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Public service interpreters education in French-speaking Belgium / Formación de intérpretes en los servicios públicos en la Bélgica francófona

Anne Delizée

Université de Mons, Belgique

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1061-8707>
anne.delizee@umons.ac.be

Christine Michaux

Université de Mons, Belgique

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0947-1119>
christine.michaux@umons.ac.be

Abstract: In French-speaking Belgium, public service (PS) interpreting in languages of larger diffusion is taught in daytime university courses. For training in languages of lesser diffusion, the main challenges are to gain access to the target audience, to design a curriculum that closely meets the needs of the stakeholders in the field, to give access to higher education to would-be interpreters, and to develop interpreting skills in multilingual classrooms. The solutions have given rise to a four-level modular and out-of-school-hour university-level training and education programme, elaborated in close links with PS interpreting providers. This article details the challenges, solutions, educational content, certification system, assessment grid and main learning methods of this programme and outlines future developments. The region has stepped up its efforts since the 2000s and now has a pool of trained PS interpreters, who can further their professional development by taking part in a tailor-made process of continuing education at university level.

Keywords: French-speaking Belgium; Public service interpreting; Training and education; Interpreters' professionalization

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Resumen: En la Bélgica francófona, la interpretación en los servicios públicos (SP) en lenguas de mayor difusión se imparte en cursos universitarios diurnos. Para la formación en lenguas de menor difusión, los principales retos son acceder al público objetivo, diseñar un plan de estudios que responda fielmente a las necesidades de las partes interesadas en este campo, dar acceso a la enseñanza superior a los aspirantes a intérpretes y desarrollar las competencias de interpretación en aulas multilingües. Las soluciones han dado lugar a un programa de formación y educación de nivel universitario, modular y de cuatro niveles, elaborado en estrecha colaboración con los proveedores de interpretación de los SP. Este artículo detalla los retos, las soluciones, el contenido educativo, el sistema de certificación, la tabla de evaluación y los principales métodos de aprendizaje de este programa, y esboza su evolución futura. La región ha intensificado sus esfuerzos desde la década de 2000 y ahora cuenta con una reserva de intérpretes de SP formados, que pueden mejorar su desarrollo profesional participando en un proceso a medida de formación continua a nivel universitario.

Palabras clave: Bélgica francófona; interpretación de los servicios públicos; formación y educación; profesionalización de los intérpretes.

Information on author contribution: Both authors contributed to all the sections. They drew on their research and the scholarly literature in PS interpreting, as well as their experience as PS interpreters and interpreter trainers.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to provide an up-to-date overview of the training and education of public service interpreters in French-speaking Belgium, with particular emphasis on interpreting into languages of lesser diffusion. Belgium comprises three administrative regions: the Flemish Region, which is Dutch-speaking; the Walloon Region, which is French-speaking; and the Brussels-Capital Region, which is bilingual. French-speaking Belgium therefore includes Wallonia and the French-speaking part of Brussels-Capital.

Belgium was one of the first European countries to set up specialized interpreting services in medical and social settings. The first professional medical interpreting initiative was launched in the 1970s in Antwerpen, followed by the establishment of a specialized service, the *Tolkencentrum*¹, in 1980 in the same town. In 1984, the *Formation d'interprètes immigrées en milieu médico-social*² service was set up in Brussels. However, it was not until the early 1990s that the professionalization of public service (hereafter, PS) interpreting really began in Belgium, in connection with the sharp rise in immigration from 1994–1995.

The degree of professionalization of PSI can be assessed according to the following five criteria (e.g. Wadensjö *et al.*, 2007; Pöchhacker, 2008; SIGTIPS, 2011): the structuring of the field of activity, the harmonization of practices, the precise definition of the professional mandate, the conditions of employment and the training received by interpreters. In section 2, we will briefly examine the first four aspects for Belgium in general. In the following

¹ *The Interpreters' centre.*

² *Training immigrant interpreters in medical and social settings.*

sections, we will look in detail at the last aspect, namely training and education, for French-speaking Belgium in particular.

2. PS Interpreting structuration and professionalization in Belgium

The first successful initiatives to professionalize bilingual and bicultural interpreters were undertaken in the early 1990s. In Brussels, the *Interprétariat social et médical*³ (ISM) was launched in 1992 to meet the growing demand in the capital and Wallonia; it rapidly opened up to sectors other than healthcare (mainly mother and child health, education and the reception of asylum seekers and displaced persons). In 2000, ISM became part of *Coordination et Initiatives pour les Réfugiés et Étrangers (CIRÉ) Interprétariat*⁴. The bilingual association *Bruxelles Accueil/Brussel Onthaal* began offering interpreting services in 1997. In Wallonia, five intercultural support services developed. In Flanders, several social interpreting and translation associations were set up. These services and associations were non-profit.

