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Through Women's Eyes. Conference Interpreters' Self-Perceived Status in a

Gendered Perspective

Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the differences between female and male conference interpreters' self-perceived status. Several studies (Angelelli 2004; Katan 2011; Zwischenberger 2011) indicate that women make up most of the professionals working in the translational professions, but little academic attention has been devoted to the question as to whether female and male interpreters have different attitudes towards their profession and their self-perceived status. Sociological studies on feminised professions suggest that women are generally underestimated in the workplace, which leads to them to perceive their status as lower compared to their male colleagues (Cortina/San Román 2006). To test whether this phenomenon was experienced by conference interpreters as well, the responses of a world survey (n = 805) were analysed, with a special focus on interpreters' self-perception of the status, prestige and social value of their profession. The results showed that, when asked to evaluate their self-perceived status, there were hardly any differences between the scores obtained by female and male interpreters. However, major differences emerged when men and women expressed their opinions on the way they think their work is seen by laypeople, showing that female interpreters perceive their status as far lower than their male counterparts do.

Keywords

Conference; interpreters; status; perception; gender; survey; sociology

1. Introduction

Interpreting and translation are predominantly female occupations: several studies (Angelelli 2004; Zwischenberger 2011; Pym et al. 2013; Dam/Zethsen 2013; Gentile 2013) indicate that female translators and interpreters considerably outnumber their male colleagues. With regard to conference interpreting, there are also indications that the profession has undergone feminisation, which means that it has become predominantly female after being originally male-dominated (Pöchhacker 2016: 174).

Whether the increased feminisation of various professions results in a loss of perceived status by women is a question that has been widely debated in sociology. Several studies (Conrad/Marshall 2011) have expounded the possible consequences that a higher percentage of women in certain occupations could have on women's own perceptions of these professions. A large body of literature has suggested that women are not treated equally in the workplace, that the value of their work is underestimated (O'Brien 2009) and that women tend to have lower incomes. Moreover, it has been hypothesised that some female-dominated professions (such as nursing and teaching) are seen as lower-status occupations, simply because the majority of these professionals are women (Sharma/Hussain/Saharya 1992). These phenomena can at least partly be attributed to the fact that, since women's work is often evaluated in direct or indirect interaction with male supervisors, stereotypical beliefs about women's work may affect the feedback women receive

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about their performance and hence women's professional self-esteem (Ridgeway 2009). All these factors could well contribute to a situation where female professionals, such as female interpreters, perceive their professional status differently from men. This aspect, however, has scarcely been studied in Interpreting Studies. As Angelelli and Bear point out, "while issues of gender and sexuality have been broadly and consistently discussed in relation to translation, they remain under-studied in the field of interpreting [...]" (2016: 2). This statement calls for further investigation into a gendered interpretation of certain sociological aspects related to interpreting, such as men versus women's self-perceived status and their beliefs about the status, prestige and the social worthiness of their work.

Two hypothesis will be put forward in this paper: the first is to confirm the outcome of previous studies, i.e. that conference interpreting is a female-dominated profession. The second is that women could experience a sense of inadequacy at work which undermines their self-esteem not so much in the way they themselves perceive their profession, but in the way they believe others see their work. In the light of these premises, this paper will report on the results of a world survey that collected 805 quantitative responses by conference interpreters worldwide, with a special focus on the response patterns given by men and women. It should be pointed out that, even though the study under scrutiny was not originally designed to investigate gender issues in interpreters' self-perception of status, the statistical analysis of the results revealed substantial differences in the perceived status of men and women, an outcome which begged further research.

2. Theoretical framework and previous research

For the sake of consistency, this paragraph will be divided into three subsections: the first will focus on the concept of status and its definition, together with previous research on the status of translators and interpreters. The second subsection will be devoted to the socio-historical evolution of conference interpreting and the way it has become increasingly female-dominated. The third subsection will analyse the phenomenon of feminisation and the empirical evidence on gender inequality at work, which have implications for female interpreters' self-perception of status. It should be pointed out, however, that one of the limitations of the present paper is that most of the research on status, feminisation and gender inequality and the results of the survey presented here paper present a Western perspective.

2.1. The Interpreters' Self-perception of Status

In this study, a difference is established between the concepts of status and prestige. Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, in sociology status and prestige fall into two different domains: status is determined by objective institutional and economic parameters, whereas prestige is influenced by social and symbolically functional codes. According to Ollivier (2000: 441), status could be regarded as a parameter which gives general information about the desirability of an occupation in terms of material rewards (such as education and income), whereas prestige refers to the moral qualities attributed to a profession enhanced by the symbolic-interactionist approach. Although the main markers of professional status – education and income – reflect a certain economic and social power and indicate an individual's social rank, Hargreaves et al. (2007) pointed out that the perceived status of a profession did not depend exclusively on the above-mentioned parameters. Indeed, the study by Dam/Zethsen (2011) showed that translator's self-perceived status is not determined by objective parameters such as income, but by other 'soft' indicators such as a sense of being appreciated.

All in all, judging from the results, visibility, (perceived) influence and societal recognition of translation skills and expertise seem to play an important role for the translators' perception of their occupational status, whereas the apparently most tangible status parameter of them all, money, appears to be less important. (Dam/Zethsen 2011: 994-995).

Within Translation Studies, research to date has focused mainly on the status of translators (Dam/Zethsen 2008; 2011; Katan 2009; Pym et al. 2013; Ruokonen 2016), and it indicated that translators are attributed middling to low status. The study by Dam and Zethsen revealed that all 244 Danish translators in their surveys perceived their status as being low, regardless of their income and their type of employment (company, agency or freelance). Their findings showed that “there are more similarities than differences in the sample, and the overall relatively low-status picture of all three groups of translators, in spite of their strong professional profiles, is probably the most robust finding of the entire investigation” (2011: 995). In contrast, the interpreting profession is characterised by a huge status gap between conference interpreting, which has always been said to enjoy high status, and community interpreting that is often referred to as a semi-profession. In the words of Sandra Hale: “since conference interpreters interpret for international figures, their own status is elevated. Community interpreters interpret for participants of differing status, but are normally identified with the migrant or refugee, who tends to be a powerless participant” (2007: 27).

Interpreters and translators also have different self-perceptions of their status, as shown by a study by Katan (2009), who surveyed 1000 translators and interpreters in 25 countries. After breaking down the respondents into three groups – full-time interpreters/translators, lecturers in T&I and students in T&I – Katan asked them to evaluate their own status. The results were as follows: 43% of respondents replied that the interpreters’ status was high against 10% of respondents who believed that translators enjoy high status. More specifically:

There is general agreement among all respondents that interpreters are regarded with relatively high status/esteem, with 43% ‘high’. Only 9% of the respondents classified interpreters as ‘low’. Translators, on the other hand, are clearly perceived by all as having at best a middling status (59%). More importantly, it should be noted that almost a third (31%) of the respondents classified the translator as having ‘low’ status (2009: 126).

Nevertheless, a study carried out by Dam/Zethsen (2013), who conducted an analysis comparing conference interpreters’ and translators’ professional status, showed a slightly different picture. Although their main hypothesis was that interpreters would position themselves at the top of the status continuum and that translators would place themselves at a lower level, the data gathered from their online survey completed by 63 Danish translators and 23 interpreters working at the EU showed that conference interpreters’ self-perceived status is not as high as expected: the mean status scores were 3.39 for the interpreters, or only slightly over the middle point on a scale of 1 to 5, and 2.56 for translators (Dam/Zethsen 2013: 241). The difference was statistically significant. The conference interpreters who replied to their questionnaire also scored low, although higher than the translators, on the parameter of visibility with a large and statistically significant difference ($t_{84} = -6.119$, $p < 0.05$) in the mean scores for this item: 2.52 for interpreters vs 1.43 for translators (Dam/Zethsen 2013: 248). Similar scores were reported for the parameter influence/power where, in a scale from 1 to 5 “both groups indicate that their level of influence is limited, never higher than 3 on a five-point scale, the most frequent score among the respondents as a whole being 2” (ibid.: 250).

