metaphor of climbing the Tower of Babel to encourage contemplation on the intricacies of interpreting, language exploration, and the examination of their distinctions and commonalities. Immersed in extensive lectures, exploration of various subjects, and language study, the author's thoughts have been directed towards professionalizing sign language interpreting within Croatia.

Despite the long-standing engagement of sign language interpreters in their craft, establishing sign language interpreting as a fully recognized profession requires the implementation of university-level training programs (Napier, 2009), which are currently lacking in Croatia.

A comprehensive understanding of the early evolution of sign language interpreting in Croatia requires further scholarly investigation and exploration of historical sources, and this research aims to delve into Croatia's sign language interpreting profession, explicitly focusing on currently employed Croatian Sign Language (HZJ) interpreters. The primary objective is to form a comprehensive picture of the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia. Additionally, the study aims to shed light on the cultural and linguistic factors that have influenced the role of sign language interpreters in Croatia, contributing to a broader understanding of sign language interpretation as a global profession. The study discusses terms used in Croatia to describe the current sign language interpreting profession- "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica," "prevoditelj/ica," and "tumač/ica." The author deliberately retains

these terms in their original Croatian form, as their translation into English fails to encapsulate the nuances they embody in Croatian.

Data for this study was collected through a questionnaire sent to currently working HZJ interpreters in different deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, interpreters', and other related associations. The questionnaire inquired about the number of active sign language interpreters in the country, their geographical distribution, the settings in which they operate, their levels of job satisfaction, supplementary responsibilities undertaken alongside interpreting, and other pertinent aspects essential for formulating a comprehensive profile of employed HZJ interpreters. The Webropol platform was used for questionnaire sharing and data collection, while the Excel file was utilized for data analysis and drawing conclusions.

Different associations of spoken language interpreters and translators were asked to elaborate on their linguistic choices for the names of their associations.

Ultimately, the research aims to answer the following research question:

1. Who is an employed HZJ interpreter in Croatia?
2. How have HZJ interpreters been educated so far?
3. What measures are necessary to professionalize the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia?

The thesis comprises of six main chapters, starting with the Introduction, which provides an overview of the work. The subsequent chapter, the Literature Review, explores the sign language interpreting profession and its development, including how HZJ interpreters currently fit into the landscape. Providing information about Croatia's history and geography is necessary to understand the positionality of this young EU member and the current background of HZJ interpreters, their employment, and educational opportunities, as well as legislation regarding deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, and interpreter communities. The chapter also introduces the terms currently used in the profession - "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica," "prevoditelj/ica," and "tumač/ica."

The Methodology Chapter 3, explains the methods used in this research, the Webropol questionnaire, and how it was distributed. Additionally, a brief outline is provided detailing the approach undertaken in engaging spoken language interpreters and translators' associations.

The following Chapter 4, Results, is based on the data collected through the questionnaire and presents a comprehensive profile of employed HZJ interpreters in Croatia, including four main areas - general information, education, employment, and HZJ interpreters' thoughts on different terms currently used. The chapter concludes with the feedback received from spoken language interpreters and translators' associations regarding their usage of professional terminology.

In the Discussion Chapter 5, the results from both the questionnaire and the associations are synthesized, establishing connections between these two domains.

In this section, limitations are also acknowledged. The research's insights spawn recommendations that delineate a trajectory for advancing HZJ interpreting into a revered and enduring profession.

The conclusive Chapter 6, Conclusions, serves as a crucial capstone, offering valuable guidance for the future trajectory of HZJ interpreters' professional journey within Croatia. By clarifying the essence of the research, this chapter completes a coherent narrative that bridges the theoretical exploration and the empirical data.

2. Literature review

Before proceeding with the primary objective of this study, which aims to introduce the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia, it is imperative to understand several fundamental aspects of sign languages, deaf communities, and the interpreter profession.

Subsequently, the focus in this chapter shifts to the Croatian context, encompassing Croatia's historical and geographical positioning in the later part. Additionally, this section covers the associations in which HZJ interpreters are employed, specific terminology related to the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia, the

legislative framework governing this field, and finally, an examination of the educational and employment opportunities available for HZJ interpreters.

2.1 Sign languages and the deaf communities

Despite initial skepticism about the natural language status of sign languages, numerous studies conducted to this day provide robust evidence supporting their linguistic nature (Stokoe, 1960; Sandler, W., & Lillo-Martin, 2003, Kavčić, 2012). Research carried out in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated the distinctiveness of sign languages from spoken languages, leading Stokoe (1960) to confirm that American Sign Language possesses a linguistic structure comparable to spoken languages.

It is noteworthy that while there are over 6,900 spoken languages worldwide, it is essential to acknowledge the oversight in recognizing approximately 119 sign languages (Campbell, 2008). Some sources even cite over 150 sign languages globally (SIL International, 2023). This highlights the importance of recognizing sign languages as integral components of the world's linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, despite the evidence supporting their linguistic nature, Woll (2019) expresses astonishment that sign languages are still not universally recognized as languages, and their distribution does not align with the boundaries associated with spoken languages. Woll et al. (2001) emphasize that sign languages exhibit unique characteristics that set them apart from spoken languages, challenging the categorization of sign languages primarily based on countries by the International Standard Organization.

Wheatley and Pabsch (2012) assert that sign languages have developed within deaf communities worldwide. Members of these communities, who use sign languages, identify themselves culturally as Deaf with a capital "D," as opposed to those identified as "audiologically deaf" with a lowercase "d," who associate more with the hearing world. The authors also highlight the intersection of different rights that deaf people hold, including human rights, minority rights, and linguistic human rights.

The struggle for these rights over the centuries has given rise to the scientific discipline of Deaf Studies. Initially developed along the lines of other minority studies

(Bauman, 2008), the primary agenda of Deaf Studies was the defense of Deaf Culture, defining attributes of Deaf identity, and developing a bilingual/bicultural model for Deaf education. Deaf Studies have explored a broad spectrum of topics, many of which fall under the more general notions of identity, power, and language. While this research does not extensively explore Deaf Studies, it is essential to acknowledge its significance and encourage readers to delve further into this field (Bauman, 2008).

For deaf individuals to express their ideas, advocate for their rights, and access information, the services of sign language interpreters have been crucial in bridging the gap between deaf communities and the wider hearing society.

2.2 Sign language interpreters

As defined by Wheatley and Pabsch (2012), usually, sign language interpreters are trained professionals fluent in one or two sign languages who have received specific training in interpreting. They act as intermediaries, neutrally conveying information and cultural meaning to ensure full and equal access for conversational partners with different source languages. Sign language interpreters can be both Deaf and hearing, but they must always be appropriately educated and qualified in the relevant country, continuously pursuing further training throughout their careers. They may also be employed at conferences or other events to guarantee accessibility to a broader audience. Sign language interpreters require specialized training in their work areas and should be capable of adapting their interpreting styles to various individuals (Wheatley & Pabsch, 2012).

Caestairs-McCarthy (2017) emphasizes the crucial role of interpreters in bridging the communication gap between individuals who do not share a common language. Signed language interpreting, also known as visual language interpreting, facilitates understanding between signed and spoken or two signed languages i.e., Croatian and HZJ or HZJ and British Sign Language (BSL). Sign language interpreters work in various contexts where deaf signers and non-deaf, non-signing individuals must interact. This profession is often referred to as a 'cradle to grave' profession, as

interpreters accompany deaf individuals in all aspects of their lives due to their reliance on sign language for communication (Napier & Leeson, 2015).

To better understand the work of interpreters, particularly sign language interpreters, it is essential to define the terms "interpreting" and "translation." Pöchhacker (2016) discusses the conceptual structure of translation and distinguishes interpreting from other forms of translational activity based on its immediacy. Interpreting involves real-time communication between individuals who speak different languages and come from different cultural backgrounds. This immediacy highlights the time-sensitive nature of interpreting, where the interpreter must convey the message promptly to ensure effective communication.

The definitions of translation presented by Pöchhacker (2016) offer different perspectives on the process. Pöchhacker (2016) also includes definitions by different authors - Rabin defines *translation* as the transfer of meaning from one language to another, emphasizing the goal of conveying meaning across languages. Brislin's definition encompasses both written and oral forms of communication, acknowledging that translation can occur between languages based on signs. (Pöchhacker, 2016).

Furthermore, sign language interpreter researchers agree with the traditional definition of interpreting, defining and "reframing it to focus on the 'live,' real-time, spontaneous rendering of a message from one language into another without the opportunity for review or correction" (Leneham, 2005). Furthermore, both Leneham (2007) and Wurm (2014) extended the traditional understanding of translation as text-to-text and emphasized focusing less on the medium and more on the process that allows for the preparation, development, review, revision, and polishing of the translation. They also highlighted the length of time it takes for the audience to 'receive' the translation and the fact that the target text is captured for posterity.

As Leneham (2007) documents, six sign language translation processes can be considered separate from sign language interpreting:

1. Signed source text (ST; video) → spoken target text (TT; audio); e.g., voice-over for deaf TV programmes.

2. Signed ST (video) → signed TT (video); e.g., translation of a signed narrative into a different sign language on video.
3. Spoken ST (audio) → signed TT (live or video); e.g., translation of a song, such as the national anthem or a hymn.
4. Written ST → signed TT (live); e.g., sight translations of social services leaflets or educational exam papers; translation of auto-cue into a signed language for news broadcasts.
5. Written ST → signed TT (video); e.g., translation of publications such as children's books, the Bible; psychometric or educational assessment tools; government legislation and policy.
6. Signed ST (live or video) → written TT; e.g., witness testimony, conference paper, or journal article; TV captions.

Despite the expanding field of sign language translation, especially after the employment of deaf interpreters and translators in various areas, from community interpreting to conference settings (Stone & Russell, 2014), it is necessary to understand the distinctions between interpreting and translation and their implications in the sign language field.

Napier et al.'s (2021) census project report, exploring shifts within the British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters' community, has provided insights that motivated and influenced this study. The report examined the BSL interpreters' workforce and its representation. Although broader in scope, it lays the groundwork for the inquiries posed to HZJ interpreters and sets the stage for exploring the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia. The Discussion chapter compares findings from the UK census project with the data generated in this study.

As previously stated, the sign language interpreting profession is an ever-evolving landscape marked by numerous changes, some of which are discussed in the subsequent section, elucidating sign language profession models.

When examining the development of the sign language interpreting profession globally, many authors (Lee, 1997; Wilcox & Shaffer, 2005; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001; Gilbert, 2013) discuss different models of sign language interpreting. Gilbert (2013) provides a historical overview of the development of interpreting models, transitioning from the helper model to the conduit, communicative facilitator, bicultural-bilingual interpreter, and ally interpreter model. While other authors propose semiotic, sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and cognitive models of interpreting (Wilcox & Shaffer, 2005), the majority of discussions revolve around the helper, machine, conduit, bilingual-bicultural mediator, and ally models.

Initially, many articles approached sign language interpreting from a helper model perspective, as only individuals living and, or working with deaf persons were able to interpret for them. However, it became evident that this perspective did not allow deaf individuals to make decisions for themselves, as interpreters acted in a patronizing manner (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001). This led to the development of the conduit model, where interpreters aimed to be impartial and not involved in the interaction beyond interpreting. This approach was believed to help restore power to the deaf community. However, the conduit model, also known as the telephone model, was ineffective as there was an imbalance in power distribution. Baker-Shenk (1985) examined the dichotomy between Deaf people as part of an oppressed minority and interpreters belonging to the hearing majority. She encouraged interpreters to reflect on their oppressive tendencies. In her later work (Baker-Shenk, 1991), she argued that interpreters possess power due to being the only individuals with access to both languages in the interaction.

In the 1970s, interpreters recognized that neither the helper nor the conduit model adequately met the needs of the deaf community. They began to explore the field of communication and reconsidered their positioning and personal appearance, which influenced interpreting. However, the focus on output still primarily emphasized quantity, and ethical and communication decisions resulted in a lack of equality in terms of access and participation for deaf consumers. (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001.)

Humphrey and Alcorn (2001) further discuss the development of the sign language interpreting profession, leading to the emergence of the bilingual-bicultural model.

This model enables deaf individuals to have higher levels of comprehension if interpreters effectively mediate between languages and cultures. In the bilingual-bicultural philosophy, interpreters recognize that speakers use words to achieve their goals, while signers use signs. Interpreters understand that these goals are accomplished differently in each language and culture, and they analyze the text to select appropriate elements in the target language.

The concept of an ally interpreter has gained prominence in recent years. The participants in the Witter-Merithew and Johnson study (2004) described an ally as someone who stands with deaf people in their fight for equality and access, while a crusader attempts to lead the fight as if it were their own. The ally model is grounded in cultural competence, whereas the crusader model may exhibit paternalism and audism, assuming that deaf people do not know what is best for themselves and cannot lead in defining their direction as individuals or as a community (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004).

Recently, a new mixed-theory model of the interpreter role has emerged, drawing on both sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. This model describes how interpreters occupy a 'role space' and adapt their behavior and level of active communication management based on the context, the individuals involved, and the interpersonal dynamics at play (Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2013). Consequently, the discourse among deaf individuals and interpreters themselves has shifted from "using" interpreters to "working with" interpreters (Napier & Leeson, 2016).

Despite the valuable contributions made by sign language interpreters, the profession is not highly regarded due to its lack of regulation. Interpreters are often perceived as being overpaid, possibly stemming from deep-seated notions that interpreters are merely helpers and do not deserve remuneration equal to that of professional (conference) interpreters, even if they have completed undergraduate and/or postgraduate qualifications. Furthermore, the field of sign language interpreting is highly gendered, which may contribute to the perception of interpreters, particularly female interpreters, as helpers. (Leeson, 2015).

The historical context outlined above provides a foundation for understanding the evolution of sign language interpretation in Croatia. Examining the development of

sign language interpretation in this country can offer valuable insights into the field's challenges, practices, and advancements.

2.3 Sign language interpreting in Croatia - background

This chapter aims to provide a contextual understanding of sign language interpreting in Croatia by presenting relevant geographical and political information about the country. Furthermore, it explores various associations and organizations closely linked to the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities, where HZJ interpreters actively participate. The chapter also sheds light on the terminology commonly used in the Croatian context when referring to sign language interpreters, encompassing terms such as "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica," "prevoditelj/ica," and "tumač/ica."

Additionally, the chapter delves into the legislative framework pertaining to the rights and accessibility provisions for deaf and deafblind individuals in Croatia. Within this context, specific aspects concerning the employment and educational opportunities available to HZJ interpreters in the country are thoroughly examined.

By conducting a comprehensive analysis of these elements, this chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the associations, terminology, and legal context surrounding HZJ interpreters and their involvement with the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities in Croatia. Furthermore, it sheds light on the country's educational and employment opportunities for HZJ interpreters.

2.3.1 Croatia - geographical positioning and historical events

As a Southeastern European nation, Croatia has been a member of the European Union for the past decade. Its historical trajectory has been significantly shaped by its geographical location, with the migration of Southern Slavs, including Croats, to the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia in the early 7th century. Over its history, Croatia has faced numerous wars and conquest attempts, mainly due to its strategic position. Initially organized as the Duchy of Croatia and the Principality of Lower

Pannonia, it eventually consolidated as the Kingdom of Croatia, which persisted until the 12th century when it entered into a personal union with the Kingdom of Hungary. In the 16th century, both entities became part of the Habsburg monarchy, and in the 17th and 18th century, Croatia became a constituent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Karaman, 1980).

Figure 1: Croatia map



This historical period in Croatia played a vital role in developing HZJ and establishing deaf schools within the country. Jepsen et al. (2015) report that due to the absence of deaf schools in the Crown countries, deaf children in Croatia attended the Institute for the Deaf in Vienna. Adalbert Lampe, a former student of the Institute for the Deaf in Vienna, founded the first deaf school in Croatia in 1885, while Slava Raškaj, a deaf painter associated with the same Institute, had schools for deaf children in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split named in her honor (Frančić, 2016).

Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Croatia became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, which later changed its name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Croatia remained a state constituent for

approximately 60 years until it declared independence in 1991, with a brief interlude as the Independent State of Croatia during World War II (Karaman, 1980).

Regarding historical and political connections, it is worth noting that the Croatian deaf community has had strong ties with the Institute for the Deaf in Vienna. Further research is required, but Šarac et al. (2007) suggest that such historical contact may have influenced some commonalities shared between HZJ and Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS).

Figure 2: Croatian counties



The subsequent chapter provides more details about the distribution of deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind individuals, interpreters, and related associations. It is essential to mention that Croatia is divided into 20 counties, which serve as the basic units of regional self-government. The city of Zagreb serves as both the capital and a separate county (Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2023).

According to the Hrvatski savez gluhih i nagluhih website (Croatian Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing) (2023), there are 22 deaf and hard of hearing associations, coinciding with Croatia's counties. However, Lika-Senja and Koprivnica-Križevci counties do not have organizations representing deaf and hard of hearing people.

