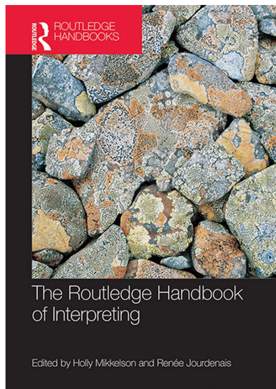
This article was downloaded by: *10.3.97.143*
On: 11 Dec 2023
Access details: *subscription number*
Publisher: *Routledge*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting

Holly Mikkelson, Renée Jourdenais

Interpreting and professional identity

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315745381.ch27
Mette Rudvin
Published online on: 17 Mar 2015

How to cite :- Mette Rudvin. 17 Mar 2015, *Interpreting and professional identity from:* The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting Routledge
Accessed on: 11 Dec 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

27

INTERPRETING AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Mette Rudvin

Introduction

'Professional identity' has been studied widely in a number of disciplines (see e.g. Beijaard *et al.* 2004). In Interpreting Studies (IS) and its sister discipline Translation Studies (TS), there has been an escalation of interest in this area in the last decade, as the interpreting profession and the translation profession have continued to evolve in response to internal and external factors, gain acceptance as fully-fledged professions and utilize to their advantage developments in information- and media technology.

This chapter looks at the various definitions of professional identity in a few related disciplines and examines whether and how interpreting as a profession meets these criteria. The author shares the view of many contemporary scholars that professional identity is an aggregate set of beliefs, values, motives and experiences relating to work, shared by a definable group and leading to a professional role (Schein 1978), but that it is at the same time negotiated dynamically, bringing together multiple identities at the public and private, social and personal levels. Thus, one might say that professional identity is a complex entity constituted by a number of complex socio-cultural interactions that influence each other but that may at times lead to conflicting beliefs and values. It is also a product of how people compare and differentiate themselves from other professional groups. Interpreting, like all professions, is thus a complex interweaving of numerous factors from different domains of the human experience. A necessity that all professions share is that of seeking recognition, as a group, from the wider community; it is the achievement of that recognition that empowers its members to 'act professionally' based on their special expertise. Indeed, some scholars have defined 'profession' as 'institutionalised expertise' (Baxter 2011:24).

Interpreting practitioners – and to a lesser extent trainers and scholars – are required by the very nature of the profession to interact with numerous other institutions and public and private bodies, and this close interface may sometimes lead to a conflict of professional values or to a 'power conflict' ('who sets the standards?', 'who has the final say if and when a dilemma arises?', i.e., 'consenting to dominant views') (see Chapter 3 on key external players). A professional identity implies a role of responsibility and decision-making that is precisely the result of collaboration and interaction with other stakeholders, although it may in turn lead to cross-disciplinary ethical conflicts.

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

This chapter addresses the various parameters that affect individual and collective self-perception as a profession(al). It is suggested that whereas the professional role, and identity, of the conference interpreter is reasonably straightforward, the identity of interpreters working in the medical, legal and other more generally 'community' related settings,[1] is far more complex and has been an obstacle to the creation of a cohesive and well-defined professional (sub)community (see also Setton and Liangliang 2009).

Furthermore, professions and professional identity, like all social practices and systems, are situated in their wider social, political and cultural contexts and are constituted by many, sometimes conflicting, variables. Consequently, professional identity varies across cultures and countries, governed by changing state policies; this is less apparent for conference interpreting, which is affected more by internal market variables such as the use of lingua francas (currently English in the 'typical' conference settings) that reduce the need for interpretation and the promotion of multilingual policies in international organizations. The impact of local and federal policy (especially immigration policies) is much more immediate for the sub-disciplines of community and legal interpreting (see Chapters 12 and 14 on court and community interpreting). Differences in macro-structural features affect the community's and the stakeholders' view of the interpreting profession (collective professional identity) and subsequently interpreters' self-perception and, ultimately, performance. This chapter questions whether the interpreting profession should be seen as a fragmented group of bodies, each acting according to its own national parameters (set by stakeholders and national policies and politics), or rather as a pan-national body that transcends such differences and acts as an autonomous, independent professional community with an autonomous set of standards, practices and objectives – if that is indeed possible. International conference interpreting associations such as the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) are indeed in a position to fulfil this pan-national function, but again this is less feasible with the arguably more fragmented and nationally variegated sub-disciplines of community and legal interpreting (see e.g. Prunč 2010 for a discussion on the difference in professional status between various prestigious and non-prestige sub-sectors of interpreting, namely conference interpreting and community interpreting).

What constitutes a profession?

The following list, adapted primarily from two studies in, respectively, public services and legal translation (Baxter 2011:24ff and Monzó 2009:136ff), suggests some of the main categories that could be used to identify the defining characteristics of a profession.

In relation to society and to world knowledge:

- *Distinction, exclusivity*: professionals have special skills that other do not;
- *Problem-solving capacity*: these organized skills (expertise) allow them to solve problems that society deems to be sufficiently important and recurrent to warrant the investment of time and money and authorization;
- *Group identity*: a profession is a 'community of practice', a structured organization supported by a professional body which may or may not have mandatory registration;
- *Group/community identity distinct from other groups:* professionals will have a sense of belonging to a profession and as such have a professional identity that differentiates them from other professions;
- *Jurisdiction*: professions dominate a particular area of activity precisely because only they have the ability and/or authority to solve that problem;

- *Positive impact on society:* positive values are attached to the problem-solving capacity, to the professionals and to the profession.

