



Recibido: 23/11/2023


Aceptado: 30/09/2024

Publicado: 31/10/2024

Making a difference: how does an interpreting course contribute to public service interpreters' professional identity? / Marcando la diferencia: ¿cómo contribuye un curso de formación de intérpretes a la identidad profesional de los intérpretes de los servicios públicos?

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Abstract: In Norway, the Interpretation Act (2022) requires that interpreters are qualified before taking on assignments. One way of qualifying is to take a 30 ECTS course in interpreting. This article will explore how such a course contributes to developing the interpreters' professional identity. Two cohorts of former students who attended such a course at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in Norway were invited to participate in an electronic questionnaire and individual follow-up interviews. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, and the results show that the former students describe themselves as more independent and self-confident, and more aware of the importance and the boundaries of their role after completing the course. They also felt the course contributed to improving their interpreting technique. Meeting other public service interpreters also made them feel that they were part of a professional community. This indicates that even short interpreting training courses play a significant part in developing the interpreters' professional identity.

Keywords: Public service interpreters; Professional identity; Training course

How to cite this article / ¿Cómo citar este artículo?

Urdal, G. H. S. (2024). Making a difference: how does an interpreting course contribute to public service interpreters' professional identity? *FITISPos International Journal*, 11(2), 96-111. <https://doi.org/10.37536/FITISPos-IJ.2024.11.2.371>

Resumen: En Noruega, la Ley de Interpretación (2022) exige que los intérpretes estén cualificados antes de aceptar un encargo de interpretación. Una manera de cualificarse es realizando un curso de interpretación de 30 ECTS. En el presente artículo se explora la manera en la que un curso de este tipo contribuye al desarrollo de la identidad profesional de los intérpretes. Dos grupos de estudiantes que realizaron un curso de esas características en la Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas del Oeste de Noruega participaron en una encuesta en formato electrónico seguida de entrevistas individuales. Los datos fueron sometidos a un análisis temático reflexivo y los resultados muestran que los estudiantes, después de haber completado el curso, se autoevalúan como más independientes, con más autoconfianza y más conscientes de la importancia y los límites de su rol. También indican que el curso ha contribuido a mejorar su técnica de interpretación. Haber conocido a otros intérpretes de los servicios públicos también hizo que se sintieran integrados en el colectivo profesional. De la presente investigación se desprende que incluso un curso breve de formación resulta importante en el desarrollo de la identidad profesional de los intérpretes.

Palabras clave: Intérpretes de los servicios públicos; Identidad profesional; Curso formativo corto

1. Introduction

Interpreting is a young profession (Pöchhacker, 2016). According to Abbott (1988, p. 8) a profession consists of professional practitioners that “apply somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases”. Formal education is an acknowledged path to achieve this abstract and specialised knowledge, so as to claim professional authority. In the process of becoming a professional, the individuals also develop their professional identity (Heggen, 2008). In this article, we focus on the way in which specialised education contributes to public service interpreters’ professional identity.

Professional identity can be described as what individuals need to become professionals in their specific field (Heggen, 2008). In this article, professional identity will comprise several aspects: how one presents one’s role, one’s ethical awareness, and the experience of one’s own interpreting skills, as well as how others perceive one’s role as a professional.

In Norway, after the implementation of the Interpreting Act in 2022, whose aim o is to improve the quality of interpreting services, interpreters must be qualified to take on assignments. Its aim is to “help ensure that interpreters uphold professional standards” through five different levels of qualification (A-E, more about this in 2.2). One of these levels (D) is achieved by taking a 30-ECTS course in public service interpreting (PSI).

Considering this requirement, our article will focus on a specific course that has been taught at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) since 2020, which aims to ensure the professional standards required. It runs every year and it has trained approximately 90 interpreters between Norwegian and 10 different minority languages since its first edition.

We shall specifically investigate if and how this training course made a difference beyond the fact that the students became legally qualified as professional interpreters. The research question guiding this study is: How does an interpreting course contribute to public service interpreters’ professional identity?

