

A Sociological Perspective on Expertise in Conference Interpreting*

A case study on Swedish Conference Interpreters

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Abstract

This paper investigates how conference interpreters with Swedish as A-language¹ working in international institutions understand the concept of expertise. Ten interpreters with Swedish mother tongue and working in the Swedish booth at the European institutions were interviewed in two focus groups (n=5) about their opinion of professional identity. The result was then compared to the findings of a survey of the official discourse of conference interpreting at the European institutions and the International Association of Conference Interpreter (AIIC). Some possible norm-related activities were identified.

1. Introduction

As I set out to explore expertise in simultaneous conference interpreting, I investigated interpreting process and product at different levels of experience (Tiselius 2006 and 2008). I have been mapping expertise following Ericsson's criteria (1996) such as long experience, consistent outstanding performances and access to expert knowledge when needed. When dealing with disciplines with no explicit ranking such as conference interpreting, Ericsson and Smith (1991: 12) suggested the following general three-step-method for investigating expertise:

1. analysis of the investigated domain and the skills necessary for experts within this domain; systematic mapping of the cognitive processes for each specific skill.

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¹A-language – the AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters) language classification of a language which one masters at mother tongue level and interprets into. http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=199#langclassif (accessed 15 December 2008)

2. detailed analysis of the performance within the outline of general cognitive theory; identification of a systematic process and its link to the structure of the task and the interpreters' behaviours.

3. presentation of the superior performance through the cognitive processes and how they were acquired along with the structure of the appropriate domain knowledge.

The three steps are clearly cognitive and consequently the relevant way to map expertise from this perspective, which is to investigate process and product from a cognitive perspective.

Furthermore, Ericsson listed three additional criteria that characterize experts, criteria that I would argue are socially determined, namely, deliberate practices, clear goals and regularly asking colleagues for feedback and advice. These criteria seemed more difficult to map with cognitive tests. I had also come to reflect on whether a person can be an expert in a social vacuum, particularly experts such as the interpreters I investigate, since they work in groups and clearly depend on each other in order to perform their task. Thus, I decided to contextualize the simultaneous conference interpreters in my previous study (Tiselius 2006). In the study described here, focus-group interviews are used together with a general investigation of these interpreters' contexts in order to map the profile they feel an expert interpreter must have. This is only a very small study and it does not claim to make any generalizations, neither on experts in general nor on the interpreters working in simultaneous mode for international institutions. Nevertheless, ten interpreters participated in the focus groups and the whole group investigated comprises roughly seventy interpreters. Therefore, the participants in the focus group interviews are a small but not unimportant part of the whole group.

2. Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate how Swedish interpreters at international institutions perceive the concept of expertise in their own profession. Furthermore, I wanted to investigate whether any traces of a common *habitus* and professional norms surface in a

focus group interview with representatives of the Swedish conference interpreting community at European institutions.

3. Background

In a larger socio-cultural context, conference interpreters, like all other professionals, operate with a "professional identity" which shapes and is shaped by the way a variety of actors and institutions inside and outside SI [simultaneous interpreting] see and describe the profession(-al).

(Diriker 2002: 25)

In her pioneering study, Diriker investigated three Turkish conference interpreters and their role at an international conference on philosophy. Diriker took her stance from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a perspective which she felt more appropriate for analyzing conference interpreting since it had an interpretative part to it as opposed to its cousin, the more observational Conversational Analysis (CA).

Diriker claimed that the professional identity of simultaneous interpreters is meta-discursive in nature. The reason for this is that the description of the simultaneous interpreters' professional identities is not an objective description but rather the result of a joint creation by the profession as well as by society, which is formed by a set of norms, in this case translational norms as described by Toury (1995). And because of this not only did she analyze the interpreters' discourse and interviewed interpreters and users, but she also contextualized interpreting from the angle of professional organizations, code of conduct, academia and so forth (2002: 26 and onwards).

3.1 Translational Norms

Toury proposed three levels of norms in his Descriptive Translation Studies (e.g. 1995). Initial norms (1) are the first choice a translator can make in relation to a text. S/he can either conform to the norms in the source culture or the norms in the target culture. There are two initial norms: the norm of *adequacy* (in relation to the source text) and the norm of

acceptability (in relation to the norms in the target culture). Preliminary norms (2) are the norms governing translation in a more direct way: first, *translation policy* which, among other things, governs which texts are to be translated; then, *directness of translation* which govern the norms of whether indirect translation is tolerated; and finally, operational norms (3) which are the norms that govern the actual translation craft (*matricial norms* and *text-linguistic norms*). Norms can be studied by comparing source and target text, and the regularities observed (e.g. regular improvement of child language) can be evidence of norm governed activity. In this context, norms thus emerge as explanatory hypotheses (Toury 1995).