Internal characteristics and development

- *Motivation and reward:* the potential reward of exclusive jurisdiction of a professional domain and of attributed status must be sufficient to warrant investment; for the individual members, rewards are membership status and subsequent privileges (also financial).
- *Training:* professions possess knowledge that is systematized, formalized, conveyed, applied, updated.
- *Guidelines and rules*: a profession has an established code of ethics, articulated to varying degrees of sophistication, standardization and authority.
- *Accreditation and legitimization*: a profession has a recognized scheme of baseline accreditation.
- *Credentials*: credentials constitute 'cultural capital' by creating a barrier to group-entrance; they link "institutional knowledge, professional practices and social perception" Monzó (2009:141); in a sense, credentials actually create the profession as an authoritative entity.
- *Standards*: a profession operates to certain professional standards codified through tradition and experience, training, codes of ethics or standards of practice.

The degree to which these parameters are met by the interpreting profession, or sub-disciplines, will be addressed below.

Historical perspectives

The existing literature on professional identity

Although much has been written on 'professionalism' in the literature on interpreting, it has been largely connected to the inherent characteristics of what it means to be 'a professional', to 'professionalism' as an attribute of 'the good professional' (largely from a prescriptive viewpoint) and on the intrinsic relationship between professionalism and quality, as 'good professional output'.[2] This connection is essential, if not axiomatic, in all disciplines. 'Production quality', in this framework, is the final output of a set of features that define a profession and a professional: a set of skills that are useful to society and through which society is able to solve a series of problems. Indeed, these skills and the knowledge that underpins them are restricted to a given and limited group (a 'profession') and acquired through (tertiary-level) training and/or experience. Furthermore, being a member of 'a profession' in this framework implies a degree of accountability to the wider society by virtue of his/her 'problem solving' nature, limited to a given community of practice and over which the members have (to a lesser or greater extent) monopoly.

Recent interpreting literature also contains a wealth of interesting in-depth studies on the role and self-perception of the interpreter, through surveys, case studies or theoretical contributions (in particular Angelelli 2004a, 2004b; Roy 2000; Wadensjö 1998; Pöchhacker 1999, 2004; Diriker 2004; Setton and Lianlang 2009; Dam and Zethsen 2013; Takeda 2010). Such studies focus on the translation-interpretation process, on the role of the interpreter as a participant in a discourse setting, as a participant in an institutional setting constrained by institutional parameters, as a player in an ideological or political context, as an 'active participant' enjoying agency and decision-making power, self-preservation, etc. These studies are analysed through various models – hermeneutical or cross-cultural – and theoretical frameworks.

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

In these studies, the notion 'role' and 'professional identity' overlap to some extent. Although 'professional identity' at the collective level has as yet received less attention than issues such as 'role', an increasing number of studies are attesting to the anchoring of interpreting as a profession and discipline in its own right (Mikkelson's early studies (1996a, 1996b), followed by Shlesinger (2009) and Pöchhacker (1999, 2004) on the development of the profession).

Other studies address the organization of interpreting services and how these services and the people who perform these services are perceived by the wider public (Ozolins 1998; Garrett 2009; Setton and Liangliang 2009; Monzó 2009). Grbićs (2010) study on 'boundary work' addresses the issue of classification and professions. In a similar vein, Bahadir (2010) discusses the 'situatedness' of professions and tackles issues of power.

It might be interesting at this point to explore sources from other disciplinary areas that shed light on what identity means to human beings, what professional identity entails, why it is important, and how these identities are played out in a mutually construing recursive relationship with the surrounding environment.

Building identities: people and organizations

'Identity' and how identity is formed in the individual and in society has been addressed widely in various literatures, principally in sociology, in the closely related discipline of anthropology, and in psychology. Roughly speaking, we might say that while psychology examines issues of identity at the individual level, the domains of sociology and anthropology address identity at the collective level (although both address the interface between these dimensions). The sociological literature, and in particular the 'sociology of professions', tends to explore professions as an occupational group, more than as individuals (see Larson 1977 and Abbott 1998 for some of the 'classic' studies on professions) and at the collective rather than the individual level (Hotho 2008:724). Much of the literature on professions has explored the 'prototypical' settings such as medicine and law, and some of the literature referred to in this chapter stems from the health sector and sociology – in some cases studies by medical scholars themselves (see Pratt *et al.* 2006:236 drawing on Hughes 1956). Other disciplines and professions that have addressed this issue in recent years are teaching and business management. More recently the issue of identity has emerged as an area of investigation in Cultural Studies (e.g. Hall 1997), and has increasingly been seen as the construction and expression of a person's sense of self at an individual and a collective level; in line with a general paradigm shift in the humanities, identity tends now to be regarded as a constructed artefact, fluid and in a recursive relationship with its environment, rather than a 'predetermined' and essentially stable 'given', an approach adopted by many earlier studies. At an individual level, professional identity relates to the construction of the self's own objectives and abilities as a result of the person's life history and rapport with all levels of domains in society (family, peers, school, training institutions, workplace, community of practice) in the wider community. At this individual level, professional identity tends to be a fluid and to a large extent unpredictable process. At a collective level, 'profession' relates to broader trends in society – ideology and policies in local, national and international politics – especially those relating to transnational movement such as migration policies, trade agreements, border disputes, language policy, etc., inter-profession competition, lobbying and funding. At the collective level professional identity responds more slowly to change and is thus more stable, or perceived as more stable.

