

Becoming an Interpreter:

Exploring the Development of Interpreters from Trainees to Practitioners

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Interpreting is an ancient activity but interpreter training is, with only decades of history, a fairly new discipline. To respond to the growing population of interpreting learners, and the rising demand for trained interpreters, this study investigates interpreters as learners, exploring the development of interpreters from trainees to practitioners.

Research on learning reveals that learning is a knowledge construction process, and that the conventional cognitive approach towards learning has been challenged by the more updated social approach to learning, with differing knowledge claims on teaching and learning styles, as well as the knowledge they produce respectively. This study assumes the existence of ‘working knowledge’, incorporating both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. To narrow the general understanding on learning down to a specialised area, or so-called professional learning, the knowledge construction process thus equates to the development of expertise in a given field. In the context of learning interpreting, this study investigates how interpreters build their expertise in interpreting. Using Charles Goodwin’s concept of ‘professional vision’ (1994) is a way for interpreters as insiders to communicate their professional working knowledge to outsiders of the interpreting field. Previous work on interpreter education provides a significant account of interpreter training curriculum and rationale, but limited work has been done on the learning experiences of interpreters at different stages. In search of a paradigm which has the potential to understand learning interpreting developmentally, Lave and Wenger’s Communities of Practice (1999) was adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. It was anticipated that the Communities of Practice could provide a more encompassing view of learning. With the Communities of Practice as the theoretical framework, this study investigates how interpreters learn by looking into their mutual engagement, why they want to learn to be interpreters by exploring their joint enterprise, and what shared repertoires are developed in their venture of becoming an interpreter.

The data of this study came from four groups of interpreters who had undergone identical interpreter training but were at different stages—student interpreters, graduate-to-be interpreters, novice interpreters and experienced interpreters—were recruited for open-ended interview. Based on an ethnographically-informed research design, narrative presented in the interview setting is the key tool in this study, offering a platform for the researcher to ‘discover and describe’ (Spradley, 1979) the learning experiences of interpreters.

The narrative data from interviewing interpreters reveal the characteristics of interpreting learners before training, learning during training, learning at work and explores learning as participation.

The findings demonstrate that many interpreting learners are not only language graduates with a practical attitude towards the promising career prospects of interpreting, but have also had related interpreting experiences prior to training, which motivated them to undertake training. Next, the narrative data examined indicate that learning during training can be divided into three primary activities: learning in class with tutors, group practice with peers, and self-study. After training, learning at work takes place within three domains: interpreting practice, the interpreting profession, and working with people. Practically, trainee interpreters increase their background knowledge and develop interpreting skills during training, while practising interpreters apply their interpreting skills at work and develop coping strategies for the demands of their work. The final sets of data examined in this study investigate learning as participation for practising interpreters using the concept of the Communities of Practice, and reveal the existence of a dichotomy between two sub-markets in interpreting, namely the private freelance market and the staff positions in international organisations, especially in terms of the interpreting market as perceived by practising interpreters. The data demonstrates the level of competition in the private market which leads freelance interpreters to undercut and undermine each other, and that the support system seems non-existent in the private market since freelancers do not expect to help each other at all. In contrast, for those staff interpreters working for international organisations, they have a more straightforward career trajectory to follow. Lastly, the development gap between trainees and practitioners is addressed by articulating the professional vision offered by practising interpreters, which include methods for learning interpreting and an effective approach to job-seeking, something novice interpreters are eager to know.

From a theoretical perspective, the idea of the Communities of Practice was found to be problematic for two main reasons: Firstly, looking from the view of mobility, there are multiple Communities of Practice in existence in the context of becoming an interpreter: Community of Trainees (CoT), Community of Freelancers (CoF) and Community of Staff Interpreters (CoS), with their own particular features and development trajectories. Secondly, by investigating the idea of identity, the three major characteristics (joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire) of the Communities of Practice are missing or only partially evident in CoF and CoS, with only CoT completely following the characteristics outlined by

Wenger (1998) and Lave and Wenger (1999). Finally, this study addresses the educational implications for interpreter training.

This study fills the knowledge gap between interpreter training, learning interpreting and interpreting practice, contributing to a contextualised understanding of how one becomes an interpreter from a learner's perspective and outlining how interpreters at different stages of development approach their professional learning.

Key Words: learning interpreting, interpreter training, interpreter development, professional learning, the Communities of Practice, narrative method

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| CI | Consecutive Interpreting; consec |
| CoF | Community of Freelance Interpreters |
| CoP | Communities of Practice |
| CoPI | Community of Practising Interpreters |
| CoS | Community of Staff Interpreters |
| CoT | Community of Trainee Interpreters |
| CTS | Centre for Translation Studies, University of Leeds |
| E | Experienced Practising Interpreter |
| G | Graduate-to-be Trainee Interpreter |
| MACITS | Masters Programme of Conference Interpreting and Translation Studies |
| MAITS | Masters Programme of Interpreting and Translatio Studies |
| N | Novice Practising Interpreter |
| PSI | Public Service Interpreting |
| QNA | Quantitative Narrative Analysis |
| S | Student Trainee Interpreter |
| SI | Simultaneous Interpreting; sim |
| T/I | Translation and Interpreting |

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Backdrop to the Study

1.1.1. The growing population in learning interpreting

Interpreting is an ancient and common form of communication. Interpreters transfer ideas and promote interaction between two parties who do not speak the same language. Interpreting as an activity is prevalent in daily life for most of the world's population and is a fundamental aspect of everyday communication in any bilingual or multilingual society. Nowadays, professional interpreters play an important role in all kinds of human interactions, ranging from medical consultations, courtroom settings, educational and training purposes to international transactions. Globalisation and technological development in recent decades, and an increasing need for political, social and cultural communication in both governmental organisations and the private sector, have led to a significant rise in the demand for interpreters.

Despite the significant role played by interpreters and the fact that interpreting is an ancient form of communication, the systematic training of interpreters only began in recent decades, as communicative needs in international politics and trade have expanded, and the emergence of international organisations has led to a series of establishment of interpreter training institutions which provide systematic training in translation and interpreting (Pöchhacker, 2004). In the past, interpreters were, for the most part, self-taught. Their educational level currently varies, some having top academic qualifications, others a modest primary school education (Gile, 2009: 5). The first educational institution to provide modern interpreter training was the University of Geneva, which established the College of Translation and Interpretation in 1941. Now, with over 70 years of history in interpreter training, the importance and significance of interpreter training is recognised by not only professionals in the field but also lay-people who have benefited from the use of interpreting services.

Since the 20th century, interpreter training institutions have been established in many countries, providing comprehensive training for interpreters. Notable examples include the Monterey International Institution of Translation and Interpretation in the US, University of Montreal in Canada, University of Canberra in Australia, Shanghai International Studies University in China, University of

Trieste in Italy, University of Vienna in Austria, Georgetown University in the US, University of Leeds in the UK, and National Taiwan Normal University in Taiwan.

Despite the fact that interpreting as an activity is common practice among those who do not share the same language, interpreter training, especially in the contemporary educational context, is often considered to be an 'elite' course among the popular translation and interpreting (hereafter refer to as T/I) electives. For example, to enrol on Chinese-English interpreting courses in Taiwan, my home country, only those who have near-bilingual fluency stand a chance of beating the fierce competition. When these foreign language majors graduate, enrolment on postgraduate level interpreting programmes becomes one of their top priorities. Ever since the Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation Studies at Fu Jen Catholic University was established in Taiwan in 1998, which was the first graduate institute of T/I, many university graduates have struggled to pass the entrance exam to enrol on the interpreter training programme. Furthermore, besides interpreter training courses provided by public educational institutions, some private organisations and adult-learning institutions often design their own interpreting courses, attracting many people who have an interest in interpreting.

In other parts of the world, interpreter training is now drawing increasingly more attention as numerous interpreting accreditation systems are adopted or proposed by governments. These include AIIC, International Association of Conference Interpreters, the first and only worldwide interpreter's accreditation organisation, which has accredited more than 2800 interpreters from over 250 cities in over 100 countries since 1953 (AIIC, 2014); NAATI, National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, the first nationwide accreditation body for interpreters in Australia since 1979; and CAATI, China Aptitude Test for Translators and Interpreters, launched in Beijing, China in 2003, indicating that the significance of interpreting accreditation has spread to the far-east. The popularity of interpreting accreditation undoubtedly boosts the demand for interpreter training, both in academic institutions and in the private sector; the number of interpreting students is increasing, along with the number of continuing education institutes that offer interpreting courses (Chen, 2009).

In such a climate, the theme of learning interpreting and interpreter development has become increasingly prominent. In recent decades, T/I ability has been recognised as the fifth basic skill for students majoring in foreign languages after the original four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Also, from observing the trend for learning interpreting all over the world, it is clear that T/I is no longer considered just a skill to facilitate foreign language learning, but an advanced ability for future T/I professionals. In other words, the training of

interpreters has become not only a skill, but a cultural phenomenon and an inspirational activity. This study is designed to respond to the needs of the rising numbers of interpreting learners, and the corresponding demand for trained interpreters.

1.1.2. The rising demand for trained interpreters

Underlying the fact that there is a growing number of interpreting learners is the rising demand for trained interpreters. Although the significance of interpreter training has started to be acknowledged over the past few decades, there are still many who do not appreciate the value of trained interpreters due to their ignorance or misunderstandings about the interpreting profession. For example, many lay-people make no distinction between T/I, and therefore mistake interpreters for translators. Likewise, many people still think that any bilingual without appropriate training can be an interpreter and that the high remuneration of conference interpreters is easy money as there is a perception that they do nothing more than talk. Another prevalent misunderstanding about interpreters is that the service users are not familiar with the working languages of interpreters, which often causes trouble when requesting interpreting services. According to AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters, there are three categories of working languages for interpreters:

A languages, in which interpreters possess native-like proficiency. When examining applicants for interpreting programmes, examiners look for proficiency of educated natives. The same applies to B languages and C languages.

B languages, which interpreters are supposed to master both actively and passively almost as well as a native, and which are active working languages, meaning that they are supposed to work into them, at least in a conference mode.

C languages, which are passive languages. They are theoretically understood at native level, but interpreters do not work into them. (AIIC, 1982: 10)

The formal definitions for language A, B and C are straightforward, but things are not as simple in the interpreting field. Grey areas do exist when it comes to determining the A and B language for a bilingual interpreter, or the 'sufficient command' in categorising a foreign language as B or C. Initially, the clear distinction between language A, B and C is an indication for interpreting service users to have a basic idea about an interpreter's language directionality and language availability: A and B languages can work into and from each other, while C language is a passive language meaning that the interpreter can only work from C language into their A or B. Not knowing the differences between working languages

might result not only in the failure to request the right interpreter for the right working mode, but also reduce the effect of facilitating communication, which is the interpreter's duty.

The widespread misguided perception of interpreters and misunderstandings about the interpreting profession demonstrate that lay-people—even some regular users of interpreting services—have little idea about the difference between untrained interpreters and trained interpreters. From an outsider's perspective, since they know nothing about the value of interpreter training, they often attempt to sacrifice quality for the sake of costs; many self-proclaimed interpreters or bilinguals engage in the practice of interpreting with no training, which tends to lower the status and working conditions of trained professional interpreters. This not only makes the entry level of the interpreting market even more vague, but also undercuts the livelihood of trained interpreters. In the opinion of many interpreting users, why pay for a properly trained interpreter if you can pay significantly less for an untrained one? This kind of mindset, which stems from ignorance about the significance of interpreter training, is still prevalent. Such ignorance undoubtedly results in the underestimation of the credentials required to be a competent interpreter.

Previous research has already demonstrated the significance of interpreter training. For instance, to disprove the misunderstanding that any bilingual can work as an interpreter, Dillinger's PhD thesis *Component Processes of Simultaneous Interpreting* (1989) showed that the accuracy of interpretation by trained interpreters is much higher than that of inexperienced bilinguals. Dillinger conducted his experiment on experienced interpreters and inexperienced bilinguals, and found that the general interpreting process could be 'broken down into more specific questions about the extent and relative importance of syntactic processing, proposition generation, and frame-structure processing components of comprehension during interpreting' (ibid: 98) by experienced interpreters. Likewise, Moser-Mercer (2000) researched the development of interpreting performance and recorded the types of mistakes that are gradually eliminated during training. In the case of simultaneous interpreters in particular, working memory takes up a huge amount of cognitive resources when interpreting under the pressure of time. Just and Carpenter (1992) demonstrated that the working memory limitations can be altered or improved by practice and training. Based on these previous empirical studies, some suggest that interpreters are 'made, not born' (Herbert, 1978; Mackintosh, 1999). The significance of interpreter training is therefore very much in evidence.

It is obvious that the basic function of interpreting can be fulfilled by anyone who has a minimum knowledge of both relevant languages. But since there are

certain quality requirements, someone with the lowest level of linguistic knowledge is unable to address such concerns as comprehensive understanding of the source language, linguistic reformulation in the target language, behavioural issues, technical issues, ethical issues or psychological issues (Gile, 2009: 6). However, it is not true that interpreting is something that must be acquired through training; there are some high-level professional interpreters who are entirely self-trained. They learnt through cumulative experience and self-instruction, practicing with self-discipline over time, and eventually reached a level of professional competence at which they could clearly demonstrate their expertise. In these circumstances, over-heated debates in interpreting studies over whether interpreters are ‘born, not made’ (Nida, 1981) or ‘made, not born’ (Healey, 1978) seem pointless. The point I would like to make here is that, while formal training may not be compulsory to enter the interpreting profession, it has become increasingly common in recent decades for formal interpreter training to be considered a prerequisite before entering the market, at least for major language combinations. Given the rising demand in the interpreting market for quality rendering, professionalism, and specialised knowledge in particular fields, the demand for trained interpreters has become nothing less than a phenomenon.

As with other professions, there is a gap between learning interpreting and the demands of interpreting practice. Many novice interpreters have expressed anxiety about entering the interpreting market after recently graduating from their interpreter training programmes. Generally speaking, the interpreting labour market is ageing and shrinking rapidly in numbers while younger interpreters sustain relatively high levels of unemployment. This might be due to the fact that the interpreting market is competitive, or that there is a knowledge gap between interpreter training and interpreting practice so that novice interpreters generally find it difficult to make their entry onto the market. The period of preparation time for an interpreter to develop from novice to expert is long compared to that of many other professions. Some novice interpreters might be very good interpreting learners during formal training, but may struggle with the hidden rules of the interpreting market compared to other, formally inferior, interpreters. As a previous trainee interpreter and a current novice interpreter, I have been pondering over whether interpreter training has provided us with the appropriate knowledge and skills to enter a fast-paced and mobile interpreting labour market. I believe that interpreting practice cannot thrive if it continues to be either simplified or deified by those who do not understand the challenging learning and development process that interpreters face. Thus there is a need to investigate learning interpreting so as to understand the knowledge of professional learning in interpreting practice. I became aware of the difference between learning interpreting and interpreting practice in the real world when I

began to work in the competitive interpreting market. My personal experience as a novice interpreter as well as accounts from interpreter trainers and colleagues all demonstrate that achieving a strong result in an interpreter training programme does not necessarily guarantee a prosperous career in the interpreting market. The desire to understand the experiences of interpreters' development, progressing from training through to practice, has inspired me to conduct this research. Through depicting this seemingly mysterious interpreter training path, the results of this research can be instructive and helpful to both current trainee interpreters and also to novice interpreters, by providing suggestions on how to find one's way in the competitive interpreting market. This study is thus designed to discover the missing link between interpreter training and interpreting practice; it is an attempt to form a collective reflection that can build knowledge and create new research and pedagogical agendas for the interpreting profession, as well as for interpreter training.

To summarise, the need for this study is three-fold: from the service users' perspective, to understand the value of trained interpreters; from the interpreting learners' viewpoint, to understand the experienced-based learning and development process; finally, as a practising interpreter and a researcher in interpreting studies, I myself have a burning desire to know how I and other novice interpreters can survive in the competitive interpreting market. Bearing these three needs of the study in mind, I aim to *discover and describe* the under-investigated link between interpreter training and interpreting practice. To describe and to discover are not only the motivations for me to embark on this PhD, but are also two key principles of ethnography (Spradley, 1979). I will discover what learners do in order to learn interpreting via ethnographically-informed research interviews, and describe what I have learnt from them with the support of narrative data. However, if I were to attempt to discover and describe every single aspect of interpreters' learning experiences, the scope and scale of the research would surely be unmanageable. I therefore set myself a boundary: as a former trainee interpreter, a developing novice interpreter and a researcher in interpreting studies, I am particularly concerned with learning, with the significance of having opportunities to engage in learning, and with exploring how that significance is bound up with learning to be an interpreter, along with the relationship between individual agency and social structure. The foci of this study are therefore the learning themes that are essential to understanding the development of an interpreter.

It is anticipated that the outcome of the study will provide guidance for future trainee interpreters in their transition to the interpreting market, offer suggestions for

practising novice interpreters in terms of career development, and provide insights for experienced interpreters who also have teaching or pedagogical commitments.

1.2. Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 offers a broad overview of the educational and interpreter training contexts underlying this study. It begins with a discussion of the concepts of learning and knowledge, including the conventional way of thinking of learning and a social approach to perceiving learning, as well as two types of knowledge. It then offers an explanation of learning as a knowledge construction process, which provides the basis for the exploration of this study to investigate learning interpreting as professional learning. In the second half of Chapter 2, the frameworks of modern interpreter training are addressed, outlining the basic elements of modern interpreter training. The chapter concludes with a rationale for the study, including the need for this study to be undertaken, the originality of the research design, the research goals that this study strive to achieve and a list of research questions that this study aims to address.

Chapter 3 introduces the methodological approach I have undertaken. It begins with an overview of the ethnographically-informed research design, followed by a briefing on the narrative research method and its significance. The discussion then focuses on how language can serve as a platform for us to explore the unknown, which supports the choice of the interview method, and how narrative data from interpreters are an appropriate source for this study to understand how one learns to be an interpreter. Afterwards, an account of the process of data collection will be given, covering both the pre-fieldwork phase and the actual fieldwork phase. Explanations regarding site selection, participant recruitment procedure, recruitment criteria and the composition of participants are covered here. The rest of the chapter concentrates on the data analysis efforts and model employed in this study.

Chapters 4 to 7 present the findings with a view to fulfilling the three research goals. In Chapter 4, a number of motivations for learners to undertake formal interpreter training are identified, followed by learners' understanding prior to training of what is required to be an interpreter. Learners' accounts of their relevant experiences before formal training have also been compiled to demonstrate interpreting learners' overall characteristics before training. Chapter 5 investigates how trainee interpreters learn during training. The findings show that in-class learning, group practice and self-study are the three primary learning activities for

trainee interpreters to expand their background knowledge and develop their interpreting skills. Chapter 6 elaborates on how interpreters learn at work. Narrative data indicates that, although no specific learning activities can be identified as those of learning during training, interpreters learn at work based on three main learning themes: the interpreting practice, the interpreting profession, and working with people. Interpreters' learning-in-practice manifests itself while practising interpreters apply the skills they acquired from training and develop coping strategies to deal with a range of working conditions. Chapter 7 explores the concept of the Community of Practice (hereafter refer to as CoP), which defines practising interpreters' learning as participation in the CoP. This chapter concludes by addressing the professional vision of practising interpreters in interpreter development. The four findings chapters fulfil the aim of this study by answering the three research questions, which shed light on how one becomes an interpreter and the transition from trainee to practitioner.

Chapter 8 aims to compile the emergent issues in this study deemed worthy of discussion. The use of the narrative method and the insights from interpreters are scrutinised, along with a discussion of the dual identities of the researcher as both an insider (as a practising interpreter) and an outsider (as a researcher). Next, the notion of multiple CoPs for interpreters at various stages is proposed and examined. Finally the pedagogical implications of the study are addressed, revealing the private stories of interpreters as public issues in interpreter training.

Chapter 9 reviews all the previous chapters, summarises the findings and identifies the contributions this study has made to the knowledge as well as the professional practice. The thesis ends by identifying limitations of the research, and provides a vision for future research prospects in investigating interpreter training and interpreter development.

Chapter 2

Contexts of the Study

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will review the educational and interpreting contexts which are relevant to the study. The popularity of the interpreting profession and the significance of interpreter training have been addressed in the previous chapter, clearly indicating that there is an unexplored relationship between interpreter training and interpreting practice. Aiming to better understand the learning and development processes that interpreters go through, this chapter's literature review was conducted to provide an understanding of the nature of learning, knowledge, and the pre-existing interpreter training framework, as well as to identify the learning needs that this research addresses.

Beginning with a learner's perspective, the literature review starts with a focus on the relationship between learning and knowledge, recognising learning as a knowledge construction process. The review on the previous scholarly work led me to understand that there are two main approaches to learning: the conventional cognitive approach, and the more recent situated approach. These two approaches to learning automatically produce opposing influences on the curriculum as well as the knowledge they create therein, which makes me wonder, when the two approaches to learning overlap, what kind of knowledge will be generated? I therefore make the assumption that to learn is to be knowledgeable, but we need both theoretical and practical knowledge to be truly knowledgeable. The preceding assumption entails the basic hypothesis of the educational context of this study by acknowledging the existence of 'working knowledge'. The literature review then moves on to focus on the theme of learning interpreting, recognising the act of learning interpreting as one type of professional learning. Thus, this review incorporates the theme of expertise development, acknowledging the 'professional vision' proposed by Goodwin (1994) to evoke working knowledge in a specific professional field.

In the second half of the literature review, I give an overview of the modern interpreter training context by addressing the evolution of interpreter training, and elaborate on the basics of modern interpreter training elements. The accounts of the modern interpreter training demonstrate that we possess much pre-existing knowledge regarding interpreter training and thus recognise interpreting practice as a complex task which can be deemed a kind of expertise. However, the account also reveals that there have so far been few studies that address interpreters' development

through the experience of learning and training. In other words, the rationale of interpreter training has been established, but there is an under-developed link between interpreter training and interpreting practice, indicating interpreters' development from trainees to practitioners. The under-investigated link, if it could be discovered and described, is believed to eventually lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the development of interpreters. The literature review is concluded by identifying the choice of the Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) as the conceptual framework for aiding the researcher to better understand the learning and development process which interpreters undergo.

2.2. The Educational Context of the Study

The educational context of the study builds on the idea of the nature of learning *as a knowledge construction process*. The coming sections will discuss how this study views the nature of learning and knowledge, how professional learning contributes to expertise development in a particular domain, and how the understanding of learning and expertise might inform the practice of learning interpreting.

2.2.1. Learning as a knowledge construction process

The notion of learning may remind us of traditional classroom settings, wherein a teacher simply passes the authorised sets of knowledge and skills on to students. The conventional notion of learning is largely based on the assumption that 'learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching' (Wenger, 1998: 3). This study adopts a broader definition of learning but draws extensively—though not exclusively—on examples of more flexible, contextualised means and forms of learning, which are entirely situated in life experiences. In this context, learning is a natural and fundamental part of everyday life rather than an exceptional activity. My understanding of learning assumes that learning is an integral part of daily life, and it is expected that over time necessary knowledge and skills grow to suit the particular contexts surrounding the subject area that learning takes place.

Looking at existing literature, the concept of learning has been described and observed in a significant amount of research, yet whatever its theoretical interpretation may be, learning is something people do naturally in daily practice

and is an integral part of human nature. In its broadest sense, learning refers to an activity in which progress is made over time. In most learning situations, people have to spend their time predominantly on improving their performances as Van de Wiel et al. states: ‘learning is usually described as a process of knowledge change through study and experience that leads to improved performance’ (2004: 182). It is generally agreed that the more time spent on such ‘deliberate attempts’ (ibid: 181) or ‘deliberate practice activities’ (ibid: 182), the more the knowledge learners gain or the better their performances can be. Therefore, I understand learning as an activity constituted by trials of practice, which leads to improved performance. Also, learning is not a one-off event but an ongoing and evolving process. The concept of learning can be demonstrated by Rogoff’s (1995) idea, regarding **the relationship of learning and knowledge as intertwined in a constructive process**. The relationship between learning and knowledge can be represented in the table below:

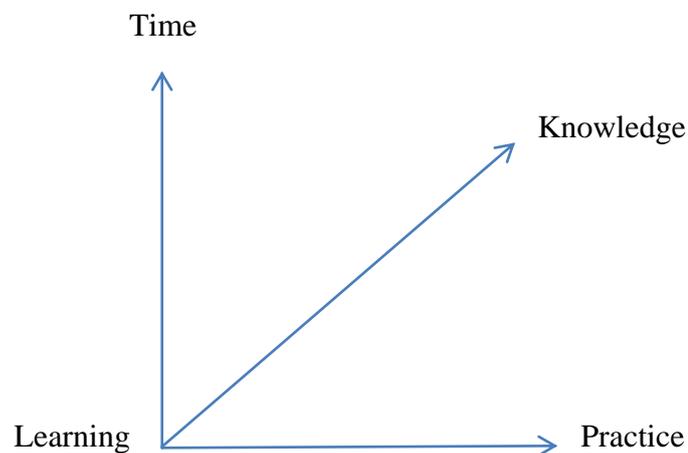


Figure 1: Relationship between Learning and Knowledge

2.2.2. Situated learning theory: Learning as a social construction of knowledge

In light of the perceived failure of cognitive science to demonstrate that learning is an accumulation of symbolic representations which could be replicated with artificial intelligence and taught using intelligence tutoring system (Sleeman and Brown, 1982; Wenger, 1987), and the realisation that the conventional perspective on learning focuses too much on internalising knowledge, which has ‘left the nature of the learner, of the world, or of the relations unexplored’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 47), studies in the 1980s showed that context is vital to understand learning, and that knowledge cannot simply be acquired in a mechanical way (Searle, 1980; Gardner, 1987; Resnick, 1987; Sfard, 1998).

During the 1990s, following the revolutionary turn on the idea of learning, researchers started to relate learning to its specific context, moving beyond the original framework of cognitive knowledge acquisition. The central theme of learning had been re-conceptualised around the role of context (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004), and the adoption of situated learning theory challenged our traditional understanding of learning and knowledge. Taking apprenticeship as its conceptual basis, situated learning theory sees learning as a process of participation. Situated learning theory maintains that the mastery of skill and knowledge requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community, in the same way a master sponsors an apprentice before the latter can have legitimate access to participation in the community's productive activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Above all, situated learning theory recognises learning as a social participation. Participation here, according to Wenger, 'refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to more encompassing and constructing identities in relation to these communities' (1998: 4). Learning as participation is both a kind of action and a form of belonging, which shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do (ibid).

The so-called situative, sociohistoric, or social view on learning soon gained popularity, emphasising the notion that learning is inherently a social process. Among such approaches, Lave and Wenger's theory of legitimate peripherality critically involves participation as a way of learning—of both absorbing and being absorbed in—the 'culture of practice' (1999: 22). Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that learning is a process of participation in the 'Communities of Practice'; participation is at first legitimately peripheral but gradually increases in engagement and complexity (ibid; Wenger, 1998). 'Practice' here connotes doing, but not just simply doing; it is 'doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do' (Wenger, 1998: 47), therefore the concept of practice is intrinsically social. Such a concept of practice, according to Wenger:

...includes both the explicit and the tacit. It includes what it is said and what is left behind, what is represented and what is assumed. It includes the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specific criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views. (ibid)

What is distinctive from ‘practice’ is that most of these above-mentioned aspects may never be articulated, yet they are still indispensable signs of membership in the CoP and are crucial to the development of the CoP. In other words, the concept of practice enables us to highlight ‘the social and negotiated character of the explicit and the tacit’ (ibid) in the practice.

Situated learning theory positions the CoP as the context in which an individual develops the practices (including values, norms, and relationships) and identities appropriate to that community. Lave and Wenger (1999: 23) assume that community members ‘have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity and hold varied viewpoints’. It is believed, in situated learning theory, that individuals bring to the community a personal account of involvement with workplace, social and familial groups whose norms may complement or conflict with one another. These conflicts need to be negotiated so that the individual is able to achieve a coherent sense of self, i.e. being a member of the community. In this way, situated learning theory embraces the socio-cultural dynamic, describing learning as an ‘integral and inseparable aspect of social practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 53) through a changing form of participation in the CoP. There are two layers underpinning such a claim: the first layer refers to the interactions that learners have with each other and with those more knowledgeable than themselves, which is close to that of the traditional way of thinking when it comes to learning theories; the second layer is at the community level, which involves the social processes of public formations of knowledge and mechanisms for arriving at these formations (McCormick, 1999: xi). As these two levels interconnect with each other, ‘knowledge is understood, not as static schematic structures, but rather as ways of relating to and participating in the world’ (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004: 237). In short, in line with the theoretical framework of situated learning theory, this study sees learning as a participatory process whose nature is inevitably social. Following this, it appears obvious to **see learning as a social construction of knowledge**.

2.2.3. Working knowledge

The emergence of situated learning theory in the last two decades has resulted in a distinction between two conceptual approaches of learning: traditional cognitive learning, and situated learning. The following table demonstrates how the cognitive approach towards learning is different from the situated approach to learning based on the literature I have reviewed:

| Two approaches | <i>Cognitive Learning</i> | <i>Situated Learning</i> |
|---|---|--|
| Settings | Classroom | Workplace or practical situations |
| Focus (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 38) | Theory (abstract & general) | The world (concrete & particular) |
| Subject (ibid: 43) | The individual learner | Learning as participation in the social world |
| Concept (ibid) | Cognitive process | More encompassing view of social practice |
| Activity (ibid: 52) | Contemplation; internalisation | Involvement; engagement |
| Main feature | Knowledge-based | Interaction-based |
| Characteristic | Strategic | Contextual |
| Considered as | Self-directed individual learning | Socially-situated enculturalisational activity |
| Emphasis | Experiential learning histories | Interactions from workplace |
| Learner's identity (Greeno et al., 1999) | An active individual learner | A member of a group |
| Definition of learning | Learning as a process by which a learner internalises knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 47) | Learning takes place through participation and negotiation of identities in communities of practice (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004: 237) |
| Knowledge gained | Abstract academic knowledge from education | Concrete practical knowledge from experiences |
| Knowledge represented by (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Blackler, 1995) | Symbolic logic | Provisional, mediated, socially-construted understandings |

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 53) | A condition for membership | An evolving form of membership |
| Slogan (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 42) | Learning-in-study | Learning-in-practice |
| Implications for curriculum design (Colley et al., 2003: 473) | Outcome-referenced model | Process-oriented model |

Table 1: Two Approaches to Learning & Knowledge

In response to Table 1, I have come to understand the nature of knowledge as one of duality: abstract theoretical knowledge co-exists with concrete practical knowledge. While the former can be acquired by cognitive processing, the latter can only be gained through situated practices which are bound to the framework of specific time and space. The comparison between cognitive and situated approaches of learning implies that a comprehensive way of learning should be achieved by both cognitive knowledge construction and situated learning practice. The knowledge constituted by learning can thus be understood in the figure below:



Figure 2: Two Types of Knowledge

Theoretical knowledge can, for the most part, be easily acquired from textbooks, curriculum designs, course outlines, etc. The cognitive idealisation of theoretical knowledge gained from the classroom is based upon the positivist assessment of abstract knowledge: that such knowledge is valuable because it reflects an objective reality and can be manipulated using rationalist and symbolic logic (Gardner, 1987). On the other hand, practical knowledge further insists that learning is prevalent in situated contexts, in conjunction with a specific time and space, acknowledging that the supreme exercise of learning involves unconscious

acquisition of the knowledge and skills required for a specific domain field (Chi, Glaser & Farr, 1988).

The two types of knowledge resonate with the differences that Lave and Wenger (1999) propose between a *teaching curriculum* and a *learning curriculum*. A teaching curriculum is a set of rigid norms, knowledge and skills which can be passed along objectively, supplying structured resources for learning, thus 'the meaning of what is learned is mediated through an instructor's participation, by an external view of what knowing is about' (ibid: 23). A learning curriculum, by contrast, consists of situated opportunities for the improvisational development of new practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A learning curriculum is a field of learning resources in everyday practice viewed from the perspective of learners. As a matter of fact, a learning curriculum is a characteristic of a community. The term community demonstrates the presence of a variety of factors in its members. Lave and Wenger's learning paradigm indicates that a learning curriculum is essentially situated, and thus cannot be considered in isolation, or be studied apart from the social relations which help shape legitimate peripheral participation.

McCormick has pointed out the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge in relation to curriculum. He thinks that the pursuit of practical knowledge should be an extension to teaching, not an act in opposition to the teaching of academic knowledge:

One of our premises as teachers is that we teach academic or theoretical knowledge because it is applicable in all situations, unlike practical knowledge that is limited to particular situations. We assume that theoretical knowledge is decontextualised, and therefore that it can be transferred from the classroom and used in practical situations outside schools and colleges. I shall argue that this is not so straightforward. None of this should be constructed as an attack on the teaching of theoretical knowledge, but a plea that we should also teach practical knowledge. (1999: 112)

As a language learner, I believe that theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge should not be considered separately since at the end of the learning process, we expect one to use the knowledge regardless whether it is theoretical or practical. If to learn is to become knowledgeable, then can I assume that there must be a portion of knowledge that is a hybrid of both theoretical and practical knowledge, in which theoretical knowledge is implemented as practical knowledge while practical knowledge is supported as theoretical knowledge. I would like to refer this overlapping knowledge as working knowledge, since it is a composite of both approaches to learning, and entails the dual nature of theoretical and practical

knowledge. It is worth noting that I am aware of the mainstream scholarly work which understands working knowledge as the knowledge acquired from work-related learning (Mjelde & Daly, 2006; Berner, 2008), but my understanding of working knowledge in this study is that it is simply a concept that the knowledge is functional under appropriate context, regardless of its origin being theoretical or practical. My interpretation of working knowledge, as well as its corresponding relations to the two approaches to learning and constructing knowledge, can thus be represented by the figure below:

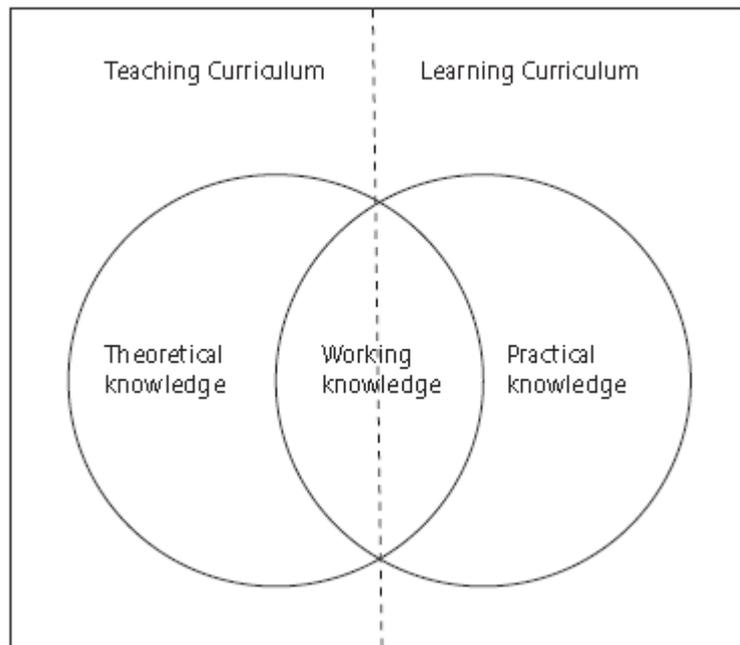


Figure 3: Working Knowledge

2.2.4. A general historical perspective on expertise

Following the discussion of learning and knowledge, the coming section will narrow the scope of general learning to learning in a specialised domain: professional learning and its corresponding result; the development of expertise.

Definitions of learning inevitably draw on notions of development, and vice versa. Where learning leads to improved performance, learning for a specific domain, will eventually result in expertise development. Expertise is something that learners can acquire through training and repetitive ‘deliberate practices’ (Ericsson, 2000). Research on deliberate practice tries to find relationships between the quality and quantity of practice activities and the level of expertise acquired: a general rule is that at least 10 years of practice, or 5000 hours of deliberate practice are required to become an expert (Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson et al., 1993 cited in Van de Wiel et al., 2004: 184).

According to Glaser (1998: 88), expertise is proficiency taken to its highest level, and understanding of experts' hard-won knowledge and skill can be used to foster novices' progress and, perhaps, to expand the proficiencies of experts themselves. Previous studies have demonstrated that expertise is highly domain-specific (Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Walker, 1987), and therefore the major differences between experts and novices lie in their professional knowledge and skills (Chase & Simon, 1973; Chi et al., 1982). Expertise became an intriguing subject for investigation in the mid to late 1980s, largely due to developments in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology. The early work of De Groot (1966) and Chase and Simon (1973) demonstrated that what distinguished strong players of chess from weak players of chess was their ability to correctly reproduce large patterns of chess positions after a few seconds of viewing, rather than their searching more deeply or broadly for the next move than weak players. In the ensuing years, the need for research in expertise was recognised, and much research in cognitive psychology has been devoted to this topic.

Historical studies in expertise have identified a couple of features of expertise, and these features can be described in respect of the differences between an expert and a novice. An expert is generally considered to be someone who has attained a high level of performance in a given domain as a result of years of experience; a novice is usually defined as someone who has little experience in a particular domain (Moser-Mercer, 1997: 255). In De Groot (1966) and Chase and Simon's (1973) study with chess players, they found that experienced chess players perceive relations between chess pieces as 'chunks' and are thus capable of memorising a larger number of pieces compared with that of novice players. The work by Simon and Simon (1978) discovered that when solving physics problems, experts were able to reason forward and thus solved problems more quickly than novices, which echoes Murphy and Wright's (1984) assertion that experts are much more aware of the complexity of a situation. Another piece of research carried out by Seamster et al. (1993) with air traffic controllers, whose work resembles a similar time-constrained working mode as that of interpreters, indicates that the professional knowledge structure of expert air traffic controllers enables them to retrieve information much more efficiently. This finding is in line with research from other domains which demonstrates that experts are capable of selecting the most relevant information for processing (Holding & Reynolds, 1982; McGee, 1982; Adelson, 1984; Groen & Patel, 1988). To sum up the pioneering work in expertise, the chunking technique, the comprehensive analysis of the problem, the faster response times and the ability to select the most crucial information out of the task are the four major features that distinguish experts from novices or lay-people. Or, in the words of Moser-Mercer et al., the differences between novices and experts have

been found to relate 'to chunking of information, to reasoning, to speed of processing, to individuals' knowledge base and its organisation' (1997: 108). All the features of expertise, according to Hoffman, are able to manifest themselves in an 'articulated, conceptual and principled' manner (Hoffman, 1996 cited in Moser-Mercer, 1997: 259). I interpreted these differences as reflecting the experts' possession of an organised body of conceptual and procedural knowledge that can be readily assessed and used with personalised stories in learning experiences. This current study however, aims not so much to identify the differences between novice interpreters and expert interpreters in terms of learning interpreting, but more to discover and describe how novice interpreters (trainee interpreters) and expert interpreters (practising interpreters) approach the theme of learning interpreting differently, so as to understand the development process of an interpreter.

2.2.5. Expertise in interpreting

The study of expert/novice differences in other domains has deepened our appreciation of the significance of experts' perceptions of patterns. Similarly, in the field of T/I, experts from various professions, ranging from philosophers, philologists, linguists, computational linguists, psycholinguists, experimental psychologists, developmental psychologists and doctors, have collaborated to solve the puzzle of how humans communicate using languages. Within the framework of such an interdisciplinary collaboration, interpreting serves both as a topic of research and a research paradigm (Moser-Mercer, 1997: 256). Over half a century, studies have shown that there is a great difference between the interpreting performances of experts and novices.

Barik (1975) observed and compared the types of omissions in interpretation between novice and expert interpreters, and concluded that the errors in output of the expert interpreters was less serious than that of the novices. Liu et al.'s (2004) research discovered that expert interpreters are not only able to produce less literal interpretation than novice interpreters, but are also capable of processing larger chunks of input. Work conducted by Mayer (1992) looked into three dimensions of interpreters' and translators' active knowledge: factual, semantic and strategic. The results of Mayer's research showed that, in terms of factual knowledge, experts display better organisation with more associative connections and domain connections; in light of semantic knowledge, experts' semantic knowledge is always tied to the context of a speech or a text, whereas novices' semantic knowledge is often unrelated to the text, which results in more isolated manners of processing; finally, in terms of strategic knowledge, experts tend to proceed from the known to the unknown, while novices focus primarily on the unknown and thus easily

encounter hindrance—in other words, experts are capable of using global plans whilst novices tend to use micro-contextual plans. Dillinger (1994) found that expert interpreters process more propositions in the same text than novices do. Kunzli and Moser-Mercer (1995) concluded that the knowledge base of expert translators and interpreters appears to be somewhat differently organised in translation processes and sight translation tasks. More recent research demonstrates that, expert interpreters are more selective in terms of what to interpret and what not to interpret (Liu, Schallert and Carroll, 2004).

To this day, quite a number of empirical studies have taken place comparing the performances of expert interpreters to novice interpreters (Liu et al., 2004; Ericsson, 2000; Kunzli and Moser-Mercer, 1995; Dillinger, 1989). Ericsson (2000) has subsequently acknowledged interpreting as a kind of expertise. Despite the fruitful results of existing research into comparing novice interpreters to expert interpreters, which demonstrate that we have long understood the novice-expert differences in the field of interpreting, no studies to date have yet been dedicated to not only depicting the differences but also to identifying the learning and development processes of an interpreter moving from novice to expert. Thus the unexplored process of expertise development in interpreting, has been identified as a gap in existing research in interpreting studies.

2.2.6. Professional vision

After noticing the under-investigated process of expertise development in interpreting, I had been in search of a way to better understand the expertise in interpreting from interpreters, and the notion of ‘professional vision’ proposed by Goodwin (1994) was found useful to capture expertise and working knowledge in a specific professional field.

How a profession is constructed and shaped forms the professional vision for that profession. By introducing the idea of professional vision, Goodwin investigates the ‘discursive practices’ (ibid) used by members of a profession to shape events in the phenomenal environment they focus their attention upon, the domain of their professional scrutiny, into the objects of knowledge that become the insignia of their profession: the theories, artifacts, and bodies of expertise that are its special domain of competence and set it apart from other groups’ (1994: 606). According to Goodwin, a professional vision is built by its members, which provides ‘socially organised ways of seeing and understanding events that are answerable to the distinctive interests of a particular social group’ (ibid: 607).

By the application of ‘coding schemes, highlighting, and the production and articulation of graphic representation’ (ibid: 624), Goodwin analyses human action and cognition as socially situated phenomena in order to shape events for a specific profession. The vision gained by such a mechanism is not solely a mental process, but ‘the competent deployment in a relevant setting of a complex of situated practices’ (ibid: 625). Within each setting, the learning process, the participation framework and modes of access to relevant phenomena, and the interaction structured along with the setting, can be seen through ‘an externalized retina’ (Lynch, 1988). In short, the perception of professional vision provides a lens for outsiders to see through a profession with specific clues, and the clues are in fact shared by the insiders of the profession. These specific clues, are learnt, internalised, understood, and practiced by the insiders of this profession, and these clues can also be learnt or be passed along to the newcomers of this profession—in this sense, the clues are the working knowledge for this particular profession which the practitioners of this profession are aiming to achieve after years of practice.

In this study in particular, the concept of the professional vision renders a passageway for me to understand the professional world of interpreters, which corresponds with the aims of ethnography: to discover and to describe. I was originally unable to decode the particular practices of the interpreting profession based on an ethnoragphically-oriented belief in ‘ignorance’ (Spradley, 1979), but the idea of professional vision provides a platform from which practitioners can articulate and make clear their professional conducts to me as the researcher. It is this aspiration of discovering and describing the professional vision of interpreters that has propelled me to conduct this research.

2.3. The Interpreting Context of the Study: Modern Interpreter Training

In what follows, I attempt to elaborate on the basic concepts of modern interpreter training in order to provide a point of reference for the proceeding study.

2.3.1. Evolution of interpreter training traditions

As a relatively young discipline, courses for the development of interpreting-specific skills date back to the early 20th century (Pöchhacker, 2004: 177). Compared with other professional training such as music and sports, interpreter

training starts fairly late in life, when a learner is in their twenties. Interpreting learners have already built up their language skills by this age, so the importance of interpreter training is how to switch interpreting learners' existing language skills to fit in with the needs of consecutive interpreting (CI) and simultaneous interpreting (SI) modes (Ericsson, 2000: 216). The first-generation teachers of interpreting established a lasting tradition of training by **apprenticeship**, which transfers the technical and professional knowledge from masters to students, mainly through exercises modelled on real-life tasks (Pöchhacker, 2004: 178). The apprenticeship approach was consolidated in the face of expansive growth in interpreter training in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s, which was later described by Mackintosh (1995) as the 'training paradigm'. During the 1980s, calls for a more **scientific** approach were made for interpreter training (Gran and Dodds, 1989). The cognitive process oriented paradigm has influenced the training of interpreters in different skills, introducing aspects such as component skills (Lamber, 1988), strategies (Riccardi, 1996), processing capacity management (Gile, 2009) and the development of expertise (Moser-Mercer, 2000). The latest evolution of modern interpreter training lies in what Sawyer proposed, a **humanistic** approach to include the social and personal aspects of instructional interaction and the process of socialising students into a 'community of professional practice' (2001: 93). Thus the evolution of interpreter training paradigms in the 20th century has led to a more 'student-oriented and interaction-based' approach (Pöchhacker, 2004: 178).

2.3.2. Modern interpreter training framework

In the context of modern conference interpreter training, curricula formats range from six-month postgraduate courses, such as the in-house training formerly offered by the European Commission, to four or five year university degree courses or master's level degree programmes of one or two-years' duration, depending on the relative weight of professional and academic content (ibid: 179).

Of the various models described in the literature (Arjona, 1984; Mackintosh, 1999; Sawyer: 2001), most interpreter training courses have similar components: basic concepts of language and communication, language enhancement (e.g. specialised terminology), 'area studies' (i.e. sociocultural background knowledge), skill training in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, and professional ethics (Pöchhacker, 2004: 179). For more specific domains such as legal interpreting or medical interpreting, supplement of knowledge and skills can be taught either as a whole or in a following basic-level training (Corsellis, 1999). Apart from the basic training elements, a number of ancillary skills for interpreting in general have also been described: analytical skills in text comprehension (Setton, 1994), expressive

skills for public speaking (Weber, 1990), and situation analysis (Thiery, 1978). All these core components for interpreter training are primarily designed for the development of either CI or SI skills, which yields to a shared consensus that modern interpreter training has followed an approach based upon ‘unity in diversity’ (Pöchhacker, 2004).

However, given the modern interpreter training framework, a couple of issues need to be addressed. Firstly, the effectiveness of various curricular arrangements is difficult to assess, since the theoretical components in the curricula are not clearly defined and training courses are hugely dependent on the underlying educational beliefs and the relative weight between professional training and academic content. In Pöchhacker’s words: ‘the pedagogy of interpreting has generated little systematic investigation but a comparatively large body of experiential description’ (ibid: 177). Sawyer (2001) also points out that there is a need for researchers to gain access to the **hidden curriculum**, which is the curriculum as experienced by the individual student and teacher, to further understand the nature of modern interpreter training. Secondly, the didactic literature of interpreter training tends to focus on the reports of teachers sharing their teaching approach, whereas little has been done to follow the learning track of interpreting students, as in Paneth’s (1957/2002) pioneering work of collecting observational data on training methods at several interpreter training schools in Europe, which Pöchhacker has commented on as an ‘isolated example’ (2004: 33) in interpreter training. These two issues illustrate a need in interpreting studies to have student-centred empirical investigations into training, which might not only consolidate the theoretical base for interpreter training, but also illuminate the training by demonstrating its significance to the interpreting learner.

