TRAINING PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES IN HOW TO COMMUNICATE VIA INTERPRETERS IN NORWAY: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES. / FORMACIÓN DE LOS EMPLEADOS DE LOS SERVICIOS PÚBLICOS SOBRE CÓMO COMUNICARSE A TRAVÉS DE LOS INTÉRPRETES EN NORUEGA: LOGROS Y DESAFÍOS.

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Abstract: The comprehensive governmental approach to interpreting in the public sector in Norway includes interpreter accreditation, interpreter training, and the Norwegian National Register of Interpreters. In this article, we argue that training public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters should also be a crucial element to ensure quality interpreting and thus equal access to services for everyone. We analyze the training options in Norway, not as an isolated phenomenon, but in the context of the actors, relations, and systems that constitute interpreting in the public sector. The analysis consists of two main parts: 1) mapping the field of interpreting in the Norwegian public sector based on Ozolins's (2000; 2010) model of governmental responses and the role of interpreter-user training and 2) examining the underlying dynamics of the current state, focusing on the role of the market and the connections between training interpreter-users and attitudes toward interpreting in the public sector.

Keywords: Interpreter-user training; Public service employees; Communication via interpreter.

Resumen: La estrategia nacional noruega sobre interpretación en los servicios públicos abarca la acreditación y formación de intérpretes y el llamado Registro Nacional de Intérpretes. En este artículo defendemos la necesidad de formar también a los empleados públicos en la comunicación mediada por intérprete para garantizar la calidad de la interpretación y el acceso igualitario a estos servicios. Las opciones formativas en Noruega se analizan no como fenómenos aislados, sino en el contexto de los actores, relaciones y sistemas que conforman la interpretación social. Nuestro análisis tiene dos partes: 1) radiografía de la interpretación en los servicios públicos noruegos según el modelo de respuestas gubernamentales de Ozolins (2000; 2010) y papel de la formación de los usuarios de interpretación y 2) análisis de las dinámicas que hoy día subyacen a esta cuestión, especialmente el papel del mercado y la relación entre formación y actitud de los usuarios de interpretación en el sector público.

Palabras clave: Formación de usuarios de interpretación; Empleados públicos; Comunicación mediada por intérprete.

1. Introduction

Norway has become increasingly linguistically diverse due to recent immigration, which has grown from 50,000 to over 800,000 over the last 50 years (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli, 2008). In 2018, 17.3% of the population comprising 5.3 million inhabitants in Norway had

immigrant backgrounds, coming from 221 countries and speaking more than 200 languages (Statistics Norway, 2018).

Providing equal and fair access to services for everyone in the public sector is a goal for the Norwegian authorities and is explained in laws and regulations (e.g., Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2018). The linguistically diverse society in this context presents challenges. Currently, it is commonplace for professionals in most, if not all, fields of the public sector to encounter language barriers in everyday practice. Satisfactory communication between public service employees and service users is vital for the provision of safe, high-quality services. Inadequate handling of language barriers can lead to misunderstandings, place service users at risk, and result in the denial of access to services. Thus, if not addressed with appropriate measures, failing to overcome language barriers can cause unfairness and inequity (Jahr, 2005; Kale, 2018; NOU, 2014).

To help ensure satisfactory communication in public services, Norwegian authorities have initiated measures, including interpreter training and accreditation, the Norwegian National Register of Interpreters (hereafter, the Register), and interpreter-user training, to improve the quality and availability of interpreting services (NOU, 2014). In this article, we focus on *one* of these initiatives—training public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters. This initiative has not been fully implemented (NOU, 2014) and has not received due attention in Norwegian practice and research. With the model of interpreting as interaction (Wadensjö, 1998) as our point of departure, we claim that interpreter-user training should be a crucial element in improving the quality of interpreting in the public sector. Against this background, we raise questions concerning the current status of interpreter-user training. Our first research question seeks to map the achievements and the challenges of interpreter-user training in Norway.