As a relatively new profession (see Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting) and as a result of technological innovation (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting), interpreting has entered a dynamic process of intense change, restructuring and aggregation. Although still marked by a

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

strong fragmentation into sub-disciplines that enjoy unequal status, it is well on its way to being established, consolidated, and distinguishing itself with a specific and a clearly defined professional mandate. At this particular historical period as we begin the third millennium, the significance of professional identity with respect to the broader community, it could be argued, lies in questioning its autonomy from the institutions it collaborates with and is to some degree dependent upon (international organizations, health services, legal services, social services, educational services, etc.).

Defining key terms

Identity: continuity and 'sameness' in the individual's self-perception

What exactly is identity, and why is it necessary to – or constitutive of – the human experience? The literature on identity, from psychology to sociology to cultural studies and much more, is vast, but the most represented and recurrent aspects relate to a person's self-image and sense of purpose. Thus, it provides internal and group-based coherence, meaning and continuity, giving shape to thought and individual and collective action, 'how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future' (Deters 2000:21, quoting Norton).

Professions and professionals: a monopoly of knowledge, skills and competence

There are many forms of group identity (the principal ones being cultural, ethnic, national, clan/tribe, linguistic, and religious) of which 'professional identity' is but one. Relating to the world of work and the interface of society/work, sociology is the discipline that has traditionally given most attention to this area, but other literatures – not least health and education – have more recently invested significant research in the investigation of professional identity as it has evolved in these domains. One of the key criteria employed in the definitions of professional identity, especially in the sociological literature, is that relating to exclusivity mentioned in the first part of this chapter, namely the knowledge and skills possessed by a certain group of people that enable them to exercise certain practices that are necessary to society. In other words, 'an organized group possesses esoteric knowledge that has economic value when applied to problems (e.g. sickness) faced by people in a society' (Pratt *et al.* 2006:235, drawing on Carr-Sanders and Wilson 1933 and MacDonald 1995). The members of this group, being in a position to exercise their skills and apply their acquired knowledge usefully, enter the group (profession) having acquired those prerequisite skills through training and/or experience, or in some cases (more controversially) through 'natural skills' (see Chapter 26 on non-professional interpreters). This confers upon the members of this group both privileges and responsibilities and the recognition of these features by society: 'Because of their unique knowledge and skill set, society grants professionals higher levels of prestige and autonomy than it grants non-professionals' (Pratt *et al.* 2006:235, drawing on Larsen 1977). This is arguably the most essential aspect defining and constituting 'profession'.

Membership in a professional group thus encompasses a range of recognized competencies and a subsequent self-perception and perception by society. Members position themselves reflexively and interactively within this emerging field, and these 'dimensions of competence become dimensions of identity' (Wenger 1998:152). The acquisition and exercising of these skills and competencies require learning new and different knowledge units (such as becoming a consultant and learning a medical specialization, or interpreting in specialized sectors, or being a

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

polyvalent 'type' of interpreter – community, court, conference – at the same time) that need to be melded together in a unified form. We might say then that membership entails 'multi-memberships'; a person belongs to different identity-forming groups (communities of practice) simultaneously.

Barriers to the formation of professional identity in interpreting

It is on the grounds of these basic features that a profession can act as a unified body or structure and through which it can promote its own interests (insofar as the conditions in society permit this) and improve the conditions of its members and the people it serves. Based on the criteria mentioned in the Introduction (based largely on the studies of Baxter and Monzó), I have identified here a few key areas that I believe could be major obstacles to the complete consolidation of interpreting – in all its sub-disciplines – to reach full professional status.

In relation to society

Trust and exclusivity: It is essential that society trusts the capacity of an occupational group to the extent that they can exclude others and achieve exclusivity. This is less of a problem for simultaneous conference interpreting because of the stringent training requirements and due to the boundary-forming technical nature of the booth. It is more problematic for other sub-areas in which it is much harder to assert, and especially maintain, exclusivity (i.e. dialogic forms of interpreting are easier to encroach upon as they have no 'natural barrier' to form a boundary between specialists and 'natural interpreters' due to the commonly held lay perception that a general command of the relevant languages is sufficient to provide an adequate interpreted rendition, or the 'anyone can do it' approach; Dam 2013). Furthermore, exclusivity is jeopardized by the lack of ability to test and control performance in dialogic interpreting. Conference interpreting is more controllable and therefore accountable due to the ease with which each performance can be recorded and listened to at a later stage. Accountability is thus easier to gain for conference interpreters and other interpreting forms where the rendition is public and/or easily retrievable.

Jurisdiction: For sub-disciplines such as community interpreting, stakeholders have (sometimes complete) control over the communication process and can establish mandate at will; it is up to the community of practice (insofar as it exists in the various domains and countries) and up to individuals to negotiate that mandate and assert exclusivity based on their possession of restricted knowledge (interpreting techniques, strategies, terms, transfer competence, etc.); if 'natural skills' are sufficient (an erroneous but widely diffused lay perception), it is harder to claim the need for specialized skills and credentials and to establish trust (especially when the issue of pay emerges and non-professionals undercut the prices). Furthermore, given that interpreting is intrinsically linked to – and in the case of community interpreting up to a point dependent on – other professions (their 'clients'), achieving full autonomy, decision-making power and thus authority, is more problematic. Again, conference interpreting is at an advantage compared to interpreting for public services or other forms of interpreting because it is less 'at the mercy' and under the jurisdiction and mandate of the institutions it serves, and secondly because it is often backed by the powerful international associations that provide: services (training, accreditation, recruitment opportunities, peer networking, funding, marketing, etc.); prestige; financial and political leverage vis-à-vis state and other funding and policy-making bodies; and a body to negotiate pay scales.