To Toury's discussion on norms Chesterman added (1997) that norms have a clear problem solving function. He said that norms exist to enable communication where it would otherwise be impossible. He suggested a division of translational norms into expectancy norms (norms on how the end product should be according to the receiving context, society and so forth) and professional norms (norms governing the production, such as relation norms, accountability norms and communication norms). He also said that norms exert a prescriptive pressure by nature. This means that translators behave as they think they should (or "ought" to behave, in the words of Chesterman) (1997: 68). Chesterman gave the following definition of professional norms:

1. accountability norm – a translator should act in such a way that the demands of loyalty are appropriately met with regard to the original writer, the commissioner of the translation, the translator himself or herself, the prospective readership and any other relevant parties. An ethical norm:
2. communication norm – a translator should act in such a way as to optimize communication, as required by the situation, between all the parties involved. A social norm.
3. relation norm – a translator should act in such a way that an appropriate relation of relevant similarity is established and maintained between the source text and target text. The only norm unique to the translation context (68-69).

Lindqvist (2002: 105) summarized her discussion on norms by saying that translators master norms just as their practice is mastered by norms. The translator's (sometimes conservative) choice in the translation process is not necessarily due to a fear of sanctions. It may also be

due to assimilated norm-governing practices, assimilated both at translation school and while working as a translator or investing in the symbolic power of the field (e.g. by joining professional organizations, working for particular publishers and so forth).

The concept of norms is well developed in Translation Studies but has not been as well explored in Interpreting Studies. In 1989, Shlesinger suggested that the notion of norms could be extended to interpreting (Shlesinger 1989). As Diriker points out (2002: 9), Harris (1990) was quick to respond by suggesting several general practices that could be seen as norms in simultaneous interpreting. In 1995, Schjoldager presented a descriptive study on norms in interpreting. She used Delabastita's translational relationships (1989) and applied them to interpreting. She concluded that the concept of translational norms may indeed work for interpreting. Shlesinger did a pilot study herself, trying to identify which norms are at play in simultaneous interpreting (1999). She aimed to identify that norms manifest in the output of the simultaneous interpreter. In this study she concluded that it was difficult to isolate norms from other processes, such as strategies or constraints, involved in interpreting.

Garzone (2002) suggested the application of Toury's norm concept to interpreting and wrote, "In this framework, norms can be seen as internalized behavioural constraints which govern the interpreters' choices in relation to the different contexts where they are called upon to operate" (2002: 110). She also added that Chesterman's distinction in norms applies very well to interpreting. Garzone concluded by warning that since surveys and questionnaires may be distorted by the fact that interpreters and users might want to emphasize what they believe matters rather than what really matters, it may be safer to adopt a purely descriptive approach.

Finally on norms, Gile (1998) claimed that investigating interpreting norms may be done more efficiently by using Toury's extra-textual sources, i.e., to interview interpreters and interview users and to investigate the discourse on interpreting in text sources. Diriker, who adopted this method, was, however, very careful not to draw any conclusions on interpreting norms from her material (Diriker 2002). Neither did Angelelli (2004) draw any such conclusions in her mapping of the interpreter's role.

3.2 *Habitus*

In Bourdieusian terms *habitus* is the web of the individual's habits and actions together with the habits and actions of its counterparts that weaves the structure of practice. Thereby, it is collectively created but not dictated by a person or body. *Habitus* governs our actions without being a rule-based action (Bourdieu 1977: 72). When individuals with the same *habitus* interact they respond to each other's actions as if one individual's action were organized in relation to the other individual's action and its possible responses to that first action. Thus, my evaluation of another interpreter's performance is organized not only in relation to that interpreter's own reactions but also in relation to other colleagues' actions or reactions. An interpreting performance can therefore not be seen as an isolated event without a past and a future; instead it has to be put into context and be explained in terms of dispositions in the social structure of past, present and future, the social baggage that we all carry (Angelelli 2002: 37).