2.3.2 Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, sign language interpreter, and other related associations

This research investigates the historical development of associations that foster collaboration among deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind individuals alongside sign language interpreters in Croatia. The first association of deaf persons in Croatia, operating under the name "Dobrotvor," was established in 1921 as a non-governmental organization located in the southern region between Vienna and Budapest. Its primary focus included social and community activities, stage performances, and vigorous sports engagement (Hrvatski savez gluhih i nagluhih, 2023). Nonetheless, it remains unclear which organization evolved from "Dobrotvor" as both the Croatian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HSGN) and the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of the city of Zagreb (SGINGZ) claim to have been established in 1921. "Dobrotvor" was initiated by Ivan Smole, the first deaf student in Lampe's Deaf school, after extensive travel across Europe and observing the establishment of other Deaf Associations. Additional documents retrieved by HSGN (Savić, 2009) propose that Smole founded the "Udruženje gluvo-nemih Zagreba" (Association of the Deaf-Mute of Zagreb). However, Žic (1985) claims that HSGN celebrated its 40th anniversary in 1985. Due to significant document losses, exact historical data cannot be conclusively determined. Despite the absence of written documentation to validate these claims, conversations with the newly elected President of HSGN suggest that due to Croatia's status as part of Yugoslavia at the time, SGINGZ might have been established earlier, with the National Association of the Deaf - HSGN emerging a few decades later (Vincek, D., personal communication, June 25th, 2023).

According to HSGN's official website, the Croatian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is a national, non-profit, non-governmental organization comprising 22 member associations (Hrvatski savez gluhih i nagluhih, 2023). The association provides services throughout the Republic of Croatia, supporting approximately 13,000 members. Since its founding in 1921 in Zagreb, the Croatian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has been at the forefront of disability-focused

organizations in Croatia. Among the 22 member associations, the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of the city of Zagreb boasts the largest membership, with approximately 1000 individuals (Savez gluhih i nagluhih grada Zagreba, 2023).

Due to Zagreb's capital status, numerous associations have established their headquarters in the city, including the Croatian Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons "Dodir," the Croatian Deaf Sports Association, the Croatian Association of sign language interpreters for the deaf, the Association of Deaf and Hard of hearing of the city of Zagreb, the Association of deafblind persons of the city of Zagreb, the Association of the deaf and hard of hearing persons "Videatur," Wish Association, Center for Research, Education, and Applied Knowledge "UP2DATE," and the National Association of sign language interpreters (Registar, 2023). Other associations are primarily located in larger cities. At the same time, Koprivnica-Križevci and Lika-Senj counties lack organizations dedicated to the needs of deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind individuals, interpreters, or other sign language-related associations.

Additionally, the Croatian Deaf Sports Association emerged as a separate entity in 1992, stemming from the events of 1921. The initial "Dobrotovor" association's emphasis on social and community activities, stage performances, and intense sports engagement laid the foundation for this specialized sports organization. Comprising eleven city and county associations, three national sports associations, and six associate members, the Croatian Deaf Sports Association thrives within the deaf community (Hrvatski sportski savez gluhih, 2023).

Furthermore, deafblind individuals find representation under the Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons "Dodir," established in 1994, currently encompassing six city association members - Zagreb, Split, Osijek, Varaždin, Čakovec, and Vinkovci.

In addition to the associations mentioned above historically involving sign language interpreters, four separate sign language interpreter associations have emerged. Before these interpreter associations were established, the Notes on 95 Years of Gathering of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People in the City of Zagreb mentioned the Interpreters and Translators Service within the City Organization of the Zagreb Association of Hearing

Impaired. The booklet also refers to sign language interpreters listed as sworn court sign language interpreters in 1982 (Juriša, 2016).

The initially established interpreters' association in 2007, known as the Croatian Sign Language Interpreters and Translators Society, changed its name to the National Association of Croatian Sign Language Interpreters (Mahalica, 2023). However, this translation needs to capture the intended meaning in English. The association is now officially known as Hrvatsko društvo stručnih komunikacijskih posrednika za gluhe, which could be translated as the Croatian Association of Professional Communication Mediators for the Deaf. According to their website: "The primary activity of the Society is focused on providing social services that facilitate communication between users of the Croatian Sign Language and other communication systems, as well as users of spoken language (hearing individuals). This includes developing and teaching sign language and other specific forms of communication to overcome social and other difficulties resulting from hearing impairments. Following its goals, the Association operates in the field of human rights and health protection. Therefore, the Association carries out the following activities: "Coordinates and directs activities and proposes initiatives to enable more complete communication for deaf individuals within the broader social environment.

- Conducts education programs
- Monitors and studies advancements in the education of new interpreters and translators
- Establishes a code of ethics for interpreters and translators
- Determines criteria for ranking and advancement of interpreters and translators"

(Mahalica, 2023). However, the Registar (2023) still needs to implement recent constitutional changes.

Former President of the Croatian Association of Sign Language Interpreters for the Deaf (CASLIFD) and long-standing President of the Croatian Association of Professional Communication Mediators for the Deaf, Mirjana Juriša (personal communication, April 17th, 2023) explains that CASLIFD was founded in 2016 since the Croatian Association of Professional Communication Mediators for the Deaf

could not become a member of European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli) due to their work within social services field. CASLIFD was founded as the professional association of HZJ interpreters, which wanted to pursue professionalizing the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia.

The goal of the CASLIFD is to bring together HZJ interpreters (both hearing and deaf individuals) and to develop and enhance the awareness of its members about the profession of sign language interpreting, ethics, and responsibilities. In line with its objectives, the CASLIFD operates in the areas of human rights protection, education, science, and research. The activities through which the association aims to achieve its goals are:

1. Actively contribute to the education and professional development of Croatian Sign Language interpreters.
2. Create and develop an Ethical Code for Croatian sign language interpreters.
3. Protect the rights and position of the Society, its members, and users of sign language interpreting services.
4. Collaborate with users (individuals using sign language interpreting services), conference interpreters of other languages, interpreting and related associations in the country and abroad, relevant authorities, and the public to promote the standards of the sign language interpreting profession, ethical standards, working conditions, and the improvement of sign language interpreting quality.
5. Organize independently or in collaboration with other interpreting associations or institutions seminars, courses, and other forms of professional development for interpreters.
6. Publish written materials to inform the members and the public about the work of the Society.
7. Propose a unified price list for interpreting fees in the area of the Republic of Croatia for its members (Hrvatsko društvo prevoditelja znakovnog jezika za gluhe, 2023).

CASLIFD organized a few efsli events, including the efsli 2018 AGM & conference in Dubrovnik (efsli, 2018). As of recently, it is a member of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI).

Newly established associations include the Association of Sign Language Interpreters and Translators of Istria County and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters and Translators of Sisak-Moslavina County, both established in 2021 (Registar, 2023). Their establishment was motivated by HZJ interpreters working in the Sisak and Istria areas. However, both associations have yet to have activities.

The terminology used in Croatia's sign language interpreting field is explained in the following chapter.

2.3.3 Terminology in Croatian sign language interpreting context - terms “stručni/a komunikacijski /a posrednik/ica”, “prevoditelj/ica”, “tumač/ica”

The distinction between a translator and an interpreter varies between Croatian and English. Although the terms "prevoditelj" and "tumač" are often used interchangeably, there are differences between these two terms.

According to the Hrvatski jezični portal (2023), "prevoditelj" is defined as one who interprets from one language to another, an interpreter. On the other hand, "tumač" is defined as follows:

- The one who clarifies, explains, and expresses someone's message, mood, or desire.
- Performs interpretation in direct conversation from a foreign language or into a foreign language; interpreter.
- Provides an explanation of a text, critical notes, comments on a text; commentary, an addition to a book that contains explanations.

These differences in the definitions of interpreter and translator have not been observed in English. However, it is crucial to recognize and address the disparities between languages and the distinct concepts they encompass. To achieve this, the semiotic triangle has been employed as a valuable tool to illustrate how individuals

from different language backgrounds, specifically English and Croatian, understand the terms "interpreting," "translation," and "prevođenje."

The semiotic triangle offers valuable insights into how people comprehend concepts and conceptualize specific terms. According to Lars (2011), the semiotic triangle serves as a model that illustrates the relationship between a linguistic symbol and the object or referent it represents. It is important to note that the symbol does not directly correspond to the object but is mediated through thought or reference. By examining Figures 3-5, one can observe the disparity between the English understanding of "interpreting" and "translating" and the Croatian term "prevođenje."

Figure 3: interpreting

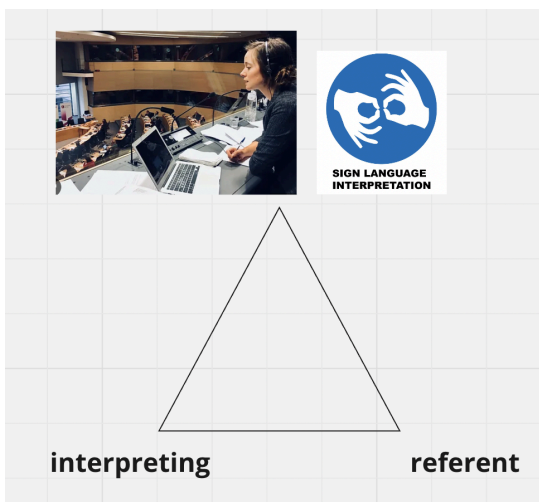


Figure 4: translation

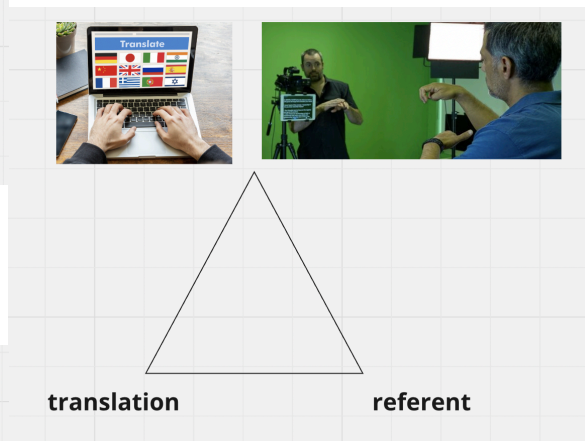


Figure 5: prevođenje



In English, "interpreting" symbolizes conference and sign language interpreting, while "translation" symbolizes the translation of written texts and sign language translation. In Croatian, the term "prevodjenje" encompasses both interpreting and translation, including sign language interpreting. Different languages may understand concepts differently and may or may not coincide in their definitions (Haspelmath, 2010).

Regarding the term "tumač" and its usage in the context of the deaf community, there has been much discussion and debate. The first definition from the Hrvatski jezični portal (2023), implying that someone needs explaining for the deaf community, has raised concerns. This interpretation can lead to a perception that deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind individuals are incapable of understanding and require someone to explain things to them or act on their behalf. However, the profession of sign language interpreting has evolved from a helper model perspective to more empowering models, such as conduit, bilingual, bicultural, and ally models (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004). Research participants from Tarczay's study (2010) and attendees of Allen Workshops (2023) "Empowering the Deaf Community" expressed a preference for the term "prevoditelj" as used in spoken language interpreting rather than "tumač," as it is associated with outdated perspectives. Additionally, the term "tumač" might have originated from a time when sign language interpreters were predominantly used in court proceedings. However, sign language interpreting services expanded to other settings as the profession evolved (Allen, 2023).

ESIT, Université Paris III, Sorbonne nouvelle, a highly reputable university for interpreting, has a program in sign language interpreting since it implies the same process as in spoken languages, i.e., transferring the message and meaning from one language to another (Tarczay, 2010). Participants of Tarczay's study (2010) also stated their preferences in favor of the term "prevoditelj/ica" due to the determinant of the feminine gender, "prevoditeljica" that is commonly used versus "tumačica" or "tumačiteljica," for the term "tumač" (male gender) which sounds somewhat awkward.

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Zagreb programs include three majors or emphases - linguistics, teaching, and translation. The emphasis on translation is translated into Croatian as "prevoditeljski smjer" (Filozofski fakultet, 2023).

Kavčić (2023), a lecturer of HZJ, which is offered as an elective course at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, supports the idea of using the term "tumač" to describe a sign language interpreter, highlighting the role of conveying non-linguistic information in addition to linguistic translation. In this sense, a sign language "tumač" not only focuses on the spoken words but also conveys other non-linguistic information, such as environmental sounds or tone of voice, which affects the meaning of the message for the Deaf user. On the other hand, sign language "prevoditelj" focuses solely on linguistic translation without conveying non-linguistic information. These claims were not found in other literature and might be further discussed.

Comparisons with the usage of the terms "prevoditelj" and "tumač" in the context of spoken languages are elaborated later in the Discussion incorporating insights from various interpreters' associations that comment on the use of "prevoditelj" and "tumač."

The term "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" was introduced in the Act on Croatian Sign Language and other communication systems of the deaf and deafblind in the Republic of Croatia (Zakon, 2015) as a general term for everyone working with deaf and deafblind communities. It includes sign language interpreters, persons working from speech to text, note takers, lip readers, and individuals who use the alphabet or articulate voice to communicate with the deaf and deafblind or support hard of hearing individuals. In addition, the Personal Assistance Act (Zakon, 2023a) passed on July 1st, 2023, mentions three categories of "komunikacijski posrednik" that are further discussed in the next chapter regarding legislation in Croatia.

These distinctions in terminology and roles require further discussion and exploration in the context of sign language interpreting and the preferences of the deaf community.

2.3.4 Legislation regarding deaf and deafblind in Croatia

As a state that ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007, Croatia is obliged to harmonize its laws with the provisions of the Convention (Zajednica saveza osoba s invaliditetom Hrvatske, 2017). The Convention places significant emphasis on the right to accessible communication and inclusion, necessitating the recognition and support of sign language interpreters.

During the drafting process of the CRPD, the participation of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) played a crucial role in promoting sign language, bilingual, and bicultural educational approaches. Consequently, the Convention's emphasis on accessible communication and inclusion highlights the importance of recognizing and supporting sign language interpreters to ensure the fulfillment of the rights of deaf individuals, as outlined in various articles of the CRPD (World Federation of the Deaf, 2023).

To address the communication needs of deaf and deafblind individuals, Croatia enacted the Act on Croatian Sign Language and other communication systems of deaf and deafblind persons in 2015. However, the Act has yet to undergo a comprehensive evaluation, and necessary amendments have not been made. Consequently, certain aspects of the Act require further clarification, particularly concerning the Government's responsibilities towards deaf, deafblind individuals, and sign language interpreters. This lack of clarity could hinder the full realization of the rights of these individuals as envisioned by the UN Convention (Allen, 2023).

Recently, the Personal Assistance Act (Zakon, 2023a) was passed, which introduces communication mediators but notably omits sign language interpreters from its scope. The categories of “komunikacijski posrednik” - communication mediators encompass:

1. Communication mediator: An individual employed by a personal assistance service provider who transfers information between a person with a hearing impairment or a deafblind person and the hearing environment, in the form of communication preferred by a deaf or a deafblind person.
2. Communication mediator for the deaf: An individual employed by a personal assistance service provider with appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities in

using Croatian sign language and other communication systems based on the Croatian language.

3. Communication mediator for the deafblind: An individual employed by a personal assistance service provider who has appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities in the use of Croatian sign language and its adaptations and other communication systems used by deafblind people and who has additional knowledge and skills for describing the environment and providing mobility support to deafblind people.
4. Professional communication mediator: A person who provides communication support to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind students during the educational process.

However, there is no specific provision for sign language interpreters. This raises concerns among the members of the deaf and deafblind community about whether these distinctions accurately address the diverse communication needs of deaf and deafblind individuals. Consequently, the Act needs to encompass sign language interpreters and ensure their recognition and appropriate regulation, as discussed in Allen's Workshops (2023).

The Croatian Deaf Sports Association advocated for equitable treatment of deaf athletes as compared to their non-deaf counterparts in the Sports Act (2023b). This legislation guarantees parity in operations across the Croatian Olympic Committee, Croatian Paralympic Committee, and Croatian Deaf Sports Association. Moreover, the Croatian Deaf Sports Association receives consistent governmental funding from the budget via the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (Ministarstvo turizma i sporta, 2021), alongside recognition for athletic accomplishments in diverse competitions (Lušić, M., personal communication, July 19th, 2023).

The preview of Laws concerning the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly deaf and deafblind individuals in Croatia, shows that there should be the recognition of sign language interpreters. To adhere to the principles established in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and promote compliance and inclusion, it is imperative to revisit and amend the Act on Croatian Sign Language and

other communication systems of deaf and deafblind persons in the Republic of Croatia (Allen, 2023).

2.4 Educational system in Croatia and HZJ interpreters' education

Croatia's educational system encompasses an obligatory eight-year primary education followed by three to five years of upper secondary schooling. While upper secondary education is not mandatory, students can opt for vocational schools, gymnasium programs, or art education. Notably, the only five-year vocational option is nursing school. State graduation exams are compulsory for gymnasium and art school graduates but not mandatory for vocational school students (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2023). State graduation exams are required for individuals intending to enroll in university programs. According to Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb) (2023), becoming a spoken language interpreter in Croatia requires completing three years of university-level education for a bachelor's degree and additional two years for a master's degree in interpreting. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences offers interpreter qualifications for various languages, providing majors such as literary and cultural studies, linguistics, teacher education, or translation (Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2023).

Kapović (2015) revised the Bologna process, which significantly changed university graduation requirements. Before the Bologna changes, university programs lasted four years, but after the process, they were restructured into formulas like 3+2, 4+1, or 5+0. The primary goal was to have students ready for the labor market in three years instead of four, with additional years serving as specializations in the field (Kapović, 2015).