2.3.3. Basics in interpreter training

A well-established T/I school is expected to produce a ‘fully-fledged’ interpreter, who ‘by the end of the I/T programme graduate linguists will have developed skills of T/I to a professional level’ (Carsten, 2002: 43-44). But the question of what exactly graduate linguists should go through during their training to be able to function at a professional level by the end of training is what constitutes the basics in interpreter training. The complex nature of interpreting as a human activity requires interpreter training to take place in an interdisciplinary setting. On the AIIC website, an interpreter training programme is expected to equip its learners with the following abilities :

- to understand what the speaker wants to say

- to grasp what lies behind the speaker's words
- to keep the message in context
- to convey it consecutively or simultaneously
- to learn a special note-taking technique
- to practice concentration, discourse analysis and fast reaction
- to build useful glossaries
- to develop public speaking skills
- to prepare for different types of assignments
- to manage stressful situations
- to observe a code of conduct
- to prepare for entry into the profession (AIIC, 2010)

AIIC has also surveyed the interpreter training institutions worldwide based on the following criteria:

- The course is only open to postgraduate students
- The course requires an aptitude test before course begins (one year) or at an early stage in the course for longer courses
- The course is taught by conference interpreters
- The curriculum must include instruction in both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation
- Course must be at least 2 semesters (1 academic year) long (AIIC, 2014)

If the criteria are met, Best Practice recommendations will then be drawn up by AIIC and the programme will be listed on the AIIC online Interpretation Schools Directory (ibid). The Directory is there to assist prospective interpreting students and training providers in better understanding the training networks. By browsing through the training programmes on the Directory, a growing consensus on the definition of quality interpreter training becomes apparent.

Assuming that the interpreting curriculum presupposes a thorough understanding of what is required in interpreter training and that this understanding is generally accepted, a description of the interpreter training curriculum is expected to serve the purpose of showcasing how the teaching methods entail core competences for an interpreter. Since the interpreter training programme at the University of Leeds has been chosen as a subject for this particular study (the reason for choosing this site will be reported in 3.5.1.1.), I would like to present its core modules as attached in the Appendix I in order to gain an understanding of what constitutes modern interpreter training. The Leeds programme is present on both the AIIC Best Practice recommendations and the List of Selected Schools with Interpretation and/or Translation Programmes in the UN Official Languages (UN, 2014); also, being supported pedagogically by the EU's Directorate General for

Interpretation (EU, 2014), its training elements should more or less reflect the backbone of modern interpreter training paradigms.

From glancing through the modules of the interpreter training course at Leeds (Appendix I) and other mainstream training curriculums provided by institutions listed on the Best Practice, it is clear that three elements stand out across the programmes: training in CI, SI and research methods in interpreting studies. Although translation modules and other supplementary courses are also offered as optional, the interpreter training modules at the University of Leeds demonstrate a practical-based approach towards interpreter training. This discovery corresponds with Ericsson's argument that the significance of interpreter training lies in transferring one's language skills to fit in with the needs of CI and SI (2000: 216), and that research methods are supplementary to the academic requirement.

Although the module overview is in line with the mainstream interpreter training guidelines recognised by authorised institutions such as AIIC, the UN and the EU, as a previous trainee of this programme and a current practising interpreter, it still seems to me that the module does not fully manifest what is required from a trainee interpreter in the programme. I can now easily orientate my interpreting practice to align with the previous training elements that I had gone through a couple of years ago as a practitioner in interpreting, but the module itself simply cannot detail the overall picture of how a language graduate becomes a professional interpreter. In other words, what I aim to achieve in the interpreting context of this study is to highlight that there seems to be a high degree of consensus about what is required in interpreter training in the modern world, but there is not much understanding of what is actually involved in developing the skills for interpreting from a learner's perspective. This unexplored viewpoint still has ample scope for further investigation.

2.4. Community of Practice as the Conceptual Framework to Understand Learning Interpreting

Having understood the notion of learning as a process of knowledge construction, its underlying dual knowledge claims and opposing implications for curriculum design, and having gained an overview of what is required in interpreter training, I strive to find a paradigm which has the potential to assist me in finding the missing link between interpreter training and interpreting practice. After looking at various learning models, I would like to draw on discussions about the CoP,

outlining its characteristics so as to explain the choice of the CoP as the conceptual framework for this study to investigate the process of learning interpreting. As mentioned in 2.2.2, Lave and Wenger adopt the concept of practice to conceptualise learning as participation in the CoP (1991). Wenger (1998) further specifies the characteristics of the CoP to make the process of negotiating meaning tractable and articulable. Three dimensions of the CoP have been addressed to create a context for the negotiation of meaning: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

Mutual engagement is the first and foremost characteristic of the CoP. Having participants engaging with each other in the practice and mutually negotiating meaning of the practice are what makes the CoP stand out from the simplistic idea of a residential neighbourhood, where the participants are no more than an aggregate of people who live together, who do not necessarily have any mutual engagement with each other. Mutual engagement creates relationships among the participants. In this sense, the CoP can be a ‘very tight node of interpersonal relationships’ (Wenger, 1998: 76), with which ‘identity can be further integrated and defined in the course of engagement in practice’ (ibid). Mutual relations of engagement give rise to both homogenisation and differentiation; in fact, ‘disagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation’ (ibid: 77).

Joint enterprise is the second characteristic of the CoP, specifying the result of a collective process of negotiation. Negotiating a joint enterprise gives rise to relations of mutual accountability among those involved (ibid: 81). In Wenger’s words, ‘this communal regime of mutual accountability plays a central role in defining the circumstances under which, as a community and as individuals, members feel concerned or unconcerned by what they are doing’ (ibid).

Shared repertoire is the third characteristic of the CoP. Over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning, which ‘includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced and adopted in the course of its existence’ (ibid: 83). The elements of the repertoire can be heterogeneous; ‘they gain their coherence not in and of themselves as specific activities, symbols, or artifacts, but from the fact that they belong to the practice of a community pursuing an enterprise’ (ibid: 82). The significance of the elements of a shared repertoire lies in the fact that they are not only useful for recognising the relation to the mutual engagement but that they also enable re-engagement in new situations.

Having understood the characteristics of the CoP, learning as participation in the CoP involves the following processes:

Evolving forms of mutual engagement: discovering how to engage, what helps and what hinders this; developing mutual relationships; defining identities, establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, and who is easy or difficult to get along with.

Understanding and tuning one's enterprise: aligning one's engagement with the practice, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it; struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretations of what the enterprise is about.

Developing repertoire, styles, and discourses: renegotiating the meaning of various elements; producing or adopting tools, artifacts, and redefining or abandoning old ones; telling and retelling stories; creating and breaking routines. (ibid: 95)

The development of the CoP takes time, but what defines the CoP in its temporal dimension is not just a matter of time itself, but a matter of sustaining significant mutual engagement in pursuing a joint enterprise to share some significant learning. From this perspective, the CoP can be thought of as 'shared histories of learning' (ibid: 86). The shared histories of learning are exactly what I endeavour to investigate in this study with interpreters, which explains why the CoP stands out from other conceptual frameworks of learning in this study, as a means to examine how one learns to be an interpreter. In this study, I aim to investigate *how* interpreters learn by looking into their mutual engagement, *why* they want to learn to be interpreters by exploring their joint enterprise, and *what* the shared repertoires are which outline their venture of learning to be interpreters. I would like to conclude my choice of the CoP as the conceptual framework in this study by citing a paragraph from Wenger:

In real life, mutual relations among participants are complex mixtures of power and dependence, pleasure and pain, expertise and helpfulness, success and failure, amassment and deprivation, alliance and competition, ease and struggle, authority and collegiality, resistance and compliance, anger and tenderness, attraction and repugnance, fun and boredom, trust and suspicion, friendship and hatred. Communities of practice have it all. (ibid:77)

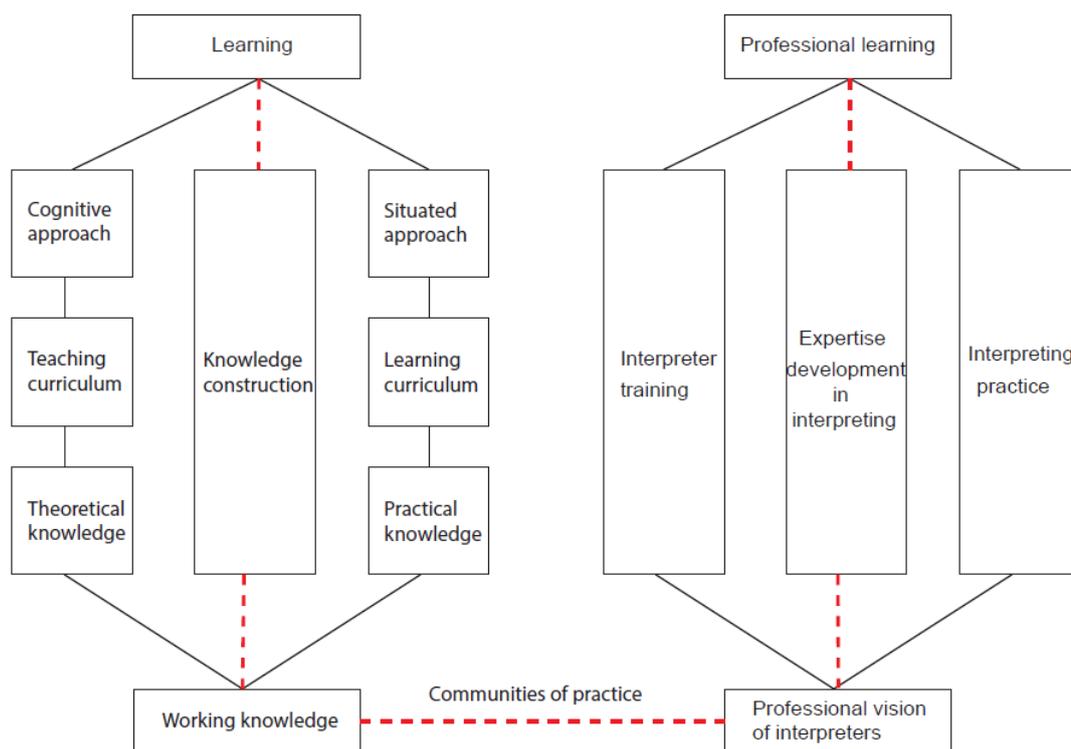


Figure 4: Summary of Contexts of this Study

Figure 4 is used here to provide a summary of the literature review of this study. If we perceive learning as a dual mechanism, in which it can be an individual activity as well as a process of enculturation into a group, a progressive process where theoretical knowledge can be applied into situated practices, and a contextualised event where both time and space matter, then we can expect working knowledge to have been generated by the end of the learning process. We can narrow our consideration of general learning down to only learning in a professional field. The learning process in a professional realm implies the development of a particular expertise. It is expected that by the end of expertise development, a professional vision can be outlined and articulated by the practitioners. Therefore, in the context of learning interpreting, expertise development in interpreting is expected to take place throughout interpreter training and interpreting practice, and a professional vision of interpreters is also anticipated to be gained in the end of the learning process. Meanwhile, by revisiting the basic modern interpreter training elements, it is understood that the rationale of the interpreter training elements has been acknowledged, but what is missing is the comprehensive description of the learning themes that interpreters as learners will have to go through. The CoP was found useful as a means to bridge this gap between interpreter training and interpreting practice, since it provides an encompassing view of learning. If the three characteristics of the CoP could be identified and examined from an interpreter's perspective, it is hoped that the findings will lead us to firstly address the working

knowledge for interpreters, and secondly to understand the professional vision of interpreters.

2.5. Rationale of the Research

2.5.1. Originality of the research design

In the coming paragraphs, I will showcase the originality of this research design in three dimensions:

1. Directionality: from a top-down focus to a bottom-up approach

Much of the research to date on professional interpreter training has focused primarily on the contents of the training, for instance, what to learn (Gile, 2009), when to learn, who to learn (the screening of interpreting students), and why to learn (the significance of interpreter training): (Dillinger, 1989; Moser-Mercer, 2000). However not much has addressed the actual learning experiences from the perspective of interpreters as learners, regarding *how one becomes* an interpreter. Learners, or trainees, are at the centre of the pathway to learning to be an interpreter, but they have not yet been given the spotlight and have instead been left largely unanalysed. This research project challenges the emphasis of interpreter training on a top-down, trainer-focused perspective to a bottom-up, learner-focused viewpoint, addressing the learning themes in the process of interpreter training and interpreter development. This research will explore various issues surrounding becoming an interpreter based on a learner's perspective— training experiences, beginner work experiences, and professional practices as an interpreter etc., with the overarching concept of learning and development throughout these experiences.

2. Subjectivity: from the trainer-centred study to learner-oriented study

It was noted, almost two decades ago, that in the field of T/I, a student obtaining his final diploma would call himself an expert with some degree of justification, but that years of experience in the field are still required for him to become a fully-fledged professional (Moser-Mercer, 1997: 255). In recent years, Liu, Schallert and Carroll's (2004) research showed that professional interpreters demonstrate a vast superiority when compared with novice interpreters, yet not much difference can be found between advanced trainee interpreters and beginner trainee interpreters. This is once again evidenced that 'for gaining true expertise in interpreting, training and practice in the classroom are not sufficient' (ibid: 38). With years of experience in learning to be an interpreter myself, and some working

experience as a practising interpreter, I understand that there is still a large gap between being a trainee interpreter and being a practising interpreter. Achieving a diploma is just a threshold for many to enter the professional market. Once there, a large variety of professional challenges, which have not yet been faced by trainee interpreters, gradually help the graduate develop to become a novice interpreter, and eventually a professional. These professional challenges are lacking in description from the insiders' viewpoint, despite the fact that the *insider's* view is a different kind of knowledge allocated from one that rests primarily on the *outsider's* view (Spradley, 1979: 4). Thus I decided to make the learner of interpreting the focus of attention in this study, and it thus appears useful to analyse what happens to learners on their way to becoming interpreters.

3. Situatedness: from the abstract understanding to concrete experiences

The aim of this study is to describe the experiences of learning interpreting by building on theoretical models that have been partially verified through methods of either applied or basic research. An additional goal is to look at developmental aspects of interpreting: this is motivated by 'bringing people to high levels of expertise in interpreting as efficiently and as rapidly as possible' (Moser-Mercer: 1997: 257). All of the data that are the foundation of this study come from the narratives of interpreters, who have gone through the process of becoming an interpreter. Thus all the conceptual frameworks and theoretical discussions of this study will be based on the concrete learning experiences of interpreters, which are very much contextualised, situated in real time, space and lived experiences, moving away from the abstract descriptions about interpreter training that we commonly see in interpreting studies.

2.5.2. Research goals

The long-term goal of this study is three-fold. Firstly, this study explores the learning processes of interpreters from the perspective of individual learners, and examines their individual learning stories to compile a collective picture of the process of becoming an interpreter. This study aims to give a better understanding of the pathways of interpreters from trainees to practitioners, with regards to the processes involved in the development of interpreting expertise. It is hoped that the unfolding of learning experiences will inform educational endeavour by shedding a new light on learning processes, and by drawing attention to key aspects of learning experience that may have been overlooked.

Secondly, this study aims to investigate the concept of situated learning of interpreters within the broader educational and pedagogical contexts in which the

CoP of interpreters are embedded. An analysis of the situated learning practice within the interpreting context will not only provide a conceptualisation of a ‘community of interpreters’, but also an understanding of what happens within and beyond the sub-communities of interpreters in various phases.

Finally, with its exploratory nature, this study is foremost embedded in an interdisciplinary context: the expertise research in interpreting provides the general paradigm for the study of the learning process of the interpreters from an educational perspective, while evidence from the existing literature in interpreter education will be corroborated or rejected in the light of the lived experiences of those becoming interpreters. The final results of this study are thus expected to be of help to interpreter training and interpreter development.

2.5.3. Research questions

As has been demonstrated, there is a need to investigate the learning of interpreting from a bottom-up perspective, with learners as the focal point, instead of trainers or programme designers. Bearing in mind these characteristics of the contexts in which one becomes an interpreter, this study aims to investigate three main research questions, each entailing a number of sub questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the interpreting learners? (before training)

1a. What motivated the learners to undertake interpreter training?

1b. How is the interpreting profession perceived by learners?

1c. What expectations do learners have of interpreter training?

1d. What kind of training or work experiences have interpreting learners had prior to their formal training?

2. What is learning to be an interpreter like in the experiences of interpreters? (during and after training)

2a. How do interpreters learn during training?

2b. How do interpreters learn at work?

2d. How can interpreter training be made more relevant to professional interpreting experiences?

3. What is it like to be a practising interpreter? (after training)

3a. What is the community of practice for practising interpreters like and how does this community work?

3b. What is the professional vision of practising interpreters?

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, the theoretical analysis of the educational and interpreting contexts of this study led us to identify an under-investigated gap between interpreter training and interpreting practice, from which the expertise in interpreting is anticipated to be developed. The concept of the Communities of Practice has been chosen to be the theoretical framework for this study in order to understand learning interpreting with a more comprehensive and encompassing approach. On a more practical level, Chapter 3 reviews the main methodological approach of this study, and outlines its emergent research design. The chapter will cover the nature of the primary theoretical frameworks, which lead to the use of the interview method for data collection. It is therefore a discussion about the link between the emergent research design and the use of the interview method, from which the narrative data is able to generate a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of learning interpreting.

As concluded at the end of Chapter 2, this study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the interpreting learners? (before training)

1a. What motivated the learners to undertake interpreter training?

1b. How is the interpreting profession perceived by learners?

1c. What expectations do learners have of interpreter training?

1d. What kind of training or work experiences have interpreting learners had prior to their formal training?

2. What is learning to be an interpreter like in the experiences of interpreters? (during and after training)

2a. How do interpreters learn during training?

2b. How do interpreters learn at work?

2d. How can interpreter training be made more relevant to professional interpreting experiences?

3. What is it like to be a practising interpreter? (after training)

3a. What is the community of practice for practising interpreters like and how does this community work?

3b. What is the professional vision of practising interpreters?

Chapter 3 is thus designed to explain why the choice of narrative data and the interview method are suitable for this particular research; this will be followed by an explanation of the data collection and analysis processes used in this study.

3.2. From an Emergent Research Design to an Ethnographically-informed Approach

The following paragraphs elaborate on the exploratory path undertaken to understand the theme of becoming an interpreter, and examine how narrative data can pinpoint the key learning themes which are crucial to the development of interpreters from trainee to professional. I begin with a very broad review of ethnographic research, followed by a reasoning of how an emergent design can suit the study of learning interpreting; this will be followed by a discussion which focuses on the specifics of the narrative data from which I chose to draw out the individual learning stories.

In the realm of social research, qualitative research and quantitative research stand out as the two best known and opposing models. In philosophical terms, the two models are known as ‘naturalism’ and ‘positivism’. Positivism became prominent in the 1930s and 1940s, promoting the application of experimental and survey research in which quantitatively measured variables are manipulated (Freidman, 1991). The most significant feature of positivism is its close ties to experiments, and the idea that truth must be at all times supported by evidence. This theory does not fit into the canons of qualitative researchers. Contrary to positivism, ethnographers are inclined towards naturalism (Denzin, 1971). Naturalists propose that the social world should be studied in ‘natural’ instead of ‘artificial’ settings, and that the social researcher should adopt an attitude of ‘respect’ and ‘appreciation’ towards the social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 7). According to naturalism, in order to understand people’s behaviour, we must use an approach that allows us to understand the meanings that guide that behaviour.

Ethnography is sometimes associated with naturalism in that it represents an alternative paradigm to quantitative research and has gained popularity in social research since the 19th century. A broad understanding of ethnography refers to ‘an

integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture' (ibid: 1). The goal of ethnography, as Malinowski put it, is to 'grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world' (1992: 25, cited in Spradley 1979: 1). In this way, rather than *studying people*, ethnography refers to *learning from people*; likewise, ethnographers are not collecting data about people, but seeking to learn from people, maybe be taught by them (Spradley, 1979).

Though the complex and shifting role that ethnography played in the 19th and 20th century in the field of social science makes it difficult to provide a categorical definition of ethnography, the following statement from Hammersley and Atkinson gives us an idea of what ethnography is, or what an ethnographer should do:

Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts—in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry. (2007: 3)

When carrying out ethnographic research, people's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than those created by the researcher; in other words, ethnographic research takes place 'in the field' (ibid). Furthermore, data collection in ethnographic practice is most of the time 'unstructured', which means no fixed and detailed research outcome is anticipated at the beginning of the research, and no predetermined theme markers have been built into what people say or do. Instead, it is anticipated that everything will unfold in the process of data collection. Two distinctive features—authentic data from the field and unstructured research design—stand out in ethnographic practice and resonate with the need of this study with interpreters. As exemplified in the previous literature, although interpreting studies emerged in academia several decades ago, the emphasis of these studies so far has been the trainers' viewpoint, with little attention paid to the perspective of the learner. To address such an unexplored field, I therefore chose to take an ethnographically-informed approach with interpreters, thus in the hope to gain an insight into the theme of learning interpreting.

3.3. The Interview Method

As shown by Spradley (1979), ethnography starts with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance. Setting off from a position of ignorance, ethnographers are expected to study the language, behaviours and artefacts of the people that they would like to learn from. Whichever means of source an ethnographer takes on board, language enters into every phase of the research process, even the end product of practising ethnography is a description of the themes studied. To understand the unknown, language plays a significant role in ethnography—if we are to understand anything we do not know, we must begin by carefully describing it. In this manner, language is ‘more than a means of communication about reality: it is a tool for constructing reality’ (ibid: 17). Referring to the *missing link* between interpreter training and interpreting practice as discussed in 1.1.2., addressing the need of the current study, language is the bridge connecting known to unknown. It is particularly true in the case of interpreters. Interpreters practise rendering between at least two languages, and language plays a crucial part in the way in which they learnt and developed as interpreters. In the eyes of the lay-person, interpreters are often referred to as the experts of language, or linguists. In this study, I essentially ask of my interpreter participants to do exactly what they do in their work; the only difference is that when they speak as interpreters they act as the mouthpieces of other speakers, while here they are speakers in their own right, telling their own life stories and talking about their life experiences. In this way, I will be able to gain access to first-hand accounts ‘from below’: understanding the interpreters’ learning and developing stories from the perspective of the learner, instead of from that of the trainer or programme designers. This is the rationale for my decision to conduct individual interviews with interpreters.

The interview method is one of the strategies for getting people to talk about what they know. It normally starts with an *explicit purpose* clarified by the researcher, followed by *ethnographic explanations* covering the purpose of the project, as well as the need to record. Most important of all, the researcher should slowly introduce new elements to assist participants to respond to the *ethnographic questions* as informants (ibid: 58-59). An ethnographic interview is a particular kind of speech event, which has rules for beginning, ending, turn-taking, asking questions, pausing, etc.

| Elements in an ethnographic interview | An ethnographic interview in this study |
|--|--|
| 1. Greetings | 1. Greetings |
| 2. Giving ethnographic explanations | 2. Giving ethnographic explanations |
| 2.1 Giving project explanations | 2.1 Giving project explanations |
| 2.2 Giving question explanations | 2.2 Giving question explanations |
| 2.3 Giving recording explanations | 2.3 Giving recording explanations |
| 2.4 Giving native language explanations | |
| 2.5 Giving interview explanations | 2.4 Giving interview explanations |
| 3. Asking ethnographic questions | 3. Asking ethnographic questions |
| 3.1 <u>Asking descriptive questions</u> | 3.1 <u>Asking structural questions</u> |
| 3.2 <u>Asking structural questions</u> | 3.2 <u>Asking descriptive questions</u> |
| 3.3 Asking contrast questions | 3.3 Asking contrast questions |
| 4. Asymmetrical turn taking | 4. Asymmetrical turn taking |
| 5. Expressing interest | 5. Expressing interest |
| 6. <u>Expressing cultural ignorance</u> | 6. <u>Expressing experiential ignorance</u> |
| 7. Repeating | |
| 8. Restating informant's terms | |
| 9. Incorporating informant's terms | |
| 10. Creating hypothetical situations | 7. Creating hypothetical situations |
| 11. Asking friendly questions | 8. Asking friendly questions |
| 12. Taking leave | 9. Taking leave |

Table 2: Elements in an Ethnographic Interview vs. Elements of Interview in this Study

Table 2 demonstrates a list of elements in the ethnographic interview compiled by Spradley (1979: 67) and the sequence of stages in the ethnographic interview adopted by this study. The first element that differentiates this study is that there is no need for the researcher to learn the native language of the interviewees, since English is the only language spoken by either side during all interview sessions. Therefore no explanations regarding native language are necessary, nor is any repetition or confirmation of the terms used during the interview sessions. The second difference is the sequence of the ethnographic interviews in terms of asking descriptive questions and structural questions. As the focus of this study is the learning and developmental stories of interpreters, the participants were asked to give a general timeline of their interpreter training and work experience at the very beginning, hence structural questions come first. The final point relocates in the expressing *cultural* difference in the original elements to expressing *experiential* difference in this study. Since I myself am a practising interpreter while working on the interpreting research with fellow trainee interpreters and practising interpreters,

my footing as an insider in the interpreting field has made my ethnographic approach an interesting starting point: there are no 'cultural differences' between me and the participants as we are all working interpreters, but 'experiential differences' might occur as we have had various interpreting experiences over the years. In addition to that, there is a pressing need to address my dual role. My binary identities as both an interpreter and a researcher function well when I engage with fellow interpreters when it comes to issues relevant to interpreting, but I can also distance myself from time to time as an ethnographic researcher who tries to learn from my informants.

Given the above-mentioned three differences, whilst interviewing interpreters, I need to bear two goals in mind: by detaching myself, I would like to know how interpreters learn from an ethnographer's point of view, while at the same time reflecting back on my own experience as an interpreter, 'making the familiar strange' (Manny, 2010). I believe it is the dual nature that has made this study unique and particularly meaningful for not only myself, but also for those who are still on their way learning to be an interpreter. Bearing such nuances in mind, the interviews conducted for this study will therefore be in-depth qualitative interviews, also known as *responsive interviewing* (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The three characteristics of responsive interview below outline my fundamental attitude when conducting qualitative interviews:

- The interviewer and the interviewee are both human beings, not recording machines, and they form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer.
 - The goal of the research is to generate depth of understanding, rather than breadth.
 - The design of the research remains flexible throughout the project.
- (ibid: 30)

In this way, during the course of interview, I gently guide my participants in an extended discussion, with a clear picture of what I would like to ask in mind, I modify my interview questions to match the interest and knowledge of my participants. I sense that my relationship with the participants varies because of the diverse personalities of participants, and sometimes this relationship changes as the interview evolves. I acknowledge that responsive interviewing is a dynamic and iterative process, as observed by Rubin and Rubin:

Some conversational partners are self-revelatory, others more restrained and formalistic. Some need prodding to elaborate; others won't stop talking. Some have keen memories and provides lots of evidence,

whereas others speak tentatively or are given to speculative conclusions.
(ibid)

3.4. Focusing on Narratives

The interview method gives me access to interpreters' personal learning and development experiences as they respond to my open-ended questions. It is their personal stories that have the potential to assist me in understanding how one becomes an interpreter with learning experiences. The depth, detail, and the richness sought in interviews, are what Geertz (1973) called *thick description*. The following section will provide an overview of the nature and features of narratives to explain the reasoning behind my focus on the narrative data.

This study draws on the notion of narrative as elaborated in social sciences, rather than that of linguistics or discourse analysis, to explore the learning themes with which interpreters are concerned. Narratives, in the sense used here, are the lived experiences of interpreters, so I will be using 'narrative' and 'story' interchangeably throughout the thesis, as one of the shared grounds between narratives and stories is they are both orally-produced accounts of life experiences which can easily be understood.

3.4.1. Narrative explained

Narratives are the stories that people tell. It has been stated by many that narratives have existed as long as mankind existed (Reissman, 2008) since human beings are 'storytellers by nature' (Lieblich et al., 1996:7). Barthes notes the universality of the form and lists many sites where narratives can be found:

Possessing the ability to convey meaning through articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and combinations of these elements, narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting..., stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, in an infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind: nowhere has there been a people without narrative... it is simply there, like life itself. (1977: 79)

To these diverse sources Riessman added memoirs, biography, autobiography, diaries, archival documents, social service and health records, other organisational documents, scientific theories, folk ballads, photographs, and other art work (2008: 4).

However, ‘narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative’ (ibid). For instance, Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher who is also well known as a storyteller, understood that narratives are often moral tales, depicting a rupture from the expected interpretation because they mirror the world, rather than copying it exactly (Riessman, 2008: 4). Yet in a contemporary context, narrative has come to mean anything beyond a few bullet points: when someone tells a story or records an event, the outcome is now called narrative by news anchors and even some qualitative researchers. In modern times, narrative does not carry the heavy educational moral burden as it did in Aristotle’s epoch, but can be applied to the fields of academic research and autobiography. In fact, a wide range of definitions of narrative can be found, often linked to disciplines. Major differences in definition do occur, the only common theme being that of a contingent sequence. As Phil Salmon stated, ‘a fundamental criterion of narrative is surely contingency. Whatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events or ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected’ (cited in Riessman, 2008: 5).

Having discussed the prevalence of narratives, let us now pay more attention to narratives in research: according to Lieblich et al, ‘narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials’ (1998: 2). In general, the term narrative in human sciences can refer to texts as several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants, interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interview and fieldwork observation, and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and the investigator’s narratives (Riessman, 2008).

Definitions of narrative differ: on the one hand social linguists refer to it as ‘an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centred and temporally organized’ (ibid: 6); on the other hand social historians and anthropologists refer to it as ‘an entire life story, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents’ (ibid). In the light of these interpretations, I am going to discuss the significance and features of narrative study in the following paragraphs to justify and consolidate the choice of narrative data as the base for the current research.

3.4.2. Significance of narrative data in this study

Although narrative study has a long history, what is new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007: 35). In the second half of 20th century, there was an abundance of scholarly work based on evidence provided by personal narratives. Retrospective first-person narratives of individual lives were collected and compiled, gradually becoming an emerging force as a newly-established research methodology. The following is Myanes et al.'s account of the impulses behind such an increased interest in personal narratives:

One primary motivation is the desire to examine varieties of individual selfhood and agency 'from below' and in practice, as constructed in people's articulated self-understandings. More specifically, analyses of personal narratives have served to introduce marginalized voices (e.g., those of women or globally subaltern people) and they also have provided counter-narratives that dispute misleading generalizations or refute universal claims. For some researchers, the goal of personal narrative analysis has simply been to work from an empirical base that is more inclusive. (2008: 1)

Myanes et al.'s claim reveals that the impulse in looking for individual variations, self-understanding, and most important of all, working from an empirical base, all in all echo with the prerequisites for conducting qualitative research. I would now like to give an account of my reasons for conducting a narrative study, based on three features fundamental to narratives: consisting of stories, generating meanings, and the connection between stories and meanings.

First of all, people are story-tellers, and narratives are the stories people tell. To tell a story, said Aristotle, is to 'speak of events as past and gone... nobody can "narrate" what has not yet happened' (Rhetoric, Book III, Chapter 16). By telling stories, past experiences are conveyed, providing ways for individuals to make sense of the past (Riessman, 2008: 8). Presented as narratives, the stories already 'have conventional structures which are arranged to provide coherence and causal sequence; they have a beginning, a middle and an end' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000: 32). Stories provide coherence and continuity to one's experience and play a central role in our communication with others (Lieblich et al., 1998: 7). These stories serve as a starting point, demonstrating the narrator's life 'as lived' (Bathmaker, 2010). The lived experiences, on one hand, provide informative elements for us to collate as we collect individual stories to draw an overall picture of the group; on the other hand, they offer a solid base for research into some abstract subject areas for which the sources are otherwise hard to obtain.

Secondly, as people are meaning-generating organisms, the stories that people tell provide ample scope for further exploration and scrutiny; as Hollway notes: 'narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful' (2000: 32 cited in Lieblich et al., 1996: 8). The flux of life stories construct and transmit individual and cultural meanings, even identities (Riessman, 2008: 8). When people construct a story line, they draw from available resources around them, either above or beyond their individual experience. By making the most of the meaning-generating mechanism of languages, one is able to construct one's own self-image 'according to a specific interpersonal context' (ibid). Therefore, when we study or interpret narratives, we can not only gain access to the individual's life history or identity but also gain insight into the narrator's culture and social world. Similarly, for scholars who analyse personal narratives, it is important to recognise that stories which people tell about their lives are never simply individual, but are told in historically specific times and settings and draw on the rules and models in circulation that govern how story elements link together in narrative logics. This is why the making of narrative is never an individual task; rather, narratives are 'collaborative constructions' (Bathmaker, 2010: 2) by the narrator, the researcher, and others who become involved in the process (such as an interpreter in some research). Even readers are free to make their own contribution to the making of narratives as they engage with them. These multiple contributions therefore possess an significant capability for generating meaning, a distinctive feature which we cannot overlook.

Thirdly, while relating narrating as an individual event to the social world, the contextualised factors are disclosed with the development of the storyline as what Lincoln and Denzin called 'an engaged social science' (2005: 1117). The stories that people tell often come with meanings or comments, and the reason a story may generate such meanings is of great interest to researchers: by examining the relationship between the story and the meaning, it is possible to uncover a great deal of information which would otherwise be hidden. These contextualised dynamics are the magnifying glasses for researchers, with which we will be able to see into a particular time, space, and relationship surrounding the narrator, and then eventually construct his or her life as lived.

To summarise, where there are human beings communicating, there is storytelling; where there is storytelling, past experiences are reconstructed; while reconstructing past experiences, people are generating meanings and looking for identities; while stories are told and meanings generated, the connection between stories and meanings opens up endless possibilities for researchers to further scrutinise the contextualised dynamics of the individual. These include the time, the

space, the history, and the life of both the narrator and the researcher, as summarised by Baker: 'it is narrativity that turns the continuous flow of experience into a set of delineated categories that can be processed in various ways' (2006: 10). Thus, personal narratives have the ability to inform us about public concerns, which, as previously mentioned, form the impetus behind this study: to discover and describe how one becomes an interpreter, with a focus on learning aspects.

In addition to the above-mentioned features on narratives, I give a couple of reasons here to strengthen my choice of a narrative study. Firstly, the choice of a narrative study has a lot to do with the sensitive nature in the interpreting profession. As a practising interpreter myself, I have already sensed the sensitive nature of this profession, such as how cooperative trainee interpreters might become more guarded and compete with each other after training, something that is very much in evidence in interpreters' personalised stories. Therefore I have striven to find a way to explore interpreters' individual learning stories without compromising their integrity. Up until now, narratives are the best possible research method I can think of to tackle this concern.

Further, my preference for narrative research lies in one of its essential aspects: distinguishing the 'singular and particular' rather than pursuing the statistical generalisations that large samples tend to offer. In Flyvbjerg's words, 'good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of life' (2006: 237). Narratives reveal ambiguity, as Hodkinson and Hodkinson describe: individual cases 'retain more of the "noises" of real life than many other types of research' (2001:4). While other research methods tend to exclude these 'noises', 'the excluded noise may be a highly significant part of the story' (Bathmaker, 2010: 2). This point resonates with my aim to conduct bottom-up research with interpreters; it is the details of interpreters' learning experiences that I wish to explore, not only gaining a basic understanding about the pathways through which interpreters develop, but also gaining an insight into individual learning stories that shimmer behind the main learning theme—particularly when the focal point of this study is the experience of the interpreting learner, as opposed to that of the trainer. By listening to the learner's voice, the narrative method in this study is expected to 'provide a means of getting closer to the experience of those whose lives and histories go unheard, unseen, undocumented—ordinary, marginalised and silenced lives' (Riessman, 2008 cited in Bathmaker, 2010: 3).

3.5. Data Collection

Following the theoretical discussion in the previous section, the coming paragraphs illustrate the specific procedures for data collection and data analysis, and other issues which have emerged from the process of data collection.

3.5.1. The pre-fieldwork phase

3.5.1.1. Selection of research site

The research was conducted at the Centre for Translation Studies (CTS), University of Leeds, and specifically targeted students or alumni of the Masters Programme of Conference Interpreting & Translation Studies (MACITS). CTS has offered postgraduate level training programmes for interpreting since September 2001. Students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and nationalities to join MACITS, where more than ten working language combinations can be chosen from. Students in CTS receive systematic interpreter training both theoretically and practically, under the guidance of both practising interpreters as well as academic teaching staff. Since this research project is taking place at the University of Leeds, and in view of the fact that MACIT has a history of training conference interpreters, MACITS at CTS has been chosen as the main site for this study.

It is also worth noting that the title of MACITS has existed only for the past 6 years (2006-2012); it was originally named MA in Interpreting and Translation Studies (MAITS) between 2001 to 2005. Despite the modification of its title, the content, the course structure, and the teaching staff that the Leeds programme provides has remained approximately the same. Therefore students and alumni from both MACITS and MAITS were invited to participate in this study.

3.5.1.2. Screening of participants

As stated in the previous chapter, this study uses an emergent research design whose aim is to understand how one becomes an interpreter from a learner's viewpoint; every step I took was exploratory in intention. To collect the narrations from interpreters at various stages of development, I recruited four groups of interpreters, eight in each group, to participate in this research. As such, neither the language combination, working mode, nor the employers of the 32 interpreters were used to screen or filter participants. What these interpreters have in common is they are all either current trainees or graduates of MACITS (2006-2012) or MAITS (2001-2005) at CTS, University of Leeds; this is to ensure they had received the same interpreter training and graduated, or were going to graduate, according to equal standards.

The duration of training and the duration of working as an interpreter were the two most distinct features in recruiting participants. Given the exploratory nature of this study, I aimed to recruit at least two groups of interpreters: trainee interpreters and practising interpreters, to reflect the difference between novices and experts in interpreting. In order to gain insight into a more comprehensive learning experience, I then decided to recruit two sub groups of interpreters under the original division of novice and expert, and eventually had recruited four groups of interpreters from four stages of interpreter training and development:

Group S (student interpreters) were absolute beginners of interpreter training. At the time of interview, they had received only two months of training. group G (graduate-to-be interpreters) were advanced trainees who had finished all the required training yet were still waiting for their exam results while writing their translation assignments or dissertations in order to fulfil the requirements of the MA degree. Group S and G comprise the composition of trainee interpreters. Unlike trainee interpreters who did not have substantial work experience, Group N (novice interpreters) and E (experienced interpreters) had all been successfully awarded their degree several years previously, and had accumulated a certain amount of interpreting work experience. The only difference between group N and E is the amount of time they had functioned as practising interpreters in the job market: below five years for group N and over five years for group E. The length of five years came from the statement that Ericsson et al. have made on professional education. As stated by Ericsson et al., a general rule is that at least ten years of practice are required to become an expert (1993, 1996 cited in Van de Wiel et al., 2004: 184). I therefore set a timeline of five years between the ten-year estimated period of time, as a way of differentiating between a novice and an experienced interpreter. Table 3 below demonstrates the features for the four groups of interpreters, while their more detailed biographical profile is presented in Appendix 2.

| Group | Years working as an interpreter | Year on the training | Training time when interviewed |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Student interpreter (S) | 0 | 2011-2012 | 2 months |
| Graduate-to-be interpreter (G) | 0 | 2010-2011 | 10 months |
| Novice interpreter (N) | 1-5 | 2009-2010 2008-2009 2007-2008 2006-2007 | 1 year |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|-----------|--------|
| Experienced interpreter (E) | 6-10 | 2005-2006 | 1 year |
| | | 2004-2005 | |
| | | 2003-2004 | |
| | | 2002-2003 | |

Table 3: Participant Group Information

In brief, I recruited four groups of interpreters to participate in this study: Group S are student interpreters, group G are graduate-to-be interpreters, group N are novice interpreters and group E are experienced interpreters. Again, language combination and the working mode of interpreting did not preclude an interpreter from participating in my study. What I focus on is the overall learning and developing experiences of individuals, and how the extent of their learning might affect interpreters at the four identified stages of development.

3.5.1.3. Participant recruitment

Conducting ethnographic research entails the investment of a considerable amount of time and effort on fieldwork, in which researchers are required ‘to engage in face-to-face contact with subjects rather than assume an impersonal detached approach’ (De Laine, 2000: 1). The early challenges which ethnographic researchers might face while negotiating and gaining access to the field are considerable. There are often significant practical problems, especially with the study of individuals, as their locations are often diffuse and contact with them can be denied for various reasons. Conducting fieldwork with fellow interpreters is no exception. I encountered tremendous difficulties at the outset when I independently tried to locate interpreting graduates.

There are basically two ways to recruit participants: direct personal contacts and indirect university or tutor contacts. Group S and G were recruited during their training, when I had direct access to go to their class and invited them to participate. The recruitment of group S was completed in November 2011, while the recruitment of group G was completed in June 2011.

However, the recruitment of group N and E was much more challenging and complicated than expected. I tried university contacts, personal contacts and contacts from interpreting tutors. The following paragraphs explain how participants of group N and E were identified and invited over a period of over one year.

In the CTS Taught Graduate Office, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Leeds, a list of contact emails of alumni is compiled and documented once students finish their training. The list grows increasingly long as time goes by, which provided me with the initial opportunities to contact the alumni.

Due to administrative constraints and privacy concerns, I was unable to gain access to the university contact list and make direct contact with the alumni. As such, it was necessary for the postgraduate officer to circulate the call of participants on my behalf. The first recruitment round of research participants took place between May to August 2011, when an invitation email for alumni was distributed to the interpreting graduates who received their MA degree between 2002 to 2010, in search of group N and E interpreters.

Unfortunately, only five respondents replied to me during the first recruitment round, and of these only one was a practising interpreter; the other four were trained to be interpreters but were working as translators. I conducted an interview with the first participant in June 2011, however, it was not until the interview time that I realised that the very first interviewee was an alumnus of MA Translation instead of an alumnus of either MACITI or MATIS! Therefore, the interview data was suspended/discarded.

I then sought help from interpreting tutors at CTS given that university contacts did not really work. The interpreting tutors then wrote an email to some alumni with the 'call for participants' email attached to it. In this way, those who were willing to participate replied to the interpreting tutors first, and the tutors in turn referred the contacts to me.

The recruitment of Group N and E started in June 2011, and was finished by almost the end of August 2012. The process took much longer than originally planned, as most practising interpreters have a busy schedule, and the allocated one-hour interview time was considered too long for some to contribute. In the end, being able to get hold of the interpreting alumni via the references of interpreting tutors at CTS turned out to be crucial; in this way the interpreting alumni were able to acknowledge my legitimacy as a researcher and were therefore more willing to participate.

3.5.1.4. Composition of participants

The participants of this study work in a number of different countries, and there is a significant distinction in terms of work conditions, between the private market and the international organisations, which affects the social status of the interpreters and can therefore have a strong bearing on the degree of professionalisation in the particular locale, especially for practising interpreters. Therefore the composition of participants of this study and the interpreting market divisions must both be identified to understand how knowledge is understood and where education might be positioned.

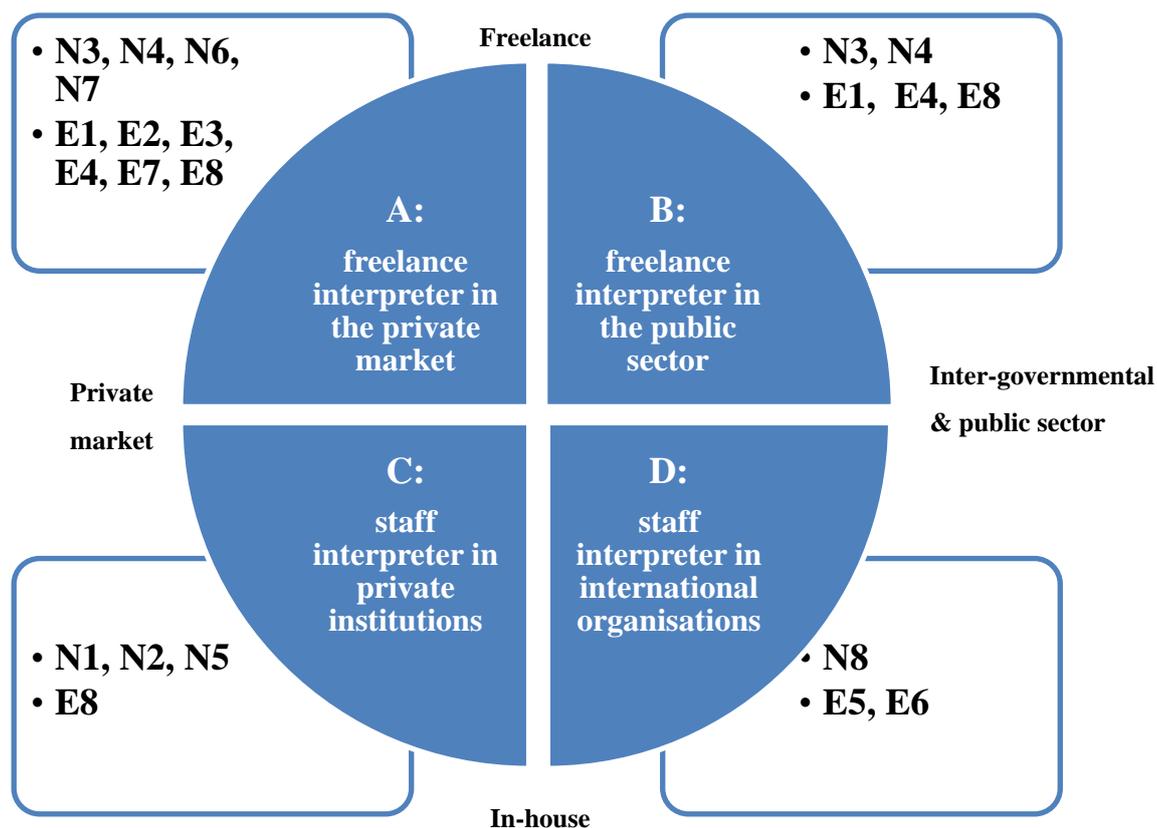


Figure 5: Division of the Interpreting Labour Market & the Composition of Participants

Figure 5 draws on a contextualised understanding of interpreting market divisions: the X-axis is used to distinguish between the private market and the inter-governmental & public sector, while the Y-axis represents the dichotomy between the freelance and the in-house nature of the employer. The diverse interpreting market can thus be divided into four sub-markets. The participants of this study have been allocated according to the market within which they work. Therefore, if an interpreter works for more than one sub-market and has shared his or her insights with regard to more than one market, their presence can thus be counted more than once. When reading the coming chapters about how interpreters learn at various stages, please refer to the sub-markets that individuals belong to since different sub-markets imply different lessons and therefore entail various contextualised stories. The differences between these interpreting markets become distinctive especially in the second half of this study, where the focus is shifted from learning as a trainee to learning as a practitioner—interpreters working in different markets do report diverse views of workplace learning, which will be discussed in Chapter 6 and 7.