If this rather low status perception is not limited to the Danish EU interpreters, it could be attributed to the swift changes the profession has witnessed in the past few decades (Biagini/Boyd/Monacelli 2016). Major trends such as the spread of English as a lingua franca (Gentile/Albi-Mikasa 2017) and the pervasiveness of technology and growing competition (Gentile 2016a) have changed the face of interpreting forever and will continue to do so in the coming years. As suggested in the introduction, there is, however, another aspect which is hardly mentioned in interpreting research but that could be crucial to gain insights into the way interpreters see their profession. Since several sociological studies (Bleidorn et al. 2016) have shown that female professionals tend to have lower self-esteem (and, consequently, perceive their status as low), could there be a link between a pessimistic view of the interpreters’ status and the fact that most conference interpreters are women? To put it more bluntly: compared to their male colleagues, do female inter-

preters tend to see conference interpreting as a lower-status profession? One particularly striking aspect which emerges in Dam and Zethsen's study is that interpreters tend to attribute themselves a lower status than expected. Although the statistical analysis did not establish any link between the gender of respondents and low status perceptions, the fact that 61% of the interpreters in the sample were women might have had an impact on these scores. Another interesting result which emerges from a world survey on the status of conference and public service interpreters (Gentile 2016a) was that, although no explicit reference to gender issues in the questionnaire was made, the statistical analysis of the data pointed out that men and women perceive their status in a different way. The female conference interpreters surveyed reported having high education and income, but they tended to have more pessimistic views on the present and the future of the interpreting profession, to the point that they would not encourage their children to become interpreters (Gentile 2016a: 145).

2.2. The Feminisation of Conference Interpreting: the United Nations as a Case in Point

As mentioned in the introduction, there is evidence about the increasing feminisation of conference interpreting. As summarised by Pöchhacker (2016: 174): "Apart from the impressive growth of the profession since the 1950s and 1960s, [...] the most striking demographic phenomenon has been the growing presence of women, who have come to outnumber men in the profession at a ratio of roughly 3:1". This statement points to the shift of the profession from male to female-dominated.

If a closer look is taken at the history of conference interpreting in the 19th and the 20th century, two crucial developments explain how a male-dominated profession has grown into an almost exclusively female dominion. These are: 1) the passage from consecutive to simultaneous; 2) the birth of interpreting schools and the increase in women entering the profession. Since it is beyond the scope of this article to explore these developments globally or even in the entire Western world, these key events will be illustrated on the basis of Baigorri-Jalón's study (2004), which combined an historical study of the birth of conference interpreting with its sociological consequences. Although Baigorri-Jalón refers almost exclusively to the turn of events which took place at the United Nations, his investigation may shed light on how women have made inroads into the profession in other settings as well.

According to Baigorri-Jalón (2004), the most crucial moment that changed the face of conference interpreting forever was the passage "from marvel to profession" (Baigorri-Jalón, 2004.: 84), determined by the birth of simultaneous interpreting, which began to be increasingly used at the UN and, eventually, replaced the consecutive mode there and in many other international settings. This change coincided with the feminisation of conference interpreting, which Baigorri-Jalón considers "one of the most visible characteristics of the sociological change [...], from the beginnings when there were hardly any women to the present day where the balance has swayed towards the female sex" (2004: 169).

The process was not smooth because of growing pains and the strong opposition of the UN's established interpreters, who saw their privileged position threatened. As Gregory Meiskins, who at the time was chief of the interpreting section at the UN, remarked: "consecutive interpreters considered themselves the interpreters and considered the simultaneous were something else. André Kaminker used to refer to them as *les téléphonistes*. And they [consecutive interpreters] had almost contempt for the other group" (quoted in Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 71). However, despite all the opposition posed by consecutive interpreters, simultaneous interpreting slowly became the exclusive interpreting mode that was used at the UN. This shift had several repercussions: not only did it affect the popular image of the profession, but it also resulted in a different organizational structure, different recruiting modes and different training schemes, all of which contributed to changing interpreters' perception of their own job.

According to Baigorri- Jalón (2004), a few consecutivists became simultaneists because there was no other choice, but this was a narrow minority, since “there were interpreters who would not even attempt it perhaps because they were afraid of the unknown or afraid of failure or of making a fool out of themselves [...]” (2004: 57). Therefore, the increase of women in the profession coincided with the wave of male interpreters who either moved up to administrative jobs or were simply ruled out of the profession because they had no training to perform it. A description made by Baigorri-Jalón (2004: 135-136) of the typical conference interpreter of the 1970s at the UN could very well describe the current sociological profile of the interpreters of the 21st century:

The interpreter is female. She comes from a monolingual middle-class family. She starts learning languages at primary and secondary school. She improves her command of the languages she is studying by spending short periods of time in the countries where the languages are spoken. She has a very good command of her mother tongue and a good command of another two languages [...]. She is not a perfect bilingual. She takes a degree course at an interpreting school. She works as a freelance interpreter or translator for a time. She starts to work in the UN after several years of experience when she is just over thirty. She reads newspapers, particularly in her own language and in English and she is up-to date on current affairs. She is fond of reading in several languages [...].

Recently, the topic of feminisation of conference interpreting has been put forward in a few scholarly papers, and there seems to be agreement among interpreting scholars that feminisation has taken place in conference interpreting and that it has led to lower status. Pöchhacker (2016: 174) contends that “the high percentage of women has been associated with the decline in prestige and the increasing image of interpreting as a service or helping profession”. Similarly, Spânu (2009), in her analysis of the feminisation of conference interpreting in Romania, argues that the higher number of women in the profession has led to “the devaluation of highly skilled professionals as well as to the underestimation of the occupation itself” (2009: 18). A closer look at the sociological theories on feminisation and its impact on the perception of status could help shed light on these phenomena.

2.3. An Overview of the Feminisation of the Professions and its Impact on Status Perception

In sociology, feminisation is defined as “the incorporation of women into professional groups that were once dominated only by men” (Chepkemei et al. 2013: 59) and considered the result of social and cultural changes in Western societies. With the exception of engineering, which has also witnessed a rise in female presence in university programmes (Cacouault-Bitaud 2001), the cross-cut process of feminisation has affected, to a greater or lesser extent, all liberal professions, and has even become “a transnational phenomenon (Malatesta 2011: 153). The case of medicine is a telling one, as women appear to have moved from being almost completely excluded from medical schools to making up a high percentage of medicine graduates, at least in several Western countries. In Canada, for example, as Adams (2005) suggests, a continuing increase in women’s participation in the medical occupations is forecast for the next few years, as already in 2005 women made up more than 50% of new graduates.

According to the sociological literature, the feminisation of the professional world is said to have led to two intertwined phenomena, which characterise the state of predominantly female professions: 1) a devaluation of women’s skills and work (which leads to lower pay); 2) lack of confidence in women’s perception of their status (Cortina 2006: 107). As for the first aspect, theories on the social construction of skills – the view that the skills associated with women’s work are socially constructed as inferior to men’s – could be useful to establish a link between the underestimation of women’s skills and the perception of their status by society. As Thursfield points out, the inferior status of women’s domestic roles has an impact on the status of women’s work (2000). The consequence of this phenomenon is that “even when similar in quality, work done by women tends to be rated lower than the same work done by men” (Carducci 2009: 536). The se-

cond aspect creates a link between low perception of status and an occupation being female-dominated. When analysing the perceived status of teachers, Cortina (2006) argues that:

Over the past few decades, teaching has become a female profession *par excellence*, with a low salary level and a significant presence of men in administrative and leadership positions. Moreover, the high rate of feminization in the profession has had an influence on the self-esteem of teachers, and it contributes to their low professional status. (Cortina 2006: 107, original emphasis).