Motivation: Are the capital resources accrued by the individual and the group adequate to invest energy in the creation and maintenance of a profession(al)? If 'the profits which accrue

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible' (Monzó 2009:142 quoting Bourdieu), this will only be possible if those profits exist, are forthcoming reasonably quickly and perceived as such by the members-to-be. In conference interpreting the profits are high enough to warrant the investment of training and recruitment, but that is not always so in the often under-paid dialogic interpreting practices such as community interpreting – and in many countries legal interpreting – where profits are often insufficient to warrant investment or the formation of a professional community.

Variables and dynamics internal to the profession

Training for interpreters in a systematized form is lacking in many countries and for many sub-genres; the percentage of untrained interpreters working in the profession and indeed constituting the profession is arguably high, although impossible to quantify. The lack of training obviously leads to a lack of an accreditation system and to subsequent credentials, thus hindering the formation of a profession with respect to exclusive entry and limitation of non-members (untrained, unaccredited) and leaving full access to those who can convincingly argue that they possess the corresponding 'natural skills'. This is not a situation that promotes the creation of a profession as it is understood according to the above criteria. The plethora of publications, conferences, courses and general financial investment in certification of interpreting attests to this being of essential importance to trainers, scholars, associations and institutions – and that it is a hallmark of 'profession-hood'.

Reward: without the potential reward of exclusive jurisdiction of a professional domain, the risk factor of investment – for a professional community – is high. At the individual level, the issue of pay is important in establishing the degree of achieved professional identity, or in-group membership: accepting to work for low pay is discredited by other members of the profession as it is harmful both to themselves as individuals (unfair competition) as well as to their perceived group status. In other words, accepting to work for sub-standard rates should exclude you from full-status membership in that professional group; i.e. 'a person who works for sub-standard rates cannot possibly have the competence required to be a true professional' and 'a good professional will charge high rates'. In a study of translation blogs, Dam (2013) shows how pay rates were a strong professional identity formation criterion for translators: 'In these examples, the link between skills and income comes across clearly, as does the assumed segmentation, or even polarization, of the translation market.' In a sense, adequate pay thus constitutes tangible 'proof' of professional identity.

Positive impact on society: Positive values are attached to problem-solving (overcoming language barriers), to professionals and to the profession. In conference interpreting, positive values are attributed to overcoming this barrier because it is a high-prestige, high-investment and money-generating domain, while in community interpreting it is in many countries a low-prestige occupation (involving low-prestige actors) and not perceived as income-generating or necessarily as wise budgeting. In conference interpreting, prestige is also attributed to the 'high-effort' training period and the perceived 'high-effort' cognitive process; this is not so in many other forms of interpreting.

On the basis of these parameters, it could be argued that it has been easier for conference interpreting to establish itself as a discipline and to gain exclusivity and jurisdiction over the practice than it has for other domains and sub-disciplines of interpreting that do not require technical expertise and where the danger of using 'natural interpreters' is much more likely, making it more difficult not just to claim but to maintain exclusivity in and jurisdiction over the practice of interpreting.

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

'Customization': identity repair and reconciliation

In a study of the medical profession, Pratt *et al.* (2006) show how certain, quite predictable, factors impact to various degrees on the development of professional identity; at times these identities clash, and these clashes or 'integrity violations' are 'fixed' through various strategies, depending partly on the strength of the individual's prior identity and on the strength of the 'clash' or 'violation'. For example, when the 'clash' derives from a (perceived or real) difference between what one actually does at work (especially in terms of mundane tasks that fall to novice professionals and that are completely unrelated to one's profession, but often part and parcel of being a 'junior') and one's training and professional mandate, a 'work-identity' mismatch or misalignment occurs. This mismatch is also a result of practitioners' own self-perceived standards of excellence that they have come to take for granted, their assumptions of what is possible and feasible, etc. (see Chapter 20 on ethics).

Again, we find a deep rift between conference and other forms of interpreting: while conference interpreters' mandate and tasks are reasonably clear-cut and delineated – and status is accorded to them as a recognition of a long and high-investment training period – other forms of interpreting that have briefer training periods, less highly-specialized task definition (and less technology) are more vulnerable to exploitation to fulfil non-related mundane tasks. This is certainly true for community interpreting but also for business interpreting and interpreting at trade fairs (in Italy they are called 'hostesses', and the general multi-tasking communication and accompanying function is predominant), as well as for liaison, diplomatic, and media interpreting.

The term 'customization process' is then used by Pratt *et al* to describe the re-integration of disparate identities, gradually strengthening and enriching the person's professional identity into a more complete whole. The resolution of these conflicts and clashes eventually leads to 'identity enrichment'. 'Integrity' is that state of being, of the sense of one's self, in which the various sub-identities in a continuous state of flux are aligned.

Another source of identity violation, and one that is more difficult to resolve or 'customize' is that of professional ethical dilemmas such as allegiance formations and the breach of impartiality. In virtually all codes of ethics or standards of practice (see Hale 2008), impartiality is seen as a crucial prerequisite (similar to that in many professions such as doctors and judges, if not lawyers). The code of ethics, a basic component in most interpreter training programmes, has a strong identity formation function, and young interpreters (here I refer to trained interpreters) start their professional lives with a code of ethics firmly entrenched. Although some interpreter training programmes take account of the fact that real-life situations are anything but clear-cut (as do some of the more nuanced and realistic codes of ethics), many do not, and the meeting with real-life situations for interpreters working in areas such as health, social services, law, education, and refugee services may lead precisely to 'integrity violations' in that real-life needs and practice clash with imprinted training. This could also take the form of confidentiality and allegiance towards the institution rather than the client, patient, defendant, etc. If the institution is one where extreme situations unfold (refugee camps, shelters, jails, emergency wards, etc.) the tug-of-war between the claims of institution, training standards, client and human values may be very powerful. The result may be a sense of confusion and distress, and a weakened professional identity resulting either from the lack of a core set of values or a lack of flexibility and ability to manage diverse situations with diverse needs and expectations. Yet another crucial source of integrity violation could be found between cultural systems – i.e. when an interpreter is socialized into one system through training but works in either different country or a different subsystems (see Rudvin 2007); examples of issues that emerge here are: topic avoidance/taboos;

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

indirectness; truth-telling vs. avoidance/hedging; specific group dynamics regarding internal hierarchies, age, gender, etc.; not knowing to which group the interpreter owes allegiance; and connoted language (politically incorrect, ideological, vulgar, etc.).