At present, Croatia lacks a structured formal education system for sign language interpreters. The prevailing notion asserts that enrolling in HZJ courses offered by various associations dedicated to serving the deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, and related communities is adequate for individuals aspiring to become sign language interpreters. However, this perspective predominantly pertains to HZJ interpreters

who do not have familial ties within the deaf community. For those with deaf family members, the assumption often prevails that their familiarity with HZJ equips them to undertake interpretation tasks. It is of utmost importance to expound upon the essential skill set required for individuals aspiring to become proficient sign language interpreters while simultaneously drawing a clear distinction between the process of language acquisition and the intricate art of interpretation.

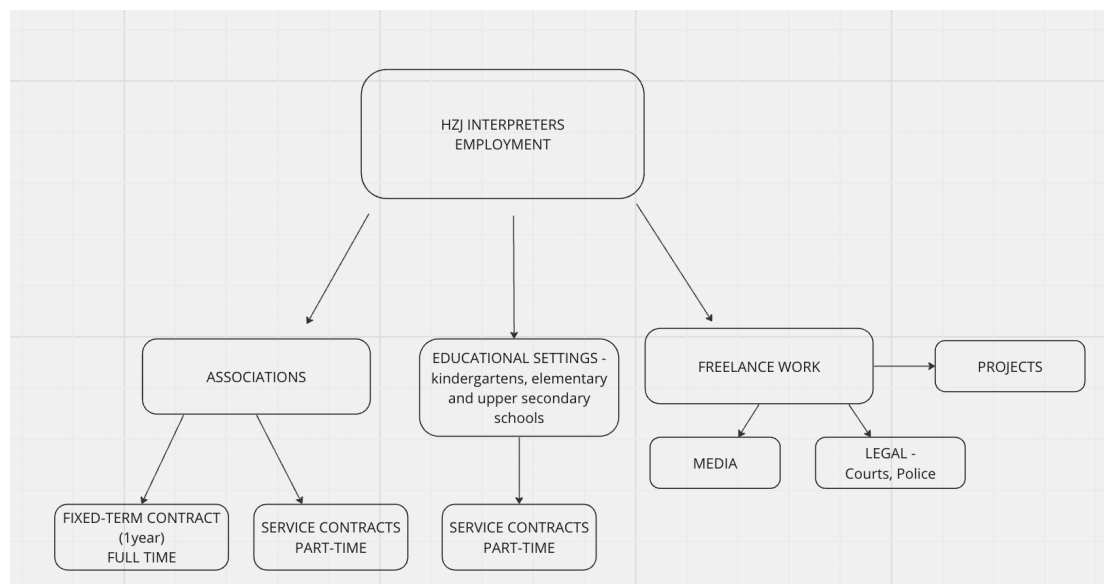
Additionally, several universities offer courses in HZJ, most of which are elective. For example, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb (Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2023a), and Teacher Education Faculty, University of Zagreb (Učiteljski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2023) offer such courses. An exception is the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation (ERF), where sign language is taught full-time during the first year and as an elective in subsequent years (Edukacijsko rehabilitacijski fakultet, 2023). Moreover, the Faculty provides sign language education at both Bachelor's and Master's levels and has established a Laboratory for Sign Language and Deaf Culture Research, contributing to advancements in sign language education (Edukacijsko rehabilitacijski fakultet, 2023a).

The Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons "Dodir" is the only association offering sign language interpreting education since 2010. Their course includes theoretical classes, practical exercises, and direct interaction with deafblind individuals, providing valuable real-world experience to aspiring interpreters. The education lasts for one semester, comprising theoretical classes, exercises, and a practical component with 15 hours of direct one-on-one contact with deafblind individuals, as agreed upon (Hrvatski savez gluhoslijepih osoba "Dodir", 2023).

The education and training landscape for sign language interpreters in Croatia remains diverse and primarily ad hoc, with initiatives spearheaded by associations representing the deaf and deafblind communities. However, sign language interpreters should acquire a standardized skill set to achieve qualification, necessitating the establishment of programs adhering to standards that mutually benefit sign language interpreters and the deaf communities across Europe (Leeson & Calles, 2013).

2.5 Employment of HZJ interpreters

Figure 6: Employment of HZJ interpreters



The nature of employment contracts extended to sign language interpreters in Croatia is subject to regulation by the Labour Act (Zakon, 2023c). Generally, interpreters are offered fixed-term contracts delineating specific periods of employment. Due to the manifold funding sources that sustain their engagements, sign language interpreters are never offered permanent contracts. Certain interpreters might benefit from three-year contracts supported by various Ministries and EU projects, yet a majority sign one-year contracts (Šoić, M., personal communication, June 25th, 2023). In scenarios where interpreters operate part-time, service contracts could be employed. This practice is often witnessed when interpreters concurrently serve associations and mainstream schools catering to deaf children.

Kavčić (personal communication, June 30th, 2023) notes that freelance engagements are infrequent and primarily occur in media, legal or project-specific contexts. Such arrangements are typically governed by the author's contracts, especially when interpreters contribute to original intellectual works in literature, science, and art. Temporary service contracts are the norm when interpreters are involved in diverse project activities. An instrumental advancement in this sphere is the recent enactment

of the Personal Assistance Act (Zakon, 2023a), affirming that interpreter contracts shall evolve into permanent employment agreements.

Accurate enumeration of employed HZJ interpreters presents challenges due to the intersection of their engagements across diverse associations funded by distinct Ministries. Moreover, comprehensive data on their employment is scarce and not publicly accessible. However, the standard trajectory for HZJ interpreters involves associations submitting applications for tenders from different Ministries and securing funding for specified durations, typically one to three years. Ministries that prominently fund interpreters and related associations include the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family and Social Policy, and the Ministry of Science and Education. The Ministry of Tourism and Sport (Ministarstvo turizma i sporta, 2021) also extends funding to the Croatian Deaf Sports Association.

Records from 2020 and 2022 indicate fluctuations in funding allocated for interpreter services. In 2020, 29 associations received approximately 5.8 million Kunas (approximately 770,000€) in funding from the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth, and Social Policy (Ministarstvo demografije, obitelji, mladih i socijalne politike, 2020). The ministry mentioned above changed its name to the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family, and Social Policy in 2021. Notably, data regarding the number of employed HZJ interpreters were absent, and associations received varying amounts for projects designed to support HZJ interpreter salaries. Consequently, deducing the precise number of HZJ interpreters employed was unfeasible. Insights gleaned from discussions with Denić (personal communication, June 12th, 2023) clarified these complexities. Associations typically prioritize securing salaries for HZJ interpreters when applying for tenders. However, in some instances, interpreters may be employed part-time, committing to four hours of work per day, totaling 80 hours per month.

Moreover, supplementary funding may be sought for operational expenses, causing association variations in funding requests. Denić clarifies that access to data is limited to associations that triumph in tenders and receive funding. According to her, in 2020, a total of 65 HZJ interpreters were employed, and this number rose to 69 HZJ

interpreters in 2022, encompassing 30 associations, with a combined funding of around 6.7 million Kunas (approximately 890,000€). Furthermore, some HZJ interpreters engage in part-time roles within associations, while others do so in educational settings, which introduces the potential for overlapping reported employment figures. In 2021, 28 HZJ interpreters were employed; this number decreased to 22 in 2022 (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2022). However, the number of HZJ interpreters working both in educational settings and associations is unknown. The Ministry of Science and Education allocates funds for interpreter salaries concerning HZJ interpreters working in educational settings, spanning kindergartens, elementary, and upper secondary schools. Local entities such as cities, municipalities, and counties may also extend financial support to interpreters operating in educational contexts. It is pivotal to acknowledge that the term "sign language interpreter" is not employed within educational settings; instead, the designation "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" is used.

The European Social Fund (ESF) offers an additional avenue for funding projects involving HZJ interpreters. Associations benefiting from ESF initiatives are required to disseminate project-related information on their respective websites. A handful of publicly accessible websites were identified, yet discrepancies in project durations and the number of employed sign language interpreters were discernible (Hrvatski sportski savez gluhih, 2019; Hrvatsko društvo prevoditelja znakovnog jezika za gluhe, 2019; Videatur, 2021; up2date, 2022). Additionally, it should be noted that the questionnaire did not inquire about the specific sources of financing for each interpreter, as this was outside the scope of the survey.

Several HZJ interpreters also engage in other occupations but undertake freelance interpreting work within the media sector interpreting news across various television platforms. It is crucial to note that such interpreters were not encompassed within the scope of this research.

It is noteworthy that HZJ interpreters currently receive an approximate monthly remuneration of 650€ for full-time engagement. Furthermore, those working in schools, referred to as "stručni komunikacijski posrednik" as per the Regulation on Teaching Assistants and Professional Communication Mediators (Ministarstvo

znanosti i obrazovanja, 2020), earn between 4€ and 5€ per hour, undertaking workloads spanning 10 to 32 hours weekly. The compensation varies across different schools, municipalities, and counties. This compensation is insufficient to sustain a satisfactory standard of living, and it falls short of meeting the expenses associated with conferences and other necessary training activities to enhance job proficiency (Šoić, M., personal communication, June 15th, 2023).

Comparatively, when juxtaposed with the average monthly salary in Croatia, which amounted to 1130€ in March 2023 (Državni zavod za statistiku, 2023), it becomes evident that sign language interpreters earn nearly 50% less than the nation's average wage.

If HZJ interpreters were benchmarked against conference interpreters in Croatia, a substantial incongruity would come to light. Specifically, conference interpreters earn approximately 50€ per hour for simultaneous interpreting, which HZJ interpreters most frequently undertake (Breznički Učović, 2022).

In the broader context of other European nations and the remuneration afforded to sign language interpreters, it becomes evident that HZJ interpreters find themselves among the countries that offer the lowest compensation. De Wit survey (2020) indicates an average hourly fee of 40€, reported by countries such as Scotland, Belgium - Flanders, Romania, and Ireland.

As discerned from this section, the employment scenario for HZJ interpreters is marked by insecurity and comparatively meager remuneration despite the demanding nature of their skill set. The sole affirmative development in this milieu is the Personal Assistance Act, which pledges to institute permanent employment contracts for HZJ interpreters.

3. Methodology

This research aims to reply to the following research questions:

1. Who is an employed HZJ interpreter in Croatia?
2. How have HZJ interpreters been educated so far?
3. What measures are necessary to professionalize the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia?

The methodology used in this research is a self-administered questionnaire, which was used by Napier et al. (2021) in conducting the UK census report. In line with it (Napier et al., 2021), self-administered questionnaires have proven to be a robust methodological instrument for surveying a sample of individuals, facilitating the collection of extensive datasets to identify significant trends. This methodology has been frequently employed in interpreting studies (Liu, 2011; Hale & Napier, 2013).

While various surveys have been employed to capture the demographic profiles of sign language interpreters in diverse nations, Croatia has yet to conduct such an endeavor. However, the necessity for a demographic survey in Croatia is underscored by the absence of formal training in sign language interpreting and the recent enactment of the Personal Assistance Act (2023), which requires training in the foreseeable future. The outcomes of this research are poised to inform the customization of formal training programs for HZJ interpreters.

To be in accordance with the policy of Humak University of Applied Sciences, this research and Thesis Privacy Statement have been reviewed by Humak's Data Protection Office on the 5th of June, 2023.

Before constructing the questionnaire and following the model set by Napier et al. (2021) with the UK census survey, deliberate decisions were made regarding including and excluding questions in this research. This study addresses the fundamental research query of who comprises the employed HZJ interpreters in Croatia, their training background, and the prerequisites for advancing the professional status of sign language interpreting in the country. A set of questions was meticulously crafted for the questionnaire to facilitate accomplishing these insights.

The questionnaire design was structured to minimize participant attrition, and completing the questionnaire requires approximately 20 minutes.

In parallel with the questionnaire directed at HZJ interpreters, other associations encompassing spoken language interpreters and translators were also approached to respond to inquiries about their linguistic preferences in their association's nomenclature.

3.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed in written Croatian, deemed appropriate for the population of HZJ interpreters who primarily work between Croatian and HZJ. An option to complete the questionnaire in HZJ was also provided. The questionnaire comprised 32 questions, encompassing various formats, including open-ended, closed-ended, single-choice, multiple-choice, and one question featuring a Likert scale. These questions were organized into four distinct sections.

Before initiating the survey, participants were required to provide their Consent in accordance with the policy of Humak University of Applied Sciences. This was accompanied by a notice informing participants that the collected data would be used to observe employment trends of Croatian sign language interpreters within the Republic of Croatia and to plan future educational programs for interpreting.

The initial section, titled "General Data," aimed to gather demographic details of HZJ interpreters. This included information concerning the county where interpreters reside and work, year of birth, gender, marital status, and whether they are parents or caregivers. Suppose participants indicated that they are parents; an additional query followed regarding the number of children they have. The final question inquired about their mother tongue.

The "Education" section sought information about the highest educational attainment, with an additional question directed at those with higher education regarding the Faculty or University from which they graduated. Participants were also prompted to provide details on how they acquired proficiency in HZJ and whether they received formal education in interpreting. This section aimed to offer insights into the pathways through which HZJ interpreters entered the field and their connections within the deaf community.

The subsequent section centered on "Work Experience." Questions here encompassed the number of years participants have worked and their employment status based on their contract (full-time, part-time employment contract, or part-time service contract). Participants were allowed to select both an employment contract and a part-time work arrangement. They were asked to indicate their work settings and whether

they take additional assignments for extra compensation. Participants were asked to specify whether they identify as hearing or deaf interpreters, their client groups, the language combinations they work with, and any other communication systems they employ. Furthermore, participants were queried about their membership in professional associations and their engagement in additional work within associations. An estimate of hours dedicated to interpreting and other employment was requested. Using a Likert scale, participants were prompted to rate how well their salary meets their living expenses. Lastly, participants were also questioned about other job opportunities they receive beyond sign language interpreting and whether they are remunerated for those roles. This section sought to shed light on the work conditions of HZJ interpreters and the diverse contexts in which they operate.

The final section sought participants' preferences regarding the labeling of their work, namely as "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica," "prevoditelj/ica," or "tumač/ica," along with explanations for these terms used in Croatia. This inquiry aimed to gain insights into participants' perceptions of their profession and their distinctions between the abovementioned terms. Before submitting the questionnaire, participants were allowed to provide comments and were asked to confirm their decision to share their data.

The questionnaire was formulated by the author, drawing inspiration from questions posed in works by de Wit (2020), Napier et al. (2021), and Kavčić (2023). Before dissemination to the HZJ interpreting community, a pilot test was conducted with three participants on the Webropol platform. The participants' feedback highlighted weaknesses and ambiguities in the questions. The Webropol platform's feature to apply conditional rules for specific questions only answered by certain participants was incorporated into the draft version. The feedback received was incorporated into the final iteration of the questionnaire, which was subsequently sent to the mentor for approval. Upon mentor confirmation, the finalized questionnaire was distributed to the HZJ interpreting community. It can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

3.2 Conducting the survey and participant recruitment

Compiling recipients' email and WhatsApp contact details involved consulting readily available online databases, such as the Registry of Associations in Croatia (Registar, 2023), and accessing information from associations' official websites. Among the various resources examined, the most comprehensive and reliable list of member associations' contacts was found on the Croatian Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HSGN) website, encompassing all 22 member associations. However, it was observed that certain contact details needed to be more accurate. In instances where discrepancies were identified, corrective measures were undertaken. This involved making direct telephone contact with the secretary of the respective member association, followed by sending emails to the contacts provided by these individuals. In situations where these endeavors were unsuccessful, the author's personal connections were employed to secure valid email or WhatsApp contacts for distributing the questionnaire. Utilizing personal connections proved to be a crucial resource in ensuring the success of this study phase.

The distribution strategy also encompassed the dissemination of QR codes and weblinks through both email and WhatsApp contacts, facilitating access to the questionnaire. Regarding response acquisition, 35 responses were collected through email links, while 21 responses were garnered via public weblinks. A total of 56 links were dispatched, and 56 participants responded, culminating in a response rate of 100%. It is essential to highlight that while Webropol effectively tracks data obtained through email links, responses were extracted from an Excel file to maintain respondent anonymity and eliminate any potential for the author to identify individual responses.

The survey was active for two weeks, commencing on the 12th of June and concluding on the 26th of June 2023. The questionnaire was presented in Croatian, with an optional provision for participants to provide responses in HZJ; however, none of the participants opted for this alternative.

A total of 56 participants submitted responses to the questionnaire. Notably, one individual chose not to grant consent, excluding their data from subsequent analysis.

When contextualizing the available data from 2022 concerning HZJ interpreters in associations, 69 were employed within associations, and 22 operated in educational settings, suggesting a potential total of 91 HZJ interpreters in the workforce. Nonetheless, these figures are inconclusive due to the potential overlap between HZJ interpreters working in associations and educational settings. However, considering the possibility of a maximum of 91 employed HZJ interpreters, the 56 participants in this research constitute almost 62% of the entire population of HZJ interpreters. This data aligns with the adequacy criteria outlined by Baruch & Holtom (2008), and response rate substantiates the representativeness of the sample population and facilitates the effective utilization of the amassed information to address the research questions, as articulated by Napier et al. (2021).

3.3 Spoken language interpreters and translators' associations

In tandem with the administered questionnaire to HZJ interpreters, a corresponding email inquiry concerning the linguistic nomenclature employed by their respective associations was dispatched to four prominent associations dedicated to spoken language interpretation and translation. The intent behind this correspondence was to invite their scholarly contributions, clarifying the rationale underpinning their terminological selections.

