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## PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING AND TOURISM: THE TOURISM-RELATED PSI

### LA INTERPRETACIÓN EN LOS SERVICIOS PÚBLICOS Y EL TURISMO: LA ISP TURÍSTICA

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#### Abstract

This study aims to provide a multidisciplinary view of public service interpreting in the context of tourism. By exploring the possible interrelationship between interpreting and tourism, we will assess the feasibility of conceptualizing tourism public service interpreting (PSI).

The main objective is to name and characterize this emerging practice as a specialty framed within the type of interpreting that PSI is (Hurtado 2001: 86). To this end, we will define the profile of the potential user and examine the areas of application, taking as a reference, the concepts proposed by Abril Martí (2006: 115).

Given the limited availability of literature on this combination of areas of expertise, this paper aims to exploit its theoretical and practical implications and provide new perspectives. This approach will allow a deeper understanding of how PSI can adapt



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and be relevant in tourism settings, opening up new avenues for the development and study of this area of expertise.

**Keywords:** Public Service Interpreting (PSI); Less widespread languages (LWL); Tourism-Related PSI; Tourism.

## Resumen

El presente estudio pretende ofrecer una visión multidisciplinar de la interpretación en los servicios públicos (ISP) en el contexto turístico. A través de la exploración de la posible interrelación entre la interpretación y el turismo, evaluaremos la viabilidad de conceptualizar una ISP turística.

El objetivo principal es denominar y caracterizar esta práctica emergente como una especialidad enmarcada dentro del tipo de interpretación que es la ISP (Hurtado 2001: 86). Para ello, definiremos el perfil del usuario potencial y examinaremos los ámbitos de aplicación tomando como referencia los conceptos propuestos por Abril Martí (2006: 115).

Ante la limitada disponibilidad de bibliografía sobre esta combinación de áreas de especialidad, este trabajo pretende explorar sus implicaciones teóricas y prácticas y proporcionar nuevas perspectivas. Este enfoque permitirá una comprensión más profunda de cómo la ISP puede adaptarse y ser relevante en entornos turísticos, abriendo nuevas vías para el desarrollo y estudio de esta área de especialidad.

**Palabras clave:** Interpretación en los servicios públicos (ISP); Lenguas de menor difusión (LMD); ISP turística; Turismo.

## 1. Introduction

The tourism industry constitutes a crucial component of the economic structure of many countries, and it is particularly significant in Spain. Most of the country's income derives from the tertiary or service sector, which includes tourism. In 2023, the contribution of tourism to Spain's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached €184,002 million (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2023). In fact, according to a report by Google & Deloitte (Various Authors 2024), the Iberian country, currently ranked third among the most visited countries in the world, could potentially rise to first place by the year 2040.

Nowadays, there are several entities committed to this sector in Spain. These include public institutions such as tourism offices, which aim to provide information to visitors, as well as private entities, generally businesses and establishments offering tourist services in exchange for payment.

Given this sustained growth in tourist visits, there has been an increase in studies on tourism. Likewise, the educational offerings in this field are broad and varied, ranging from specialized undergraduate and master's degrees across all autonomous communities, such as the Master's in Intercultural Communication, Translation, and Interpreting in Public Services at the University of Alcalá, to single and double undergraduate degrees in tourism, available in most Spanish cities, such as the Joint Degree in Translation and Interpreting and Tourism at the University of Córdoba.

As a result, linguistic knowledge and, by extension, language education, have become one of the essential tools when traveling the world. However, not everyone has access to such learning opportunities, especially when it comes to less widespread languages (LWL) or those that are more difficult to learn from a given source language. In this regard, the role of interpreters and tourism professionals specialized in languages is crucial.

Within the scope of our research, we find a greater number of investigations focused on tourism translation compared to those addressing interpreting in this context. Some of the publications that apply interpreting knowledge to tourism or explore interpreting within this sector include: the pedagogical study by Álvarez García & Limbach (2019), which presents the results of an analysis based on a corpus of German-Spanish-German bilateral interpreting drawn from tourism-related productions; González-Pastor's (2019) research, which examines aspects of tourism translation and interpreting; and studies on interpreting in the context of medical tourism by Almahano Güeto & Postigo Pinazo (2013) and Lavado Puyol (2015), which address intercultural communication, the particular challenges of medical discourse, and their implications in the tourism sector.

Currently, there is a lack of available bibliographic material on this intersection of disciplines, which, in our view, holds significant potential

and constitutes a fertile ground for further exploration. In fact, no in-depth work has yet been carried out on the characterization, definition, or conceptualization of this interpreting specialization.

With this purpose, the current paper seeks to explore the theoretical and practical aspects of this subject, offering new insights and innovative approaches. As a starting point, we consider that, in a context shaped by Spain's geographic location and significant tourist flows, the role of the interpreter in public services within the tourism sector takes on particular relevance due to their active role in the various communicative acts that may occur between the tourist user and the public entity, thus facilitating access to these organizations and ensuring the protection of their basic communication rights (Fidalgo 2019: 149).

This study will explore this multidisciplinary and complex field, which has been less researched both in the tourism context and within the interpreting discipline, by presenting the characteristic features that define Public Service Interpreting (PSI) and its applicability to the tourism sector, along with its corresponding conceptualization.