Impartiality is an 'external' parameter that links the interpreting act to its context and is therefore affected by, if not dependent upon, context. However, parameters that are internal to the communicative act of interpreting and have been internalized through training and codes of ethics, such as the principle of accuracy, are easier to maintain and less prone to integrity violations if the interpreter has acquired the skills taught during the training period assuming that accuracy is possible in that specific utterance and language combination.

While the integrity violation posed by impartiality affects role perception, the challenge of accuracy will be felt more as an objective that can be acquired through adequate preparation, practice and information gathering. Ethical competence, under which impartiality falls, is acquired less easily and as a result of experience and maturity, i.e. the ability to evaluate the situation contextually, cognizant of all the risks involved.

Such 'integrity violations' can weaken professional identity and lead to confusion, guilt, a sense of not being a 'good' interpreter, of not being responsible, not helping one's clients (not being impartial, not following one's mandate), and balance or harmony is thus undermined. One determining stressor, in both Pratt's data and Baxter's literature review, is the question of discretion or autonomy, how much decision-making power the individual actually has (Pratt *et al.* 2006: 254; Baxter 2011). A lack of such discretion can lead to a strong sense of powerlessness, of loss of control over one's ability to actualize the professional standards interpreters have internalized through the training process or in a code of ethics, and to weakened self-esteem and professional quality and performance. This is especially true for interpreting domains such as community, court and medical interpreting, because of their relationship with the institutions and also because of the intimate and often traumatic nature of the conversation. A strong sense of powerlessness, of loss of control, may thus emerge here.

Blending multiple and 'sub-identities' – integrity, violation, reconciliation and enrichment

The self-perception of various sub-specialties in the medical profession, discussed by Pratt *et al.* (2006), operates in a competitive fashion whereby some specialties (surgery) perceive themselves as distinctive in relation to other specialties, and this self-perception both reinforces and separates their professional identity. With the fragmentation of sub-specialties in interpreting, where court interpreting in some countries enjoys high prestige (and adequate pay) while in other countries it is perhaps one of the least protected and prestigious sectors in which interpreters work (in part because of the inadequate pay), this sub-identity violation has already occurred (see Dam and Zethsen 2009; Prunč 2010). Sub-speciality prestige (high economic and social capital) will depend on a number of environmental factors (perception of the public, utility to the public, the ability to solve problems that are considered important, association with high status users or institutions) or internal working conditions (such as pay). We might thus speak of a powerful identity fragmentation or violation under the 'umbrella' of interpreting in competing sub-genres (such as court vs. medical interpreting).

While Pratt *et al.* focus on the amalgamation of sub-identities and the resolution of conflict and incompatibilities, Solomon speaks of primary and secondary identities that are experimented with and 'tried on'. An individual selects from a 'repertoire of identity types associated with a type of work' which occurs at the intersection of individual history and social/cultural norms

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

and the conventions of a given domain of work' (Solomon 2007:7–9). This is a process that takes place in the course of the 'life history' of many interpreters, from training to steadily more professional experience: the 'trying out' of the various specialized areas of interpreting (and often translation alongside) and the different interpersonal and ethical demands of each. Wenger speaks of 'reconciliation' in the attempt to maintain one continuous identity across boundaries (Wenger 1998); the resolution of this imbalance has a powerful 'sense-making function'. Again, with conference interpreting this is less of an 'identity' problem (although it is a significant cognitive challenge in terms of the range of terminology domains) than it is with dialogic forms of interpreting (medical, business, legal/court, social, humanitarian, media, emergency and conflict, war, etc.). Slay and Smith also discuss identity formation of stigmatized groups and report how individuals adapt and adjust their identities during periods of career transition (Slay and Smith 2011:87). At a macro-level, this reflects the stigmatization of precisely these sub-genres of interpreting, historically, compared to the more high-prestige conference interpreting. Whether or not this is what the future holds for the interpreting profession *tout court* is difficult to predict, but seems unlikely.

Current issues

The integration process

We have seen in Pratt *et al.*'s (2006) data and the framework they suggest that the development of professional identity follows a trajectory of training to specialization to fully responsible professional to continued professional experience, and each of these phases, or strands of professional identity, are constantly negotiated. The first phase is clearly that of completing the training period, of leaving a protected world of limited responsibility and entering a much less reassuring one in which budding professionals are responsible for their own actions and the welfare of people who depend on their services. In some of the prototypical professions such as medicine and law, the 'boundary crossing' from student to practitioner is more gradual and passes through a period of apprenticeship (internship, residency, specialization), which again is fragmented into various sub-specialties. In interpreting, this transition is far more abrupt and less cushioned by an adequate apprenticeship period where novices can try out their skills in a real-life situation supported by peers until they master the necessary skills and are able to deal maturely with potential 'identity violations'.