This supplementary approach was instrumental in advancing the methodological spectrum of this research initiative. Specifically, its principal function is facilitating a comparative analysis between the domain of sign language interpretation and spoken language interpretation. The overarching objective was to discern potential differentials that may manifest within the linguistic choices inherent to these disparate paradigms.

4. Results

This section of the study presents the analytical process applied to the questionnaire data, utilizing descriptive statistical analysis techniques. The objective is to garner a more comprehensive understanding of the profile of employed HZJ interpreters. 55 participants completed the questionnaire.

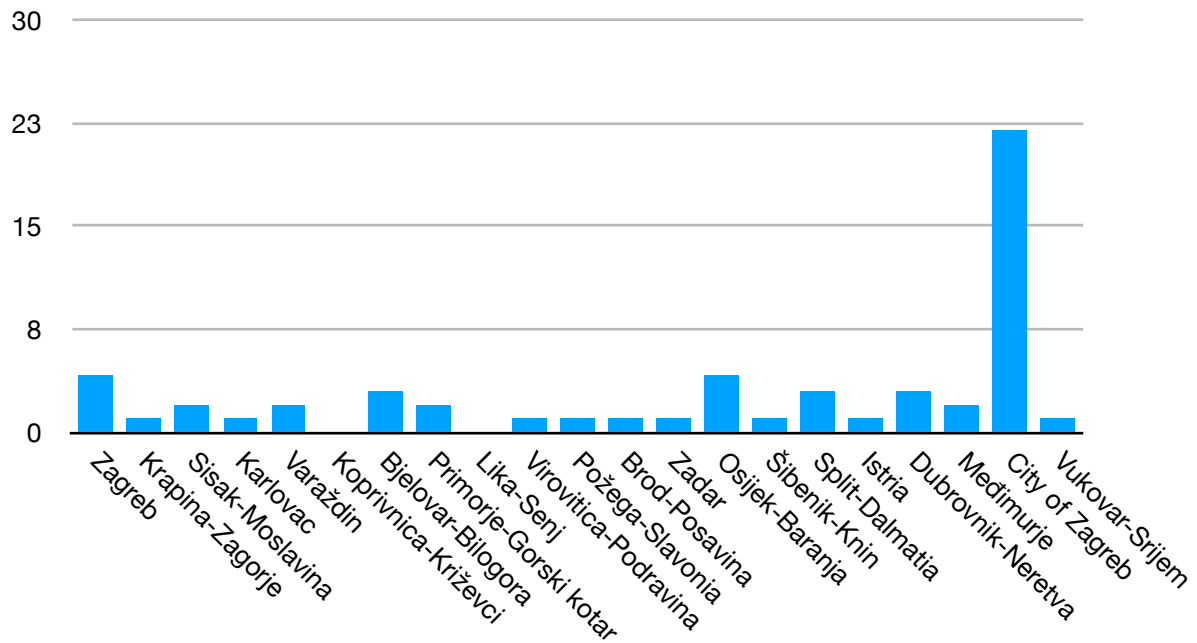
4.1 General data

The initial segment of the questionnaire was designed to gather demographic data about HZJ interpreters. In contrast to the approach adopted in the UK census report by Napier et al. (2021), exploring the intersectional characteristics of HZJ interpreters within the Croatian context was not pursued. The cultural distinctions between the United Kingdom and Croatia influenced this decision. Consequently, certain sensitive aspects like religious affiliation, ethnicity, and sexual identity were intentionally excluded from the survey. Several considerations informed this choice. Primarily, such inquiries could potentially unveil highly detailed personal information from a group of this size, making it a sensitive subject. Moreover, it was ascertained that these aspects were irrelevant to the present research objectives. As a substitute, the focus remained on investigating the geographical regions in which HZJ interpreters operate, their age distribution, gender distribution, marital status, parenthood or caregiving responsibilities, and their native language.

4.1.1 Counties

As previously highlighted, Croatia is administratively divided into 20 counties, with the City of Zagreb serving as a distinct administrative unit. This delineation offers valuable insights into the dispersion of HZJ interpreters nationwide. However, it is worth noting that the geographical distribution of HZJ interpreters is not uniform. In alignment with the observations made in the section discussing associations related to the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities, a notable absence of such

Figure 7: Counties



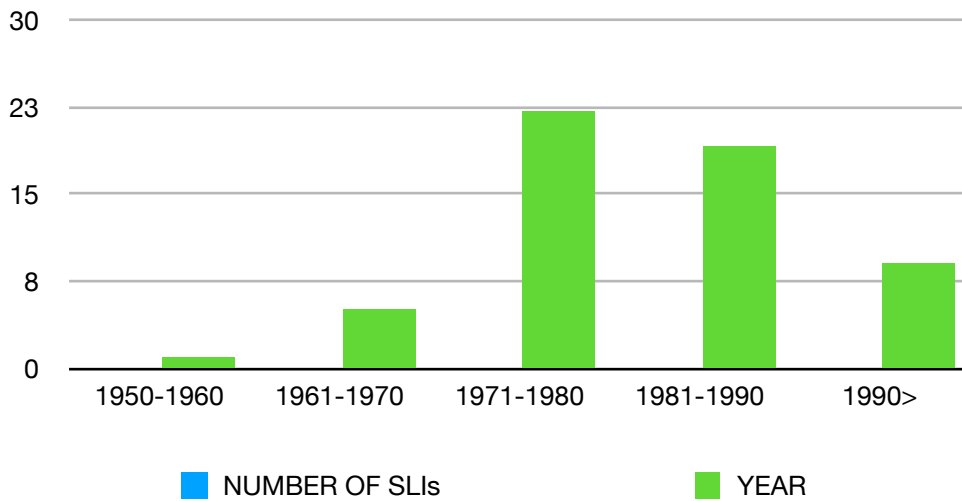
organizations is evident in the Lika-Senj and Koprivnica-Križevci counties. The lack of participants from these counties in the questionnaire responses might indicate potential gaps in the availability of sign language interpretation services within these regions.

The survey outcomes underscore a heightened demand for HZJ interpreters in the City of Zagreb. This phenomenon can be attributed to the city's concentration of various associations, institutions, and establishments that frequently necessitate the expertise of sign language interpreters. Entities such as hospitals, courts, and universities rely on these services to ensure effective communication with the deaf and hard of hearing individuals they serve. As a result, the greater demand for HZJ interpreters in urban centers underscores their pivotal role in facilitating inclusive communication within diverse professional and societal contexts.

4.1.2 Age distribution

The analysis of the age distribution among HZJ interpreters highlights a noteworthy variability, spanning from interpreters aged over 55 to those in their mid-30s. Notably, the survey data reveals two prominent age groups: interpreters born in 1982 and those born in 1991. These findings align closely with the age distribution patterns documented in earlier research endeavors (Napier et al., 2021; Breznički Učović,

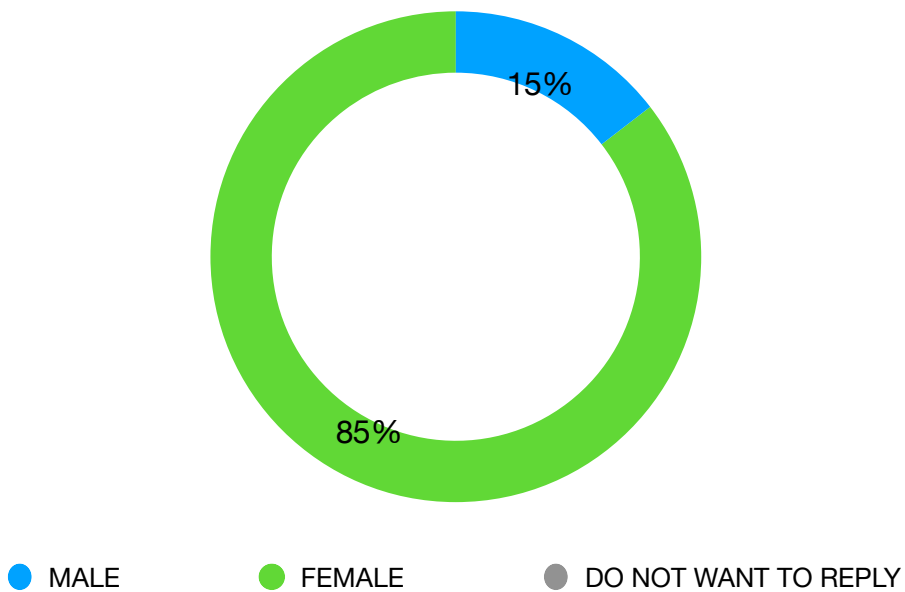
Figure 8: Year of birth



2022). This convergence underscores the robustness and credibility of the current study's data, thus supporting the reliability of its insights.

4.1.3 Gender

Figure 9: Gender



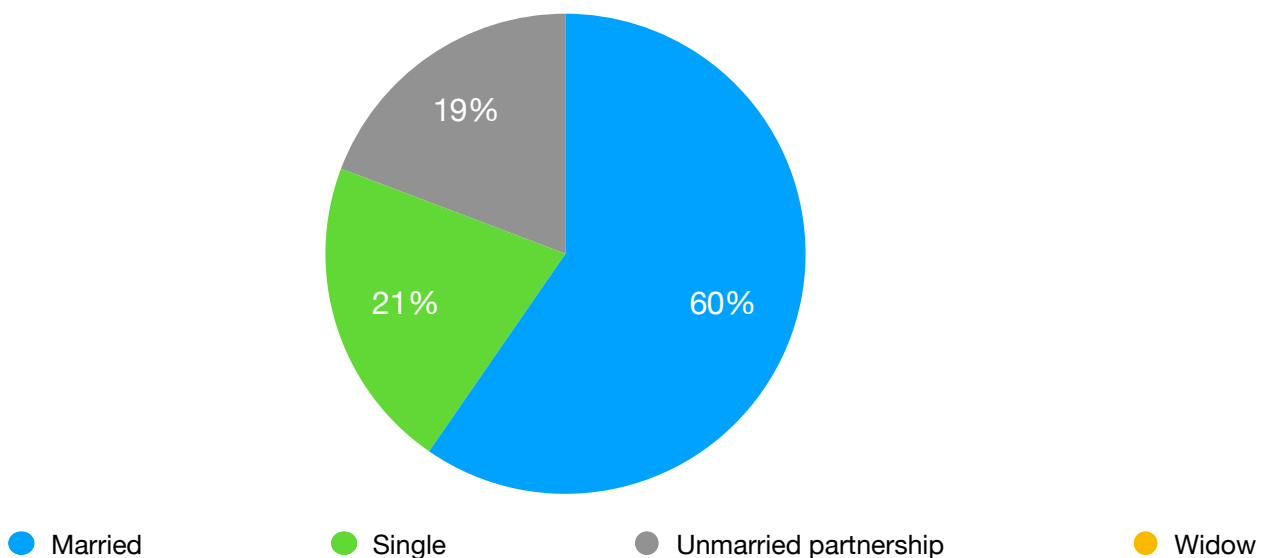
The data provided by the questionnaire affords valuable insights into the gender distribution within the surveyed cohort of HZJ interpreters. Among the interpreters who participated in the survey, a majority of 47 respondents responded as female, while eight respondents indicated their gender as male. No participants opted for the "Other/do not wish to reply" category.

These findings align harmoniously with existing research, which consistently portrays a preponderance of female representation within the realm of sign language interpreting. Drawing upon sources such as Napier & Barker (2003) and Bontempo et al. (2014), prior studies have repeatedly underscored that approximately 80-90% of individuals engaged in sign language interpreting identify as female.

Furthermore, Napier & Goswell's comprehensive inquiry (2013) outlined the prototypical profile of a sign language interpreter, particularly in Western contexts. This profile characterizes interpreters as typically young Caucasian females, often acquiring sign language proficiency as non-native learners. They tend to engage in part-time work predominantly within community settings. This gender distribution, strongly leaning towards female interpreters, aligns with the overarching trend in the broader field of interpreting and within the specialized domain of signed language interpretation (Napier & Barker, 2003; Pöchhacker, 2016).

4.1.4 Marital status, parenthood/caregivers

Figure 10: Marital status



The survey responses offer a comprehensive overview of the marital and parental statuses among the participating HZJ interpreters. The distribution of responses is presented as follows:

Marital Status:

- 31 participants reported their marital status as married.
- 11 participants indicated that they are single.
- 10 participants reported being in unmarried partnerships, denoting cohabitation in a family arrangement without formal religious or civil marriage
- 0 widow/ers were included in this research

Parental or Caregiver Status:

- 30 participants identified themselves as parents or caregivers.
- 22 participants confirmed that they do not have children nor engage in caregiving responsibilities for other family members.

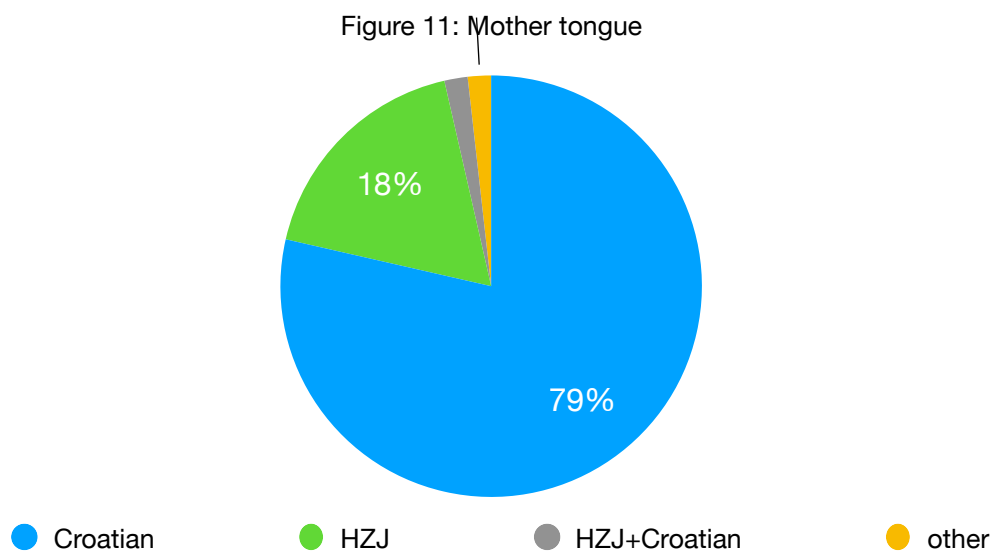
Regarding the number of children, the data illustrates the subsequent distribution:

- 17 participants have two children.
- 8 participants have one child.
- 4 participants have three or more children.

For both responses, 3 participants chose not to disclose their responses to these inquiries.

A similar ratio we found in the UK census report (Napier et al., 2021) - 56,5% parents versus 54,5% in Croatia. These findings emphasize the diverse marital and parental/caregiver statuses in the surveyed cohort of HZJ interpreters. This diversity gains significance when considering interpreters' distinct needs and challenges in balancing their professional commitments with familial obligations. A nuanced understanding of these demographic dimensions has the potential to inform organizational and policy interventions aimed at cultivating an environment that facilitates a harmonious equilibrium between interpreters' work and family spheres.

4.1.5 Mother tongue



The results indicate that a significant proportion of HZJ interpreters, precisely 44 out of 55 participants, identified Croatian as their mother tongue. A similar can be found in Napier et al. (2021), which indicate English as a preferred language - 84,2%. Additionally, HZJ was reported as the mother tongue by 10 participants. One participant mentioned having another European language as their native language, while another reported using Croatian and HZJ as their mother tongues.

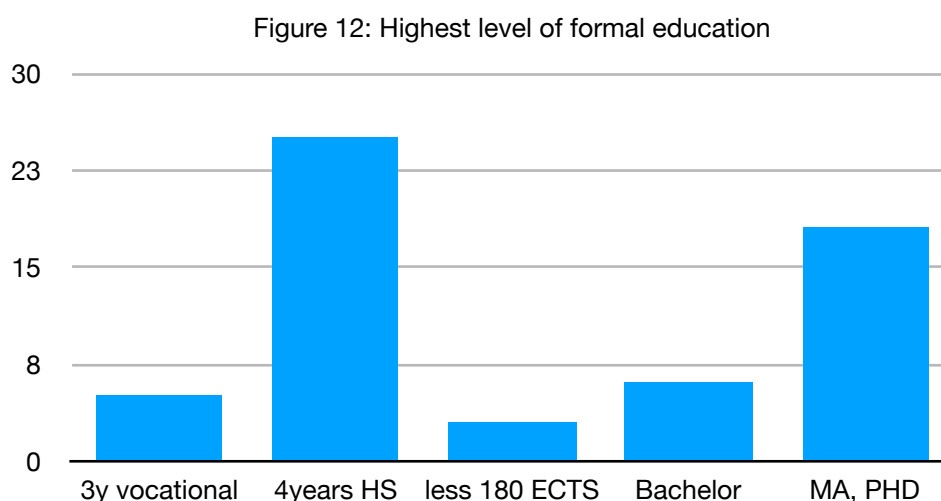
These findings suggest that the majority of HZJ interpreters have Croatian as their mother tongue, with a subset having HZJ as their native language and a few indicating proficiency in another European language.