### *1.1. Objectives*

This research is based on the premise that there may exist a framework of relationship between language interpreting and tourism, highlighting the need to consider this interrelationship of disciplines in public services within tourist areas. In this context, our main objective is to apply the parameters used in PSI (Hurtado Albir 2001; Jiménez Ivars 2002; Abril Martí 2006; among others) to the tourism sector. In other words, we aim to analyze the modality or technique, the number of languages of the interpreter, the communicative situation or context, the social function of the interpreter, the relationship between the speakers, the use of technology, and the status of the interpreter (Wadensjö 1992: 47-48; Alexieva 1997: 153-155; Pöschhacker 2004: 13-23). Our main goal is to develop a characterization of PSI in the tourism field, for which we propose the concept of "tourism PSI". This perspective facilitates the analysis and delineation of

a specific operational scope within PSI, allowing the definition of tourism PSI as a distinct category within the same field.

To achieve this goal, the study will start by reevaluating the conventional definition of the user as a beneficiary of PSI, investigating whether tourists have been incorporated into previous definitions of PSI, and what features might justify their inclusion. Consequently, one of the specific objectives is to define the potential users of tourism PSI, who may have different communicative and intercultural needs than the typical profile.

Following this, another specific objective will be to identify and characterize the contexts, situations, and interpreting techniques within tourism PSI.

Finally, the findings will be discussed in terms of the applicability of PSI parameters within the tourism sector, to confirm the initial hypothesis and contribute to the definition and boundaries of “tourism PSI”. Additionally, the implications for interpreter training and professional practice will be evaluated.

### *1.2. Methodology*

The methodology employed is both qualitative and quantitative, with an exploratory design aimed at defining, categorizing, and analyzing tourism PSI as a specialized area within PSI. Its relevance stems from the increasing need for linguistic services by tourists engaging with public institutions in Spain.

The first step involves conducting a bibliographic review to collect, evaluate, and synthesize the existing literature on PSI, which has been enhanced by numerous studies published in the past few decades that may apply to tourism. The main criterion for selecting works was context, focusing on recent research in PSI, tourism, and translation and interpreting for tourism purposes. Sociodemographic studies were selected provided they were conducted in Spain. Regarding the type of publication, doctoral theses, articles in journals, book chapters related to PSI and tourism, and online publications from reputable bodies like the World Tourism Organization (WTO) were included. This systematic approach will help

provide a detailed and comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge in the field, as well as introduce a new area of practice within PSI, drawing from the work of other authors.

In this framework, we believe it is essential to carry out an analysis proposal of the tourist population in Spain and their linguistic needs, using a quantitative methodology followed by a qualitative analysis of the foreign population. This will allow us to define and categorize the target population of our study. Subsequently, both disciplines, tourism and PSI, will be correlated to identify whether the tourism context could benefit from the features that make up PSI. We will define both concepts and analyze the similarities and differences between the two disciplines (tourism and PSI) through a contrastive analysis of communication participants, interpreting modalities, etc.

As a final step, to ground these new investigations in a real context where collaboration between interpreting and the tourism sector is necessary, an evaluation of the relevance and feasibility of tourism PSI will be conducted. Since this is still an underexplored specialty with considerable growth potential, this analysis will help assess its current impact and potential applications. It will also contribute to identifying key areas for future research and suggestions for effective professional and academic implementation and integration.

## 2. Conceptual overview of tourism and PSI

Before exploring the intersections between tourism and PSI, it is essential to clarify a shared concept within both fields: “interpretation/interpreting”.

In the tourism field, heritage interpretation refers to the process of effectively communicating the meaning and value of cultural and natural heritage through interactive, educational, and meaningful experiences, intending to promote understanding, appreciation, and emotional connection of people to their heritage and environment (Patrimonio Global 2023).

On the other hand, interpretation (or interpreting) from the perspective of applied linguistics focuses on “the communication between people with different languages and cultures” (Corsellis 2010: 1). The author

emphasizes the multilingual and multicultural dimension of interpreting, which aims to facilitate understanding between “groups who do not speak the language of the country” and who wish to access “important services such as healthcare, housing, education, social services, or legal procedures” (Corsellis 2010: 1).

Likewise, it is important to note that the terminology used in the field of interpreting has led to ambiguities in the distinction between the concepts of modalities, techniques, and types, as well as in the very notion of Public Service Interpreting (PSI). The lack of consensus in the literature regarding its definition and usage highlights the complexity of this field and the diverse interpretations associated with these terms.

Authors such as Hurtado Albir (2001: 86) and Jiménez Ivars (2002: 10-11) refer to PSI as social interpreting and define it as a type of oral interpreting or oral translation, respectively. Valero Garcés (2008: 2), on the other hand, asserts that PSI is a modality of interpreting that responds to a social need to:

Un público específico que responde a una minoría cultural y lingüística, que posee un nivel educativo y adquisitivo generalmente inferior al de la mayoría y que, con frecuencia, desconoce o no domina la nueva realidad social del país en el que se encuentra. [A specific audience that belongs to a cultural and linguistic minority, generally characterized by lower educational and economic levels compared to the majority population, and who often lack knowledge of or familiarity with the new social reality of the country in which they reside.]