This huge diversity prompted them to join forces in a national think-tank, the *Coordination Fédérale de la Traduction et de l'Interprétation en milieu Social*⁵, with the aim of structuring the sector in depth, working towards professionalization and obtaining legislative recognition and structural funding. After five years, in 2009, this huge project came to a successful conclusion. In particular, the interpreter's mandate in social settings was defined (COFETIS, 2007). It served as a basis for the codes of ethics and reference frameworks of competencies that were then gradually adapted according to the development of knowledge about PS interpreting, both in French-speaking Belgium (SeTIS, 2011; Delizée & Bruwier, 2021) and in Flanders (All, 2015). With a clear framework in place since the late 2000s, the field became more visible, leading to greater recognition by user services, and federal and regional decision-making bodies.

However, the process of unifying the field could not go any further at national level, due to the division of responsibilities for legislation and funding between the federal and regional levels. PS interpreting therefore continued to be structured and harmonized in each of the three regions separately. In Brussels, the bilingual association *Bruxelles Accueil/Brussel Onthaal* increased its activity, while *CIRÉ Interprétariat* became the *Service de Traduction et d'Interprétation en milieu Social (SeTIS) Bruxelles* in 2010. In Wallonia, the five intercultural support services gradually merged from 2004 onwards to become *SeTIS Wallon* in 2008, the sole provider of interpreting services in the region until 2018. In the same year, the association *Univerbal/le Monde des Possibles* also began offering this type of service. In Flanders, the *Centrale Ondersteuning/Cel voor Sociaal Tolken en Vertalen*⁶ was set up in 2004, and the *Vlaams Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering*⁷ became the umbrella organization for the *Cell* and the various social translation and interpreting services from 2015 onwards. As a result, in less than ten years, the various small local associations merged into regional non-profit bodies that ensure the harmonization of practices.

As far as recruitment conditions are concerned, the two *SeTIS* (in Wallonia and Brussels), which have been the main suppliers of PS interpreting in French-speaking Belgium to date,

³ *Social and Medical Interpreting service.*

⁴ *Coordination and Initiatives for Refugees and Foreigners (CIRÉ) Interpreting services.*

⁵ *Federal Coordination of Social translation and Interpreting (COFETIS/FOSOVET).*

⁶ *Central training and testing Cell for social interpreting and translation (COC).*

⁷ *Flemish Agency for Integration and Civic Integration.*

are keen to give preference to permanent contracts. When recruiting, priority is given to language and intercultural competencies, soft skills, interpreting aptitudes and professional motivation, rather than academic qualifications. Interpreters then follow a specific training programme, while starting to work in the field (see section 3). The average salary scale is that of holders of a bachelor's degree, even if the person does not have a university degree. In French-speaking Belgium, most *SeTIS* interpreters are therefore salaried employees, while in Flanders they are generally self-employed and paid by the hour. Having a stable job and belonging to an institution make it easier to enrol in a continuous training process (see section 3.2), allows for regular exchange of good practices and participation in discussion groups aimed at emotional unburdening, which has a direct and beneficial influence on the degree of involvement, motivation and well-being at work (e.g. Anderson, 2011). These aspects also contribute to the professionalization of PS interpreters.

By the start of the 2010s, the field was structured, the professional mandate defined and practices clearly harmonized at national level⁸. Efforts to professionalize PS interpreting are continuing at regional level, where the focus is gradually shifting from structuring the field to training interpreters. This particular aspect will be detailed in the following sections for French-speaking Belgium.

3. Educating PS interpreters in French-speaking Belgium

The challenges of educating PS interpreters in French-speaking Belgium are twofold: (1) to introduce PS interpreting into university day courses in interpreting that mainly target languages of larger diffusion, and (2) to guarantee a high level of education for people who have not followed this type of traditional course, but work (or intend to work) in the field, mainly in languages of lesser diffusion (LLD).

3.1 *PS interpreting in daytime university courses*

Since the 1960s, higher education institutions in French-speaking Belgium specializing in interpreting have traditionally focused on conference interpreting (consecutive and simultaneous). However, from the mid-2010s onwards, a dozen or so hours devoted to the so-called community or liaison interpreting was introduced into the curricula of some institutions. In 2019, the University of Mons (UMONS) took a major step forward by opening a genuine specialization in 'liaison/public service interpreting' at Master's level⁹. As a general rule, in the daytime programmes open to PS interpreting, the learning activities focus mainly on widely spoken and/or European languages, such as English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Danish. This training offer is therefore insufficient to meet the current needs for LLD interpreting, driven by the dramatic increase in migratory movements in recent years. An approach other than traditional daytime programmes was therefore needed.

⁸ For a detailed history of the professionalization of PS Interpreting in Belgium up to the early 2000s, see Delizée (2015) for French-speaking Belgium, All (2015) for Dutch-speaking Belgium, and Stengers *et al.* (2020) for both regions.

⁹ Seventy-five hours (8 ECTS) in the first year of the Master's programme, and 210 hours (12 ECTS), plus 144 hours of professional integration activities (work placement, 6 ECTS) in the second year of the Master's programme.