As interpreter-user training is not an isolated phenomenon, it ought to be examined in the broader societal context, for example, its relation to legal regulation of the field, interpreter training, and interpreting service providers. The provision of interpreting services is not regulated in Norway, and anybody can be a provider. Surveys conducted in 2013 and 2017 showed the market as considerable and increasing in value. Based on an estimate in 2017, 746,000 interpreting assignments costing 826 million NOK were delivered in Norway (IMDi, 2018a: 4), almost double the previous estimate in 2013 (343,000 assignments costing 490 million NOK) (NOU, 2014: 13). Statistics in 2018 revealed that interpreters listed in the Register were used in only approximately one-third of all assignments in public service (IMDi and NHO, 2018: 4). A disturbing finding in itself, it is even more puzzling in the light of another finding from the survey, namely that registered interpreters were not working at full capacity and wanted more work. The interpreters from this survey stated that on average, only 57% of their capacity was used (IMDi, 2018a). Our second research question thus concerns the unregulated market. By focusing on interpreter-user training, we discuss how the unregulated market influences the measures for improving the quality of interpreting in the public sector.

This article is structured in the following way: in Section 2, we present our theoretical and contextual perspectives, followed by an overview of our methodological approach in Section 3. The first research question is addressed in Section 4, describing the interpreter-user training in the context of interpreting in the Norwegian public sector. The second research question is addressed in Section 5, with an analysis of the underlying dynamics of the current state, focusing on the role of the unregulated provision of interpreting services. In Section 6, we conclude the article by identifying future priorities in research and practice.

2. Theoretical and contextual perspectives on training public service employees

2.1 Interpreting as interaction – a pas de trois

Our theoretical approach to interpreting in the public sector is in line with the interpreting model presented in Wadensjö's seminal work, *Interpreting as Interaction* (1998). According to this model, all communication participants contribute to meaning making in contrast to understanding interpreting as the interpreter's sole responsibility. The interactional model has also recently been acknowledged by researchers focusing on interpreting in the public sector, including topics about interpreter-user training (e.g., Li et al., 2017; Hsieh, 2018). Wadensjö (1998) suggests a *pas de trois* (a dance for three) as a metaphor for interpreting. In institutional dialogues, the typical dancing partners are interpreters, minority language speakers, and public service employees. To make the dance flow, it is necessary that all dancing partners agree about what form of dance they engage in and that they all know the dance steps well.

Interpreter-users also need to know the steps and the type of dance. This is our rationale behind the need for interpreter-user training. Skillful dancers typically attend dance courses; similarly, interpreter-users will benefit from training. When we mention interpreter-users in this article, we refer to public service employees. The minority language speakers' need to learn how to communicate via interpreters is not discussed here but should be addressed in future research and practice.

For the interpreter, knowing the steps in the *pas de trois* means being qualified. However, the term *qualified* is contested, as discussed in this article. We use the terms *qualified/unqualified* and *registered/unregistered* to reflect different actors' uses of the concepts in particular contexts. In the official Norwegian documents (NOU, 2014; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019), the term *qualified interpreters* refers to those listed in the Register even though the Register's categories cover a wide range of qualifications. The Register consists of five categories, Category 1 being the best. Categories 1–3 comprise the interpreters who have passed an accreditation exam or completed university-level interpreter training or both. Translators who have finished a short course in ethics and interpreting techniques are placed in Category 4. The minimum requirements for attaining Category 5 are documented bilingual skills and completion of the short course required in Category 4 (IMDi, 2009b).

For the purpose of readability, our investigation's objective—training public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters—is referred to as *interpreter-user training* and *training of public service employees*. In line with the model of interpreting as interaction, we hold the view that interpreter-user training is an important contribution for improving the quality of interpreting in the public sector. Although recent international publications have addressed interpreter-user training in (among others) legal and healthcare settings (e.g., Avidicus, 2008–2013; Cox and Li, 2019; Hsieh, 2018; Krystallidou et al., 2018), the call for further attention to this topic in research remains valid (Corsellis, 2000, 2008; Pöchhacker, 2016). Within the scope of this article, we focus on the Norwegian situation.

