

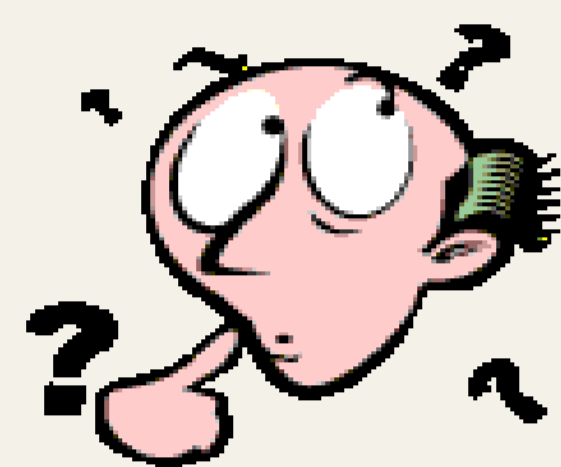
# The Interpreter's Professional Status

## A Sociological Investigation into the Interpreting Profession

### Introduction

The study of **professional status** has so far received **scant attention** as a research topic in Interpreting Studies, as:

- **No empirical investigation** has been carried out so far to assess the validity of the myths attached to the profession.
- A study carried out by **Dam and Zethsen (2013)** revealed that interpreters' considerations on status do not correspond to the assumptions found in literature on the high standing of the interpreting profession.



### Aim and Hypotheses

The objective of the study is to assess **how conference interpreters and public service interpreters perceive their occupational status** and how they believe that interpreting is regarded in society.

Such an analysis might contribute to shedding light on what is required to **enhance interpreters' status**, the main hypothesis being that interpreters' views of their own status are not consistent with the public perception of the prestige and social value of the interpreting profession.



### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework hinges on **Sociology**, which contributes to framing the concepts of status, prestige and profession. A discussion on the social value of a profession is crucial to determine interpreters' self-perceptions of their status.

In this study, status is analysed according to the parameters issued by sociologists (Volpi 2008):

1. Education
2. Remuneration
3. Value to society (Bourdieu 1985)



### Methodology

- The study is based on quantitative analysis of **questionnaires**.
- The first questionnaire, which is addressed to conference interpreters, has already been distributed. It consists of **35 closed-ended questions** and it has been filled out by **803 interpreters worldwide**. The questionnaire parameters were:

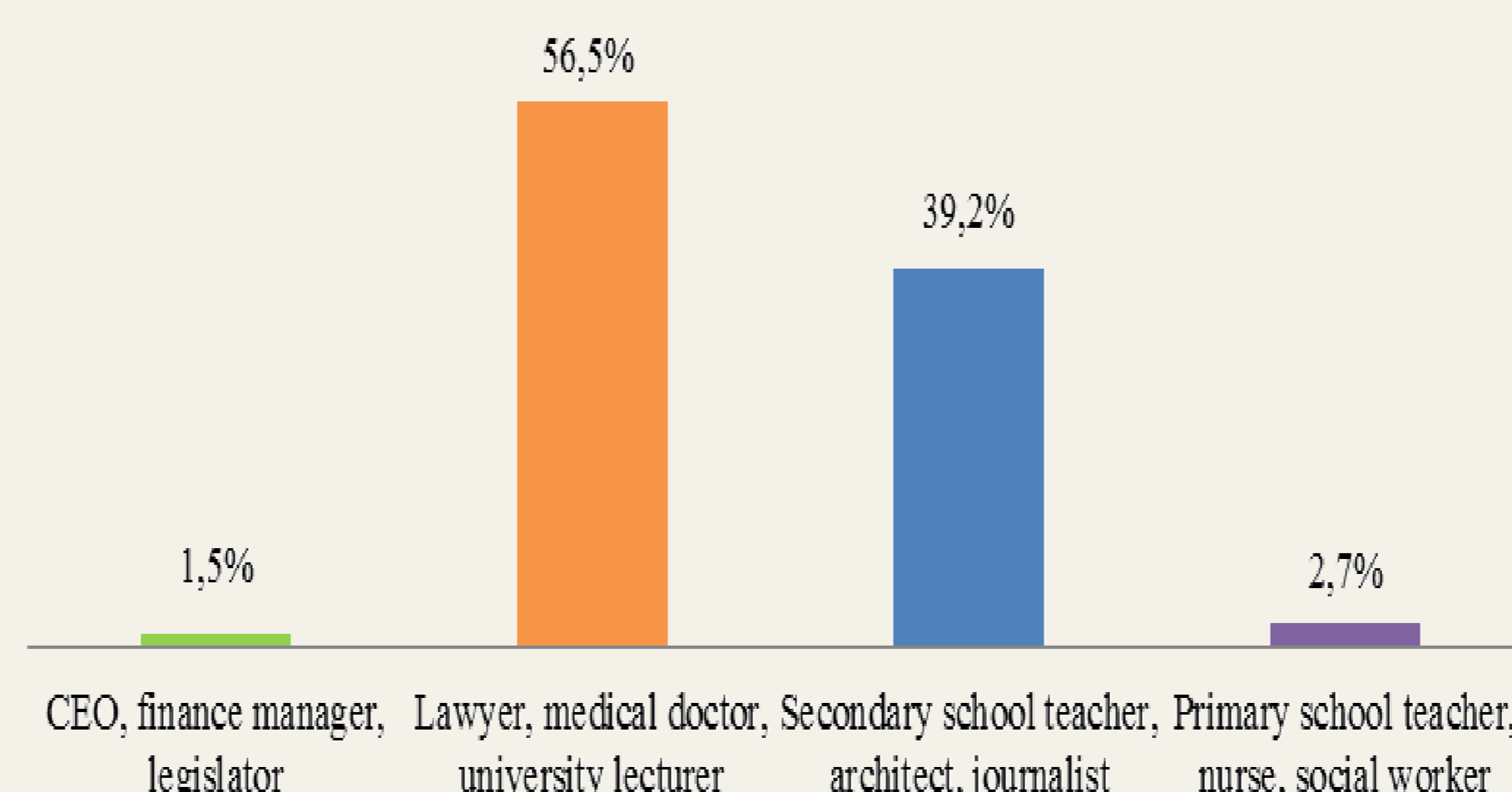
1. Demographics
2. Professional identity (years of experience, professional associations, free-lance or staff);
3. Opinions on public service interpreting;
4. Education and opinions on research in interpreting;
5. Remuneration;
6. Exposure of the interpreting profession in the media;
7. Perception of status;
8. Perception of prestige and the social value of interpreting;
9. Perception of role;
10. The future of the interpreting profession