3.2 PS interpreting in a unified out-of-school-hour university-level education programme

In French-speaking Belgium, as elsewhere, the practice of PS interpreting developed in the field before being the subject of university-level training. From the end of the 1990s to 2005, the various PS providers in Wallonia and Brussels offered their interpreters in-house training courses lasting a few dozen hours and covering a wide range of subjects; the focus was mainly on ethics and subject knowledge. This was a common practice in Europe at the time (cf. Weiss & Stuker, 1998). From 2005 onwards, teachers from the Mons School of International Interpreters, who were mainly trained in conference interpreting but had also developed a practice as liaison interpreters in the field, also began to give a minimum of ten hours of liaison interpreting technique courses in these associations. This ensured that interpreters received compulsory in-house training in ethics, disciplinary knowledge and interpreting techniques. However, the training courses were not recognized by an official document, and the heterogeneity of training content and practices persisted from one association to the next, which hindered the process of professionalization.

This is why, from 2015, the UMONS Faculty of Translation and Interpreting-School of International Interpreters (hereafter, FTI)¹⁰ has gradually developed a unified educational path and certification process, and PS interpreting providers are enrolling their interpreters in it as soon as they have been recruited. This unification of the training programme and certification by a single higher-education institution has greatly facilitated the harmonization of practices, the professionalization of interpreters, training in LLD, and the recognition of the need for specific training by higher education organs. The main challenges and solutions of this process are set out in section 3.2.1, the content of the curriculum and the certification system are detailed in sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 respectively, the main learning methods are outlined in section 3.2.4, and the number of participants and their background are given in section 3.2.5.

3.2.1 Challenges and solutions

The unified curriculum process faced five major challenges, to which solutions were found in the light of structural, administrative and pedagogical constraints.

Firstly, the curriculum had to be as close as possible to the field, so as to avoid the risk of becoming trapped in an academic world detached from professional reality. This is why the teaching team is multidisciplinary and made up exclusively of people who have close links with PS interpreting: practising PS interpreters; linguists, philologists and researchers specializing in PS interpreting; professionals from other disciplines who frequently work with interpreters on the field. Regular consultations are held with field associations (PS service providers or users)¹¹ in order to keep abreast of their needs, and the programme is modular in order to respond to these changing needs (see section 3.2.2).

¹⁰ Mons School of International Interpreters (*École d'Interprètes Internationaux*) became the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI – *Faculté de Traduction et d'Interprétation*) of Mons University in 2008.

¹¹ The UMONS partner institutions are currently *SeTIS Bruxelles* and *Bruxelles Accueil* for the French-speaking Brussels-Capital Region, *SeTIS wallon* and *Univerbal/le Monde des Possibles* for Wallonia, the interpreting department of *Médecins du Monde* (Doctors of the World), which is active in the humanitarian hub for migrants in Brussels, as well as the *Médiation interculturelle en milieu hospitalier* department of the *service public fédéral Santé publique, Sécurité de la Chaîne alimentaire et Environnement* (Intercultural mediation in healthcare of the federal public service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment) and the interpreting department of the *Commissariat Général aux Réfugiés et Apatrides* (Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons) at the federal level.

Secondly, one major issue was to develop an effective university-level staggered, continuous, spiral and four-level curriculum for interpreters in LLD (such as Dari, Lingala, Farsi, French-speaking Belgian sign language, International Sign System, Pashto, Pidgin English, Tigrinya, Urdu, etc.), whereas they are not (or rarely) taught in French-speaking Belgium (see section 3.2.2). This out-of-school-hour four-level education programme is described in section 3.2.2. In these multilingual classes were thus introduced non-language-specific learning methods (see section 3.2.4).

Thirdly, we trusted that it was important to give access to higher education to people whose linguistic and cultural skills are in demand in the field, but who do not necessarily have the qualifications required to enrol on a university course. These may be people who have not had the opportunity to complete secondary education, or whose credentials have been lost or are not recognized in Belgium. In these cases, the pathway is the 'Recognition of professional and educational experience' system (VAE)¹²: applicants must demonstrate that they have acquired skills and knowledge that amount to part of a university course in PS interpreting, even if they did not follow a traditional educational course. For example, a candidate who has developed communication skills in a multilingual environment may be admitted to the programme after assessment of his or her application file. The principle of VAE was introduced by the higher education organ in French-speaking Belgium¹³ (Décret 'Paysage', 2013, art. 119): it is therefore an official access to a higher education programme. After successfully completing the programme, participants receive an official title attesting to a level of mastery equivalent to that of a master's degree (see section 3.2.3).

Fourthly, the aim was not only to provide *training*, i.e. practical-only learning, but also and above all to provide *education*, i.e. to equip the learners intellectually by enhancing their capacity for critical analysis, reasoning, autonomous judgement and informed decision-making (cf. Merlini, 2017, p. 139). This is why the programme typically includes liaison interpreting exercises on various topics, but also theoretical content and discourse analysis exercises inspired by research into conversational analysis, interactional linguistics and cognitive pragmatics applied to PSI (see section 3.2.2).