Simeoni pointed out the relationship between norms and *habitus* in his article on the translator's *habitus* (1998). He asked, "What drives the translator's decisions in practice and how can this be?" (1998: 2). In order to explain this he brought in Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and asked, "How does one acquire, in practice and principle, a translator's *habitus*?" (1998: 15). Although in agreement with Toury that a process-oriented study needs to have its cultural-semiotic conditions incorporated into it, Simeoni claimed that the translator's practice is far more complex than what could be ascribed to internalization of norms or socialization to translating (1998: 14-15). He called for more explorations into the translator's *habitus*. Simeoni claimed that instead of putting the focus on what controls the translators' behaviours (i.e. translational norms), focus could be put on which role the translators themselves play in the maintenance and creation of norms (i.e. the creation of *habitus*) (1998: 26).

In mapping an expert profile among a particular group of interpreters (conference interpreters working at an international institution in this case), the concepts of norms and *habitus* fit in very well. Presumably, the interpreters grow into the *habitus* of the profession and the *habitus* of their particular group, and in growing into that *habitus*, they integrate and recreate the norms of the profession. Hopefully an interview with these interpreters will give at least some glimpses of their *habitus* and their norms. Although, it is clear that many of the

practices are probably internalized and taken for granted by the group, it may nevertheless be possible to listen to what they say and draw conclusions on norms and *habitus*.

4. Swedish Conference Interpreters at European Institutions

In order to contextualize the Swedish contingent of the profession (i.e. the conference interpreters with Swedish as their A-language) I will describe the conference interpreting profession in Sweden. Conference interpreting is not a very old profession in general, but this is even truer in Sweden. When Sweden joined the European Union in 1995 there were only a handful of trained conference interpreters, most of them trained either in Geneva (École des Traducteurs et Interprètes, ETI) or Paris (École Supérieure des Intepètes et Traducteurs, ESIT). Not all conference interpreters are members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC); nevertheless, AIIC membership gives an indication of the number of interpreters in a region. In 1995, when Sweden joined the European Union there were some five AIIC members with Swedish A in Sweden and another few worldwide. In 2008 there are 28 AIIC members with Swedish A in Sweden and another 40 interpreters with Swedish A worldwide.

4.1 Conference interpreting training for Swedish interpreters

There had been scattered courses on conference interpreting held at different university language departments in Sweden. However, at the threshold of European Union membership, the Swedish government gave the Institute for Interpretation and Translation Studies (TÖI) in Stockholm the task of arranging conference interpreting training. Since 1994, seven courses have been held and some 60 students have graduated. An overwhelming majority of these students have been accredited at the European institutions.

There are, of course, other schools that have supplied the market with interpreters with Swedish A-language, such as ETI (Geneva), ESIT (Paris), Université de Mons-Hainaut (Belgium) and the European Commission's DG for Interpreting's (SCIC) own training course (discontinued in 1996). Furthermore, a few unique individuals have trained on the job.

All the schools mentioned here, TÖI included, use conference interpreters as trainers. This is a very strong tradition laid down by AIIC's training committee: "Courses should be designed and interpretation classes taught by practicing conference interpreters [...] Professional interpreters who serve as teaching faculty provide the essential interface between the classroom and the profession. They can inform newly qualified interpreters who have been their students about the market and potential employers, and mentor them as they start their careers."²

This guild-like practice can of course be a strong component in developing a joint *habitus* and to both convey and maintain professional norms.

4.2 Age and gender structure

There are some 70 interpreters with Swedish A accreditation at the European institutions, with about 17 % of them being men. Regarding the age structure, a majority of the group are between 35 and 55 years of age. Only 23 % are either younger than 35 or older than 55. The figures seem to indicate a small and homogenous group.

5. Method

[...] our selves are reflexive constructs, but they are very much more likely to be collective than individual constructs.