Similarly, the Association of Trainers, Researchers and Professionals in Public Service Interpreting and Translation (in Spanish, AFIPTISP) defines it as a “professional and academic modality” of translation and interpreting, emerging as a result of the migratory movements of the past two centuries. These movements have prompted the adaptation of public services to facilitate communication between professionals and the users of those services (AFIPTISP, online. Following Collados & Fernández 2011: 55):

La interpretación en los servicios públicos es una modalidad de interpretación que ha ido configurándose como actividad profesional a partir

de la segunda mitad del siglo XX. El punto de partida lo constituyen los desplazamientos de población y los movimientos migratorios, por causas económicas y políticas, que caracterizan el mundo en el que vivimos. Las necesidades reales de comunicación de las minorías en el mundo desarrollado y en ámbitos tan dispares como la educación, la sanidad, el mercado laboral o la vivienda, así como una mayor sensibilidad social a favor del reconocimiento de derechos de estos colectivos, han puesto de relieve la importancia de una actividad profesional de mediación interlingüística e intercultural en este ámbito. [Public Service Interpreting is a modality of interpreting that has gradually taken shape as a professional activity since the second half of the 20th century. Its origin lies in the population displacements and migratory movements, driven by economic and political factors, that characterize the world we live in today. The real communication needs of minority groups in developed countries, across diverse areas such as education, healthcare, the labour market, and housing, along with a growing social awareness regarding the recognition of their rights, have highlighted the importance of professional interlinguistic and intercultural mediation in this context.]

Due to the lack of consistency in the terminology used in this context, as previously noted, we have considered to define PSI as a “type of interpreting” and to classify the emerging concept of “Tourism PSI” as a “specialization” or “subtype” within the broader field of Public Service Interpreting.

On the other hand, we will use the term “modality” to refer to the general varieties of interpreting, following the approaches of Hurtado Albir (2001) and Jiménez Ivars (2002), and “technique” to refer to the way interpreting is carried out. According to Abril Martí (2006: 28), this may be simultaneous (including whispered interpreting or *chuchotage*), consecutive, or bilateral. Although the author uses “technique” and “modality” as synonyms in her categorization, we think it is crucial to distinguish between them in our analysis. Lastly, we will use the term “domain” to refer to the specific area of public service in question; “context” to refer to the physical setting in which the communicative situation takes place; and “situation” to designate the interaction itself between participants, such as an interrogation or a medical examination (Abril Martí 2006: 28).

### 3. Relationship between Tourism and PSI

Once the distinctions between the concept of “interpreting” in the tourism sector and in public services have been outlined, we can identify some points of convergence between the two approaches: both involve a clear communicative and relational purpose, and both emphasize the central role of the participants in these communicative settings, as they define the concept and contribute their cultural contexts, which must be considered in the interpreting process. Additionally, in both cases, the goal is to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers, with interpreting serving as a tool for both linguistic and cultural mediation, seeking to bring the product closer to the individual.

By identifying common aspects, such as the interaction between culturally diverse groups, it becomes evident that Public Service Interpreting can also be applied in a tourism context. As Alonso & Baigorri (2008: 3) note, in Spain, there is a significant demand for interpreting services from migrant workers. However, since Spain is one of the main tourist destinations, many other people passing through may also require such services at specific times. The link between tourism and PSI, in terms of the communicative needs of various user groups, would help to understand the convergences and divergences in communicative situations, offering new insights into the application of interpreting across different fields and the potential categorization of tourism PSI as a specialty within PSI.

In the following sections, based on Abril Martí's (2006) proposal, the relationship between tourism activity and Public Service Interpreting (PSI) will be analyzed from a contrastive perspective to strengthen our premise.

For this purpose, we will consider the “classification criteria based on the elements of the communicative situation” proposed by Alexieva (1997): main participants, the subject matter and its relation to the communicative context, the type of texts used in the communication, non-verbal communication, spatial and temporal specificities, and the purpose of the communication.

### 3.1. *Participants*

Before undertaking the task of assisting a tourist in any of the domains, contexts, or situations related to PSI, it is necessary to distinguish between the types of foreign populations present in Spain. To confirm the need for a specialized PSI interpreter in the tourism sector, a first distinction must be made between those coming from non-EU countries, whose movement and type of stay are generally motivated by economic, labor-related, or social reasons, and those who travel for leisure purposes, among whom different categories can be identified.

— Tourist (or overnight visitor): A visitor (domestic, inbound, or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor) if their trip includes at least one overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise (Naciones Unidas 2010: § 2.13).

— Visitor: A visitor is a person who travels to a main destination outside their usual environment, for less than one year, for any main purpose (leisure, business, or other personal reason) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. (Naciones Unidas 2010: § 2.9) A visitor (domestic, inbound, or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor), or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise. (Naciones Unidas 2010: § 2.13).

— Traveller: A traveller is any person who moves between different geographical locations for any reason and duration (Naciones Unidas 2010: § 2.4)

This study will focus on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of global tourists (Burkart 1981), as well as on aspects such as frequency, purpose, duration, type of travel, and the nature of tourist destinations, along with the types of activities undertaken (Cohen 1996), as these factors may involve tourists accessing public services, which will be discussed later.

According to Cohen (2002: 182), tourists can be classified into four categories: drifters, explorers, individual mass tourists, and organized mass tourists. Among these, the latter is most relevant to our study, since demographic data show that this type of tourism is the most prevalent in Spain.

In both cases, the concept of interpreting is shaped by the subject involved. In the tourism context, the user profile typically involves visiting a destination to engage in one or more types of tourism, such as adventure, gastronomic, cultural-historical, or health tourism. In contrast, within the realm of public services, the most common user profile is that of the migrant individual, belonging to a linguistic minority (Burdeus-Domingo 2018: 128), and often characterized by sociocultural differences and a power imbalance concerning public service providers. Although some authors, such as Abril Martí (2006: 105), include tourists in their definition of PSI, it is generally migrant populations, such as refugees and asylum seekers, who most frequently rely on this type of interpreting, as they are the group most affected by language barriers. Within this characterization, users' countries of origin emerge as a common denominator. In both contexts, users bring with them their cultural backgrounds, although there are certain differences between the two.