Fifthly, the programme had to allow for progressive learning to take into account the personal situation of the vast majority of candidates, i.e. adults with families who work to earn a living while studying to specialize in PS interpreting. The learning system is therefore staggered, continuous, spiral and four-level. This means that at each higher level, knowledge, know-how and interpersonal skills are repeated, deepened and broadened to allow learners to take the time they need to develop automatisms and assimilate increasingly complex theoretical content. They can follow the courses and take the exams as many times as they need to, with no additional enrolment fees.

3.2.2 A four-level spiral and modular curriculum

The solutions found to the above challenges have given rise to a modular and spiral four-level course, delivered by the UMONS FTI. The programme has not been designed by adapting existing courses for conference interpreters to PS interpreting. Instead, it has been designed from the ground up, based on the needs and insights as expressed by the partner interpreting service providers and by trainers with extensive field experience, as well as on some notable theoretical and methodological work (e.g. IMIA, 1995; Angelelli, 2008; Ertl & Pöllabauer, 2010; Davitti & Pasquandrea, 2014; Cirillo & Niemants, 2017; Driesen & Delaforcade, 2020).

¹² Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE).

¹³ Namely the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*.

The programme consists of a staggered timetable course independent of the traditional daytime courses in interpreting (see section 3.1). To date, the FTI is the only university training provider in French-speaking Belgium to offer an out-of-school-hour university-level programme devoted exclusively to PS interpreting that includes training in vocal and non-vocal¹⁴ LLD. The course is revised every year in line with needs in the field and feedback from learners. Specialised education is not officially mandatory to work as a PS interpreter in medical and social settings, but in practice almost all the interpreters from the non-profit PS interpreting service providers have completed training to at least Level 2. For sworn translators and interpreters, Level 3 in Legal Knowledge (48h, 10 ECTS) is compulsory¹⁵.

Here is the description of the current academic curriculum (see summary in appendix 1).

Level 1 'Awareness-raising' (organised from 2022 to facilitate access to Level 2). The main objective is to make the learners aware of the fundamental ethical and communicative principles governing an interpreter-mediated bilingual interaction, and of the need to undertake an in-depth education process to become a professional interpreter. This practical 10-hour seminar includes an online individual preparation, one day of face-to-face lessons, and online review exercises. The content focuses on ethical sensitivity and the deontological management of the most frequently encountered sensitive situations, adaptation to the communication situation, awareness of the multimodal nature of PS interpreting, the fundamental strategies of interaction management. An attendance certificate is issued.

Level 2 'Basic knowledge and competencies' (organised from 2015). The main objective is to acquire basic disciplinary knowledge and competencies in PS interpreting thanks to theoretical insights implemented in practical exercises. The course consists of 110 hours. The content focuses on ethical positioning; intercultural communication strategies; verbal, non-verbal, paraverbal and emotional communication strategies; linguistic competencies (collocations, lexical and phraseological enrichment); analytical competencies (identifying key ideas, intra-textual and extra-textual logic); memorization competencies; basic principles of documentary and terminological research; basics of an interpreted interaction (functionalist conception of interpreting; play of mutual influences; communicative *pas-de-trois*, management of the interactional dynamics and of the prosodic and non-verbal dimensions of communication, multimodality of the interpreted interaction, Gile's Effort Models); liaison interpreting techniques and strategies (consecutive with or without note taking, chuchotage, sight translation); over-the-phone and video remote interpreting; disciplinary and terminological knowledge in somatic health, mental health, asylum procedures and foreigners' law; interpreting exercises in these settings; school system, youth support and protection structures in French-speaking Belgium; care for victims of sexual violence in migration contexts; awareness of sexual and gender diversity; addiction and mental health; interpreters' well-being and self-protection strategies against distress, etc. An oral exam is taken at the end of the course, and a certificate of successful completion is issued if the pass mark is reached.

¹⁴ A hearing sign language interpreter accompanies deaf learners during lessons.

¹⁵ In 2020, by mutual agreement, each of the four French-speaking universities offering a programme in translation-interpreting opened a Certificate of University in Legal Knowledge for Sworn Translators/ Interpreters (48h, 10 ECTS). The creation of these certificates is in response to European Directive 2010/64/ EU on the right to interpreting and translation in criminal proceedings, and to the requirements of the resulting Belgian legislative framework. It should be noted that, in accordance with this framework, learning in these certificates focuses essentially on theoretical knowledge and does not necessarily include cross-linguistic translation/interpreting exercises.

Level 3 'Mastery' (organised from 2016). The main objective is to master liaison interpreting and to specialize in a specific setting, such as the legal (courts, police, lawyers) or the health settings, or in international protection procedures and foreigners' law. These vocational specialization programmes are embedded in Certificates of University (hereafter, CoU). A CoU is a type of continuing education offering learning activities equivalent to level 7 of the framework of qualifications for higher education in French-speaking Belgium, which corresponds to a master's level (Décret 'Paysage', 2013, p. 80). A CoU can only be issued by a higher education institution, and it qualifies for the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This means that a CoU is recognised in any European higher education institution. In UMONS, here exist a CoU in interpreting in legal settings (165h, 30 ECTS) from 2016, a CoU in legal knowledge for sworn translators and interpreters (48h, 10 ECTS) from 2020, and a CoU in somatic and mental health settings (60h, 28 ECTS) from 2024.