As Earle and Letherby (2008) illustrate, the higher number of women who pursue professional careers has coincided with a loss of perceived societal status and prestige of some professions, such as medicine and the legal profession. The loss of status and prestige may be linked to certain stereotypes about working women that still abound in the Western world, as revealed by a review of sociological literature. The stereotypes originate from the supposedly caring and sensitive nature of women: as women give birth and raise children, their stereotypical connotations correspond to those of caregiver and mother. The causes of these stereotypes have been said to stem from “women’s socialization towards lower self-esteem, to their training to appear becomingly (femininely?) modest and/or unselfish, to a historical-social context that devalues women and rewards them less for their work” (Lips 2017: 202). Sociologists Abbott and Meerabeau, who point out that “gender ideologies are an important factor in all the caring professions” (1998: 47), establish the link between this public image of women and low perception of status: “First of all, the idea of ‘care’ itself and the growth of this work from women’s activities means that it is seen as an extension of female roles and therefore less privileged in status” (1998: 48). It is not surprising that most “caring professions” – defined as “jobs involving looking after other people, such as nursing, teaching, or social work” (Oxford Dictionary 2017) – are female-dominated. In the nursing profession, for example, 97% of nurses in the US alone are women (King 2000: 982), and this pattern is spread globally to the point that nursing as a profession has become identified with the female gender, since it “supports the stereotypical feminine image with traits of nurturing, caring, and gentleness in contrast to masculine characteristics of strength, aggression, and dominance” (Atkins 2009: 10). A relationship between the caring profession and community interpreting has also been established by Gentile (2016b), whose survey results indicated that community interpreters believe that their status is similar to that of nurses and teachers.

On the whole, it appears that there still is a gender-structured division of labour, which distinguishes between male labour – superior – and female labour – inferior (Hayes 2017). According to the *Encyclopaedia of Leadership*:

Gender roles are socially-constructed classifications that are inspired and furthered by the overarching influence of patriarchy within society, communities, and families. [...]. The fundamental structure of Western patriarchal society depends upon an understanding that males are superior, more powerful, and that they represent the “norm”, whereas women are understood as inferior, lacking in power and autonomy, and secondary (Goethals et al. 2004: 77).

In the professional field, this supposed inferiority of women is still deeply rooted in the logic of the labour market. According to the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* (O’ Brien 2009), one of the consequences of this phenomenon is that women are more vulnerably employed, which “reflects the influx of women into low-paying jobs as well as the changing quality of employment generally” (2009: 319). A self-evident example of the inequality between men and women is the “wage gap”, whereby women earn less than men do despite doing the same job:

Feminist researchers have argued that, in the U.S. society, the cultural valuation process is gendered and, because women are generally devalued, so are the jobs and skills that are associated with them. This cultural devaluation of women’s’ work is one explanation for the lower wages in female-dominated fields (O’Brien 2009: 386).

Although the study by Dam /Zethsen (2011) showed no link between status perception and income, women’s awareness of the fact that they are often paid less than their male colleagues for the same job may be another factor influencing low status self-perception. The relationship bet-

ween low pay and a devaluation of the worthiness of women's work has been established by Conrad and Marshall, who argue that "women are paid less than men in comparable jobs because their work is perceived to be less valuable [...]. The taken-for-granted assumptions of our society and organizations lead us to believe that a wide variety of hierarchical relationships are normal and natural" (2011: 49).

Another issue linked to both the stereotypes about women as the primary carers for children and to their lower income concerns the challenges of combining work and family. It has been confirmed that women tend to engage in flexible and part-time jobs and are more likely to experience interruptions in their career by virtue of their maternal and domestic responsibilities (Lips 2014: 89). In the field of translation, research (Katan 2009) also indicates a link between the family friendliness of the translation profession and the fact that most translators are women. Though no questions were asked in Katan's survey regarding gender, it is clear from the comments that most professionals are female. As translation can be carried out at home, as one interpreter put it, "the job is 'family friendly', which is certainly a factor in its attraction" (Katan 2009: 142). This comment suggests that women may tend to choose translation as a career because it can be combined with other tasks, including maternal responsibilities. Pym et al. agree: "Since translation is something that can be done at home and with a flexible schedule, it is thought to be attractive to women at a certain stage of their careers" (2013: 75).

The above-mentioned stereotypes about women's work and its devaluation can also be found in scholarly literature on Translation Studies. Drawing on the concept of the 'subservience' of the translator's habitus (Simeoni 1998), Wolf adds that "this sort of subservience, at least with reference to female translators, might be found in Bourdieu's argument that men and women contribute equally to masculine domination, men as primarily dominant and women as primarily dominated agents in society" (Wolf 2006: 136). In order to reproach this subservience, Wolf suggests that investigating the "gender-related working conditions of translators in the closer sense, where in many cases women, despite constituting a numerical majority in the field, still lag behind men in terms of recognition and all other Bourdieu's forms of consecration [...]" (2006: 137). Her arguments follow the logic that translation is defined as a mostly female-dominated and subservient profession and that female translators are not seen as worthy of the same recognition not just in financial terms, but also as concerns the moral worthiness of their work.

The notions of subservience also became apparent in a study on conference interpreters' perceptions of their role (Zwischenberger 2011). In her worldwide survey with 704 responses Zwischenberger aimed to analyse the extent to which conference interpreters' responses propagated by the international conference interpreters' association AIIC "form an integral part of the professional identity of individual practitioners" (2011: 123). When asked to describe their role in a word or two, the respondents frequently used phrases evoking a serving role with expressions such as "Speaker's alter ego" (R 561), "Becoming the speaker's voice" (R 328) or "being as true to the original as possible" (R 50)" (2011: 127). Although almost all of the respondents also believed their work was (very) important (2011: 129), internalised notions suggestive of subservience may have some influence on the interpreters' status perceptions.

With regard to interpreting, the sociological assumptions equating feminisation and low status perception are also reflected in the hypotheses advanced by Ingrid Kurz who, in 1989, published a review of the MA thesis written by Christa Maria Zeller, entitled *Causes and Effects of the Feminization of the Profession of Translating and Interpreting*. In her study, Zeller threw light on the phenomenon of the feminisation of conference interpreting by pointing out some of its causes and postulating its possible consequences. Drawing on the results of an experiment carried out in the United States on the psychological effect that the growing presence of women in some professions could have, Zeller argued that, in conference interpreting, "increased proportions of women can reduce the prestige and desirability of a high-status profession" (Kurz 1989: 74). Along similar lines, Kurz commented that the high percentage of women in the language professions was not a sign of emancipation, but that "language studies and professions are viewed as a playground for

women, with the resulting lack of professional recognition and ghetto formation” (1989: 74). These assumptions could therefore lead women to have lower self-perceptions of status.

More recently, the feminisation of the interpreting profession has been linked to a general perception of low status in at least two studies. Baigorri-Jalón (2004; 2014), whose research on UN interpreters was reported in 2.2. above, argued that “[...] it would be appropriate to consider whether this increased participation of women had some correlation with the negative perception of simultaneous interpreting held by consecutive interpreters – practically all of whom were men (2014: 144). The (mostly female) simultaneous interpreters were slightly called *les téléphonistes* by the older generation of (mostly male) consecutive interpreters: “being put in a booth might imply a loss of prestige, a blue collarisation [...]” (2014: 169).