Moreover, his study will solely focus on the practitioners’ sense of developing a professional self, which can promote our research can contribute to the profession gaining recognition for being worthy of the mandate as providers of interpreting services. The topic

can be of interest to interpreters, interpreter trainers, and governing bodies that manage and/or are responsible for interpreting services.

2. Background

2.1 Identity and professional identity

Identity is often referred to as the sense of who we are as individuals. According to Hall's discursive approach (1996, p. 2), identification is "a construction, a process never completed". Identities are, therefore not about being, but rather becoming, and are constructed using resources of language, culture, and history.

Professional identity builds on personal identity and is related to the understanding of a professional role. It can be defined as a more or less conscious perception of the "self" that constitutes "me" as a good professional in terms of values, perspectives, ethical guidelines, knowledge, and qualification (Heggen, 2008). Professional identity develops within specific institutional and historical contexts, influenced by different contexts and social practices in the field of practice. Thus, it tends to be defined and redefined over time. Therefore, both education and the professional community can be considered as factors that can influence a person's professional identity.

The concept of professional identity examined in this study is understood in relation to the interpreter's experience of their role and the values they emphasise. Skaaden (2023) refers to the Scandinavian model of professionalisation which emphasises accuracy, agency, and the exercise of discretion. Thus, the interpreter's experience of ethical awareness is incorporated within professional identity.

This study investigates if and how the course has had an impact on the students. As the aim of an educational programme is to develop students' knowledge and skills, it is relevant to link both of them to professional identity. In this study, it is not pertinent to find out whether their knowledge or skills have actually changed, but rather how they experienced the change, which is relevant to our context. Moreover, considering that other people's perceptions can also affect the way in which one sees himself/herself, we included the perception of others as an element of one's professional self.

As a result, professional identity in this study is defined as how an interpreter experiences and expresses his/her professional role, his/her ethical understanding, how he/she experiences their knowledge and skills, and how they believe to be perceived by other people. This is also in line with how professional identity is described in research in the field (see section 3. of this article, Literature review).

2.2 The context

Interpreting is recognised as a profession in Norway. However, anyone can act as an interpreter and offer interpreting services without being required to provide any qualification proof. In 2021, 40% of all interpreting assignments in the public service were carried out using unqualified interpreters (Agenda Kaupang, 2022).

On the other hand, considering recent legal provisions, such as section 7 of the Interpreting Act (2022), a qualified interpreter is one "who fulfils the requirements for being listed in the National Registry of Interpreters". Levels A-E, mentioned in this act, refer to different qualification levels in the registry, with different requirements for each level, which

show that training is essential. Thus, at the lowest level (E), the interpreter must have passed a bilingual proficiency test and a short introduction course on the interpreter's responsibilities. The next level (D) requires a 30-ECTS course in PSI at the university level. In levels A-C, the interpreters must pass an authorisation test (C) and/or have a bachelor's degree in interpreting (B and A). Thus, there is a diversity in Norway in what is considered to be a qualified interpreter.

2.3 *The course*

The course in question is a part-time, one-year course in PSI at HVL, totalling 30 ECTS. The course is based on a model developed in a former project (2003-2006) by the University of Bergen and was further developed by Oslo Metropolitan University. It takes place both onsite and online, with 15 credits per semester. The course is organised with three onsite campus seminars over two days per semester (six in total), as well as 8 (autumn semester) and 10 (spring semester) online lectures or discussions.

As far as the main characteristics of the course, it focuses on the development of adequate interpreting strategies and techniques since interpreting is a demanding cognitive operation which occurs in complex interactional situations. Based on theoretical discussions and practical exercises, it aims to give students the opportunity to acquire the skills to perform the act of interpreting. To access the course, the students must pass a bilingual test, although many of the students already have several years of experience as interpreters.

Regarding the trainers, the course is taught by interpreter trainers (including interpreters with the same language combinations as the students) and guest lecturers who represent different domains within PSI and ensure practical and adapted teaching methodologies. Many of the activities are based on the experiential-dialogical approach to learning (cf. Skaaden, 2017), where learning activities are student-centred. During the first semester, communication and the interpreter's area of responsibilities are topicalised. The learning activities aim to produce a reflection on the role of the interpreter, as well as ethical guidelines, discretionary power, and the interpreters' process of professionalisation. Practical exercises with reflections and discussions are also introduced and executed. Moreover, students' experience is included in class in a fruitful and educative way.