In level 3, the basic knowledge and competencies of level 2 are reviewed and expanded. In particular, the linguistic transfer is analysed in depth from the point of view of

- the Gricean cooperative principle (Grice, 1975);
- the inferential dimension of communication (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), i.e. the interpreter's verbalized assumptions and their consequences on the interaction, and the phenomenon of negotiation of meaning (e.g. Delizée & Michaux, 2019, 2020);
- the argumentative dimension of communication and the dialectic and rhetoric strategies (e.g. Anscombre & Ducrot, 1983; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), and their consequences on the triadic exchanges (Gallez *et al.*, 2017);
- the relational dimension of communication, i.e. the manifestations of linguistic politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1992) and the relational discourse markers (e.g. Dostie & Pusch, 2007), and their processing by interpreters (e.g. Delizée & Michaux, 2022).

The main aim of level 3 is to raise the learners' awareness to the richness and extreme complexity of speaking, and therefore of the linguistic transfer in interaction. Learners are invited to work not only *with* their own languages, but also *on* their languages, in order to realize that 'interpreting as interaction' means being caught up in a game of mutual influences (Wadensjö, 1998) and therefore 'doing things with words' and acting on the other (cf. Austin, 1962). The whole point of learning is to become aware of these mutual influences so as to better monitor them and optimally minimize one's subjectivity (Delizée, 2020). Participants are also encouraged to become aware of the ethical consequences of their translational choices.

The essential notional and terminological knowledge specific to the domain under study is taught, such as the Belgian legal system and judicial organization, notions of criminal and civil law, police investigation, the different types of police hearing, human trafficking and smuggling, issues relating to the reception of unaccompanied minors, the hearing procedure by the protection officer in the context of an asylum application, etc. This theoretical knowledge is systematically put to use in interpreted bilingual role-plays (Niemants, 2015). Particular attention is paid to ethical aspects, interpreting strategies and the management of multimodality and interactional dynamics. Written exams and an oral exam are taken at the end of the course. Upon successful completion, a Certificate of University is delivered.

Level 4 'Specialization' (organized from 2023). The main objective is to offer a range of theoretical and/or practical 5, 10 or 15-hour seminars closely aligned with the evolution of professional realities. This means that three out-of-hour seminars are organised every semester, and that the programme changes every semester according to requests from

the field. For example, seminars are held on the interpreter's vicarious trauma and coping strategies, note taking, domestic and sexual violence, genital mutilations, interpreting in prison and courthouses, in health crises, in migratory crises, etc. To date, this level of specialisation is not mandatory and is open to people who wish to continue learning throughout their professional lives. At the end of each seminar, participants revise the acquired knowledge and take stock of their professional development in online quizzes or reflective portfolios. A certificate of attendance is delivered.

3.2.3 Certification system

The first level of the spiral course ends with online exercises designed to have learners think about the basic ethical and communicative principles of interpreted interactions.

The second level ends with an exam consisting of an interpreted bilingual role-play and a terminology test, whose objective is to assess the mastery of health and foreigners' law main disciplinary notions and terminology, the mobilization of basic knowledge and competencies during interpreting-in-interaction, and the functional knowledge of French and the other working language for quality interpreting. The tests at these first two levels are formative, i.e. in a regulatory sense, they aim to support learning by giving advice on how to improve performance and to encourage further development of knowledge and skills (cf. Perrenoud, 2001). In this case, by moving on to the third level.

The level 3 tests consist of written examinations, a bilingual role-play to be interpreted and an oral examination in terminology. Their main objective is to assess the learners' mastery of notional and terminological knowledge, their interpreting competencies and strategies, their competence in mobilizing theory to underpin reflective practice, their ability to maintain an ethical framework in non-standard situations, and their mastery of French and the other working language for high-quality interpreting. This time, the exams are certifying, meaning that the level of knowledge and competencies attained by the learner is assessed as realistically and accurately as possible (*Idem*). The Certificate of University awarded on successful completion attests to a level of mastery equivalent to that of a master's degree, and is associated with ECTS credits that can be used in any European higher education institution.

The online quizzes or individual portfolios in the fourth level enable learners to check what they have learnt as part of their continuing education, and encourage them to reflect on their professional development, their needs and future endeavors.

At levels 2 and 3, the interpreting exams consist of a bilingual interaction lasting approximately 20 minutes, to be interpreted. The domains under examination are somatic health, mental health, asylum procedures and legal settings. The scenario includes language elements in French and the other working language at level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, notions and terminology specific to the domain under scrutiny, communicative and interactional difficulties requiring the implementation of informed strategies depending on the characteristics of the communicative situation (translational choices and adoption of the appropriate interpreting technique), as well as ethical pitfalls. The examination board is made up of at least four members: a French speaker playing the role of the service provider, a linguistic expert in the other working language (interpreter, translator, philologist or linguist) playing the role of the allophone user service, and two professional interpreters observing the interpreted interaction.