2.2 Comprehensive approach: including the training of public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters

How is the interactional approach to interpreting mirrored in governmental policies? Governments worldwide have responded differently to multilingual interpreting needs. Ozolins has outlined a model of development based on various governmental responses (Ozolins, 2000, 2010). According to this model, development can be identified through four stages, from neglect to comprehensiveness:

> [A]t first there is neglect, then some institutions (typically Police and hospitals) find *ad hoc* means of getting some interpreting done (by friends, family, volunteers); many countries have then moved on to provide some generic language services (for example a Telephone Interpreting Service, or appointing interpreters to the staff of hospitals). A comprehensive approach (at that time best exemplified by Australia and Sweden) involved not only generic or specialised language services, but also a certification system, a training regime, and a degree of policy planning and evaluation (Ozolins, 2010: 195).

Although Ozolins (2010: 195) criticizes his own model, pointing out that it has proven to be too simple, it is still useful in tracing possible stages of development of language services and supportive infrastructure. In the light of the model, the Norwegian government, represented by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI)[1], has taken a *comprehensive* approach, after the initial phases of neglect and ad hoc measures. As Norway follows the Nordic model of a welfare state that takes responsibility for providing universally available and accessible services for all, in domains such as healthcare provision, judiciary, and education (Christiansen et al., 2006), the state is expected to assume an active role in regulating interpreting in the public sector as well. The current Norwegian official approach is outlined in different political documents, most recently in the Official Norwegian Report "Interpreting in the public sector: a question relating to the right to due process of law and equal treatment" (NOU, 2014).

The comprehensive governmental approach in Norway includes several measures, such as a certification system—an accreditation exam (since 1997), the establishment of university-level professional training (sporadic since 1985 and permanent at the Oslo Metropolitan University [OsloMet] since 2007), with a bachelor's program in public service interpreting (since 2017), and the Register (since 2006) (IMDi, 2014; Skaaden, 2013, 2018). One of the most important initiatives raised in the NOU was the proposal of a law regulating public institutions' responsibility for the use of interpreters in Norway (the Interpreting Act). Work on the law started in 2015, and a draft is currently in circulation (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019). Another NOU proposal, a regulation forbidding the use of child-interpreters, was enacted in 2016 (Forbud mot bruk av barn som tolk, 2016).

In addition to the initiatives discussed by Ozolins (2010), the Norwegian approach also aims to encompass training public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters (Felberg, 2011, 2013; Skaaden, 2013; IMDi, 2014). The NOU (2014: 154) argues that successful communication via interpreters depends not only on qualified interpreters but also on knowledgeable interpreter-users, that is, public service employees. It goes even further, stating that it is the public service employees' duty to decide whether the communication with public service users is adequate. It is important for all public service employees to know what the interpreter's function is and to be aware of how communication via interpreters influences their own professionalism (NOU, 2014: 159). The draft of the Interpreting Act proposes that public service employees use qualified interpreters in encounters with language barriers.
When asked specifically, public service employees report both their need and wish to learn more about how to communicate via interpreters. This view is documented in five reports dealing with different areas of the public sector, such as courts, schools, child welfare services, health services, and social services (IMDi, no date, 2007a, 2008, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b). However, other reports indicate that some public service employees remain unaware of their responsibility for communication via interpreters (Rambøl, 2010; Berg et al., 2018) and will not seek training options. Against this background, the current situation and its dynamics need to be explored further.

[1]The IMDI plays a strategic role in the development of interpreting in the Norwegian public sector.

2.3 Exploring dynamics within a phase of comprehensiveness

When criticizing his own model, Ozolins (2010: 195) comments that it "presents a too linear and teleological model, as if there were to be an inevitable move of countries from ad hoc to the comprehensive stage". We add yet another critical viewpoint and argue that once a phase of development has been stipulated in official documents, the actual measures need to be defended, maintained, and promoted in practice on the ground. In short, the stages of development are not static; thus, the dynamics within the phases should also be explored.

One factor that contributes to the dynamics is the attitude toward interpreting. The official attitude toward interpreting that is promoted in the official documents is not necessarily shared by all public service employees (see IMDi, 2014; Berg et al., 2018). There are ongoing debates on what it means or should mean to be an interpreter in public service settings (Berg et al., 2018; IMDi and NHO, 2018).