Baigorri Jalón’s analysis thus appears to establish a link between women’s entry in the conference interpreting profession and its consequent status devaluation. A similar argument is put forward by Spânu (2009, 2011) in her analysis of the feminisation of conference interpreting in Romania. Her findings not only showed that women’s work is often not taken seriously by male clients, but that several forms of sexual harassment (from jokes to intimidation) are perpetrated by male delegates and businesspeople at interpreted events. As one of her respondents put it: “We worked for the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, and we were constantly referred to as ‘the girls’. We were ‘the girls’, ‘the girls who translate’” (2009: 40). In other cases, female interpreters are even confronted with jokes that turned into sexual advances: “There was a time when an inspector asked me if I wanted to go to his room. We were talking and when he said this; I realized that this was enough” (2009: 41). The scholar also pointed out that:

In a context of an unregulated interpreting market, the incidences of exploitation of the services provided by the interpreters and their common associations with other female-dominated occupations (especially secretarial jobs) are commonplace in Romania. In an unregulated working market these women’s competences and skills as professional conference interpreters are trivialized (Spânu 2011: 188).

The findings of this study, which focused on 14 face-to-face interviews, are limited to just one country, but they suggest that more research is needed to gain insight into to whether this tendency is widespread in other countries as well. Although this is not the focus of this paper, special attention needs to be paid to female interpreters’ working experiences with male clients, a topic which, in the light of the findings by Spânu, needs to be urgently investigated.

The above-mentioned research thus indicates that women’s work still tends to be accompanied by lower income (O’Brien 2009), underestimation [of their skills (Thursfield 2000), perceptions of lower social value (Conrad/Marshall 2011), and even harmful stereotypes (Kurz 1986; Abbott/Meerabeau 1998; Spânu 2009). These phenomena could therefore have a negative effect on female professionals’ perceptions of the status and prestige of their profession, especially considering the way in which they think they are seen by others.

3. Method

This paper is based on quantitative analysis of an online questionnaire, which is part of a larger study aiming to investigate and compare conference and public service interpreters’ self-perception of their professional status. After carrying out a pilot study, the survey – available only in English – was placed on the online survey portal *SurveyMonkey.com*. All the 35 questions were close-ended and a space for open comments was placed at the end of the questionnaire, which collected 469 qualitative comments. Initially the link to the questionnaire was sent to professional associations of conference interpreters¹ in 64 countries. In addition, snowball sampling was used, a method which consisted of choosing survey subjects upon referring to other survey respondents.

1 The list of the professional associations used in the survey can be found at the following link: http://www.sft.fr/clients/sft/telechargements/news/fichier/818_fl_repertoire_des_associations.pdf

This process brought responses from freelance interpreters who are not members of any professional association. The questionnaire was made up of ten sections, which are:

1. Demographics (sex, age, country of residence);
2. Professional identity (years of experience, professional associations, freelance or in-house, interpreting as a full-time profession);
3. Opinions on public service interpreting;
4. Level of education and opinions on research in interpreting;
5. Remuneration;
6. Exposure of the interpreting profession in the media;
7. Self-perception of status;
8. Self-perception of the social value of interpreting;
9. Self-perception of role;
10. Considerations on the future of the interpreting profession.

To shed light on whether and to what extent differences would emerge among male and female respondents' views on the status of the profession, this contribution will analyse the items on conference interpreters' self-perception of status, prestige and social value of the profession, as well as the respondents' views of how others outside the profession perceive the professional status of the interpreting occupation.

IBM SPSS was the statistical software used to analyse data and set up inter-group comparisons, which were measured by means of chi-square and Student's *t*-tests. In addition, the software Tableau® was used to provide interactive data visualisation graphs. The independent variable chosen for the analysis was *gender* and the other dependent variables which were taken into consideration for female respondents were age and interpreters' level of education. As for the level of education, the questions aimed to elicit information as to whether the respondents had an MA degree in translation and interpreting. Responses to open questions are used as illustration where relevant.

Since most questions contained in the questionnaires present a ranked structure allowing respondents to express their opinions, the chi-square test was a necessary tool to assess correlations among dependent and independent variables. To complete the analysis, the Student's *t*-test was used, in that it is a parametric test comparing the means of two groups; its main objective is to assess whether there is a significant difference between the means. If the value of the *t*-test is higher than the significance value ($p = 0.05$), it means that there is no difference between male and female interpreters in their perception of status. Conversely, when the *t*-test result is lower than the significance value, there is a significant difference between the groups. While the analysis focuses on the results of the conference interpreter survey, I have also conducted a similar survey among public service interpreters. The results of this second questionnaire (Gentile 2016a, 2016b), which obtained 888 responses worldwide, will be taken into account as a point of comparison where relevant.

4. Results

The questionnaire sections which will be analysed in this contribution are: 1) demographics and professional identity, collected information about the sociological makeup of the interpreters surveyed; 2) self-perception of status; 3) self-perception of the prestige and social value of conference interpreting.²

² An overall coverage of the data obtained from the study *The Interpreter's Professional Status. A Sociological Investigation into the Interpreting Profession* can be found in Gentile (2016a).

4.1. Demographics and professional identity

The data collected on conference interpreting seem to be in line with the previous studies on the number of women in translation and interpreting. With 75.7% female respondents (n=609) and male interpreters accounting for 24.3% (n=196) of the total, it can be argued that conference interpreting is a predominantly female profession. These results are virtually identical with those of an earlier worldwide survey of conference interpreters, where 76% of the respondents were female and 24% were male (Zwischenberger 2011: 125).

The average age of respondents is 48 years and the continent which obtained the highest number of responses is Europe, which accounts for 79% of respondents, whereas the most represented non-European countries are Brazil with 5.6% (n=45) and the United States with 3.5% of participants (n=28). Countries hosting the headquarters of several international organisations, such as Belgium with 16.3% (n=131) and Switzerland with 7.5% (n=60), are also well represented in the survey. For the sake of completeness, the map of the countries represented in the questionnaire divided by gender is shown below:

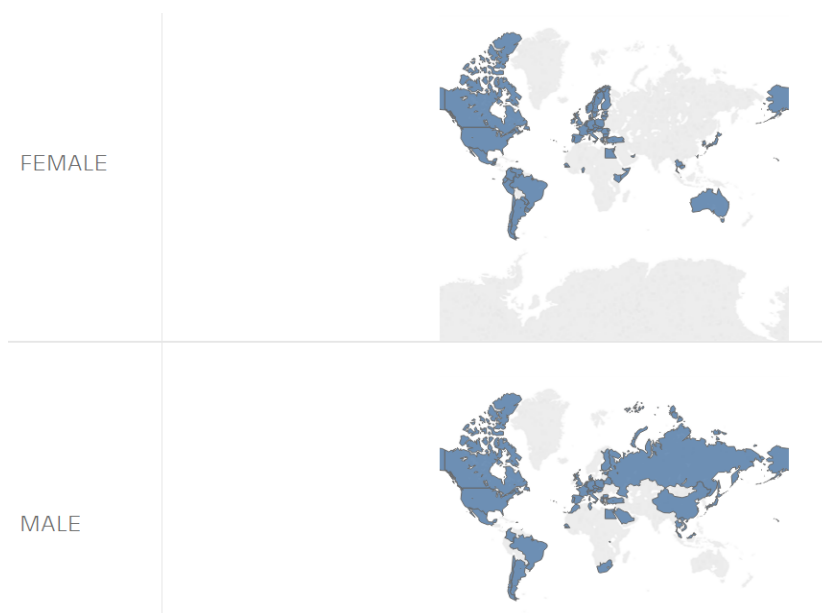


Figure 1. Geographical gendered distribution of the questionnaire responses generated with Tableau®

This representation shows that female respondents are more concentrated in Europe and the Americas. Since the link to the questionnaire was sent to professional associations worldwide, most respondents (90.4%, n=728) belong to a professional organisation. The most represented professional associations of conference interpreters were: AIIC (n=526), followed by the Italian Association of Conference Interpreters (*Assointerpreti*), with 65 respondents, APIC (Professional Association of Conference Interpreters from São Paulo) with 50 respondents and AICE (Association of Spanish Conference Interpreters) with 23 respondents.