The candidate's performance is assessed on the basis of a rubric (see appendix 2) by at least four people, two of whom, having taken part in the interaction, can give a particularly informed opinion on the quality of the management of the interactional dynamics and the relevance of the interpreting strategies. For editorial reasons, it is not possible in this article to give a detailed account of the choices made in drawing up the rubric, but the criteria were developed on the basis of the professional experience of the interpreter-teachers involved in the course and of research work shedding light on the specific features of interpreted interaction. The rubric is also revised each year on the basis of what has been observed in the examinations, with a view to improving it. The main competencies to be assessed are:

- mastery of the two working languages and of cross-linguistic transfer (virtual absence of lexical and syntactic cross-linguistic interference);
- mastery of conceptual and terminological aspects;
- the ability to render the original accurately and concisely, taking into account not only the elements of propositional meaning (semantics), but also the pragmatic dimension of communication (management of inferential processing of the original, argumentative strategies and linguistic politeness);
- the capacity for logic and reflection;
- the ability to choose strategically the most appropriate liaison interpreting technique according to the characteristics of the interaction (short consecutive without notes or with short notes, chuchotage);
- the ability to manage interactional dynamics (normative rendition in the first person singular, management of speech turns, overlaps, pauses and silences, transparency of asides, clarification questions if necessary);
- mastery of non-verbal, paraverbal and prosodic elements to convey meaning and ensure smooth interaction;
- respect of the ethical framework.

To sum up, this four-level certification system enables learners to progressively master the required knowledge and competencies, first in a formative way (levels 1 and 2), then in a certifying way (level 3), which serves as a solid foundation for subsequent formative self-assessment in a spirit of continuing education (level 4).

3.2.4 Learning methods

The participants to the UMONS training programme are recruited by the PS interpreting service providers. It is these associations that test the candidates' working language competencies, cultural and soft skills and interpreting aptitudes on recruitment. Generally, after completing the 'Awareness-raising' level 1, these people start working as junior interpreters in the field while being accompanied by experienced interpreter-mentors in their associations and completing level 2 'Basic knowledge & competencies', then levels 3 and 4 at their own pace.

Being active in the field and employed by a PS interpreting association has three major benefits for the learning process. Firstly, the parallel development of experiential knowledge and education are mutually enriching. Interpreters quickly establish links between their experiences in the field and the knowledge and competencies they learn in class. Experiential

knowledge, which is a dynamic, evolving and unique form of practical knowledge, consolidates and accelerates learning (cf. Demailly, 2020, pp. 37–38). Conversely, learning, and in particular ‘talking about doing’, gives rise to awareness of experiential knowledge, which is then gradually converted into ‘know-how and interpersonal skills’ (*Idem*, p. 41). Secondly, the PS interpreting associations support the UMONS curriculum with in-house training that covers their specific areas of intervention and/or the particular vulnerabilities of their interpreters (for example, a seminar on female genital mutilation, a course to reinforce French as a foreign language or multilingual terminology research). Thirdly, the associations organize special opportunities for their staff interpreters to reflect on their work: a practice analysis group to put experience into perspective and link it to learning; meetings between interpreters and members of other professions to strengthen their collaboration (e.g. Hlavac *et al.*, 2022); discussion groups led by a psychologist to help interpreters manage emotional distress and protect themselves from vicarious trauma (e.g. Splevins *et al.*, 2010). In this way, through regular dialogue, the UMONS and the associations in the field are constantly adjusting their respective efforts and training in a spirit of mutual learning consolidation.

In response to the needs of the field, it is mainly LLD speakers who follow the out-of-school-hour training course. Non-language-specific learning methods are used for these multilingual classes, where the trainers often do not master the working languages. The main features are as follows¹⁶. Practical training in interpreting an interaction is mainly based on role-playing (Niemants *et al.*, 2023). The role-play is based on real situations (semi-authentic components, cf. Crezee, 2015), is written entirely in French and involves linguistic and pragmatic, notional, terminological, interactional and ethical difficulties (see sections 3.2.2., 3.2.3 and appendix 2). As far as possible, the group of learners is made up of pairs, i.e. subgroups of at least two speakers of the same working language in addition to French, who will play the roles of the service user and the interpreter. Only the primary speakers have access to the script, and they are invited to improvise from it so that the interaction is as spontaneous as possible (speaker A plays the role of the public service provider in French and does not understand the other working language; speaker B prepares and translates his or her lines into the other working language). As far as possible, the trainers are also in pairs: one trainer specializing in interpreting and one trainer specializing in at least one of the group’s LLD. The second trainer is generally an interpreter with long experience in the field. The interpreting exercise is commented on by them, but also by the learners on the basis of a rubric specially designed for the peer co-construction of knowledge.