4.2. Education

The section denominated "Education" delved into the utmost echelon of formal education that HZJ interpreters have attained. This exploration is predicated on the absence of a formal curriculum for sign language interpreting within Croatia. Consequently, individuals aspiring to become HZJ interpreters pursue their education through diverse upper secondary schools, faculties, and universities. Subsequent to this, they can partake in HZJ courses facilitated by various associations dedicated to

the deaf, deafblind, or interpreting domains. It is noteworthy that these programs are often characterized by their ad hoc nature or irregular structure.

4.2.1 Highest level of formal education



The highest echelon of educational attainment revolves around formal education, which, in the context of Croatia, encompasses obligatory elementary school education, progression through upper secondary schools, and advanced studies within faculties or universities.

Concerning the highest level of education reported by participants in this research, a distinct observation arises: 5 participants indicated their completion of a 3-year vocational education, while the most significant subset, comprising 23 out of the total 55, concluded a 4-year upper secondary education. This discovery elicits a pivotal concern, as underlined by various authors (Napier, 2009; de Wit, 2020), who emphasize the imperative nature of comprehensive training for aspiring sign language interpreters, given the intricate demands intrinsic to the profession. The presence of participants whose educational background solely encompasses an upper secondary school curriculum prompts reservations about their competence in interpreting within intricate contexts such as medical, educational, legal, or high-level meetings and conferences.

Advancing to higher-level education, the aggregate reveals 3 participants who reported graduating from a program with less than 180 ECTS credits, 6 with Bachelor's degrees, and 18 who have successfully achieved qualifications in graduate university studies, professional study, or Ph.D. levels. Remarkably, the questionnaire did not afford the granularity required to specify whether these graduates had concluded their studies before implementing the Bologna process, possibly aligning their achievements with the "old system" of MA levels.

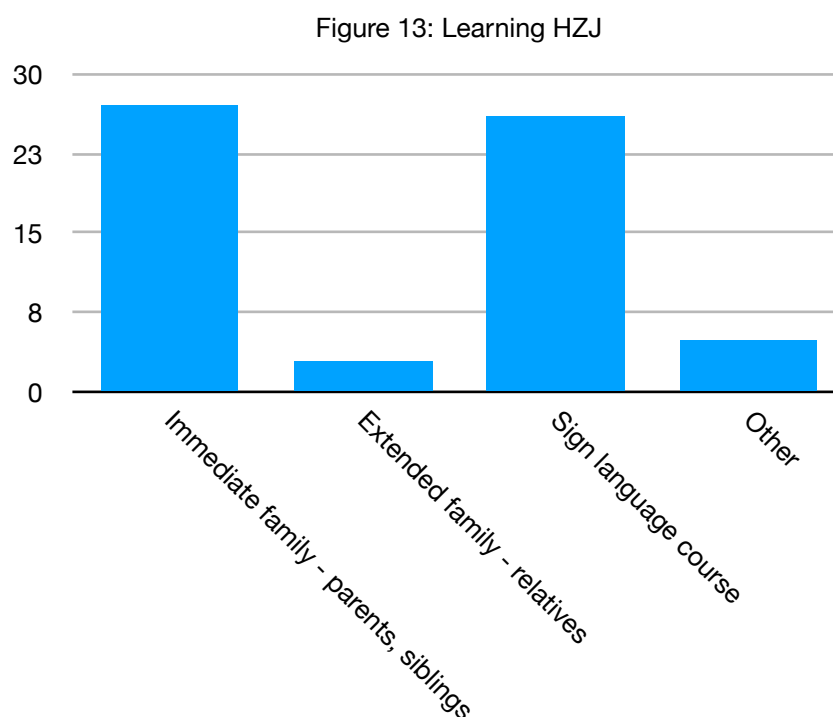
Participants were also inquired about their academic paths post-upper secondary schooling. In response, 25 participants shared insights into their chosen study programs. Remarkably, only 7 participants obtained their degrees from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences across various programs, encompassing linguistics, sociology, philosophy, logic, and ethics. Notably, 2 participants refrained from specifying the names of their chosen programs. Considering the faculty's prominent status as a hub for diverse language studies, this is intriguing.

Furthermore, 8 participants declared their graduation from either the Faculty of Law or the Faculty of Economics, both of which offer university-level programs in Law and Economics, respectively, albeit without explicitly divulging the specific program titles. The category labeled "Teacher Education Faculty" introduced an element of ambiguity, with three participants listing programs that could be pursued within this faculty, although without offering further specificity on the exact program undertaken. Lastly, the data underscored that the remaining seven participants had completed their degrees across various universities within the country, encompassing fields unrelated to language or interpreting disciplines. This information was aggregated under the generic category "other," devoid of detailed elaboration to ensure confidentiality.

These inquiries sought to delve further into the educational background of HZJ interpreters, given the absence of formal education in sign language interpreting in Croatia.

Based on the educational profiles presented by the participants in response to this questionnaire, a noteworthy conclusion comes to the fore: none of the respondents had completed a dedicated interpreting program.

4.2.2 Learning HZJ



When discussing the acquisition of HZJ by the participants, a significant majority of the 55 participants, specifically 27 individuals, reported that they acquired the language within their immediate families, learning from either their parents or siblings. Notably, in this questionnaire, the term "immediate family" was employed as a singular category, differing from the categorization method used in the UK census report by Napier et al. (2021). The census report utilized distinct classifications such as "mother and father," "mother or father," "siblings," "relatives," "other family," and "personal connections" to delineate familial relationships.

The second most prevalent mode of Croatian sign language acquisition was through formal sign language courses. It is also pertinent to mention that a minority of 5 participants indicated alternative sources for their language acquisition. Some respondents attributed their acquisition to interactions within Deaf associations, associating with deaf acquaintances, or exposure to the language during kindergarten.

4.2.3 Informal interpreting education

As previously mentioned, currently, there is no formal training for HZJ interpreters in Croatia. However, various associations intermittently provide informal training opportunities.

The Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons "Dodir" stands as the sole association offering sign language interpreting education since 2010 (Hrvatski savez gluhoslijepih osoba "Dodir", 2023). While the prominence of "Dodir" was evident within the questionnaire, nuanced analysis is imperative to ascertain whether participants referencing "Dodir" allude to the same or distinct programs offered by the association over the years.

It is not surprising to observe that 11 participants explicitly noted their lack of formal education in interpreting. Within the dataset, a subset of participants underscored the significance of day-to-day interactions with deaf individuals as a pivotal facet of their interpreter education.

Insights gleaned from the questionnaire unveil that 8 participants referenced HZJ courses when addressing their sign language interpreter education queries. This phenomenon implies a potential disparity between language acquisition and the intricate skills required for interpretation. Should this presumption hold, it becomes essential to differentiate between the acquisition of a language and the nuanced set of interpreting skills.

Participants who have undergone diverse training offered insights into the duration and affiliations of the programs they participated in. Within this subset, 3 participants exclusively referenced the Croatian Association of Sign Language Interpreters for the Deaf, while 3 others solely cited training from the Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons "Dodir." Additionally, 2 participants mentioned completing an HZJ examination at the Croatian Association of Sign Language Interpreters for the Deaf without providing specific details.

A total of 22 participants recounted their involvement in a spectrum of workshops and training sessions orchestrated by various associations catering to the deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, and interpreter communities. Noteworthy instructors were cited,

such as Marina Milković, Mirjana Juriša, and Tina Vrbanić, an EUMASLI alumnae. Despite certain inconsistencies in the data, several participants offered detailed accounts of their training experiences. However, there is a need for greater specificity regarding the training topics, even though some participants alluded to training encompassing HZJ grammar, interpretation techniques, and the application of HZJ within educational contexts. The duration of these training programs exhibited a spectrum of variability, ranging from 25 to 160 hours. Several participants referred to projects that facilitated their training, although specific details about topics and durations were omitted.

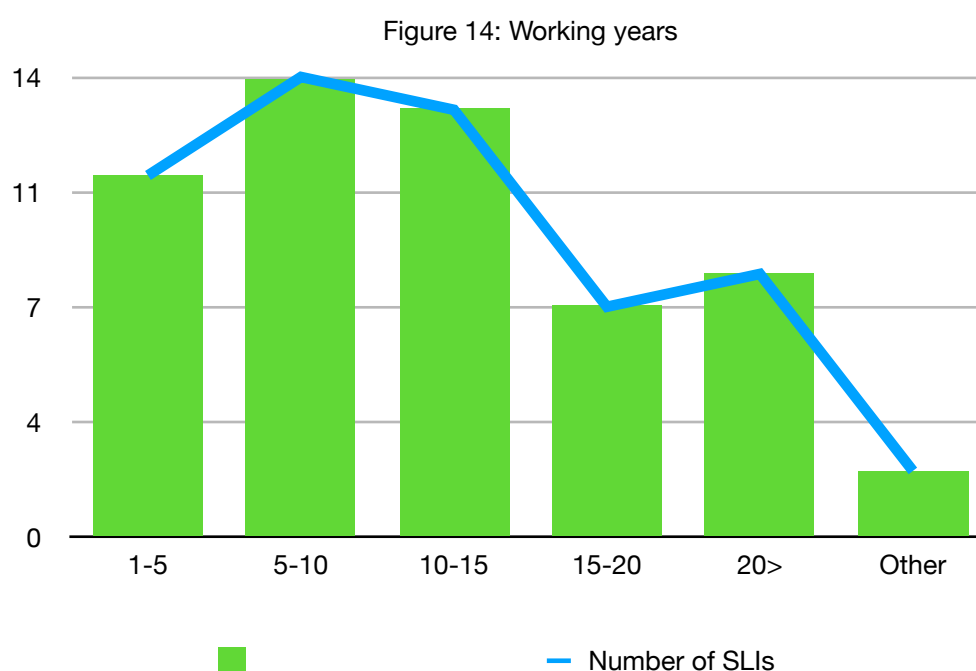
Conversely, a minority of participants indicated their attendance at training sessions yet faced challenges recalling precise details regarding the topics covered or the duration. Participants who cited alternative forms of training alluded to informal education, self-guided study of relevant literature, learning through diverse projects, and participation in conferences and seminars, particularly events organized by efsli (European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters). Several participants voiced concerns over the absence of structured training opportunities and the subsequent need to independently navigate their professional advancement without the requisite support. One participant candidly conveyed that many interpreters are thrust into formal contexts such as media, courts, and education despite lacking formal education or experience. This prevailing circumstance is rooted in the unfortunate reality that possessing an educational foundation in Croatia does not command the respect it rightly should. A subset of HZJ interpreters holds efsli certificates, which, unfortunately, carry limited weight within the Croatian context. The shared sentiment emphasized that investing in knowledge and interpreting skills is fundamentally driven by individual motivation, with the collective aspiration that the accumulation of expertise will ultimately yield professional dividends.

The information provided in response to this question underscores the urgent need to establish a formal interpreter training program that meticulously distinguishes between language acquisition and the acquisition of interpretation skills.

4.3 Work experience

The subsequent section presents a dataset encompassing the work experience of HZJ interpreters. This data aims to elucidate the principal environments in which interpreters are engaged, their remuneration, and the organizational framework governing their employment contracts and overall stability.

4.3.1 General data on employment



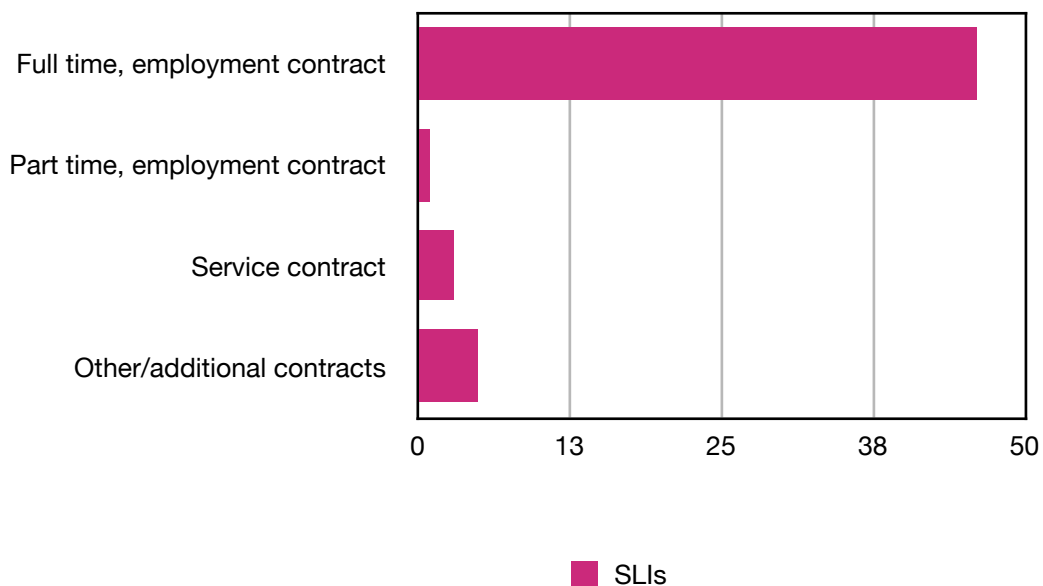
This chapter presents an exposition of the operational tenure of HZJ interpreters, employment contracts, their audiological status, their clientele, membership within professional associations, and their contentment with remuneration.

Upon analysis of the years of work experience, compelling competition surfaces between HZJ interpreters operating within the 5 - 10 years range and those boasting 10 - 15 years of professional engagement. Notably, among the cohort, 14 participants affirmed their involvement in the 5-10 years' bracket, while 13 individuals attested to accumulating experience spanning 10-15 years. Moreover, a distinct cohort of 11 respondents stands at the nascent phases of their careers, having dedicated 1 to 5 years to the profession.

Moreover, an intriguing parallelism emerges between interpreters operating within the 15 - 20 years' tenure and those positioned within the 15 - 20 years' experience span. Eight participants align themselves with this category by leaning towards HZJ interpreters with a service history surpassing 15 but falling short of 20 years.

While participants were offered an "Other" category to expound on their work experience, minimal engagement with this option is evident. Merely two respondents chose this category, and within this subset, only one individual offered a comment outlining a substantial over 20 years of tenure as an HZJ interpreter. It is important to note that a direct comparison between these findings and the results from Breznićki Učović (2022) and Napier et al. (2021) was not feasible due to the absence of examination of this specific data in those research.

Figure 15: Employment contracts



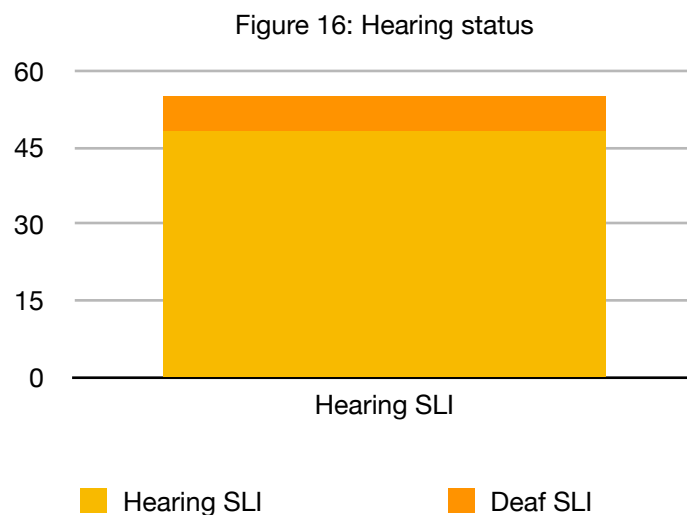
Most HZJ interpreters, precisely 46 participants (equivalent to 83.6% of the total), operate under full-time employment contracts. In contrast, a mere 10.6% of UK sign language translators and interpreters (SLTI) possess similar full-time employment contracts, as reported by Napier et al. (2021). Notably, the prevailing trend among UK SLTI professionals leans towards self-employment.

This distinction in employment status between Croatia and the UK underscores the variance in the prevailing professional landscape. Within the UK context, the prevalence of full-time employed SLTI professionals stands at a meager

10.6%, contrasting with the employment conditions witnessed among HZJ interpreters in Croatia.

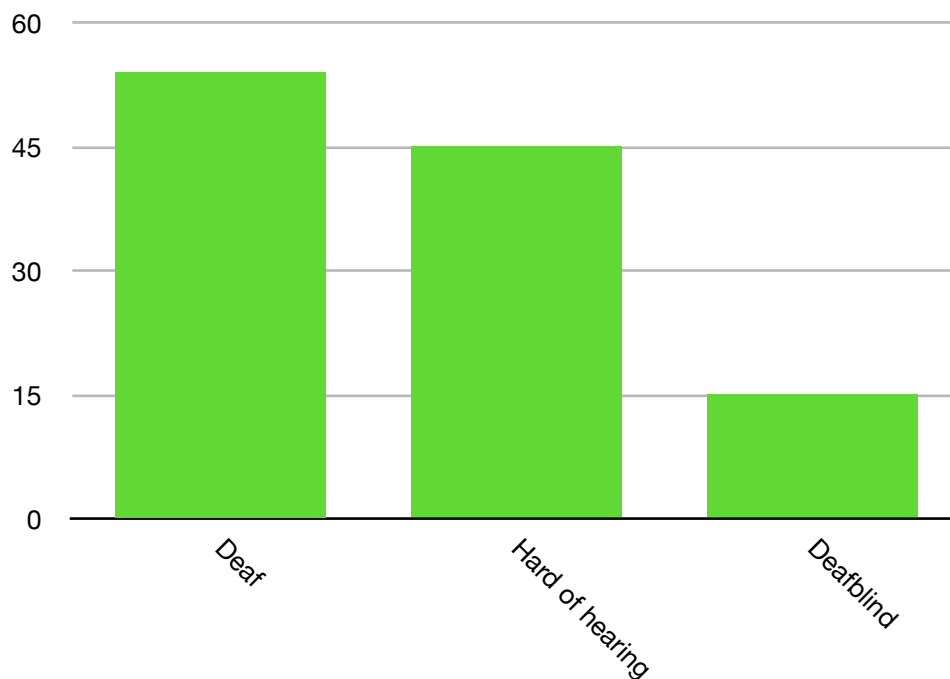
Moreover, HZJ interpreters in Croatia exhibit diverse employment arrangements, often affiliating themselves with various associations. This flexibility extends to the opportunity for part-time engagement within these associations and educational settings, as elucidated in the earlier section addressing HZJ interpreter employment dynamics. A subset of 5 participants hold two contracts, with 2 explicitly outlining their dual employment status within a deaf association and an educational environment.