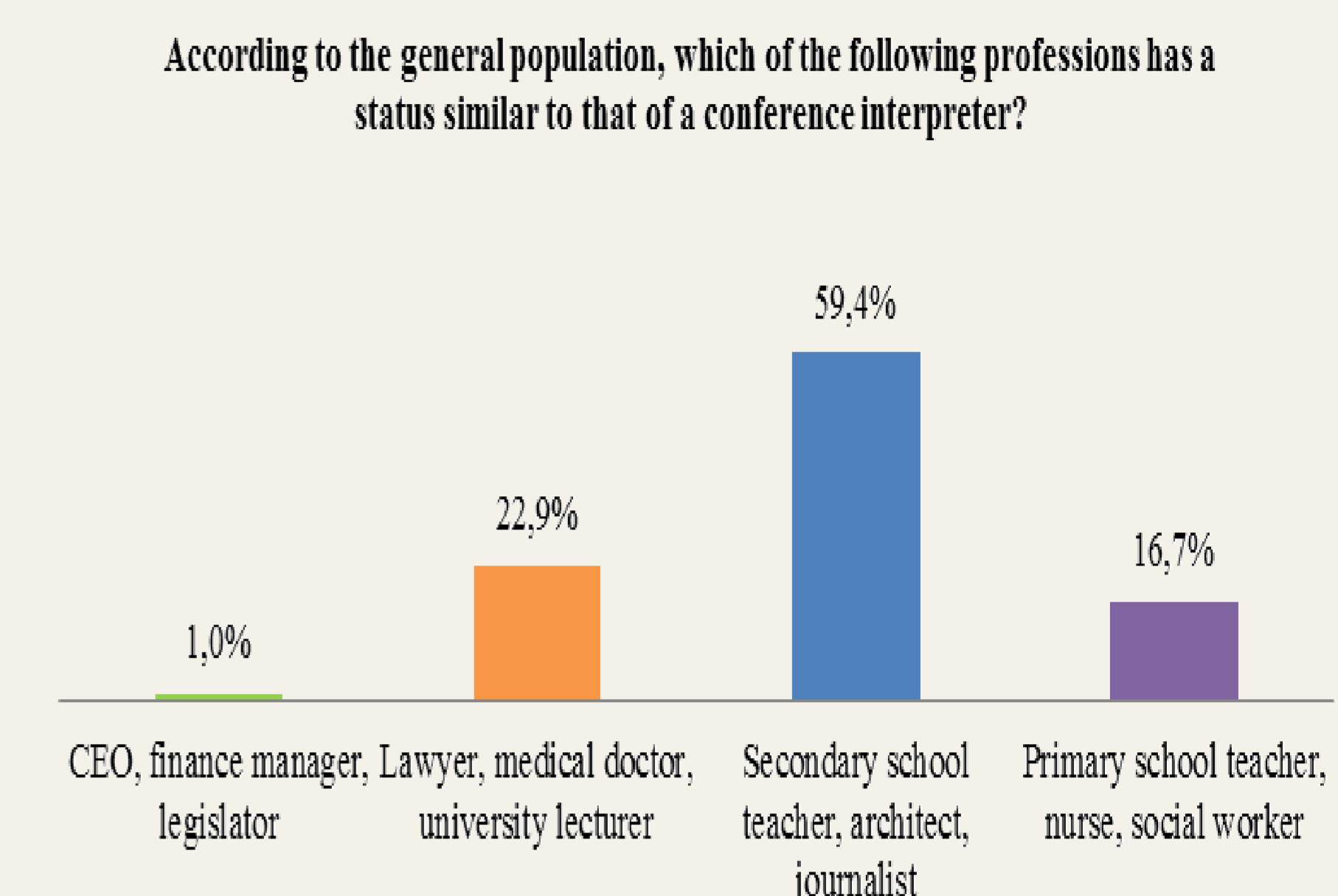
### Provisional Results

The first survey results aimed at assessing whether there is a discrepancy between the **internal perception of status**, which indicates how interpreters perceive themselves in their own eyes (and how they see themselves compared to other professionals), and the **external perception of status**, which sheds light on how interpreters think they are perceived by society:

In your opinion, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?



However, when asked to evaluate how society regards their status, i.e. their **external perception**, they answered as follows:



These findings demonstrate that there is a **high level of status discrepancy** in the interpreting profession, which means that conference interpreters believe that **they are not accorded the status they deserve**.

### Future Developments

The **second questionnaire** is being addressed to **public service interpreters worldwide**. A few more parameters have been added and focused in particular on:

- The interpreter's **role conflict** and role perception, both in communication and in society at large;
- The **European Directive 2010/64/EU** on the Right to Translation and Interpreting in Criminal Proceedings. Do interpreters believe that the implementation of such a directive is a step towards professionalization?



### Provisional Conclusions

The first questionnaire **did not confirm** the general belief that conference interpreters are "the stars of the translation professions" and that enjoy a **high status**.

However, **contrasting perceptions of status** were found not in the socio-economic criteria defining the profession, but rather in **how interpreting is considered by society in general**