(Bloor 2001: 5)

In the present study, unmoderated focus groups were used in order to interview the interpreters. Focus groups were chosen since the aim was to capture the interpreters' general claims as a group about their profession. Bloor et al. (2001: 4) said that focus groups can yield data on the underlying meaning of group assessment and also that the method can help us understand the "normative understanding" that groups use to reach a common opinion. Bloor et al. went as far as to claim that the normative assumptions that the ethnographer can only progressively reveal through immersion in the collectivity (since according to Bourdieu

² http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm?page_id=60 (accessed 15 December 2008)

(1977) the force of the normative influences lie partly in their unexamined character) can be articulated in a focus group with the right stimuli. The group gives the members a "socially legitimated occasion" for the group members to participate in "retrospective introspection" in an exercise designed to shed light upon assumptions which are taken for granted (Bloor et al. 2001: 5-6). In focus groups formed from an existing social group it may be possible to capture the processes already existing in that social group. Furthermore, it is important to remember that when a focus group is asked to arrive at a consensus on a given topic, the researcher can expect that divergent opinions will be silenced. Bloor et al. dismissed the opinion that members of focus groups must be strangers. This stems from marketing companies who prefer using focus groups made up of people who do not know each other.

Myers (2004) problematized focus groups and public opinion, reminding his reader that Bourdieu questioned the fact whether there was anything called public opinion at all in a paper called "Public opinion does not exist" (1977). Do focus groups reflect at all the views of their participants or, as Bourdieu argued, is public opinion the artefact of the methods used by the industry eliciting public opinion? (Myers 2004: 78) Myers, however, argued that "focus groups are framed as rehearsals of opinions," and he added that "in every group, participants offer opinions, not as their own but as views of others that need to be taken into account. They are, in effect, monitoring their own performances and supplying any missing views" (Myers 2004: 55).

When it comes to size, groups should be neither too small nor too big. Bloor (2001) suggested between six and eight participants and Wibeck (2000) said "not less than four and not more than six."

When it came to identifying possible evidence of norm related activities, Diriker's method was used in this study. In short, Diriker examined discourses on interpreting in different contexts using Critical Discourse Analysis. My aim is not an investigation as thorough as Diriker's (2004: 26 and onwards), but I will examine a few sources and try to relate them to the notion of the expert or skilled interpreter. In the extracts below, possible norm-governed activities or claims are highlighted.

5.1 Discourse on skilled interpreters in different contexts

5.1.1 AIIC – Code of professional ethics

In the second part of the International Association of Conference Interpreter's (AIIC's) code of professional ethics, called the code of honour, article 3.a states that "Acceptance of an assignment shall imply a **moral undertaking** on the member's part to work with all due **professionalism**" (my stress) and article 3.b goes on to say, "Any member of the Association recruiting other conference interpreters, be they members of the Association or not, shall give the same undertaking."³

5.1.2 European Parliament

On the European Parliament's web page there is a section on interpreters. This web page states that "The main task of the European Parliament's interpreters is to render orally the speeches given by the MEPs **faithfully** [...].⁴ Working from soundproof booths situated along the meeting rooms, they [the interpreters] **faithfully transmit the speaker's message** into up to 20 (sic) official EU languages. Visible to the audience but **never in the spotlight**, they are the voice for all speakers" (my stress). This page goes on to say that "Interpreters **speak their mother tongue perfectly** and have a very **high proficiency in at least two other languages** [...] language is only a tool; interpretation involves **transmitting the message** of a speech. Lots of people can speak foreign languages well, but only a few make good interpreters. It is **a skill that needs to be taught** [...] the interpreter is required to have a solid general knowledge and expertise in all areas of EU activity. Being familiar with an MEP's political opinions can help an interpreter **grasp the speaker's intentions beyond mere words**. [...] The interpreters are **communicators**, their **feelings about what is said being irrelevant**. 'I make people understand each other whatever they say, even if they say the opposite of what I hold as true,' said Ms Dietze. 'We are **impartial** and this is easier for people who have a talent for acting, who can put themselves in the frame of mind of the speaker... you are on the same wavelength' [...] Interpreting is **not word-for-word translation** but the **transmission of a message**, captured in one language and **faithfully**

³ <http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article24.htm> (accessed 15 December 2008).

⁴ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?id=155&pageRank=4&language=EN> (accessed 15 December 2008).

rendered in another. [...] so they [the interpreters] listen selectively, focusing on the **message rather than on the words**. [...] Having little time for thought in the booths, interpreters spend a lot of time **preparing** in advance, reading relevant documents in their working languages, trying to keep pace with changes and new terms" (my stress).⁵

5.1.3 European Commission

The European Commission published a leaflet in 2001 called "Translation and interpreting: Languages in action."⁶ The leaflet states that "They [the interpreters] present the speaker's **ideas and convictions** with the **same intensity and the same shades of meaning**. [...] **Ability to understand** is essential for [...] interpreting. So [...] interpreters must have a **thorough knowledge of the source language**, a **well-developed ability to analyse** and **some knowledge of the subject matter**. Interpreters [...] must **possess gifts of intuition and flexibility** [...]. The hallmarks of good interpretation are **understanding of the original speech, quality and speed of analysis, accuracy and faithfulness to the original**, a **high standard of advance preparation**, a **high standard of spoken language**" (my stress).