Another important factor that influences the dynamics is the provision of interpreting services. The market associated with the provision of interpreting services in Norway offers opportunities for substantial profit (IMDi, 2018a: 4). Both private and public service providers (state in-house and county service providers) deliver interpreting services. The private providers dominate the market; 72% (540,185) of the assignments are taken by private providers, while 19% (138,890) are fulfilled by providers managed by counties, and 9% (66,996) are taken by in-house state-operated providers (IMDi and NHO, 2018: 5). A recent development is that the private interpreting service providers have been organized under the Norwegian Federation of Service Industries and Retail Trade (NHO, 2019), which is placed under the NHO Central (The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise), an umbrella organization that is the largest and strongest syndicate in Norway. Becoming part of the NHO has given interpreting service providers a powerful position from which they can negotiate their own interests.

While the government has initiated some measures, such as interpreter accreditation and education, listing in the Register, and training public service employees, the provision of interpreting services has not been regulated. This implies that anybody can provide interpreting services without being responsible for the quality of service. This raises questions as to how the unregulated provision of interpreting services influences the governmental measures, including interpreter-user training and governmental attitude toward interpreting.

3. Methodology

To answer our two research questions, we have used a mixed-methods approach involving document analysis and two surveys.

3.1 Document analysis

To gather information on how the Norwegian government has approached the topic of interpreter-user training, we have reviewed published reports and articles (Felberg, 2013, 2016), political documents (e.g., NOU, 2014; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019), official reports (e.g., IMDi 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2014), and statistics (e.g., IMDi and NHO, 2018). The Official Norwegian Report (NOU, 2014), has a special status in this article because it is the first and only one dealing with the topic of interpreting in the Norwegian public sector, and it provides a comprehensive review of the state of affairs. To obtain information on the number of interpreting assignments, the costs involved, and the use

of registered versus unregistered interpreters, we have consulted the available statistics (IMDi and NHO, 2018). These recent statistics include the data provided by a large number of private interpreting service providers, which was not the case previously.

To describe a particular interpreter-user course that IMDi commissioned for OsloMet to develop, we draw on published materials (Felberg, 2013, 2016), as well as internal reports and evaluations of the course. The evaluations were obtained through standardized forms filled out by course participants (n = 335, gathered from 15 courses over the 2011–2015 period). The information about the number of courses, including the cancelled ones, was obtained through e-mail correspondence with the administrative coordinator. In this article, the course evaluation and information is referred to as the *Evaluation of OsloMet courses*.

3.2 Surveys

3.2.1 Questionnaire sent to interpreting service providers (Survey 1)

To have an idea of interpreter-user training, we sent a questionnaire to the three types of interpreting service providers existing in Norway (public, in-house, and private interpreting services): (1) the three (out of nine) largest public interpreting service providers (based in Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim), (2) the two (out of five) largest in-house service providers (the interpreting office at Ullevål Hospital and the Directorate of Migration - UDI), and (3) the NHO–Service og Handel, which organizes private providers. The NHO received information from the following interpreting service providers: Hero Tolk, Semantix, Amesto, Salita, and Skiwo. All recipients responded via e-mail.

The questionnaire was sent from September to October 2018 and consisted of the following questions: (1) Do you offer courses in communication via interpreters for interpreter-users? For whom? (2) What is the duration of the courses? (3) How many courses have you offered this year? Over the last five years? How many participants attended the courses?

3.2.2 Questionnaire sent to teaching personnel (Survey 2)

To learn about the current situation regarding the topic of communication via interpreters as part of the curriculum in basic professional education we sent an online questionnaire to all teaching personnel in the Faculty of Health Sciences at OsloMet. The survey was conducted from January to March 2018. We received 119 answers out of approximately 600 invitations. We asked the following questions: (1) Is communication via interpreters a topic in your teaching? (2) Is the language barrier between patients and healthcare personnel a challenge in the field of expertise that you teach? (3) Give examples of situations where it is of particular importance that patients and healthcare personnel communicate well (related to your field of practice). (4) Related to your teaching, do you need more knowledge of the topic about communication via interpreters? (5) Do you have any additional comments or recommendations?