To identify potential users of tourist public service interpreting in Spain, a sociodemographic study was conducted based on the collection and analysis of statistical data concerning the number of tourists by country of residence. First, the total number of tourists arriving in Spain as of August 2023 was extracted according to their country of residence, using data provided by the Spanish National Statistics Institute, specifically the Border Tourist Movements Survey (FRONTUR) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística n.d.). Next, each country of origin was cross-referenced with its official or co-official language(s) to identify potential language barriers with Spanish public institutions. The results of this field study are presented below:

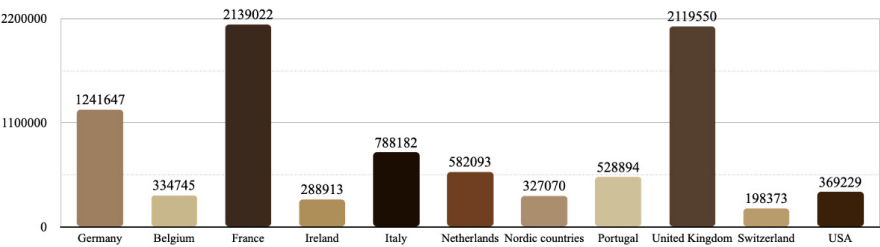


Figure 1. Number of tourists in Spain by country of residence in the third quarter of 2023<sup>1</sup>

As shown in Figure 1, the geographical origin of tourists is concentrated in Western countries (the United Kingdom, Germany, France, etc.), that is, industrialized and European nations which share certain sociocultural similarities with the destination country. Furthermore, the likelihood of these communities being able to communicate with public service workers—when an interpreter is not available—is generally higher (Policastro Ponce & Merino Cabello 2024: 50), as they come from European countries whose languages are more commonly spoken or understood by professionals working in Spanish public institutions, who may even be able to communicate in English or French on their own.

1. Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from Frontur (Instituto Nacional de Estadística n.d.).

| Tourist border movements | Total      | Vehicular languages of tourists           |
|--------------------------|------------|---|
| Total                    | 10 186 163 |   |
| Germany                  | 1 181 927  | German                                    |
| Belgium                  | 331 671    | French, German, and Dutch                 |
| France                   | 1 974 734  | French                                    |
| Ireland                  | 282 528    | English                                   |
| Italy                    | 742 187    | Italian                                   |
| Netherlands              | 555 125    | Dutch                                     |
| Nordic Countries         | 330 545    | Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Icelandic |
| Portugal                 | 460 763    | Portuguese                                |
| United Kingdom           | 2 036 999  | English                                   |
| Switzerland              | 210 547    | Romansh, French, German, and Italian      |
| Rest of Europe           | 835 635    |   |
| United States of America | 292 531    | English                                   |
| Rest of America          | 424 393    |   |
| Rest of the World        | 526 577    |   |

Table 1. Relationship between the tourists’ country of origin, total number, and their vehicular language in the second quarter of 2023<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the previous findings lead us to affirm that the archetype of the tourist who might resort to tourist PSI will present a demographic and socioeconomic profile typical of Western countries, characterized by a certain purchasing power. This type of tourist will seek an enriching experience, as their main motivation is leisure, and they will have the economic solvency to afford it. They will likely prefer a personalized, high-quality

2. Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from Frontur (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2023).

interpreting service that offers an experience tailored to their linguistic and cultural needs. The characteristics of this group appear to align with the conclusions put forward by Toledano Buendía et al. (2006) and Abril Martí (2006), who equate the PSI demands and needs of these individuals to those of foreign residents. However, it is important to consider that variations may exist depending on the geographical destination and the traveler's tourism motivation.

Lastly, it is important to note the significant differences between the tourist user and the migrant user, who is the typical profile seeking interpreting services in public institutions. The latter group faces greater challenges in the post-migration phase, which can act as an obstacle to their sociocultural integration. This group, particularly speakers of LWL, often tries to find interpreters who are fluent in their language, thus impacting communication with public services. Furthermore, they are often more economically vulnerable and may have experienced traumatic events that result in anxiety disorders, adjustment issues, depression, and Ulysses syndrome (Pena Díaz 2023: 26). Ultimately, the user type, along with their specific characteristics and needs, plays a pivotal role in the provision of public services and, as such, in PSI, irrespective of the domain or context.

### *3.2. Format of the communicative situation*

The second aspect on which we will base the characterization of tourism PSI is the classification of PSI domains, drawing on the framework proposed by Abril Martí (2006: 115), who offers an overview of the various “institutional contact domains,” namely: legal, healthcare, and social domains. In addition, we will introduce an additional domain specifically related to interpreting services occurring within tourism-related institutions.

Therefore, the different contexts, situations, and interpreting techniques that can be identified according to the PSI domain, as outlined by Abril Martí (2006), are as follows:

| Legal-administrative interpreting   | Healthcare interpreting   | Social services interpreting   |
|---|---|--|
| Context: Judicial setting.<br>Communicative situation: Court hearing.<br>Technique: Simultaneous and bilateral interpreting.                              | Context: Healthcare centers (hospitals and clinics).<br>Communicative situation: Consultation or emergency.<br>Technique: Bilateral interpreting. | Context: NGOs or associations.<br>Communicative situation: Reception interviews.<br>Technique: Bilateral interpreting.                         |
| Context: Police setting.<br>Communicative situation: Interrogation and witness statement.<br>Technique: Simultaneous, bilateral, and remote interpreting. | Context: Patient's home.<br>Communicative situation: Consultation.<br>Technique: Tele-interpreting and remote interpreting.                       | Context: NGOs or associations.<br>Communicative situation: Training activities.<br>Technique: Simultaneous interpreting.                       |
| Context: Asylum office.<br>Communicative situation: Reception interview and asylum request.<br>Technique: Bilateral interpreting.                         |   | Context: Public institution offices.<br>Communicative situation: Accompaniment to other public services.<br>Technique: Bilateral interpreting. |

Table 2. Contexts of Public Service Interpreting (PSI)<sup>3</sup>

Based on this classification, we have outlined a proposal of our own regarding the possible domains, contexts, communicative situations, and interpreting techniques in which PSI can be implemented within the tourism sector. Our reflections are grounded in both our own experience and that of other authors, who will be duly cited.