Considering content, since interpreters tend to work in a number of domains and need specific context knowledge, in the second semester, the course covers several subject areas, from the Norwegian public service, such as welfare services, children protection services, health services, to police and court settings. In these activities, students learn both about the thematic context and the terminology required in each field. The overall aim is to prepare students to use their bilingual tools and to develop effective strategies that will enable them to enter a variety of domains and contexts.

With three cohorts having now completed the course, with approximately 30 students each year, the language combinations so far have covered Norwegian with Arabic, Dari, Polish, Tigrinya, Kurdish-Sorani, Somali Thai, Vietnamese, Turkish and Amharic.

3. Literature review

In the literature, the professional identity of interpreters and translators is described as the individual's sense of who they are in relation to what they do (self-identification) (see for example Hunt, 2015; Runcieman, 2018; Urdal, 2019), and includes the individual's professional commitments and goals, and perceptions of the future work as a professional in relation to the community of professionals (see for example Setton & Liangliang, 2009; Hoyte-West, 2020; Salo et al., 2020). The literature emphasises different factors contributing to the constructing and reconstructing of their professional identities. Education is one of these factors. According to Hunt (2015), interpreting students gain knowledge and expectations for their future profession in the classroom. Based on these newly acquired competencies, they experience an evolution of an interpreter self and see the work as an extension of the self as they develop their professional identity. This is supported by Urdal (2019), who finds that students gradually construct this identity based on the discourses of how "the interpreter" was described – discourses that were made available to them both in class and in the field of practice. The value of education is also discussed by university Nordø (2011) and Harwood (2017), who argue that interpreters' individual and collective professional identities are strengthened through educational opportunities, mentorship, research and a sense of community. However, these studies do not discuss how much education is required for this to be reflected in the professional identity.

One study that refers to a similar university-level course is described in Skaaden (2017), focusing on the effect of an experiential-dialogic approach. It argues that the students develop knowledge and professional identity in onsite and online activities with teachers as facilitators. The study emphasises that the students develop a sense of a "we" as being part of the professional community, but it does not investigate how each individual perceives him/herself as a professional.

Furthermore, the effect of simulation and vocational training are highlighted in Salo et al. (2020), Lee (2020), and Suslova (2018). The findings in Salo et al. (2020) and Lee (2020) show that simulation helps students gain insight into the expectations, requirements, and possibilities of the profession and that practical exercises are crucial factors in building their professional identity. According to Suslova (2018), training together with students' values, the positive image of the professional "self", and the motivation for professional activity are the most important factors in the construction of the students' professional identities.

Even though several studies emphasise the importance of educational training, findings in some studies are more ambivalent about its relevance. In Setton and Liangliang (2009), training and certification are only seen as beneficial for the profession by half of the 62 respondents of working translators and interpreters, where approximately 80% of them were trained themselves at a postgraduate level. In a related study, Hale and Ozolin (2014) found that a monolingual short course on language-specific accreditation did improve students' contextual knowledge as well as their understanding of the ethics of the profession, but not their ability to practice interpreting between two languages. However, Hale (2005) argues that the lack of pre-service university education requirements, the interpreters' ambivalence about their role, and their insecurity about their competence contribute to a professional identity crisis. In addition, according to Hoyte-West (2020), limited training and work opportunities can affect the sense of relation and connection to the profession.

Other factors that influence interpreters' and translators' professional identity are their attitudes towards their role, and the definition of their role (see, for example, Setton & Liangliang, 2009; Zwischenberger, 2011). In fact, most of the respondents (n=62) in Setton and Liangliang (2009) express a more practical attitude towards their role and their contribution to society when they articulate who they are as professionals. In addition, they

downplay the interpreter as a cultural mediator. Role definition is also investigated by Zwischenberger (2011). The results from this author's web-based survey show that conference interpreters did not present their role in a uniform way and this divergence highly influenced their professional identity.