In addition, respondents were asked if they worked as freelance or in-house interpreters. The data collected from the survey reveal that a slightly higher portion of men works as staff interpreters at international organizations. This means that there were 161 freelance men (83%) and 35 male staff interpreters (17%). As for women, the proportion was: 536 freelance (89%) and 73 staff interpreters (11%).³ This figure suggests that women appear to be self-employed and to work

³ These results are identical to those obtained by Zwischenberger (2011: 125). In her study, 89% of conference interpreters were freelancers, 11% worked as staff interpreters.

both as conference interpreters and translators, thereby supporting the assumption on the family-friendliness of translation discussed in Section 2.3 above. This hypothesis is further supported by the following question: “Apart from conference interpreting, do you have any other job?”, where 72.2% of women answered that they also work as freelance translators. Although this mainly seems to be due to the fact that translation and interpreting skills are both required in the current T&I market [“In the private market, interpreters also have to do written work, too, such as translating, editing, writing, speaking and teaching” (Female, Belgium)], the percentage of male interpreters who also translate is significantly lower (63.8%).

As for the level of income ($\chi^2 = 3.370$, $DF = 4$, $p > 0.05$) and education ($\chi^2 = .029$, $DF = 1$, $p > 0.05$), there seems to be no statistical difference between women and men, which means that both groups are highly educated and equally satisfied with their income. The questions on self-perception of status will be illustrated more in detail in the following sections.

4.2. Conference Interpreters’ Self-Perception of Status

To investigate differences in status perception, the respondents’ views on status were evaluated through a comparison with other professional groups by means of 5-point Likert scales. The respondents were asked to assess how they regard their professional status and how they think it is seen by the general population. To that end, four groups of professions were provided as points of comparison, divided into the categories established by the ISCO-08 Standard Classification of Occupations. This classification was chosen because it is one of the first methods used to analyse features of the professions (including status). It was initially adopted by Ganzeboom et al. (Ganzeboom et al. 1992), who took the two main status parameters of education and income into account, together with the skills associated with each occupation. Ganzeboom et al. (1992: 2) determined the socio-economic status score for each occupation and created the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08).

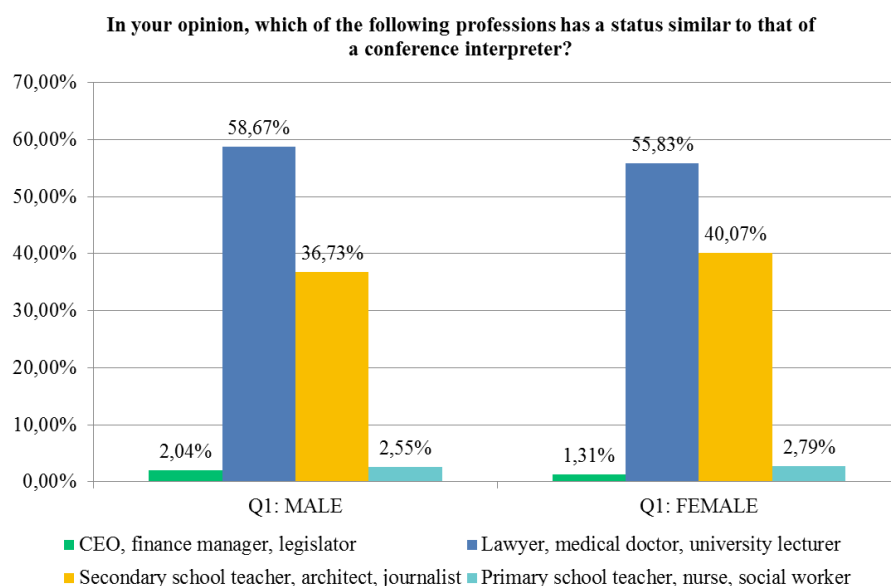


Figure 2. Interpreters’ self-perceptions of status

As the chart shows, a slightly higher portion of men (58.6%) believes that conference interpreters have the same status as medical doctors and university lecturers; a total of 40% of women equate their status with that of secondary and primary school teachers (columns 3 and 4), in contrast with 36.7% of men. The contingency table of a chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 1.189$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$) further showed that men tend to attribute the interpreting professional a slightly higher status than women do, although this difference is not statistically significant (table 1, my emphasis):

Contingency table What is your gender? / In your opinion, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?

		In your opinion, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?				Tot	
			CEO, finance manager, legislator	Lawyer, medical doctor, university lecturer	Secondary school teacher, architect, journalist	Primary school teacher, nurse, social worker	
What is your gender?	MALE	Count	4	115	72	5	196
		Expected count	2,9	110,8	76,9	5,4	196,0
	FEMALE	Count	8	340	244	17	609
		Expected count	9,1	344,2	239,1	16,6	609,0
Total		Count	12	455	316	22	805
		Expected count	12,0	455,0	316,0	22,0	805,0

Table 1. contingency table showing the relationship between gender and self-perception of status

The second questionnaire on public service interpreters produced similar results: there was no statistically significant difference between men and women in their self-perceptions of status ($\chi^2 = 4.559$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$).

Interestingly, younger women appear to attribute a higher status to conference interpreting, but this perception of high status decreases with age. The results of the chi-square test on age and status perception ($\chi^2 = 31.099$, $DF = 15$, $p < 0.05$) show that there is a significant difference within the group of the female conference interpreters surveyed (Table 2, my emphasis):

Contingency table What is your age group? / In your opinion, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?

		In your opinion, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?					
		CEO, finance manager, legislator	Lawyer, medical doctor, university lecturer	Secondary school teacher, architect, journalist	Primary school teacher, nurse, social worker		
What is your age group?	18-25	Count	1	2	1	0	4
		Expected count	,1	2,2	1,6	,1	4,0
	26-35	Count	0	43	24	4	71
		Expected count	,9	39,6	28,4	2,0	71,0
	36-45	Count	2	77	41	2	122
		Expected count	1,6	68,1	48,9	3,4	122,0
	46-55	Count	2	97	72	4	175
		Expected count	2,3	97,7	70,1	4,9	175,0
	56-65	Count	2	88	66	6	162
		Expected count	2,1	90,4	64,9	4,5	162,0
	65+	Count	1	33	40	1	75
		Expected count	1,0	41,9	30,0	2,1	75,0
Total		Count	8	340	244	17	609
		Expected count	8,0	340,0	244,0	17,0	609,0

Table 2. contingency table showing the relationship between age and female interpreters' self-perceived status

As for the second dependent variable – level of education – no statistical difference was found ($\chi^2 = 3.060$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$), which means that education is not a factor impacting on female interpreters' self-perceived status.