3. Source: Own elaboration based on Abril Martí (2006).

### 3.2.1. *Legal-administrative interpreting*

According to some authors (Ortega Herraéz 2006; Rodríguez Fernández & Cobos López 2024), judicial interpreting is considered a subgenre of legal interpreting, with the latter understood as “the interpreting that takes place in any environment where legal actions are carried out, such as courts, police stations, immigration services, prisons, etc.” (Ortega Herraéz 2011: 43). The judicial interpreter provides services to judicial bodies and the state and regional security forces, either as a staff translator-interpreter or as a freelance professional. In their work, Hale & Valero Garcés (2010: 68) outline four contexts where the presence of a judicial interpreter may be required in cases involving foreign individuals who do not understand the language of the proceedings: police interrogations, judicial interviews, hearings in courts, and trials.

We believe that, considering the tourist’s travel objectives, the interpreter can perform their role in the legal field, particularly in the police context. One scenario that tourists may face is the loss of or theft of personal identification documents (Various Authors n.d.). In these communicative situations, which take place in police stations or precincts, the most common interpreting techniques are simultaneous and bilateral interpreting to assist the victim in question. A practical example of this is the Foreign Tourist Assistance Service (*SATE*), an initiative from various municipalities in Spain aimed at assisting victims of crimes or infractions in a personalized manner, and in their native language, with a team of experts. This service helps victims cancel credit cards and documents, contact embassies and consulates, communicate with or locate family members, etc.

On the other hand, in judicial contexts such as hearings in courtrooms or trials, we understand that, if the tourist’s stay in the destination is determined or limited, these proceedings will be carried out via videoconference (Article 21 of Regulation (EU) 2020/1783 of the European Parliament and of the Council of November 25 2020), and the interpreting technique would be remote for interrogations and witness statements. Additionally, it may occur that the tourist returns to their country of origin or to a third

country, in which case Spanish justice must resort to international legal cooperation, understood broadly as “a formal way of collaboration between two countries for carrying out judicial actions outside their respective territorial scope or in a third country” (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Justicia y Relaciones con las Cortes n.d.). In this regard, the interpreter’s role in Spain would not be necessary beyond informing the tourist of the procedures to follow and what the authorities will arrange, through bilateral interpreting, and even sight translation for reading their rights.

Lastly, in the legal-administrative field, there is a communicative situation that occurs frequently in Spain, especially in coastal areas: the purchase of real estate by foreign nationals. In these cases, the Public Administration is present when the public deeds are signed, and the property is registered in the land registry by the new owners. While users may hire their interpreters privately, we believe that institutions of this type should provide an interpreter to ensure effective communication between all parties. In these cases, the bilateral technique and sight translation of certain documents are usually employed.

### 3.2.2. *Healthcare interpreting*

For this study, it is necessary to include the assistance provided in public healthcare centers to tourists who arrive at a destination with different purposes, such as cultural or gastronomic reasons, but for various reasons need to seek emergency care or visit a health center. In the tourism context we focus on, except in emergencies, tourists tend to visit private healthcare centers that have a team of interpreters specialized in assisting these types of users, especially in areas where international demand has led to a significant healthcare infrastructure, such as Mallorca, Alicante, and the Costa del Sol (Escuela de Organización Industrial 2013). Moreover, these interpreters also serve as a link between foreign insurance companies and the healthcare provider, sometimes even working with international insurance intermediaries who facilitate communication between both parties.

Similarly, we must also consider the assistance provided in this interpreting field to tourists who travel to a destination solely for medical

purposes, i.e., medical tourism, understood as “the practice of traveling to a destination different from the place of residence to obtain medical treatment, while also visiting the destination and engaging in activities typical of a regular tourist” (Escuela de Organización Industrial 2013: 10). According to information provided on the website of *Fundación Salud, Empresa y Economía (FUSSE)*, Spain is considered the second European country in terms of exporting healthcare services, only preceded by France. In such cases, the communicative situations where the interpreter must be involved are consultations with specialists and pre-anesthesia consultations.

For these purposes, the most common interpreting techniques are telephone or remote interpreting, in cases where the patient is not present at the destination or healthcare center; interpreting in the presence of both main interlocutors; and sight translation for cases in which the patient must sign documents, such as informed consent.

The shortage of interpreting services in healthcare centers may be one of the reasons why tourists turn to international private insurance. In situations where the patient seeks treatment through international medical insurance, they are referred to a private hospital, where the interpreter acts as a mediator between the patient and the provider for contracting services or cost claims. In such cases, the most appropriate interpreting technique would be remote or telephone interpreting, as the medical insurance professional or worker is typically not present at the same location as the patient.

### 3.2.3. *Social services interpreting*

It is vital to clarify that the concept of “social services interpreting” associated with PSI not only refers to the interpreting provided within associations and NGOs but also comprises the legal, healthcare, and other public sectors. This term was coined by Mayoral Asensio (2003: 129), paralleling the interpreter’s role in public services with that of a social worker.