3.5.2. The fieldwork phase

3.5.2.1. Conducting the fieldwork

The primary fieldwork of this study was conducted between June 2011 and July 2012. It involved a planning phase, from April to June 2011, in which an interview guide was drawn up to specify a range of topics which I knew from my experience as an interpreting learner would be worthy of discussion. The topics included:

- the participants' motivation for learning interpreting
- the participants' understanding of interpreting
- the experience of learning to be an interpreter
- the process of developing from trainee to practitioner
- the knowledge gap between training and real-life interpreting practice
- guidance for less experienced interpreters

A detailed interview guide can be found in Appendix 3. Once the recruitment of a participant was confirmed by both sides, I would send a copy of the consent form as well as a participant information sheet out for the participant to read and sign. At the same time, I exchanged emails or made phone calls to the participant in order to set a date for interview.

The first round of interviews was with group G interpreters. By the time group G interpreters were interviewed, they had recently finished training and were waiting to graduate while anxiously attempting to try their luck out in the interpreting market. I invited them to talk about the one-year learning experience while everything was still fresh in their minds, and in return provided them with some advice on entering the job market as a total beginner.

I then travelled to Mainland China and Taiwan and spent two months there, where I interviewed around ten group N and E interpreters based in several cities, including Beijing, Chongqing, Taipei and Kaohsiung. I moved back to Leeds in September 2011, and conducted interviews with group N and E interpreters based in the UK. By December 2011, the third round of interviews with group S took place, while the participants of group S joined the interpreter training programme for only two months. Interviews with group S were completed within one month without any delay. However, the number of group N and S interpreters interviewed at this point was still well insufficient, so I decided to experiment with other forms of interview beyond the face-to-face method.

At the beginning of participant recruitment stage, I was keen to recruit only those who could conduct a face-to-face interview. Not until the end of 2011 did I realise that it was almost impossible to have all the potential participants conduct a face-to-face interview due to the time and space constraints. I started to conduct skype interviews with interpreters scattered around the globe from February 2012. The change had a positive outcome, as an increasing number of the participants were willing to conduct a skype interview due to it being comparatively convenient, especially for those interpreters with young children—a skype interview allowed them to have the interview in several stages based on their personal needs.

All the interviews, both face-to-face and skype, were recorded; while face-to-face interviews were recorded by a MP3 recorder, Skype interviews were recorded using an online recording programme, iFree Skype Recorder, with which it was possible to record the conversation from both sides online and restore the recording as a separate MP3 file. The participants had been informed about the recording and their consent had been gained before conducting the interview. At the end of the fieldwork phase, eight interpreters from four groups had contributed to 32 recordings, each ranging from one to two hours in duration.

3.5.2.2. Possible biases in the sample

With no similar study available for reference, it is rather challenging to determine bias in the sample, yet the following few points should be taken into account when examining the data. Here, I will firstly raise the issues that might cause further concerns, and provide my approach or possible solutions according to the best of my experience and knowledge as both an interpreter and an ethnographic researcher.

To begin with, the dividing point of five years work experience between group N and E interpreters is hard to define. When recruiting participants, I roughly categorise those who graduated within five years time as group N interpreters and those who graduated over five years previously as group E interpreter. Some might argue that the years after graduation cannot demonstrate capability as a practising interpreter, since one might start to work as an interpreter straight away after training and accumulate a substantial amount of working hours and experiences compared with someone who graduated many years previously but for whom interpreting is only a part-time commitment. It is true that such expertise as interpreting is at all times hard to evaluate: both theory and practice have demonstrated that there is no perfect measure for differentiating between novices and experts in interpreting. However what I would like to emphasis in this study is that, although defining expertise and evaluating interpreting performance are difficult, the length of time that someone works as a professional in a given field

does at least reveal something valid, as seniority demonstrates certain values that a total beginner can never comprehend. To respond to such a concern, there are two points that I would like to raise: first, genuine working hours are extremely difficult to obtain. While novice interpreters might exaggerate their workload in order not to be looked down on by their peers, well-established interpreters might choose to understate their professional experience when asked questions about their working life. Therefore, it proved to be unrealistic to use working hours as a standard to recruit participants. Secondly, as this study is an exploratory one which looks at learning interpreting from a learner's angle, I would like to assume that the longer someone works as an interpreter, the better their understanding of the interpreting profession will be. The five year span offers a general idea for us to explore whether seniority in interpreting does make a difference for someone in terms of learning to be an interpreter. In addition to that, to minimise the bias, I have tried my very best to control the standards in recruiting participants, making sure that all the participants who participated in the research are practising interpreters with frequent interpreting assignments once they completed their training. In this way, hopefully concerns about using the total working length instead of working hours can be alleviated.

Next, there is possibly a bias with respect to the proportion of participants who are mostly Chinese-English interpreters. It would be ideal to have more of a balance of interpreters from all language combinations, in order to have a greater variety of learning experiences. However, the Chinese-English group under the chosen interpreter training programme is relatively large compared with other language combinations. Consequently, Chinese-English interpreters outnumbered other interpreters with different language combinations. Besides, since I myself am a Chinese-English interpreter, it was easier for me to invite my colleagues who are also Chinese-English interpreters to take part. But I have to stress once again here that, when recruiting participants, I did not state any preference over language combinations or personal relationships with any potential subjects. All the participants were chosen according to identical standards and requirements, and all the interviews were arranged in line with the participants' willingness and availability.

Thirdly, the design of the study did not distinguish between different interpreting working modes, such as CI, SI or public service interpreting (PSI). Some might suggest that different interpreting modes function in rather diverse manners, and therefore might require different sets of knowledge and skills. However, as stressed before, the aim of this study is to focus on the overall learning and development stories for individuals who have gone through the process of

becoming an interpreter, therefore the type of interpreter should not be an issue here. Also, although some interpreters do have specialised working modes as well as their own specialised fields, the general set of principles for one to serve as an interpreter are more or less the same, as are the issues that concern an interpreter are very consistent, this can be seen from consensus demonstrated in the basics in interpreter training programmes. For this reason, the working mode and the specialised field were excluded when recruiting participants—indeed differentiation by working mode and field emerged as interpreting issues in the research and will be revisited and discussed later.

3.6. Data Analysis

3.6.1. Transcription

As data collection drew to an end, I returned to my work station with over 60 hours of audio and MP3 recordings and a substantial amount of field notes. Yet the data was not ready for analysis. The transcription duty became a significant supplement to the audio recordings— listening to the interview recordings repeatedly, and typing up each and every utterance from both myself as the researcher and the narrators for further analysis, are what make narrative research distinctive from other qualitative research methods.

To make the transcription process more efficient and accurate, I used a piece of transcription software called DozBlogspot (豆子謄稿機, downloadable from <http://doz.blogspot.co.uk/2006/10/10420061017.html>) in which the transcription can be done without needing to switch between the audio player and a word file. The actual transcription process was as follows:

Step 1: I listened to the audio recording to gain a rough idea about the whole story.

Step 2: I opened the audio file on DozBlogspot, listened to the audio and did a verbatim transcription, noting the exact time after each and every meaning segment.

Step 3: I listened to the audio recording while reading the original transcription to make sure there is no omissions or spelling errors.

The actual data consist of 32 audio recordings, each one between 55 minutes and over two hours in length, which resulted in a transcription with a sum total of over 450,000 words. The process of transcription was extremely labour-intensive yet very inspirational. By listening to the recordings, I started to develop a rough idea of

how to analyse the work. I sometimes stopped the recording and took notes at interesting points, and these notes are expected to be of great help when undertaking the actual analysis. Figure 6 below demonstrates the sources of my data and how they will assist my analysis.

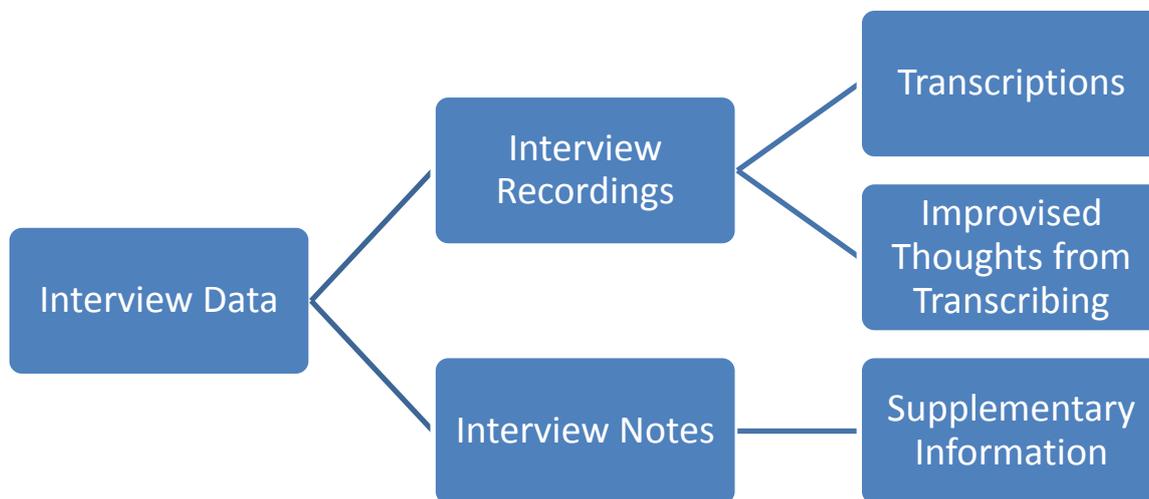


Figure 6: Resources for Data Analysis

3.6.2. Initial analysis trial with Nvivo

The data analysis process is not a one-off, self-contained task, but an ongoing process throughout this project. The following paragraphs provide a report on the data analysis process.

At the early stage of analysis, eight recordings (two from each group) were chosen for verbatim transcription of all the 32 recordings and uploaded to Nvivo for further analysis. Nvivo is a type of software designed for the qualitative analysis of long interview data sets. I had received both basic and intermediate training in Nvivo between September 2011 and March 2012, after which four transcriptions (one from each group) were partially analysed using the software.

Nvivo enabled me to do transcription, and to codify and organise the information according to themes and sub-themes. Nvivo is renowned for its ability to allow the user to make connections between random points, in which ‘links’ can be easily made between the transcribed texts and the themes. Additionally, Nvivo allows the research project to be an organic one, since all the relevant resources—for example, text files, PDF files, interview recordings, external references—can be restored in a systematic manner, and so the burden of analysing data is thereby

expected to decrease. However, after trying to work with Nvivo for three months from January to March 2012, I found it rather confusing to create sub folders for analysis. Sometimes it was tedious to interrupt the analysis to create a new folder for a new theme, or to link the text to an existing folder; also, the effort required to look for the right folder and to link the text with the right theme was very time and energy consuming. Consequently, I decided to discontinue the use of Nvivo in April 2012, and returned to manual analysis only.

3.6.3. Manual analysis model: Quantitative narrative analysis (QNA)

After failing to analyse the interview data using Nvivo, I turned to the traditional manual method of analysing the interview transcriptions. With more than 400,000 words of transcribed narrative data from 32 interpreters, I was overwhelmed at the beginning of my data analysis work. I was fully aware that I had been doing a qualitative research project and that starting from an ethnographically-informed emergent research design, employing a qualitative method of data analysis was the only way to proceed. However, the huge amount of transcription made such an approach seem impractical. I had been struggling to strike a balance between analysing my data qualitatively while presenting the results in a quantitative and systematic manner. I was therefore pleased to discover quantitative narrative analysis (QNA) as a potential means of analysing my data.

QNA dates back to the 1940s, when Harald D. Lasswell, the director of the Experimental Division for the study of War Time Communications in Washington, D.C., was commissioned to develop ‘a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’ (Berelson, 1952: 18 cited in Franzosi, 2010: 33). He created a set of themes for coding and then yielded quantitative measures to the data; such a quantitative approach to narrative texts, in Franzosi’s word, is simply to ‘turn words into numbers’ (2010: 4). I turned to QNA simply because I have far too much information to process on a qualitative basis. Also, given the word limit of my thesis, turning my lengthy narrative data into numbers seemed to be reasonable and justified.

Nonetheless, the nature of my analysis work remains primarily qualitative—QNA is simply a model for me to see the totality of the data, thereby gaining an idea of the significant themes according to the number of references and eliminating the less important data from the analysis itself. In the following paragraphs, I will explain how I conducted the analysis so that I will be able to present the coming four findings chapters.

3.6.4. Manual analysis work: Content analysis

Content analysis refers to a set of methods used for systematically coding and analysing qualitative data. These methods are used across the social sciences and the humanities to explore explicit and covert meanings in text—also called manifest and latent content—and for testing hypotheses about texts (Bernard and Ryan, 2010: 287). Given the exploratory characteristic of the study, I was starting out from an expectation to ‘learn’ from my participants’ stories about learning to be interpreters. Analysing the stories that interpreters tell and forming a synthesised idea about the learning experiences was a means for this study to achieve the end: answering the research questions regarding learning interpreting and interpreter development.

The manual analysis work comprised three separate steps: coding for themes, drawing a mind-mapping diagram for initial data analysis, and finally producing a mind-mapping diagram for writing up the findings chapters. I am going to outline the procedures taken in these steps in the following paragraphs.

3.6.4.1. Looking for themes for coding

I took extra care when looking for the themes from research questions; as Berelson warns: ‘content analysis stands or falls by its categories’ (1952: 147). I began by using common sense and looking at the explicit terms I had asked about in my original research questions, and included all the terms on my coding list. Then all the terms on the coding list were categorised, firstly based on my research questions and secondly according to my interview sequence, as they were expected to answer my research questions. These categories were constructed with reference to research questions, in the hope that ‘the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units’ will then ‘permit precise description of relevant content characteristics’ (Holsti, 1969: 94 cited in Franzosi, 2010: 36).

After gathering the themes for coding, I used the major themes for coding as dividing markers, as shown in Appendix 4. Some of the themes are present in all four groups but some only emerged in certain groups. Generally speaking, the more experienced the group of interpreters is, the broader the spectrum of themes that will be assigned to them, because it is expected that their seniority will endow them with more answers to my questions.

3.6.4.2. Coding according to the themes

The second step I took in data analysis was coding. First of all, I listened to my interview audio recordings as a whole for an overview of each interview session,

while adding time allocations and checking the accuracy of the transcription. Once the transcription was consolidated, I drew charts with Microsoft Word 2007 according to my themes for coding based on my research questions, as I read through the narrative data in detail for the second time, and fed the chunks of interview data into the corresponding themed charts. The themed charts consist mainly of three columns: the first column was for the accommodation of individual interview data, the second column was for summarising the main points for content analysis, and the last column was used for narrative analysis. The purpose of allocating chunks of narrative data into specific themes aims was assist me “in understanding and observing certain *patterns in the data*” (Berg, 2004: 39 cited in Franzosi, 2010: 40).

Following data codification, I read the individual interview data one theme at a time, marking off the significant sections while noting down the points worth reporting in the following two columns for later use in both content and narrative analysis. This process enabled me to see which part needed further investigation. I normally equipped myself with a red pen and a blue pen along with crayons of at least three different colours. I used red pen to circle particular segments that needed further investigation, blue pen to write down my observations, and lastly the crayons in different colours to link a particular word or a sentence with another for detailed analysis. Along with my manual analysis work and the themed charts, I had a blank notebook next to me for jotting down any emerging thoughts or ideas that might be of use for further writing up tasks.

3.6.4.3. Drawing mind-mapping diagram with Freemind

The third step of my analysis work was largely concerned with QNA. I was searching for a tool which could demonstrate the narrative data in the intended order, but at the same time was able to support the basic function and purpose of QNA, as I had to rely on the numeric data sets as evidence when writing up my findings chapters. After months of trial and error with different software, I found Freemind particularly useful in assisting me with the analysis work. By this stage, I had already established a clear idea about which concepts to look for, and all I needed to do was transform my abstract understanding of the narrative into a concrete mind-mapping graph. Following one specific theme at a time, I branched out for sub categories, relating individual answers to those sub categories, and finally attached narrative pieces under the story teller. One of the advantages of Freemind is that it allowed me to examine my qualitative data quantitatively, while the mind-mapping graph still illustrated the relationships between narrative items. At the end of this stage, I was able to produce a mind-mapping graph, as shown in Appendix 5.

3.6.5. After the manual analysis work

As the original aim of this research was to find out how one learns to be an interpreter via the individual learning stories of interpreters, the ultimate goal in data analysis was to examine the storyline from the narratives of interpreters. The manual analysis work provided me with a set of mind-mapping graphs, representing the gist of my study results. But patterns and numbers do not speak for themselves; they too have to be interpreted and put back into words. In the last stage of my data analysis work, the qualitative and quantitative went hand in hand: the numbers taken from the mind-mapping graph functioned as evidence to support the construction of the retelling, while words went beneath the superficiality of numbers to (1) provide context to numbers, (2) suggest relationships, following the clues offered by words, and (3) reinforce the explanatory logic of quantitative narrative analysis (Franzosi, 2010: 153). In this way, it should not be words *versus* numbers, nor qualitative *versus* quantitative, but words *and* numbers, qualitative *and* quantitative. After all, it is words and numbers, quality and quantity that share the same etymological root based on the sequential organization of narrative (Franzosi, 2004: 32).

3.7. Summary

In Chapter 3, the methodological approach informing this study was addressed. Following an overview of the ethnographically-informed research design, the narrative method was introduced. This highlighted the appropriate choice of narrative data to understand how one learns to be an interpreter. Finally, an account of the process of data collection and data analysis was given. The following four chapters will be spent on presenting the major findings of this study.

Chapter 4

Findings I: Characteristics of the Interpreting Learners

4.1. Introduction: the Nature of the Data

Having examined the contexts of this study in Chapter 2, and explored the methodological approach of this study in Chapter 3, the following four chapters, 4 to 7, are going to present the findings with a view to addressing the three research questions: **what are the characteristics of the interpreting learners, what is learning to be an interpreter like in the experiences of interpreters and what is it like to be a practising interpreter.** Figure 7 below demonstrates the time frame, the research questions and the corresponding findings chapters.

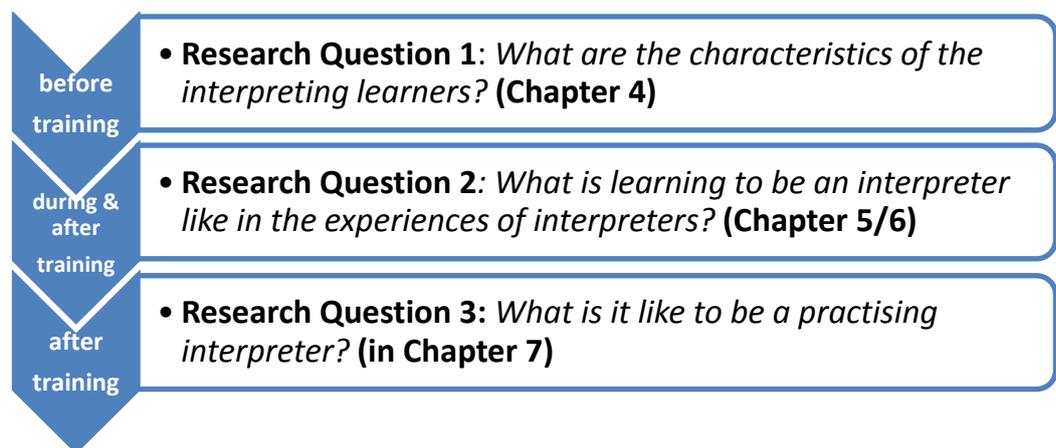


Figure 7: Research Questions and Corresponding Findings Chapters

Chapter 5 will discuss the characteristics of the interpreting learners before training. After reading thoroughly through my narrative data, I analysed 32 individual stories pertaining to the experience of learning to be an interpreter and found that these personal stories follow specific patterns that can be formally investigated to provide an understanding about learning interpreting and interpreter development. The four findings chapters elaborate on the main learning themes I have identified in the data. The time frame is the foremost principle I relied upon when telling the stories of learning interpreting and learning themes were generated based mainly on three time scales: before training, during training, and after training. These learning themes originated from the research questions, but emerging themes will be reported too along with the expansion of the analysis.

At the outset of my data analysis, I kept asking myself, as an ongoing interpreting learner, a practising interpreter and a researcher in interpreting studies, what stories can I tell about myself as well as my interpreting colleagues and why should these stories be of interest to others? My mind had always been occupied with questions of what value can be derived from narratives; specifically, what insights can a study of narrative accounts with interpreters bring to us? I have always believed in the potential that narratives have for demonstrating personal experiences and exploring how these are inextricably linked to their contexts—what C. Wright Mills refers to as linking ‘personal concerns’ to ‘public issues’ (Mills & Mills, 2000: 248). In the same spirit, this study will examine the collected and compiled personal learning experiences in order to reflect the public issues within the context of becoming an interpreter. Yet how to tell the story of interpreters from my data is now an issue of selection and presentation. The principles behind my selection and presentation work are supported by an essential characteristic of my data in which I firmly believe: ‘good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of real life’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 237). I would like to capture and depict the real experiences from the data, in order to reflect the belief that narratives have the ability to help a researcher to approximate the complexities and contradictions of real life. Thus my findings chapters are expected to be full of genuine dynamism comprising not only general rules but individual differences which Bathmaker describes as ‘real ambiguity’ (2010: 2), which resonates with what I have aimed to do by employing a bottom-up ethnographically-informed method.

The findings chapters bring together a collection of learner narratives which explore a variety of aspects of interpreting learning experiences. The learning process is understood as normative and lifelong, built of and through experiences in social contexts: interpreting learners’ motivation before training, as trainee interpreters in classrooms and within the programme, as practitioners in the market, and as members of the CoP in the workplace. I have tried to strike a balance between presenting a holistic description of learning interpreting and demonstrating the valuable individual differences. In addition, every theme reported below includes an account of how these narrative data have been constructed and transformed into an organic whole; with an exploratory intention, I intend therefore to ‘make a story of the research, and construct a meta-narrative while relaying and interpreting the

accounts of informants' (Van Maanen, 1998; Atkinson, 1990; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997; Wolcott, 2001).

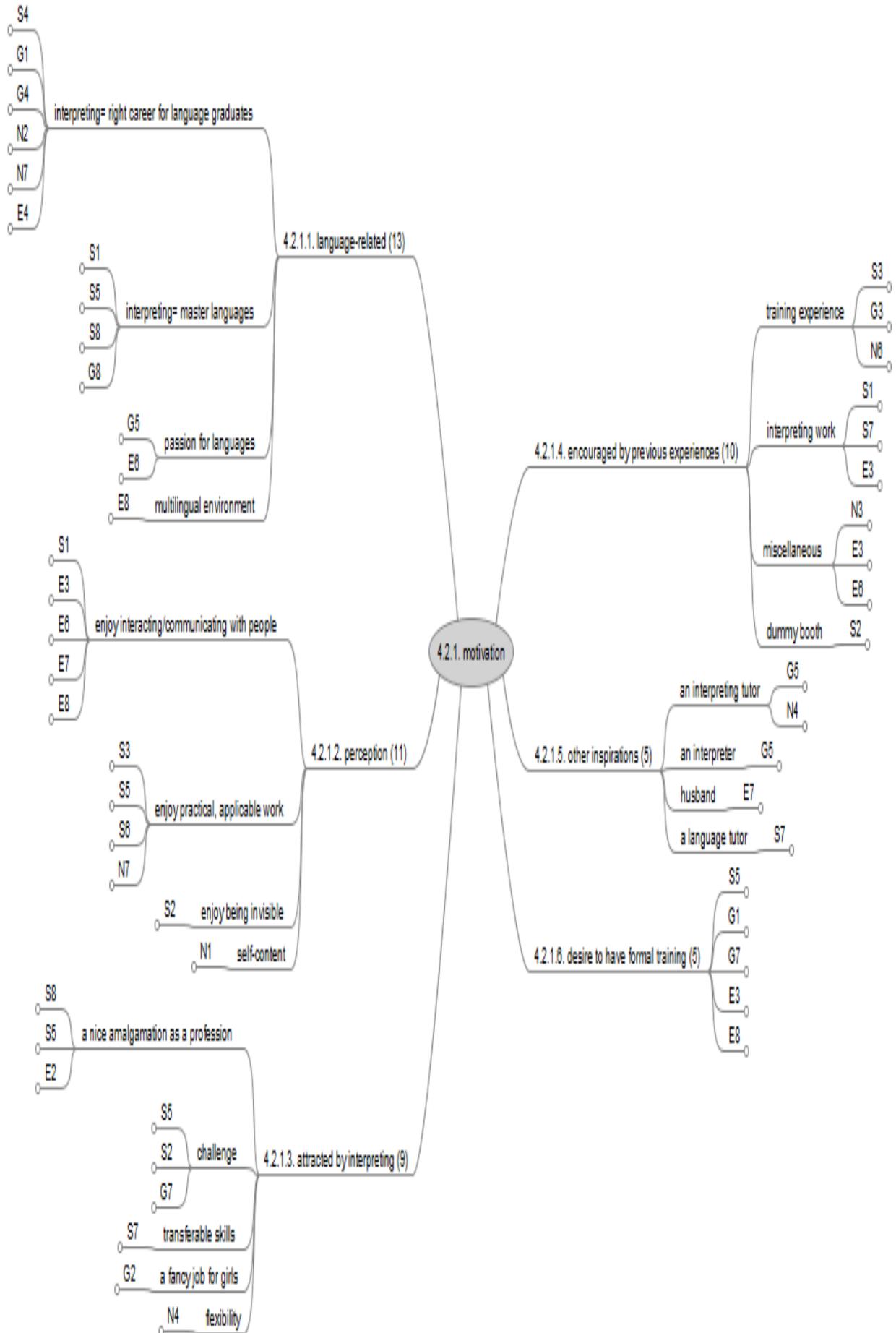
Furthermore, a mind-mapping diagram has been attached at the beginning of the main text of context analysis, in order to signpost the key issues addressed in each chapter. The mind-mapping diagrams were produced during the data analysis stage, as explained in 3.6.4.3. Also, to adhere to the word limit, abbreviations for the four groups of participants are introduced in line with the List of Abbreviations at the outset of this thesis. Therefore, S refers to group S interpreters; E1 is number one interpreter from the group of experienced interpreters, etc.

4.2. Characteristics of the Interpreting Learners

4.2.1. Motivations for learning interpreting

By sharing these original narrative data, I aim to go beyond the glamorous image of the interpreter that the general public often hold, and look beneath the surface repeatedly to discover the underlying characteristics of the interpreters at the very beginning: what initially *motivated* them to be interpreters? Motivation, as elaborated by Dornyei, et al., is 'the direction, and magnitude of human action, that is, the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it' (2006: 9). By learning about interpreters' initial motivation to undertake interpreter training, I will be able to get to know their purpose behind receiving interpreter training. Of all the 32 interpreters, it is not surprising to note that all of them have a strong tie with languages: they either hold a language-related degree, or were born into or raised in a bilingual or multilingual environment. With more than one language being used in their daily lives, interpreting thus came naturally to them.

Aside from an interest and/or background in languages as an overarching factor motivating these learners to learn interpreting, there are various other reasons at play: due to self-perception, due to previous formal or informal interpreting experiences, attraction to the interpreting profession, influence from their partners, and a desire in and of itself to have formal training in interpreting. I will discuss each of these factors in the coming paragraphs.



4.2.1.1. Language-related issues

As previously mentioned, all the participants undertook interpreter training with a strong tie to languages, yet the extent to which they love languages does vary. Under language-related motivation, only two interpreters admit that their pure love of languages motivated them to learn interpreting, while four declared that they believe learning interpreting is the best way to polish or master their existing languages; the other six reported that they attended training simply because it is an ideal way for language graduates to make a living.

N7 is now an active conference interpreter based in Taipei, Taiwan. He shares how he made the decision to study interpreting years back:

N7: Let me be just very honest with you... it wasn't really a motivation. I was just between many choices. I graduated from a Taiwanese University with a BA degree in foreign languages and literature, and I was waiting my options. I could study literature, linguistics, teaching English as a second language, or translation and interpretation. And... I consider myself as a very practical person. I like to study but I like to see results immediately. I like to practice. So between theory and practice, I would say that I prefer practice. **Interpretation seemed to be a good option for me at that point.**

In N7's account, we cannot see any career expectations about interpreting (which we can see in 4.2.1.3.) nor a love of languages but rather very practical career preference. There are five interpreters who give similar accounts, indicating that, for these language graduates, studying interpreting seems to be a more practical choice, especially when studying theory-based literature or linguistics or teaching is not of interest to them. Such a practical motivation, coupled with the career prospects for interpreters, makes interpreting an obvious choice for those language graduates who are unwilling to teach and who are not interested in literature or linguistics. Especially when these six interpreters come from both Asia and Europe, representing a good mixture from all stages of interpreting learning with one S, two Gs, two Ns and one E, the fact it may be seen as a practical career choice may help to explain why it was a preference.

The second group motivated by language-related issues claim that they regard studying interpreting as the best way to polish their language skills. Interestingly, those who consider interpreting as a tool for language mastery are either Ss or Gs, and are either undertaking training at the time of interview or have recently finished training, and have no interpreting work experience at all. I present their narratives below to demonstrate their shared expectation of learning interpreting.

S1: Actually I regard studying interpreting as the highest degree as an English major. And I think that my English proficiency is not enough for me to find a good job in the market. So **have to further my study up and to learn about English language** and also the culture here.

S5: Before I came to Leeds, I was an English teacher. I taught those students preparing for studying abroad. I taught IELTS, TOFEL, preparation courses for almost two years.

I want to further enhance my English skills, that's one of the reasons why I chose to take this course to promote my English skills.

S8: Of course I am not native speaker so **I need to improve my English**. And in this way I have to combine my English with my Chinese perfectly to express my idea perfectly. So **I think interpreting means to train me in this way** to make my expression more concise, more to the point, get to the point.

G8: I think the passion that I had for English language and Chinese language as well, but not as much because I was an English major when I was in college. So I had this passion that **I want to learn English well and to outperform my peers—that's my motive**.

These are four responses out of 32 interviewed, which means one in eight interpreting learners undertake training with the motive in mind that interpreting can, or has the potential to, polish their language use, instead of the reverse being true: that having a solid language ability is a foundation for interpreter training. This issue can be worth noting for interpreting trainers and prospective interpreting students as a signpost for interpreter training—in the long run, it might be better for trainers to have a clear idea of what is expected of trainees during training; also, students should be able to differentiate more clearly between language learning and interpreter training.

The third group of interpreters are language lovers, who came for interpreter training out of their passion for languages. Their answers are simple and direct, without any expectations before training or after the training.

G5: **I have a great passion to learn English. I love learning English and that's all.** Just love learning it.

E6: **I was motivated to become an interpreter because I studied in Spanish when I was 16.** I had a pretty monolingual background. My parents were English-speaking Americans, and I grew up in a fairly monolingual area until adolescence when all over the United States started to have a huge influx of people from different places. You notice the influence of Spanish. I started to learn Spanish when I was 16. **I absolutely love it.** I made a lot of progress very quickly. And I decided that I would consider becoming an interpreter as part of my career... one of my career options.

Contrary to the common belief that interpreters should normally hail from a multilingual background, the results of my study show that only one interpreter out of 32 came from a multilingual environment (i.e. she was raised in an environment with both parents speaking different languages) and she had acted as an informal interpreter since she was little.

E8: **I grew up trilingually**, my father is Greek, my mother English, and I was born in Germany. And at that time, we were speaking all three languages, German, Greek and English. English my mother Greek my father said, then pretty much **I would be an interpreter for my mother from Greek, and an interpreter for my father from English because neither my father or my mother spoke each other's languages.** When I was 18, then I went to a term study languages, I studied Russian and I always knew that actually at the end of this I want to become an interpreter. I see interpreters work, my father worked in European Commission and often spoke of the incredible work that interpreter is doing in the booth. So it's quite fascinating by the career from the very early age.

4.2.1.2. Perception issues

If it can be said that people with the same characteristics go for the same career, interpreters are a rather diverse and interesting group: both introverted and extroverted personalities co-exist; similarly, passionate language graduates who are determined to be interpreters so that they can employ their linguistic expertise in facilitating communication exist alongside interpreters who see the interpreting profession as nothing more than a practical way to earn a living. There are also interpreters who choose this profession simply because interpreting can bring them a level of contentedness which other professions cannot.

Five interpreters enjoy interacting and communicating with people, thus they undertake training in the hope of becoming interpreters so they may have more opportunities to interact and communicate with people. E3 for instance was originally trained to be a translator, but later realised how much she loves interacting and communicating with people, so she did her second MA in interpreting. In the narrative below, we can see how she thrives when interacting and communicating with people, and how this pushed her to eventually become an interpreter:

E3: **I like to communicate with other people really.** And during the first year of my MA in Translation Studies, for most of the time I have to carry my laptop...and of course, translating is an interesting one, and, yeah, I'm feeling that **I really want to communicate, I want to help, with the real people to assist their communication.** Maybe that's something related to my personality. So I think that is probably the reason why I chose to continue with interpreting studies.

Contrary to those who love human interaction, S2 reported that she thought of becoming an interpreter only because it is one of the few professions which guarantees her a private space in the booth while still allowing her to make use of her linguistic expertise. She is the only one who declares her preference of not being under the spotlight.

S2: Even though it's highly-skilled, **if you are in a booth, you are not visible as I'd like to be in the back.** I don't necessarily need the central attention.

The interpreter's role has been depicted and imagined by lay-people as glamorous; one example is the actress Nicole Kidman in *The Interpreter*, who can be seen working with high-profile personnel in business suits in state-of-the-art international conference halls. The image of Nicole Kidman as a UN interpreter in the film has been distinctive in the minds of the potential learners; her sharp and bright image has been a driving force for some to undertake training. Contrary to such a superficial impression, S2's statement makes us rethink what the most important prerequisite for an interpreting learner might be: is it an outgoing personality, someone who mingles with people in order to facilitate communication, or rather someone being more introverted but with impressive expertise in interpreting, which might help the interpreter to focus more on the interpreting task itself? Whichever it may be, an outgoing interpreter might well team up with

interpreters like S2 in the same booth; alternatively, maybe outgoing interpreters are better suited to CI tasks where they will become the focus of all attention, whereas interpreters like S2 might find it easier to function in conference interpreting settings.

Another category under self perception concerns practicality. Four interpreters out of 32 claim that being an interpreter equates to making active use of their languages and straightforward application of what they learnt from school, and that this is a key motivation for choosing interpreting. Below are four excerpts from those 'practical' interpreters. What these interpreters have in common is that all of them dislike theory, but enjoy practice and application.

S3: I did my BA in English and for... for this major if you want to further your study you can choose to do linguistics or literature and I really have no interests in those. So as I told you **I am not very good at doing theories**, so... I did a bit about interpreting and found that **this profession is like purely application** and in..Yes. That's why.

S5: **I think studying interpreting would be more practical.** It's more skill-oriented. There is no theory behind it. That will be more suitable for me.

S6: **I am more of a practical person. I don't like theory.** I like things that practical. and I am not, I am not that kind of person who wants to like research deeply on the theory subjects. I am that kind of person who like to know a little bit, a little bit of everything, so I think interpreter, interpreting might serve me.

N7: **I consider myself as a very practical person.** I like to study but I like to see results immediately. I like to practice. **So between theory and practice, I would say that I prefer practice. Interpretation seemed to be a good option for me at that point.**

Lastly, one N thinks that contentedness is what motivated her to be an interpreter. I had tried to ask her about any other motivations, but she insisted that interpreting brings her contentedness and pride which other professions might not be able to give her. Our conversation is presented here:

N1: Before I got to know interpreting, **I thought interpreting is a job which can bring you lots of self-content** and can make you very proud of yourself. Because without you, the meeting or the activity cannot be carried out as you are the bridge for the two parties who cannot understand each other. And... I think that's the most important reason: self-content.

R: Was there anything about the interpreting profession that attracted you to get the training?

N1: I think it's still relate to pride and self-content. If you are a professional interpreter, first you can be very confident and very proud of yourself and you can act very professionally...it's still the belief that without you the thing cannot be done.

R: Ah, that people rely on you and clients count on you.

N1: Yes, yes.

4.2.1.3. Attraction to the nature of the interpreting profession

The nature of the interpreting profession was an initial attraction for about a quarter of the interpreters to learn interpreting. However, when questioned about which aspects of this profession attracted them, interpreters give a wide range of answers. S8 and N5 think interpreting is an ideal profession, accommodating what they consider to be appealing elements such as linguistic expertise, communication,

meeting people from all around the world, 'and at the same time it is paid' (N5). S2, S5 and G7 enjoy the challenges that being an interpreter can offer; as expressed by G7, in comparison to being a translator, the immediacy that interpreting work is able to provide is exactly what she is seeking:

G7: **I prefer challenge**, and I think if I study as a translator I have enough time to search the background knowledge and then began to translate something, but, I, if I become a interpreter, especially a simultaneous interpreter, I don't have any time to, uh, prepare before I start to work, so I think because its challenge so I choose it as my master's courses.

Also, S7 was motivated to learn interpreting because she believes in the usefulness of interpreting skills:

S7: Even if you don't go into interpreting afterwards, **it is still transferable skills**. Still useful anyway.

N4 claims that there is no way for her to adapt to the 9-to-5 fixed schedule, thus the flexible lifestyle that comes with the interpreting profession attracted her to learn interpreting. What's more, G4 describes interpreting as 'a fancy job for girls.' Here are her reasons behind such a description:

G2: I would say, **being an interpreter is really a fancy job for me**. And it has high payment, and work's like not too long, and also have vacations. So I think **it's a very nice job for girls**. That's my initial motivation.

While we may be amazed at how the nature of interpreting can attract so many language graduates to undertake training, it is also interesting to note that, while eight interpreters claim their motivation for learning interpreting is career-oriented, there is no guarantee yet that all of them can make their way into the competitive interpreting market—as those eight interpreters are either Ss, Gs or Ns. None of the Es who have survived the competition in the interpreting market raised the point that interpreting being an fascinating profession had attracted them to be interpreters in the first place. The differences between trainees and practitioners demonstrate how real life work experience influences the interpreters' perceptions when answering career-related questions. It might be that the actual interpreting work had altered the practitioners' understanding about the profession, resulting in them avoiding the seemingly glamorous side of the career, to instead focus mainly on either the practical choices or personal preferences.

4.2.1.4. Encouragement by previous experiences

There are nine interpreters who stated that previous interpreting experiences were of significance in motivating them to learn interpreting. Although their previous experiences were diverse in nature - three had training experiences in interpreting, three had interpreting work experience, while one had dummy booth experience, and the other two had miscellaneous experiences related to the need of language use - what they had in common is that all these experiences were positive and pushed them to pursue interpreting as a career later on in life. S3, G3 and N6

had received interpreter training when they were doing their first degrees and they all loved the experience, which made them think of continuing to learn interpreting afterwards. S1, S7 and E3 had worked as interpreters before they had any proper training, and they 'absolutely loved' (E5) the experiences. E3's story here demonstrates how she touched upon the interpreting profession accidentally, and found herself able to facilitate communication even without training, then eventually came back to do an MA in interpreting.

E3: And the other thing is, before I came to Leeds, I actually tried to be an interpreter even back to my university... I mean undergraduate studies. I remembered that maybe in the last year of my undergraduate studies, **I tried once or twice to be an interpreter.** But at that time I didn't really know interpreter, translator, the difference in between. **I think I worked pretty well. And those kind of 'facilitate communication' was there,** after I finished my task. **So that's something, the experience before, that I think, well, maybe I can do that.**

Aside from having training and work experience, S2 is the only one who was inspired to be an interpreter because of her dummy booth experience which she had as an adolescent:

S2: My parents have a friend who interpreted in Hungarian. When I was about 16, I spent a week with her, shadowing her in European Parliament. So **from there, I think, OK, this is something I might want to do in the future.** And I did apply in university, I wanted to do something with my languages. And yeah, simultaneous interpreting shall I say, that's what motivated me to start..... **It was my experience.** So I was sitting... **I got a dummy booth, and I was allowed to sit and listen to the proceedings and interpreters. Uh, I was just really happy.** That was my first experience. And obviously you tried to say it at the same time, and see how far you can get.

Aside from realtime work experience or dummy booth experience, three other interpreters reveal that they either enjoyed or performed well in previous interpreter training in their undergraduate studies, which encouraged them to undertake an MA degree in interpreting. Their shared pleasure from previous training experiences can be summarised in S3's quote: '**I had the first taste of interpreting and I liked it.**' In contrast to the aforementioned experiences, there are two other interpreters, N3 and E6, whose motivation for learning interpreting was inspired by miscellaneous reasons: one religious, the other unplanned experience was interpreting for friends. Below are their stories:

N3: I was working in the United States and I am a church goer, and when I was, um, going to, I think, I was, I was attending a Korean church, and I noticed that there were few Americans who don't really understand Korea, Korean there well, in the, um congregation. So um, **I realised that language is a big barrier um, that could um, prevent people to persue their, um, spiritual life,** because I, yeah, I am Christian and I think I want to help, um, to, to, to break down this barrier and that's my motivation of, yeah, being an interpreter, yeah. Yeah, just, yeah **I wanted to help the church.**

R: Did you help them, did you help those people in United States, to, another language?

N3: Yes, I did, um, yeah, cause, um, I, I help them to, try, and yeah I did a little bit interpreting and professional interpreting for them, for example I interpreted the sermons for them, um, did a little bit translation as well, written texts, um, yeah and I talked to them (laugh).

E6: When I was 18, I went on a school trip to Spain. And when I came back, I was sure that I wanted to be an interpreter. **I sort of interpreted for some of our schoolmates who didn't speak Spanish as well, and so I started researching interpreting.** I signed up with an agency that does public service interpreting. And started to take their classes and started to interpret for them.

4.2.1.5. Other inspirations

There are five interpreters who acknowledged inspiration or support from a significant other to be an important motivation for them to learn interpreting. Their 'significant others' range from language or interpreting tutors (S7, G5 and N5), to outstanding interpreter (G5), to even the husband (E7). S7's inspiration from her language tutor in her teens is particularly noteworthy. This is her story:

S7: I think in a broader sense, when I finished my GCSEs, I really enjoyed doing French and Spanish when I was doing my GCSEs. And **one of my tutors said that she can imagine I working in Brussels and I put that idea in my head...** And then it was back to my mind during my A-levels and then I went on to do languages in university. **It was always there.** And then it became more concrete when I took a French interpreting module in my final year, which I loved cause we had headsets and everything... I thought I could really do this and I enjoyed it. And so I went to Paris and worked about it and try to do the masters and yeah, **I carry on.**

R: So that idea was always in your brain. Somebody predicted that you might be an interpreter in the future, you just followed the path.

S7: Yeah. **One of the teacher said that, yeah, I just followed the path.**

Many of us can reflect back and describe a teacher who was admired in considerable detail and continue to emulate that role model in numerous ways; S7's story shows how her high school language tutor deeply influenced her career-oriented choices in life as a trainee interpreter at the time of interview, and very possibly as a professional interpreter in the future.

4.2.1.6. Desire to have formal training

There are five interpreters whose motivation for learning interpreting lay in their desire to have formal training, 'to be trained professionally' (G1) as they came with a clear understanding and expectation of this profession. But there is a smaller group of interpreters, four out of 32, who actually came with absolute ignorance about interpreter training, as expressed by S5:

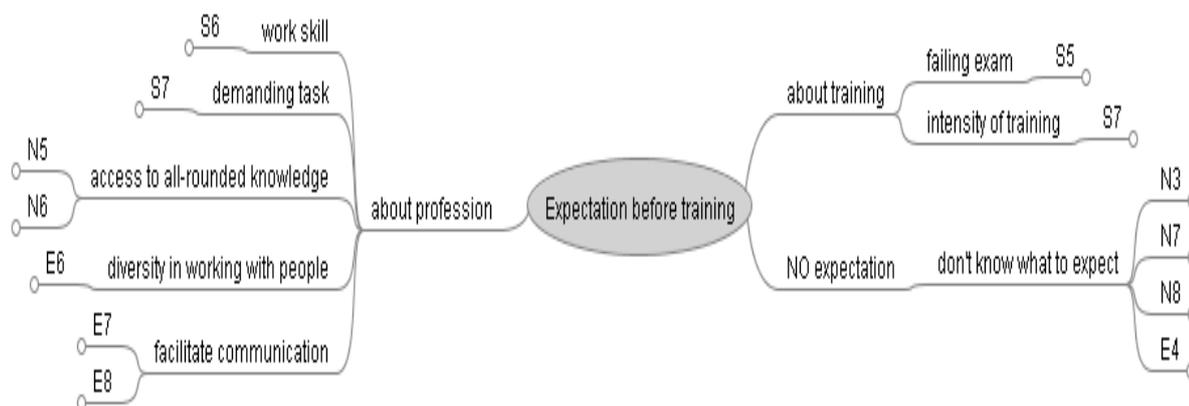
S5: I didn't really know what a professional interpreter should do in what way to be professional. So I want to get more systematic training.

The ignorance, or the curiosity about interpreter training, could ultimately become a drive for some to receive formal training. On the other hand, E8—who had accumulated a substantial amount of interpreting work in a governmental organisation—was actually encouraged by her colleague to receive formal training to consolidate her skills:

E8: **I has my first interpreting job when I was 19 as working for the Ministry for Employment in Luxembourg, and I was hired as an interpreter even I had no training.** And at this conference, there was another lady who was trained and became very clear. Even though I spoke my language well, I did not have the core skills required to be an interpreter as it is expected at 19. But it was a big eye opening for me,

because this lady has been an interpreter at the European quarter for 25 years. And she said to me why don't you go and train at some stages, **because I was doing the job without knowing whatever I was doing**. Breaking every rule in the interpreter academic books. Well, they seem to understand each other. (laugh) Everything to get on... **But at the end of the day, I still longed for a proper training, so I came back.**

4.2.2. Expectations before training



Following inquiries into participants' learning motivations, I want to know what learners expected before they learnt anything about interpreting. Their responses fall into three categories: expectations about their personal abilities relating to the interpreting profession, expectations about the training itself, and those with no expectations at all.