To sum up, the training process for PS interpreters in French-speaking Belgium, which began in the field in the early ’90s, was gradually expanded from 2005 onwards by university instructors specializing in PS interpreting. Since 2015, in-house training has been supplemented by a university curriculum, which is expanded and fine-tuned from year to year in line with the evolving needs of associations in the field.

3.2.5 Participants number and background

Since 2015, when the progressive organisation of the unified educational path began, 842 people have been trained¹⁷: 76 at Level 1, 277 at Level 2, 421 at Level 3 and 68 at Level 4. Around 75% of them have a migration background and report being proficient in several languages. As regards the LLD currently most in demand in the field in French-speaking

¹⁶ Editorial constraints do not allow us to describe this type of non-language-specific system in detail here. We refer the reader to articles on this topic (e.g. Balogh *et al.*, 2016; Crezee, 2022).

¹⁷ Data as at 15 December 2024.

Belgium, 101 speakers of Dari/Farsi, 38 speakers of Pashto, 37 speakers of Kurdish, 29 speakers of Mandarin, 21 speakers of various sign languages, 16 speakers of Tigrinya, 15 speakers of Albanian, 15 speakers of Somali and 10 speakers of Urdu have been trained. In addition, 186 other speakers of non-EU LLD have been trained, including speakers of Amharic, Aramaic, Bambara, Kirundi, Uyghur, Peul, Sousou and Wolof. Among the most represented languages are the various variants of Arabic (347 speakers) and English (202 speakers), Russian (151 speakers) and Spanish (104 speakers). Out of the 55 languages represented, 41 are non-EU.

4. Concluding remarks: main achievements and challenges in French-speaking Belgium

Professional PS interpreting has been actively structured in French-speaking Belgium since the 1990s. Since 2015, in a bid to accelerate the professionalization of interpreters, a unified, spiral and modular four-level PS interpreting education programme with staggered timetables has been established thanks to the close links and combined efforts of associations in the field and UMONS. It is accessible to all PS interpreters, whatever their initial level of education or working languages. Such architecture encompasses the harmonization of practices, a rapid response to changes in professional reality, and inclusiveness. Interpreting into languages of lesser diffusion is at the heart of this system: the overwhelming majority of learners are LLD speakers, which reflects the relevance of the proposed educational path to the needs of the field. Gradually, and each at his or her own pace, participants learn to master the knowledge and competencies that are essential for quality interpreting, and take part in a system of formative and certifying criterion-based assessment. This education, which involves not only training in interpreting, but also the development of reflective and decision-making skills underpinned by theoretical foundations, is made up of a minimum of 285 hours of classes and as many specialization modules as necessary to respond to the changing professional reality. In addition to a staggered timetable, some university day programmes in interpreting have gradually opened up to liaison/PS interpreting since the second half of the 2010s, either via modules of a few hours, or via a two-year Master specialization in UMONS. In this context, learning takes place mainly in widely spoken languages.

As a result of these ten years of sustained efforts, French-speaking Belgium now has trained a pool of PS interpreters who can take part in a tailor-made process of continuing education at university level. From the perspective of the five professionalization criteria developed in sections 2 and 3, it can therefore be said that French-speaking Belgium has stepped up its efforts since the early 2000s and is now clearly moving from paraprofessionalism to professionalism.

However, it still faces a threefold challenge, as is undoubtedly the case in most regions of the world involved in the PS interpreting professionalization process. Firstly, it will have to continue to develop its curricula in response to the explosion in demand for training and education, to ensure that it remains relevant to the needs of the field, and to integrate more widely the fruits of the abundant research into dialogue interpreting (e.g. Cirillo & Niemants, 2017; Gavioli & Wadensjö, 2023). Secondly, the experiential knowledge of field interpreters themselves will need to be more openly valued. By 'field interpreters' we mean people, mostly with migrant backgrounds, who have not necessarily studied interpreting at university, but who have accumulated invaluable experience often over more than twenty years. This can take the form of seminars in which field interpreters share with novices their repertoires of experience (for example, their experiences of migration, their contact with public services in the host country through an interpreter, the hardships they have

overcome in a process of personal empowerment) and the way in which they use this *mêtis* – this cunning experience – in their interpreting profession to act in the interests of primary parties (cf. Demailly, 2020; Le Goff & Carbonel, 2020). This implies greater participation by field interpreters in the teaching team. If teaching is to be effective and reflect the complexities of professional reality as far as possible, it must be more open to the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and origins. Thirdly, the profession of PS interpreter must be recognized by the public authorities. The UMONS and its partners in the field have been working to meet this challenge since 2021 for French-speaking Belgium within the *French-speaking intergovernmental trade and qualification service*¹⁸. Towards the end of 2024, this process should lead to the validation of *ad hoc* competencies. A major step will then have been taken towards official recognition of public service interpreting as an essential link of an inclusive society.

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¹⁸ Service Francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications (SFMQ).