5.2 The focus group participants

There were ten participants divided into two focus groups. Age and gender are given in table 1. The groups consisted of two men and eight women between thirty and sixty years of age. Two were under forty and two were over fifty. This means that the gender and age distribution of the focus groups were very much in line with the overall distribution of the group of interpreters with Swedish mother tongue (n≈70) at the European institutions.

⁵<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20060403FCS06935+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#title2> (accessed 15 December 2008).

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/bookshelf/traduc_int_en.pfd (accessed 15 December 2008).

Gender	30 – 40	40 – 50	50 – 60
Men gr. A		1	
Men gr. B		1	
Women gr. A	1	2	1
Women gr. B	1	2	1

Figure 1. Gender and age distribution

The interpreters were recruited via a general e-mail where they were asked to volunteer to participate. Since the groups were recruited from a specific population in line with the goal of the project (in this case, interpreters with Swedish mother tongue working at the European Parliament), the groups have to be seen as a purposive sample (Morgan 1998b: 56, cited in Wibeck 2000: 54), meaning that the participants are chosen from a population in line with the goal of the project. In this case interpreters at the European institutions were chosen to investigate the possible norms of that group.

5.3 Statements and questions for discussion

The groups were first given thirteen statements about a skilful interpreter to rank in order of importance. This is a method proposed by Bloor to warm up a group. The participants were also encouraged to add other statements they found important. The statements (and later the questions) were chosen to try to reflect both Ericsson's (1996) criteria and the evidence of norm-related activities found in the inventory of the sources above. The questions reflecting Ericsson's criteria are labelled E and the questions reflecting possible norm-related behaviour are labelled N.

The statements were a) a skilful interpreter is always well prepared (N), b) a skilful interpreter asks colleagues for advice and feedback (E), c) a skilful interpreter has long experience (E), d) a skilful interpreter does not change the information in the speaker's message (N), e) a skilful interpreter is always striving to render a completely comprehensible interpretation (N), f) a skilful interpreter does not need to practice (E), g) a skilful interpreter has clear goals (E), h) a skilful interpreter interprets everything that is said (N), i) a skilful interpreter needs his/her colleagues (E), j) a skilful interpreter is always

neutral (N), k) a skilful interpreter has interpreting training (N), l) a skilful interpreter has an excellent mastery of his/her mother tongue (N), and m) a skilful interpreter is fluent in all his/her working languages (N).

After that first ranking exercise the interpreters were asked to discuss a series of open-ended questions. They were a) does a skilful interpreter have an innate talent for interpreting? (N), b) what advice would you give to an interpreting student to become a very good interpreter? (E, N), c) what advice were you given when you were a student? (N), d) is interpreting teamwork or an individual performance? (E), e) what do you think characterizes a good interpreter? (E, N), f) can an interpreter be "seen" or not by his/her customers? (N), and g) how "well" do you have to speak your mother tongue and your foreign languages? (N).

The questions and statements are also in line with, although not as detailed as, the recent survey by Zwischenberger et al.⁷ drawing on Bühler's (1986) and Kurz' (1993) surveys. They also have some features of Angelelli's (2002) Interpreter's Interpersonal Role Inventory, IPRI, although, again, not anywhere near as thorough.

5.4 Practicalities

The focus group lasted an hour and was held in a meeting room in the interpreters' usual workplace. The discussion was recorded on video tape. The interpreters were granted full anonymity and they all signed a form agreeing to participate in the discussion and knew it was to be used for research.

Due to a technical mishap the sound of the video recording of one of the focus groups was disturbed to the extent that the discussion is not possible to hear. Therefore, the only useful material that came out of that group was the result of the ranking exercise.

I should also state that I am a professional conference interpreter accredited at the European institutions myself. This means that all of the interpreters participating in the discussions are my colleagues and that their norms and their *habitus* are most likely my norms and my *habitus*. I have tried to analyze their contributions as transparently and open-mindedly as

⁷ <http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article2242.htm> (accessed 15 December 2008).

possible. I admit, however, that there might be features that I am overlooking or taking for granted because of my background.