So far, I have considered the results concerning the respondents' self-perceptions of status, which did not show a statistically significant difference between men and women. However, when

the respondents were asked to assess society's perceptions of their status, the response patterns of men and women were significantly different (figure 3):

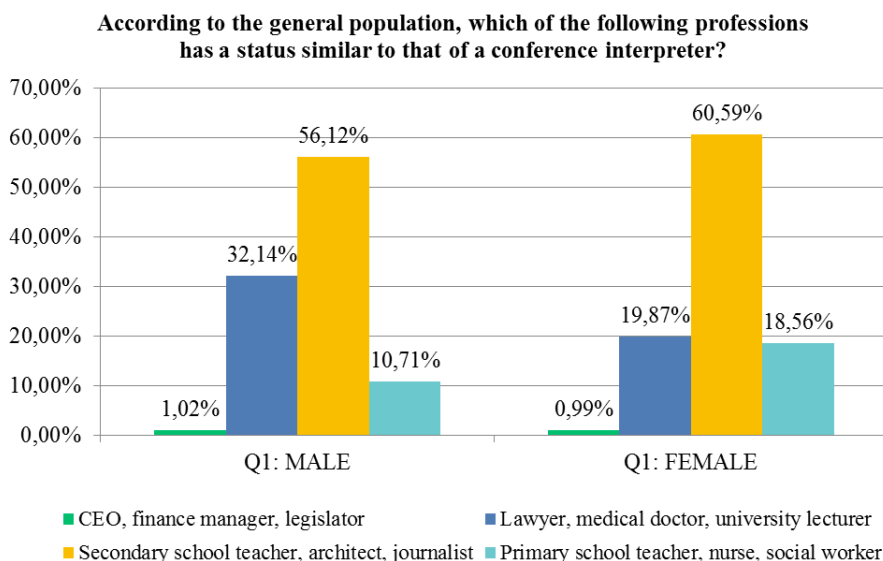


Figure 3. Interpreters' opinions on how they believe society sees them

The graph clearly shows that men and women have different perceptions about the way they believe that society sees their job in comparison to other professions. 32.1% of the men believe that the general population considers them to be akin to medical doctors, lawyers and university lecturers, whereas only 19.8% of the women share that opinion. It should be pointed out, however, that the higher or lower status of the professions listed in the survey are not necessarily maintained cross-culturally, because, for example, some countries – such as Finland – may attach to primary school teachers a rather high status.⁴ Nevertheless, the results do show different response patterns for women and men on the same question. The open comments further illustrate that way female interpreters tend to be more pessimistic in their considerations of status: in one comment, a respondent refers to the longstanding stereotype that knowledge of languages is tantamount to being an interpreter, which still appears to be one of the most widespread misconceptions related to the interpreting profession.⁵ Another concern regarding the profession points out that clients see interpreting as a waste of money.⁶ One of the reasons for this lack of consideration is underlined by a respondent who reports that clients have little understanding of what the interpreters do.⁷ Even though these concerns are voiced both by female and male respondents and none of the

4 “Today, the Finnish teaching profession is on par with other highly regarded professions; teachers can diagnose problems in their classrooms and schools, apply evidence-based and often alternative solutions to them [...]. Parents trust teachers as professionals who know what is best for their children.” (Sahlberg 2015: 180).

5 Just as Internet makes people believe they can have everything for free, it is assumed that with every pupil learning 2 foreign languages and with google translate the profession will disappear like the dinosaurs. What will happen will be as in photography: digital technology makes photographers of us all, till the dust settles and people realize any professional work is done on film to this day, from Hollywood movies to the front pages of digital photography magazines shot on medium format...film. In other words, it is likely our profession will be squeezed into even more of a niche market, those lucky to be in will still make a comfortable living, the others will likely struggle to make ends meet and have to do other jobs as well” (Female, Belgium).

6 I am only getting started in the profession and enjoy it a lot but I feel like the situation is changing towards smaller linguistic regimes and lower pays (especially on the private market). A lot of people are questioning the usefulness of interpreters and consider them a waste of money. To tackle that, we need to be excellent to prove our added value and we need to explain better why we are useful and why we should be paid “so much” while indeed, avoiding wasting resources” (Female, Belgium).

7 Interpretation is still misunderstood by the general public and generally confused with translation. Skilled interpre-

respondents explicitly claims to have high status, men tend to show a slightly more positive attitude towards the profession.⁸

As for statistical significance, in this case there is indeed a difference between the mean computer test status scores of males ($n = 196$, $M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.64$) and females ($n = 609$; $M = 2.96$; $SD = 0.65$), $t_{(805)} = -3.8$, $p < 0.05$. The results of the contingency table are illustrated below (table 3, my emphasis):

Contingency table What is your gender? / According to the general population, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?							
		According to the general population, which of the following professions has a status similar to that of a conference interpreter?				Total	
		CEO, manager, legislator	Lawyer, medical doctor, university lecturer	Secondary school teacher, architect, journalist	Primary school teacher, nurse, social worker		
What is your gender?	MALE	Count	2	63	110	21	196
		Expected count	1,9	44,8	116,6	32,6	196,0
	FEMALE	Count	6	121	369	113	609
		Expected count	6,1	139,2	362,4	101,4	609,0
Total	Count	8	184	479	134	805	
	Expected count	8,0	184,0	479,0	134,0	805,0	

Table 3. contingency table showing the differences in men and women's consideration of status as seen by laypeople.

As the table shows ($\chi^2 = 15.749$, $DF = 3$, $p < 0.05$), there is a significant difference between men and women. The main differences between the two groups can be observed in the second column: as for men, there is a 19-point difference between the actual and the expected count, and for women the reverse is true with a difference standing at 18 points. There was a similar difference in the public service interpreter survey ($\chi^2 = 10.716$, $DF = 3$, $p < 0.05$).

ters deserve far more recognition, in particular the high level of stress involved (Female, USA).

8 A totally fulfilling profession. Interesting, challenging, rewarding (both financially and also professionally at the best of times). Requires tenacity and talent plus suitable personal traits to guarantee personal success (which profession doesn't!). I have a journalistic background to supplement the linguistic which has helped of course. A small language environment (Finnish) limits competition which also has been beneficial; quality and excellence prevail rather than fee dumping. Public awareness of our profession was (temporarily) increased by the country's membership in the EU (Male, Finland).

Unlike in the case of self-perceived status, the results obtained from a chi-square test for the variables age ($\chi^2 = 14.155$, $DF = 15$, $p > 0.05$), and education ($\chi^2 = 3.177$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$) show that these two variables produce no statistically significant differences for this status item. Nevertheless, the contingency table related to status perceptions and level of education showed that women with a lower educational level believed the general population to perceive interpreter status as lower than respondents with an MA in Translation and Interpreting.

The results suggest that female and male interpreters actually perceive their own status in a similar manner; what differs is how they view the perception held by the general population towards the status of the interpreter. Indeed, what emerges from this analysis is that men seem to be confident about the way their profession is perceived by others. Even though teachers' and nurses' low perceptions of status cannot be considered a universal phenomenon, the higher number of women who compare themselves with primary school teachers and nurses⁹ seem to confirm the theories about the devaluation of feminised professions (see 2.3. above). The response pattern suggests that women feel that they are not treated equally – or, to put it with their own words that they are seen as “second-class citizens” – when they work:

Many interpreters are female and in a macho culture like the UK and Spain (my languages) we are always treated like second-class citizens. Few people see the interpreter as a need even when they see us helping them communicate successfully with their interlocutors (Female, Spain). I was once jokingly introduced as the “interruptor” rather than the “interpreter”, at a liaison job

Also great surprise was expressed on my arrival on another occasion: “But he’s a MAN!” Some attention to gender attitudes should be paid (Man, USA).

These comments confirm the assumptions postulated in the theoretical framework of feminisation, which point out that if people feel that they are not appreciated by the people outside the profession they are more likely to devalue their status and professional value.

4.3. Self-perception of the Prestige and the Social Value of Conference Interpreting

In this questionnaire section, the respondents were asked to assess the level of prestige they believe society attributes to conference interpreting. When asked to determine whether interpreting was a prestigious job in their own opinion, the answers were as follows (figure 4):

9 As for the difference between ‘profession’ and ‘semi-profession’, Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger remarked that interpreting was “an extreme example of an understudied semi-professional occupation” (2011: 3). A semi-profession is defined as a job which is similar to a profession, but requires less education and enjoys limited autonomy. Several sociologists include among the major semi-professions “elementary and primary school teachers, librarians, social workers and registered nurses” (Hodson/Sullivan 2011), which offer few opportunities of promotion and low salaries.