4. Interpreter-user training: mapping the current situation in Norway

4.1 Interpreter-user training: a variety of courses

In Norway, different types of interpreter-user training have been available since the 1980s. The overview of the training options given in the NOU (2014: 154-160), covering the time span

until 2013, shows that training options range from in-house training courses, such as in a hospital, to externally organized, classroom courses, such as those offered by a university or a service provider. The courses also vary from on-site and e-learning types to a combination of the two.

On-site courses in communication via interpreters are often organized as part of other courses, for example, communication in general, migration, or diversity issues, or they may be provided as comprising a separate topic. The courses vary in duration from one hour to several days. The content of the courses is not explicitly addressed in the NOU; however, the need for quality control of the offered courses is pointed out (NOU, 2014: 159), and the content should reflect the official attitude toward interpreting and interpreter training courses.

One example of an e-learning training course developed by Ahus Hospital near Oslo, in cooperation with OsloMet, consists of three half-hour modules. The first module introduces the topic of interpreting, the second focuses on remote interpreting, and the third (called Interpreters' Voices) stimulates reflections on practical and ethical problems in communication via interpreters in healthcare services. Developed in close collaboration with users, these modules combine different degrees of interactivity, making this approach a popular way to learn. The modules are still being used and are now available online to all interested parties (IMDi, 2018b).

4.2 Toward standardization of training options (available to public service employees) in how to communicate via interpreters

One course was developed at OsloMet by interpreter trainers (including one of the authors of this article), in compliance with governmental recommendations. OsloMet occupies a special position in Norway with regard to interpreter qualifications, as it is the sole training institution that offers a BA degree in interpreting in the public sector, as well as the accreditation of interpreters and the bilingual test for admittance to the Register.

The OsloMet course was financed by IMDi, with the underlying idea of standardizing the course content and making it available to all public service employees. The overall aim of the course is to empower public service employees to take (back) responsibility for communication by, for example, using the interpreters listed in the Register.

The discussion about what is understood as *qualified interpreters* is an important topic in the OsloMet courses. During the course, interpreter qualifications are presented and discussed in detail. The Register is presented as one of the most important tools for quality assurance available to public service employees. The differences among the five categories are explained (see Section 2.1), and the consequences of using the different categories are discussed. This knowledge aims at empowering public service employees to be more aware of the choices they make and the consequences of those choices. The role of public service employees in communication is foregrounded as a crucial contribution to quality assurance in communication.

The learning outcomes of the one-day course are defined as follows:

> The professionals working in the public sector will, upon the completion of the course, have achieved the following learning outcomes:
>
> 1. Knowledge about
>   • how language barriers influence public service employees' own professionalism
>   • the interpreter's area of responsibility and working methods
>   • prerequisites for successful communication via interpreter
>
> 2. Skills in
>   • how better to communicate via interpreter in the most usual situations

3. General competence regarding
   • how to prepare for successful communication via interpreter
   • how to understand the connection between one's own professionalism and communication via interpreter (Felberg, 2016: 142–143).

The learning outcomes of the course mirror the official policy, and the course was developed in close cooperation with IMDi and public service employees. The course consists of (among other topics) general information about the field of interpreting in the Norwegian public sector, the official view of the interpreter's and the interpreter-user's areas of responsibility, information about the unregulated market, interpreters' required qualifications to be listed in the Register, and laws and regulations controlling interpreting in Norway (Felberg, 2013: 145). The outline of the course and other information are easily accessible online to all interested parties (OsloMet, 2019b).

Felberg (2013, 2016) provides a detailed description of the course. The course is recommended by IMDi (2018b) on its resource page about communication via interpreters. Offered to employees in the Norwegian public sector, the course has been evaluated by more than 90% of the participants as good and relevant for their work (Evaluation of OsloMet courses). However, the number of courses delivered over the last few years is very low (e.g., only three in 2018). Potential buyers and course participants report two main obstacles: the course length and price. One-day courses do not suit public service employees because it is often difficult to be away from work for a full-day course. They require shorter courses, for example, one to two hours (Evaluation of OsloMet courses). A course costs approximately 200-300 euros per person. If sponsored by IMDi, for example, the courses have been well attended, indicating that the price is a problem (Evaluation of OsloMet courses).