In the proposed tourism context, there is a paradigm shift in the meaning of “social services interpreting”, as in this case, we focus on the voluntary activity carried out through solidarity tourism. Although this

type of tourism is not typically present for the profile of tourists visiting Spain, it could be implemented in other global destinations where solidarity tourists travel. As an example, below are the different contexts and communicative situations where this could take place:

We can consider that the user of the interpreting service will be the facilitator of assistance to a community in need, as they collaborate and commit to the population/territory they visit through some social and environmental project in a poor or developing country (Perogil Burgos 2018: 31), and in such cases, they may require the services of an interpreter.

There are different types of travel in solidarity tourism, all of which share the motivation of seeking to undertake an experience that benefits society: volunteering, work camps, cooperation projects, cultural exchanges, etc. Given this context, an individual may decide to embark on a trip to a destination with a solidarity tourism motivation through an international NGO or association and may need the assistance of an interpreter for the interview and reception at the destination to ensure effective communication with the entity, using bilateral interpreting techniques. In the same context, as in the usual PSI framework, the volunteer may require the help of an interpreter for conducting training activities, where the predominant interpreting technique would be simultaneous interpreting.

Additionally, the volunteer may find themselves in a destination where their task is to assist refugees or asylum seekers who do not speak the country's main language, and they may perform interpreting duties. For example, they may accompany these individuals to other public institutions, such as healthcare centers, where the interpreting technique would also be bilateral or liaison interpreting.

In this social sphere, we must also consider the movement of people for educational purposes, which generally involves public institutions such as Spain's universities through programs like Erasmus+ and Study Abroad, which contribute over 2 billion euros to Spain's economy (Grasset & García Méndez 2020: 32). In 2020, a total of 148,670 international students enrolled in educational programs, of which 126,051 completed their studies in person.

During their stay, these students may need to visit public institutions related to education, such as universities, to request a certificate of arrival or a student ID card, or healthcare centers and hospitals to receive medical care or request information about the European Health Insurance Card. In these cases, it is understood that the student should have a basic knowledge of the language, but it may not be enough to communicate with public service professionals, making the assistance of an interpreter essential to ensure their stay in the destination country is safe and satisfactory.

#### *3.2.4. Interpreting in Tourism-Specific Organizations*

At this point, it is important to remember that the interpreter in public services does not only focus on the social sector. Due to this misconception, their role is often confused with that of a social worker, which leads to a lack of professional recognition and consideration for their work and training. These interpreters are trained in legal, healthcare, administrative, and even economic areas, so their presence in other public bodies, as mentioned below, could be taken into account by the Administration.

The role of the interpreter in public services can also extend to organizations that do not belong to the aforementioned sectors but, due to their close relationship with tourism and foreign populations, should have specialized interpreters. These organizations may include those connected to the Ministry of Industry and Tourism, where a tourist may, for example, file a complaint; tourist offices, where a tourist might need personalized information in a language other than English or French, which are the most commonly spoken languages by the staff; or even at tourism conferences and fairs such as FITUR (Spanish International Tourism Trade Fair), where tourists and service providers from all over the world, including speakers of LWL, gather.

Although these organizations should employ staff who can communicate in foreign languages such as English or French, tourists or foreigners may arrive who do not speak these languages, or professionals may attend meetings or conferences where communication with administrations or professionals in languages other than the most commonly used is

necessary. In this context, the assistance of an interpreter trained in public services would be very useful, as their training covers the specific areas of work involved, as well as their knowledge of the functioning of the public administration and immigration issues.

Based on the previous sections, we conclude that the interpreter plays a crucial role in communication situations between professionals in public organizations and the community of tourists who reside temporarily in Spain or visit the country and require public and free services from the Administration. These situations lead to the use of the most common interpreting techniques in public services, including bilateral or liaison interpreting, telephone or remote interpreting, sight translation, and whispered interpreting.

### 3.3. *Contextual setup*

In terms of the contextual framework that characterizes encounters within the tourism context, both cases establish cultural relationships. In the tourism context, this implies explaining local cultural concepts and practices to visitors. Meanwhile, in the case of interpreters in public services, it involves assisting users in understanding and accessing services available within a different culture.

Beyond the linguistic load that characterizes encounters in the tourism framework, it is also important to highlight the cultural load inherent in this discourse. This becomes a crucial aspect as it transforms interpreting into a tool for both linguistic and cultural mediation (Durán 2014: 104). Through interpreting, communication problems between local and foreign communities can be solved, whether due to language or cultural misunderstandings, thus avoiding miscommunication or a lack of information.

Linked to this component is the concept of “cultural term” which, according to Vermeer (1983: 8), refers to:

Es un fenómeno social de una cultura A que es considerado relevante por los miembros de esa cultura y que, cuando se compara como un fenómeno social correspondiente en la cultura B, se encuentra que es específico de la cultura A. [It is a social phenomenon of culture A that is considered relevant by the members of that culture, and when compared to a corresponding social phenomenon in culture B, it is found to be specific to culture A.]

In the communicative situations that concern us, cultural terms play a fundamental role, as the interpreter will have to address realities that do not exist in the target culture. This aspect is crucial in interpreting, especially in a tourist context characterized by cultural diversity.

Furthermore, this factor is linked to shifts in meaning, which are also shared between both disciplines. The interpreter in public services must be particularly careful with these elements, as the interpreting can affect the verbal outcome and, consequently, the service provided by the public organization receiving the interpreting user.