Moreover, research (Runcieman, 2018; Lee, 2020) shows that at the beginning of educational programmes, students often primarily connect their professional identity with a linguistic identity. In fact, Runcieman (2018) suggests that, based on the lack of institutional guidance on the curriculum, it is up to the teachers to highlight the interpreter as a visual, active participant. After further investigations, Runcieman (2022) also argues that the teachers' own personal histories and experiences as well as their perspectives on the profession have a significant impact on the students who have previously not worked as interpreter. In addition, Morris (2010) finds that interpreters, after years of experience, are increasingly seeing their role as something more than a language expert.

Furthermore, Kapsaskis (2011), Harwood (2017), and Hoyte-West (2020) discuss how outside pressure and recognition (or lack thereof) influence how interpreters view their identity as professional practitioners. According to Kapsaskis (2011), pressure can lead to a "fragmentation of the profession into multiple roles" and translators express their concern as to whether this change might lead to fewer opportunities to carry out their specialisation. Hoyte-West (2020) argue that if interpreting is not a protected profession, it will affect the interpreters' recognition and professional status. Correspondingly, positive experiences and outside recognition are also major factors when it comes to contributing to interpreters' professional identity.

Considering the previous context, we could state that the existing research discusses students' and experienced translators' and interpreters' development and professionalisation and it highlights the importance of education. However, it does not specify the length of programme or course required to make it significant. In studies where this is mentioned, programmes are either longer (bachelor's degree), are taught at a higher level of education (master's degree), with students with little or no practical experience as interpreters, or do not investigate the individual students' development of professional identity. That is why our study will focus on the effect of a specific one-year part-time course (30 ECTS), taught at the undergraduate level, whose students may already have numerous years of work experience as interpreters. Therefore, it offers insight into the impact that such courses can have on the individual practitioner, their professional development, and their self-identification as professionals.

4. Methodology

A constructionist approach (Burr, 2003) was adopted to gain insight into the historically and culturally specific knowledge about how students develop their perception of themselves as professionals. In line with this approach, the aim was to take a critical stance toward the authors' understanding of the world and how that is taken for granted, both in how the questions were asked and how the data were analysed.

4.1 Survey and individual questionnaire

In this study, all ethical requirements were met and the study received ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (566332). Data were generated through two instruments. The first instrument was a survey, taking the form of a structured online questionnaire with 12 questions. This was followed up by semi-structured individual

interviews to provide a deeper and better understanding of the phenomena.

The questionnaire focused on gaining both quantitative and qualitative data. The questions revolved around the participants' background, former education, work experience as interpreters, working conditions as interpreters (quantitative data), and if and how the training course had contributed to a change in different aspects regarding their perception of themselves as interpreters. These were open-ended questions and were framed by what this study defined as being included in a PSI's professional identity. Examples of such questions are: Has the training course changed the way you see yourself as an interpreter? If yes, how? If not, why not? Has the training course influenced your awareness and reflection regarding ethical issues? If yes, how? If not, why? Has the training course contributed to improving your interpreting technique? In what way? If not, why not?

To gain a more in-depth understanding, semi-structured individual interviews were also conducted by the author. In these interviews, the participants were asked how they would describe themselves as interpreters, how they defined professional identity in general and their own in particular, and if these descriptions and definitions had changed after they had completed the training course.

Before the data collection, both sets of questions were discussed with two interpreter trainer colleagues. This was done to ensure the study's validity, in this case, making sure that the questions were relevant, not ambiguous, and that they contributed to answering the research question (see for example Bryman, 2012).

This study focuses on the participants' experiences, how they perceive themselves as interpreters and their impression of how others see them. What they actually do when they interpret, if that has changed, is not investigated.

4.2 Data collection procedure, ethics, and participants

The participants are PSIs who completed the training course in PSI described above at HVL. During the autumn of 2022, the information letter and survey were sent out to the first two cohorts of students who had attended the training course (n=59). Of these, 29 responded, and the participants represented six out of the seven languages that had been offered at HVL.