Furthermore, a handful of HZJ interpreters occasionally accept author's contracts for HZJ interpreting services, indicating a supplementary avenue of engagement.



Among the cohort of 55 participants, 48 self-identified as hearing HZJ interpreters, while 7 identified themselves as deaf HZJ interpreters. It is of significance to note that no respondents opted to abstain from answering this demographic inquiry. In a comparative context with the study conducted by Napier et al. (2021), it is apparent that the proportion of participants identifying as deaf interpreters is notably higher in Croatia, accounting for 12.7% of the total, in contrast to the UK's figure of 3.3%.

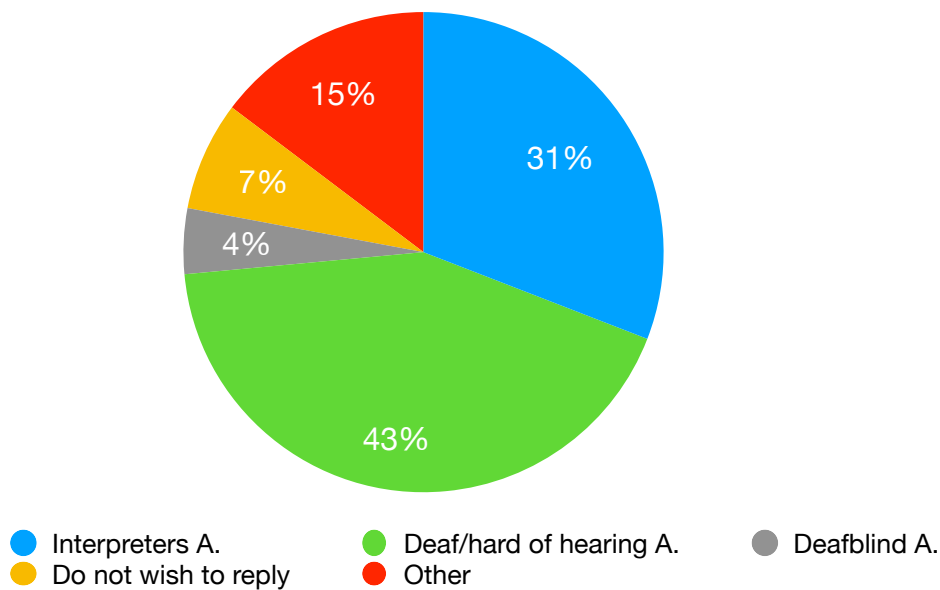
Figure 17: Clients



Among the cohort of 55 participants, a solitary respondent exclusively reported providing services to hard of hearing clients. Conversely, the majority, comprising 45 individuals, interpret for both deaf and hard of hearing clients. Additionally, 11 HZJ interpreters detailed their involvement in catering to all three distinct groups: hard of hearing, deaf, and deafblind individuals. Notably, it is essential to highlight that several HZJ interpreters indicated their involvement with multiple client categories, reflecting the multifaceted nature of their roles.

A more intricate data analysis underscores that a mere 6 participants are exclusively dedicated to serving deaf clients. Furthermore, 4 participants noted their involvement in both deaf and deafblind contexts. Intriguingly, all participants interpreting for deafblind clients concurrently selected at least one additional client category. Noteworthy is the observation that, among the 16 participants interpreting for deafblind individuals, 10 possess higher educational qualifications, including Bachelor's or Master's degrees.

Figure 20: Association membership



Despite receiving responses regarding membership in associations, there was a possibility of misunderstanding among participants, leading to the omission of this data from the analysis. It is likely that some participants interpreted the question to inquire about their employment status in interpreter, deaf and hard of hearing, or deafblind associations, rather than their membership status in these associations. To ensure the presentation of accurate and reliable data, the potentially ambiguous responses were excluded from the analysis.

When participants were prompted to assess their sign language interpreting salaries on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10 concerning their ability to cover living expenses, the average rating was 3.6. Furthermore, the median score of 4.0 underscores that the remuneration provided is inadequate to cover the cost of living. This observation aligns with the sentiments expressed during discussions with Šoić (personal communication, June 25th, 2023), who emphasized that the current monthly remuneration of 650€ for sign language interpreters is insufficient to sustain a reasonable quality of life and meet essential life expenses. This challenge is particularly pronounced in educational settings, where sign language interpreters earn approximately 360€ monthly.

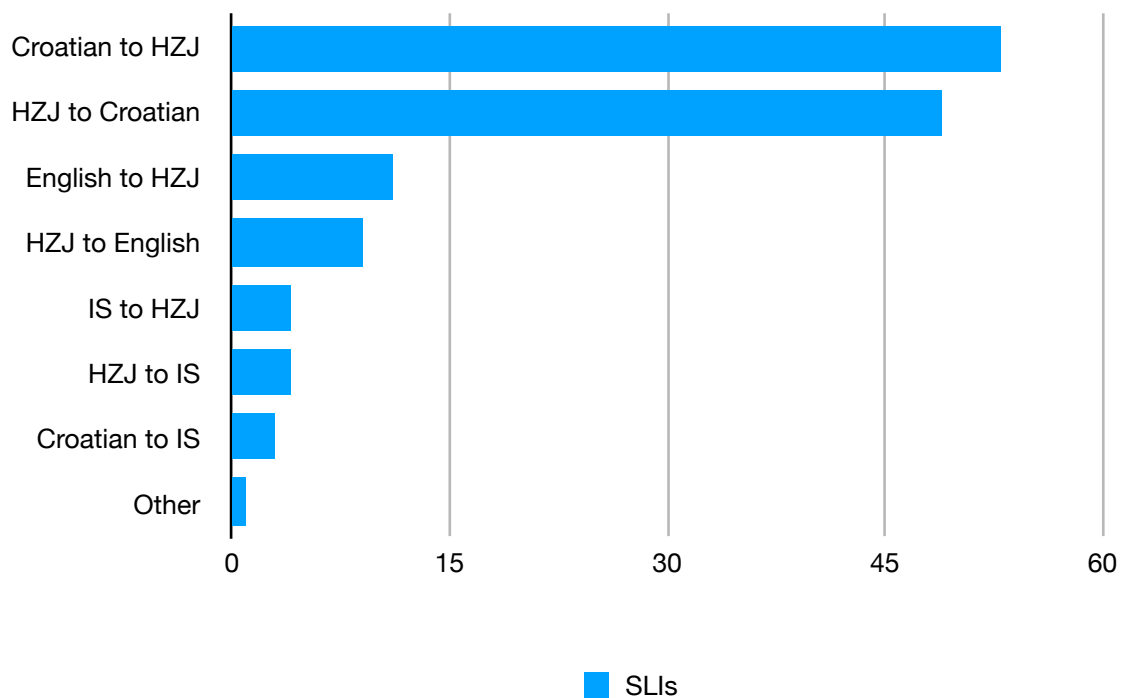
Moreover, when contextualized against Croatia's average monthly wage of 1130€ in March 2023 (Državni zavod za statistiku, 2023), it becomes apparent that sign

language interpreters earn nearly 50% less than the nation's mean income. While acknowledging the complexity of comparing HZJ interpreter salaries with their counterparts in other European nations, it is worth noting that those employed in educational settings typically earn between 4€ and 5€ per hour, whereas the average salary for sign language interpreters across European countries hovers around 40€ (de Wit, 2020).

This substantial disparity further highlights the challenges sign language interpreters face in meeting their financial needs and maintaining a satisfactory standard of living.

4.3.2 Language combinations and settings

Figure 18: Language combinations



The subsequent chapter delineates the linguistic combinations within which HZJ interpreters operate, alongside supplementary modes of communication they engage, in addition to the settings wherein their services are deployed.

The examination of language combinations employed by HZJ interpreters unveils intriguing patterns. A notable majority, encompassing 53 interpreters, indicated their

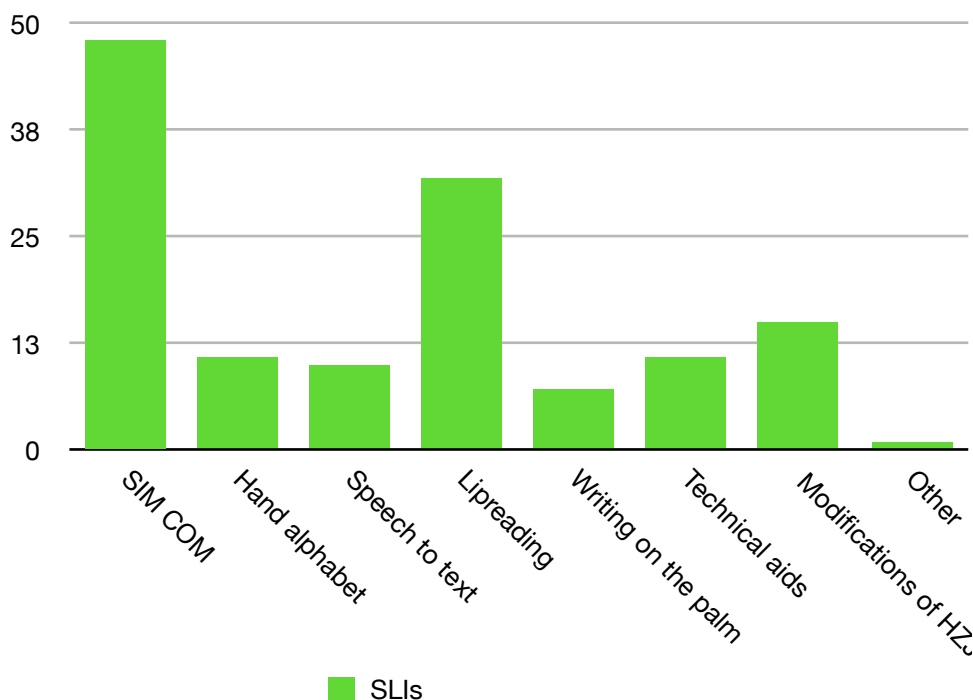
expertise in interpreting from Croatian to HZJ. Slightly fewer, 49 HZJ interpreters, attested to their proficiency in interpreting from HZJ to Croatian.

Within English, 11 HZJ interpreters disclosed their specialization in interpreting from English to HZJ. Conversely, a more modest count of two HZJ interpreters expressed their competence in interpreting from HZJ to English.

Of particular interest is the presence of 4 HZJ interpreters adept in mediating between International Sign and HZJ, as well as the reverse (HZJ to International Sign). However, only 3 HZJ interpreters deploy language combinations bridging Croatian to International Sign.

Notably, the United Kingdom exhibits a higher degree of linguistic diversity, with the UK SLTI workforce engaging across a broader spectrum of sign and spoken languages in their language combinations. Napier et al. (2021) state that the UK's SLTI workforce encompasses proficiency in 7 different national sign languages, International Sign, and 4 distinct spoken languages.

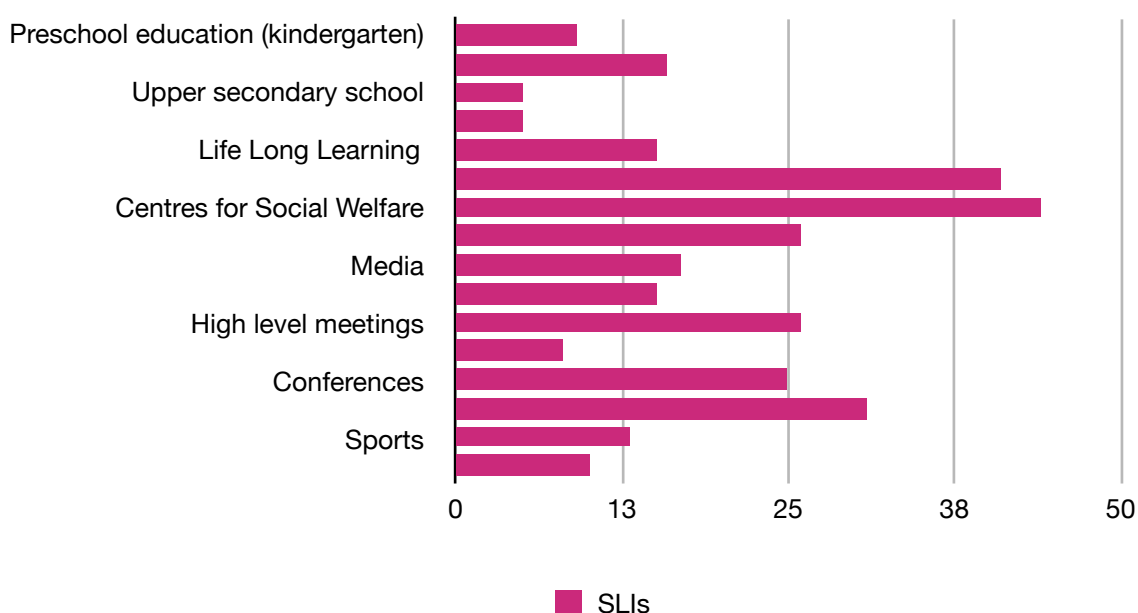
Figure 19: other communication methods



In addition to interpreting to and from sign language, several HZJ interpreters employ other communication systems (Zakon, 2015). One such system is simultaneous sign-oral communication, known as Sign Supported Speech (SSS) (Humphrey, 2007). Out of the participants surveyed, 48 indicated that they utilize SSS. Another communication method utilized by 11 participants is the hand alphabet. The question regarding the exclusive use of the hand alphabet may have yielded unclear results since it was meant to question if participants use only the hand alphabet without incorporating any signs from Croatian sign language, suggesting the need for more precise wording in future inquiries.

10 participants employ speech-to-text typing, while 32 participants report using lipreading. Some of these interpreters adapt Croatian sign language for deafblind individuals, with 22 of them utilizing such accommodations. Additionally, 11 participants made use of assistive technology. Notably, one respondent mentioned using a different system when working in a school with a deaf pupil. This explanation helps clarify the unique response and highlights the diverse settings in which other communication systems are applied.

Figure 21: Interpreting settings



Examining the data on settings, it is evident that most HZJ interpreters predominantly work in Social welfare centers, now known as the Croatian Social Welfare Institute after the Government reform, with 44 out of 55 participants (80%) reporting

involvement in this setting. Medical settings emerge as a close second, with 41 participants (76%) offering their services in such environments. On the other hand, HZJ interpreters exhibit minimal engagement in preschools, upper secondary schools, and university-level settings.

A noticeable contrast is evident in theatre settings, where a modest number of HZJ interpreters, specifically 8 (14.5%), are involved. The domains of sports, lifelong learning programs, religious ceremonies, elementary schools, and media settings exhibit a range of participation, encompassing 13 to 17 participants (23.6% to 30.9%). Similar patterns arise in courtrooms, high-level meetings, and conferences, wherein approximately 45% of the participants, corresponding to 25 participants, are employed. Notably, the category of community interpreting does not possess a direct equivalent in the Croatian context, leading 31 participants (56.4%) to select the option of "utilities/municipal procedures/city/public institutions." However, responses categorized as "Other" may potentially align with the scope of community interpreting, encompassing settings such as banks, post offices, utilities, and bookkeeping. The nuanced distinction between these domains might not be universally recognized, contributing to potential misinterpretations.

Remarkably, the work settings appear consistent across participants identifying as either deaf or hearing interpreters. Deaf participants also frequently reported involvement in social welfare centers and medical settings. Conversely, no deaf participants indicated working in theatre settings.

As observed for other groups, an attempt was made to discern a pattern between participants with higher education and their engagement in medical and social welfare settings. However, no such pattern emerged from the data.

A noteworthy observation is that all participants who reported completing three years of upper secondary school education are engaged in medical settings. Some of these individuals also work in social welfare centers, courts, and high-level meetings and conferences.

This observation raises an intriguing conjecture: the potential underlying cause might be an insufficiency of HZJ interpreters at large. This provokes a pertinent question:

Do HZJ interpreters possess the autonomy to decline assignments that they deem beyond their comfort zone, owing to their level of proficiency?

Addressing these disparities and advocating for formal education for HZJ interpreters is imperative to further the field's development.