6. Results

6.1 Ranking the statements

The rankings compiled by the two groups were very similar. Naturally, the thirteen statements were not given the exact same ranking but they were still in most cases not more than two positions apart.

Both groups ranked d) *a skilful interpreter does not change the information in the speaker's message* and e) *a skilful interpreter is always striving to render a completely comprehensible interpretation* as their most important statements. These are the notions of intelligibility and faithfulness that were also seen in the survey of text sources above and that Diriker's interpreters also mention (2002: 73).

The next three statements (not ranked at exactly the same positions though) were *neutrality* (j), *preparation* (a) and *mastery of mother tongue* (l). Again, these are statements that are found in the official discourse of official institutions and schools.

The next group of statements was *need for colleagues* (i), *interprets everything* (h) and *asks colleagues for advice and feedback* (b). These are statements that have not been identified in the official discourse above, instead (i) and (b) link back to Ericsson whereas (h) is rather the opposite of the official discourse, "Interpreting is not word-for-word translation." It should be mentioned though that in the discussion on how to rank, all interpreters agreed on the fact that interpreting is not a word-for-word translation but they did not want to put (h) at the bottom of the list, since the interpreter also had an obligation to render all the information in the speech (cf. (d) above).

The four bottom marks were *does not need to practice* (f), *has clear goals* (g), *has interpreting training* (k), and *is fluent in the foreign languages* (m). Statement (f) was deliberately formulated as the opposite of both the official discourse (interpreters spend a lot of time preparing in advance) and Ericsson's criteria of deliberate practice. The fact that the interpreters ranked it low (i.e. they are of the opinion that interpreters *do* need to practice)

puts the interpreters' opinions in line with both Ericsson and the official discourse. The video tape reveals that the participants found (g) unclear and difficult to understand and was therefore ranked low. Surprisingly, however, both (k) and (m) are found in the official discourse: "it is a skill that needs to be taught" and "a very high proficiency in at least two other languages." The video tape shows a rather long discussion on whether interpreting is an innate skill or not, and reference is also made to the colleagues who have not gone through official training. There is a consensus on the fact that some part of the interpreting skill is innate. It seems then that the participants judge the innate fact higher than the training fact. When it comes to (m), fluency, participants do not make a link between *speaking* the language fluently and have a full *understanding* of the language. Since they argue that full understanding is necessary but not speaking fluently, (m) is ranked low.

The two groups do not agree on *experience* (c), one group ranking it fifth and the other eighth. However, the discussion reveals that a group ranking it higher means that experience is important for everyone and would make both an excellent and an average interpreter even better.

6.2 Answering the questions

Each question is presented along with some examples of the answers given. Direct quotations from the tapes are given in italics. Naturally the answers were not given as a list, as presented here. These are the answers that were located in the discussion and that were extracted and put into a list. Furthermore, the themes identified earlier in the official discourse and now present in the statements of these interpreters have been put in bold.

a) Does a skilful interpreter have an innate talent for interpreting? (N)

Participants agreed on the fact that the interpreting skill is at least partly **innate**. They said that early academic talent is probably an important factor as well (*I believe almost everyone I meet was the best kid in their grade, Ingrid*). Furthermore, they stated that an **interest in the world around** is also helpful. The focus group also concluded that aptitude tests at interpreting schools identify (at its best) the innateness.

b) What advice would you give to an interpreting student to become a very good interpreter? (E, N)

The interpreters in this group gave straightforward advice such as “**read everything** you can lay your hands on” or “be meticulous in the beginning when it comes to vocabulary and glossaries.” Furthermore, they suggested that students should keep **up to date** and **read** daily newspapers and current topics. According to these interpreters it is also important to **inform yourself on the meeting** you will work in and **prepare** for that as thoroughly as possible. The group said that the less experience you have the more you **need to prepare**, and that it was important to understand the usefulness of the internet.