In other words, interpreters 'grow into' their professional identity, which starts with theoretical and practical training (when this is the case) and continues with work experience; it is not 'ready' and 'fixed in stone' as soon as they complete the training period, but continues throughout their professional life. Thus, the individual actively constructs his or her own identity (Pratt *et al.* 2006:237). The function, and power, of the surrounding professional community through peer feedback and the powerful role of national and pan-national associations for conference interpreters (and court and medical interpreters in the US, for example), is a major conditioning factor in this identity-forming period, however, and the stronger the peer feedback and surrounding pressure (of training institutions and of professional associations) is, the more the individual will conform to the norms provided during the training period.

If the entire training phase is absent and interpreters lack both practical skills and a professional identity, *ad hoc* interpreters will likely find identity-resolution and integrity violation even more difficult to negotiate, and will most likely adhere to the identity conferred on them by each individual client. Those sub-professions which are backed by strong training institutions

and associations are much less vulnerable to the pressures and conditioning factors found in those forms of interpreting that are far more closely linked to, and arguably more dependent on, institutions.

Identity and context, profession and state – a mutually interactive relationship

As in virtually all of the studies following what we might refer to as the 'post-structuralist turn' in a range of academic disciplines (sociology, anthropology, philosophy language studies, cultural studies, psychology, but also economics and law), Deters (2012) acknowledges in her study the connection and recursive interaction between discourse, identity (individual and collective), agency (individual and collective) and contextual factors, as expressed through social, cultural, political, ideological, historical as well as cognitive and physiological variables. This 'turn' reflects a deeper understanding in the humanities, one that has informed academic literature for the last few decades, of the reciprocally impacting connection between language and the individual, between individual and society, between thought/cognition and context, between form, content and context, and between a text and its interpretation (in both senses of the word). Meaning is no longer seen as a 'fixed', unified, stable entity but is dynamically created through discourses and practices; meaning, through discourse and other semiotic practices, is constantly 'in process' (for one of the earliest studies in IS see Metzger 1999). This has been precisely the locus of the 'cultural turn' in interpreting and translation studies the last decade or so (somewhat longer in TS). It has deeply affected the meta-practice of interpreting in the form of research and the acknowledgment of the wide range of contextual impact factors on the interpreted rendition, as well as the recognition that interpreting is never a 'neutral' or 'invisible' act. As such, it has affected the meta-interpretation of the profession and its academic/intellectual identity and positioning in an array of other academic disciplines. Whether or not it has affected interpreting performance is hard to say: In other words, has the cultural turn provided the individual interpreter with the authority to be more 'involved' in the communicative act and in his/her rendition? Again, this seems more likely to happen in the realm of dialogic forms of interpreting rather than in conference interpreting. It will be interesting to see whether or not descriptive research on the interpreter's self-perception and role, such as Angelelli's (2004b) work, receptive of the interpreter's impact on the communicative act, will in time feed back into interpreting practice and 'authorize', and thus consolidate, that potential leeway further (this relates specifically to community-based forms of interpreting). It is hard to say whether the meta-forms of the profession (academic literature) have the strength and power to change its very practice and thus self-perception, professional identity, or other factors such as accommodation to the requirements of client institutions (see Shlesinger 2009 for a discussion on the interface between theory and practice).

Recommendations

The need for strong professional identities

One of the aims of a professional community should thus be to encourage a strong identity to enable practitioners to perform well and effectively, to increase motivation and job satisfaction (Baxter 2011:17), to form and maintain a robust community of practice that is in a position to set standards, and to achieve a sense of meaningfulness and job satisfaction. These qualities can counteract interpreter-related stressors such as burn-out, role-confusion, lack of autonomy/discretion, lack of recognition, lack of training and accreditation opportunities, lack of professional group membership, etc. A strong professional identity not only improves performance

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

(performance quality is critical to the professions interpreters are serving, it is not just an esthetical ideal), but also the sense of group belonging, a space in which to share ideas, experiences and problems. By this means, interpreters can improve working conditions and provide a sense of continuity as a profession from past to future.

Does a lack of a robust, clear-cut identity as perceived both by the professional and the surrounding community lead to an erosion of the professional self? Does it impact on professional salience and effectiveness? The answer to both of these questions is, this chapter argues, unequivocally yes, and it is therefore crucial to support measures at all levels – training, recruitment, accreditation – to enable a solid professional identity. Interpreting is developing rapidly in the direction of increased professionalization in all sectors, as witnessed by a burgeoning literature (which in itself is testimony to a strong basis of academic research), an increasing number of international conferences dedicated specifically to sub-sectors of interpreting – a wide range of training opportunities, codes of ethics and standards of practice that are increasingly sophisticated – in contrast to the early reductive and overly prescriptive norms, and accreditation systems in many countries around the world. And in those countries that as yet have a very ill-defined professional status and a loosely connected professional community, significant improvements are being made too, not least with the encouragement of pan-national policies (for example the 2010 European Union directive on translation and interpreting in the legal sector). Whether or not the political, social and cultural factors will foster these trends in the future remains to be seen and depends on many unpredictable factors – not only political developments but demographic and migratory developments, in turn based on push-and-pull factors of migration such as war, natural disaster, ecological changes, political developments, the distribution of resources, and economic crises.

Implications for training

There are links between training, prestige and status, i.e. trainees' perception of themselves as future fully-fledged professionals and of the prestige and status of their respective professions. The data also suggest that competence assessment coincides with identity enrichment strategies and that perceived competence is related to learning through work ('you learn the most about surgery by doing surgery, there's no replacement'; Pratt *et al.* 2006:258). This principle is perfectly applicable interpreting and suggests that giving trainees professionally relevant tasks might speed up learning cycles and the perception of professional integrity. In conference interpreting, this has already been established, but in the emerging sub-disciplines that have fewer training opportunities, practical training programmes should be boosted.