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Appendix 1: UMONS 4-level spiral and modular curriculum & certification system for PS interpreters in French-speaking Belgium

Level 4 Speciali- zation	Specialized seminars for various settings	e.g. Vicarious trauma and coping strategies, interpreting in prison, in migratory crises, in therapeutic groups, mediation at the border, sham & forced marriages, in-depth terminology in criminal law, etc.	5/10/15-hour theoretical & practical modules	Online quizzes or reflective portfolios (formative self-assessment)	Attendance certificate
Level 3 Mastery	In-depth study in legal, asylum & health settings	e.g. Theoretical foundations of discursive analysis, in-depth analysis of the linguistic transfer, ethical consequences of translational choices, disciplinary and terminological knowledge in specific settings (e.g. police investigation procedures, human trafficking, forensic examinations, asylum procedures for unaccompanied minors, etc.), interpreting exercises.	Theoretical & practical seminars, 48h, 60h and 165h	Written theoretical exams Oral interpreting exam Oral terminological exam (certifying assessment)	Certificate of University 10, 22 and 30 ECTS
Level 2 Acquisition	Basic knowledge & competencies	e.g. Communication strategies, liaison interpreting techniques & strategies, functionalist conception of interpreting, interactional dynamics management, remote interpreting, ethics, disciplinary & terminological research, disciplinary & terminological knowledge in healthcare, foreigners' law; seminars on sexual and gender diversity, addiction and mental health, sexual violence in migration contexts, etc.	Theoretical & practical seminars, 110h	Oral interpreting exam Oral terminological test (formative assessment)	Certificate of successful completion
Level 1 Awareness-raising	Ethical & communicative foundations	e.g. Ethical sensitivity, awareness of the multimodal nature of an interpreted interaction, interactional management basics, need of further vocational training	Practical seminar, 10h	Online quizzes (formative assessment)	Attendance certificate

Appendix 2: UMONS rubric for interpreting an interaction

<p>Proficiency in both working languages and mastery of the cross-linguistic transfer</p>	
<p>French proficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fluent, syntactically and lexically correct, idiomatic expression, use of appropriate collocations¹ expression with lexical and/or syntactic inaccuracies and errors, which do not hinder comprehension² asyntactic utterances, lexical approximations and phonological peculiarities that significantly hinder comprehension <p><i>Comments:</i></p>	<p>Proficiency in the other working language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fluent, syntactically and lexically correct, idiomatic expression, use of appropriate collocations¹ expression with lexical and/or syntactic inaccuracies and errors, which do not hinder comprehension² asyntactic utterances, lexical approximations and phonological peculiarities that significantly hinder comprehension. <p><i>Comments:</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> little or no lexical and syntactic cross-linguistic interference 	
<p>Mastery of conceptual content and terminology</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding of specific concepts use of terminological equivalent in target language OR adequate explanation of the term in the target language <p>↪ mastery of the conceptual and terminological aspects of the interaction</p> <p><i>Comments:</i></p>	
<p>Mastery of the cross-linguistic transfer in relation to the management of liaison interpreting strategies and interactional dynamics</p>	
<p>Quality of the cross-linguistic transfer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> transmission of propositional meaning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> with precision with minor errors of meaning with omissions of functional elements with major errors of meaning that deviate the interaction from the original scenario adequate transmission of the pragmatic dimension of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what-is-meant level: management of inferential processing of the original argumentative level: management of dialectical and argumentative rhetorical strategies interpersonal level: management of discursive markers of relationship, management of linguistic politeness strategies accurate transmission of tonality, register and other stylistic characteristics of the original reflection and logic concise expression <p>Interpreting and interaction management strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> choice of appropriate liaison interpreting techniques according to the characteristics of the communicative situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> petite consécutive without notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good memorization fine-tuned management of turn-taking fine-tuned management of overlaps and pauses transmission of interactional discourse markers chuchotage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> appropriately used technically mastered no loss of information consecutive with notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> brief note taking does not hinder interactional dynamics respect for pronouns used by the primary speakers, first-person renditions appropriate management of asides: they are made transparent to all primary speakers if necessary, clearly formulated clarification question / adequately formulated metalinguistic commentary assertiveness while not usurping the place of primary speakers <p>↪ mastery of precise cross-linguistic transfer in conjunction with mastery of interactional aspects and liaison interpreting techniques and strategies</p> <p><i>Comments:</i></p>	

Mastery of non-verbal, paraverbal and prosodic aspects	Respect of the ethical framework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate management of gestures, intonation and voice placement. Use of these aspects to convey meaning • through eye contact and non-verbal communication, supporting direct communication between primary speakers • virtually no false starts, hesitations or other paraverbal interference respect of prosodic convergence with the original <p>↪ mastery of the non-verbal aspects of the interaction</p> <p><i>Comments:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • verbalization of the ethical framework if necessary • triangular positioning • respect for the code of ethics in both verbal and non-verbal behavior: work in complete impartiality/neutrality • appropriate management of intercultural differences when necessary <p><i>Comments:</i></p>

¹ Equivalent to level C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

² Equivalent to level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.