In the survey, the participants were asked if they were willing to take part in an individual interview. Those who accepted were contacted during spring 2023 and an individual interview was conducted with five participants. These participants represented four of the seven languages that had been offered. As the participants lived in different parts of Norway, the interviews were conducted through a secure Zoom link, lasting approximately 30 minutes.

All the participants were informed that taking part in the survey was anonymous, that answers from the survey and interviews would be non-traceable in publications, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

It is important to mention that this study was designed by the author (a qualified interpreter) and a colleague (a qualified translator), both of whom are experienced interpreter/translator and interpreter trainers. They were also responsible for the training course at HVL which might have biased the questions asked and affected the responses. This was mitigated by the anonymous completion of the survey and contributed to making the nature of the interviews more interactional, which us allowed to probe the interviewees' responses in more depth.

4.3 Data analysis

The participants' interviews were transcribed and reflexive thematic analysis was chosen to identify and report on themes within the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594), themes are “creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves”. Data analysis was based on Braun et al.’s framework, with the following six phases; 1) familiarisation; 2) generating codes; 3) constructing themes; 4) revising the themes; 5) defining the themes; and 6) drafting a report (2018).

Initially, the qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the survey and the interviews were read and reread by the author to familiarise herself with them. Notes were made, shaped by the research question and what the data showed. Next, the author systematically went through the dataset to identify meaning. Chunks of text were labelled and coded to be able to organise the data in meaning patterns later. For example, an answer such as “I understand more fully the expectations and the demands and when and how to say no¹” was labelled as “more conscious of the role and its responsibilities” and a response such as “[I’m] more aware of and self-confident in what I’m doing” was labelled as “independent and self-confident”. Overall, we used an inductive-oriented process with data as our starting point.

Similar codes and associated data were then collated into clusters of meaning and thus, constructed the themes. For example, the labels “more conscious of the role and its responsibilities” and “independent and self-confident” constructed the theme “the understanding and setting of boundaries for the role of the self as an interpreter”. Other collated labels constructed the themes “professional community” and “the interpreter’s skills set”. All of them were summed up in one overarching theme: “Change in professional identity – more competent, stronger awareness of the role and identifying with the profession”. These themes were discussed with other interpreter trainer colleagues as well as revised and redefined, and finally, a thematic map was made to visualise how the themes fitted together, telling the overall story of the data (Table 1). During the report, the themes were revised again to decide on a final version and to ensure that they were close to the data and provided answers to [the research question].

Quotes	Labels	Themes	Overarching theme
[Being an interpreter], it has affected me in my everyday life as well. When we talk about ordinary everyday things, I’m cautious about what I can say and how.	Professional versus private	The understanding and setting of boundaries for the role of the self as an interpreter	Change in professional identity – more competent, stronger sense of being a professional and identifying with the profession
If it’s a person who has interpreted for 20 years, but still has no formal competencies, qualification and category. No, it’s hard to relate to/work with such people.	Professional versus non-professional		
I understand more fully the expectations and the demands and when and how to say no.	More conscious of the role and its responsibilities		
It has made me more self-confident in my position as an interpreter.	Independent and confident		
I’m even more aware of the ethical guidelines, especially confidentiality and the consequences that can occur if the interpreter doesn’t relate to the guidelines.	The impact of the ethical guidelines		
I feel I’m more accepted on assignment [...] they trust me more than they do a non-professional.	Respect and trust		

¹ The quotes have been translated by the author for the purpose of this article.

To connect with people that do this full-time, it's useful, we can help each other.	Learning from each other	Professional community	
Every time I finish an assignment, I try to reflect using my theoretical knowledge.	Know how to talk about it		
I'm better at managing the turn-taking and making use of notes.	Improving the skills	The interpreter's skill set	
I'm a dynamic interpreter.	Adapting to the situation		

Table 1. Thematic map

Findings will be presented in section 5. They will be discussed based on the following themes, as seen in the thematic map: 'the understanding of and setting boundaries for the role of me as an interpreter', 'professional community', and 'the interpreter's skill set'. Before entering the details of the different themes, a short presentation of the participants will also be provided.