For question b) all statements up to this point have dealt with preparation. However the group also added advice dealing more with personal attitude. They said, “Be yourself and **use your own language**” and also “don’t be too formal; **interpret**, don’t just imitate the speaker.”

c) What advice were you given when you were a student? (N)

When it comes to the group’s own experience of advice when they were students it dealt with quite other areas such as “**never address a delegate**; don’t contact your customers” (*I don’t think that was good advice, by the way, but the question didn’t say good advice, did it?, Ingegerd*). Furthermore, they were told to not eat in the booth, to breathe out and not be nervous. They were also advised to try to deliver a **fluent** interpretation and not be staccato-like when they interpret. The members of this group were also told to cut a sentence into smaller parts if it is very long and complicated and to try to moderate very emotional outbursts without losing the **faithfulness**.

d) Is interpreting teamwork or an individual performance? (E)

I did not believe I would find any statements that would give evidence of norm related activities here, since there was no reference to teamwork or colleagues in the official discourse I went through. However, when looking at the answers, a few very strong, possibly norm-like, practices stand out. These statements are highlighted here.

Interpreters said that interpreting "is a bit of both" (teamwork and individual performance), since "the performance is individual, but you need your colleagues to **write down figures and find documents** for you." They stated that "a very good interpreter is independent in the interpreting situation but is clever enough to **ask his/her colleagues for help** when it is needed." Furthermore, they also concluded that "you are responsible for your own performance, but from a client perspective you are judged on the performance of the whole team" and that "if the team work is not good in the booth it affects the individual interpreter's performance." The interpreters in this group agreed that "it takes a lot of energy to mentally deal with somebody who is not behaving as he or she is expected to in the booth" and that "you are taught at interpreting school that you have a **duty in the booth**, such as **noting down figures** the speaker may quote, and **be attentive to your colleagues' needs**." They said that "it is very annoying when the colleagues do not do their 'duties,' and it is a very good atmosphere in the booth when everybody is co-operating" and that "the customers only see the performance of the whole booth, unless they learn to recognize voices and have favourites." They added that the customers most certainly do recognize voices and have favourites.

e) What do you think characterizes a good interpreter? (E, N)

The interpreters thought that many of the features that characterize a good interpreter were the features that they ranked in the earlier exercise. However, "apart from those things – active co-operation is important." They also said that as a good interpreter you "**liberate yourself** from the speaker" and "**use your own language**" as well as "**keep stylistic values**." The group added that a good interpreter is "not imitating the speaker, but keeping the distance to be able to find **a good formulation that equates the speaker**." Furthermore it "is also being **neutral**, because if you are neutral you keep the speaker's register, and if you are a good interpreter you master all these registers." Other features of a good interpreter according to this group are "an **empathic gift** in order to grasp what the speakers think when they say something" and "**not to interpret word for word** but reading the whole situation," for instance, "do they look angry or not?" The group claimed that "a thousand different things matter in an interpretation, and if you can **feel with what the speakers say** it makes it easier to make a lively and good interpretation." On a final note they added the aspect of preparation saying that "maybe it is a long-term **preparation** to

know your delegates and their political backgrounds because knowing that also makes it easier to interpret empathically. And you can hear if it is an empathic interpretation. It is about culture too, **knowing the country** behind your delegate, **common knowledge** too, and that you are **constantly updated.**"

f) Can an interpreter be "seen" or not by his/her customers? (N)

This point was quickly dealt with. The interpreters in this group said that it was "interesting that interpreting schools teach not to contact the customers since the experience from the private market is the opposite; a good contact is the foundation of a good performance," before they concluded that "**to be seen or not is not relevant as to whether you are a good interpreter or not.**"

g) How well do you have to speak your mother tongue and your foreign languages? (N)

This question was also quickly settled, and the group was quickly in total agreement saying that "the better the **mastery of one's mother tongue**, the better the interpreter" and that "if you don't understand what is said it is not possible to interpret; the **language knowledge is the base** of the whole profession." The group concluded the session by stating that "language instinct is also something **innate** just as the aptitude for interpreting may be."

6.3 Some additional concepts

In addition to the concepts that the questions covered, the following concepts came up: 1) booth manners – doing your duty in the booth, writing down figures, finding documents and so forth; and 2) disagreement with what was taught in interpreting training (never approach your customers and moderate very emotional outbursts).

Finally it was interesting to notice that in both groups the statement on asking colleagues for feedback and advice was ranked low. However, within the analysed group's discussion, the discussion developed into advice and feedback among the group members.