4.3.3 Additional working options

Given the potential for HZJ interpreters to engage in supplementary endeavors, this chapter elucidates the specific contexts wherein they have the opportunity to accrue supplementary compensation. Furthermore, it examines the feasibility of undertaking supplemental roles within their affiliated associations, as well as the extent to which alternative employment opportunities are extended to them beyond the scope of sign language interpretation.

The subsequent section of the questionnaire investigated the involvement of HZJ interpreters in additional work for extra compensation and the specific settings - police, courts, TV, projects, other or they could indicate that they work in those settings but are not being remunerated - in which they engaged in such activities.

The results yielded the following insights: The majority of participants, totaling 23 out of 55 participants, reported their involvement in various projects to augment their income. 17 participants disclosed that they provide interpreting services without financial remuneration. Among participants who pursued additional interpreting work alongside their regular interpreting assignments but did not receive compensation, a substantial number indicated their engagement in various projects.

Moreover, 3 participants outlined a diverse range of settings where they provided interpreting services without remuneration. These settings encompassed courts, banks, hospitals, and public notary offices. It is noted that these participants might have interpreted the question as inquiring about settings where they typically work and are compensated by the association they are employed.

15 participants indicated their involvement in other settings, which encompassed private companies, different organizations, media interpreting, elementary schools, and interpreting for International Sign setting.

Additionally, 2 participants clarified that their primary full-time occupation did not pertain to the Croatian sign language interpreting field. These findings shed light on the strategies employed by HZJ interpreters to enhance their income through supplementary work, including paid projects.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge that this particular question reveals a limitation of the research. The question's clarity might not have been uniformly understood by all participants, suggesting the need for rewording to improve clarity.

Participants were queried regarding their engagement in supplementary occupations alongside their sign language interpreting duties, and 34 out of 55 respondents indicated exclusive involvement in interpreting tasks. Among those who acknowledged additional professional commitments, administrative roles emerged as prevalent. Specifically, a substantial number described their secondary occupation as involving secretarial responsibilities. Concurrently, an equal count of participants, numbering 6 each, declared their roles as project coordinators. Furthermore, 2 participants disclosed that they concurrently held project coordinators and social workers' positions. Certain respondents also revealed their involvement in the combined spheres of project coordination and administrative functions.

The spectrum of supplementary roles extended to encompass diverse job profiles, such as lecturing HZJ or offering various forms of training, contributing to kindergartens with deaf children, serving as professional associates or educators in schools, participating in project-based assignments, and one participant cited adaptability to various roles based on situational demands. Notably, 2 individuals indicated occupations unrelated to sign language interpreting.

Regarding the distribution of hours between these additional occupations and sign language interpreting, several participants found it challenging to demarcate a distinct division. While some delineated their work hours to encompass interpreting for association board members and association constituents, alongside administrative tasks, association management, project and report composition, employee

timekeeping, salary disbursements, and other member-oriented responsibilities, including community interpreting, the allocation of working hours for other roles exhibited variability among participants. Certain individuals committed 40 to 30 hours per week to alternate jobs, whereas others dedicated 1 to 15 hours per month to interpreting.

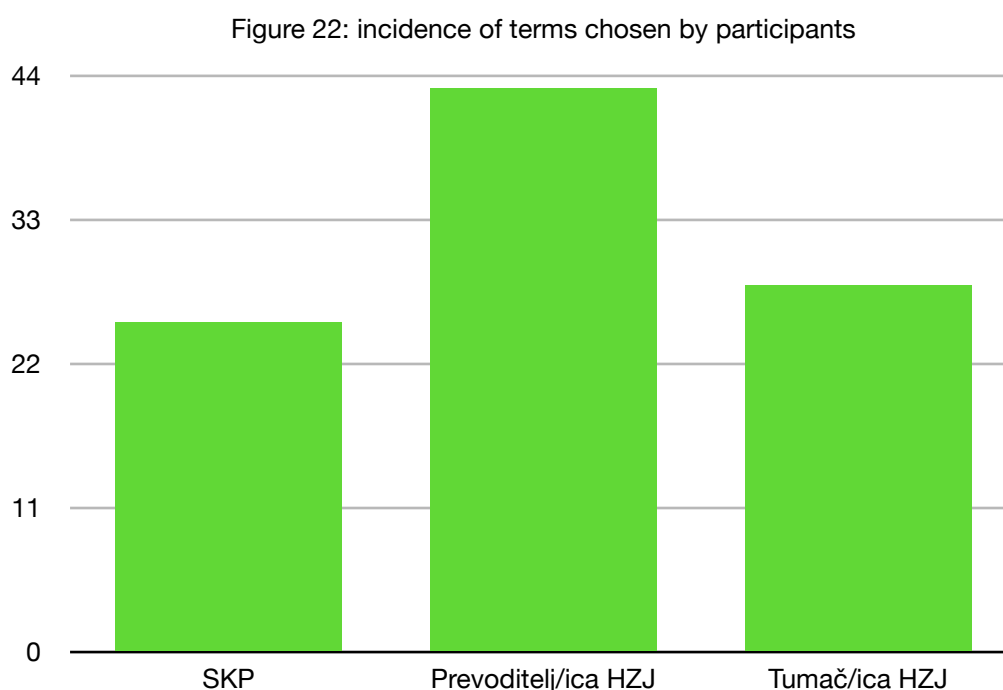
The data underscores the multifaceted array of supplementary job opportunities pursued by HZJ interpreters, revealing the dispersion of their work hours across sign language interpreting and these diverse occupational spheres.

In addition, participants were queried about their prospects for undertaking supplementary roles encompassing responsibilities such as coordinators, project managers, activities managers, educators, community managers, brochure authors, or analogous positions. Among the respondents, 18 individuals acknowledged the existence of such opportunities. Some participants underscored the sporadic nature of these prospects, while others indicated encountering them primarily in the capacity of project managers or through supplemental interpreting assignments. Additionally, certain participants mentioned instances where such roles were offered but only pro bono, a proposition some opted to decline.

A majority of participants engaged in supplementary work emphasized the imperative nature of extra income for survival, attributing this necessity to the inadequacy of interpreter salaries to sustain a satisfactory standard of living. Nonetheless, even among those who reported receiving remuneration, a prevalent sentiment pertained to a substantial workload that often exceeded the initially agreed-upon terms. Notably, as a considerable portion of HZJ interpreters are based in Zagreb, they perceive a higher likelihood of securing additional compensated engagements.

4.4 Defining terms - "stručni komunikacijski posrednik," "prevoditelj," and "tumač"

The final section included the examination of HZJ interpreters' perspectives on three terms commonly used to describe their work in Croatia - "stručni komunikacijski posrednik," "prevoditelj," and "tumač" - was crucial for understanding how these professionals define their roles and the nature of interpreting.



Among the participants, "prevoditelj/ica HZJ" was the most commonly chosen term, with 43 participants (75%) expressing a preference for it. This was followed by 28 participants (51%) who favored "tumač/ica" and 25 participants (45%) who identified most with the term "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica." Upon closer examination of the data, it became evident that participants selected various combinations of these terms as they found appropriate. The author intentionally allowed participants to choose multiple combinations to avoid influencing their perceptions.

Once again, the highest number of participants chose to use only the term "prevoditelj/ica," with 16 individuals making this choice. The second-highest number,

11 participants, opted for the combination of "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica," "prevoditelj/ica," and "tumač/ica." This result was comparable to the combination of "prevoditelj/ica" and "tumač/ica," which 10 participants chose. 6 participants selected the combination of "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" and "prevoditelj/ica," while 5 participants chose "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" exclusively. The term "tumač/ica" was chosen by 4 participants, and the combination of "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" and "tumač/ica" was the least preferred, selected by 3 participants.

An analysis focusing solely on deaf participants showed that the term "prevoditelj/ica" was the most popular choice, with 7 out of 8 deaf participants (87.5%) identifying with it. "Tumač/ica" was chosen by 4 deaf participants in various combinations.

Interestingly, upon closer examination, it was found that only 3 deaf participants (37.5%) selected "prevoditelj/ica" exclusively. Additionally, 3 deaf participants chose both "prevoditelj/ica" and "tumač/ica" as their preferred terms. None of the deaf participants selected "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" as their preferred term.

4.4.1 "Stručni komunikacijski posrednik"

Among the participants in the study, it was observed that 6 individuals abstained from providing a definitive explication or were uncertain in their understanding of its precise definition for the term "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica." Conversely, one respondent, representative of 22 similar responses, expounded upon the term, citing its regulations within the Ministry of Science and Education Ordinance. This definition delineates "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" as an intermediary facilitating communication between hearing and individuals with hearing impairments in educational contexts, notably encompassing kindergarten, elementary, and upper secondary school levels. In conjunction with communication mediation, this role provides supplementary support to students with hearing impairments, encompassing

motivational guidance, task instruction, additional elucidations for comprehension of classroom proceedings, and other non-linguistic assistance. 3 participants harmoniously converged in their interpretation, associating "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" with an individual engaging with non-HZJ communication modalities. Equally, 4 participants aligned their perspectives with the term's legislative or legal contextual definitions.

However, some responses emanated a measure of ambiguity, exemplified by: "type of communication method," "person professional in the work they do," "knowledge of HZJ," "person having a certificate to do the work," and "person who understands deaf persons, their grammar, and thinking. A person who helps a deaf person to understand better the surroundings they live in." There were further responses such as "A person helping deaf and hard of hearing persons in communication so that they can understand hearing persons better," and "I do not have the profession of a professional communication mediator, so for me, this is superfluous. Communication mediator."

Another thread surfaced, with 4 participants attributing the role of "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica" to an individual endowed with adeptness, knowledge, and competencies of HZJ or alternative communication systems predicated on the Croatian language, specifically within educational milieus.

In a collective consensus, 7 participants affirmed that this function facilitates communication between individuals with hearing impairments and their hearing counterparts.

4.4.2 "Prevoditelj/ica HZJ"

A consensus emerged among 16 participants, signifying a prevailing inclination towards the term "prevoditelj/ica HZJ." This designation as unanimously ascertained, conveys the notion of an intermediary operating between sign and spoken languages engaged in interpreting meanings. The participants further emphasized that such an individual must possess a rich repertoire of interpreting skills while exhibiting an adept understanding of the cultural dimensions within the deaf community. Notably, the exclusive utilization of HZJ, the continuous enhancement of interpreting

capabilities, cross-cultural competence, and the mastery of both languages were underscored as requisites within this role.5 participants directed attention to "prevoditelj/ica HZJ" as conveying verbatim interpretation, while a single respondent accentuated its application in spoken word interpretation during conferences without supplementary contextual elaboration. However, there were 6 instances where participants either opted not to provide a response or displayed uncertainty in articulating a definition for the term "prevoditelj/ica HZJ."

Certain responses exhibited a measure of indistinctness, typified by descriptions such as "Adequate," "Direct information transfer," "Simultaneous interpreting," and "Interpreter." Additional descriptions included "A person who shows in signs that deaf persons cannot hear" and "Interpreter in all life situations." Another response characterized the role as "prevoditelj," focusing on exclusively and literally translating between languages without comprehension concern. Furthermore, the term was described as one involving explaining terms to deaf individuals, particularly within the framework of the social welfare system. The transfer of information from and to a deaf person in HZJ and the conversion of information from sign language to spoken language for third-party communication were also suggested as definitions. However, these responses maintained an element of ambiguity.

Of note, 8 other replies exhibited comparable ambiguity. In a similar vein, one participant's depiction of "prevoditelj/ica HZJ" alluded to a conveyor of information, encompassing both the translation of information to HZJ from external sources and the relay of information from a proficiently literate deaf person utilizing sign language to other modes of communication in various life contexts.

A single response maintained uniformity across the three terminological categories: "From an academic point of view and by the letter of the law - terms 'tumač', 'komunikacijski posrednik', and 'prevoditelj' are defined. Personally, I think the terminology and division are unnecessary as long as a person who does the work - with his/her work (communication mediation, explaining, and interpreting) helps an individual - a deaf or hard of hearing person or a wider community (association of deaf and hard of hearing)."

The composite array of responses aptly exemplifies the diverse range of perceptions and connotations encapsulated within the term "prevoditelj/ica HZJ," underscoring its multifaceted nature within the context of interpretation and communication.

4.4.3 “Tumač/ica HZJ”

Concerning the nomenclature "tumač/ica HZJ," participants' responses can be systematically categorized as follows:

1. No Reply: 7 participants abstained from responding to this term.
2. Unclear Replies: Another 7 participants offered responses that lacked clarity or precision.
3. "Tumač" as Explanation: 15 participants understood that "tumač" denotes the act of explaining meanings.
4. Inappropriateness: 3 participants found the term "tumač/ica HZJ" inappropriate in the context of their work.
5. Similarity to "Prevoditelj/ica HZJ": 5 participants perceived a likeness between "tumač/ica HZJ" and "prevoditelj/ica HZJ."
6. Repetition across Terms: 2 participants consistently provided identical responses for all three terms.

Within the remaining spectrum of responses, some participants exhibited a more or less accurate comprehension of the term's implications. Intriguingly, the term "tumač/ica HZJ" engendered a distinct category not observed concerning the preceding terms. 4 participants conveyed aversion towards this term, expressing a lack of utilization and a view of its inappropriateness due to its connotation of deaf individuals requiring explanations. This view was rooted in perceiving the term as discriminatory, implying a need for explanations that they deem unnecessary. One participant stated, "In my opinion, it is quite a controversial term because I think that for deaf people, it is not necessary to explain anything, nor do I think that I am doing it; I only interpret from one language to another while taking care of how to interpret the content expressed in one language into another language, so that the meaning remains identical, but also taking care of potential cultural differences that need to be bridged in the interpreting

process." This corresponds to attendees of Allen workshops (2023) who state the same.

A participant who asserted the identity of "tumač/ica HZJ" with "prevoditelj" mentioned that the sole distinction lies in the use of "tumač" for court interpreting, necessitating additional examination clearance. This is further analyzed regarding responses received from spoken language interpreters and translators' associations.

Several responses were vague, capturing notions of interpreting, translating, explaining, and providing explanations. The term "tumač" was even provided as a response, underscoring certain participants' uncertainty in explicating the term's significance.

Additionally, 3 participants clarified "tumač/ica HZJ" as an individual who exclusively interprets from spoken Croatian to HZJ.

Moreover, some participants demonstrated perplexity in distinguishing between "tumač/ica HZJ" and "prevoditelj/ica HZJ," suggesting potential confusion or interchangeability between these terminologies.

4.5 Comments by participants

The insights gleaned from participants in the section "Comments" unveil a range of central themes and concerns about the current landscape of HZJ interpreters in Croatia. 10 participants articulated discontent with the existing state of affairs, pinpointing issues such as inadequate remuneration, an absence of acknowledgment and appreciation for their professional contributions, and a conspicuous lack of well-defined differentiations among the roles of "tumač/ica HZJ," "prevoditelj/ica HZJ," and "stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica."

A prevailing sentiment permeates the discourse, wherein the vocation of the HZJ interpreter is deemed undervalued, yielding a climate of diminished impetus for continued education and professional advancement. This collective perspective underscores the urgency for formalizing educational frameworks and formulating precise delineations regarding the duties and obligations aligned with each corresponding terminology. The prevailing lack of clarity and the merging of terms

necessitate elucidation both within the interpreter community and to a broader audience.

Numerous participants expressed optimism for a future that honors recognition, esteem, and improved remuneration for the HZJ interpreter profession. In this trajectory, the significance of ongoing education and training was accentuated, aiming to refine interpreter competencies and augment the quality of services rendered.

However, lingering uncertainties and concerns emerged concerning the terminology and the evolving roles of interpreters, especially within the context of varying degrees of hearing impairment and distinctive communication requisites.

4.6 Spoken language interpreters and translators' associations

The insights from several professional interpreter associations underscore critical themes and concerns that permeate the domain of spoken language interpreters and translators. In correspondence with associations, it was revealed that the terms "prevoditi" and "prevoditelj" hold a more inclusive purview, encompassing "tumačiti" and "tumač," which are more specifically linked to court interpreting.

The Secretary of the Croatian Association of Scientific and Technical Translators (HDZTP) provided a comprehensive perspective (personal communication on June 15th, 2023). The elucidation advanced the distinction between "prevoditelj" and "tumač." In a broader application, "prevoditelj" is perceived as an interpreter, transferring meaning across both written and oral forms. In contrast, "tumač" is not synonymous with "prevoditelj." Within a broader context, "tumač" signifies an individual who determines or explicates meanings rather than merely conveying them. This differentiation was exemplified through instances such as the "tumač" of the Bible, denoting a scholar specialized in discerning textual implications, and a "riddle interpreter," unraveling the meanings of enigmatic constructs.

Further, "tumač" signifies an authorized "prevoditelj" operating within court systems to ensure the fidelity and credibility of both written and spoken interpretations. This term also pertains to non-verbal communication, specifically in sign language

interpretation. The correspondence illuminated the interchangeability of the terms "tumač" and "prevoditelj," contributing to confusion and imprecision in daily usage.

However, within this exchange, it is apparent that there is a misunderstanding regarding sign language being classified as non-verbal communication.