### *3.4. Type of tourism and the role of interpreting*

As a result of the significant increase in tourist movements over the years, and the changes and diversity in demand, preferences and ways of tourism have evolved and diversified exponentially. In this regard, Cohen (2004), based on results from the World Tourism Organization, has established a classification of the different types of tourism that can occur in the tertiary sector, including: adventure tourism, wellness tourism, cultural tourism, sports tourism, educational tourism, rural tourism, health tourism, solidarity tourism, etc.

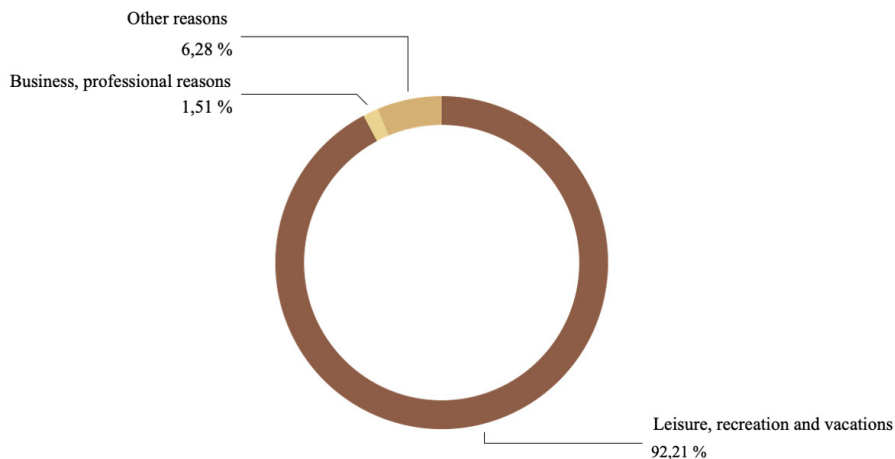


Figure 2. Number of tourists in Spain by main purpose of trip in the third quarter of 2023<sup>4</sup>

Based on the statistical results (Figure 2), we can observe that out of a total of 10,186,163 trips, the main reason for travel for tourists coming to Spain is leisure, recreation, and vacations, accounting for 92.2%. In the second category, “other reasons”, which includes health, educational, or personal and social reasons, represents 1.51%. The remaining 6.28% come to Spain for other reasons.

First, health tourism, which includes wellness tourism and medical tourism,

cubre aquellos tipos de turismo que tienen como motivación primordial la contribución a la salud física, mental y/o espiritual gracias a actividades médicas y de bienestar que incrementan la capacidad de las personas para satisfacer sus propias necesidades y funcionar mejor como individuos en su entorno y en la sociedad [includes those types of tourism that have as their primary motivation the contribution to physical, mental, and/or spiritual health through medical and wellness activities that enhance

4. Source: Own elaboration based on Cohen (2004).

individuals' ability to meet their own needs and function better as individuals in their environment and society.] (Naciones Unidas Turismo n.d.: § 148)

In these cases, it is evident that the tourist will require public healthcare services (although private services are also available), given the type of user profile that usually has a certain level of purchasing power.

Secondly, educational tourism, understood as that which “is primarily motivated by the tourist’s participation and experience in learning activities, personal improvement, intellectual growth, and the acquisition of skills” (Naciones Unidas Turismo n.d.: § 136). According to Millán Escriche (2021: 369), it involves a broad range of services and products related to academic studies, vacation programs to enhance skills, school trips, etc. The needs that the tourist may have in terms of public services will mostly be administrative in nature.

We must also consider solidarity tourism, which, according to Marrero (2017: 140), can be defined as tourism that seeks collaboration with less privileged destinations through coexistence with local entities for community development and the improvement of the quality of life of the members. Since it is a recent practice, there is currently no clear and exact definition, and it is often related to other types such as responsible tourism, ethical tourism, ecotourism, ethnic tourism, intercultural tourism, community tourism, or tourism as a tool for fighting poverty (Rivera Mateos & Rodríguez García 2012: 9). In this context, we can find various communicative situations that require public services, with organizations and associations being the most common environment for the development of such activities.

### *3.5. Purpose of the communicative situation*

In terms of the communicative aspect, both disciplines share the goal of providing services to users with a clear informative intention. In the tourist context, the aim is to connect visitors with the history and culture of the place, while in the context of PSI, it aims to ensure that all users can communicate effectively and efficiently with service providers. However, it is

important to note that the level of assistance to foreign users varies, mainly due to differences in the target audience and the purpose of their trip. Despite these differences, the core goal remains, in essence, to facilitate effective communication.

#### **4. Tourism PSI: A specialization within PSI?**

Considering the evaluations previously discussed, it can be argued that the two disciplines are interdependent, suggesting the viability of a relational framework between language interpreting and tourism.

To achieve our objective, we start from the assertion that the scope of PSI is not limited to migrant users marked by social, economic, or cultural inequality. Although the conceptualization of PSI has been partially restricted by existing literature and applied practices, our goal is to offer a more objective and generalized view. Through a bibliographical review, we will attempt to address a broader dimension of this interpretive modality and identify those studies, albeit few, that have considered tourists in their reflections on PSI.

In Martin's (2006) definition of PSI, it is explained that it responds to the social need of a community of people who, for one reason or another, do not speak the majority language and are therefore disadvantaged in their interactions with the administration and in the exercise of their rights and duties when accessing public services. We take this approach as a starting point, considering it to offer a more holistic perspective of the concept: the author uses the qualifier "social", referring to society as a whole. However, this definition limits the concept to a specific community, even if it is generalized, by focusing on the predominant communicative and intercultural needs within that group.