Expectations of the interpreting profession touch upon the nature of interpreting work: essential skills, demanding and rewarding tasks, access to all-round knowledge, diversity in working with people, and communication facilitation. These characteristics of the interpreting profession come naturally from learners' basic understanding about interpreting, which became a drive for them to undertake training. I also observed that interpreters all seem to have faith in training, i.e. they firmly believe that training will enable them to develop their desired ability within the scope of professional interpreting skills. The table below displays how interpreters speak of their expectations prior to training, regarding skills or potentials surrounding the nature of interpreting work:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Essential skill | S6: My expectation is that I expect my English to improve of course and I expect to learn everything I need to know (laugh) about interpreting and I pretty much wish that training can provide me with essential skills to work in the future. |
| Demanding task | S7: Because it's all my expectations, my understanding is that it is a very demanding thing because you are asking your brain to do something that doesn't actually do. And I think that's human intense if anyone was to say that it is just a question of repeating and... That's |

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| | not really true. (laugh) |
| Access to all-round knowledge | N5: What I expect is that it enables you to access to a lot of things. As an interpreter, you learn something of everything, everything of something . So in order to learn something about everything, you need to learn the topic within a short time. So this is what I like, I think. |
| | N6: I want to have access a wide range of information . That's why I thought interpretation would be the best choice for me. |
| | R: Right. So you want to be well-rounded. N6: Yep. |
| Diversity from working with people | E6: Well, I like to see ideas of having independence and having some varieties in my work , the idea of going to different continents where people would talk about different things everyday. Or different meetings, of whatever type. |
| Communication facilitation | E7: For me, expectation was always, you know, helping people to understand each other . That was my expectation towards this job. I don't want to be glamorous, never. If that's the case if you want to ask...(laugh) or whatever. But my first intention was to help people to communication . |
| | E8: I grew up, I would say, reasonably, on the one hand quite multi-culturally in terms of that it was Greek, English, French, German, Spanish; those different cultures but still very Eurocentric. What I find fascinating now is working with other cultures and being able to facilitate communication working , for example, from somebody speaking Greek into English and that a Chinese person like yourself could- or Taiwanese should I say- can they understand what's going on because that's a much bigger gap to bridge than the very European focus that I grew up with. |

Table 4: Expectations before Training

Contrary to these positive aspects, the low pass rate of the interpreter training programme as well as the intensity of work during training have made some beginners feel intimidated, and they admitted that the fear is their expectation before training. S5 heard it's difficult to pass the final exam, she kept mentioning: 'I was a little bit concerned because I heard some failures from the past years.' Similarly to her colleague, S7 heard that 'interpretation is the second highest level burnout after stockbrokers' before training, and in reality 'when I got here, I thought, wow... more than I had expected (laugh).' What is interesting to note is that both S5 and S7

are trainees who had just started training, thus their expectations are still very much related to the course and the exam. None of the other interpreters interviewed mentioned the intensity of training or the failing of the exam being a concern, or even an 'expectation' before training. It might be due to the fact that the other interpreters had either finished training or survived the exam, and are now placing more emphasis on being an interpreter rather than worrying about the training. But it does not necessarily imply that they did not have any negative expectations of training regarding failing or the intensity of training before they started their interpreting learning process.

The final group of respondents here, when asked about their expectation before training, gave me a very frank answer: 'no expectation at all,' or 'don't know what to expect.' They are two Ns and two Es, which provides a nice contrast to the previous group who came with obvious aims, as those who came with no clear expectations are all working interpreters. It is very likely that their real life interpreting practices have consolidated their understanding of this profession, therefore they tend to regard themselves as having no expectations of the training while reflecting upon how they thought of the training as students. Here I would like to take N8 and E4 as examples. The reason why N8 has no expectation at all lies in her ignorance around the interpreting profession:

N8: **Expectations, no. I really only knew what they taught me.** I didn't have any contacts with interpreters, I hadn't seen anywhere else. Once when I was in Spain, I went along to one of these mock conferences that they held. The University of Granada. And I basically started and did as everybody does the first time. I saw interpreters put their headsets on, and then you press one, you press two, and you press three, and you listen it all. I just think, wow, wasn't this incredible! I will never be able to do that. But apart from that, I mean, I didn't have any experience like that. I'd never sort of interpreted, you know, on behalf of my family or anything like that.

R: Yeah, you are brand new to this profession.

N8: Yeah, absolutely.

However in E4's case, she blamed her older age compared with that of her colleagues from the same year in the training, as in those days information about professional interpreters was still rare:

E4: No, **I didn't know what to expect.**

R: Like a lot of students, like nowadays a lot of students they come here for interpreting training, they all thought that interpreting is a job for easy money, just basically talk and you earn a awful a lot of money.

E4: Yes.. I know that, I understand that. You are like to think ' Oh.. You are paid for being, for just saying things.'

R: And sounds like such a glamorous job, especially for girls. So do you have kind of expectation like this?

E4: No.. I didn't.

R: Not at all?

E4: No. I didn't know what to expect. Because you see, compared with the student nowadays, I am quite old. (both laugh)

R: Not really...

E4: I think it's because. You see when I did my undergraduate it was in 1990's. And we had a couple of foreign teachers, we didn't have computer, no internet. So there

wasn't like even foreign even DVDs. **The time has changed and so many things have happened and advanced as well.** Nowadays you can get information anywhere. You go on YouTube you know..you can listen to anything, you can watch... You have access to so many learning materials. **When I was doing my undergraduate we didn't have that.** Um.. The BBC was locked. OK. In China, VOA blocked, so occasionally if the signal was fine we could get some programme..

R: By the radio..

E4: Yes.. On..by the radio. Um.. We could listen to the BBC. other than that, no. **So an interpreter definitely wasn't something we were familiar with.**

Whether they had some expectations of the glamorous side of the interpreting profession, or expected difficulties that they might come across during training, what interpreters had in mind before training is rather superficial. In the coming chapters, we will see how their original superficial expectations were challenged, altered, or reduced by their learning experiences.

4.2.3. Understanding of interpreting

Interpreting has been defined as 'a process of communication', with the interpreter's role being depicted as 'a bridge' or that of 'an ambassador' with such key words and messages being used in their narratives repeatedly. These include facilitating communication, transferring languages, or metaphorical expressions such as bridging the culture between two parties. Some interpreters add that such communication should go beyond the boundaries of the linguistic level, 'to deliver the speaker's intention or purposes to the audiences rather than focusing on the tasks or the sentences' (G1). G4 has put the idea of interpreting in a concise manner:

G4: **Interpreter is a bridge to communicate between two parties.** And why they need a bridge, because they cannot understand each other, when they cannot understand each other, it's not just about language, but about the culture, about the different background, so you have to bridge all of those obstacles for them. Um, language is the first, the most important thing, but other thing like cultural background, is important but less noticeable.

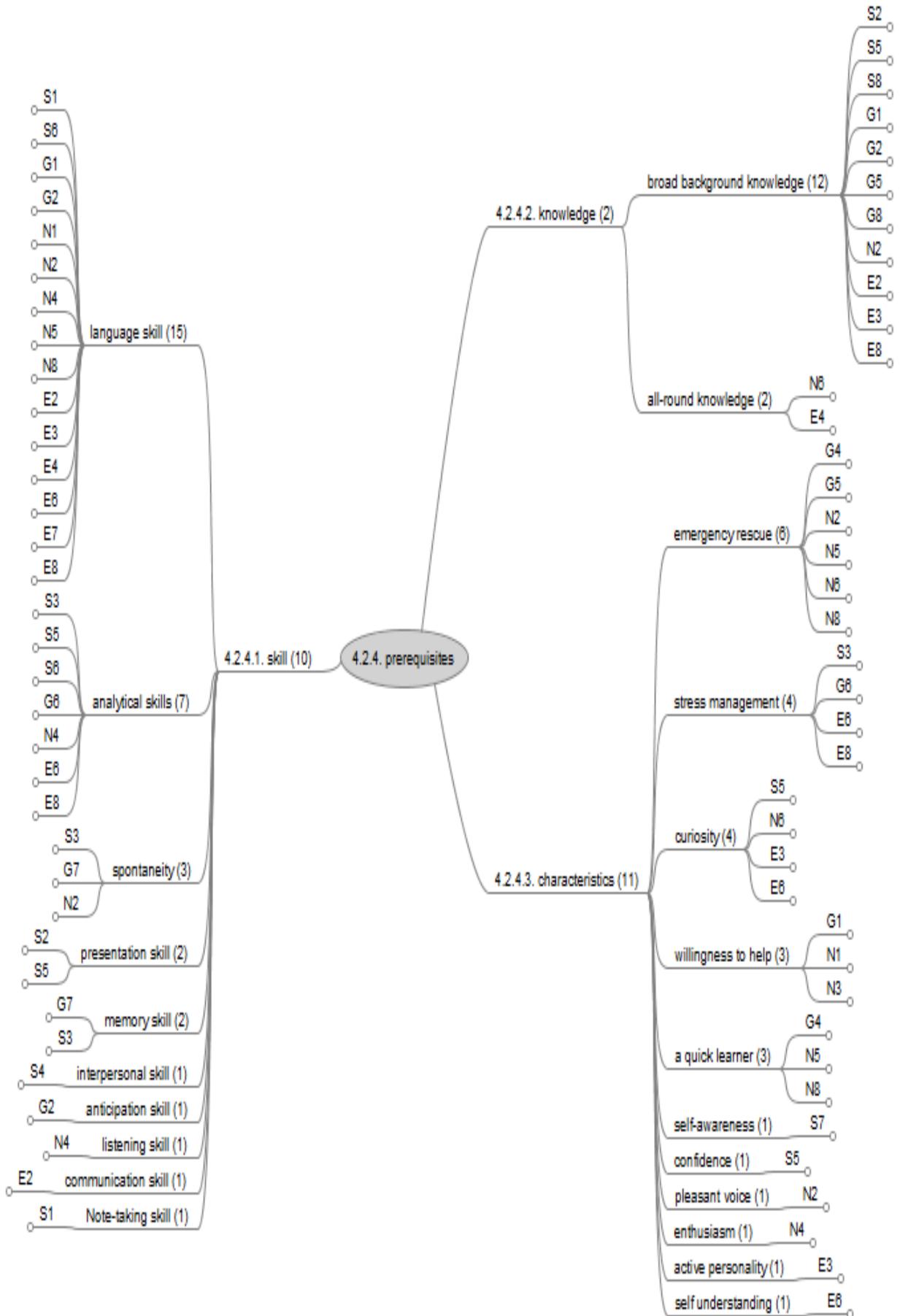
G5 goes beyond the conceptual understanding about interpreting to share with me her experience as a volunteer interpreter for the Refugee Council, and how this experience reinforces her understanding about interpreting with the added value of helping others.

G5: I think interpreting for me, it's a... **Firstly, it's a bridge connecting, help people who cannot communicate with each other to communicate.** And it's very important. It's an important agency to help both sides. **And secondly, it shows the true value of a person that is to help others.** Because this time during my internship in the Refugee Council in Leeds and every day, not every day, I will go there every Tuesday. So every time I went there I saw a lot of refugees who are struggling with their lives. They have difficulties in... They have difficulties to... They have difficulties to find a place, a proper accommodation to live in the UK and they did not have much money. And they come to the Refugee Council to seek for help. So **if there are no interpreters they cannot communicate with the project owner, they cannot express their feelings or their struggling to the staff. So during interpreting I really felt that I am helping others.** So I was very happy that my work is very valuable.

Their understanding of interpreting can be seen as being informed by their pre-existing knowledge of interpreting prior to training. In addition to getting the gist of the understanding of the interpreting activity, interpreters are going to reflect upon the knowledge and skills necessary for an interpreter.

4.2.4. Prerequisites for an interpreter

By inquiry into the knowledge and skills participants believe are necessary for an interpreter, we can expand our understanding of how interpreters perceive the interpreting profession before training. This aspect was originally expected to show some differences between trainee interpreters and practising interpreters, but interestingly answers from all participants reached a unanimous agreement when asked what the necessary knowledge and skills for an interpreter are. Broad general knowledge is prevalently covered with no field-specific references, while skills for interpreters include 10 diverse types of skills. No distinctive correlation can be found between work experience and the participants' understanding of the knowledge and skills for interpreters. Furthermore, though unasked, more than half of the participants point out personal characteristics are of importance if one wants to be an interpreter.



4.2.4.1. Skills for an interpreter

First and foremost, language proficiency is mentioned repeatedly by participants as the most important and basic skill for interpreters. 15 interpreters see language skill as 'the first requirement' (N4). To make the sub criteria under language proficiency more specific, participants think having 'a good command of standard variety of your mother tongue' (E6) is fundamental, as an interpreter needs to 'have an excellent knowledge of your mother tongue and source language' (E8) and also 'be very good at expression in all working languages' (N2) in order 'to reach a professional level' (S1).

Second to language proficiency is analytical skill, which was mentioned by seven interpreters. E8 is a senior interpreter with years of interpreter training experience. She considers analytical skill to be 'on top of all the other skills', since with it 'you can see the bigger picture and how ideas and concepts and units of meaning are linked'. S5 refers to the significance of analytical skill in the processing of the huge quantities of information that interpreters frequently encounter, which leads to 'how to summarise the information effectively'. Thus we can see that the analytical skills are there in preparation for good summarising skills, as both skills are essential for interpreting practice. S3 gives an example of how one of her fellow trainees made a mistake in their interpreting mock exam by not employing analytical skills properly:

S3: Yes, and analytical skills. Well, you have to be very good at um... you have to be very good at grasping the important things. This happened in our mock exam, too. One student, he thought that he did very well, but the mark, marks obvious didn't say so. So he was like wondering why, actually the main problem was that **he did not grasp the most important thing of the speech**. The speech was telling about this and that. But he didn't really explain this to... **He spent too much time on other details**.

Spontaneity has been proposed by three participants as a must for interpreters. Here spontaneity is understood by interpreters as the ability 'to react very quickly' (S3) or 'to have a quick response' (N2). G7 makes a comparison of interpreting and translation in order to make the skill of spontaneity more clear by stating:

G7: You should reflect quickly because when you hear some words and some paraphrases, maybe if you're a translator, you have time, you have several seconds or several minutes to think how to translate it, but **if you're interpreting, interpreters, you don't have time** you have to quickly reflect to what is relevant to the target language.

Two interpreters think that the ability to multi-task is necessary for all interpreters. However when mentioning multi-tasking, S8 gives examples on what aspects to note at the same time: 'be able to handle their stress, and a good speaking style, good voice, good pace, and good skill communication, including eye contact... just to say and to hear and at the same time you should **combine different behaviors**,' while N8 describes multi-tasking as 'being able to **think of different things at the same time**.'

Apart from the above-mentioned skills, there are seven other skills mentioned by individual interpreters. Table 5 below presents the data on how these skills are accounted for by individual interpreters:

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| <p>Communication skill</p> | <p>E2: And also the communication skills .</p> <p>R: Can you give some examples?</p> <p>E2:Yes. I don't know whether you have ever encountered this situation. In business occasion, maybe A said something very rude, maybe he said he was shout or something, and you wanted to interpret or translate the message to B. But sometimes I didn't do the full translation. .</p> <p>R: Oh...</p> <p>E2:You know what I mean...</p> <p>R: Yeah yeah yeah just skip something.</p> <p>E2:Yeah.</p> <p>R: The rude part.</p> <p>E2:Yes I would...</p> <p>R: Just to get the meaning crossed.</p> <p>E2:Yes.</p> |
| <p>Note-taking skill</p> | <p>S1: Note-taking skill is important. I think I try to write down all the things in my target language, but I think it's totally impossible. And I wrote too much in the note.. too wordy, too much words. I cannot get rid of it. But now I think I should try to listen more and write less.</p> |
| <p>Presentation skill</p> | <p>S2: Oh I actually haven't thought about since but I came here for public speaking. I thought you just sit somewhere with microphone, it's fine. But the consecutive you have to stand, you know, 'Good morning...' There are set rules. That's the presentation skills.</p> |
| <p>Memory skill</p> | <p>G7: And the second one is that you should have a good memory. Um, good memory is very important, because when you do interpreting you have to remember something before, uh, people mention before, and maybe if when you want interpreted it but you don't have time, you want to insert it in the later part, you should remember it, what's that.</p> |
| <p>Interpersonal skill</p> | <p>S4: Yeah, good personal skills, good group skills as well because a lot of time you are working with other people, aren't you?</p> |

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <p>Anticipation skill</p> | <p>G2: And also some skills like generalisation. Um, and basic assumptions...Those are all needed. .</p> <p>R: Basic assumption towards the speech?</p> <p>G2: Yeah, towards the speech. And you can guess the attitude or the conclusion, but not to go too far from the speaker..</p> |
| <p>Listening skill</p> | <p>N4: First of all, you need to be a very good listener. And you need to understand or comprehend what they are talking about. So you should be a very good listener and you are able to listening and talking at the same time.</p> |

Table 5: Skills Necessary for Interpreting

4.2.4.2. Knowledge necessary for an interpreter

When it came to particular knowledge for interpreters, participants reached a consensus: broad general knowledge is a prerequisite for anyone who intends to be an interpreter. In defining broad general knowledge, S2 simply says ‘you must know a lot’; S5 refers to it as ‘current affairs, any topic’; S8 borrows what her interpreting tutor told her: ‘knows something about everything’, which is similar to G2’s ‘have a basic understanding about anything and everything’.

As for the scope of broad knowledge, G8 thinks of ‘economic and politics and international relations and social policies and social issues’, E2 considers ‘international relations, or history, or some business administration, or any kind of knowledge’, or eventually as G2 puts it: ‘basically everything in the world, every subject, every topic.’ E8 even notes the importance in connecting the various types of knowledge into an organic whole for interpreters; in her words: ‘an understanding of wider historical, political and cultural concepts, where they came from, why they have arisen, seeing the connection between those. Further down the line, again, understanding of certain broader political and philosophical concepts.’ In addition to having access to all-round knowledge, interpreters are expected to ‘still have to be interested’ (S2) and ‘have the enthusiasm or the passion to learn new things’ (N2). In short, broad general knowledge for interpreters is a prevalent idea which can be referred to as knowledge of all types. Over half of the participants interviewed acknowledge that interpreters must accumulate broad general knowledge over time, ‘to be like an encyclopaedia’ (E8).

4.2.4.3. Personal characteristics for an interpreter

As well as knowledge and skills for interpreters, my participants gave me their thoughts on the kind of personal characteristics that an interpreter should have. Ability to manage a crisis is the most frequently cited desirable characteristic for an

interpreter. Six participants mention that whenever emergencies happen, interpreters are expected to have ‘a very strong mentality’ (N5) in order to ‘keep calm all the time no matter what happened’ (N2), and then to ‘be calm and quick’ (G4) in responding to emergencies. In addition to these characteristics, N6 adds ‘quick-witted’. She explains why being calm and quick-witted are both important for interpreters in crisis:

N6: Calm and quick-witted. Because interpreting is quite challenging, and you would never know what the speaker would say, and there are always times that an interpreter don't know how to interpret, but somehow they still have to manage to speak something out for the audiences. So **they have to stay calm even they don't really understand, and they have to be quick-witted to say something out of their mouth.**

Relevant to crisis management, four interpreters think stress management very much determines whether one is able to perform well in his or her role as an interpreter. Stress management simply means that the interpreter needs to be able to ‘deal with pressure’ (S3), or ‘to have the ability to at least feel that you are not stressed out even if you are and also the ability to not stress out as much as possible’ (E6). E8 compares the stress management for interpreters to that of an athlete:

E8: Similar to an athlete, they need to be able to harness their adrenalin that when they are in a situation that they are always in command of the situation and that they are very conscious of how they speak and conscious of ...very**self-conscious in... not in the negative sense but have a sense of ‘self’ at all time** for which you require a certain amount of calm and composure.

The other four interpreters believe curiosity is necessary for an interpreter. The curiosity can be as abstract as to ‘have a curious mind’ (S5), or to ‘be curious about different things happening around you’ (E3), or ‘to be interested enough to acquire a lot general knowledge’ (E6). N6 gives an account of why she thinks curiosity is of such importance for interpreters compared with other professions:

N6: For other researchers, they can just take a break for a month, a week if they don't want to do research. But interpreter is not, interpreters would always be concerned about what's going in the world, they don't want to take a break, they eager to know what's going on. For example, the latest global issue would be about the stock market, it's for all investors in the world, they have suffered a serious loss at their stock market, because of US bonds, and also what's going on in Europe. And as for any interpreters, whether they have money in stock or not, they must be concerned about this. So **interpreters can never say they want to take a break, because they have to keep updated with the latest in the world.**

I would therefore understand ‘curiosity’ for interpreters here as a desire to acquire new knowledge. Curiosity as a personality trait therefore functions best as a driving force to support and motivate interpreters to acquire the most up-to-date knowledge. The emphasis placed on curiosity by interpreters implies that to be an interpreter, curiosity and an eagerness to learn are indispensable, and inter-related.

Corresponding to curiosity, three interpreters tell me that being a quick learner is a requirement for interpreters. The reason lying behind this is very practical: ‘especially when time is limited’ (G4), ‘a conference interpreter... needs to learn a lot of different topics unrelated. So it is impossible for him to know everything, so

he needs to learn very quickly' (N5). As a staff interpreter in the EU, N8 demonstrates how important it can be for an interpreter to be a quick learner:

E8: So you know, you were told that Monday morning that here's a list of 100 words that we'll be using in the next few days, OK, you don't have to learn 100 words just like that. But you do need to be able to pick it up quite quickly so that the 2nd or 3rd time you hear it, you know, you know what that is.

Willingness to help has been acknowledged by three interpreters as a core personal value for interpreters. Willingness to help here is deeply connected to communication. There are three levels of communication under the overarching concept of helping people: firstly, interpreters 'help people to understand each other' (N1); this is the very basic task. The second level lies in 'realising the speaker's original purpose so that he can deliver it properly when he meets difficulties' (G1). In addition to getting the meaning across and understand the speaker's position, an interpreter needs to make the whole interpreting event a pleasant one, as indicated by N3:

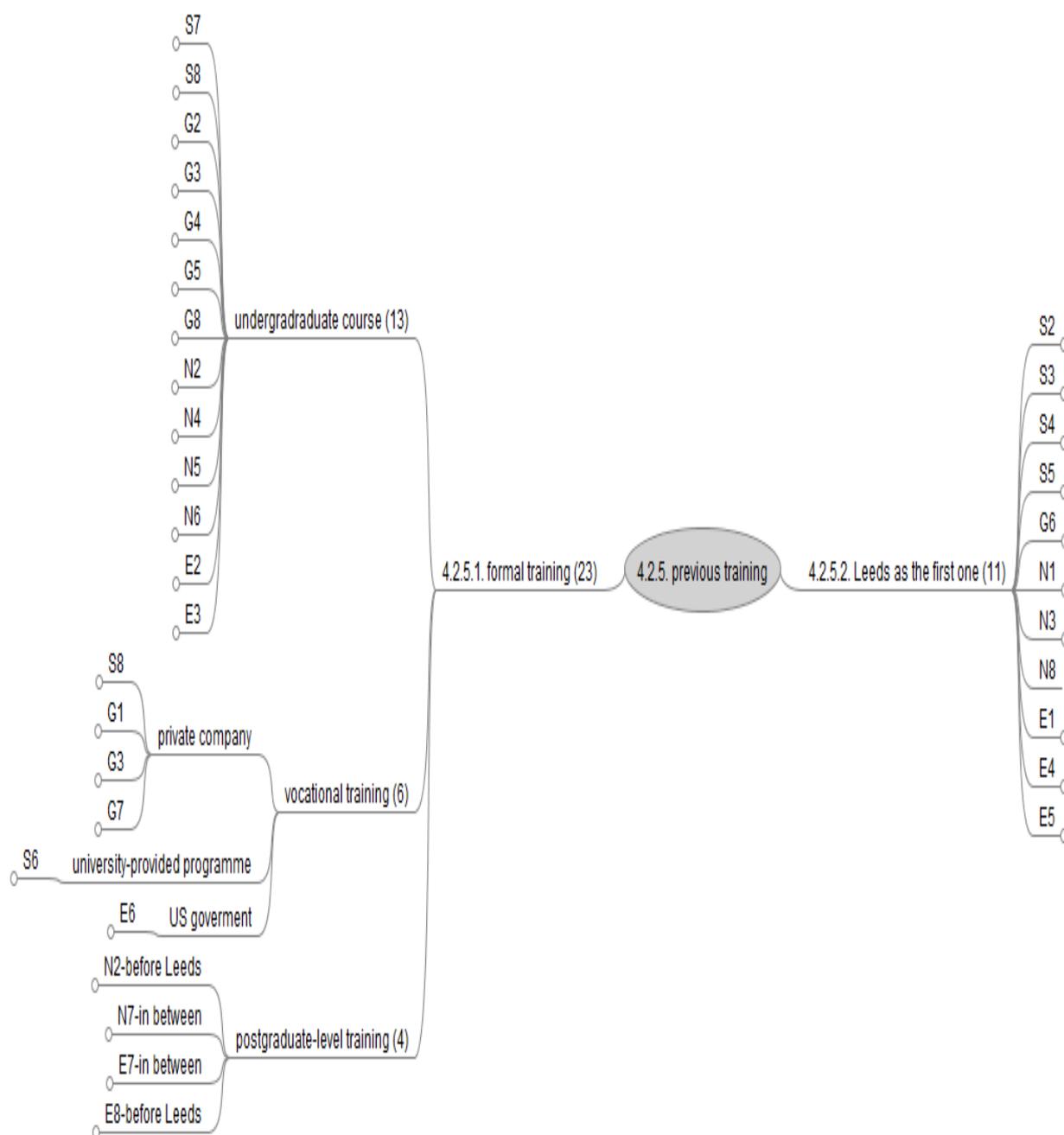
N3: A helper, to help, um, two parties to understand each other, to feel friendly about each other, um, to build a relationship for them, and **also to provide a pleasant experience**, I think interpreter is there not only for interpreting, not only to convey a message but also you're part of the whole experience.

R: Yeah, of course.

N3: So you need to be pleasant, you want your customers, both of them, I mean the customers from both parties, to have a pleasant experience.

Other personal characteristics proposed by interpreters include self-awareness and self-understanding, confidence, enthusiasm and an active personality, and even a pleasant voice. But as these characteristics have only been mentioned once, I am not going to present any of the narrative excerpts related to these here. All characteristics proposed by either trainee interpreters or practising interpreters indicate that the significance of interpersonal skills cannot be overstated. Personal traits are seemingly as important as the necessary knowledge and skills for someone to function as an interpreter.

4.2.5. Previous training experiences



As a means of understanding the characteristics of interpreting learners, I was curious to learn what they had been doing before they attended the interpreter training. I was originally under the impression after analysing the first theme on motivation that interpreting learners are simply language graduates who have a rather practical attitude towards their career, and so go into interpreter training. Yet what these interpreters had been doing before training demonstrates that they already had an interest in interpreting. The majority of participants had received training in interpreting previously: 12 had studied an interpreting module during their undergraduate studies, seven had received vocational training in interpreting with public or private institutions, three had experienced relevant training

experience in interpreting; only 11 interpreters had no other training experience before.

In the following paragraphs, I will go through their three main types of formal training one after another, with narrative data provided as supporting evidence. Some interpreters had undertaken two training courses before. For example, S8 and N2 had both been on an introductory course to interpreting in their undergraduate studies, and while S8 turned to a private adult-learning institution to receive interpreter training, N2 enrolled on another MA programme to receive formal interpreter training.

4.2.5.1. Formal training in interpreting

4.2.5.1.1. Interpreting module in undergraduate studies

23 interpreters claimed that they had received formal interpreter training before. Over half (13 interpreters) had had compulsory or elective courses in the 3rd or 4th year of their undergraduate studies, as a requirement for language majors. The interpreting class was usually one or two hours per week, and consisted of pronunciation drills, intonation training, listening comprehension exercise, sight translation, role play, and CI practice. Materials include speeches prepared by tutors, real life conference presentations, materials from the website TED (G3), government reports (G4), and English-language magazines such as *Time* and the *Economist* (N6). Their overall impression of their undergraduate interpreting modules is that they are overwhelmingly simplistic, as summarised by E2: ‘I think that was really for beginners’. Also, the simple and introductory nature of these undergraduate interpreter training experiences is evident in the following examples:

(1) The casual tone in describing the interpreting class:

G8: **But all we do is just listen to recording and take notes and then some of us will be picked by the teacher to render the speech or anything...**It’s like the teacher taught a lot about what is interpreting. And we had this book, the teacher would play the recording and we will take notes, mostly speeches made by teachers, and we would take notes and then the teacher will pick someone to interpret randomly. After that, **she will probably give us feedback and that was it.**

N4: **Very simple, very suggestive.** Let me think... It taught me how to do the note-taking and how to... then write about what people are talking about. She will talk in Chinese and you will try to take the notes and interpret into English or other ways. **So it’s very basic thing. Just give a picture to see what is an interpreter. They are very basic things.**

(2) Interpreting tutors’ low expectations of students:

E2: **So she treated us very well and she always encouraging to us. So at that time I don’t really feel frustrated.**

G8: It is not really difficult because **the teacher is not strict.** Yes, really not tough on us. So I would say the materials used are not very easy, but **the teachers’ requirements on us are not very high.**

- (3) In terms of language, the focus is on interpreting into one's mother tongue, instead of both ways; in terms of interpreting mode, CI is covered whilst SI is not:

N2: Yeah, we **focused more on consecutive**, but also we covered a little simultaneous. And **mainly from English to Chinese**.

N6: **Only consecutive**. Because we didn't have simultaneous interpreting booth.

- (4) Sentence by sentence translation outweighs overall interpreting practices:

N5: We mainly focused on taking notes, like how to take notes and **how to interpret sentence by sentence**.

Notwithstanding the simple and introductory nature repeatedly mentioned by the interpreters, their undergraduate interpreter training experiences in fact played an important role in inspiring language graduates to take further training in interpreting as demonstrated in 5.2.1.4. Such encouragement came mainly from the tutors: for G3, because of her admiration for her 'charming and very humorous' tutor, she has loved interpreting ever since. In G4's case, it was his very first interpreting tutor who made him understand what it is to be an interpreter and inspired him to pursue this career path.

G4: My teacher was **a really excellent teacher** in my university, and **she taught me a lot about how to be an interpreter**. She said that the first important thing is to trust your language and your voice, actually that's the sentence attracted me to be an interpreter. And the secondly, she said as an interpreter, you have to have a really strong mind, because interpreters is a kind of work that if you really do well, people would think that's good and nobody would praise you. She said it's kind of job behind this screen, and I really like that kind of description cause I don't want myself to be a shining star or something like to do work behind all the people.

4.2.5.1.2. Vocational interpreting training

There are another six interpreters whose vocational interpreter training before with adult-learning institutions ranging from the EU, the US government, university-provided interpreting programme to private vocational training centres. S1, G1, G3, G7 received their initial interpreter training at adult-learning institutions, also known as language-learning 'cram schools' in Asia. The popularity of such cram schools is due to the fact that many language graduates prepare for national interpreting exams such as CATTI (China Aptitude Test in Translation and Interpretation), in order to stand out in the job market. These cram schools have been established in response to the Chinese population's passion for language learning and interpreter training. As a matter of fact, cram schools are profit-driven, with 'more than 100 students in a class following only one tutor to go over listening exercises' (S8); therefore chances for students to practice are limited. S8 regards such experience as 'of course a waste of money' and 'of no doubt regret for it'. The approach these institutions employed in delivering interpreter training is more lexical-based, as reported by G1: 'in China, we focused on the words in the sentence only, but here we focus on the information.'

Unlike her fellow interpreters, S6 chose to have her first interpreter training with a further educational supplemental programme provided by a university in Taiwan. She has a neutral impression of the training, and refers to it as 'introductory-like training', with the class conducted in a 'very casual... like they will go around table and everybody contribute a sentence' manner. Looking back, she appreciates what the training offered her, because 'it was the very first time that I learnt that interpreting is not translating, (laugh) is not about word-by-word. It's about message.' It is because of this understanding in interpreting that she then decided to go abroad to receive formal interpreter training.

E6 is the only interpreter whose very first experience in interpreter training was with the US government. The course is designed specifically for medical interpreters working in the US, and the emphasis is very much on the code of conduct for an interpreter, rather than interpreting skills, listening skills or presentation skills which were addressed repeatedly by other interpreters in their formal interpreter training. The following is E6's account of the interpreting course:

E6. The very first course I did was the course called Bridging the Gap. And it's a very... **It is a standard course for medical interpreters in the US.** I think it's 40 hours long. I could be wrong, but I think it is 40 hours long. It is a programme that **teaches mostly the ethics and the practice of interpreting.** It tells you what CI and SI are and as well as sight translations that gives you a few ideas about the health care system in the US. There is a point a doctor comes in and gives you some basic anatomy lessons. You have role playing with others. So that was my very, very, very first rudimentary conference or rather interpreting training.

4.2.5.1.3. Postgraduate-level interpreter training in another university

Two Ns and two Es, or one in four interpreters had interpreter training with another university either before they joined the chosen programme, or across the chosen programme. N2 and E8 completed their MA in conference interpreting in different universities in the UK, but while N2 came to Leeds because she failed her first MA, E8 came to Leeds because she wanted to improve her interpreting skills in another language combination with proper training after years of working as an interpreter. In contrast, N7 and E7 were in the middle of their original MA interpreting education in their origin countries; N7 came to Leeds as an exchange student, and E7 came to Leeds because she dislikes the way interpreters were trained in her home country. These four interpreters all spoke extensively when comparing the two interpreter training programmes that they attended. But since the purpose of this study is not to compare interpreter institutions but to provide a generalised understanding of the learning process of an interpreter, their report will not be presented here.

4.2.5.2. Leeds as the only one and the first interpreter training experience

The interpreter training programme at the site of study is the only one and the first training experience for over one third of the interpreters. These interpreters come from all groups: 4 Ss, 1 G, 3 Ns, and 3 Es. We can assume that prior training is not necessarily a prerequisite for interpreting learners, as the figures clearly tells us that in the past 10 years, the chosen programme has received trainees both with and without prior training in interpreting.

4.3. Summary: Learner Characteristics

In this chapter, the narrative data clearly indicate that interpreting learners undertake training for various reasons, although embracing interpreting as a pragmatic career choice stands out as a popular motive. The learners' expectations of training is either idealistic; or, it is seen as the means to an end which would eventually lead them to be interpreters; alternatively, the training alone can be anticipated to be demanding and intensive, an attribute in itself. They have very synthesised answers regarding the understanding of interpreting events, and what is required to be an interpreter in terms of proper knowledge and skills, which shows that the learners initially had a vague idea about training and the career path after training. Their pre-training interpreting experiences, both formal and informal, reinforce the idea that they were either good at interpreting and wanted to know more, or that they were not satisfied with the training before and would like to receive more systematic training. Bearing this understanding in mind, in the next chapter I will elaborate on how interpreters as learners recall their learning experiences during training.

Chapter 5

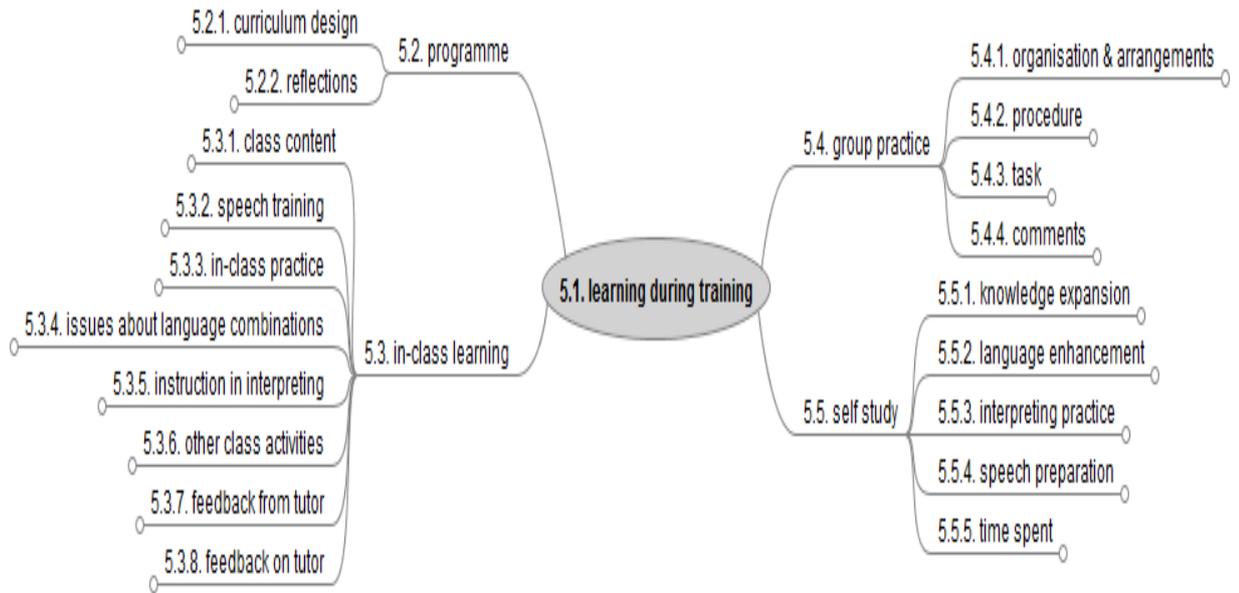
Findings II: Learning during Training

5.1. Introduction

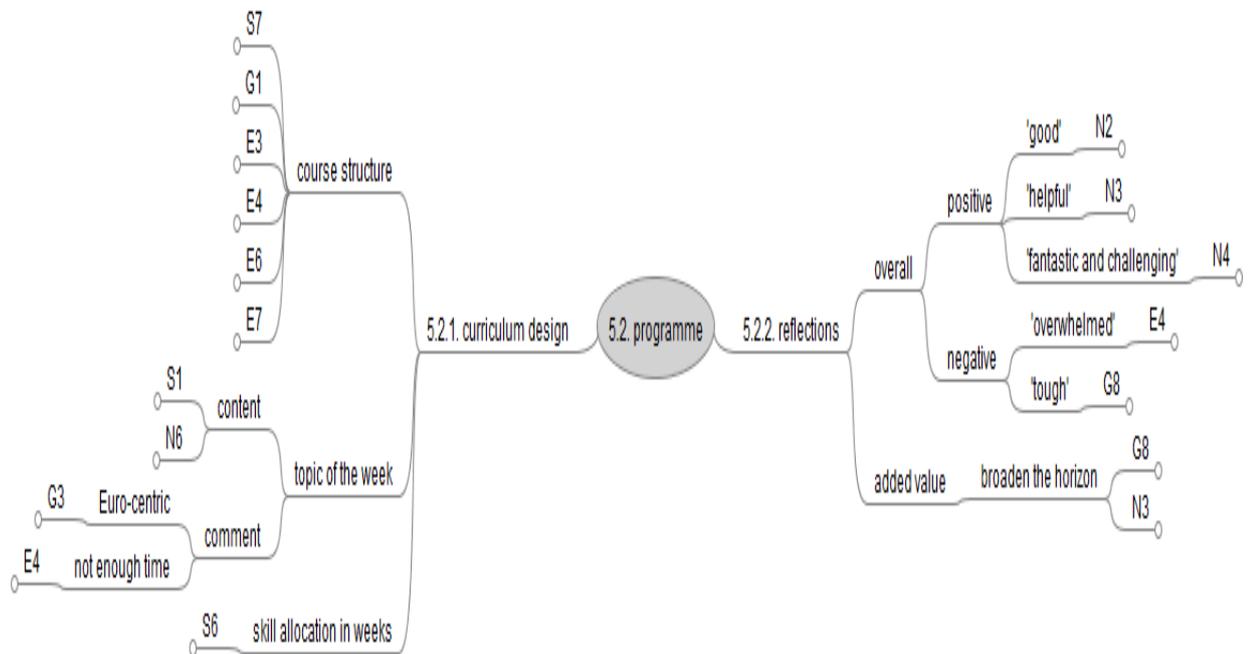
The previous chapter, Chapter 4, gives us an indication of what motivated interpreters to undertake training, and any relevant interpreting experiences they had had prior to training, which contributes to further understand the characteristics of interpreting learners. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will elaborate on the learning themes I gathered from the narrative data, depicting how one learns to be an interpreter both during and after training. The responses can thus be divided into two phases: learning during training (Chapter 5), and learning at work (Chapter 6). Thus Chapter 5 aims to answer research question 2a: **How did interpreters learn during training?**

While Chapter 4 focused on discovering the individual characteristics of interpreting learners, the emphasis of this chapter is to provide a more synthesised, overall picture to understand interpreters' training experiences. Hence I tend to summarise the narrative chunks from individual stories into condensed pieces, with only significant quotes being kept to support the elaboration of arguments. What I have aimed to do is to construct the learning path for interpreters through the stories they tell, and demonstrate that the stories they tell are valuable accounts of the learning experiences that they have gained.

To make sure that all of my subjects enjoyed the freedom of choosing what they wanted to say and how they said it, and in order to maintain the simplicity and openness of the narrative method, I simply asked: I want to know more about your learning experience, please tell me how you learnt interpreting as a trainee. The responses from the participants show a high consistency by covering four main fields about their learning experiences: i) the MA interpreter training programme itself, ii) how the subjects learn interpreting in class with tutors, iii) how they have group practice with peers outside the classroom and iv) how they learn interpreting on their own. These four main areas include all of the key aspects I myself experienced as a previous trainee interpreter, and some answers even move beyond the basic elements and into the realm of reflections on learning. In the coming paragraphs, I will present content based on these four identified fields.



5.2. Overview: the Interpreter Training Programme



5.2.1. Briefing on the curriculum design

The basic learning elements of interpreter training programmes have been addressed in 2.3.3. The interpreter training programme that this study examines, like other training programmes, provides training which aims to equip language graduates with fundamental know-how to enter the interpreting market. The

narrative accounts provide a picture of how current and previous trainee interpreters perceive the programme. Their experiences reflect the reality, or part of the reality of the training programme, with the narrative accounts depicting a general outline of the training experience. Although explicit periods and content of the course are not covered completely by each participant, by reading through these experiences, we can still assemble the individual pieces into a coherent whole, understanding what it is like to be a postgraduate student in interpreting.

The participants talk about two dimensions of the programme: the curriculum design and their overall impression after the training. The following four excerpts outline how trainees recall the course structure:

S7: In the first four weeks, we were doing, basically just **active listening**, just as I have mentioned, actively listening to someone delivering a message, taking the ideas and redelivering something moving away from the source language into the target language. So we did that for the first four weeks, using from **presentations of speeches** and delivering them just **without any notes**. And after week four, we moved on to **note-taking**.

G1: First, we learn **how to be a speaker**. And we learn **how to write a speech** for others to interpret, and then we learn **how to analyse a story or message**, how to grasp the structure of that. And then we learn **note taking**, and the balance between note taking and your memory. And then we learn how to **combine all these skills together** to deliver your interpretation.

E3: At the very beginning I just followed instructions from the teachers because they gave very clear instructions like **memory training**, and **note-taking**, and balance the two skills. And after that, we had **CI**, and after that **SI**. I think that's the sequence of the whole training.

E6: We had, we started out with **summarising stories**. Then we moved on to, sort of **basic to inter-medium consecutives**. Then we started simultaneous and we moved on to sort of **advanced simultaneous, more advanced consecutive** by the end of the course.

E7: We started with **consecutive** for one term, and it was only the second term that we started the **simultaneous**.

These five interpreters share similar accounts of three stages of the course structure: active listening and memory training are introduced at the beginning of the course, then note-taking and speech delivery come next, with which CI and SI skills are developed. However, what is interesting about these five excerpts is that, although four of the interpreters all give a brief description of the programme, whilst the current trainee (S7) and recent graduate (G1) provide detailed information about the training such as listening, note-taking and speech preparation, three Es who completed the course over five years ago do not focus on the training, rather on the canonical chunks of the programme, e.g. CI to SI, and basic, intermediate and advanced difficulty of the training. The contrast is a simple but significant indicator that the years after graduation might have an influence on how interpreters perceive the learning experience: trainees (S & G) report the facts, whilst interpreters in the

field (N & E) reflect on their experiences with generally positive feelings about the course structure, for example 'learning in class was very structured' (E6) and 'I think it (the course structure) works' (E4). The statements from interpreters in the field thus imply that distance from training allows them to recognise the value of the learning experience, thus enabling them to give credit to the learning experience.

Under the theme of curriculum design, my participants share more related aspects which can be the feature of the chosen programme that other interpreter training programmes might not have. One of the most distinctive features is the implementation of the 'topic of the week'. N6 explains what 'topic of the week' entails:

N6: We had different topics each week, so after semester all trainees could have basic understanding of about 20 topics. Agriculture, literature, economy, business, politics, and so on.

'Topics of the week' are introduced from the outset of the training, and each week the class is conducted surrounding the chosen theme. Trainees are expected to do research around the topic and prepare speeches on it. The range of the topics of the week is broad, but were described by G3 as 'focusing more on European affairs than Asian affairs' thus being 'Euro-centric', and E4 commented on the lack of sufficient time when rushing into next topic before thoroughly understanding one topic:

E4: The topic of the week and then so you see, it was like we rush from one topic to another. Never have enough time. Eventually we decided, I think it's like a collective choice, decision. We decided... for comforting us by saying '**Great interpreters don't always prepare. We have to get used to it.**' **That was a mistake. Serious mistake. So when I started working as an interpreter, I learnt my lesson. You need to prepare. That's very important.** But you don't have to prepare for long time. But you do need to prepare. Yes.. However, **at that time, just too many things we couldn't cope.**

E4's reflection can be understood as a trigger of professional development: as an interpreter, being well-rounded and well-prepared is not only important in the training, but also equally important later on in their professional lives. E4 admits that she and her colleagues did not prepare enough on the course for the topic of the week. They were unable to cope as trainees so they made a collective decision to compromise on the preparation work. However, when she started to work as a professional interpreter, she understood that surviving on the course would have instilled in her good habits and therefore prepared her well for life as a professional interpreter. Her reckless attitude on the course and her realisation as a professional complement each other, and her story provides a good example of how the training can contribute to the professional development of interpreters.

Alongside the topic of the week, there is another parallel learning flow, which is the assigned skill allocation taught by tutors to trainees on a weekly basis. S6 talks through how various skills related to interpreting are given:

S6: They also give you different technique. For example, during the first two weeks we were taught about **active listening**... how to listen to the gist of the whole message. And then the following two weeks we have **memory training**, so we learn how to retell a story without note. And like it was on week 5 or something that we started **note-taking**, so we spent the whole week talk about note-taking a lot. Yeah. And then we have **voice coaching**. I know that we are going to learn about **booth manner** and thing like that later.... So **each of the week we have a specific theme to go through**.

So far we know that the curriculum design at this chosen interpreter training programme is a two-layer system: the training focuses are divided into interpreting skills such as active listening, memory training, note-taking, CI and SI, which is the fundamental base of the curriculum, whilst the topics of the week come into play on a weekly basis to enrich trainee interpreters' general background knowledge and to provide a context for the skill practices. The two-layer system also corresponds with the dual notion of learning; when trainee interpreters expand their background knowledge according to the topic of the week, they equip themselves with necessary theoretical knowledge, and the interpreting skills they acquire from the training serves as practical knowledge which is also necessary for interpreting practice. In this way, we can see that the curriculum corresponds with the nature of learning and that the expected outcome of learning would be a process of knowledge construction, in which the theoretical knowledge and the practical knowledge are covered. How the curriculum design validates the understanding of learning can be represented in the conceptual framework below, which is an expansion of Figure 1 in Chapter 2.