5. Findings

5.1 The participants and their backgrounds

The 29 participants in this study interpret between Norwegian and six different minority languages. Their experience as interpreters stretched from 0 to 30 years, with an average of six - years of experience in the profession. In addition to taking this course, several participants had started or completed degrees in other topics: 12 at bachelor's degree level, 8 at master's degree level, and 2 at PhD level.

Most of the participants had working experience acquired as a freelancer both before and after the course (70 %), but more than half of them increased their work frequency. Before the course, 59 % took interpreting assignments weekly. Afterwards, this rose to 74 %. Four participants reported no work experience as an interpreter when embarking on the course. Only one participant did not work as an interpreter at that time.

All the participants indicated that the course had contributed to a strengthening of their professional identity as interpreter. The implications of this finding will be presented in the following section.

5.2 The understanding and setting of boundaries for the role of the self as an interpreter

This first theme we focused on refers to the participants' understanding, which seems to be more thorough and the setting of boundaries for their own role as an interpreter. This means that they feel more confident and are more conscious of what they should and should not do, as well as their responsibilities as interpreters. Moreover, their ethical guidelines play an important part in their work as well as respect and trust.

Several of the participants expressed that they were capable of making a clear distinction between their personal and professional lives. This is important for them to portray themselves as professionals. One of the participants explained the effect he/she noticed since completing the course: "I try not to become their friend after assignments, even though I am often asked about it. I do my job and that is to interpret, nothing more." The participants are also more careful about what they can and cannot talk about outside the assignments. In fact, one of them described the contrast as "it has affected me in everyday life. When I talk about ordinary, everyday things with friends and acquaintances I am careful about what I can

say and how I can say things.” This distinction leads to less contact with people from their home country in some cases while in others, it regulates the contact they already have. They see it as a requirement to maintain their professionalism.

The participants describe a strong sense of professionalism and feel a connection to the profession. They now operate being aware of the distinction between us and them: “we”, the professionals, and “the others”, the non-professionals. This was exemplified in the following statements: “We who have the interpreter education [course]” and “I know we are professionals” in relation to “the other interpreter”. One described it as “I felt like I was an imposter: ‘I’m not an interpreter, I’ve just learned to pretend to be an interpreter.’ That’s why I took the course.” This may indicate that the course has given them a platform from which they can execute their practice professionally. This is probably also related to the fact that they are now considered as ‘qualified interpreters’ according to the Interpreting Act.

Moreover, several of the participants pointed out that they had gained more knowledge about their professional roles. One of them explained that he/she had increased his/her knowledge, especially regarding attitude and role: “how I can present myself as an interpreter, to understand what the interpreter role entails, acting impartial and neutral, and not to be part of the conversation.” Therefore, it could be said that the participants understand more about the requirements of their role, its boundaries, and the choices they have to make. Some examples can be found in the following statements: “[The course] provided the basis for conscious and well-founded choices during my interpretation.”; “[I] got a clearer picture of what’s expected of me, the demands, and when and how to say no or set boundaries if required.” The latter shows that, although the role of the interpreter is not fixed, the course has given them a clearer picture of their operational space as interpreters.

Becoming more conscious of the interpreter’s role also involves becoming aware of its responsibilities. From this point of view, one participant said: “I’ve stopped saying that ‘I’m just an interpreter’. I am aware of the importance of my role and I do my utmost to live up to the responsibilities it entails.” Other participants also mentioned that the course had made them take themselves more seriously. For example, one of them pointed out that “through education you get the feeling that ‘I am a professional now’. That feeling is followed by a duty you need to fulfil, and you take yourself a bit more seriously.” Another participant believed that the course had helped by making the interpreter’s social responsibility more evident: “After I increased my competence, I now have a social task I can contribute to.” Therefore, their sense of responsibility for providing interpreting services so that people from the same country can communicate with public services in Norway has increased.