4.3 Defragmentation of the training?

Because of the declining distribution of the courses in communication via interpreters offered by OsloMet, we wanted to access the information regarding interpreter-user training courses offered through other channels. Due to the lack of an overview of available training options for public service employees, we sent a questionnaire to private, in-house, and public providers of interpreting services to learn more about their offerings in terms of training options for public service employees (Survey 1). The survey results paint a complex picture. All service providers indicate that they offer courses for public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters. The courses last from one to three hours. Some providers (the number is unspecified by the respondents) offer free courses to customers who buy interpreting services from them.

The courses do not constitute the only method of training interpreter-users. Some providers use written materials, such as guidelines and e-learning programs, or organize meetings where stakeholders discuss the problems they encounter in communication via interpreters.

Similar to the case of the OsloMet course, some public providers report a decrease in the demand for interpreter-user courses (Survey 1, e.g., Oslo public provider). In this case, the main reason for the decline is quoted as the shortage of teaching personnel. Other providers indicate that they have persons designated for training interpreter-users (Survey 1, Bergen and Trondheim); in this way, they are more proactive in providing courses. In-house providers have better access to interpreter-users on a daily basis and are thus in a better position to offer individual guidance and have permanent slots in seminars for new employees, for example (Survey 1, the Interpreting Unit at Oslo University Hospital and the Directorate of Immigration).

Some providers report about their difficulty in motivating prospective attendees to participate in the courses course participation (Survey 1, NHO). The lack of financial resources and time are cited as the main reasons for not attending the courses. This finding overlaps with our own findings concerning OsloMet courses.

The content of the courses was not part of our survey. However, some providers volunteered information and described the content of their courses as consisting of how to succeed in using interpreting services, experience sharing, and how to increase the service quality. The information about the recommended content of the courses is readily available on the IMDi website so that it is possible to create courses that follow governmental policies. However, there are reasons to believe that the content of the courses delivered by private providers does not comply with the authorities' recommendations. One reason is the short duration of the courses in contrast to the recommended length. Another reason is that providers who employ bilinguals not listed in the Register as interpreters cannot be trusted to include the disapproval of such practice in the content of their courses.

4.4 Interpreter-user training as an integral part of training future professionals

In line with the NOU's (2014: 14-17) encouragement to introduce the topic of communication via interpreters in the basic education of relevant professionals, we wanted to map the current situation at OsloMet. OsloMet (2019a) educates future professionals, including nurses, teachers, and child welfare officers. We conducted a survey that asked the teaching personnel (in the training programs for healthcare professionals) several questions concerning communication via interpreters. Regarding whether the language barrier poses an actual challenge in the field of the medical practice that they teach, 89% (n = 106, N = 119) answer in the affirmative. Concerning the question of whether they include the topic of communication via interpreters in their study programs, only 29% (n = 34, N = 119) reply yes. As for the question of whether they need more knowledge about communication via interpreters, 40.7% respond that they do.

Although this is a small sample, it shows the tendency that although the language barrier is perceived as a common problem, the topic of communication via interpreters is not fully integrated in the curricula. This discrepancy is acknowledged by the respondents, who report that they need more knowledge about communication via interpreters. The ability to communicate via an interpreter is not categorized as a learning outcome; however, it might be addressed in practice and therefore be considered part of informal learning. However, we lack a systematic overview of what students learn and whether it is sufficient to enable them to communicate via interpreters.[2]

4.5 Summary

In summary, there is no clear-cut answer to our first research question about the situation of interpreter-user training in Norway due to several factors. The topic of communication via interpreters is not yet incorporated into the basic education of professionals (Survey 2). However, a variety of training options in how to communicate via interpreters is available to public service employees in Norway. Some training options follow governmental policy, but they are not fully utilized (Evaluation of OsloMet courses).