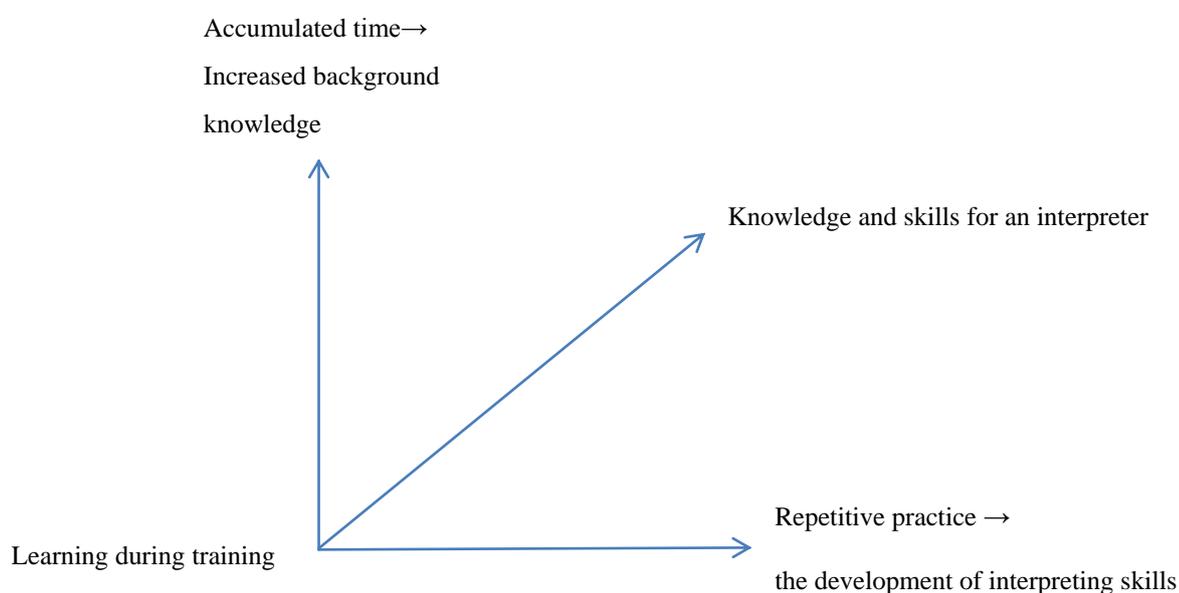


Figure 8: The Notion of Learning vs. Interpreter Training Curriculum Design

5.2.2. Reflection on the programme

While being asked about their training experiences, instead of going straight into their learning stories, a fraction of the interpreters chose to comment on their overall impression of the training programme with an adjective. Their chosen adjectives were both positive and negative, and they are both worthy of reporting. Here are three interpreters who have rather positive impressions of the training: N2 thinks the training is ‘good’, N3 thinks it’s ‘helpful’ and N4 acknowledges it as ‘fantastic and challenging’:

N2: The whole programme is not that strict, and also the timetable or the schedule is not very tight... **The trainees were very good, and the teachers were ok. They were actually good.** And I had some personal friends who were really close to me, so **I think that year was so good.** And also because the previous year study was very strict, and I suffered or I went through that whole year. I was kind of familiar with the whole training system, so the second year is more like a repeat of the first year. But it's more relaxed repeat. So I just thought not very tight, I didn't have that much pressure. And also one reason is I know that we can all graduate, so I don't have the pressure like first year. The first year I was worried and I concerned all the time I couldn't graduate, I couldn't get the degree. But I know the year in Leeds, I can surely graduate, so I don't need to worry.

N3: I think **the training is very helpful in general**, well I said that I had no previous experience or any expectations about interpreting so basically from scratch, from zero I learnt how to understand this profession, how to um, develop skills that I need to be a interpreter, um, so I think the programme is, is useful, is helpful in general. But I feel it's a little bit, um, **less sufficient in terms of time and training.**

N4: I think that is **a fantastic year**. It's the first time I know what is interpreting, especially what is SI. And it is **a very challenging year** to me.

Interestingly, these three interpreters who have good impressions of the training experience are all Ns who graduated no more than five years ago. N2 thinks the training is good due to a stark comparison with her previous postgraduate-level interpreter training experience at another institution, and her personal circumstances were generally improved. N3 thinks the programme is helpful in general, but she feels there is no sufficient time for training. N4 simply summarises her experience as a fantastic year, but a challenging one.

Contrary to three Ns, two other interpreters’ overall impression on the one-year training programme was somewhat negative. E4 remembers the long hours spent in the interpreting classroom and she provides a vivid memory on the heating:

E4: I did my degree as you know, in 2004. That was long time ago. And I think when we first started **I was left overwhelmed** because sometimes the lesson, **I remember was 9 to 7 by the time we finished the heating would have gone.** So it was cold in the classroom. That was what I remembered.

G8 remembers the experience as ‘tough’, due to her struggle between the extensive reading, intensive class hours, and the changing of topics every week:

G8: I can use one word ‘**tough**’ to describe it. We were allowed to do **extensive reading**, that’s one thing, we also had to do **intensive interpreting classes** and that’s the other thing. Those are the two things that I think that are most difficult. You have to read and you have to write speeches. And also later on, you have to practice

interpreting a little bit. And the topics change every week, it changes by week. So it can be pretty tough that we haven't had an idea about what is going on here and we were asked to move on to another topic and **can be quite stressful especially when it has going on like this for a year**. It's OK at the beginning, but **it gets tougher and tougher towards the end**. So I think the difficult part is the topic changes and you have to keep up.

Further to the overall impressions of the training, G8 and N3 are two interpreters who appreciate the added value of the training. When reflecting upon the one-year training, they both can see how much they learnt and benefited from it, which goes beyond the superficial level of whether they enjoyed the experience in the first place. G8 just complained about the difficulties she encountered during training, yet she appreciates how the training experiences broadened her horizon with an example, on how she learnt from other's opinion about interventionism:

G8: I think the one thing that you can get from this one year programme is that your interpreting skills increased a lot, that's for sure, but the other thing that you can get from this experience is that different people's opinions. By listening, you will have an idea of what the other trainees think... I mean, knowledge-wise. **You increase on your knowledge, you open your horizon...** I am actually talking about the mock conferences when we had different delegates expressing their opinions. I remember the interventionism week when we had this topic. And I used to not believe in the United States going into Iraq for the benefit of Iraqis. But I do learn from the French delegates that there are people who think that going to those poor countries, they are helping them. I actually don't believe that by intervening they are trying to help, from China, because we are non-interventionists. So I listened to the French delegates and I realised that there were people who were trying to help are really doing things to help them. And they can think like that 'we are trying to help them'. And we have this responsibility of helping them, which is quite unimaginable back in where I came from.

Similar to G8, N3 believes that it is the training that made it possible to see into a world she had never ever been exposed to before, which even changed her as a person:

N3: Um, to summarise, that's a very exciting experience. **It broadened my view about the world**, and, I think it actually changed my life in a way, because I was forced to, to look into something I wouldn't really, you know, not interested at all, yes. But actually, it, **this training programme provides me a window to look into the world that I have never really known**. And I found actually those worlds are very interesting, fascinating, now I think, yeah, I would say that I step up a level after the training as a person.

Be they positive or negative, acknowledgements or complaints, these statements from the interpreters unveil the difficulty of the programme on one hand, whilst demonstrating the underlying value which can never be overlooked or forgotten by the trainees who also appreciate it.

5.3. In-class Learning

All of the participants gave a substantial account on how they learnt interpreting in class, which is well summarised by G2: **'I think learning in class is**

absolutely the core part of my learning experience.' Before I go into depth presenting the individual aspects covered under the content of the interpreting class, I should like to present the below extracted narration from G2, as it provides the most comprehensive portrayal of what an interpreting class entails with regard to tutor-trainee interaction and participation, along with his personal acknowledgements for the learning elements covered in the interpreting classes:

G2: We have several steps. The first step is to put you in a real environment of interpreting. **The first thing we did is have some active listening.** I should say it's not memory. It's active listening. Um.. we, the tutor asked us to just listen to the speech, listen to the material. All kinds of materials. Either stories or history or just the funny things, interesting things that they talked about for three, for one to two minutes. Then based on our memory, based on our active listening, just try to generalise it. This is the first step of interpreting. And I personally believe that it is very helpful because an interpreter does not rely on his or her notes doing interpreting jobs. He or she relies on the memory. So memory or active listening is definitely the core parts of the interpreting. This is the first step. **And next step we started to use notes.** The tutors at that time told us 'don't feel too happy too soon' because it doesn't mean you have notes you are become a successful interpreter. But it means, if you have notes, it means that your task will be more demanding but at the same time it will be more rewarding because you have notes, you can give detailed, more detailed, more, more specific interpretation. But without notes, maybe you cannot do that job. Um.. This is the second step and **after that we, we use longer speeches.** Um.. on one hand train our, train our active listening, on the other hand, train our note, note, note-down skills.

R: And then you...?

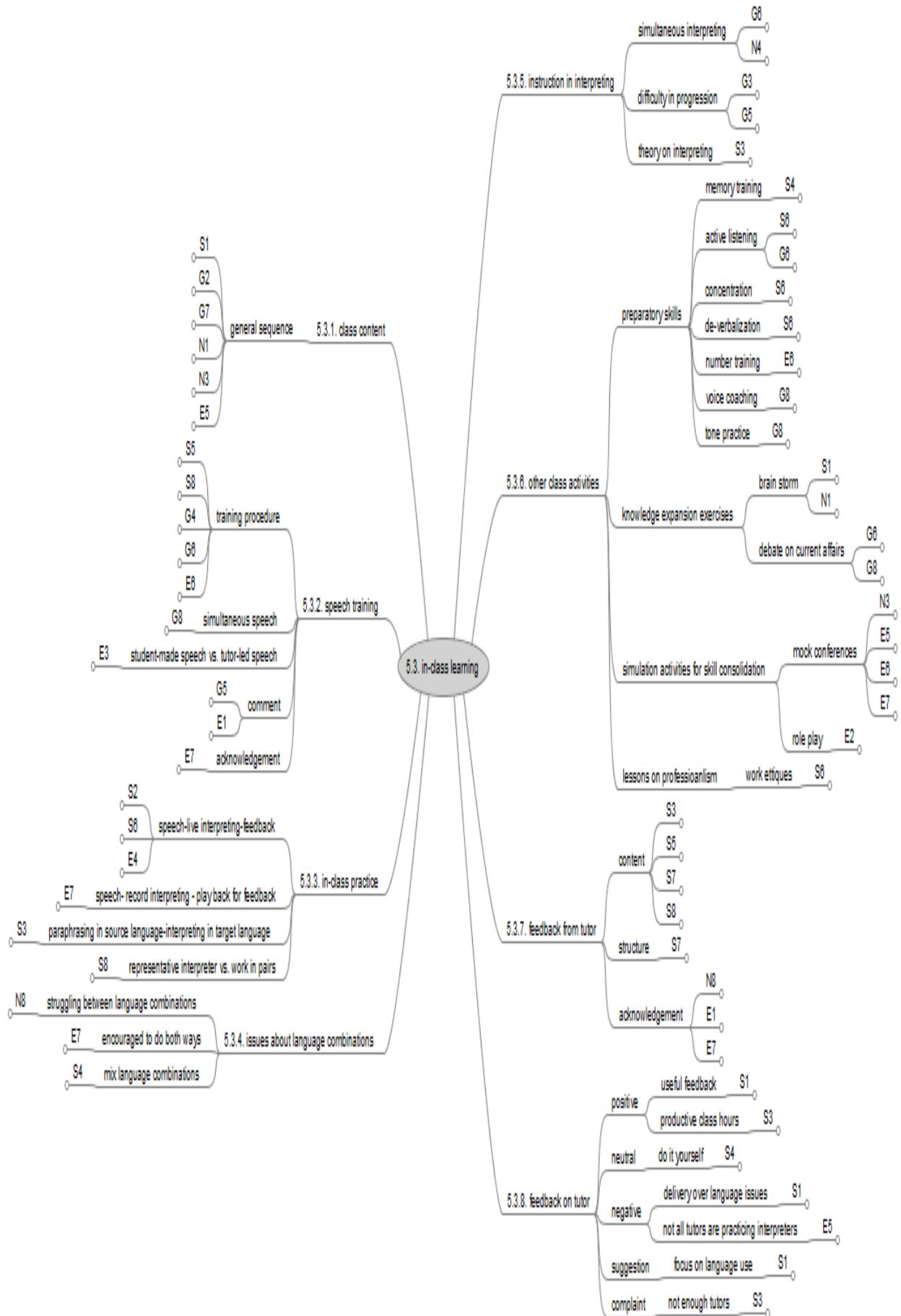
G2: You speak. We speak in front of the class, speak very confidently or try as confident as possible and **try to be a real speaker rather a student delivery.** Yeah, I try, by saying that try to be like a real speaker. This is the point where, which tutor also mentioned. Tutor X also mentioned that you should think your position, you should think what, who, who is, who are your target audience. Basically who is listening to you and you should think what they expect from you by bearing this in mind you have, you have made the first step successfully in preparing a speech, because a student is giving speeches for the speech's sake. But the speakers giving speeches in order to influence people. I think this is the, basically the major difference between student and speaker. **After that we entered into the area of SI.** That was brand new area. It's, it's, the area is based.. SI is based on what you learnt in CI, but it's absolutely, as far as I am concerned, is absolutely different. Because for consecutive interpreters, you have time to organise, to arrange your language, to try to, try to speak in a posh way, in a very nice way. You have very good delivery skills. You can speak very posh language. But for SI, in most cases you just don't have the time. You have to cut it short. To cut it short the tutor advice us to **do summary techniques.** Summary techniques is to cut long sentences. But the long sentences I don't mean complex or complicated sentences. I mean, a single sentence can be a long sentence. And you have to cut it short... So for SI our tutors told us that it's not about bring polish language, it's about bring brief, short, and straightforward language to your audience. Umm... make it quick, make it fast, make it sound convincing and make sense. That's what tutors told us and I think that's very essential skills for us.

R: OK. And is there anything else you would do in class?

G2: Yes, exactly. **We have a debate on current affairs.** And I think that's very useful as well. Because by doing debate you have time to examine your own opinions and you have time to see what others are thinking on this event. And it's a process of exchange of ideas. I think that's very useful not only in terms of interpreting, but also for you to have a comprehensive and a holistic view of the world. Because you are not in the world where everyone thinks alike. So you have to bear in mind that everyone has his or her own opinions and he or her, he or she is freely in expressing their own opinions. **I think they are all very helpful for me.**

G2 provides an account of how an interpreting class is conducted and the basic flow of the curriculum: the training starts with active listening exercises and speech delivery practices. At the very beginning of the training, trainees are asked to do interpreting practice from memory. Next, note-taking skills are introduced and trainees are expected to note down the gist of the speech and give a more detailed interpretation from their own notes. The predominant interpreting mode practiced in class covers CI only, not until the second term of the training programme will SI skills be instructed and then trainees will be guided by the tutor to do either CI or SI practices. In addition to the aforementioned chain of interpreting learning activities in class, trainees sometimes have debates about current affairs to polish their language skills as well as exchanges of personal opinions. In addition to that, trainees by and large recognise the significance behind the design of such a curriculum and appreciate the sequence of the learning activities.

After providing an overview of what an interpreting class is like in the chosen programme, I will now introduce how trainees learn in class through their narrative accounts according to a number of categories: the content of the interpreting classes, the speech training, the in-class interpreting practice, issues about language combinations, tutors' instructions in interpreting, other class activities, the feedback trainees receive from tutors, and finally trainees' comments on interpreting tutors.



5.3.1. Content of the interpreting class

The description of the sequence of the interpreting classes ranges from the tasks that tutors ask trainees to do, the interpreting mode being covered, to the summarised impressions of a class, as demonstrated below:

S1: Someone would deliver the speech. We will listen and take notes, translate it from Chinese to English, English to Chinese.

G2: We learnt some skills, like **note-taking**, and yeah, we did have a lot of skills. **Anticipation, paraphrasing, generalisation**, and we also did **shadowing**.

G7: First in the beginning, we just do some, did some excises about understanding and listening and **training of the memory**. We are not allowed to take notes, we just listen to paragraph or a speech and we review it, we recite it first and then we paragraph it, and just like this. And after that, we started to learn how to **take notes**, and the length of the speech is becoming longer. And we started to take notes. And at that time we always do **CI** and have time to summarise and prepare before we actually doing the interpreting. And after that for the semester two I think we start the **SI**.

N1: The learning of interpreting is carried in this way, for example, someone gives a **speech** and we just **interpret** it and the teacher might give us some **comment**.

N3: For example, give a speech, learn how to give a speech, to memorize all these new vocabs and to practice, um, to hear something, to speak while you're listening to a language, so **that's basically a set of skills that you can only acquire through repetition and practice**.

E5: Yeah, that was really it is, we prepare **speeches** and all the tutors prepare speeches and that would really be, yes, the whole class would really be doing that.

The general sequence of the interpreting class basically overlaps with the course structure discussed in 5.2.1., yet no matter how these interpreters describe the interpreting class from memory, one element is always present, which is speech delivery. Therefore, we are now going to look into how interpreters describe their speech training on the programme.

5.3.2. Speech training

There are no fixed teaching or learning materials for trainee interpreters. They practice interpreting from the speeches they make for their peers, or the speeches that tutors prepare for them. Trainees are required to have at least two speeches prepared for each class, as E6 remembers:

E6: In class we were made to... told to come with speech always ready in our languages, A language and B language usually and **to have it ready, to read for the class to perform for the class**.

The importance of these speeches cannot be overstated. S8 recognises the use of speeches as a fundamental feature of interpreter training:

S8: I think the most intriguing thing about this programme is **we did speeches first**. We didn't do any interpreting at the beginning, just did your speech. **Our tutor just**

said if you cannot speak, you cannot interpret. You can say that **we majored in speeches.**

S5 describes their 'speech training' in the programme:

S5: They, actually at the very beginning, they taught **how to write speeches**, and **how to deliver speeches in a confident way**. And we learn how to write our own speech, **to integrate different topics**, to integrate the information that we got the internet. With the progressing of the course, we moved into the consecutive training with different topics, **with the topics advancing each week**.

For those who have never received any interpreter training, it might be difficult to understand the relation between being an interpreter and being a speaker and thus being able to understand why speech training is indispensable in interpreter training. But in the following quote, G6 indicates why the speech training is such an integral aspect in training an interpreter:

G6: You speak. We speak in front of the class, speak very confidently or try as confident as possible and try to be a real speaker rather a student delivery. I try, by saying that **try to be like a real speaker**. This is the point where, which tutor also mentioned. Tutor X also mentioned that you should think your position, you should think what, who, who is, who are your target audience. Basically who is listening to you. And you should think what they expect from you by bearing this in mind you have, you have made the first step successfully in preparing a speech. Because a student is giving speeches for the speech's sake. But the speakers giving speeches for... in order to influence people. I think this is the, basically the major difference between student and speaker.

From G6's account, we can understand the intention lying behind the emphasis of the speech training: to function as an interpreter, the trainees are expected to be a good speaker first so as to empathise with the speaker. Without understanding how a speaker speaks and what might be the concerns for a speaker, an interpreter might not be able to be the mouthpiece of a speaker in the first place. Secondly, the speech training is a fundamental part of interpreter training: learning about how to speak in public, how to organise different arguments, how to present personal opinions in an effective way, and how to draw attention from the audience, so on and so forth. As a matter of fact, a good speaker might not be able to work as an interpreter if he or she doesn't have a second language. But a good interpreter can be, and has to be a good speaker at all times. This point is well elaborated by E7:

E7: We needed to prepare speeches, which was really good because then you knew how a speaker felt, which is I think quite an essential part of being an interpreter, to understand how it feels. How you get murmurs, how you start to rush, how you...all of that. So you as an interpreter understands, why speakers speak the way they do, and why you as an interpreter need to have a special level of understanding for the speaker, so that you know how to interpret. Because then, that's at least I think, is important. When you interpret, you try to listen between the lines. Speaker really wants to say, especially if he or she is very nervous, perhaps doesn't end sentences, or is too fast, you then learn to anticipate, **that you learn to think how a speaker thinks, that you learn to find strategies, how to interpret different styles of speaking**. So that you have your own practice, when somebody is very nervous and speak in a very fast speed, that you learn how your voice stand secure and that you learn how to cope with that. Some of us may summarise, others try to be as fast as the speaker, or whatever. So you find out yourself by knowing how speakers appeal: What is the best strategy for you as an interpreter to be his or her voice. And that's what I think what we are.

To make the speech training even more challenging, not only prepared speeches are required, but sometimes the tutors ask trainees to deliver an impromptu speech on a given topic as G8 recalls:

G8: And we are asked by our teacher to produce a speech just spontaneously using ... yeah I just remember an experience where **we had to be like a queen to deliver a New Year Eve speech, Christmas speech.**

Besides speeches prepared by trainees, tutors might occasionally prepare live or recorded speeches for trainees as E3 records:

E3: We were asked to give speeches as a source for the rest of the class to interpret from. That's one thing, one type of method. The other type of method is the speeches given by the teachers. Were...for example, **tutor X might give us some mp3 or a real speeches**, maybe a video or something, and asked us to try to interpret from.

In response to the emphasis on speech preparation and delivery during the training, interpreters have opposing views. E1 thinks the use of self-made or peer-made speeches made her 'learn through practical experiences rather than theory'. However, G5 comments that the heavy reliance on trainee-made speeches might be suitable for beginners, but is clearly not enough to prepare trainees for the interpreting market in the long run, and the limited sources of speakers and speech styles might be another constraint for trainee interpreters:

G5: But sometimes I think that **the speech materials was not very formal** and was not very difficult. At the very beginning it's very suitable. But I think gradually we should let, make that speech more and more difficult so that we can make improvement, make visible improvement. And I think we can listen to some materials from the internet, for conference speeches. When I listened to some conference or I think we should not just let every class make a public speech. And we will listen to that... because **we may get used to his or her accent or her style in making a speech.** .

Whether the trainees welcome the use of speeches as good preparation for interpreter training, or whether the simple choice of trainee-made speeches can be a downside for future interpreters, these opposing opinions obviously reflect two facts: one is the significance of the speech training in interpreter training, and the other is potentially a call from the trainees to have more speeches from real life conferences as the training proceeds, instead of relying on the use of peer-made speeches as the primary source of practice material in interpreting classes.

5.3.3. In-class interpreting practice

With both trainee-made or tutor-led speeches as the main source of learning material, there are other interpreting practice modes being carried out in the class. The following table shows a list of practice modes in class with narrative examples supplemented:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Speech delivery— live interpreting— | S2: So in class, we give a speech , everybody else interprets it. Then we have feedback from the tutor and also peer feedback . S6: We are expected to give speeches to fellow trainees to interpret. So basically in class everybody comes with their |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| feedback | <p>speeches and then we will, like have people, um.. interpret right on the spot for feedback.</p> <p>E4: Speaker would give the speech and then we interpret and then feedback.</p> |
| <p>2. Speech delivery— interpreting being recorded— play back for feedback</p> | <p>E7: And in Leeds, we recorded ourselves, and then we listened in class. We listened to the interpreting of all the trainees. So not for negative or being criticising people, the teachers helped us a lot by...when you were listened to yourself in public, when you know that somebody is listening to you, especially colleagues, you listened differently and really helped to improve your performance. And that's what the teachers did. They played our recording in the booth, while they were giving their speeches, or somebody else is giving their speeches. And then we listened publicly for a couple of minutes of interpreter's work. They criticised and asked us to do self reflection: what do you think? How do you feel and how do you feel as a listener? Not an interpreter but as a listener? And that was very important for me, because from then on I understood, that I need to interpret the way that my listeners like to listen to me. To my voice, to my style of speaking, although you need to adopt despite of the speaker, but it's always a question of intonation. You can improve by listening to yourself.</p> |
| <p>3.Speech delivery— paraphrasing in source language — interpreting in target language— feedback by tutor</p> | <p>S3: Usually the teacher will give a student or the student will give a speech and then one person will interpret. And sometimes like the first person will paraphrase in the same language if the speech is too difficult and another student would interpret. And then the teacher will give the feedback.</p> |
| <p>4.Speech delivery— interpreting by a representative v.s. Speech delivery – interpreting in pairs for peer feedback</p> | <p>S8: After the speeches, there are two ways. The first after speeches, the tutor would appoint one of the trainees to stand and deliver the interpreting immediately, and ask another to go to the booth and to prepare. After the student interpreted, the other student would come back and deliver his or her speeches. Another way is after the speech, the teacher will ask everybody work in pairs to practice.</p> <p>R: Okay. And after that...</p> <p>S8: Feedback. Feedback time. Tutors gave their feedback first, and after that trainees will add in something.</p> |

Table 6: In-class Interpreting Practice Modes

According to this table, we can see that the speech delivery and the feedback are two indispensable parts of the interpreting class. But after speech delivery and before feedback, it is very much up to the tutor to decide how to arrange trainees to practice. It is most common to have one trainee give an interpretation and another to give live feedback. Some tutors might choose to record the trainees' interpretation in the booth, and later play the recorded version to the whole class for more specific feedback. Other tutors prefer having a representative trainee to interpret, while others may encourage trainees to work in pairs so that more trainees can have the

opportunity to practice in class, meanwhile skills of giving peer feedback can be fostered.

5.3.4. Issues regarding language combinations

Another issue which has been raised by a few interpreters with regard to in-class practice is the various language combinations that trainees have, and how the complicated language combinations can be a concern for class arrangements. As explained in 1.1.2., a trainee's mother tongue is called language A. Language B is the language that you can work both into and from, so on and so forth. Language combinations for trainees on the chosen interpreter training programme can be divided into two main groups: bi-directional and two (foreign) languages. Bi-directional trainees are those with Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, Russian and Japanese mother tongues. They are referred to as bi-directional as they only have to work in two languages: their mother tongue and English. When it comes to interpreting, bi-directional interpreters have to interpret both ways, into their mother tongue and into English. However, things can be quite complicated for those with two foreign languages especially in class practice sessions. S8 recalls that the source language of the speeches depended on who participated in a specific class:

S8: It's like the tutor found our volunteer from trainees to give out as a speech. If there are only Chinese trainees, there will be a Chinese into English or English into Chinese. But if there are a mixed class, we only have English speeches and do the reciting or paraphrasing.

A class with trainees with identical language combinations is free to use either language as the source language, but when a mixed class is conducted, having speeches in English is the possibility. S4's account gives a more detailed description of how trainees with different language combinations work together in the same class:

S4: Well in our class, the Spanish, we don't have any Spanish mother tongue trainees, so the interpreters have to give the speeches in Spanish because they say that, you know, say I would have to give one, it wouldn't be as clear as if a mother tongue individuals. Sometimes so that's two of us in our class have Spanish B, so sometimes trainees give English speeches and we go into Spanish with them. So it's a little bit mix of teachers and trainees depending on which languages we go into. Usually we try work out in the combination of languages we have, so in our group, I got A and B, so it's English A, Spanish B, so ideally I'll give a speech in Spanish, so that the people have got just Spanish C can listen to the Spanish and go into English back. And we have some Italians in our groups, so sometimes we try work with them, say they can hear it in Spanish and tell someone in Italian, for example, so **we just try to mix everyone.**

The diversity in having various language combinations seem to be an advantage at first glance as trainees get the opportunity to work and learn from those who with different languages. Nevertheless, N8 confesses that her language combination, an especially rare combination, made her truly struggle during training:

N8: **I always thought I was struggling between my languages, and especially with my language combinations.** Because I found that, you know, it's not enough to just read up about something in German and because you know, the Spanish would be very different. The vocab has been very different. And I found it worked as well, you know. If I'm doing vocab lists for certain meeting, **then I really do have to look at the vocab in three languages: in English, German and Spanish!** Um, whereas, if I listen to the delegates speaking French, my French is no way any perfect but I realise that the vocab is very similar to Spanish vocab, so I always, you know, I was struggling, I had this extra difficulty there to learn the vocab. .

5.3.5. Main instruction in interpreting

CI and SI are the two major modes of interpreting which are instructed on and practised in class. The instruction of CI and SI are therefore the core part of the training programme. The interpreter training consists of CI training in the first term and SI training plus advanced CI practices in the second term. CI training mostly follows the speech, interpreting and feedback pattern, plus selective class activities according to the arrangements of the tutor. In this way, trainees are made to practice CI throughout the year, while the SI only takes place for a couple of months before graduation. G6 gives a detailed account on how SI training is given and its basic elements which are instructed upon in class.

G6: After that we entered into the area of SI. That was brand new area. It's, it's, the area is based.. SI is based on what you learnt in CI, but it's absolutely, as far as I am concerned, is absolutely different. Because for consecutive interpreters, you have time to organise, to arrange your language, to try to, try to speak in a polish way, in a very nicely way. You have very good nicely delivery skills. You can speak very polish language. But for SI, in most cases you just don't have the time. You have to cut it short. To cut it short the tutor advises us to do **summary techniques**. Summary technique is to cut long sentences. But the long sentences I don't mean complex or complicated sentences. I mean, a single sentence can be a long sentence. And you have to cut it short. It's a kind of chop, chopping skills. As I said a simple sentence can be a very long sentence. So for example, I, "Today I am very happy to join you to talk about my experience yesterday in watching a football match." This is a simple sentence, but it is quite long. So you cannot just wait until the end of the sentence. You should start at the first meaning groups comes forward to me. So when I say "Today I am very happy" You should say, in Chinese or whatever language, or whatever your target audience want to hear from you. Then the next meaning group will come to you, you interpret. So for SI our tutors told us that it's not about bring polish language, **it's about bring brief, short, and straightforward language** to your audience. Umm... make it quick, make it fast, make it sound convincing and make sense. That's what tutors told us and I think that's very essential skills for us.

On top of the basic elements of SI training, N4 shares her very first experience of in-class SI learning:

N4: I think some of the tutors went into the booth, did the SI and they showed us the way they are going to do, like how they will prepare for their task. From what I remembered, I remembered that they will give us some **introduction about booth manner**, and then we have a very short period of time when we can go inside the booth, so we can **paraphrase SI**. I think one course is tutor S's course. She just played a record of another European guy...Very strange pronunciation and very hard to understand. We go into the booth and do the paraphrase. I cannot understand any word of it. And then tutor S just go mad about our performance. So I think... that time I was so disappointed about myself and... I think there is... another lady, I forgot her name... OK. That's tutor V. I think tutor V gave us some courses about SI and showed us and

told us seriously she had in the booth and off sight. And then tutor V ... Yes, in tutor V's course we **have some very interesting games and different topics and people will do the interpreting**. Some of us will in the booth and some outside. I think that is the end of the course. We then got more time to practice SI.

Based on N4's description, we can gain a clearer picture on how the tutors guide the trainees into the domain of SI from the outset. Instead of going straight into SI, introductory lessons about the booth manner are conducted followed by paraphrasing exercises. Simulation activities might then be introduced to familiarise trainees with the simultaneous mode, before actual SI practices take place. Different tutors might have various approaches in leading trainees to understand SI, although some approaches might not be appreciated or acknowledged by trainees right away; N4 felt 'disappointed' due to her inability to understand 'a word of it'.

Apart from training in CI and SI, another indispensable part of the training is a theoretical module in T/I theory. However, of all the 32 interpreters interviewed, only one counts her learning of T/I theory as part of the in-class learning. S3 remembers learning T/I theory and gives a ratio between theory and practice during training:

S3: I think like sometimes we have some, **a little bit of theories**. But mostly we just have practice. **The ratio between theory and practice is one to ten**, so theory is only 10% and practice accounts for 90%.

As a former trainee at the same programme, I was quite surprised to learn that there is such a low response rate among trainees in recognising the presence of the theory module. The theory module is named 'Methods and Approaches'. The module is taught weekly in the form of one hour lecture and it introduces various T/I theories. The module requires a written essay at its end which is taken seriously to make the MA programme academically sound. Nevertheless, according to my own experience and the responses I got from the participants, it seems to me that the theory module makes little impression on trainees' overall learning of interpreting. The interpreter training programme is skill-based and practically oriented, so the majority of the trainees pay more attention to the skilful and practical sides of the learning experience without noticing that they are actually applying the theories learnt from the theory module. Yet interpreters regard the theory module to be relatively useless compared with actual interpreting practice, which will be reported on later in 6.4.3.2.

5.3.6. Other class activities

Many more activities are carried out alongside the speech and feedback mode in the interpreting classes. These class activities might not be frequently mentioned by the majority of participants, but their detailed coverage by individuals still reflect the diversity of interpreting class activities. Other class activities can be divided

based on four types of needs: preparatory skills for interpreting, knowledge expansion exercises, simulation activities for skill consolidation, and finally lessons on professional etiquette. Constraints do not permit supplementary discussion about each and every class activity, so selected narrative paragraphs will be employed to demonstrate a comprehensive interpreting learning experience.

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Preparatory skills | <i>Memory training</i> | S4: From the first few weeks, because in class we weren't allowed to take any notes , I am sure you remember, but we still have to, yeah, interpret speeches. I guess in the first few weeks they showed us we didn't, you know, to always being writing, but you can remember, so they told us to use memory , we do have that..... I found it's very useful. Especially because also when I write speeches, when I prepare to do the oral exam for languages anything I am the one who want write everything down and even if I don't look, I like to have it there, but it really taught me that I that. I got confident about not needing to have every single word written down. My brain does work and I can memorize things. |
| | <i>Active listening</i> | G6: The first step is to put you in a quasi real environment of interpreting. The first thing we did is have some active listening. I should say it's not memory. It's active listening. The tutor asked us to just listen to the speech, listen to the material. All kinds of materials. Either stories or history or just the funny things, interesting things that they talked about for three, for one to two minutes. Then based on our active listening, just try to generalise it. This is the first step of interpreting. And I personally believe that it is very helpful because an interpreter does not rely on his or her notes doing interpreting jobs. He or she relies on the memory. So memory or active listening is definitely the core parts of the interpreting. This is the first step. |
| | <i>Concentration</i> | S6: And sometimes, even when the, the tutor is just speaking and you thought she's just chatting or talking about like, well, of course what she says is very important. But sometimes I was sit there and I just listened to what she said. She says and suddenly she would just pick me to interpret what she just said. R: What would you do? Can you catch up? S6: Yeah, Yeah, mostly (Laugh). That's quite surprising, but I think it's good. Um..One thing I learnt in class here is that you really have to concentrate 100%. |
| | <i>De-verbalisation</i> | S6: Well, yesterday tutor X came with like a power point of a speech and she wanted us to look at the slide and then turn it into Chinese. So maybe like the whole speech were divided to parts and we would have to contribute like one part of the speech. R: One slide? S6: Yes. One slide and she wants to, through this exercise, she wants to, train us to de-verbalise , to focus on the story line and tell the story in our own way. It was about child labour, um... working, working hazardous, work. |
| | <i>Number training</i> | E6: We would practice the...with certain recordings and sometimes in class we would do exercises that we want on particular issues, such as figures or numbers. |
| | <i>Voice coaching</i> | G8: I remember once the teacher wants us to detect irony or sincerity in one's tone. And we are asked to read out a few sentences in the tone required by our teacher, and the other trainees will have to guess whether I am being ironic or I am being sincere. |
| | <i>Tone practice</i> | G8: We are asked to read out a few sentences in the tone required by our teacher, and the other trainees will have to guess whether I am being ironic or I am being sincere. |
| Knowledge | <i>Brain storm</i> | N1: Oh and before the speech, we have a brain-storming session on the topic of the week. We just summarise the topic of the week for the words and the phrases. |

| | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| expansion exercises | <i>Debate on current affairs</i> | G6: We have a debate on current affairs. And I think that's very useful as well. Because by doing debate you have time to examine your own opinions and you have time to see what others are thinking on this event. And it's a process of exchange of ideas . I think that's very useful not only in terms of interpreting, but also for you to have a comprehensive and a holistic view of the world..... I think that's very helpful for me. |
| Simulation activities for skill consolidation | <i>Mock conference</i> | E7: In Leeds we had mock conferences every week..... We had time to prepare our own speeches at the beginning, the mock conferences were done by the trainees I think..... And there were always people from other departments, teachers from other departments, asked a couple of trainees who had to prepare speeches..... So we knew that, for instance, in two weeks time, somebody from, I don't know, from the engineering department or traffic I think, public transport, was at one point, a couple of times the topic. So you knew the topic but you did not know what kind of speech came up . So you tried, either alone or together, compile glossaries for that topic . And then you were recorded again, the mock conferences were recorded, and then we just sit in the classes to interpret. |
| | <i>Role play</i> | E2: And also tutor Y played some games of role plays. Like one was the speaker and another one was the interpreter , and she made all the trainees together... So it was quite interesting. |
| Lessons on the professionalism | <i>Professional etiquette</i> | S6: Once I was doing an interpretation and then my colleague, she was being funny. She was... In her speech she was saying that she hasn't had a boyfriend for a long time or maybe she would like have a boyfriend in the UK. She said that with a big smile. When I interpreted it I laughed, too. And tutor Z, my tutor, she told me that she is unhappy about that because, sometimes laughing can be very dangerous and it's not professional . |

Table 7: Other Class Activities

5.3.7. Feedback from tutors

As in other teaching/learning contexts, in an interpreting class, tutors play the most important roles in leading trainees to explore the field of interpreting. The previous narrative accounts on interpreting class activities pinpoint that the feedback from tutors constitutes a major part of in-class learning, and serves as a driver for trainees to modify their interpreting performances. Consequently, I have collected examples of narrative data regarding the feedback from tutors. It is worth mentioning that all those who give detailed accounts on how tutors give feedback are primarily Ss. It is perhaps natural for them as current trainees to recall clearly how tutors comment on their performances, given that they are still engaged with the detail of the course and do not have a holistic overview like Ns and Es. Those who acknowledge the significance of feedback from tutors are mainly practising interpreters. This might be due to the accumulation of actual work experience which makes the practitioners reflect on their learning experience as a whole and learn to appreciate the value of the feedback from tutors.

Here are four narrative excerpts illustrating which aspects tutors tend to cover when giving feedback in class:

S3: First of all tutors comment on whether you grasp **the content**, do you have a like a main distortion, **major distortions** and then, come down to your **language**, your **delivery**, your **voice**.

S5: We would receive some feedback from the tutors, and especially for the **structure** of the interpreting, or the structure of the speech, the very important **links**, and the **speaker's intentions**, other very important elements, we would've received this kind of feedbacks, and teachers are very picky on our English **delivery**. It's quite useful for us to realise how should we deliver a speech in a fluent way and comprehensible way.

S7: You can divide feedback from tutor into content and presentation as I suppose. Content would be whether you understood **the overall picture**, whether you followed **the structure**, whether you got **the links** properly so that you can deliver the idea faithfully, and whether you will be able to analyse that you should take **the speaker's intention** and ideas, and then process them and deliver them again faithfully. And on the other side, you have presentation, so whether you delivered them **with confidence**, whether your English was at an appropriate level, whether you had **good eye contact** with you and really communicating with the audience or not.

S8: For example, the tutor would say "Well, your **voice** and **pace** is really good and we can hear you all over the classroom." But sometimes like one of my classmates, you are struggling with the words and phrases, you cannot express your idea concisely, so your **language** is a little bit wordy. Or your **voice** is okay, but sometime you can be very flat. You are like robot. Yeah, your **intonation**. Main idea, I don't think main idea is a big problem for Chinese trainees. They can just **deliver the main idea** to a greater extend, but **presentation** skills is a really problem. Or sometimes it can be like in this situation you should use this word, but you use another, so it sounds awkward to your ears. ... is it **collocation**?

After reading through the four narrative accounts regarding the content of the feedback from tutors, three categories can be identified according to the sequences mentioned: content of the original speech, delivery of the interpretation, and finally presentation skills. I gathered all of the elements mentioned by the interpreters, along with my prior knowledge about interpreting, to assemble Table 8 below:

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Content (of the original speech) | overall picture / the main idea |
| | major distortions |
| | structure |
| | links |
| Delivery (of the interpretation) | language use |
| | collocation |
| | grasp of the speakers' intention |
| Presentation Skills | voice |
| | pace |
| | intonation |
| | eye contact |

| | |
|--|------------|
| | confidence |
|--|------------|

Table 8: Feedback Content from Tutors

In addition to the content of the feedback, S7 shares how feedback given by tutors changes over time:

S7: At the beginning, they were more positive, which they had said right at the very beginning in introduction session. **Their feedbacks were at start quite positive, and then gradually got worse.**(laugh) So at the beginning they were very positive and focused on things that have been done well, structure, delivery etc. Now it was more general, fine, but **there were much more emphasis on negative things** which were very helpful.

The feedback is a mixture of both positive and negative comments. It normally begins with positive aspects and ends with negative aspects. S7 believes that the structure of such interpreting feedback from tutors is ‘quite sharp but helpful’.

S7 is not the only one who believes that the feedback from tutors was helpful. After gaining some work experience and reflecting on their learning experiences, Ns and Es still acknowledge the comments they received as trainees. N8 thinks the feedback from tutors was ‘not only useful, but relevant all the way through our professional lives’. E1 claims that the feedback from tutors was ‘something we aiming for, something to improve next time’. E7 concludes by saying, **‘the positive criticism from teachers constitutes my core learning in interpreting’**.

5.3.8. Comments on tutors

When sharing their in-class learning experiences, one in four interpreters also give feedback on the tutors. Their feedback includes acknowledgments, complaints and even suggestions for the programme. One set of complaints refers to the comments that tutors give, that is to say how useful the comments given are for trainees to improve their interpreting performance. Two Ss express their appreciation towards the same tutor, tutor X. S1 gives an example of how tutor X gives constructive and conclusive feedback, which is particularly useful for trainees:

S1: I think tutor X has done a very good job. She can pick up all words. She does not just pick up some specific problem we have made. **She can figure out kind of principle or we always made mistakes** such as we Chinese people like to say ‘对我来说<for me>’, 我觉得 <I think>...’ bla bla bla. And we will translate into ‘For me, I think...bla bla’ that kind of structure is wrong.

R: It’s not authentic.

S1: Yes. No. It’s wrong. We should say ‘for me, it is..’ or just ‘I think bla bla bla’ But most of the student would make the mistake in that case. So she can figure out that the same mistake we have made by most people and present, or analyse those errors for us and she lets us know why we will make such mistakes and not just pick up’ Oh.. you are wrong here, you are wrong here.’ **She just let you know why you have such... why you stuck at this point or why you always made the same mistake.**

Because of the usefulness of the feedback from tutor X, tutor X’s class hours are considered to be ‘productive’ by S3:

S3: I think I liked it. Some classes are two hours and some others only one hour. Like the one with tutor X. Every week we have only one, two hour class with her and **this class is always most productive one and then we have like one hour session with her. When I talk about productivity I mean it's not like we don't have enough time. It's like...**

R: How much you learnt.

S3: Yes. When you...Yes. **How deep you can go.**

One common complaint is that the trainee interpreters, especially those with Chinese-English combinations, feel that the class hours with tutor X were not enough, as they regard the class hours spent with tutor X as the most productive. In response to her understanding in productivity in interpreting classes, S3 takes another not-so-popular tutor for example, raising a potential call for more 'productive' tutors who are able to give the appropriate feedback for trainees:

S3: We do have another tutor... I don't remember her name. But she came like maybe once of four weeks. Next time when we see her will be like half to four weeks. **It's not so useful to spend time with her...** we complained. Usually in this session, how to say, maybe one or two person, people have a chance to practice. We discussed about it. We always thought this one hour session was not very, not very, how to say, productive.

R: Well...

S3: We... Yes. Many trainees complained about this. But I think because **if there is like only tutor X who can do this, we cannot require her to like work more, right? I think the problem is that there is not sufficient teacher**, especially English-Chinese.

The comments from the two Ss reinforce each other. These comments firstly demonstrate how trainees value the training, which is very much based upon how much they learnt from the classes, yet the effectiveness of the interpreting classes is hugely dependent on the ability of the tutor to give feedback. Class hours with a tutor who gives useful constructive feedback would ultimately be considered popular; conversely, a lack of feedback may leave trainees frustrated and demoralised.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the negative comments on interpreting tutors, two Ss mention that the practice time given by tutors in class is insufficient:

S3: Most of our classes will only have two hours, after one speech and all the interpreting, usually we did not have much time left. Sometimes we managed to do a second speech. But **most of the time we only do one speech in a class...I mean in one class, never happened everyone got practice.** Never happened. And my group is really small already. Only 6 of us in the Chinese group.

S4: Yeah, because I think it's, I'm not sure how you'd go about teaching someone to do in anyway unless you has, a lot more time with them, and on a personal level, I only get four hours a week practice in class, and that with, you know, between 8 or 9 people, so **it's almost impossible for everyone to practice, all you can do is do the best you can in interpretation and listen to their feedback and go and try to do it yourself.**

Apart from the insufficiency of practice time given by tutors, E5, the only E who comments on the interpreting tutor, expresses her dissatisfaction towards having a tutor who was a non-practising interpreter during her training:

E5: **Not all of the tutors are professional interpreters and we complained about that.** Some of them were, and I think some of them are still the same today. Let's see, for example, we had one Spanish tutor. I don't think he was professional as far as we

knew he wasn't. He wasn't very good and we didn't like that. And we actually complained to tutor S whoever it was at that time.

R: Because he wasn't a professional?

E5: He wasn't a professional and so he wasn't doing it very well. **He didn't seem to know how to help us really and we were not very happy with his teaching.** And I don't, I think he was, I don't know what he was. I think he was a translator, but not an...

R: Oh, I see.

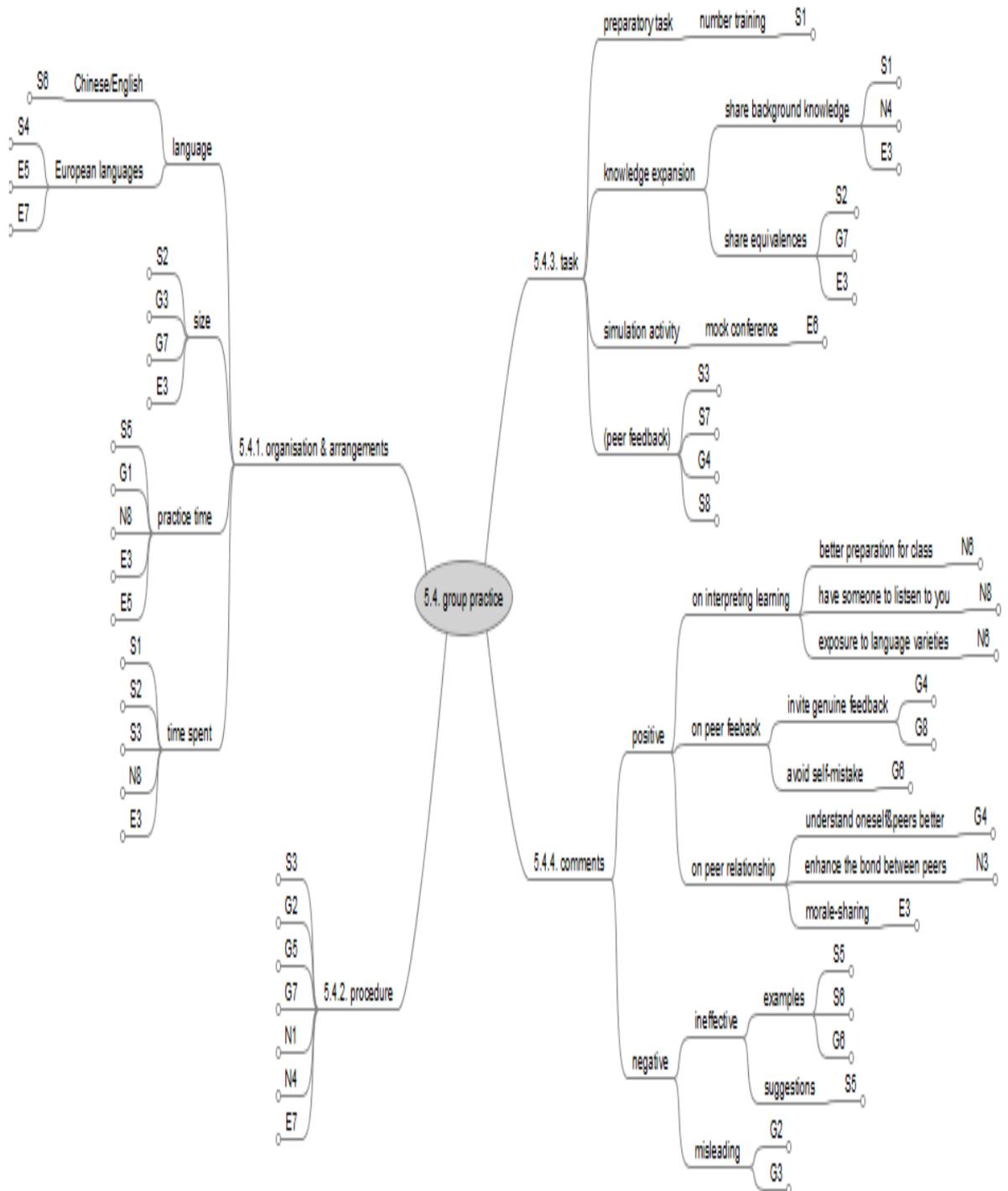
E5: Perhaps he was an interpreter in the past, but I don't think he was then and we weren't happy with him. So I think perhaps, maybe that contributed to the fact that we weren't very happy with him and his professional there.