Increased awareness of the role can also be related to the influence of the interpreters’ ethical guidelines. From this point of view, the principles of accuracy and neutrality, and the duty of confidentiality in particular were highlighted as essential aspects of their role as an interpreter, as in the following example: “The fact that you are only there to interpret. That you should not take side. You should act neutral. You have the duty of confidentiality and things like that.” The impact of these guidelines has increased after completing the course, as one person explained: “I have become even more aware of ethical issues, and how to deal with them if they arise unexpectedly.” This ethical awareness makes it easier for them to make decisions onsite and gives them more confidence when doing so. Without the course, it would be different, as somebody else indicated: “Without the interpreting course, it could have been very difficult. I would struggle and start explaining and sympathising with the [non-professional] parties.”

A prominent topic in the participants’ answers was how the course affected their sense of confidence and independence, as seen in the following quotes: “[The course made me] more

confident in my position as an interpreter” and “[I’m] more confident in myself and in making choices”. Several people also replied that the course gave them “increased self-confidence and courage to say something when needed”. This confidence is related to their increased knowledge about what they should do as an interpreter: “Going through a formal professionalisation process means that I now have more clear answers to things.” Here, reflections on the literature and other people’s experiences have contributed to building this confidence, as shown in this example: “Getting confirmation in the professional literature in terms of what I experience, it makes me feel more certain”.

On the other hand, not all the participants underlined a significant impact of the course on their professional identity. Nonetheless, they still mentioned that it had contributed to a change. For example, one person described this as a transition from acting intuitively to acting more consciously: “Before, a lot was done intuitively. I was a little unsure if it was right [...] But everything became more evident [after the course].” This consciousness helped in creating a sense of independence and self-confidence as an interpreter.

Most of the participants pointed out that the course and the fact that they felt more professional had also influenced the way in which they were perceived by other people and the way they interacted with them. From this point of view, one participant explained that it was about “how the interpreter sees himself and how others respect the role the interpreter plays”. Another one said: “I also feel that one is perceived as more professional by others when one has a certificate in what we do”. However, some participants underlined that the course had not had an impact on how others interacted with them. It had more to do with “my own experience of who I am as an interpreter”, or that “[others] respect me as a professional mainly based on my performance as an interpreter”. These statements show that, although more participants feel more respected and are met with professional trust, perhaps the biggest change is the one that occurred in terms of how they perceived themselves and the role of the interpreter.

5.3 Professional community

In terms of professional community as a factor to be considered, we refer to how the course enabled participants to feel that they were a part of the professional community. According to the findings of our study, participants no longer felt alone as they had met other interpreters and enjoyed working, reflecting, and discussing with them. They also pointed out that the course had given them a vocabulary that now allowed them to discuss what they did. One noted that learning had happened in specific circumstances such as “the professional community where you exchange experiences and see that others feel the same way as you. You can always be inspired.” Thus, receiving advice from other interpreters and interpreting teachers helped participants develop as professional interpreters.

Moreover, attending the course gave the participants a feeling of belonging to something bigger, as one of them put it: “Being able to socialise with other professional interpreters is also something that contributes to a feeling that we are a group of professionals”. Generally, participants were very explicit about how the course had helped them make contacts. These contacts contribute positively to the individual’s life as an interpreter, as one of them explained, helping to create a community that makes them more confident in the workplace: “At least, I have my colleagues. I am no longer alone on assignments”. Thus, it can be said that, although they actually interpret alone, they feel supported by other professional interpreters.

According to the participants, the course also helped them develop a conceptual apparatus to reflect on and discuss their thoughts and experiences: “Everything became

more apparent and I can put it into words. I can say that I am unbiased and I know what it means, and that I have read something about it. It had an effect on me". The collaboration and the sense of community are, therefore, also grounded in having gained a shared 'language' to express their experiences.

5.4 The interpreter's skillset

Participants also described changes regarding how they performed and used their skills as interpreters, thus showing their own reflections about their learning process. They expressed that they became better both at interpreting and at coordinating the act of interpretation. This improvement also means that they felt that they were now able to adapt to different situations to a greater extent.