7. Discussion

In the initial survey of the discourse on conference interpreting in an institutional setting a series of statements were identified, namely, faithfulness, perfect mastery of one's mother tongue, high proficiency of second languages, transmitting a message not words, a skill (that needs to be taught), grasping the intention beyond words, neutrality, preparation, intuition and flexibility, and finally, analysing ability. These statements were coupled with Ericsson's criteria, namely, long experience, regular outstanding performance, access to expert knowledge, deliberate practice, clear goals and regularly asking colleagues for feedback and advice.

These statements and criteria were transformed into statements and questions for the focus group. Now, it can be argued that the questions steer the answers. However, since the participants started with the ranking exercise where they were free to rank as high or as low as they liked and since they were encouraged to add any other important issues they felt were not covered, hopefully they were given a broad set of possibilities to react to any possible issue.

Of the statements, the participants ranked faithfulness, neutrality, preparation, and mastery of one's mother tongue high, which is in line with the official discourse. Other issues that came up in the discussion were innateness, preparation, fluency, and empathy, also in line with the official discourse. However, all of Ericsson's criteria were ranked low, except for experience.

7.1 *An Expert Interpreter?*

According to these interpreters, a very good interpreter in an institutional setting is someone whose performance is in line with the official discourse of the institutions. The criteria that Ericsson listed do not seem to bother these interpreters. However, it can be argued that the expert interpreter needs Ericsson's criteria in order to perform in line with the norms reflected in the institutional discourse. These interpreters all show a very strong identification with the norms identified in the survey of the official discourse. As was shown above in the survey of the official discourse, most of Ericsson's criteria are not part of the official discourse. Then the reason for the interpreters to rank Ericsson's criteria low may be

due to the fact that they are either truly unimportant for very experienced interpreters or that the interpreters are unaware of their importance for the expert personality. The fact that the criteria are not present in the discourse of very experienced interpreters does not mean that they are lacking in their actual professional behaviour. However, it shows that experienced conference interpreters with Swedish mother tongue in the European setting have a strong identification with the norms expressed in the official discourse.

7.2 *Habitus and norms*

The fact that this group of interpreters find the statements of the official discourse (possibly reflecting norms) most important is due to their identification to their group, their *habitus*. As said above, training of interpreters is a guild-like practice with professional interpreters teaching interpreting students; this is likely to create a strong *habitus*. As a consequence, and as stated above, when individuals with the same *habitus* interact they respond to each other's actions as if one individual's action were organized in relation to the other individual's action and its possible responses to that first action. This is, therefore, what happens in the focus group. The joint *habitus* of this group is what shows in its discussion. In order to investigate *habitus*, more thorough CA and CDA analyses are needed.

When it comes to norms, the statements found in the official discourse and confirmed by the interpreters fits nicely into Chesterman's professional norms. The possible norms identified were neutrality, transmission of message not words, perfect mastery of mother tongue, intention beyond words, preparation, intuition, flexibility and faithfulness. Neutrality and transmission of message not words fit in under the accountability norm. Perfect mastery of mother tongue, intention beyond words, preparation, intuition and flexibility fit into the communication norm. Faithfulness fits the relation norm.

Can we thereby claim that the statements found in the institutional discourse are interpreting norms? They are certainly not norms as Toury defined norms; to some extent they may fit in under operational norms. As said above, at first impression they fit into Chesterman's professional norms. Naturally, this has to be investigated in more depth in order to draw any conclusions in that direction. However, considering it is a small community and considering the homogeneity of the community, it is not impossible that these are norms at some level.

8. Conclusion

Swedish conference interpreters accredited at the European Institutions are a small and homogenous group. And being so, they are likely to have a strong joint *habitus* and clear norms that ought to be easily detected. This small survey gives some interesting indications in that direction.

The fact that the interpreters in this group are in agreement both among each other and in relation to the official discourse supports the assumption that there is a presence of a strong joint *habitus*.

Chesterman, as cited above, said that norms exert a prescriptive pressure by nature. The official discourse investigated in this study also has a certain prescriptive tone. Chesterman meant that translators behave as they think they should.

Furthermore, norms and *habitus* can be investigated in many different ways, both sociologically and cognitively. Clearly, the two concepts can only benefit from each other in order to draw the whole picture of the *habitus* of the conference interpreter. Different interpreting contexts are likely to be governed by somewhat, if not totally, different norms and therefore different contexts would have to be studied. Different mother tongue and different training may also result in different norms and even different *habitus*, thus other groups of interpreters ought to be studied. And finally, different interpreting professions may differ when it comes to norms and *habitus*.

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