E5 did her training during 2001-2002. Since none of the interpreters mention the same issue, I suspect that the chosen programme recruited professional interpreters as tutors in the following years.

I believe that these complaints can be treated as a reflection of the same issue: the quality of the feedback from tutors determines the effectiveness of the interpreting class, therefore the inability to give constructive feedback or the lack of professional experiences in interpreting to strengthen interpreter training might both result in a particular interpreter trainer becoming very unpopular.

5.4. Group Practice

Group practice constitutes a substantial amount of the learning experiences for trainee interpreters. In their narrative accounts, the interpreters report the main procedures of the group practice, the tasks they do during group practices, their comments about group practice and how they organised or arranged group practice according to each other's needs.



5.4.1. The organisation and arrangements of group practices

The group practice is a voluntary extracurricular exercise, which is completely organised by trainees for trainees. S2, G3 and G7 usually practiced with a group of four to five trainees, while E3 tends to practice with two to three trainees in a smaller group. Five seems to be the maximum number of trainees in a group for interpreting practice but the number does drop as the training proceeds. S2 recalls that 'at the beginning the groups were bigger but this was just unmanageable really'.

Five trainees shared the frequency and the timing of their practice. S5 and G1 practices two to three times a week, and N8 practised daily with peers. Two Es, E3 and E5 both remember that their group practices not only took place during weekdays after class, but also at the weekends. S1 shared her average time spent on group practice every week as a current trainee:

S1: We have group discussion, group training. Several times a week. I participate in two groups. One group is our Chinese group. We meet at least two times a week. And also a group in Sentinal Towers <a university student accommodation>. Just three of us. We meet every weekend just one time. I think **each time we will spend one hour and half or two hours and for Chinese groups I think it's at least four hours. Sentinal Tower's group is two hours per week.** So it's like **six hours per week.**

Her colleagues S2 and S3, report the same amount of hours spent on group practice:

S2: In a normal week, probably **about 6 hours a week.** So it will be...we meet and practice whenever people have time. Probably **two to three times a week,** and probably **two hours each time.**

S3: We practice **once or twice per week, every time at least two hours** I think...

According to these Ss, we can see that trainees might participate in different groups. The groups can be fixed by the accommodation or the language combination like S1, or can be as free as S2 to join a random group whenever she felt like practicing. The trainees' group practice time in total is more or less equal: approximately 6 hours a week.

It is also worth mentioning that the six hours group practice time is not rigid. Trainees from different years can have longer or shorter group practice hours depending on the preferences of their colleagues. N8 generally practices after class plus an extra four-hour practice in the weekends, while E3 recalls that her group practice time was approximately only two hours:

N8: We would only do a couple of hours and maybe extra during the week. On weekends we would come in and we would spend a good, yeah **four hours?** Maybe **sometimes longer** if it's close to the exams.

E3: We meet up practice for maybe **two hours every week.** Approximately two hours.

Besides the general organisation of the trainee-led group practice sessions, four interpreters talk about issues surrounding their language combinations in group practices. As mentioned earlier, there are mainly two main language combinations in the chosen programme: bi-directional and two languages. It is rather more straight

forward for bi-directional trainees. S6 is a Chinese-English trainee interpreter, explains:

S6: **For English and Chinese I have my own practice group with two other girls.** So we always provide Chinese speeches to each other and we will interpret and we will give each other feedback.

However, things can be pretty complicated for trainees with two foreign languages. S4 has English A and Spanish B, she explains how her group practice works with Italian peers present:

S4: Usually we try work out in the combination of languages we have, so in our group, I got A and B, so it's English A, Spanish B, so ideally **I'll give a speech in Spanish, so that the people have got just Spanish C can listen to the Spanish and go into English back.** And we have some Italians in our groups, so sometimes we try work with them, say they can hear it in Spanish and tell someone in Italian, for example, so we just try to mix everyone.

While S4 tried to accommodate everyone's needs in group practice, E5 adopts a free choice—whoever comes to the practice can have a go in their language combinations:

E5: Well, I think it will depend on who was there. Because I think Spanish speakers in the class, so they would do speeches in Spanish and a couple of native speakers and whoever was there I think just be there by chance really. Whoever came would give a speech and by that, I think, so I didn't think the practice session would be just in French and it would be a practice in Spanish, it would be, **each practice session would be depending on who was there.**

It is understandable that practice arrangements can be a burden for trainees in the long run, therefore some of the trainees with more than two languages might retreat to practice with those who have identical language combinations as the course proceeds.

S4: Later, **I met more with the other Spanish B individual,** we haven't been managing to do that much now, but that's was very helpful with me, that's twice a week and stay for two hours each, so we were doing a lot work, but what we really need and which we are still looking for a native, you know, mother tongue.

E7: We practiced in class, and we also practiced outside the class. **The trainees just met in their different languages,** so in German we were just four people I think, and we met every day for a couple of hours and just practiced consecutive.

To sum up, the organisation of the group practice sessions are free and casual, and it is up to the individual to make their personal decisions. No authority figure seems to intrude into the practice sessions which enables the trainees to decide who, when, what, and how they form their practice groups.

5.4.2. Main procedure of group practices

The following are interpreters' recollections of the main procedures of group practices:

S3: Outside class we have practice within our groups. **Follow the similar format. One person will give the speech and others will interpret.** We have to come up with one speech, at least one speech to go for group practice, and give each other comments. We

gave speeches to each other and some people do SI, some people do CI, that's **basically what we have in class**.

G5: Besides, outside the class we will form some study groups to practice. Practice group. yeah, **after making a speech we interpreted it and we give feedback to each other**.

N1: It's kind of **similar to what we've done in class** cause um..., for example, we prepared for a topic, we need to find out useful phrases, and then we get together. First, share the phrases we prepared, then the speech is giving...for example, two people is in the group, we practice and give comment to each other and at the end we gather together to share our comments.

N4: We have the learning groups. **We had study groups and we do what we do in class**: Practice note-taking, practice paraphrasing or practice to build up terminologies for the words will be used for that week. But I don't think we can do something for SI. Sometimes we will book the booth and some of us will go there during weekend and practice, practice.

According to these descriptions, the main order of group practices follow the same pattern as that of the interpreting classes: starting by speech delivery, followed by the interpreting practice, and finally peer feedback. Trainees indicate that group practice basically copy what tutors do in the class, the major difference being that peers are the source of feedback instead of tutors.

5.4.3. Tasks for group practice

The tasks that trainees do in their group practice are very similar to those that tutors guide them through in interpreting classes. Trainees mention that the tasks they do in group practice cover the preparatory tasks, i.e., knowledge expansion exercises and simulation activities. The major difference between an interpreting class and group practice is primarily the shift in source of feedback from tutors to peers.

Table 9 below is compiled according to trainees' descriptions of the tasks in group practice. Based on a similar table on other class activities (Table 7), these two tables make for an interesting comparison. The essential activities are covered in group practice: preparatory skills, knowledge expansion exercises, and simulation activities for skill consolidation. Only lessons on professionalism are missing, which is understandable since no tutors are present in group practice sessions to give adequate advice about professional etiquette. The high consistency between the content of activities in the class and in group practice demonstrates that, interpreting is a practice-based skill, and that the investment of long practice hours is necessary for skill consolidation. The repetitive accounts from trainees prove that they take group practices almost as seriously as interpreting classes. However, having peers as the only source of feedback without tutors as the source of legitimate feedback, does

give rise to some doubts and complaints. These will be reported in the next section, 5.4.4.

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Preparatory skills | <i>Number training</i> | S1: We do some number training. Like we will devise some very difficult words, figures to practice to sharp our ears. So just read out the figures and others do the practice . And also these figures in the passage like 'increase to' 'increase by' or 'decrease how many times'. |
| Knowledge expansion exercises | <i>Share background knowledge</i> | S1: We share the knowledge because we have several topic like media, like all kinds of thing. For example, In Chinese C group we have six people. We will take different topic. We will choose the topic we think we... I myself don't know much, eg: I don't know much about the pension system or the education system in UK I will choose the topic and prepare my English and Chinese speech in that topic. So we try to make sure every people can cover different parts and we rely on each other. |
| | | N4: Sometimes when I'm with my classmates, we will talk about that topic apart from the research... And then we will talk about the topics and she or he will give us some brand new idea, new information we got on that topic. I think that's very helpful even more helpful that the knowledge we received from Google from the internet. |
| | | E3: For example we may find a topic for example about international news or the main issue, and then we decide, for this week, we will go back and find everything possible from the internet, try to understand about the topic. And then, maybe once a week, maybe one afternoon, we will get together, to compare what we learnt about this issue and then the other one try to interpret. Yes I think it's actually very useful. And because we are talking about the thing we are interested in, and it's current affairs, so we have, I mean we really invested a lot of time and energy to this activity. And I think I benefited from it a lot. |
| Simulation activities for skill consolidation | <i>Share equivalences in languages</i> | S2: We would share the key words . Umm, not only key words but those words that will be difficult to take notes for at the moment. So proper names, or the topic, and words are technical at the moment. |
| | | G7: And sometimes we, because there's topic of the week, so during this week, all the speeches are relevant to the topic, and sometimes we share some very useful topical words about this topic and we share those kind of words with each other, and that is outside the practice. |
| | | E3: We got together, and each one of us tried to find some terminology on the topic and share. |
| | <i>Mock conference</i> | E6: When we were outside the class, our group, we got along very well and we often trained together outside class at our free time. Should be a couple of hours a day. Every other Saturday at least we tend to hold sort of, mock conference. |

Table 9: Content of Activities in Group Practice

5.4.4. Comments on group practice

Similarly to the feedback trainee interpreters give to tutors, my participants also comment on group practice. One point worthy of mention is that those who give positive feedback on group practice are amongst the Gs, Ns and Es. None of the Ss interviewed give positive feedback about group practice. In fact, about one third of the concerns raised in the negative feedback on group practice are from Ss. To

respond to such an observation, we can speculate that as current trainees Ss are keen on receiving the best training possible, and they therefore seek to give negative feedback in the hope that further changes in group practice could be made. For interpreters from other groups, the time spent with peers in group practice sessions could never be regained. So the sense of nostalgia might make them share more positive reports about group practice. Whatever the reason might be, the comments from interpreters, either positive or negative, suggest a delayed effect by which training activities might only make sense with hindsight.

5.4.4.1. Positive comments on group practice

Comments on group practice fall into three main categories: benefits of learning interpreting, of peer feedback, and of peer relationships. Three Ns recall the usefulness of group practice in learning interpreting. For N6, group practice equates to 'better preparation before classes'. N8 thinks group practice benefits trainees:

N8: And then outside the classroom, we would get groups, which is very important. Because you can interpret until you come home, but if you are not listening to yourself, and if nobody else is listening to you then, you might speaking nonsense and you don't realise because your brain is concentrating so hard on, you know, what you are hearing. **And you don't actually get a chance to listen to yourself. So it was very important to work in teams, in groups.**

Furthermore, group practice might offer a variety of language exposure even in the same language. For instance, N6 is a Chinese-English interpreter from Taiwan. She encounters another version of Mandarin Chinese from her peers who came from mainland China during group practice. She regards having access to another variety of Chinese as beneficial in her learning in interpreting:

N6: It was originally a problem that some of the students were from Taiwan, and the rest were from Hong Kong or China. **We have different terms of same thing in Mandarin, and we would also have different ways to explain things. Finally we thought that we will have different markets and it's good to learn from each other.** That's the best solution.

Next, three Gs acknowledge how group practice is able to generate genuine feedback as well as help trainees avoid mistakes:

G4: To know our true capacity or what I can say is we know how can we interpret or kind of how hard the speech that we can deal with. And in the classes, we didn't have so much chances to try ourselves, and the pressure is different. Because it's friends, **we know each other better so to feel it easy and to speak what do you like to say**, and actually that's where you are. And at the first stage, of course you can do it, so you have to meet them and to practice, but in the classes, you try to avoid and hide it. So that's quite different.

G8: It can help you find out things you wouldn't be able to find on yourself. For example, if you use one word too much, yourself wouldn't be able to recognize that and this kind of mistakes will be picked up by your peers. And that's one thing, **I remember someone counted one word that I used so many times then tell me you have used that word for twenty times** or something. And the other thing is that, one problem with my speech is the lack of links between different paragraphs. **That's something I would not be aware of, but the others can tell me, the missing links in your rendering.**

G6: I firmly believe that giving feedbacks, be able to give feedbacks is a very essential skills for you to do successful interpreting. Because **by giving feedbacks to others you just know whether you have encounter the same problems**. How would you solve this problems, how would you improve your skills? I think that is very helpful.

Learning interpreting is different from other traditional academic disciplines with which you won't be able to study, immerse, internalise, and eventually master the knowledge. Learning interpreting entails a great deal of time spent on practicing, thus the significance of peer learning cannot be overestimated. From the quotes above, these Gs have already experienced the benefits of group learning, therefore, they are able to give credit to group practice with specific examples.

Beyond the concrete benefits that group practice bring for learning interpreting, three interpreters across different groups think that group practice makes a difference in boosting peer relationships. Two interpreters think that group practice sessions consolidated their relationships with peers:

G4: We have only two hours in the class, but we can practice like four hours a day, so **we can know each other better, and know more importantly ourselves better**.

N3: **It helps us to build a good, good bond among the, um, our fellow trainees**. That's still something very useful and powerful these days

Meanwhile, E3 finds that some of her peers had better stamina in group practice, which became a stimulus for her to work harder:

E3: Actually that's very helpful to some extent. Because for me for example, outside classroom practices were 1 or 2 hours, I think I don't really have the energy to do another hour. But some of my classmates had really long stamina, and they can do maybe 3 or 4 hours, and their performances just didn't deteriorated! Magic, OK? **So later on I found probably I can do better**.

5.4.4.2. Negative comments on group practice

As mentioned previously, trainees feel that the group practice sessions are a copy of their interpreting classes, with one major difference in that the source of feedback shifts from tutors to peers. Learning to give peer feedback is an essential element in interpreter training; by learning from other's mistakes, trainees know how to avoid mistakes and strive for better performances. However, the advantage of group practice in giving peer feedback can be a double-edged sword: what if the feedback that peers give is not as sound as that of tutors due to their inexperience? What if the feedback from peers is misleading? The consequences of peer feedback can be enormous. This concern is reflected in the negative comments of trainees.

Two Ss report that they found peer feedback ineffective:

S5: Maybe we're not specific about the areas that we should improve, we're just doing the practice. Just my colleague would give me a speech and I just interpret it into the other language, but **not so specific about the problems**, maybe we focus on a lot of content, but not really about the links, I think that's some problems I'm encountering now in the after class practice. I think we should, actually, **the tutors recommend some feedback forms, but we didn't print it out** to... I don't know why no one is doing that, but I think it's quite necessary. **Now I realise it's quite necessary, we should make more effective and specific feedback on each other**. Otherwise we're still repeating all the mistakes, we really have to let it stopped and think about what's

wrong here, how can we cope with it, and to avoid this kind of mistakes next time, but we really didn't do that much on this area. Right now I don't think we're effective, **we're just moving fast but not really effective.**

S6: **I don't feel our feedback to each other is that useful.** And I feel for the past a few times would be a little bit too laidback. And probably **sometimes we can just be too preoccupied by our own interpretation or my own comprehension instead of listening to each other.**

According to their reports, trainees are looking for specific feedback during practice. S5 mentions that tutors do introduce some feedback grids to them that they can take for reference while giving peer feedback, but in reality none or not many trainees do practice with the recommended feedback grid. S6 indicates that too much focus was put on their own interpretations instead of on those of peers. This is another reason why peer feedback is ineffective. The description of S6 points out the dynamics of this intricate interplay between trainees in giving and receiving feedback. Group practice provides an excellent platform for trainees to be student and teacher at the same time, but the boundary between teaching/training and learning thus becomes even more blurred, especially for beginners like S5 and S6. As a result, G6 explains why he chose to practice with another trainee only in the second term, rather than joining a group for practice:

G6: So from the second semester I prefer practice myself or practice with several people, three or four people, not too much, not too many, or in more cases, with student A. Because **it's very important for you to practice while after that you can receive feedbacks—receive very straightforward, very specific feedback, not too general.** You cannot say "Your delivery skills is very bad, you have lots of Ums.." That's not. That's very general. You have to focus on each point every time. You cannot change, you cannot, you cannot make up all your weaknesses in one time. You have to do it each time. So **I think the less number of people the more effective and efficient of the practice.**

To respond to the ineffectiveness of peer feedback in group practice sessions, S5 advises:

S5: I think it's about to have more effective communications between the colleagues, among the colleagues we should **have a very serious talk about the what is more effective to make most out of this after class practice.**

However, similar concerns might not necessarily be solved among trainees even after having 'a serious talk', because trainees from the same level, especially for beginning interpreters, might still find it hard to give appropriate feedback due to their lack of experience. Their narrative accounts suggest that group practice might function more effectively under the supervision and guidance of tutors or experienced interpreters.

In addition to ineffective peer feedback, two Gs describe another interesting aspect of the dynamic interplay of dominance and subtle contestation of manipulation by receiving misleading feedback:

G2: But I think that group practice is not a good way for me to practice. Because well, some people may find it useful because they can find their mistakes, their weaknesses.

But I cannot. During the group practice, I found it really enjoyable with them, and my colleagues are really nice people, and **they gave me very positive comments, which to some extent, make me didn't realise my weaknesses.** It's not good for me. Cause **I need someone to pick my mistakes.** At the beginning... because we didn't have the mid-term mock exam for this semester, I can't realise my mistakes. So **I just relied on my colleagues' comments and I think I was OK. But no.**

G3: But in the second semester, because I failed the first exam, I reviewed our group practices and my own feeling, and I thought that **I actually prefer practice with myself.** Because when you practice as a group, **we are not good enough to give each proper peer feedback.** And sometimes if we don't give feedback, that's alright. **But sometimes we give the wrong feedback, we will form the bad habit,** like when we were practicing, sometimes they told me I'm doing well. But actually not. They will say your sound is very fluent, you are doing great. Or sometimes I decided to omit some details because I think they are not as important as the main point, but they will say "hey, you miss this." So during the group practice period, I tend to be really careful about the details, **I think that's also why I failed the first exam.**

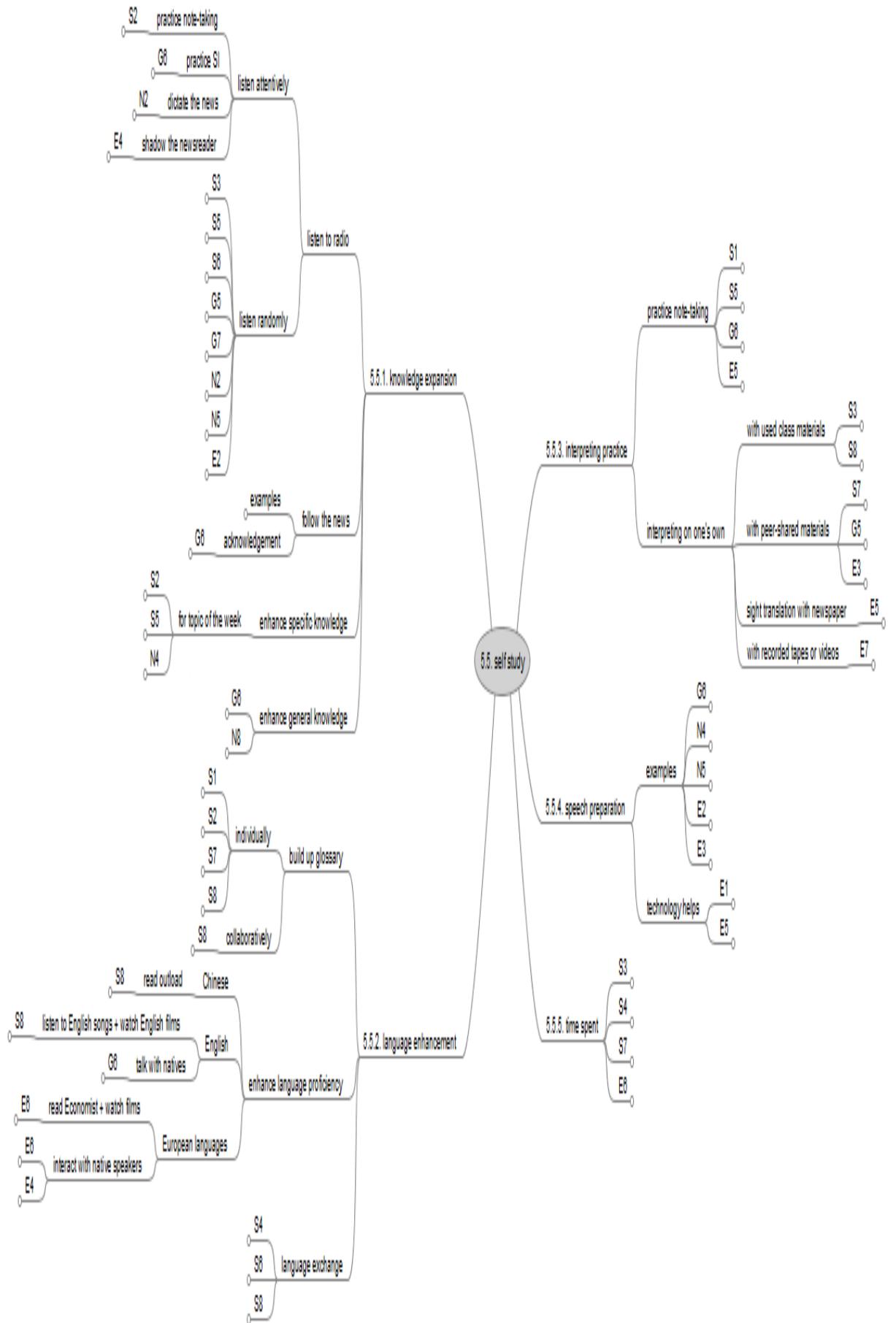
R: So that you failed.

G3: I don't know. I cannot know for sure, but after when I practiced myself, I tried to note down only the main points and remember the details, but not noted all of them down. And then, I think **I was doing better in the second semester by practicing by myself.** Of course practicing as a group will force me to practice regularly, because I can be really lazy.

In these two cases, both G2 and G3 failed their interpreting exams and they attribute blame to the misleading peer feedback. They relied on peer feedback largely in the first term and believed in the positive feedback they received from peers. Consequently, G2 started to have too much confidence in herself without realising her weaknesses, and G3 started to form some bad habits in interpreting following the peer feedback she received in group practice. Nevertheless, the exam results of these two interpreters prove that peer feedback is a contrast to what tutors perceive, which is a blow to both interpreters, and which made G3 retreat to practise on her own in the second half of the course. Although the reasons for failing the exam can vary, one certainty is that group practice did not live up to the expectations of group Gs who were trained in that specific year, since they have given mostly negative comments about group practice compared to their schoolmates who received training before or after.

5.5. Self-study

Self-study constitutes another indispensable part of learning experiences for trainee interpreters in the chosen programme, followed by trainees' learning in class and group practice. The components of self-study are very much related to the content of the interpreting classes. In the coming paragraphs, I will describe the components of self-study in four main categories: self-study for knowledge expansion, self-study for language enhancement, self-study for speech preparation and finally self-study for actual interpreting practice.



5.5.1. Self-study for knowledge expansion

5.5.1.1. Listening to radio

Nine times out of ten, interpreters think of listening to BBC radio programmes as the first item of self-study. S6 states that: ‘ever since I came here and started the course I started to listen to Today on BBC 4. BBC World Service and Today Programme in particular were mentioned by more than one third of the interpreters as the requisite programmes. Listening to BBC Radio 4 was also mentioned widely by interpreters as their very first self-study item. A few interpreters take listening to BBC radio so seriously that they devise some self-learning activities along with listening. S2 practices note-taking while she listens to BBC radio news, G6 tried to do SI following the newsreader but retreated to practising shadowing, N2 dictates the news bullet points, and E4 practices shadowing with BBC radio. But the majority of interpreters prefer to treat listening to BBC radio as supplement to their learning of interpreting, taking a more casual approach to listening to BBC radio. The excerpts below demonstrate how interpreters relate listening to the BBC radio to their daily routines:

S3: I listen to Radio 4. Well, for the BBC radio 4, **I often have the radio on when I play card games or I brush my teeth.** It’s always on. Yes. I don’t pay much attention. But it’s on.

S5: I get used to listen to BBC, Radio 4 Today programme, so I think that’s way to improve my listening. I think for me I just try to use anytime I have to listen, I use my ipod, when I was cooking, I would tune on BBC, just **let it go as a background music.**

G5: Actually every day I listen to BBC. In the morning when I get up I will open it and listen to it for about half to one hour. and in the after... in the evening I will listen to it for a longer time. For example, two or three hours. So **it’s just background music.**

Two interpreters use the term ‘background music’ to describe how they listen to BBC radio on a daily basis. Such a casual term can exemplify how autonomous learning is achieved in a spontaneous way— trainees think that listening to BBC radio is beneficial for their learning in interpreting so they mentioned it when I inquired about their learning experiences. On the other hand they admit that they treat listening to BBC news in a carefree way. Besides, there is no fixed length on how long interpreters should listen to BBC radio. It could be 30 minutes before sleeping like S5 usually does, or 2 to 3 hours in G5’s case. Each individual tailors it to their own needs.

5.5.1.2. Following the news

As with listening to BBC radio, following the news is something that trainee interpreters do naturally. Practising interpreters need to keep up to date with current affairs, so that sufficient background knowledge serves as an asset in interpreting practice; the same applies for trainee interpreters. Although no surveys have been

conducted as of yet to understand how much time trainee interpreters invested in following the news, S1 and S4 both say that they spent ‘a lot of time’ reading newspaper and news articles. The sources of news can be BBC, CNN, Times, Guardian, El Pais (Spanish newspaper) and Chinese quality newspapers such as 鳳凰 (Phoenix) and 南方週報 (Asia News). Some trainees prefer having newspapers to read, while others choose to update themselves on the news online. Here is S8’s example on how she make skimming the news over breakfast into a habit:

S8: So **I usually use my phone to see some Chinese vision news online**, and to get to know a little bit about the current issues. It's good but it's really a weakness of me. I don't like to know things like has nothing to do with myself, so it's really difficult. But I'm trying, I think have made a little progress. Um. **I have developed the habit. In the morning when I have my breakfast, I would just bring the cell phone with me into the kitchen, and popping the websites to start reading and eating at the same time.** It's help me in this way because you have developed such a habit, your are not bored while eating. At the same time, you get to know things about today because it's in the morning.

The majority of the interpreters consider following the news a basic element of self-study, G6 expresses how he loves following the news and how such a habit helps him in interpreting:

G6: I just love watching news and reading newspapers. I think by doing that I did, made a quite big progress in interpreting. Because I think I have gained, well, basic level of general knowledge in the areas where our interpreting topics usually happen. So **I think that is very helpful for me.**

5.5.1.3. Enhancing specific knowledge for topic of the week

In terms of knowledge expansion, three interpreters mention how they expand on their specific knowledge for the topic of the week as trainee interpreters:

S2: With the topics of the week now, I try...we had advice from tutor T, which is very helpful. Which is **don't try to cover all the topics, just one thing**. Choose one thing, I read articles about it. **I choose a topic then listen to programmes about it and note down figures.** Or **I will read various articles under the same topic.**

S5: Basically after class, I spend most of time doing the research of topics, I collect a lot of information about the weekly topics, such as, the topic for this week is ILO, so I will go the official website of ILO **to see what's happening, some reports newly released, some statistics, and I will try to have my own say.**

N4: We have the topic of the week and we will do the research. We **google** that or...I think we used **Wikipedia** a lot at that time. It is the topic you never heard before. Something about economics or something you will go back and google it to know what is happening about it. The history and what is happening now. And you try to build up your knowledge regarding that topic. I think that is a very helpful way. And you build up your knowledge, you got the terminologies and you got the words you will need. But that is... you do all the research about that topic. **That's very helpful and makes you confident in the classroom.** You know what people will talk about.

The use of the topic of the week has become a feature of the chosen programme, and we can see how this feature is used in trainees’ practice. The topic of the week tends to be on broad general issues, but S2 was advised by a tutor to choose a sub-field under the weekly topic and do thorough research around it instead of having relatively superficial understanding of the general topic, and N4

acknowledges that with the preparation on the topic of the week, she feels more confident in interpreting classes. Her point corresponds with some of the activities in the interpreting classes: brainstorming and debates on the topic of the week. We can see that the self-study activities that trainees practise are highly consistent with class content and the goal of interpreter training.

5.5.1.4. Enhancing general knowledge for interpreting

Apart from enhancing the specific knowledge based on the topic of the week, two interpreters mention that they do spend extra time enhancing their general background knowledge for interpreting purposes. The excerpts below describe tasks they do to enhance the general background knowledge:

G6: I like to stay at home, reading books, watching news, watching BBC documentaries. Not only BBC news, but documentaries. Because I think by doing this I am making progress in **preparing my background knowledge in interpreting**.

N8: Um, I've been doing a lot of background reading. I always read the newspapers. And things like that. That was quite a key focus for the, **broadening general knowledge about the world in terms of specific interpreting training things**.

5.5.2. Self-study for language enhancement

5.5.2.1. Building up a glossary

Four interpreters mention that they build up glossaries as part of their self-study duties:

S1: And third is there is, there are a lot of words, terms I should know. So right now I am trying, **spend a lot of time in comprising my glossaries**.

S2: We sort of taught in the B group that you need to think very careful... structures in the B language. So I try to find at the moment, **compile list of conjunctions, thesaurus, or alternative ways of saying structures or phrases**.

S7: And apart from that, just generally **building glossaries with various topics** that we study because we thought it broad, a huge range so that we understand a lot of what's going on in public affairs, political things.

S8: **From the news is the best way**, there is a passage and there are only a few words that you don't know, so you can focus on them and try to get to know what do these words mean. **I tried to remember a series of glossaries**, like the UK government, but there are too many. So it's really difficult. But you can learn things, you just see the phrases or words, and you never seen them before. At that time you get to little know of them, so it's a little bit progress although you cannot remember them. But you have a sense of it, and when they come out you just know something to say.

Since these four interpreters are all Ss, we can assume that by the time Ss were interviewed, compiling glossaries had been guided and stressed by tutors. The preparation of glossaries is not only an individual task. In the narrative account below, S8 shares how she divides the work of glossary preparation and even background knowledge with colleagues.

S8: We have also the workshops between Chinese trainees. Like the topic of last week is about the United Nations, and like me, my job is to do the glossaries for UNESCO and intellectual property right, and **every student have a task of about one or two UN agencies**. We have a group, you know, and then **we will just get a whole list of it, and everybody just get two of them**. And there is group of people, everybody has two topics and we will share. So we get a lot of buzz words. **And you get to know how the agencies work**. Oh my god, it's a load of information. For example, if we give out the task today, after two or three days, we'll gather together again for about two to four hours and book a room with whiteboard. One student in charge of UNESCO who will go out and write down something, and then come back to talk about the UN. **Firstly, to introduce the UNESCO tasks, values or principles, and how does it work, and its organisation and framework. After that the student gives some important words and phrases usually mentioned in UNESCO.**

According to S8, trainees firstly allocate work amongst themselves, and then all get together during group practice sessions to share the knowledge and the glossaries they compiled with peers.

5.5.2.2. Enhancing language proficiency

Learning interpreting is deeply related to language proficiency. The enhancement of language proficiency is therefore an indispensable part of the self-study tasks for trainee interpreters. Interpreters from all of the groups told me about how they improved their language proficiency while they were on the course. The way that the trainees adopt to enhance their language proficiency varies.

S8 is a Chinese-English interpreter. For her, reading aloud is an effective way to fine tune her languages:

S8: Uh, read English. Both English and Chinese. Usually for English is easy because you have lots of news as your reading resources, but when it comes Chinese, I don't read news, I usually **read my translation**.

R: Your translation? What did you mean by reading your translation?

S8: There is translation homework. The English version, of course, it's native. When you see the words, it's OK to see the Chinese characters, but when you read it out, it's a different story. So I would just **read out loud my own translation to find awkward parts and to correct them**. I think it's good because you are correcting yourself. It's the most difficult part to correct yourself.

S8 also says that listening to English songs and watching English films are how she enhances her English autonomously:

S8: I listen to English songs and movies. I don't know if it's right thing to do, but it helps me a lot. When I was little, I just listen to lots of English songs and watch lots English movies, and **sometimes you can just pop up the words that surprised everybody**. Sometimes you can **find the very authentic expressions in the movies**, especially feelings from the resources.

Spending time with with native speakers is another way of polishing one's English, as stated by Chinese-English interpreter G6 and E4:

G6: I think one of the most important thing is I do, or did outside classroom is talk with, talk to native trainees, **talk to native speakers**. Because we live in the UK so we have to solve our problems, daily problems—buying food, buying accessories or asking people where to go, so I think this is valuable experience which I think **is very helpful for you to polish your English skills**. And every time when I need to know something I, I don't, I didn't bring a map when I, when I, when I go to some, some strange area. Because I believe if you want to know where to go the only thing you need to know is to google it, google it before you go, knowing the basic knowledge of the area then ask

about the way. In that, by doing that you cannot only find the most effective and efficient way to find your destination, but also polish your skills, **polish your communication skills**. And by doing that I don't afraid to talk to foreigners or listen to foreigners. Listen to English, English native people. So I think that is very helpful.

E4: If you say tips, I think when you live in other country, language is different from what you leant in textbooks. So I would say.. **get in touch with local people**, you know with native speakers. That will help.

R: British People.

E4: Yes. **We don't just interpret words. It's a culture as well**. You need to understand the culture. So I think you get to know people because if you get to know people, it will be helpful.

Spanish/French/English interpreter E6 needs to interact with international trainees to grasp more opportunities in speaking Spanish and French:

E6: I have a lot of, even my social activities I have. I had...**I spent a lot of time in the parties with the international trainees** so I would get to speak to them in either French or Spanish. That was very....That was what I did basically.

5.5.2.3. Language exchange

Apart from the rather traditional language enhancement methods mentioned above, 3 Ss have language exchange partners to work on the language they want to improve.

S4: That's what we really need in order to actually access a Spanish.Well she is an English too, so **we just give speeches to each other, interpret them, we practice and give each other feedback**.

S6: And for Chinese into English I have language partners and what I do is that I will **record my speeches or my interpretation and I will let them listen to it and I want them to point out where I sound strange**, not natural and how would they say it. Yeah that's my way.

S8: Two friends of mine and myself, we found language exchange partners in the language centre, and they can speak Chinese. That's a good way to practice so we just get together every Tuesday evening. And like **if I give out speech in English, and the British people will interpret into Chinese**. At the same time, **we will point out what is bad about my English, and this is both way**.

These three Ss have various language combinations, and the way they practice with language exchange partners are similar: either giving speeches in their mother tongues, practicing interpreting followed by feedback, or having their interpretation recorded in advance for their exchange partners to give feedback on.

5.5.3. Self-study for interpreting practice

5.5.3.1. Interpreting practice on one's own

Interpreting practice takes place in the interpreting classes, group practice sessions, and self-study hours. Over one third of the interpreters claim that they practice interpreting on their own. The practice materials range from used speeches from the classes and materials shared between peers.

S3 and S8 practice interpreting on their own with previously used class materials. S3 repeatedly goes over the speeches used in class, records her own interpretation and deletes the versions with which she is dissatisfied until she comes up with a satisfactory interpretation.

S3: Sometimes I go over speeches we had in class again and practice. .

R: How do you practice with yourself?

S3: I Um...mainly note-taking. Sometimes I interpret again and **I record myself**. And **then I listened to myself**. But I hate listening to myself. (both laugh) Because I felt like I was so terrible.(laugh) How can you speak like that?

R: And after you listening to yourself what would you do?

S3: **I would delete whatever.. Then I would do it again**. For like 50 seconds, I feel like I was too terrible I have to do it again. Then I will repeat. I will interpret again.

R: And listen to it again, then delete it? (laugh)

S3: Yes. Completely format the recording and after maybe um... many times. **Finally come up with like um... almost five, six versions**.

S8 finds that the class hours are not enough for every trainee to have sufficient time to practice, so self-practice with class materials becomes crucial as it is an alternative for trainees to consolidate what they have learnt in class. S8 tends to read through her speech notes from the class and does extra practice with the used materials:

S8: I read my speech notes from class. It's like after class, and in the evening you don't have anything to do, and you have **to review what you learnt today**. Because in classes you don't have enough time to review from the top to the end. So just when back home for yourself, read your notes and try to recite what did your listen this morning. **And try to interpret all through by yourself**.

To elaborate further on the idea of 'used class materials', the concept of 'recyclable' speeches in E3's comment sounds very useful for trainee interpreters. The exchanging of used speeches between trainees not only saves time in speech preparation, but also enlarges speech resources, making learning interpreting an ultimately sustainable process.

E3: So **we don't want to waste this speech**. So even this speech has little with the learning, we will keep this speech. And then, the other one will use this speech. For simultaneous one I think is very useful. Because for example, **my classmates will use mp3 to record her speech. And then I will listen to the mp3 and then interpret** without any recording. But I mean my, the other two friends, listened to my production, and they can judge. Just like a listener without the interference of the speech, you know what I mean. So they can say well, here you have lots of long pauses, or here, the expression is too weird, OK. So they are not really monitoring true languages. **Because that's their speech, so they already know what the speech is all about. I think they can comment on my production, and also very helpful**.

E3 was trained in the period 2001-2002, when the use of internet was not as common as nowadays. Her schoolmates though, who received training in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 both mention that the online speech sharing mechanism were there for fellow trainees to share speeches with their peers. In the year 2011-2012, there was a website for trainees to upload speeches of their own and to download others' speeches for practice; while fellow trainees in 2010-2011 shared one identical email account and saved speeches there as attachments so that all the trainees could have

free access to the speeches. Please refer to what S7 and G5 reported below for more details:

S7: **Then individually we record speeches and upload to a 4share the sites we can access other people's speeches and practice with those at home.** So I can do and I've really been given an access to the EU speech repository. So we can use EU speeches and practice with it.

G5: We have listened to... Actually our college who is an English person, **he has established a mail box to serve as a speech repository.** And **we can download the videos there and we will listen to that and I listened to that.** I make notes then...or do some SI.

Unsurprisingly, whilst Ss and Gs as current trainees and recent graduates rely heavily on new technology such as websites and email accounts as their platform to share practice materials, two Es who graduated 10 years ago mention that they practice interpreting on their own with newspaper and recorded tapes or videos:

E5: Something which I used to do and I still do now, was to practice sight translation for myself. I don't remember whether I mentioned that. I might **take a newspaper in French, and then tried and read the article aloud, but read it out in English.** Sort of doing a simultaneous interpretation of the news.

E7: Yes **we practiced simultaneous with tapes. At that time we still had tapes.** (laugh)

R: You practiced simultaneous with tapes? What kind of tapes?

E7: Well, speeches, either on radio...oh yes they did also videos in class from the parliaments, the UN, from the different councils and then when we were on our own, we were allowed to get into the laboratory, and we were allowed to practice with the tapes they have there.

The interpreter training programme only began in 2001, seemingly not so long ago, yet the advancement of technology has made a difference in learning methods, which is quite obvious among those interpreters who graduated early and those who trained in later years.

5.5.3.2. Note-taking practice

Beyond solo interpreting practice, four interpreters say they would spare some self-study time particularly for the mastery of note-taking:

S1: And I try to **find some useful symbols for myself for note-taking.**

S5: I tried sometime, it's quite effective actually, I find it's really helpful, such as when I was having problems with my note-taking, and **I really just find a peaceful afternoon, and I just started to have some review of all the speeches, and I just did several pieces of note taking again, and I found it's useful.** It's quite magical that I'm doing better. I'm actually better than in class, I just realise that maybe I'm more familiarised with the topic, maybe I'm more organised with my note taking.

G6: From the second semester I began to do some **generalising exercises of bullet points** because for the first thirty minutes of Today programme it contains some bullet points of the news and some brief introduction of the news which will be talked about in later programmes. So I will **try to take notes and try to generalise each news.**

E5: And at the same time I would **practice the symbols** a little bit to make sure that they stayed fresh.

R: How did you practice your symbols?

E5: Well, I had a little book that I used to, **I used to divide the most important symbols, one on a page and I just read through it whenever I had time.** And also I wrote all of the symbols onto a piece of paper and I stuck it from the bathroom, so I can look at my symbols.

S1 simply mentions that she tries to find useful symbols for herself, S5 relies on old speeches used in class to do more note-taking practices, G5 does generalisation exercises with news while polishing her note-taking skills at the same time, and E5, as a professional interpreter, said that she already had a notebook compiling the symbols she has and keeps familiarising herself with those symbols whenever she can.

5.5.4. Self-study for speech preparation

As stated before, speech delivery is an essential element of the interpreter training, consequently, a significant portion of trainees' self-study time is devoted to it. N4 and S3 record how trainees' speech preparation ability has improved over time due to the feedback from tutors:

N4: And I think at the very beginning we need to prepare speech, but at that time **some of us will just copy the speech on the internet. And we will be criticised by our tutors, saying they are not appropriate for practice.** That is not oral English, not suitable for the interpreting practice. **Later on we will know how to make up our own speeches with oral English, or I think some of them just write some key phrases or key words and they will just make a speech on the spot.**

E3: And for us, uh, trainees normally, I think we get the material from the internet. And the teachers ask us, I remember, the teachers ask us to write the speech by using those materials from the internet. **But don't copy the original version** because of, uh, otherwise nobody will understand what you are talking about. **The languages should be in real languages.** So we adopted it to be our speeches as well. Yes.

G6 gives a detailed account of how he usually prepares a speech by amalgamating his existing general knowledge, with new knowledge he acquires from the internet:

G6: I think I have two-layer system. **The first layer is my general knowledge** before I came to Leeds. **The second layer is that I will search the internet.** I think internet is a very helpful tool. The only thing you need to know is you should how to use this tool. Google is definitely very helpful. Just enter the keywords, you will find loads and loads of entries which you can click on it and find useful information. But I think you **have to be selective.** Every time we need to prepare speeches, usually for the first semester it's about three or four minutes. You cannot include all contents. You cannot be. So you have to be selective. Every time before I make a speech I will tell myself what kind of point or what area, **what specific area I need to cover.** Then I just find the relevant topics and I will not focus on one articles. I will focus on several articles and **link them to my knowledge, previous knowledge.** Then make a brand new speech. And I think that is very helpful. Because I think, based on my knowledge the aim of asking trainees to prepare their own speeches is not asking them to generalise what, the ideas of the existing articles, at the internet, or in journals or in magazines. **The aim is to ask trainees to link their knowledge, their older knowledge and new knowledge in order to have their own say.**

As for the most popular materials from which trainees do speech preparation, the BBC website and the *Economist* have been particularly mentioned by two interpreters:

N5: **I remembered preparing speeches from BBC news** with partners. At Leeds we needed to prepare materials on our own. So we did it mainly from BBC news for speeches in English.

E2: and I also bought **the *Economist* magazine**. I just **chose some articles which I liked and I rewrote it**. And I transferred them to be my speeches because sometimes I needed to be a speaker.

The advancement of new technology over time is not only reflected in the way that trainees share their speech materials, but also in the way that interpreters from different years prepared speeches. While internet connection may not always have been as prevalent as nowadays, E1 read newspapers for inspiration in making speeches, and it was impossible for E5 to copy and rewrite a speech from online so the ability to deliver improvised speeches became significant.

E1: Yeah. **I read the paper to prepare lots of the speeches**. I usually write probably two or three in English, and then a couple in Spanish. **It was most of the time papers, yeah. Now it's different now**. Now there are so much available. And then also now you know, I might just hear a quick something on the radio and I think, oh that's perfect for a speech, and I will just quickly write a speech about it. But now I become serious to write speeches that I...you know, you could give me two words and I can write a ten minutes speech based on the two words! And for example if I watch interesting documentary, or I watch any programme or TV or I hear someone tell me that...so now I take many different resources. But at that time I think it was mainly newspapers or factual information. So certain topics of the week that I didn't know much about, especially things about the EU and I didn't know much about it at the time, so I would go on Europe website or something like that, and take something very factual and turned it into a kind of informative speech.

E5: Uh, well, yeah, I try, of course I think it's different, because **we didn't have internet of the same way**, like listen to a radio. I didn't have a computer in my flat with internet. So I couldn't listen to the radio like that on the internet. I mean it really, we didn't really do that. It's amazing how much it has developed.

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so at that time you actually didn't have any internet connection at home.

E5: No, I had a computer. I lived in a hall of residence so there was a computer room there. If I could use the internet, I would use it to do that. As far as I can remember, we didn't use the computer with the help of the internet. No.

R: OK, so the way you practice is actually slightly different from the way we practice. We rely on computer and technology all the time.

E5: Yeah, we didn't. There wasn't a speech with help of the internet or some broadband. **So we just had to do it all alive, simultaneously**.

5.5.5. Time spent on self-study

In the last section on self-study, I would like to share what interpreters told me about the time they generally spent on self-study as a learner. Their responses demonstrate that despite different training years and the individual diversity in learning interpreting from what has been covered before, the time interpreters spent on interpreting-related self-study is more or less the same. On top of the approximately 15 hours interpreting class hours, S7 spends three to four hours a day on self-study, S3 spends four hours, and S4 spends four to five hours. Their predecessor, E6, who did the training 10 years back, reports a similar amount of time in self-study: 15 hours a week. E6 remarks that: 'even a lot of my recreational

activities are indirectly linked to interpreting'. Therefore, we can see that self-study takes up a significant amount of time for trainee interpreters.

5.6. Summary: Learning during training

When viewed individually, the narrative accounts may seem like random chunks of personal learning experiences. But when taken together, such random extracts of narrative depict a coherent picture on learning interpreting during training, with in-class learning, group practice and self-study interwoven to manifest situated learning practices within the interpreting context, which demonstrates how the interpreter training corresponds to the notion of learning for dual knowledge construction, and how actual learning activities are implemented to assist a trainee to become a practising interpreter throughout this process. Having understood how trainee interpreters learn during training, the next chapter, Chapter 6, will demonstrate how practising interpreters approach their professional learning in the interpreting market.