Furthermore, findings show that they are not only aware of their abilities but are also able to describe how they improved their interpreting techniques. One person, for example, stated: "I have improved in the turn-taking, the use of note technique, and the way I interpret". Another person answered the following: "I didn't know anything about implicit and explicit coordination of the turn-taking before [the course], and I was afraid to interrupt the speaker. But now I'm confident in giving turn-taking signals". Therefore, participants felt more competent and have the courage to take on new and different assignments. Furthermore, context-specific knowledge led them to expand their interpreting expertise, as one explained: "the terminology that we learned was quite useful".

Indeed, interpreters need to adapt to various settings as few assignments are equal. This process is something that the participants became more aware of during the course. In fact, one of them stated that: "on the course it became completely clear to me that the use of turn-taking strategies is context dependent". The course led them to not only become aware of what turn-taking strategies were but also that they had to be used according to the situation in which they act as interpreters. This shows an increased awareness of the relationship between technique and context.

Overall, the data analysis shows that students/participants experienced changes considering their professional identity. This is evident in how they described how the course had led to a greater understanding of the interpreter's role, with all its responsibilities and boundaries. The course also contributed to their experience of being included in something greater than themselves, the interpreting profession. Ultimately, after completing the course, they started to feel more competent when taking on assignments, both in terms of their skillset and their adaptation to the variety of interpreting settings.

6. Discussions and conclusion

The findings in this study confirm findings other studies also underlined such as the fact that education influences interpreters' professional identity. In our study, this is evident in how the participants see themselves after having taken the university course and how they experience the feeling of belonging, as shown in section 5. Now they present themselves as professionals included in a group of professionals (we), which aligns with the findings of Skaaden (2017), Nordø (2011), and Harwood (2017).

Moreover, our findings also bring additional details that help us understand the topic. In this sense, Hunt (2015) points out that interpreters see their work as an extension of the self. Our study brings an additional finding, the fact that participants develop their ability to distinguish between their private self and their professional selves. They have become more

aware of the interpreter's responsibilities and see this separation as a necessary condition to maintain their neutrality.

Furthermore, the fact that the interpreters who took the course constructed their professional identity based on what they had discussed in class aligns with what Urdal (2019) and Runcieman (2018) found in their studies. This can clearly be seen in how participants refer to and link the interpreter's ethical guidelines to how they reflect on the profession and how they interpret. Additionally, the fact that students used the guidelines while describing who they were as professionals can also indicate that the guidelines are an important part of the profession. Thus, by adhering to them, the participants demonstrate their belonging and feeling of inclusion.

Additionally, it is important to consider that the participants took part in practical exercises during the course, in which they were invited to reflect on the expectations and requirements of the actual professional setting. Salo et al. (2020) and Lee (2020) found that such reflections are important for interpreters' development of professional identity and can contribute to making students more aware of what is required of them in the field. This correlates with the findings in this study.

The participants describe their professional identity as being more than a language expert, which corroborates the findings of other studies such as Morris (2010), Lee (2020), and Runcieman (2018). The participants in this study emphasise the fact that they need to coordinate turn-taking, perform their role according to the ethical guidelines, and adjust their skills to the situation at hand.

On the other hand, not all the participants reported a change in the way in which they were perceived in the market as a result of taking the course but did report change considering their professional self. However, they emphasised their concern regarding the 'interpreter' as a titled that is not protected and the fact that many unqualified interpreters take on assignments. They fear this might affect how other people generally perceive and interact with professional interpreters, too (see also Hoyte-West, 2020). Consequently, they displayed a strong need to make a distinction between we, the professionals and they, the others.

Despite the extensive previous interpreting experience that several of the participants had, this 30-ECTS course led to significant changes in their professional identity. This is particularly evident in how they perceived the boundaries of the interpreter's responsibilities and role. The most prominent change can be seen in how the course made them more confident and independent. Additionally, what they believed to be true regarding the interpreter's role was confirmed in class, through discussions and literature, therefore strengthening their sense of being a professional.

Although our study does not investigate whether the interpreters' skills actually improved, it contributed to the existing literature by providing several details that portray the relation between training and professional identity, showing that interpreters perform better with a strengthened professional identity given that they now adhere to ethical guidelines, feel more competent, and are included in a professional community.

Glossary

PSI – Public service interpreting/public service interpreter

HVL – Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

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