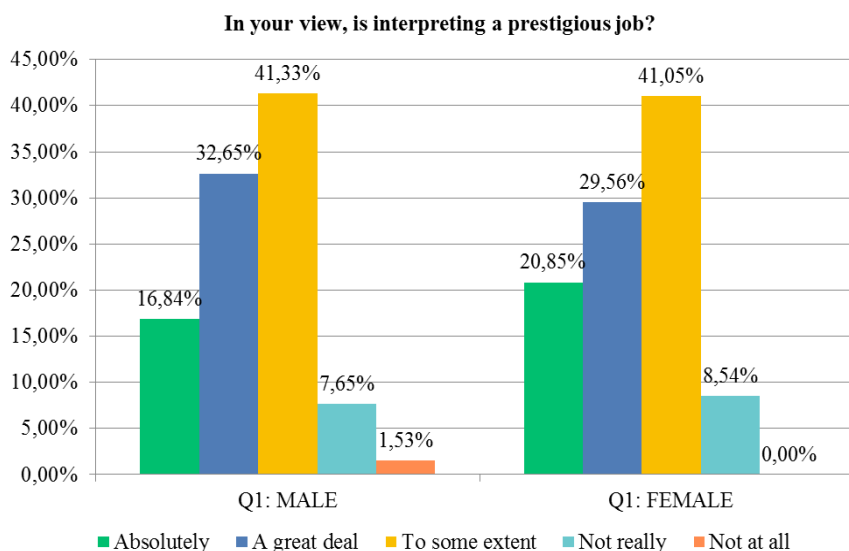


Figure 4. Male and female interpreters' self-perception of prestige

The graph shows that both men and women attribute a high degree of prestige to the interpreting profession. Although the majority of the responses tend to concentrate on the intermediate value proposed by the Likert Scale (41.5% of women and 41.3% of men), opinions tend to coincide as for the first two values (column 1 and 2), where both men and women regard their profession as a prestigious one (50.3% of women and 49.4% of men). Although a slightly higher proportion of women (8.5%) thinks that interpreting is not really prestigious compared to men (7.6%), this is balanced out by the fact that 1.5% of the men believe that the profession is “not at all” prestigious as opposed to a 0% of the women. By calculating the test scores of males ($n = 196$, $M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.91$) and females ($n = 609$; $M = 2.37$; $SD = 0.90$), an independent Student's t -test showed that there is no significant difference between male and female interpreters ($t(805) = 0.95$, $p > 0.05$) in their perception of prestige. According to the data, women do not consider interpreting to have lower prestige.

However, the results were different when interpreters were asked to evaluate what degree of prestige society attributes to their profession:

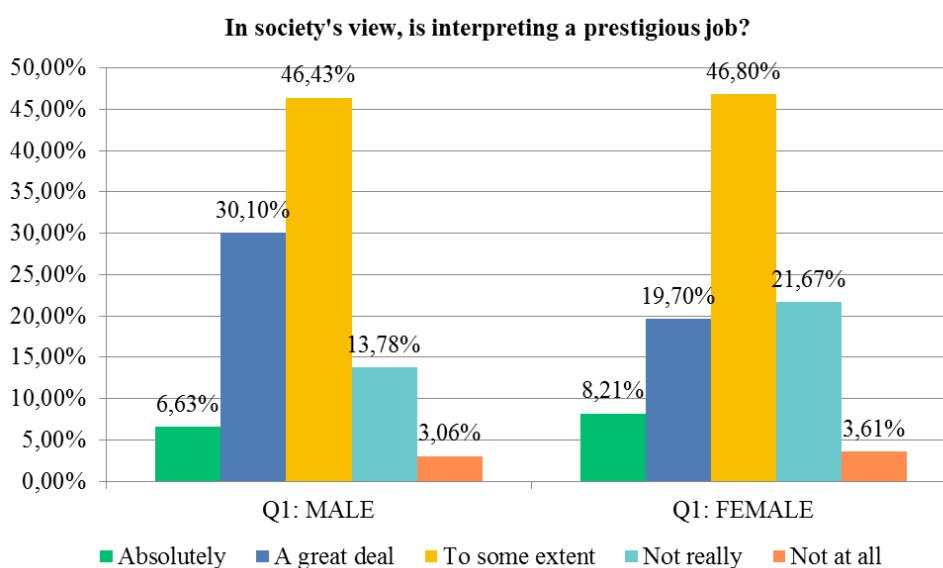


Figure 5. Male and female interpreters' perceptions of society's views of prestige

The graph suggests that there could be a significant difference between female and male conference interpreters in their perception of how prestigious their profession is considered in society. To get more accurate results, statistical tests showed the following (table 4):

Contingency table What is your gender? /In society's view, is interpreting a prestigious job?										
			In society's view, is interpreting a prestigious job?					Total		
			Absolutely	A	To	Not	Not			
			deal	great	some	really	at all			
				extent						
What is your gender?	is	MALE	Count	13	59	91	27	6	196	
			Expected count	15,3	43,6	91,5	38,7	6,8	196,0	
		FEMALE	Count	50	120	285	132	22	609	
			Expected count	47,7	135,4	284,5	120,3	21,2	609,0	
Total			Count	63	179	376	159	28	805	
			Expected count	63,0	179,0	376,0	159,0	28,0	805,0	

Table 4: contingency table showing men and women's considerations of how they believe society sees the prestige of the profession

The table shows that there is a significant difference between men and women in the way they believe laypeople perceive the prestige of conference interpreting ($\chi^2 = 12.499$, $DF = 4$, $p < 0.05$). With a variation of roughly 15 points, men appear to hold a more confident view. This outcome is corroborated by a *t*-test, where the differences in the means obtained from men ($n = 196$; $M = 2.77$; $SD = .88$) and women ($n = 609$; $M = 2.92$; $SD = .93$) suggest that women are far more pessimistic than their male colleagues when it comes to evaluating the way their profession is seen by others ($t = -2.137$, $p < 0.05$). The statistical scores of the further variables taken into account – age and education – revealed that there is no statistical difference among age groups ($\chi^2 = 12.996$, $DF = 20$, $p > 0.05$) that there is no difference based on the possession of a degree in interpreting ($\chi^2 = 1.908$, $DF = 4$, $p > 0.05$). In this particular case, the geographical distribution of the responses, however, suggests that the interpreters' perceptions of the way society views their prestige depends on the country in which the interpreters work (figure 6):



Figure 6. Graphical representation of men and women's perception of social prestige generated with Tableau®

The first row – which represents the responses given by women – shows that women in Europe, Northern Africa, Australia and in the Americas tend to believe that interpreting is not a prestigious profession in the eyes of society. Further research is therefore needed to shed light on the underlying reasons for this tendency.

The respondents of the present study were asked to assess whether they believe that the knowledge and skills of interpreting can be used for the common good. When asked to evaluate whether they regard their job as socially valuable, the results were as follows (figure 7):

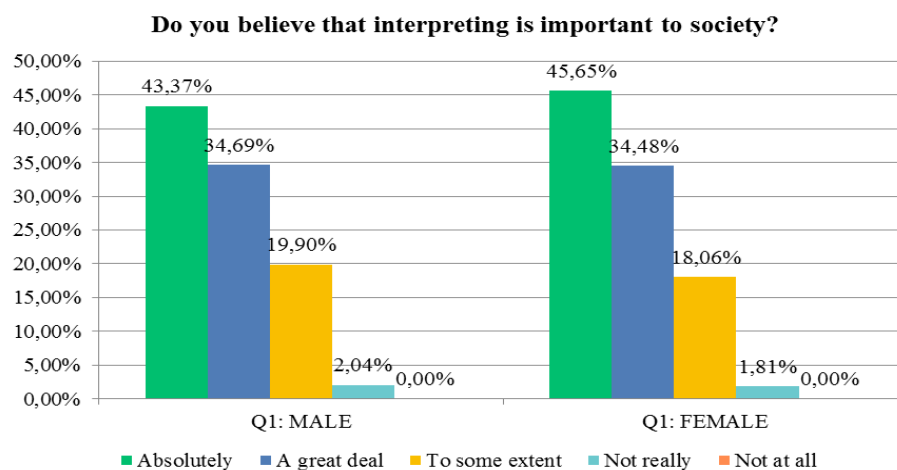


Figure 7. Male and female interpreters' self-perception of social value

The figure illustrates that a high number of conference interpreters (88.9%) answered that they attach great social value to the interpreting profession, and no significant difference was found between the two groups ($\chi^2 = .487$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$). No significant difference for this question was found in the second questionnaire addressed to public service interpreters ($\chi^2 = 2.530$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$), either. The variables age ($\chi^2 = 16.489$, $DF = 15$, $p > 0.05$) and education ($\chi^2 = 5.350$, $DF = 3$, $p > 0.05$) were also not significant.