Chapter 6

Findings III: Learning at Work

6.1. Introduction

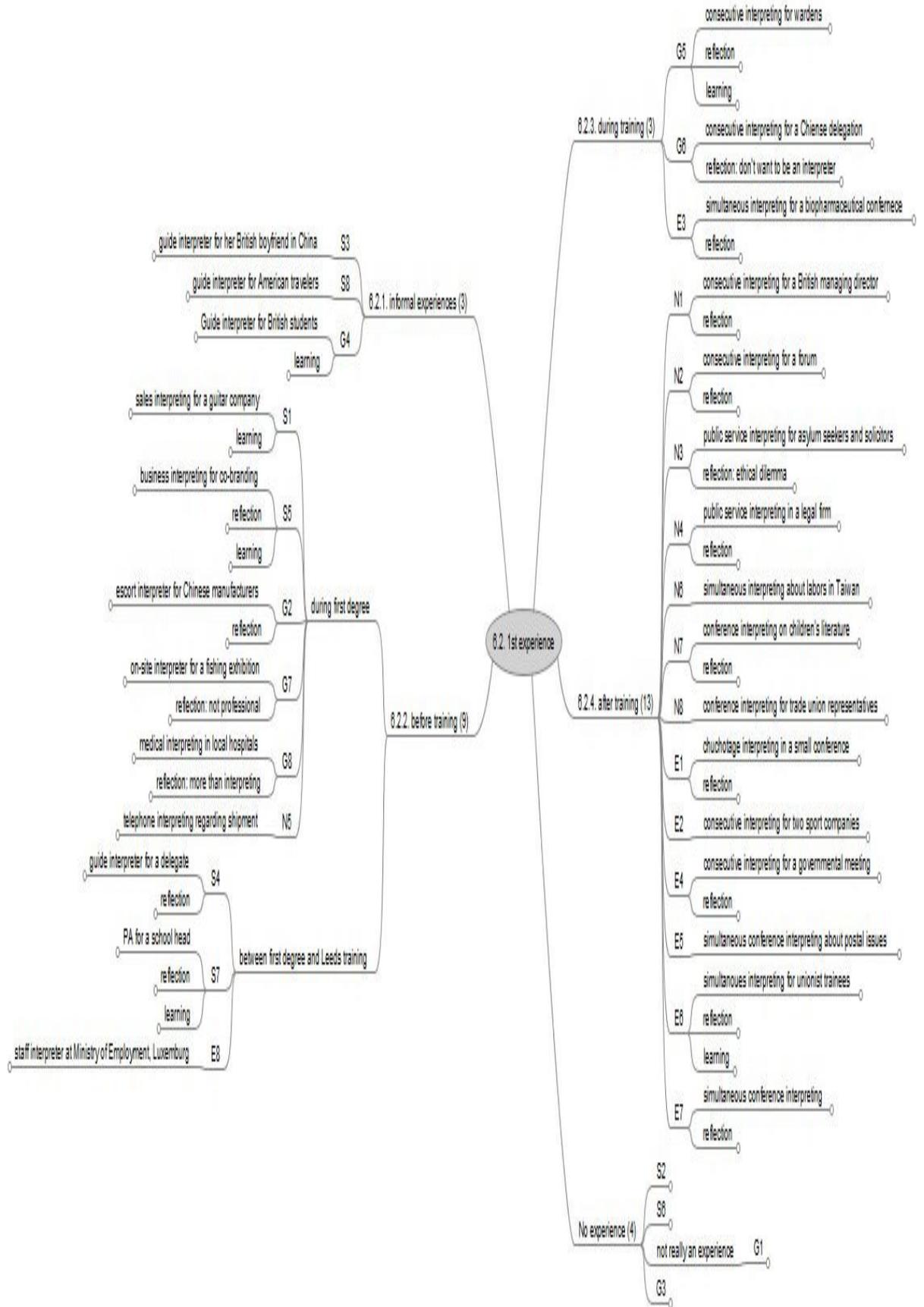
Narratives relating to personal and practical issues surrounding learning interpreting at work can demonstrate how practitioners adapt to their professional roles and develop the reflective stance that is crucial for competent practice. Chapter 6 will present findings regarding how practising interpreters learn at work. But prior to going into depth exploring practising interpreters learning at work, the first experiences that these interpreters had will be presented to reflect how the first attempts have an enduring effect on practising interpreters' professional lives.

6.2. First Experiences

Regarding the transition from trainee to practitioner, the significance of first assignments cannot be overstated. Therefore I asked my participants about their first experiences of working as an interpreter. My original assumption was that the majority of participants might have had their first assignment after training. However, the data indicate that only 13 interpreters had their first assignments after training. Nine interpreters had their first assignment either during their first degree or before training, while three interpreters were offered paid assignments during their training; as for trainee interpreters (Ss and Gs), four of them had had no interpreting experience of any kind at the time of interview, while another three had some informal quasi-interpreting experiences prior to training. The figure tells us that training is not prerequisite to entering the market as many (including myself) would imagine it to be, suggesting to me as a researcher that interpreting is still emergent as a profession. This is demonstrated by the absence of a screening mechanism to distinguish between untrained bilinguals and trained interpreters. This fact corresponds with the issues discussed in 1.1.2.: from an outsider's point of view, there are many interpreting service users who know nothing about the value of interpreter training and who tend to sacrifice quality to budget. This makes the interpreting job market chaotic while at the same time reducing the livelihood of trained interpreters. It ultimately results in trained novice interpreters having to spend much longer idling or waiting before being able to establish a network.

Another interesting observation derived from looking at the first interpreting experiences of my participants is that the majority of Ss and Gs (trainee interpreters) had their first experiences before they received interpreter training, while the majority of Ns and Es (practising interpreters) claim that their first experience took place after they finished training and formally entered the job market. The two groups of trainee interpreters came from the academic year 2011-2012 and 2010-2011, and the two groups of practising interpreters were recruited in two 5-year periods, 2006-2010 and 2001-2006. The data demonstrate a clear distinction; in the past two years, interpreting learners tend to have more pre-training interpreting experience compared with their seniors, who mainly completed the training and then entered the market. This suggests a phenomenon in which more and more language graduates in recent years are aware of the significance of pre-training interpreting experience, so they show more eagerness to gain experience before training.

In the following paragraphs, I am going to showcase some first interpreting experiences so as to reflect the diversity of their experiences, as well as discuss what kind of learning was derived from these first experiences. Firstly, there is a need to address how I differentiate between formal and informal experiences. I categorise those unpaid or voluntary services within the realm of interpreting as informal experiences, and treat those assignments which take place via formal employment, agency work, or paid fixed contract as formal experiences.



6.2.1. Informal interpreting experiences

The three interpreters who had had informal experiences were, coincidentally, all from China and their experiences were all as guide interpreters for non-Mandarin speaking travellers. The common factor in these three interpreters' early experience is that they were doing interpreting without knowing this would be their future career. Despite the fact that they had a limited understanding of what interpreting was all about at that point, some valuable insights about interpreting were gained from those informal sessions. In S3's example, as she interpreted between her British boyfriend and her Chinese family, she realised:

S3: **It's all about communication...** You cannot interpret word for word.

In G4's case, he was the voluntary guide for a couple of British students during their year abroad. He admits:

G4: **It gave me impression that to be an interpreter, you must know the culture.** And because the British students their way of thinking, their way of living impressed me at that time. They got drunk at night and went round... **I wouldn't be doing a good job if I could not understand their culture.**

Understanding the essence of interpreting as the facilitation of communication and realising the importance of appreciation of the service user's culture are two key principles for many practising interpreters. G4 and S3 understood this long before they came to undertake interpreter training.

6.2.2. First experience before training

Nine interpreters, including four Ss, three Gs, one N and one E, representing a good mixture from all groups, had undertaken paid assignments prior to training. Six of these experiences took place during their undergraduate studies as language students. They had their first experiences either through translation agencies, or through referral from their home university. After their first degree and prior to commencing training, three interpreters had been in formal employment in which their duties included interpreting. In whatever way these interpreters experienced their first attempts, they all had a rather positive impression of the work. S1 did sales interpreting for a guitar company, and **felt excited about helping people communicate**; S4 felt similarly when she was **able to facilitate communication** for a Kenyan lady in governmental meetings in Paraguay. S1 also appreciates that her first experience in the music industry allowed her to gain **access to specialised knowledge**. These features in interpreting assignments seem to be intertwined; in G8's interpreting experience for a local hospital, she realised that an interpreter sometimes **functions as a coordinator**, so language services are just a basic requirement among other duties. A coordinator inevitably needs to deal with difficult circumstances from time to time, which was made obvious in S7's

experience. S7 realised through one experience in particular that being an interpreter does not always simply entail tackling straight-forward language tasks; she **learnt coping strategies for controversial issues** when interpreting between the head of a school (in which she worked as a personal assistant) and some parents. She talks about one scenario where she needed to interpret for a divorced couple, while at the same time engage in conflict resolution:

S7: **But sometimes it would be something controversial**, like there was one boy who was struggling academically and his parents, uh, school was saying that he should take a like psychological test, since he had some sort of learning impediment, and his parents were divorced and hated each other. And one said that it was a good idea, the other said that they didn't want this test. So there was a big meeting with lots of parents and I had to interpret for the father who didn't speak English to sort of speed the process up. **Because only the mother could interpret otherwise, and the mother hated the father**, so they didn't chat with each other. **So I had to be, I was very tense and there were a lot of technical vocabulary related to the test that I didn't know.**

In many cases, these first experiences motivated interpreters to attend formal training. For G2 in particular, her very positive first attempt at interpreting between a Chinese manufacturer and some Western businessmen **strengthened her motivation to receive formal training** in order to become a competent interpreter. In contrast with G2, S5 realised that **training might benefit him by allowing him to acquire useful skills such as taking notes** for bullet points after he failed his first interpreting attempt with a company which specialised in home appliances. E8 on the other hand met someone who persuaded her to seek proper training, despite the fact that she had previously been working as a full-time staff interpreter for the Luxemburg government:

E8: I had my first interpreting job when I was 19; I was working for the Ministry of Employment in Luxembourg, and I was hired as an interpreter even though I had no training. And at this conference, there was another lady who was trained and it became very clear that **even though I spoke my languages well, I did not have the core skills required to be an interpreter as it would be expected at 19**. But it was a big eye opening for me, because this lady has been an interpreter at the European Court of Justice for 25 years. And she was a very experienced professional. And she said to me why don't you go and train at some stage, because **I was doing the job without knowing what I was doing. Breaking every rule in the interpreter's handbook.**

Glancing through their formal interpreting experiences before training, these interpreters' reflections indicate that, unlike those who had informal interpreting sessions with family and friends, they experienced the difficult aspects of being a practising interpreter, such as making tough decisions or making mistakes. On the other hand, these mixed feelings about a sense of accomplishment and the complicated nature of the interpreting tasks have proved to be incentives for some interpreters to pursue formal training in interpreting.

6.2.3. First experience during training

Three interpreters, G5, G6 and E3, report that they had their first interpreting work experience during training. G5 and G6 were referred by tutors to have one-off interpreting paid assignments. G5 was introduced to help a female British prison warden to explain the jail's rules and regulations to Chinese-speaking inmates. She admits that she made a serious mistake in her first experience, for which she still feels embarrassed:

G5: Sometimes when I listened to something I couldn't understand and I clarify to that person one time. I clarify for that. **But I feel very embarrassed that I.. that I couldn't understand at that time so I just make it up.** But after that I think it's not very good to do that.

Her colleague G6, similarly referred by his tutor to help a delegation coming from China to interpret academic training sessions, had done a comparatively satisfactory job. However, G6 refers to his first experience as a reminder for himself not to be an interpreter in the future because he simply realised that he did not have passion in interpreting from the first attempt:

G6: So when I have the job, when I am doing my job, when I am meeting, **when I met some difficulties I will not motivate or encourage myself to do this perfectly, to manage it properly. I will always try to think that whether I have some alternatives.** And the thing is I do have many alternatives. **So it reinforced my decision not to become a professional interpreter in the near future.**

E3 is another interpreter whose first experience took place during her training. She was also referred by a tutor, to team up with tutor X for a biopharmaceutical conference. According to what she recalled, good preparation and support from tutor X ensured that experience was a pleasant, rather than nerve-wracking, one:

E3: **At that time at first, we were really worried and we prepared a long time before the meeting,** with colleague A I mean. Tutor X of course offered a lot of help with our preparation. And luckily, for this task, the organiser gave us the ppt and part of their script. So we can prepare it very well before the meeting. And of course **tutor X gave us the task, or the part which is easier,** and tutor X took the most difficult, the most challenging part, which is the Q&A session. So that was that kind of arrangements. But we three take turns. And I think, performance, I think it's satisfactory. It's satisfactory, yes. There is no unpleasant things, according to what I remembered. Because really those tasks are well-prepared, well-rehearsed by me and colleague A so there won't be anything wrong with it.

Compared with their fellow interpreters, G5, G6 and E3 are a small minority who were able to have their first paid assignments during training. Nevertheless, their impressions concerning first experiences differ hugely from one another. It is probable that the timing of their first experiences did affect the result— G5 and G6 had their first experience in the middle of training, while E3 received her task towards the end of her training, when her interpreting skills had matured compared with those of G5 and G6. Another factor might be the comprehensive preparation that E3 made before her first experience. It seems that tutor X took on the challenging parts of that particular assignment, so that E3 and her colleague A were

able to enjoy the satisfactory results. If we are to compare the three first experiences during training, there are two implications: if trainees intended to have their first real life interpreting experience during training, the later the first experience comes, the better; and if the first experience can be led by an experienced practitioner, this may help to facilitate the experience.

6.2.4. First experience after training

13 interpreters had their first interpreting experience after training, thus representing the majority. These interpreters obtained their first assignment through translation agencies with which they registered after graduation, through personal contacts, or formal employment. Apart from unusual cases like those of E1 and E2 who felt their first experiences were, respectively, either an absolute failure or a complete success, most interpreters report feeling ‘extremely nervous’ (N1; N2), ‘too nervous to concentrate’ (E4) or ‘a daunting experience’ (N7) though most of them ended up receiving positive feedback.

As well as nervousness, these interpreters had opportunities to experience the highs and lows of the interpreting profession. Some interpreters were lucky enough to work with very helpful experienced colleagues, who volunteered to cover them whenever needed. N1 worked at a meeting about a joint venture between China and the UK, and her manager covered her for ‘challenging bits’ about the specialised terminology in the construction industry. N6 struggled to interpret from a heavy Phillipino accent in English in her first try; her interpreting partner, whose first language was English, was kind enough to offer help whenever she was struggling. E4 collaborated with tutor X from training in her first assignment. She was originally too nervous to concentrate on the interpreting task, but tutor X **‘would take note at the same time to make sure that no important information is missed’**. Several years have already passed and E4 has now developed into a fully-fledged interpreter, but she is still very grateful for the support that tutor X offered as an experienced colleague.

In contrast to the warm support that the above-mentioned interpreters received, N3 and N4 suffered from the difficulties that a novice interpreter might typically face. They graduated in the same year, and had their first assignments at about the same time, both with Chinese asylum seekers in the UK. N3 felt that the Chinese asylum seekers fabricated stories in order to remain in the country; this presented a professional dilemma for her to tackle as she constantly questioned the trustworthiness of the stories: if she interpreted faithfully, she was going against her conscience as a Chinese:

N3: Generally we do, I do the same type of thing all the time, interpreting for asylum seekers, um, **help them to make a case which in most of time it's not genuine. I feel very frustrated cause it's um, I think it's against my conscience.**

R: How do you know that it's not genuine?

N3: Oh, it's just very obvious, I mean if you have any knowledge, if you have lived in China, you know what they say is not true. **You know it's not true. But there is no way you can change it.**

N4 could not cope with the ever-changing nature of interpreting practices. Here is how she recalled the 'frustrating' first experience:

N4: But being an interpreter for them, I think that time I feel **it's a quite challenging job to me.** Because every day's topic will be new and your client will be another one because they are from different corners of the world. **They got different accents and they got different requirements to you and they have different expectations to you.** So every time it is just frustrated and disappointed to yourself because no one will say you are good. There is no continuousness. They would change everything, your clients will change every day. I feel so...frustrated. I think it is too hard to me. I cannot stay there anymore and **every day when I wake up, I say, 'Oh, another disaster, another day for disasters.'**

Whether these interpreters had received help from senior colleagues or had experienced frustrations as novices, they learnt new lessons which training alone simply could not offer. The following paragraphs will demonstrate three types of learning from first experiences:

(1) The necessity of preparation

E4 admits that she did not prepare at all for her first assignment for a high-level governmental meeting, something she still regrets:

E4: I didn't prepare at all. I did nothing. Because when I first started I didn't have any experience in interpreting, so **I thought it would be fine.** We were being trained for years professionally trained and I should be OK. So stupid. **Nowadays I probably can do it without preparation. But in those days I definitely need it.** I wasn't happy about my performance at all. No preparation is to blame.

(2) Working with experienced colleagues

The interpreting market for E7 proved difficult to enter after graduation. E7 mentioned how difficult and hostile it is for novices to enter the market in her home country, where interpreting tutors might even consider students as competitors. But E7 taught herself how to work with an experienced colleague without revealing that it was her first time:

E7: And I just got there, in the booth, with very experienced colleague. **I did not tell her that this was my first assignment.** So that's the typical Austrian way of doing it. **You just need to jump into the cold water and you need not tell anybody that it is your first time—which was quite difficult, but I survived.**

(3) The reality of the English booth in international organisations

The first experiences N8 and E6 are fairly unique: both of them are English A interpreters who were recruited by international organisations as staff interpreters immediately after graduation: N8 passed the EU accreditation test and E6 was accredited by the UN competitive language examination. However, their first try with international organisations turned out to be somewhat unusual. N8 was still paid without opening her mouth for interpreting during her first conference, and E6 suffered long waiting hours in the English booth. They both learnt that their respective experiences are actually the norm in international organisations:

N8: It was quite a nice meeting to begin with. It was a meeting of trade union representatives. And they were discussing sort of recognition of professional qualifications, which is a subject that yeah, you kind of understand, because it's something that interests you, yeah, we all want to move abroad, and we all want our qualifications to be recognised, that sort of thing. So it's quite, it was a subject that it's quite easy to grasp, to get your head around. It wasn't fisheries, for example, to start with. And I was, obviously **I was particularly nervous**, that was the very first of my day, I went in and I had prepared, and I had all the glossaries—I had written them all down, I had vocab lists and everything. And then I went in. And there were three of us working in the booth that day. And for some reason, **all these trade union representatives; they obviously didn't know how things work with the mission. And they just all spoke in English!** And they spoke in English for about an hour. And then, well, we don't do anything in English. But nobody had their headphones on either, so they weren't actually using the other booths, you know, just sort of I don't know, seven different booths: the German interpreter, the Spanish interpreter, the Italians, French, Dutch, bla-bla-blah... And they weren't even working because nobody had their headphones on. They obviously wanted all these people who were sitting around the room, that's a bit odd! **They didn't really know that they could speak in their own languages. It was very bizarre situation.** So in the end, the interpretation for that meeting was cancelled. My colleague was the head of the interpreting team, and she said, she went in the room and she said, "Do you realise that we are here, you can speak your language if you want?" And the chairperson said, "Oh, oh we have interpreters! Oh Ok. Um, do you want us to speak other languages or do you want us to continue to use English? Or we just continue in English." Oh that's fine. Yeah. So that was my first ever day I was sent down to the meeting.

E6: And the bad thing about working in the English booth is that...you don't just have...because most conference taken place in English, you spent a lot of the conference not working and so you just don't have that baptism of fire that the other booth do. Other booth they got into the booth and they just started work and eventually they just realised that they have to keep working. **While in the English booth you can go several days without even opening your mouth.** So the time...**it's the suspense that kills you. Just waiting the time for someone who is going to speak makes you more nerve-alerting.** And that was exactly what I experienced in my first day of work in the UN.

To summarise, for the transition from trainee to practitioner, first interpreting experiences, according to the impression of the interpreters, played a crucial role which has a lasting influence on later interpreting practice. In terms of time, for those who had their first interpreting experience before training, these experiences motivated them to attend further training; for those who had their first experience during training, this experience enabled them to apply what they had learnt on the course to their practice, and for the majority of interpreters who only had their first experiences after training, they touched upon real life professional issues in

interpreting practice, such as working with more experienced colleagues, and confronting ethical dilemmas between interpreting the truth or following one's conscience. As reflected in their narratives, their first experiences have an impact on their professional lives in the long run.

6.3. Learning at Work



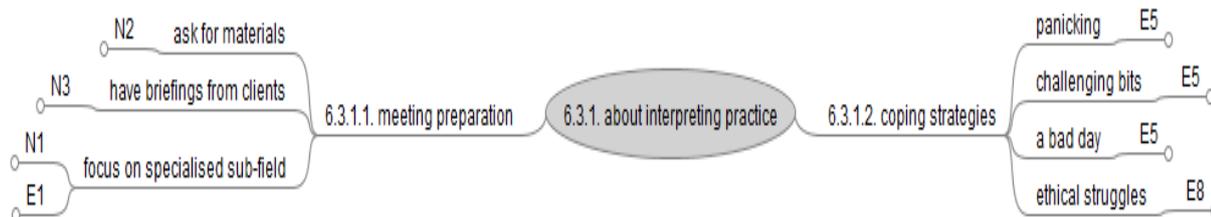
In the following section, emphasis will be placed on learning aspects that practising interpreters recollected from work. Data suggest that interpreters' professional growth and their authentic learning, unlike 'learning during training', do not follow an orderly, hierarchical progression. Rather, they are embedded in contexts—the particular people, places, artefacts, and cultures of their interpreting practice. Compared with 'learning during training' described by my participants, the answers to how they learn interpreting at work are more sporadic and spontaneous, corresponding with the nature of situated learning experiences. Therefore, no groupings can be generated by quantitative methods. Regarding learning at work, personal experiences prove so diverse that the answers do not feed into pre-arranged categories. However, the learning issues reported by practising interpreters still fall under three major themes: professional behaviour regarding interpreting practices, interpersonal skills in working with people, and a better understanding of the interpreting profession. Therefore, I am going to present the data according to these three themes in the following paragraphs.

One more issue to be addressed here pertains to the interpreting labour markets and how these determine interpreters' learning experiences in the workplace. Since work experiences are the key to retrieving learning themes at work, only Ns and Es (practising interpreters) are entitled to share their thoughts. Their thoughts, though, do vary according to the interpreting market within which they work; please refer to Figure 5 in 3.5.1.4. for reference while reading Chapters 6 and 7. Theoretically speaking, since the participants in this study fall into four interpreting labour markets, I expected to hear about four diverse experiences of learning in work as an

interpreter. However, the gap between the private market (market A) and international organisations (market D) is particularly great, as will be seen from data in the coming paragraphs. This might be due to the fact that the majority of interpreters have to work freelance in the private market to start with, even if they choose to be a freelancer in the public sector (market B) or a staff interpreter in private institutions (market C), they can still move freely back to market A to undertake freelancing assignments from time to time. In fact, as data analysis progressed, I realised that there are actually two obvious differences to be presented under learning at work: market A vs. market D.

6.3.1. Learning about interpreting practice

Through work experiences, practising interpreters accumulate necessary knowledge and skills to improve all aspects of their interpreting performance. Acquired knowledge and skills can be roughly divided into two aspects: meeting preparation before the interpreting assignment and coping strategies during the actual interpreting practices.



6.3.1.1. Meeting preparation

As has been discussed in Chapter 5, interpreter training requires trainees to expand on their background knowledge, for example when they do research on the topic of the week and prepare speeches for use in class. In the second half of the training, mock conferences take place to simulate overall meeting preparation. But when working in the real world as an interpreter, the preparation required is not quite the same. N2 points out the major difference in meeting preparation as a practising interpreter: it is necessary to ask for preparation materials from the client.

N2: When we were students, we didn't really prepare for an interpreting assignment.

R: We have a mock conference, we would do some preparation.

N2: Oh, yes. Of course different. Because like **when you are doing in the real world, you would get the prepared some documents before, and you would get some presentation or sometimes introduction of the speaker, but sometimes very rarely we would have the prepared speeches.**

R: So you have more materials to start from, but as a student you have nothing.

N2: Yeah, sure.

R: That would be easier if you have something beforehand. Would it be easier?

N2: Surely that would be easier, but there will be more time you have nothing. Nothing before in hand, and then you have to do the interpreting without prepared documents.

Or sometimes you will get the documents or get the presentation like 5 or 10 minutes, or half an hour before the conference starts or before the forum starts.

So you don't have enough time to prepare. All you can do is just have a very quick look, and then you just start the job.

N2's statement reflects that, although it is a norm to ask clients for materials in advance, it is very likely that practising interpreters will only have access to materials at a very late stage, which leaves almost no time for interpreters to familiarise themselves with the materials. In addition to asking for meeting materials, N3 indicates that some clients might give interpreters briefings in advance. She also gives an example on what to do when no briefing from the client is received:

N3: **Some of the customer who are really responsible, they would ask you to come earlier, they will teach you, walk you through everything**, and you know, give you, um, a briefing about what they want, and what kind of particular information they are looking into, um, but some, I think the big big, like a bank, Dutch Bank I once worked with a Dutch Bank as well...

R: Dutch Bank?

N3: Yeah, the bank, yeah the bank has someone over here to, um, do interviews with investors, I don't think they care at all. So they show up late and they, uh, they didn't show up late, sorry. But they, the, um, people, my client, the client didn't even want to talk to me. So I think, I wanted to know what he wants, I wanted to understand their, um, expectations, but he didn't want to talk to me at all. So I realised probably he's really tense or under a lot pressure, I just, I shut up, don't bother him.

R: And what did you do? What can you do if that's the case?

N3: Well, if that's the case, I will just generally look, to look up some vocabs, the very basic vocabs, for example, if I know I work for Dutch Bank, it must be about some financing thing, um, investment, merging, acquire, so I **just look some of the very basic vocabs, maybe practice a few numbers**.

Both N2 and N3's experiences show that, although it is possible for interpreters to receive some preparatory materials or briefings prior to the meeting, preparation work is still indispensable. N1 is an in-house interpreter at an engineering company, and her tip for on-the-job preparation work is to focus on the specific sub-field:

N1: Before the interpreting, I did preparation every time. That's because I knew what they would talk about for the meeting so I just **prepared for this specific sub-field for the particular meeting not for the whole engineering field**.

What N1 refers to as a 'specific sub-field' is made clearer by the examples given by E1 below. As an experienced interpreter and an interpreter trainer, E1 states that she does not worry about interpreting skills anymore. But she still makes a lot of effort preparing specific terminology or specialised knowledge.

E1: Or you say specific things very much, not about the skill itself, but more about, you know, I need to know more about this or **I should have known this person's name**, or I should have, uh, go and **find out the specific terminology**. I think you are right about more specific knowledge. And it's not about the skills, it's more about the whole thing.

R: The task?

E1: Yeah. Yeah. I don't worry about my analytical skills, I don't worry about my presentation skills, I don't worry about my memory skills, I don't worry about my note-taking skills, those are things I don't worry about anymore.

R: What would you worry about then?

E1: It's like I've said, **more specific terminology, specific knowledge, maybe specific accents, maybe specifically, if something is very specialised or dense, or maybe even certain speaker styles**. You know when you start a conference, and you really think that oh this speaker is really difficult. And you have to think about how am I

going to deal with them as they keep talking and I have to keep interpreting...so things like that. You know, much **much more targeted**.

In short, meeting preparation work for trainees and practitioners is generally identical. Practising interpreters might be able to request meeting documents or gain a basic understanding from clients beforehand, but it is likely they will have to do interpreting without prior briefing. In this case, self-study on the specific field for the particular meeting is necessary.

6.3.1.2. Coping strategies

E5 and E8 have both worked as staff interpreters in international organisations for a long time, and offer some coping strategies when asked about what they have learnt at work over the years. In E5's opinion, both novice and experienced interpreters panic regardless of how experienced they are. E5 explains the cause of panicking, and provides her own coping strategy:

E5: For panicking, maybe you just stop for sometimes and just take a deep breath, and then sit as if you are going to miss out some of the information, because lots of panic, often **the panic comes from some of the speaker was speaking too quickly** from my experience. If somebody speaks well, then I can generally manage. If the delegates speak clearly and appropriately, not read a text directly, it's usually OK. But the problem tends to come, if somebody is speaking too fast, you just can't keep up and it's just too fast for you. And now I have children, I tend to be tired and my brain is slow as well. I have trouble keeping up, so this was really bad, I just have to say and **I try to say to myself, just stop, just leave that sentence and forget it, because when you, when it, you start to panic, you start to speak too fast, and I just start stammering**, like uh, uh, uh, and I just can't get the words out properly. Well, exactly, **I try to keep my voice very calm and maybe to leave out the sentences completely** and just say right. **Start over again, have a tiny break to get your mind come again. And that's what I try to do.**

Interpreters are also very likely to panic when they are faced with certain challenges. To confront these, E5's solution is to pay extra attention to understanding:

E5: The meeting is difficult and I would just listen to it more, because there are times you don't listen to the whole meeting, sometimes you go out for some break. **If it's really difficult, I will try to make sure that I keep listening, and start read the document more carefully and concentrate even on it for half an hour.**

Possibly the worst scenario that an experienced interpreter could find themselves in is when panic has been caused by a great deal of challenging content, and the condition of the interpreter is particularly poor. E5 refers to this kind of situation as 'having a bad day', and she talks about one of her bad days and her coping strategies for dealing with them:

E5: I had a very bad day very recently, it just goes to show, you could always, it can never really go, and you can always have a bad day. Just last autumn, I had a bad day. It was a summit in EU, Brazil summit. So the Brazilian president and the minister were all here. And I don't usually do meetings at a high level like that. And of course the Brazilian speaks Portuguese, which is my weakest language of the three. And they had not planned for me to do it. But they rang me on the morning of the summit and said, "It has already started. Can you rush in to work? Come and do it." So I haven't prepared and it has already started. And it was the president and the EU president as well, and all the main people from the EU. And so I had to rush in and it was a kind of mobile booth and they were in a dining room, where they were to get to my booth. I couldn't just go in the back and carry on the way we usually do, so I had to rush in very

quickly and it was the day I was moving house. So there were lots of boxes and I couldn't take a dictionary with me, as we were trying to pack boxes. I rushed in first thing in the morning without preparation time and no warning. I go through the room and rush in a panic, and then try to do the work. It has already started. I couldn't really listen to the context. Usually we try to listen to the beginning of a meeting to get the ideas of what it is about. And the Brazilian Portuguese is just different from Portuguese, so I am not used to it and it was terrible. (Laugh) It was just awful! That was the worst day ever! And that was just last October.

R: And did you still ask for help then?

E5: No, because there I couldn't. I really couldn't, because there was, I was, actually it was the president's own interpreter who came with her. That was in a real situation. Because she brought her own interpreter and said, "We don't need interpreters. We want our own interpreters, but she only had one and the team had to be made up of two. And her interpreter said that, he actually said, "I am not going to do it the whole morning on my own. I can't." So the EU had to call me, had to call in an interpreter to complete the team. Because the president insisted on her own interpreter, but she only brought one. So that's why they have to call me. But the meeting has already started and he has already been working for, I didn't know how long, maybe 45 minutes.

R: On his own?

E5: Oh his own. So I had to, I had to work. I couldn't expect him to carry on it any longer. And no, I could, I asked him, you know, what are they talking about, and I asked him a few things like that. But I couldn't ask him to do the work for me. Because he has already done a lot on his own.

R: Right. When you found struggling, apart from asking for help, is there anything that you can do on your own to make things work better?

E5: In that meeting, maybe not so much. It was completed, it only lasted for an hour and it stopped. So on the morning, that was, the only solution would be the same as before, **to try and really slow down and really keep distance between myself and the speaker, because I couldn't really understand all of it.** So what, ideally, what I should have done is to really slow down and to just miss out more to get nice sentences of what I could understand. But in that situation, I didn't really manage to control the message, the whole situation is quite unusual. And I, and I, I spent too much and I was trying to say everything. What I, what I used didn't make much sense, because I couldn't really understand them. So I think the only thing, **you just have to always keep working on this thing of holding back, taking a breath, and leaving out information, rather than trying to say too much, and it doesn't make sense in the end.** But I didn't manage to do it. So I did panic a bit and I spent too, and the way I said was not very elegant and not very correct really. So I didn't know, I can't, **you have to control the stress, even more try not to panic anymore. But I couldn't navigate everything and I didn't find that solution.** . .

Even as an interpreter with years of experience, E5 still acknowledges that there are highs and lows in her professional practice and the coping strategies, though seemingly simple and straightforward, can be divided into three stages: to calm down, to try to understand, and to carry on with the task.

Apart from the coping strategies proposed by E5, E8 shares her experiences of dealing with ethical dilemmas, when her identity as a human being and her professional role as an interpreter conflict with each other. This is well expressed by Mason: 'interpreters are not merely fulfilling a normative role, that of automatically and neutrally representing another's talk, but also reflecting and representing their own selves' (2004: 89). E8's story is worth quoting at length, since it demonstrates in a fascinating way how she strove to strike a balance between following her professional code of conduct, and meeting the expectations of the parties involved:

E8: I had one incident, it's a long time ago now when I was interpreting for the police and it was a lady who was trying to commit suicide and **I've started off interpreting**

for the police completely faithfully, as in I was following what they were saying, and this lady obviously was extremely distressed and they said to me "we really don't want a force her to get down from this ledge." She was trying to jump off to a building because then we would have to section her and obviously that brings about infringement of her rights and of her personal freedoms and I, in the end, **I stopped interpreting what the policeman said and just engaged with her as a person and that for me whenever I think about ethics I think of that story.** Because I think every interpreting assignment particularly PSI assignments like that make it very important that you take it that you don't just go by the handbook or by the rulebook because I, yes, **I disregarded what he said and I pretended to be the woman's daughter which she thought that I was her daughter and I was interpreting the policeman she ignored me but when I then just called her Mum and said "Please, don't just leave us" then she got down and went with the police.** But I think, yeah, that for me was a very profound moment and I was very upset by that whole process because it took me, I mean I spoke to her over a period of about two hours and I was interpreting, interpreting, interpreting, interpreting and then that point when I thought "this just isn't right, this isn't working" **so an awareness that I couldn't just be the spokesperson I, XXX, had to jump in.** And that was, it took me a lot to somehow get to grips with at the time and to make that decision because I didn't take it lightly and also afterwards to think "ok, we say that we interpret faithfully what we hear" and when is it ok not to? And was that ok not to? Was that the right thing to do?

R: Yeah, a lot of ethical struggles?

E8: Well, the real world, that's the thing, **the real world isn't a classroom situation, the real world is something like that; a woman who's profoundly distressed who feels that her life is not worth living and a policeman is just doing his job and you're doing liaison between the two of them.** So bi-directionally.

R: Did you inform the policeman that you need some time to calm this woman down and you will detach yourself as an interpreter and jump in as a person?

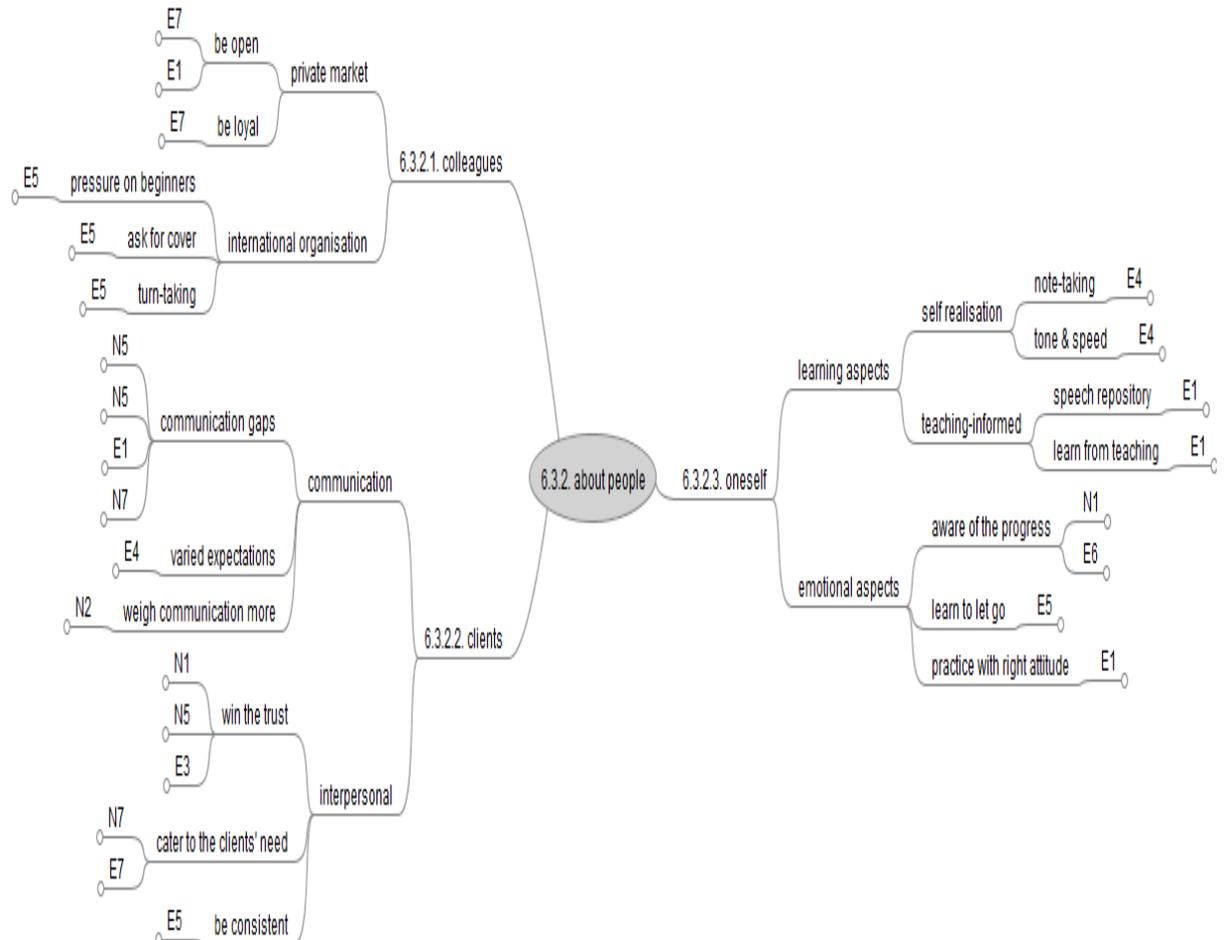
E8: No I told him afterwards. **I did it and I told them afterwards and they thanked me and just said "You did the right thing"** and were just happy that I'd done my job but, um, I took the decision and did that; I impersonated this woman's daughter and afterwards...yes, I pretended to be her daughter. I said "Mum" because she thought I was the daughter she talked to me all the time as if I was the daughter and **she called me "Carolina" and I, in the end, I just said "Mum, it's me, Carolina" and then she started listening to me.**

Over time, scholars have striven to develop a theoretical norm of interpreting and translation. The norm can refer to 'models' for Shlesinger (1989) and Harris (1990). However, despite the breadth and depth of interpreting norms, the ethical dilemmas encountered by practising interpreters can never be explained by norms and regulations. In E8's story, what she did at the very beginning was exactly in line with what she had learnt on her interpreter training: to interpret the speakers' original speech. The speakers in her case were the policemen on duty, whose goal was to rescue a woman attempting to committing suicide. E8 followed the 'norm' in interpreting, yet realised that this was not going to prevent the suicide. After struggling for a period of time, E8 realised that she could not simply be a spokesperson for the police, and that she had to take the initiative. Consequently, she moved beyond her role as an interpreter, and spoke as the daughter of the woman, just to gain her trust. She did this with the awareness that she might break the work ethics for professional interpreters, but as a human being she acted on her empathy for the woman. Finally, the woman was rescued, and the police thanked her for her decision. Her story suggests that training and so-called professional ethics are merely points of reference— rules in certain circumstances can be broken, or in fact

should be broken according to the judgment of professional interpreters. Since in such contexts the work of interpreters has a great deal to do with being human, it is justifiable to allow room for flexibility regarding the norms. E8's story clearly demonstrates that the role of the interpreter varies according to different interest groups or requirements. Hence the related coping strategies ought to involve a degree of flexibility, at the discretion of the interpreter under the specific work conditions.

6.3.2. Learning about people

If learning in the classroom, based on what I have gathered from the narrative data, is regarded as the core stage of learning for trainee interpreters, learning about people constitutes the major theme of learning at work for practising interpreters. Learning about people can be divided into three major sources: learning from colleagues, learning from clients, and learning from oneself. Practising interpreters share numerous personal stories to illustrate what they have learnt about people. These personal stories demonstrate an obvious growing awareness of personal and emotional connections with the wider world together with an emerging sense of professional responsibility, which can never be gained from classroom settings.



6.3.2.1. Learning from colleagues

The main contributors to this part are two Es who have worked in totally different markets throughout their professional lives: E7 went into the private market after training and is now the owner of an interpreting and translation agency, while E5 was recruited by the EU as a staff interpreter. Their descriptions of learning from colleagues therefore represent two views on features for the private market (market A) and international organisations (market D). Originally I assumed the general rules for interpreters to work with colleagues were more or less the same, but the interview data from the two Es proved me wrong—there are variations in how interpreters learn and adapt, depending on which market they are in.

6.3.2.1.1. In the private market

E7 developed from being a freelancer in the private market to being the owner of an established T/I company, and has much to share regarding the rules for working with colleagues in the private market. As distinct from other professions, in the interpreting world it is very common to work with a brand new team with each new assignment. Therefore, the ability to learn and adapt is highly prized, especially for freelancers in the private market. Three principles—being open, cooperative, loyal are offered by E7 based on her experiences working in the private market. For E7, working with others guarantees a fascinating opportunity to learn through observing how people work:

E7: You can learn everything. Learning interpreting skills, also what to behave and what not to behave, which is also very important. If you are watching people, or your colleagues, and you make efforts yourself, if this kind of behaviour is what you like, to be or to adapt, or if this kind of behaviour is absolutely not what you want to be...so you can learn everything. What they are doing, what they are saying, how they are interpreting, how they are preparing, how you work in a group or in a team...**there are different ways of working in a team. So you can learn in every aspect.** You learn all of it. First of all, listening to speakers, growing with the challenges that every speaker can be for you, listening to other interpreters, working with different people...so **you always have somebody else in the booth where you can learn from, and being open to learn. I mean, just accept that other people do something differently.**

She was not able to articulate what she has learnt in concrete terms, but ‘be open to learn’ is the principle that she maintains as the most important. In the paragraph below, she describes how she observed an EU interpreter adopting a slightly different interpreting style when translating into their mother tongue. It may be that only practising interpreters would notice nuances in individual interpreting styles; little work has been done so far on how interpreting styles differ when interpreting into the interpreter’s mother tongue. What E7 indicates below might serve as a starting point for a related study.

E7: Once I worked in Brussels with the EU interpreter which I had never done before. And since he was only working in his mother tongue, he had a different style I cannot tell. Because in the private market, I usually work into English. And he only worked into his mother tongue, he had a different style of interpreting and also different

style because he worked for the EU..... And I just listened to him, the way he speaks, the way he interprets, and you can learn from everybody. There is no particular story. It's just that you, **if you listen to your peers and if you want to learn, then you can learn from everyone.**

While E7 appreciates all aspects of learning from colleagues, she stresses that a practising interpreter should always be loyal to colleagues:

E7: One thing I just mentioned today to my colleague is, that **if you are working for a colleague, that you need to be loyal**, which means **if he is behaving nicely to you, you need to be loyal that you don't give your contact detail to the customer.**

Lay-people might first need to gain an understanding of the freelance interpreting market. A recently graduated interpreter might spend years waiting and exploring, before a network with regular clients can be established. This process can be extremely time and energy-consuming, and sometimes demoralising. But there is a hidden ethical rule in the interpreting world that interpreters should be loyal to the institution to which he or she belongs; if the interpreter is dispatched by an agency, the interpreter should not leave their contact information with the client after the assignment so that the client might have direct access to the interpreter next time. Likewise, if an interpreter is referred by a colleague to interpret for a meeting, leaving contact information with the client might result in direct contact between the client and the referred interpreter in the future, which would constitute a threat to the colleague. Of all the participants, E7 is the only one who runs her own T/I agency, thus she pays extra attention to the hidden ethical rules for interpreters in the private market.

6.3.2.1.2. In the international organisation

Since staff in international organisations (market D), undergo a similar recruitment process and have fixed salaries (although dependent on seniority), there is not such an issue surrounding loyalty. But hidden rules for staff interpreters still exist. As an EU staff interpreter, E5 shares three points: firstly, she declares that there is pressure on novices in large international organisations, since experienced interpreters might take advantage of the concerns and self-doubt of novices. E5 had a personal experience with an experienced colleague, as conveyed in the anecdote below. She states that having some courage is necessary for novices.

E5: Sometimes there are complaints from all those people. **Sometimes your colleagues, there are times at the beginning, when there are two colleagues and they are quite nasty to the beginner** that can happen. When in the year of the beginning, they are really dare to say anything because you think what I know they are talking about, they are right and I'm wrong.

R: Do you have any examples as of how colleagues speak nasty?

E5: Well, there was one particular man, who was quite often, he was horrible to everybody, not just to me. He, at the beginning, there was a day when I was having some trouble and wasn't doing very well. Then **he put his head in his hands and just shook his head and looking as if he was in misery**. That was not very good, because the people in the room can see through the window that he has got his head in his hands. **But he said to me, "You did very well, did you?" But I just, I didn't do very well.** Then after a couple of years, he tends to always be a bit horrible and there was one time,

I said: "What do you mean? I am not very good. What do you mean?" And I said I was quite gentle. I said: "You know, why, what do you mean?" It wasn't very good. And he was very, he said: "No, no, no, I didn't mean anything. Don't worry! Don't worry!" And since that day, he has been much nicer. I think sometimes you just need a bit of courage. As nowadays, I don't have that courage and I'm a quite shy person anyway, but sometimes saying it to people in a quite nice way.

Another point for staff interpreters in large organisations is that it is not acceptable to ask colleagues to cover. E5 explains that in the private market, it is normal for beginners to ask for cover; and it is justifiable for an experienced interpreter to offer help. But when working in a large institution such as the EU, it is very rare for beginners to ask for cover. In E5's experience, she was offered help by a senior colleague voluntarily, but she understood that it was not appropriate to ask for help from colleagues when interpreting for a large institution.

E5: Very occasionally at the beginning, some beginners might say to their colleagues, "oh, can you take over? I can't do it." But otherwise you can't do that and I can't really do that anymore. A beginner would do it better except, a beginner would say to their colleagues, "you help me and I, I, I'm struggling" **But usually it doesn't happen.** It's quite rare that you have to help a colleague who was in trouble. **It's quite rare to ask, it's quite rare to offer, and it's quite rare to have to do it.** It doesn't happen very often. There was one day when I newly started, I was really struggling and he said to me, "why don't we do fifteen minutes and fifteen minutes instead of half an hour and half an hour" Usually it was half an hour and he said while you try to do fifteen minutes, because it was very difficult for you to carry on for half an hour, so not one time that I was talking yes. You can't ask for help too much, because obviously your colleague, **the reason you do half an hour is because that's the amount of time you can concentrate on, so you can't ask your colleague to do much for you.**

However, exceptions can be made on rare occasions. In the paragraphs below, she lists two exceptions where experienced interpreters can offer help so that novices might be able to take a break. She concludes by saying that the seniority of the staff interpreters is the main factor influencing her willingness to accept help.