We have also found reasons to believe that some training options promote attitudes toward interpreting that do not comply with governmental recommendations and might

[2] To find more about formal and informal ways of how the topic is included in the basic education of professionals, OsloMet has allocated funds for a PhD fellow who will explore this topic further.

undermine the field of interpreting in the Norwegian public sector. This leads us to the next section, which explores the factors that contribute to this situation.

5. Current state of interpreter-user training and unregulated provision of interpreting services

In the light of the upcoming law and the other governmental efforts to improve the quality of interpreting in public services, it is important to gain a better understanding of the current state. In the following subsection, we discuss how the unregulated provision of interpreting services arguably contributes to undermining the governmental policies on interpreting, including interpreter-user training.

5.1 Unregulated provision of interpreting services in Norway

When public service employees purchase interpreter services from providers, the former expects the latter to provide qualified interpreters (Berg et al., 2018: 91, 96). This is a reasonable expectation because providers of other forms of professional services, such as those of nurses or doctors, would typically ensure quality. However, in the case of interpreting services, the situation is different. As mentioned earlier, public service employees are far from guaranteed to receive services from qualified interpreters, as only one-third of all assignments in public service is taken by registered interpreters (IMDi and NHO, 2018).

Recently, published statistics show substantial differences among providers regarding the frequency of providing unregistered versus registered interpreters. Private providers provide registered interpreters in only 23% of the assignments compared with 56% from county-level providers and 98% from in-house providers (IMDi and NHO, 2018: 5). Knowledge about quality in interpreting is necessary, not only for individual public service employees, but also for public service institutions, in the process of the selection of and agreements with interpreter service providers. In Norway, there are examples of public service institutions establishing in-house interpreter services (Tolkesentralen, 2018). The reason for this change in practice was the high number (over 80%) of assignments given to unregistered bilinguals provided by the private providers with which the public institutions had contracts (Linnestad and Fiva Buzungu, 2012a, 2012b). This number dropped dramatically; in 2017, only 2% of the assignments were taken by unregistered bilinguals (Tolkesentralen, 2018).

The fact that a considerable number of public service employees are unaware that this market is unregulated and that the tax payers via government may be paying for unqualified services is documented in several reports (Rambøl, 2010: 5; Berg et al., 2018). In the evaluation report of the Register (Rambøl, 2010: 5), 64% of the respondents (interpreter-users) indicated that they did not know about the Register even though it had existed for 10 years at the time of the survey.

It might be asked why providers do not provide registered interpreters. Their explanations vary, from being unable to find registered interpreters of rare languages to accepting particular assignments at a busy time (Bogacz, 2018). There are reasons to question some of the explanations, but it is beyond the scope of this article to examine their validity. The important point here is that there is still no regulation that hinders providers from selling services performed by unregistered bilinguals (Linnestad and Buzungu, 2012a, 2012b; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019). This means that the interpreter service providers make profits, regardless of their employed interpreters' qualifications. The data from the surveys strongly indicate that the interpreter service providers contravene the governmental

recommendation of prioritizing interpreters who are listed in the Register (NOU, 2014). Although it is not an illegal practice, it clearly undermines the purpose of the Register, and the practice weakens other governmental measures, including interpreter-user training.

This practice does not only influence the use of registered/unregistered interpreters but also has broader consequences that undermine the existing qualification system. As already described, the Register consists of five categories. However, some private providers have introduced additional categories, for example, Categories 5i, 6, and 7. These categories give the impression that they follow the official system as they connect to the Register's five categories (Berg et al., 2018: 96; Bogacz, 2018). These unofficial categories are described as consisting of bilinguals who have been tested by the providers and have taken internal courses organized by the same providers. In this way, the interpreting service providers advocate for parallel, non-standardized *qualification systems*. By blurring the difference between registered and unregistered interpreters, the providers challenge the official system and make it difficult for the buyers to understand what kinds of services they are receiving and what kind of *dance* they are participating in. This is especially the case if the buyers lack knowledge about interpreting quality assurance, and it is frustrating for those who know the system.