= 3, $p > 0.05$), appear to have little impact on female interpreters' perception of social value, although younger interpreters are more convinced of the usefulness of their job.

However, when it came to assessing the way in which the social importance of the profession is perceived by society, the answers were as follows (figure 8):

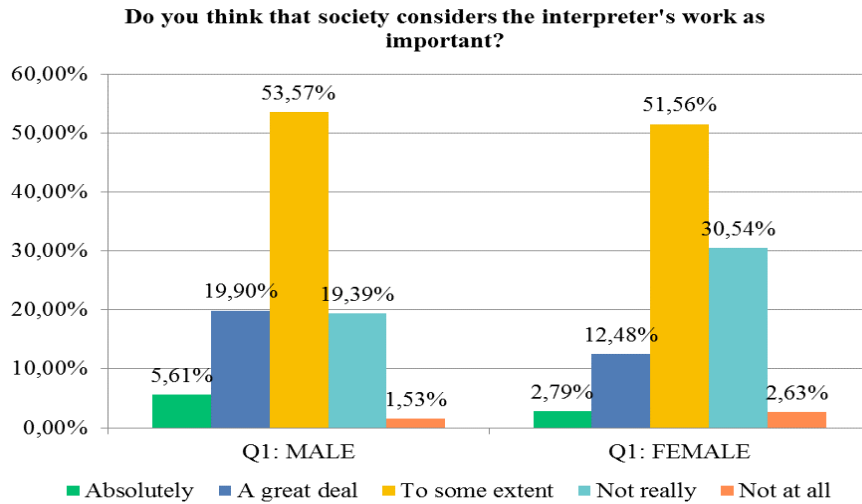


Figure 8. Interpreters' opinions on the social value of the profession as seen by laypeople

Statistically, there is a significant difference between men and women ($t_{(805)} -4.049, p = 0.00$), as can be seen in the contingency table below (table 5, my emphasis):

Contingency table What is your gender? /Do you think that society considers the interpreter's work as important?

		Do you think that society considers the interpreter's work as important?				Tot	N	
		Absolute	A great	To	Not			
		ly	deal	some	really	ot	at	
				extent		all		
What is your gender?	Male	Count	11	39	105	38	3	196
		Expected count	6,8	28,0	102,0	54,5	4,6	196,0
	Female	Count	17	76	314	186	16	609
		Expected count	21,2	87,0	317,0	169,5	14,4	609,0
Total	Count	28	115	419	224	19	805	
	Expected count	28,0	115,0	419,0	224,0	19,0	805,0	

Table 5: contingency table showing how male and female interpreters describe the social value of their work as perceived by others

The results confirm once again that women tend to be more pessimistic regarding society's acknowledgement of interpreters' social role ($\chi^2 = 16.605$, $DF = 4$, $p < 0.05$). A similar response pattern emerged in the survey on public service interpreters ($\chi^2 = 13.384$, $DF = 4$, $p < 0.05$). The statistical results obtained from the analysis of the two dependent variables of the conference interpreters survey (age and education) showed that there is no statistical difference in the response patterns according to age ($\chi^2 = 23.603$, $DF = 20$, $p > 0.05$) and education ($\chi^2 = 8.806$, $DF = 4$, $p > 0.05$). All in all, the data seem to be in line with the sociological theories on the feminisation of the professions, and suggests that women and men do not perceive their status in the same way when it comes to assessing how they believe society sees conference interpreting.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The main objective of this study was to analyse if and to what extent female conference interpreters perceive their status differently from their male colleagues. The theoretical section was divided into three parts: the first aimed to illustrate the sociological theories on professional status and prestige, together with the results of previous studies on status carried out by Translation and Interpreting Studies scholars (Dam/Zethsen 2013). The second reported on an historical overview illustrating how female interpreters came to outnumber their male colleagues in conference interpreting (Baigorri-Jalón 2014). The third section described the sociological phenomenon of feminisation by relating it to the fact that feminised work tends to be underestimated and that, as a consequence, women tend to underestimate their status (Cortina 2006).

The responses of a world survey filled in by 805 conference interpreters worldwide – which forms part of a larger project aiming to investigate interpreters' perception of status – were then scrutinised. The main hypothesis – that conference interpreting is a predominantly female profession – was confirmed: 75.7% of respondents are women. As for the geographical distribution, most responses given by women come from Europe and the Americas, whereas men tend to be more present in Asia and Africa. In addition, only 12% of the surveyed women works as in-house interpreters at international organizations, a significantly lower figure compared to that of men, as shown by a chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 4.399$, $DF = 4$, $p < 0.05$). 72.2% of female conference interpreters are employed as freelance translators and both men and women are satisfied with their income. As for the assessment of interpreters' self-perceived status, two dependent variables – age and education – were taken into account to determine whether they had an impact on any difference in perception.

The statistical tests for the independent variables of age and education were carried out by calculating only the responses given by women ($n=609$). The first question on self-perceived status showed that there was no significant difference in women and men's self-perceived status, which indicates that both male and female conference interpreters believe that interpreting is a high-status profession. Among the female respondents, differences were found across age groups, however: as shown by the contingency table (table 2) younger generations see interpreting as a high-status profession, whereas older interpreters believe that the profession has lost its allure. No difference was found as to interpreters' level of education.

In contrast, when asked to evaluate the way in which they believe their profession is seen by others, women tended to show low status perception, especially those who are less educated. The same trend is found in the assessment of prestige and social value: while women themselves believe that interpreting is a socially important and prestigious profession, they do not think that these aspects are acknowledged to the same extent by non-interpreters. The results of the second questionnaire on the self-perceived status of public service interpreters also revealed similar trends (Gentile 2016).

All in all the findings suggest that, when it comes to self-perception of status, women do not score lower than their male colleagues. However, they feel their work is valued less highly by others, a finding which is in line with the theories on feminised labour indicating that some pro-

fessions are underestimated just because they are female-dominated. The analysis of the qualitative comments suggests that women tend to stress further the general lack of understanding of the profession by laypeople, who are less willing to pay for interpreters' services. Furthermore, other studies on gendered perspectives in conference interpreting in Romania (Spânu 2009; 2011) suggested that female interpreters are often devalued and even harassed while doing their job just because they are women. The extent to which these factors have an impact on these differences in perception could open up possible future avenues for research.

It should be noted, however, that the main objective of the original study was to assess differences among conference and public service interpreters' self-perception of status. For this reason, the present study only limits itself to describe a tendency – i.e. gender differences in status perception – which manifested consistently in the survey questions related to status, prestige and social value. The underlying causes determining women's lower perception of status are still to be investigated. Hence, further research is needed to identify the possible causes of this phenomenon, which could originate from women's professional experiences with male clients – as shown by Spânu (2011) – from the constant changes in the T&I private market, or from other gender-related, psychological and cultural factors.

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