

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:

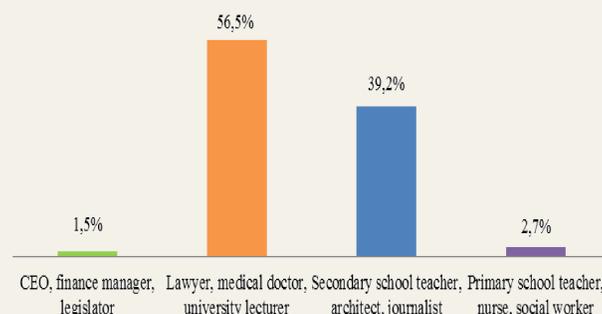
1. Demographics
2. Professional identity (years of experience, professional associations, free-lance or staff);
3. Opinions on public service interpreting;
4. Education and opinions on research in interpreting;
5. Remuneration;
6. Exposure of the interpreting profession in the media;
7. Perception of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



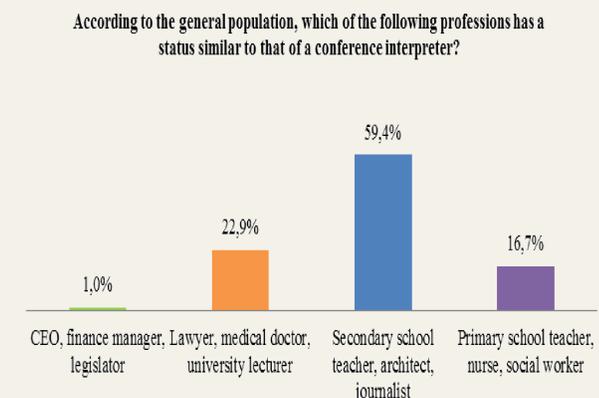
Provisional Results

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**