Parallel, competing constructs of the *qualified interpreter* also undermine the professionalization process of interpreting. For a comparison, imagine a situation where private providers of nurses and doctors advocate for those who lack the necessary education but are qualified through internal courses organized by the private providers. The interpreting profession has not achieved the same status as that of the medical profession in Norway, and it will be more difficult to do so unless stakeholders advocate for the use of qualified professionals. Public service employees can help in this endeavor by being aware of what interpreting is and how it influences their own profession.

5.2 The OsloMet course as a commodity?

The role assigned to the market has not only proven to be problematic regarding the provision of interpreting services, but it has also influenced the provision of training courses in compliance with the official standard. An example is the availability of the interpreter-user training course offered at OsloMet. In the pilot phase, the course was offered free of charge and was fully booked. After the pilot period, the course became part of the fee-based portfolio and became expensive for the buyers. The consequence was that the number of courses dropped dramatically (Evaluation of OsloMet courses).

Offering courses for a fee is not unusual in Norway, although studies are normally offered free of charge at all public universities. The new practice of charging for courses is due to the introduction of new forms of management associated with the market economy and new public management (Møller and Skedsmo, 2013). The training of public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters ended up in the *business department* of OsloMet, and the distribution sank. This situation raises the question of whether the transfer of this course from its public-funded educational status to a product for sale was prudent. The above-mentioned example indicates that it might not be the case.

5.3 Summary

The high demand for interpreting services in the public sector, combined with an unregulated market and too little knowledge about interpreting among the buyers of interpreting services, creates challenging situations. Public service employees' lack of knowledge may constitute part of the background about why the training is necessary in the first place, yet it may offer an explanation for the low interest in learning about interpreting. This combination leads to

negative consequences for the quality of interpreting in public service. Interpreter-user training appears to be stuck in a vicious circle, where business and money, an unregulated market, and the lack of knowledge all play important roles.

6. Concluding remarks

To facilitate communication and mutual understanding in situations where the partners encounter language barriers, it is essential that all participants share a common understanding of interpreting and the role played by an interpreter. For the dance to flow, it is a basic requirement that the participants share an understanding of the kind of dance in which they are engaged. The ideal of interpreting as a *pas de trois* requires all partners' competence to ensure just and equal access to public services in multilingual societies. As discussed, this is not always the case in the Norwegian public sector. Although the measures in the comprehensive approach, such as interpreter accreditation, training, and the required listing of interpreters in the Register, are officially in place, none of them is fully used in practice. We have argued that the comprehensive approach should also include training options for public service employees in how to communicate via interpreters. Our sample indicates that the existing training options in how to communicate via interpreters are versatile and vary from on-site and online courses to written guidelines, as well as from group to individual training.

The government-initiated standardization of the content of such training is now offered as a one-day course at OsloMet. Nonetheless, the interest in course attendance has decreased. There is no simple explanation for this. One reason is that the government no longer fully funds the training; another reason is that the governmental measures are undermined by the unregulated market. As we have observed, the market currently plays, to a large extent, a negative role in the practices of interpreting in public service that comply with governmental policies.

This is a snapshot of the situation (more research is needed to provide a detailed account) in Norway while the Interpreting Act proposal is in circulation. The draft stipulates that public service employees are obliged to use qualified interpreters. Our expectation concerning interpreter-user training is that the Interpreting Act will oblige public service employees to acquire knowledge about how to communicate via interpreters. To meet this requirement, the public sector should prepare itself by having available and adequate training, such as (1) the integration of the topic into the curriculum of future professionals; that is, the Ministry of Education and Research should integrate the topic into the policy documents, which will enable the program planners in universities to integrate the topic, and (2) the training of public service employees should receive predictable public funding and not be left to the forces of an unregulated market.

In addition to practical measures, we have identified several areas that need to be addressed in future research. One area might be comparative international research on how interpreter-user training is addressed in different countries and how this measure interacts with others to improve the quality of interpreting in the public sector. In Norway, the role of interpreting service providers has not been an object of research, although in practice, it influences the quality of interpreting in significant ways. Finally, minority language users' knowledge about interpreting and their experience in the *pas de trois* require the attention of researchers.

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