Regarding the integration of the tourist as a participant in PSI, Martin (2006: 105) herself states that:

el primer rasgo distintivo en la ISP en España es que la población potencialmente usuaria de la misma no se limita a inmigrantes, solicitantes de asilo, refugiados o bien poblaciones indígenas, sino que incluye necesariamente a los turistas y residentes extranjeros de países de la UE. [The first distinctive feature of PSI in Spain is that the potentially user population is

not limited to immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, or indigenous populations, but necessarily includes tourists and foreign residents from EU countries.]

The author, in her generic definition of PSI, includes the tourist as an “PSI user” and provides a series of reflections on the communicative situations related to the tourism sector within the framework of PSI in Spain and the profile of this type of user. In general terms, she highlights that cultural contrasts between tourists and foreign residents are minimal and groups them within the same socioeconomic level, distinguishing them from non-EU immigrants. This is because tourists and foreign residents in Spain typically come from European, developed countries with a certain purchasing power. However, they are still users whose communicative situations can be hindered by language barriers.

Toledano Buendía et al. (2006: 188), in their research on the situation of PSTS in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands, argue that:

los turistas deben ser incluidos como parte del grupo de potenciales usuarios de los servicios públicos ya que ocasionalmente pueden demandar servicios de mediación lingüística en lugares como, por ejemplo, comisarías, hospitales o, en menor medida, ayuntamientos. [Tourists should be included as part of the group of potential users of public services, as they may occasionally require language mediation services in places such as, for example, police stations, hospitals, or, to a lesser extent, town halls.]

The aforementioned authors recognize two differentiated groups in this context: a) foreign visitors and tourists, characterized by the provisional and brief nature of their stays, but representing a significant number of users who typically come from European countries, and b) residents and immigrants who make up the foreign population, whose data “are not very precise due to the existence of “unregistered migratory flows”. This includes both legally residing foreign populations, those in irregular situations, and retirees who immigrate.

From the viewpoint of Cela Gutiérrez (2022: 427), the PSI

aparece precisamente para evitar la barrera lingüística que surge entre el personal de las instituciones públicas y los usuarios de estas, que no hablan ni entienden la lengua oficial del país.[ appears precisely to avoid

the language barrier that arises between the staff of public institutions and the users of these institutions, who do not speak or understand the official language of the country.]

And outlines a proposal for characterizing PSI that considers the tourist as the main interlocutor and user of these services. However, in her study, she identifies two well-defined groups:

las personas pertenecientes a una minoría lingüística y cultural, en su mayoría con un bajo nivel educativo y económico, y que desconocen la realidad social del país de acogida, y, por otro lado, los trabajadores de los servicios públicos encargados de atender a inmigrantes, refugiados, turistas, estudiantes o enfermos, normalmente en situaciones críticas, de desconcierto y nerviosismo ante un problema surgido durante su estancia en el país de acogida. [people that belongs to a linguistic and cultural minority, mostly with a low educational and economic level, and who are unfamiliar with the social reality of the host country, and, on the other hand, the public service workers responsible for assisting immigrants, refugees, tourists, students, or patients, typically in critical situations, confusion, and anxiety due to a problem that has arisen during their stay in the host country.]

Therefore, one party has more power (public services) concerning the other (immigrant), who depends on the services provided by the former. Generally, research on PSI tends to share this approach, while the need to resort to a public agency and require the assistance of an interpreter can arise regardless of the user's country of origin and their social or economic situation (more or less favorable), meaning their rights and duties toward public agencies could be diminished.

Thus, in the context of our research, we take a broader perspective, and we consider that PSI applies to society, not to a specific and restricted group, characterized mainly by the need to resort to a public agency and require the assistance of an interpreter.

## 5. Conclusions

According to the findings presented in this research, we consider it relevant to conclude with a personal evaluation of the concept under study,

which could serve as a foundation for future work in the field and contribute to facilitating its application in related contexts. In our opinion, tourist PSI could be defined as a specialization of public service interpreting (PSI) focused on adapting linguistic assistance for individuals who travel abroad for various tourism-related reasons and, due to cultural and linguistic differences, require the help of an interpreter to access the services provided by the administration.

This research aimed to address PSI from a perspective that broadens the understanding of PSI as a service offering linguistic support to any foreign individual who does not master the language of the host country in public service contexts. This enables us to recognize PSI as a crucial tool for intercultural communication, capable of serving a wider range of users in various contexts. From this holistic view, we believe there is potential to delve deeper into PSI in a less explored context to date: tourism.

In our opinion, the integration of PSI into the tourism context is an evident need, especially considering the limited number of studies on the provision of interpreting services in public agencies within the tourism sector. This need is further emphasized when we identify the converging points between the disciplines involved. Moreover, recognizing how PSI can contribute to more effective communication in tourism environments opens the door to new opportunities to enhance the visitor experience and ensure better understanding between the parties involved. Therefore, advancing research and developing interpreting models that respond to the specific demands of this less conventional context, such as the tourism sector, is essential.

Additionally, it is crucial to highlight the avenues this research opens in the realm of university teaching. In this regard, analyzing the profile of tourists provides valuable information to guide the training of future interpreters, allowing for adjustments in teaching programs to meet the actual needs of the sector. On the one hand, understanding the characteristics and expectations of tourists can help define which specific competencies should be prioritized in training, whether in terms of specialized terminology, communication strategies, or intercultural adaptation. On the other hand, this analysis could also contribute to the development of more

contextualized educational materials tailored to real-life interpreting scenarios in the tourism field. Thus, this study offers a proposal to improve the teaching of the discipline, ensuring more relevant and effective training for future professionals.

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