The President of the Croatian Society of Conference Interpreters, Sandra Breznički Učović (personal communication, July 10th, 2023), provided an extensive perspective. She articulated the prevalence of "tumač" in court proceedings, which denotes a distinctive category of interpreters regulated by the Rulebook on court interpreters. These interpreters engage predominantly in the written translation of diverse documents and court records, complemented by spoken interpretation for various legal entities. This spoken translation varies fundamentally from the interpretation performed by conference interpreters. Consequently, labeling these professionals as "tumač" in Croatia would create confusion, as it does not accurately encapsulate their roles. The term "tumač" is deemed inappropriate for spoken interpreters as it conveys an ability to explain or justify someone's words—an erroneous implication. Conversely, the term "prevoditelj" aligns more fittingly with the role of an interpreter.

Likewise, the Croatian Professional Association of Court Interpreters, represented by Katarina Justin (personal communication, July 10th, 2023), replied that the utilization of the term "tumač" within their Association's nomenclature was explained as derived from legal regulations, specifically the Courts Act (Zakon, 2022) and the Rulebook on Permanent Court Interpreters. This terminology aptly captures the essence of interpretation in the context of legal proceedings.

Further insight was provided by the former President of the Croatian Association of Audiovisual Translators, Kristijan Nikolić (personal communication, June 15th, 2023). In this perspective, it was highlighted that the term "tumač" finds relevance only within sign language interpretation. He cites the source from which he draws this inference - https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0442_HR.html. Across literary, conference, and audiovisual contexts, the term "prevoditelj" is employed, both in official and unofficial capacities. This differentiation is notable, as even within the sphere of conference interpreting, the

term "tumač" has not gained substantial traction. Efforts to introduce it have primarily faltered, reinforcing the predominance of "prevoditelj." The official occupational classification is referred to for clarification, although nuances in usage persist.

A unanimous consensus emerges from the interpreter associations approached for clarification—except court interpreters—who collectively advocate using "prevoditelj" to describe the interpreter's vocation. Nonetheless, this shared understanding can potentially introduce confusion, especially concerning deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind individuals, who might anticipate sign language interpreters providing explanations. This expectation may have roots in historical practices, where early sign language interpreters, often family members, offered counsel and opinions (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001).

5. Discussion

Exploring the employed HZJ interpreter profile represents uncharted territory, establishing this research as a pioneering endeavor. Addressing the research question, "Who is an employed HZJ interpreter?" portrays a 40-year-old female domiciled in Zagreb. She is married, a parent of two, a native Croatian speaker, and possesses a 4-year upper secondary education. Her proficiency in HZJ emanates from interactions with deaf family members, supplemented by informal and insufficient sign language interpreting training. Having amassed a decade of full-time experience, she maintains a fixed-term employment contract and sporadically engages in supplementary projects. Identifying as a hearing HZJ interpreter, her primary role encompasses interpreting from Croatian to HZJ for deaf clients, primarily employing signed Croatian (simultaneous sign-oral communication) as other communication modalities. She undertakes supplementary tasks within her employing association but expresses dissatisfaction with her remuneration. While occasional project work is extended, compensation for such endeavors remains irregular. Her primary work revolves around Social Welfare Centres, designating her role as a "prevoditeljica."

Furthermore, this research tackles the question, "How have HZJ interpreters been educated thus far?" The response reveals diverse associations offering ad hoc informal

training programs. However, numerous HZJ interpreters voice discontent with current affairs and advocate for training and recognition within the sign language interpreting profession.

Moreover, in addressing the query regarding the means to professionalize the sign language interpreting profession in Croatia, the establishment of formal sign language interpreter training, ideally at the university level, akin to spoken language interpreters, and the implementation of continuous professional development programs emerge as pivotal measures.

The investigation unveils a concentration of HZJ interpreters in Zagreb, facilitating accessibility to diverse institutions. Notably, the study does not encompass a comprehensive count of HZJ interpreters affiliated with various associations across distinct regions. However, this information can shed light on the required number of additional HZJ interpreters in different locales. The geographic distribution of HZJ interpreters appears uneven, with certain counties lacking participant representation, implying gaps in sign language interpretation services within these regions. Understanding these dynamics can inform tailored service provision, enhancing accessibility for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities.

The predominant age bracket of HZJ interpreters' centers around individuals in their forties, reaffirming the gender distribution trend within sign language interpreting as predominantly female-dominated (Napier & Leeson, 2016; Napier et al., 2021; Breznički Učović, 2022). Encouraging a more balanced gender composition is advisable. Since many of these interpreters are parents, reconciling formal education and work-life equilibrium warrants consideration.

Pending the establishment of formalized sign language interpreting programs, encouraging HZJ interpreters to enroll in programs such as language interpretation at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences could equip them with foundational interpreting skills. Moreover, individuals with upper secondary education backgrounds might consider pursuing university programs or state graduation exams for a broader knowledge base. The prevalence of acquiring HZJ proficiency within familial contexts versus training courses prompts an evaluation of instructional

program quality. The distinction between language learning and interpreting necessitates clarity to prevent potential misconceptions.

Given the age and accumulated professional experience of HZJ interpreters, securing stable employment assumes paramount significance. Indefinite tenure contracts could facilitate the influx of new interpreters. Equitable compensation for supplementary roles, such as those in legal and media domains, is essential, as current remuneration falls short of meeting living expenses. Delineating a clear boundary between interpreting and other roles within associations is imperative. Aligning interpreter remuneration with inflation rates is essential for sustainable livelihoods.

Promoting greater participation of deaf interpreters is pivotal, expanding their influence, particularly within the International Sign realm. Simultaneously, hearing interpreters should enhance competencies in English and spoken Croatian interpretation. Investigating association memberships warrants further exploration in subsequent research.

Regarding predominant work settings, upcoming training initiatives should emphasize education within medical and social welfare contexts. The presence of interpreters with only three years of upper secondary education at conferences, high-level meetings, or medical settings raises essential considerations.

Comparing the employed HZJ interpreter profile with a typical sign language translator and interpreter (SLTI) practitioner in the UK reveals similarities, such as being female, hearing, 44 years old, with caregiving responsibilities, and primarily working as an interpreter. However, the significant disparity lies in the qualifications of UK SLTIs, who undergo academic or vocational training, are registered with NRCPD, and are ASLI members (Napier et al., 2021).

In the Croatian context, consistent terminology within the sign language field is essential to parallel the spoken language interpreting sector. Findings from this research highlight the need for comprehensive education in interpretation for HZJ interpreters, mirroring their spoken language interpreting counterparts. This aspect warrants in-depth exploration in future studies. Through formal education and specialized training, interpreters can develop a deeper understanding of their

profession, essential competencies, and an awareness of their practice's ethical and cultural dimensions.

5.1 Limitations of the research

Acknowledging limitations is essential for contextualizing the study's findings. To comprehensively understand the HZJ interpreter's profile, future research should directly inquire about entities and programs responsible for remunerating interpreters. This adjustment would enable a comprehensive enumeration of HZJ interpreters across Croatia, particularly those engaged in educational settings and ESF-sponsored projects.

Concerning association membership queries, greater clarity is necessary. Some participants referred to affiliations with deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind associations that might not directly correspond to their association memberships. Addressing this concern explicitly in future investigations will ensure that participants understand the query and provide relevant responses.

Additionally, specific responses exhibited ambiguity when assessing work hours involving non-interpreting tasks. Clarification is needed in future investigations to grasp interpreters' professional obligations accurately.

Despite valuable insights, online questionnaires have inherent limitations, including the inability to seek clarifications in real-time.

5.2 Recommendations

Furthermore, study's insights offer recommendations for stakeholders in HZJ interpretation in Croatia:

1. Formal Education in Sign Language Interpreting: The importance of formal education must be balanced, integrating HZJ interpreting into academic programs to provide a comprehensive skill set.

2. Tailored Training Strategies: Understanding interpreter demographics emphasizes the need for tailored training and recruitment strategies to encourage diversity and attract younger interpreters.
3. Equitable Distribution of Interpreters: Concentrated interpreters call for a more even distribution across regions to enhance accessibility.
4. Terminology and Clarity: Clear and consistent terminology is vital for professional clarity, requiring exploration in future studies.
5. Equitable Compensation: Findings underscore the need for equitable compensation, necessitating a comprehensive review of remuneration structures.
6. Future Research Avenues: Investigating association membership and specific aspects warrants exploration in subsequent research.
7. In-depth Exploration: Qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups can provide deeper insights into participants' perspectives.

In conclusion, this study informs decision-making and interventions in HZJ interpretation in Croatia. Even though these topics require further exploration, it is recommended to span training, recruitment, terminology, and compensation in future research. By heeding these recommendations, stakeholders can enhance the professionalism and accessibility of sign language interpretation services for deaf communities.

6. Conclusions

The advancement of any field hinges upon a thorough comprehension of its current state. This research has shed light on the present landscape within which HZJ interpreters operate, thereby uncovering the indispensable strides necessary for professionalization.

The implications of this study extend to a diverse array of stakeholders in the realm of sign language interpreting. The observed concentration of HZJ interpreters in Zagreb underscores the importance of ensuring equitable distribution of interpreters across regions to enhance accessibility for the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities. Understanding the demographic composition of interpreters and the prevalent age range offers insights for tailored training and recruitment strategies. Encouraging gender diversity, addressing work-life balance concerns, and devising targeted initiatives to attract younger interpreters could contribute to a more dynamic workforce. The significance of formal education in sign language interpreting emerges as a key consideration.

The importance of formal education in sign language interpreting is underscored, a key consideration that finds support in the scholarly works of Napier (2009), Wheatley & Pabsch (2012) and Leeson & Calles (2013). Furthermore, the work of Leeson & Calles (2013) contributes essential insights into the requisite competencies sign language interpreters must master to operate professionally.

Integrating HZJ interpreting into established academic programs, such as those offered by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, could provide aspiring interpreters with a solid foundation in interpreting techniques.

Furthermore, addressing the ambiguity in terminology and fostering a clear distinction between language learning and interpreting competencies is pivotal to professional clarity and effectiveness. The study's findings also underscore the need for equitable compensation, particularly for additional tasks undertaken by interpreters. This emphasizes the importance of reviewing remuneration structures to ensure interpreters are fairly compensated for their diverse roles.

Future research endeavors could delve into specific aspects that this study could not fully explore. A more comprehensive investigation into the membership landscape of different associations and the intricacies of interpreters' involvement in various contexts could provide valuable insights.

Additionally, conducting interviews or focus groups may allow for deeper exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences, overcoming the limitations of online questionnaires.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the current landscape of HZJ interpreters in Croatia, providing a foundation for informed decision-making and targeted interventions. The findings serve as a springboard for further research endeavors, policy initiatives, and educational reforms to enhance the recognition, professionalism, and accessibility of sign language interpretation services to benefit the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities.

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8. Appendices

Questionnaire

Research GOTOVAC 2023

Mandatory questions are marked with an asterisk (*).

This research is conducted as part of a master's thesis within EUMASLI - the European Union Master's Program in Sign Language Interpreting. The data collected through this research will be utilized to observe the employment trends of Croatian Sign Language interpreters within the territory of the Republic of Croatia and to structure future educational programs for interpreting.

Before proceeding with the questionnaire, your consent is required. This implies that you understand the research's objective and that the data collected through this research will be used and stored in accordance with the data protection regulations of HUMAK.

GENERAL DATA

1. CONSENT: *

Yes, I agree with the research objective and accept to complete the questionnaire.

I do not agree with completing the questionnaire.

2. County you live in*

Zagreb county

Krapina-Zagorje

Sisak-Moslavina

Karlovac

Varaždin

Koprivnica-Križevci

Bjelovar-Bilogora

Primorje-Gorski kotar

Lika-Senj

Virovitica-Podravina

Požega-Slavonija

Brod-Posavina

Zadar

Osijek-Baranja

Šibenik-Knin

Split-Dalmatia

Istria

Dubrovnik-Neretva

Međimurje

City of Zagreb

Vukovar-Srijem

3. Year of birth*

4. Gender *

Female

Male

Other/I chose not to respond

5. Marital status

Single

Married

Unmarried

Widow

I chose not to respond

6. Are you a parent or a caregiver?

Yes

No

I chose not to respond

8. Mother tongue *

EDUCATION

9. Highest educational level *

Elementary school

Vocational training

One-year and two-year high school vocational education

Three year vocational school;

Gymnasium high school education; four- and five-year vocational high school education

Professional studies at the end of which less than 180 ECTS points are obtained; vocational specialist training and training; master's programs with at least two years of evaluated work experience

University undergraduate studies; professional undergraduate studies

University graduate studies; specialist graduate professional studies; postgraduate specialist studies

Postgraduate scientific master's studies;

Postgraduate university (doctoral) studies; defense of a doctoral dissertation outside of studies

10. If you finished higher education please indicate which Faculty or University you graduated from

11. How did you learn Croatian Sign Language?

Immediate family - parents, siblings

Extended family - relatives

HZJ course

Other

12. Do you have an education in interpreting? If yes, describe where you acquired it, how long it lasted (hours), and how it was designed (several different educations in different fields, continuing education lasting XY time, occasional workshops within the association (specify which ones)...)*

WORK EXPERIENCE

13. Years of work*

1-5 years

5-10 years

10-15 years

15-20 years

20 and more years

Other, please specify

14. Work status *

Full-time, employment contract

Part-time, employment contract

Part-time, service contract

If you have both an employment contract and a part-time work contract, please indicate whether it is one or more employers (e.g. deaf/hard of hearing/deafblind association and school, deaf/hard of hearing/deafblind kindergarten...)

15. Are you working for an additional fee (multiple choice possible): *

Police

Courts

Television

Projects

Other, please specify

I work, but I do not receive a fee (please indicate where you work from the options offered)

16. You identify as: *

Hearing interpreter prevoditelj (interpreting from spoken to sign language)

Deaf interpreter prevoditelj (translating sign languages or written texts)

I do not wish to reply

17. Which clients you work with (multiple choice possible): *

Hard of hearing persons

Deaf persons

Deafblind persons

18. Language combinations (multiple choice possible): *

Croatian to Croatian Sign Language - HZJ

HZJ to Croatian

English to HZJ

HZJ to English

International Sign to HZJ

HZJ to IS

Croatian to IS

Other, please specify

19. Which additional communication systems do you use? (multiple choice possible): *

Simultaneous sign-oral communication (I simultaneously speak and sign)

Manual alphabets (I exclusively use finger-spelling (two-handed or one-handed) and do not use any signs from HZJ)

Captioning or typing

Speechreading from lips and face

Writing on hand

Technical aids Adaptations of Croatian Sign Language for deafblind individuals (guided, tactile, localized CSL)

Other, please specify

20. Are you a member (multiple choice possible): *

Interpreters association

Deaf and hard of hearing association

Deafblind association

I do not wish to reply

Other, please specify

21. Do you have any other job besides interpreting?*

Yes

No

22. If you have another job, please describe what type of job it is (social worker, project manager, association secretary, etc.)

23. If you have another job alongside interpreting, please indicate how many hours you translate per month and how many hours you work in your other job(s).

24. In your opinion, how much does your salary cover your living expenses

1 10 Likert scale

25. Are you presented with opportunities to take on roles in other projects, such as coordinator, project manager, activity leader, educator, community manager, author of brochures or other printed materials, etc., outside of your regular job?

26. If you have additional jobs, are they also separately or additionally compensated?

27. In which areas do you most frequently work as an interpreter? (multiple choice possible)

Preschool education (kindergarten)

Primary education

Secondary education

Higher education - colleges, universities...

Lifelong education

Medicine

Social welfare centers

Courts

Media

Religious ceremonies

High-level meetings (Ministries, municipal or town administration...)

Theater

Conferences

Municipal services/municipal procedures/city/public institutions

Sports

Other, please specify

OPINION AND DEFINITION

28. How do you define yourself and your job? (Multiple answers possible) *

Stručni/a komunikacijski/a posrednik/ica

Prevoditelj/ica HZJ

Tumač/ica

29. How do you define the term stručni komunikacijski posrednik? *

30. How do you define the term prevoditelj HZJ? *

31. How do you define the term HZJ?

32. In this section, feel free to share any comments and opinions that you were not able to provide during the questionnaire.

Research Title: Profile of HZJ Interpreters

Location: HUMAK University

Researcher: Nives Gotovac - nives.gotovac@humak.fi

Supervisor: Liisa Halkosaari - liisa.halkosaari@humak.fi

I participated in the above research, which aims to collect data about Croatian Sign Language interpreters. Information about them has never been documented before, and the researcher aims to gather data that will aid in creating future interpreter education and policies related to the employment of Croatian Sign Language interpreters. I am aware of the information and purpose of the research, as well as my rights, benefits, and risks involved.

I had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers. Sufficient information about the collection, processing, transmission, and disclosure of my personal data during this research was provided to me, and HUMAK's Data Protection Policy was available to me. I was not forced to participate in this research. I had enough time to consider whether I wanted to participate. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without giving any reason. I am aware that if I withdraw from the study or revoke my consent, any data collected before my withdrawal of consent may be included in the research data.

By giving consent, I confirm my voluntary participation in this research. If the legal basis for processing personal data within this research is consent given by the data subject, I give my consent for the processing of my personal data. I have the right to withdraw my consent regarding the processing of personal data as described in HUMAK's Data Protection Policy.

33. I confirm that I want to submit the completed data. *

Yes

No

I appreciate your effort and time in completing this questionnaire. I value all the information you have shared. Your responses will contribute to analysis and influence future policies and education for Croatian Sign Language interpreters. If you wish to read the research once it's published, feel free to reach out to nives.gotovac@humak.fi or nivgot@gmail.com.