If the first and most profound imprinting of professional identity takes place during the training period, the degree to which a training curriculum is standardized or semi-standardized will impact deeply on the development of the individual's professional self-perception and on the development of the profession collectively (see Chapter 25 on pedagogy). It should be recognized that the professional norms and codes of ethics reflect our cultural systems and belief. However, a base level of standardization for the profession *tout court* would encourage an identity consolidation process, not least in an era of increased globalization and internationalization. At the same time, there must be some acknowledgement of the need for flexibility in accommodating the needs of the institutions interpreters work with, the cultures they work within, and the peculiar characteristics of some of the more 'special-needs' areas. Such flexibility can be introduced at the training stage, but also through role models in a successive phase where the less clear-cut 'real-life' demands of an interpreting situation can be observed and internalized. Validation through peer feedback and through role models is also an important means of strengthening professional identity.

Future directions

It has been mentioned above that it is difficult to see which changes interpreting might be subject to in the coming decades, partly as a result of technology that will probably pave the way for profound changes in the discipline. Referring to the translating profession, Dam (2013) shows in a social-constructivist approach how the profession(al) is developed and arguably constructed through the social media, specifically blogs: 'they blog for empowerment'. Dam's results show how weblogs enhanced the translators' and the translation profession's status as well as being a vehicle for networking, building communities and bringing visibility to other translators and to the translation profession.

Communication technology is likely to become a powerful tool of identity formation for the translating and interpreting profession, as for many other professions in the future. The accessibility of the Internet to all users, bypassing the gatekeeping function of other identity-forming fora and communication channels such as academic publishing and professional associations, is both positive and 'democratic'. It can exponentially increase the statistical representation of the views expressed, but its very freedom means that there is no controlling filter in the form of carefully reflected and peer-reviewed claims, but a more spontaneous and immediate discourse system that the blog permits. Social media are thus a powerful identity-constructing channel for the future of the interpreting profession, and as Dam claims for the translation profession, a discourse that can itself contribute to the development of the profession. In other words, more visibility and empowering discourse on issues of professionalism increasingly consolidate the profession through that discourse: 'I assume that blogging translators contribute to changing (or perpetuating) existing perceptions of themselves and their profession – including their occupational status – by talking or writing about these issues in a certain way' (Dam 2013). This is certainly an encouraging and empowering opportunity also for the interpreting profession.

Moving in the direction of more collaboration with the institutions with which interpreters work – at the same time maintaining a distinctive professional identity and autonomy – will be a major challenge, because that collaboration is essential, as Garrett (2009) reminds us, and the balance delicate. It is also possible, as Grbić (2010) observes, that new *classifications* resulting from sociopolitical changes will emerge and create new professional fragmentations, constellations, collaborations and partnerships. As it is, the neat distinctions between interpreter and translator, freelance/staff, and other binaries are undergoing changes, restructuring and 'reshuffling' (see Chapter 26 on non-professional interpreters). New hybrid forms of interpretation (live subtitling in the theatre, sign language 'translating'; Grbić 2010: 112) await the profession in the future, and it will have to be solid enough and flexible enough to survive as a profession. Economic conditions and changing market demand might in the future favour different or less marked segmentation into sub-genres of translation and interpreting.

Acknowledgement

The author is deeply grateful to the editors and to Emanuelle Gallez for their valuable comments; any errors and all opinions expressed are the sole responsibility of the author.

Notes

1 Like many other professions, community interpreting is intrinsically linked to the institutions – public and private – it serves. The degree to which it is in a position to autonomously establish its own criteria in terms of mandate, code of ethics, working conditions, etc. depends on a number of factors, and varies greatly from country to country (dependency being greater in those countries in which the

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

profession is less established). The degree of autonomy depends also on the status-power differential – real, or as it is perceived by the public – differential between the community interpreting profession and the institution. In those countries where public funding is inadequate and this is exacerbated by a conservative immigration policy (little funding for immigrant-related services), this dependence is strong. In countries where the importance of community interpreting is recognized (partly mirroring national policies and national immigration history and tradition) and adequately funded and – possibly as a result of this – community interpreting has emerged as a strong autonomous profession with a very robust professional identity individually and collectively, this is much less the case.

2 There is a large body of literature on *professional language* that addresses language use in various professions and how discourse is constitutive of these professions and thus the professional identity of both individual and group, but this is not an issue that will be addressed in this chapter.

Further reading

Wenger, Etienne (1997), *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grbić, Nadja (2010), 'Boundary work' as a concept for studying professionalization processes in the interpreting field in *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5:1 (2010), pp 109–123.

Sela-Sheffy, R and Shlesinger, Miriam, eds (2011), *Identity and Status in the Translational Professions*, John Benjamins: Amsterdam.

Hale, Sandra (2008), *Community Interpreting*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

References

Abbott, Andrew (1988), *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Angelelli, Claudia (2004a), *Medical Interpreting and Cross-cultural Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

——(2004b), *Re-visiting the Role of the Interpreter: A Study of Conference, Court and Medical Interpreters in Canada, Mexico and the United States*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Bahadir, Şebnem (2010), The task of the interpreter in the struggle of the other for empowerment. Mythical utopia or sine qua non of professionalism? *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5:1, pp. 124–39.

Baxter, Jacqueline (2011), *Public Sector Professional Identities: A Review of the Literature*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Beijaard Douwe, Meijer Paulien and Nico Verloop, N (2004), Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, pp. 107–119.

Dam, Helle V. (2013), The translator approach in translation studies – reflections based on a study of translators' weblogs. In *Haasteena näkökulma, Perspektivet som utmaning, Point of view as challenge, Perspektivität als Herausforderung. VAKKI-symposiumi XXXIII 7.–8.2.2013. VAKKI Publications 2. Vaasa, eds. Eronen, M. and M. Rodi-Risberg,* pp16–35. available on http://www.vakki.net/publications/2013/VAKKI2013_Dam.pdf.

Dam, Helle V. and Karen Korning Zethsen (2009), Who said low status? A study on factors affecting the perception of translator status. *JosTrans* 12, pp 2–36.

——(2013), A study of the occupational status of Danish EU interpreters as compared to Danish EU translators. *Interpreting* 15:2, pp. 229–59.

Deters, Ping (2012), *Identity, Agency and the Acquisition of Professional Language and Culture*. London: Continuum.

Diriker, Ebru (2004), *De-/Re-Contextualising Conference Interpreting. Interpreters in the Ivory Tower?* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Garrett, Pam (2009), Healthcare interpreter policy: Policy determinants and current issues in the Australian context. *Interpreting and Translation* 1:2, pp. 44–54.

Grbić, Nadja (2010), "Boundary work" as a concept for studying professionalization processes in the interpreting field. *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5:1, pp 109–23.

Downloaded By: 10.3.97.143 At: 08:46 11 Dec 2023; For: 9781315745381, chapter27, 10.4324/9781315745381.ch27

Hale, Sandra (2008), *Community Interpreting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hall, Stuart (1997), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: SAGE Publications.

Hotho, Sabine (2008), Professional identity – product of structure, product of choice. Linking changing professional identity and changing professions. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 21:6, pp. 721–42.

Larson, Magali Sarfatti (1977), *The Rise of Professionalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Metzger, Melanie (1999), *Sign Language Interpreting, Deconstructing the Myth of Neutrality*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Mikkelson, Holly (1996a), Community Interpreting. An emerging profession. *Interpreting* 1:1, pp. 125–29.

Mikkelson, H. (1996b), The professionalization of community interpreting. In Muriel M. Jérôme-O'Keefe (ed.), *Global Vision, Proceedings of the 37th Annual Conference of the American Translators Association,* American Translators Association, pp. 77–89.

Molander, Anders and Terum, Lars Inge, eds. (2008), *Profesjonssstudier*, Universitetsforlaget: Oslo.

Monzó, Esther (2009), Legal and translational occupations in Spain. Regulations and specialization in jurisdictional struggles.*Translation and Interpreting Studies* 4:2, pp. 135–54.

Morris, Ruth (2010), Images of the court interpreter: Professional identity, role definition and self-image in *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5:1, pp. 20–40.

Ozolins, Uldis (1998) *Interpreting and Translating in Australia: Current Issues and International Comparisons*, Melbourne: NLIA.

——(1999), Communication needs and interpreting in multilingual settings: The international spectrum of response. In Roda Roberts, Silvana E. Carr, Diana Abraham and Aideen Dufour (eds), *The Critical Link 2: Interpreters in the Community*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Pöchhacker, Franz (1999), 'Getting organized': The evolution of community interpreting. *Interpreting* 4:1, pp. 125–40.

——(2004), *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. London: Routledge.

Pöchhacker, Franz and Shlesinger, Miriam (eds.) (2002), *The Interpreting Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.

Pratt, Michael, Rockman, Kevin and Kaufman, Jeffrey (2006), Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49:2, pp. 235–62.

Prunč, Erich (2010), Rights, realities and responsibilities in community interpreting. In Claudia Kainz, Erich Prunč and Rafael Schögler (eds), *Modelling the Field of Community Interpreting: Questions of Methodology in Research and Training*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 49–66.

Roy, Cynthia (2000), *Interpreting as a Discourse Process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rudvin, Mette (2007), Professionalism and ethics in community interpreting: The impact of individualist versus collective group identity. *Interpreting. International Journal of research and practice and in interpreting* 9:1, pp. 47–69.

Schein, Edgar (1978), *Career Dynamics: Matching Individual and Organizational Needs*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Sela-Sheffy, Rakefe and Shlesinger, Miriam (eds) (2011), *Identity and Status in the Translational Professions*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Setton, Robin and Liangliang, Alice Guo (2009), Attitudes to role, status and professional identity in interpreters and translators with Chinese in Shanghai and Taipei. *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 4:2, pp. 210–38.

Shlesinger, Miriam, (2009), Crossing the divide: What researchers and practitioners can learn from one another. *The International Journal of Translation and Interpreting Research* 1, pp. 1–14.

Slay, Holly S. and Smith, Delmonize A. (2011), Professional identity construction: using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human Relations* 64:1, pp. 85–107.

Solomon, Jeff (2007), *Metaphors at Work: Identify and Meaning in Professional Life*. Available at http://www.thegoodproject.org/pdf/JSolomon-Metaphors-at-Work-Manuscript-Nov-2007.pdf.

Takeda, Kayoko (2010), *Interpreting the Tokyo War Crimes Trial: A Sociopolitical Analysis*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

Tseng, Joseph (1992), Interpreting as an emerging profession in Taiwan – a sociological model. MA Thesis. Fu Jen Catholic University.

Wadensjö, Cecilia (1998), *Interpreting as Interaction*. London: Longman.

Wenger, Etienne (1998), *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.