E5: Well, it depends on the situation. Perhaps I think he could do. If I'm having a particular trouble with, for example, the Portuguese person. If my colleagues have Portuguese and I might be able to say, "Can you do the Portuguese today?" Because **it's unlikely that there will be much Portuguese, you wouldn't be making your colleagues do much extra work** as he did the Portuguese for you. And I have never done that, because you feel bad doing it. You possibly could do that, but they wouldn't be able to do all your work for a day, because they can't carry on it all day either... I think perhaps you can ask them to do for one intervention. But it is different from case to case. And there was a time, I was with somebody, who was new to me, so I was the experienced one and she was doing those quite a lot of Italian and she had Italian and I don't have Italian. But after a while, she asked me, "Please can you do it for me, because I can't carry on anymore." Because she just, she was new, perhaps you know she has done it for half an hour and **in that case, I had to take the Italian on relay from the French booth. Usually you don't do that, but it was an exception,** she had done half an hour and then I did, I think I did her half an hour for her from the relay, because in that case you don't half an hour and it was just me do half an hour. Usually you try to do it directly in the relay, so usually that won't happen, but sometimes **if you can't fit in that situation, when there are a lot of Italians in the meeting and your colleagues have the Italian and you don't, after a while, you can do it a little bit on relay to give them some break.** Maybe do half an hour in that case. If you find this Italian, Italian, Italian for ages, then you might do half an hour. You might do half an hour in that case for them.

R: OK, so the action depends on how you organise your time slots with your colleague.

E5: It depends on, yeah, it depends on the way the meeting works, and what languages are being spoken. It depends on languages the two of you have with your colleague, and then you just, **if you realise that your colleague is very new and inexperienced, then you could easily do more for them. But if you are too experienced colleagues, you don't really tend to do much for them.** If it has been speaking in Italian all day long, and your colleagues have to do Italian all day long, and you might offer to do half an hour for them.

Through E5's stories, we have learnt that working with other interpreters can involve some practical rules which are absent from the training context. When cooperation and loyalty are considered paramount for freelancers, pressure from seniors and the intricate turn-taking rules can be problematic for staff interpreters.

6.3.2.2. Learning from clients

Interpreters are language service providers, who work with people who do not speak the same languages. When two parties who do not share the same language and cultural background meet, interpreters are there to eliminate the barriers. Interpreters therefore cannot work alone. Hence how to work with clients is an important issue for practising interpreters. Issues include communication aspects - regarding the tacit knowledge in facilitating the communication - and interpersonal aspects, regarding the rules for interpreters when engaging with clients.

6.3.2.2.1. Cross-cultural communication aspects

Interpreter training focuses mainly on the linguistic aspect of interpreting, and pays more attention to the use of language, e.g. register, whilst placing relatively less emphasis on communication needs. However, in practice, the communicative ability of an interpreter is often the most important attribute from the perspective of the client. Many clients do not have an idea of what to expect from a 'professional' interpreter. They may not have a basic framework for evaluating the quality of interpretation, and therefore judge according to other aspects, such as whether the message has been translated, whether the negotiation has reached a consensus, or simply based on the personal attributes of the interpreter.

The communication gap between the two sides often has much to do with cultural differences and varied expectations of each other. N5 is an in-house interpreter who works for a European CEO. While this European CEO speaks in direct manner, Chinese people prefer to speak indirectly. It then becomes N5's responsibility to bridge this gap in speaking styles:

N5: He is a European and sometimes, for European and Chinese, we have different manners, or different ways of thinking about communication. **He sometimes just speaks out, but that might cause trouble, but the Chinese people are less-direct; we don't speak out what you really think about.** So I need to go round.

N5 provides another example of the gap in educational backgrounds, in this case between his European employer and the Chinese clients. This gap results in an

imbalance in the interpreting time, which confuses the European employer; here it is undoubtedly the interpreter's responsibility to bridge this gap.

N5: It is very interesting when I did interpreting for my boss, we have some communication gaps. As an interpreter I have to have various conversations with people: either those who from a very low social status, or those who stays in a shop, or very important clients or customers. I shouldn't distinguish among them, but I expect them to transfer their ideas clearly. So my boss asks some questions, I don't know, sometimes they don't understand at all. **Their answers are normally not related to the question. I need to confirm with them, even double check with them, so it takes a long time.** My boss just asks me, why do you ask so many questions? And also, **when my boss asks them something, maybe the answers are simple, but their answers are not equivalence to the questions! In this case, I just translate maybe one sentence. And then my boss feels confused again,** he said, 'Why? You talked about five minutes but you just interpreted one sentence!' But actually, what he said can be summarised in one sentence.

N5's examples are particularly fascinating. I have had some similar experiences, especially in PSI settings: the English side are normally highly-educated, well-trained officers, while the Chinese side are primarily asylum seekers who are sometimes illiterate, or poorly educated. There is no difficulty in translating the English message into Chinese, however the Chinese side often has problems not only understanding the question, but also answering the question in a concise manner. The Chinese asylum seekers may repeat what they said previously, dwell on their emotional concerns, or are simply unable to find the right expressions to answer the questions. In this case, it is the interpreter's responsibility to repeat and/or paraphrase the question until the Chinese side fully understands what they are being asked, or alternatively explain the difficulty of communication to the English side and let the English side make a decision. Under this kind of circumstance, interpreters are sometimes in danger of becoming the scapegoat of communication failure, as the Chinese side starts to get frustrated and the English side becomes confused and eventually loses trust in the interpreter. To respond to such a communication gap, concern may arise regarding whether interpreter training has provided interpreters with sufficient adaptive knowledge to enable them to confront various scenarios. E1 is a good example here. She works both as a public service interpreter and a simultaneous conference interpreter. She realises how she gradually gets to know how to make sense of what she initially perceives as nonsense, what to do to bridge the communication gap, and how to respond to the imbalance of power as an interpreter.

E1: So I already knew the different approaches, so from that point of view, it wasn't a hindrance **because I just fed in what might be useful** so I knew that note-taking would be useful, for me in my PSI, I knew certain things would be very useful. But at the same time, I knew that we couldn't behave in a way that we were being taught here because SI and public service settings are different work. And I wouldn't be that formal, and I couldn't make things more eloquent as they were. For example, as we were told to do that here. Just because speakers, rubbish speakers doesn't mean interpreters should speak in that rubbish way. On this course we teach as eloquent as possible, but to get the message across as much as possible. Whereas sometimes in public service settings, in mental health for example, the point is, that you can't make sense of something that

doesn't make sense. You need to say something that does make sense. So from that point of view I already had that difference very clear in my mind. As I was learning, I already think, OK, **this would work, this won't work**. This kind of thing.

Another prevalent communication gap exists when cultural differences manifest themselves during the course of interpreting activity. N7 has been a practising interpreter for many years, and finds translating jokes with cultural connotations particularly challenging. His suggestion is to approach the jokes in a 'plain manner', rather than 'working too hard on it'.

N7: Sometimes you have to step back in terms of wording, especially when there is cultural difference. And **if you don't understand some jokes, it's probably, probably safer for you to approach it differently, in a plain fashion**.What I mean is that...unless you have the confidence to deal with issues like jokes, insults...this kind of stuff, **unless you have full confidence, otherwise just don't try to work too hard on them**. Because there is more to come. And jokes are just beginning.

Communication gaps exist not only in the conveying of messages, but are also evident in the expectations that clients have of interpreters. E4 provides two examples here, demonstrating the potential binary consequences of when interpreters go above and beyond expectations:

E4: Like I recently had a.. I had a good example which interest me. I had a speaker who was quite new. The speaker was nervous. She was saying something. She is actually funny. She is quite interesting. She was saying something, you know, **so when I interpreted it I deliberately used a more exaggerated way to make it funnier**. Then the people could feel, could sense her...So people could sense what she really wanted to say. Um. You know, achieve the effect she wanted to achieve. And actually after that, everyone was laughing and after that one of the audience came to me and said, '**Actually I know she wasn't, she didn't, you know, she wasn't that funny. But you made it.**' Yes. Funnier. 'We really enjoyed it.' Um... That is of course a good thing.

E4: But sometimes you have to be careful. I learnt lessons as well. Those in the meeting, um, you know, official negotiation and then European side, you know, the commissioner she was actually blaming China, blaming the Chinese people. So I, it was my turn, I said exactly what she said, 'Why?' Eventually the Chinese delegate came to me and just said, '**You know I don't think she said that. Why did you keep saying this?**'

There has been an interesting discussion about the danger of interpreters becoming scapegoats (Baker, 2006; Niang, 1990). The point of this study is not to judge whether or not interpreters are in the position to be treated as scapegoats but rather to show that it is important for practising interpreters when bridging the communication gap, to bear in mind cultural differences and the expectations that clients have. In N2's words below, she demonstrates how clients rank communication ability over linguistic perfection in the workplace; this suggests a need to include more teaching of communication aspects in interpreter training.

N2: But in the real market, the clients especially the foreign clients. **I don't think they have that much expectation on your language, usually they do not pick up your mistakes**, usually it's more likely Chinese clients who speak English or who think their English is good will pick up your mistakes. The English client or most English clients, **what they really expect of us is they can understand you and they can get the message**, that's ok. They don't expect you to be a perfect speaker speak without any

mistake, they don't expect that. So sometimes it's the same when you speak Chinese, your Chinese is very like re... What's that word?

R: Redundancy.

N2: Redundancy, that's the word. So when your Chinese is very redundant or very unorganised, as long as they can get the information, that's ok. They don't need you to speak a very like, like a written language or very fluent, no need. So I still think, **for interpreting, the most important thing is to get the message across, to transfer the message or to convey the message.**

6.3.2.2.2. Interpersonal aspects

When working with clients, the importance of interpersonal skills cannot be overstated. Most practising interpreters consider winning over the client's trust to be the first and foremost principle in workplace; different interpreters have their own approaches to this. N1's employer originally had doubts about her knowledge of engineering as an English major, but N1 gradually built up trust by proving her professionalism:

N1: I used to have a business trip to Zhuhai for the Hong Kong-Macao Zhuhai Crossing Project. This is one of the largest bridge projects in the world. I was sent there for translation job basically, but sometimes a British guy, Nick, took me with him to the meetings with the clients. And I arrived there at noon, and I started working in the afternoon. I did some translation for him and he checked the work to see how things were going, and he read a few lines of mine translation. It seemed that he was not satisfied with my translation cause it was very technical about the bridge design. And before I started to work there, he asked me about my major. Cause he know nothing of me, he just asked the managing director of China to recommend someone who can do translation, and I was sent there. **When he knew that my major was just English language, I do not have the knowledge of engineering; I can see that he was a little bit disappointed.** He said that, 'Let's see how you cope there.' So my first day there was not very satisfying for him. But the second day, he took me to the meeting with the clients. The meeting was about the aesthetics about the bridge. Actually he did not speak too much in the meeting, **but for the meeting I took down some notes about other's speeches. He had a look on my notes and he had known how the meeting goes.** And after that meeting, I actually didn't think that I did a very good job; cause firstly I do not have too much chance to interpret for him, and still for some technical terms about bridge, my notes did not reveal it. But he seemed to be very satisfied. I was very curious so I asked him about this. **He said that maybe there was something I don't know, but compared with the assistants who helped him with interpreting before, he can see a huge difference between me and the previous assistants.** Cause they haven't received interpreting training before, and there was a girl—he used to have two assistants to help him with interpreting—a girl who studied English in China and a boy who had stayed in Britain for 13 years but he mainly studied engineering. So he said that he could see that I can communicate with other and I am not afraid of interpreting for him in the meeting. It's just the whole thing which I take it for granted. Cause it's just a meeting and I interpret; it's just very normal for an interpreter. But he found it is unusual for a girl to do this things in a professional way. So **at that moment I was very happy that I had received professional training in Leeds cause it made a difference.**

R: People can see that you are actually trained, so they started to acknowledge your expertise as an interpreter.

N1: Yes. So **from then, I could see that he trusted me more.**

Similarly, in N5's case, the way for him to win his boss's trust was to accurately interpret and understand his needs.

N5: Yes **I think because in-house interpreting, the most important thing is getting to know my boss, thinking about what is the message he tries to convey.** The very important thing is get to know my boss. Because sometimes when he talked to someone,

it's very, how to say, very trivial, or very vague. Like there is a very exquisite relationship between them. You have to be very careful, to catch the real meaning. It's an important thing. I remember once in Chengdu, my boss was saying something. Actually he didn't come to the point about this manager, **he hadn't mentioned it yet. But I know him very well, so I spoke out before he spoke it. I got to know his point beforehand. So he was very happy.** I was very happy too, because I made a good guess. I got to know his point. **And he got to trust me more and more after that.**

Showing the client commitment and a willingness to learn is another way of gaining their trust, as noted by E3:

E3: You may ask them to let you know some background knowledge before the meeting. And actually I did so because some of the organisers or the clients they are very serious. They want to hold a seminar which is as successful as possible. So they ask interpreters to come to their company and gave you kind of a pre-training, before you start to interpret. That's very helpful. But through the way, I think you really need to know **how to communicate with them, how to win their trust—that's really important.** And when they say that you are really a serious person, a serious interpreter, and you take their trust as serious as you can, as your own task, they will trust you. So I think that the thing I learnt a lot in my interpreting experience is how to communicate with other people.

R: Do you have any concrete example?

E3: I remember once I interpreted for an automobile industry's seminar. It's actually organised by BMW. And they plan to open a new branch which is BMW Automobile Financial Company. And this seminar is a kind of opening ceremony. So actually it's not that challenging, I have to say, technically speaking I mean, for an interpreter. But they really take this event very seriously because their big boss will be there, will present this opening ceremony. So they were a little bit panic. I mean, those kind of organisers were a bit panic. And **they asked me to come to their company once, twice, three times**, really. I think for interpreters it is impossible because we are so busy. It's not possible for us to come to their company. But for me I think it's doable, it's not that challenging. So through the way, I have to communicate with them...if I can go to the company, I will be there and ask them the questions I concerned about and of course, if time is allowed, **I can learn a lot of things from the clients which I can't find from the agenda myself.** So that's very valuable. But after that, **if we talked through telephone, I would say for example, I will come back to review these materials that they have sent to me, and if I have any problem, any questions, I will definitely say, 'I will telephone you back,'** and then they are very serious. They actually organised telephone meeting with me, allowing me to ask questions to their colleague in Singapore or maybe elsewhere not in Beijing...so we will have this kind of telephone meetings before the start of the interpreting task. So I think in this way, they can see that I am serious as well. I want to do as well as I can. So actually in the meeting there is nothing like unpleasant things happened in these meetings. But quite contrary, my partner in that meeting, was an experienced interpreter. That was the very first time I cooperate with him in the interpreting meeting. And he didn't turn up for all the meetings: the telephone meetings, the training meetings during the preparation sessions. And the clients were a little but panic about this interpreter. And in the opening ceremony, actually this interpreter, my partner interpreter actually quarrelled with the client. **I think this quarrel is not from that the interpreter he himself is incompetent, but because all these worries, all these panic things...**Yes that's the lesson actually I learnt from the experience.

After the interpreter has gained the client's trust, the next step is to cater to their needs. In the excerpts below, N7 and E7 share the kind of questions they would ask themselves prior to carrying out interpreting assignments. They adapt to the client's needs, instead of rigidly adhering to rules:

N7: Uh take conference for example. Uh...you learn that sometimes you probably have to adjust with strategies...uh...especially in Taiwan, I think some conference attendees...**most conference attendees, they understand English. But they want to rely on you for comfort reasons or just as a matter of formality.** Maybe they have

better language skills than you... than you do. So you really...I kind of learn to understand my audiences and cater to their needs.

R: Can you give me some concrete examples?

N7: I mean one obvious example is...I think every trained interpreter will do the same. For example, if you...when you are working for a Q&A session, and you notice that your Chinese...that the person you are working for is wearing a headphone, that means he or she is listening to you while receiving questions from the audiences. So you do your job in interpreting, but at some point, you notice that he or she jumps in right after the question, or two or three seconds without your interpretation. And **then you wouldn't be...that stupid to interpret every word when interpret every time.** Because the speaker already gets it. And I think **your job is to facilitate communication. Instead of just interpret every word that you receive to your ears.** You need to be in that situation.

E7: **I'm always thinking about what kind of environment are we all in.** So what type of conference is this, what is the purpose, why are we sitting here and what do they want to get out of this? So what is the goal of the customers? And what is the goal of the audience? **And then I just ask myself, am I doing it the right way?** Am I interpreting the speaker, who is just, I don't know, nervous, or whatever, or very professional? Am I living up to the expectations of my audience?

In one study, Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2009) research the role of public service interpreters, investigating how interpreters behave in order to reflect the 'audience design'. N7's story describes how he reacts to a conference audience who have only a basic understanding of English; instead of interpreting word for word, his aim is to facilitate communication. E7 demonstrates that being aware of the demands of the interpreting assignment is the nature of audience design: only when interpreters align their practices with clients' needs can they be regarded as 'professional'.

On the other hand, although it is recommended that interpreters be flexible and adaptive based on the needs of clients, sometimes it is still necessary for interpreters to adhere to certain boundaries, especially regarding working conditions. As an EU staff interpreter, E5 raises a concern for interpreters working in the private market by stating that having a 'firm but consistent' attitude is the right way to deal with meeting organisers. In the paragraph below, she talks about the danger of failing to consistently follow rules:

E5: And it's the same with the organiser. **At the meeting, you have to be polite but firm and you have to insist on the rules,** because here in the EU, the rules are quite strict and they are quite good for interpreters. In the morning, you can't work more than four hours before the lunch break. So the meeting starts at ten, you could carry on until two, because that is the absolute maximum. And you have to be very firm with organisers about that, and **sometimes he might think that, oh, we can give him another ten minutes and fifteen minutes to be nice. But if you start doing that, it's such a big organisation, it could become a habit and you start to take fifteen twenty and half an hour.** And so you just have to, you have to know to be firm in dealing with things like that. So I think, yeah, that's one of the things you have to learn, if you are a head of a team. You have to be firm with your colleagues; you have to be firm with the meeting organisers. **Because if you don't tell the meeting organisers that we are going to stop, then all the rest of the colleagues will come and start complaining to you.** They will get angry.

From winning the trust of clients to catering to their needs, and being consistent with working conditions, acquiring these interpersonal skills for

practising interpreters is easier said than done. But at least by reading their stories, we have an idea about what to avoid and what to do when working with the clients.

6.3.2.3. Learning from oneself

Learning from oneself is the third part of learning at work for practising interpreters. The phrase 'learning by doing' has been mentioned repeatedly by practising interpreters when referring to their learning at work. I did not understand what they referred to at the beginning of data analysis, but I later realised that when they say they learn interpreting by doing interpreting, what they mean is that they gain particular knowledge and understanding while they immerse themselves in the practice of interpreting. This kind of learning is independent, but is still very much contextualised. Learning from oneself can be divided into two aspects: practical aspects and emotional aspects.

6.3.2.3.1. Practical aspects

E1 and E4 are both experienced interpreters who have worked in both international organisations and the private market, whilst also contributing to interpreter training. They identify two practical issues: looking for suitable methods for oneself; and adopting teaching-informed interpreting practices.

For E4, the most helpful lesson derived from learning at work was discovering what works best for her in interpreting practice. The first example she gives is changing the way in which she takes notes: writing in words works better for her than drawing symbols, as suggested by the trainers.

E4: Taking, for example, taking notes. Different people have different styles when we were in the course, you know, we were told that you could draw a symbol. (Laugh) **And then for me, it does not work.**

E4 also became aware of her interpreting style through working in the market; she learnt that she is a fast interpreter with an exaggerated tone:

E4: Like um... Yes. When I started, most Chinese interpreters remain calm, they keep at a steady speed, they were, you know, it does not matter what the speed the speaker was going, the interpreters, my colleagues use the same speed, very calm. **I wanted to be like that. But then I found that is not my style.** .If I speak too slowly...because for me, normally pretty fast. So if I... I am a Chinese people, if I speak slowly, remain flat and calm, I just cannot work.

R: (Laugh). OK, so actually learn what kind of style you are?

E4: Yes. Passionate style. (Laugh) If I remain calm I cannot do it. Yes... **This is a very important realisation for me, because I could not notice it as a student.** I am not say which one is good or bad. **There is no good or bad. There is only suitable or not suitable.** You know, it doesn't suit me, I cannot do it.

Understanding her own style as an interpreter by comparing herself with colleagues was something E4 did not experience as a trainee interpreter.

E1's discovery took place while teaching. She practises most when she is in the interpreting class observing students; she also uses a speech repository (an online

interpreter resource platform for interpreting learners) to practise note-taking, and constantly thinks about how to improve her teaching through practice:

E1: Generally, obviously when I'm in class when I'm teaching, I always take notes. Even if I don't deliver in consecutive I am listening to consecutive practices in PSI... a lot of it is in consecutive. But because of my commitment at the university I do a lot simultaneous than I do consec. So, I do a lot of work with SCIC repository. **But I recorded myself, listen to myself, that was basically working on my own and try to come to an conclusion as to how what I thought is good and what I thought isn't good, improving my performance.**

For E1, getting involved in interpreter training is beneficial to her role as a practising interpreter:

E1: Well like I said, in my case, which is different from a lot of professional interpreters, obviously **I teach, that is a huge advantage really because I'm consciously involved in interpreting.** So if I'm not doing a huge amount of SI at one point, I'm obviously listening to speeches all the time. I'm listening to students do their SIM, I'm listening to both things at the same time, which is still good practice. And I'm giving them feedback. **Sometimes I give feedback and I think to myself, you know, I must remember to apply that myself!** Because that's really good feedback! And I know I would have made the same mistake. For example, if I haven't thought about it, I definitely thought about that, and obviously I take note all the time, so that's kind of separate thing I get.

6.3.2.3.2. Emotional aspects

In addition to these learning aspects, there are other emotional aspects of which interpreters become aware of while working as practitioners. These emotional aspects, which function as the backbone of learning at work, reflect the core beliefs and observations that practising interpreters have towards themselves.

To begin with, learning is unconscious in the workplace, but progress is nonetheless noticeable. The following are some examples from practising interpreters, which demonstrate how they become aware of their progress:

N1: **I didn't actively learn it. But still, I benefit from actual interpreting work.**

E6: **You feel at the very first beginning of your career, at some organisation they called you and then that will require a lot of study. Afterwards, it's not...you don't need to study as much for each conferences because you might know this conference very well.** I am not saying that you can completely not study. But you are studying less because you know a lot of the terminologies because you have been doing these conferences a lot more. I think you do improve naturally... It is important for an interpreter. I think that **you do more interpreting, the more you have successful experience, the more you believe in your ability to perform satisfactory...in a satisfactory fashion and the more you are able to calm down in an interpreting situation.** And the calmer you are, the better you perform. Or at least in my case, the more I am, the calmer I am, the more I perform, the better I perform.

In these two examples, while novice interpreter N1 cannot articulate in detail about what has she learnt at work, experienced interpreter E6 demonstrates that reduced preparation hours and increased confidence are two features which provide evidence of unconscious learning at work. This indicates that, over time, interpreters tend to gain a better understanding of what they have learnt over the years.

Meanwhile, E5 learns to let go of negative thoughts and stops blaming herself for mistakes she made as an interpreter. Interpreting is a demanding profession in which mistakes made can rarely be remedied. Therefore learning how to let go of mistakes and quickly rebuild her self-confidence is what E5 has learnt through work.

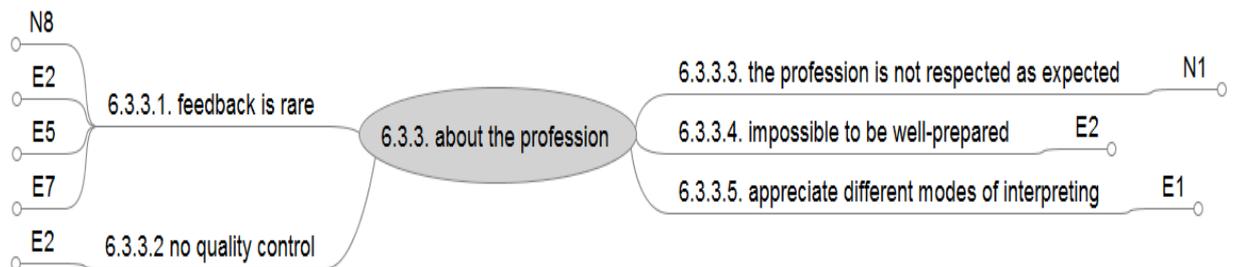
E5: As an interpreter you could always have a bad day, that's the reason, that's why you are, what you have to learn to do is to say, "OK, I did that one badly, it was difficult because I did a bad job. But it wasn't my fault." And **that's difficult at the beginning, because at the beginning you always think that it was your fault**, because you are not a good interpreter. And later you realised that actually it was because the speaker was speaking too fast and not clearly. And **it took me a long time to be able to think that actually it wasn't my fault, I was OK.**

It was by the end of the analysis process that I came to realise what practising interpreters meant by 'learning by doing'. When practising interpreters are able to take a step away from their role as an interpreter, and stay detached and reflect upon their practice, they not only nurture their professional stance as individual practitioners, but also cultivate a professional vision with which only insiders of the interpreting field can identify. I think E4's declaration can best represent practising interpreters' self-realisation from learning at work:

E4: **I put theory into practice.** What we learnt, you know, in the classroom are theories. Now I am practising it, **I may find 'wow, this works for me, this may not work for me.'**

6.3.3. Learning about the interpreting profession

Practising interpreters demonstrate that working in the interpreting profession is the only way to develop an insider's perspective. What they learn in the workplace can be very different from what they learnt as trainee interpreters.



6.3.3.1. Feedback is rare

Receiving no, or very little, feedback is something practising interpreters are not used to when they first step into the job market. E7 says that the only way to obtain feedback is to observe how clients behave, or if anything goes wrong:

E7: **As a professional you don't get any feedback. You only get feedback when you are watching your listeners. They only give feedback and they only get back to you when something was wrong.**

R: OK. If you did a good job, nobody would mention that.

E7: No.

In E2's experience, only when the client requires her for the next assignment can she find out whether the client has feedback for her from the last assignment:

E2: **When you started to work, you didn't really get the feedback...that directly.** So you have to ask your client but you cannot ask that directly because it may lose your face or whatever...or sometimes the client didn't really say even they think it's OK. So I think to get the feedback is very difficult.

R: Then how did you try to get the feedback from working experience?

E2: I didn't dare to ask, first of all. And if they gave me the compliments, I would think, OK, it's good, especially for those foreign visitors or foreign lecturers. They did give me the feedback immediately. But for Taiwanese clients, they don't really give you the feedback.

R: How come?

E2: Immediately you know, after you finish the conference. **You have to wait if the call you next time for another meeting, and then you know, OK, they recognise you.**

R: But if they didn't call you means that they are not satisfied with you?

E2: Hm. Hm.

E2: Yes. It's very depressing.

Receiving no feedback can make interpreters feel uneasy, especially novice interpreters who are eager to know how they are progressing with the new job. N8's reflection on receiving feedback for an assignment demonstrates how rare this is:

N8: I remember one meeting, where I was working with a lady who is very keen to give feedback. Now that's something very unusual. Most colleagues will simply not saying anything, and they won't pass comment on your ability, or the way you just interpreted something. And **sometimes that's quite frustrating because you know that they know that you got it wrong. But they are not saying anything because they don't want to offend you** and because at the end of the day, you are doing exactly the same as they are. You know, they probably not earning any more money than you, they are not your superior, they are not your boss, so. So they don't feel that it's their place to pass comments. Which I suppose is good, once you've been got to be in the market for a long time, you probably don't want people to comment on your interpretation all the time. However, **when you firstly started, sometimes you think, I really wish people to give me some more feedback!**

Under such a circumstance, if an interpreter desires feedback, the only way to obtain it is to ask. The following extract presents E7's methods for obtaining feedback following an assignment:

E7: **I always asked the clients** because I want them to be content, I want them to come back and I want them to tell me if there is something I can do better. **Right after the conference, I would just send them an email, and ask them if everything was alright if there is something which we could improve.**

The process in international organisations is somewhat different from that in the private market. According to E5, staff interpreters regularly receive peer feedback; however, the feedback is very general, leaving no room for individual improvement. Sometimes EU delegates do give interpreters feedback, but it is still very rare.

E5: Feedback is very rare. Here, **sometimes here, the SCIC, the interpreting DG, they organise the feedback service.** I don't know how often it is, I can't remember, maybe two or three times since I started. So it's probably two or three years or something. And they from a period of maybe two or three weeks, they will give questionnaires to all the delegates asking them about their satisfaction with the interpreting. Of course, some of them answer the questionnaire, some of them don't. And then they compare the results, and they ask whether, what did they feel about the

interpreter they knew about the vocabulary, did they think the interpreter sounded pleasant to listen to, were they happy, were they not happy. Yes, a lot of questions about the interpreting, so that's the main source of feedback really. **But of course it is not individual.**

R: So you never know how you did.

E5: No, you know yourself in a way and **very occasionally you will get maybe the positive comment from the delegate**, usually they don't come and tell you themselves, because we are quite separate from the delegates, but sometimes they give comments to the organisers. Eventually that does get back to you. But it's very rare and maybe it happened to me two or three times since 2003. And sometimes what happens is you may get a positive comment from somebody in whatever booth that has to take you on relay.

R: Oh, and they are interpreters as well, so they know how good or how bad your work was.

E5: They know, yes, they know that they can judge quite well and also they have more eye-contact with you. So it's easy for them at the end of meeting to just come into the booth and say thank you. And I think the people, **I try to say that to people, if I think it's good. Because we don't get much feedback, it's good to know.**

6.3.3.2. No quality control

Related to this near absence of feedback provision in the interpreting profession, quality control is often lacking since there is simply no supervision or other quality control mechanism in place. Since most interpreting service users do not speak the other language, quality control is in fact almost impossible on most occasions, as E2 observes:

E2: Like some other professors (of interpreting) from university X and Y. They really know the industry and the profession. Because **for outsiders cannot really tell**. They would just say, OK your English is good. Your pronunciation is not that bad. And you are not afraid. You are not that shy...so I think it's OK.

R: But they cannot see the difference in between. They don't know whether the message is clear or not...

E2: I don't feel that they do check. That's what I observed. I don't know some other people, in some other industries, maybe they did check. But from my assignments with the government, **they don't really check**. That's what I think. They would just say, OK everything is OK.

To demonstrate the potential consequences of this lack of quality control, E2 gives an account of how a well-known interpreter with whom she worked was actually fabricating her own story instead of accurately interpreting:

E2: Last time, I mean last December, my partner, I did one interpretation for the Department of Health, and my partner next to me, tell me one very funny story. She said once she worked with another interpreter. And **that interpreter is very famous in Taiwan. And she is already teaching in the university. And during this conference, she was just making her own story. She didn't really follow the speaker.**

R: Really?

E2: Hmm. But **she could come up with her own theory for the conference! And all the listeners were very happy, and they even came to thank her!** I really don't know who is checking the quality! Nobody really checked the quality...**I think it's very difficult for common people to listen to different languages at the same time.** That's what I think. If you don't get trained through the training, it's a bit difficult.

E2's story clearly demonstrates one of the interpreting profession's greatest flaws. Given the fact that the interpreter in question was famous in her field, it is plausible that she may have done this for a certain period of time without being challenged.

6.3.3.3. The profession is not respected as expected

The issues of no feedback or quality control suggest that service users pay no attention to either the interpreting activity or the interpreter. This point is made clear when N1 complains that she only realised that interpreters are not respected as much as she had imagined after entering the interpreting market:

N1: I think when I was studying in Leeds, interpreting was taken very seriously by everyone and we focused on it. **But for my current job, when I was doing interpreting, as I just told you, some people they might not listen to me, they might chat. And for some customers they might understand English.**

R: They just ignored you.

N1: Yeah, **interpreting was not taken as serious as before.**

Realisations like this can sometimes be a blow for novice interpreters, since what they experienced as novices go against with what they had expected as a trainee, as reported in 4.2.2.

6.3.3.4. Impossible to be well-prepared

Another demoralising discovery for practising interpreters is that, no matter how much one prepares, it is impossible to prepare for every eventuality, as E2 experienced:

E2: There is one thing I learnt from the job was that **I cannot prepare everything. I would just do my best. I couldn't really prepare everything as what I did at school.**

R: How did you realise that?

E2: It happened last December, I also got one assignment, and it was a very difficult one. Seriously, it was about medicine, a medical conference. It was so difficult with lots of graphs and figures, and also lots of names of the process. So I tried my best to prepare, and I got the slides beforehand. **So my partner and I tried very hard to prepare for everything, but then when the meeting was going on, and then in one break, somebody just came in the booth and gave me another pile of slides, which we didn't really see. And the speaker was going to speak in five minutes.**

R: Then what did you do?

E2: We have to check everything quickly. And try to circle everything, like some figures. But I have to say that I felt quite frustrated when I did the interpreting. The speaker was a fast speaker. Her English was so good.

R: And the context was extremely difficult.

E2: And the context was so difficult. I haven't really gone through all the details. So that one was really...

R: Disastrous?

E2: Yeah.

Although practising interpreters understand that they are making progress and that it is acceptable to make mistakes, years of work experience also teaches them the true nature of the interpreting profession, which is that preparation work is never-ending, as explained by E1:

E1: **I guess with the experience and also an awareness that I wasn't...as an interpreter you never finish.** As an interpreter I think you have to be very aware that you need to learn and learn and learn, and carry on learning and carry on learning. And that you are never going to, you can never go to a job and think, phew, this is going to be really easy. And sometimes you see people and people say, for example, on our visit to a commission and students were going and said, oh look, you know these people sit in there and all reading the newspaper and stuff like that and they said, how come they look so easy? So I don't know. Perhaps if you were a staff interpreter and you work in

the same place for 30 years, maybe at some stage, you are so comfortable with vocabulary, also comfortable with the situation, or perhaps it is easy. But the way I work, which is obviously as much as I can, but not all the time. It means that **I feel that I can never sit back and go, well, this is going to be easy.**

We have already learnt much about the nature of the interpreting work e.g. how much preparation work an interpreter needs to do before meeting, what kind of emergencies interpreters may have to cope with. But it is not until trainee interpreters step into the job market that they realise how cruel it can be to be a practising interpreter—the impossibility of being fully prepared is just one aspect of the reality. Therefore it is important to establish an attitude of embracing lifelong learning, if one chooses interpreting as a profession:

E1: I have made a huge effort to make sure that I've been taking on, whether it's voluntary or paid SI, regular periods to make sure that I don't ever lose it. And if I feel that I'm going for a while without, oh not lose it, I don't think I lose it but make sure, you know it doesn't go downhill... So I tried to do as much as possible here and there, and if I feel that I've gone maybe three or four months haven't done any simultaneous then I will go on the SCCI repository, and I will do several speeches. And I force myself to do it. Whenever we take the students to the study visit to the EU, I go and do dummy booth. They said, oh why are you doing dummy booth you are accredited! **I go and do it because I think it's good for me to do it. So I always made an effort to carry on.**

6.3.3.5. Appreciate different modes of interpreting

Nevertheless, there are still some positive aspects that interpreters learnt about the profession from their work experiences; E1's case is particular interesting. The interpreter training programme is designed to train simultaneous conference interpreters. But for E1, she had accumulated some experience in PSI before training, and she strikes a balance between SI and PSI assignments as a practising interpreter. Becoming accustomed to the different modes of interpreting and being able to appreciate these modes are the most important lessons she has learnt as a practitioner. She offers some insights about being both a public service interpreter and a conference interpreter. She begins by differentiating between the features of PSI from SI:

E1: It (SI) is mainly this idea... one the idea of all of the idea of it always has been the idea that's important. In PSI it's not like the case. Sometimes words are important. You know you have to accept that. **Sometimes it's not good to make someone sounds more eloquent when they didn't, it's not good to leave out their hesitation or whatever. In fact their hesitation can be extremely important in the response they gave.** As a conference interpreter you were trained to make sense of anything. **So someone said loads of rubbish and you make sense of it and you produce something that make sense. You can't do that in PSI on many occasions. You know, many occasions you need to say something that doesn't make sense** because that's how the counsellor is going to be altered. Counsellor person. Or that's how the immigration solicitor is going to know whether someone is not sure about the date that they were giving, for example. Or whether they are just making something up. Or whether they are traumatized about something and then need to refer them to psychiatrist, you know. Those things are extremely important. **So, a lot of witty, very simplistic version of interpreting, which does apply generally to SI world, but which doesn't apply to all areas.**

She then goes on to defend the status of PSI, since many people still have the idea that SI is harder than PSI:

E1: **Some people were very scathing about PSI, I think that's very unfair.** It's true that **sometimes the challenge is different**, they might not be interpreting, linguistic challenges as such, they might be some terminologies... **The whole thing with the professional decision-making, and the situation you are in, the way you impact the situation is a big deal.** But also, you know, when I work for migration solicitors, I'm doing five-minute, six-minute, ten-minute consecutives, so it's not always PSI. A couple of sentences, a doctor saying, hello, how are you, I've got a headache, you know, which some people think it's what it is. So when you work in court, that's very challenging. When I work for social services, I quite often do chuchotage, that's SI, which I think is harder than doing SI in a booth. And also **you work a lot with people who never work with interpreters, those who doesn't know how to make it easy for you**, not for SI that everyone wants to, but at least some people are aware of the interpreters are kind of adapt to the way that interpreters work. So I think it's unfair to say that's not valuable practice. To me it has been very valuable. **When in my accreditation test, they said, you can just tell that your consecutive is just, you know, natural to you. That was down to the level of experience I have in PSI!** Because most conference interpreters do very little consecutive. So **for me it's extremely useful, extremely positive, and a very good way of making sure, keeping my skills going, and developing all sorts of different knowledge and vocabularies at the same time.**

For E1, it was her strong ability in PSI that allowed her to pass the EU interpreting examination. In her case, she turned the negative impression of PSI into her strength, since she is strong in CI, something which most conference interpreters are not so good at. Reflecting back on her interpreter training, E1 still thinks that the skills she learnt are useful and transferrable:

E1: I would always say to students that **the skills you learn on this course are very useful for PSI, but the approach has to change almost completely.** What you learn here, definitely apply public service, but change your approach completely.

But she also points out that, as a trainer, she would prefer to have modules dedicated to both SI and PSI:

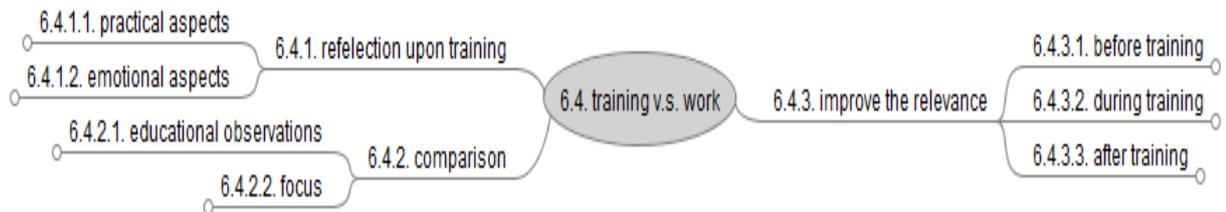
E1: **I would have different modules for training though. Yeah. And I would hope that everyone would do all the modules.** I don't want to push PSI over SI, but I also don't want to push SI over PSI. I think they both are very important. That should be recognised. The skills involved, they both should be recognised. There are different challenges, but they are both challenging. And I think all should be taken into account. But yes, **I think that there needs to be a lot of similar training, then also some complementary training, for each one.**

Her distinctive experience of working as both a public service interpreter and a conference interpreter has inspired her to conduct research in the future:

E1: **And as a result**, I am very interested in both PSI training and SI training and there the synergies are, and whether not—if I'm going to, in the future do some research, it would be very much around that kind of thing **because I find that very interesting.**

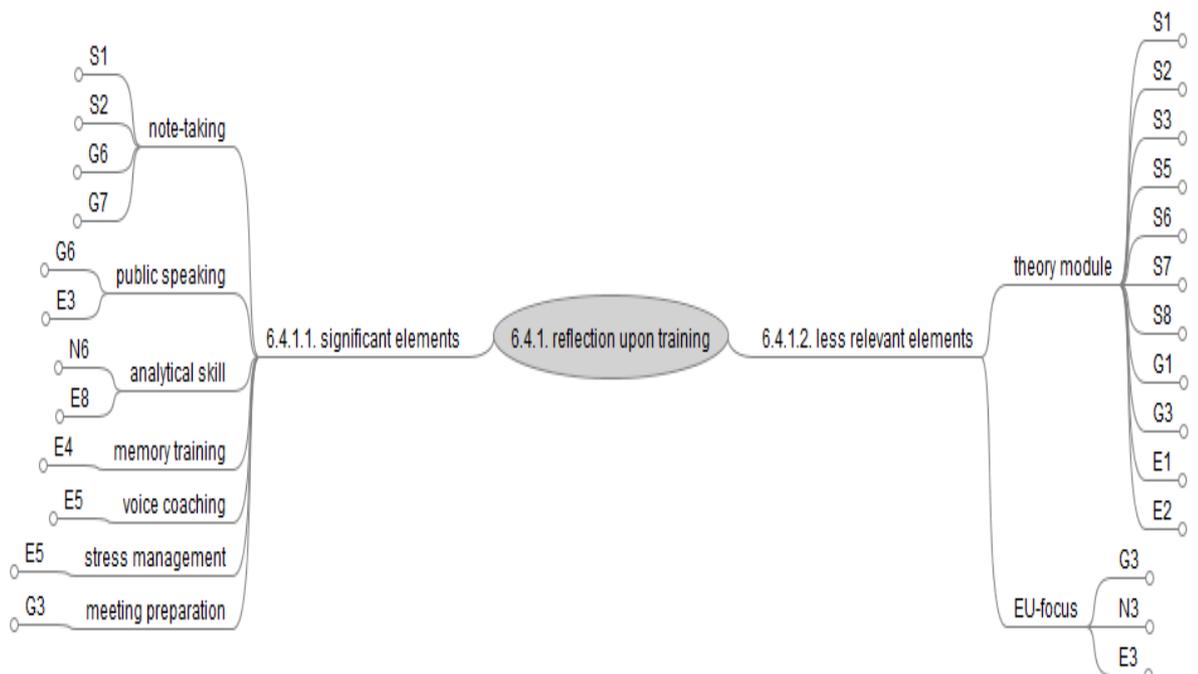
6.4. Thoughts about Learning during Training and Learning at Work: Feedback on Interpreter Training

I have distinguished between two stages in interpreters' careers: learning during training and learning at work, in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. This coming section contains feedback from interpreters regarding their training. This is an emergent section outside the original research design-- when interpreters were asked about their learning experiences, they naturally reflected upon these experiences, comparing the training with real-life interpreting practice, identifying the gap between training and practice, and providing suggestions to make training more relevant to interpreting practice. In the coming paragraphs, I will incorporate their narrative extracts to demonstrate how real-life interpreting practice could inform training.



6.4.1. Reflection upon training

When reflecting on their interpreter training experiences, the distinction between training and real-life interpreting practice is most notable. Interpreters categorise the useful skills that they attained through training as significant aspects, and refer to what they perceive as insignificant training elements as less relevant aspects.



6.4.1.1. Significant elements

Almost all the key interpreting skills are perceived by interpreters as significant training elements. The table below shows specific skill points that are of significance for interpreters, and some narrative extracts are attached as supporting evidence.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Note-taking | G6: Note-taking skills helps me to think logically while listen actively. |
| Public speaking | E3: I think the first thing came to my mind is about public speaking. Because I've got that kind of habits to prepare a speech in nearly... not everyday, but every week. So I did enjoy giving speeches during the interpreter training! And maybe that's the reason why I'm more comfortable to be a public speaker. And that helped me a lot both as an interpreter and as a teacher. Because of this, I was given a lot of tasks, for example, coaching my students participating in the national English competition. And later for example, my boss asked me to participate in many competitions. At that time of course you are the speaker in teacher's competition, and you will major role is to be a speaker. And... of course later on, I found my interest in public speaking and teach public speaking to my students. So all those things are interconnected. . |
| Analytical skill | N6: Um, yeah, analysing a speech to cultivate rational thinking. Sometimes when I get lost in a speech, I would try to manage to say something based on rational thinking. And it's also important for me because this rational thinking can be applied in other areas. |
| | E8: As a learner...for CI, learning about the links, and key ideas, that's the most important things. And links actually for all of our training. That's most important. Links, using analysis, and spotting key ideas, and spotting key speech patterns. |
| Memory training | E4: Like the memory training, three weeks or four weeks, that was really important. You know, without the training I think I would probably struggle. R: OK. So you reckon the importance of the training very much. E4: Exactly. Yes. But when you said... when I started to work I realised actually it makes a difference. It's quite helpful. |
| Voice coaching | E5: Your clients maybe listen to you all day, so it's quite important that your voice is pleasant really. And often people don't give you any feedback about how your voice is... Actually it can help with your, with the delivery and with avoiding panic really. So I think voice coaching is a quite useful thing. Maybe you don't have to do hours and hours of it, but at least a little bit will be quite useful. |
| Stress management | E5: It's probably quite useful really, because you do have to learn to stand stress, sometimes when you get a bad performance, you will be aware of it. Even if your colleagues still say it, "we have to just keep going, keep going." I think the course was from time to time, you are struggling or having a bad day. Sometimes when the tutors will be a bit hard on us, I think I really find it very stimulating, very enjoyable, but it was tough. And I think it's important to be tough, because it is tough when you really have to start interpreting. You haven't got any choice. You just have to, you have to swim. Sink or swim. So I think for me that they should be, they can't recreate the reality as I said, of the stress. I think being tough is actually very positive as long as you are constructive as well. You know I can't just stay nasty to you. They have to be quite demanding, and quite hard on you, something you thought it's too much, but now I'm looking back on it, I'm not so sure. I think probably it's necessary, yes. |
| Meeting preparation | G3: How to prepare for an interpreting job. I mean if you are already know what you are going to interpreting, for example, if the teacher give us a topic, now I am more familiar with searching information and more efficiently. And to how to do glossaries, how to predict. |

Table 10: Significant Elements in Training

One aspect common to all the significant training elements so far is that these skills are deemed to be applicable in the workplace (which is not limited to interpreting-related work only); in other words, the extent to which skills are transferrable to the workplace determines the importance interpreters attribute to them.

6.4.1.2. Less-relevant elements

According to the narrative accounts of interpreters, their practical expectations of training have for the most part been met. However, there has been a surprisingly large number of interpreters who point out two issues with the training. These two less relevant elements in training are the compulsory theory module and the EU-focus of the training programme. The theory module in particular is deemed less relevant: 11 interpreters, or one third of the participants in this study, have raised the same concern which is that the theory module is irrelevant to real-life interpreting practice. The theory module is entitled 'Methods and Approaches' and is an introductory course to the fundamental theoretical elements in the field of T/I. Apart from the two-hour weekly class time in the first term, trainees are required to read a series of textbooks and complete an essay on a selected topic by the end of the term. The reason so many trainees pay less attention to the theory module is understandable: since most trainee interpreters are language graduates who want to make good use of their languages, they expect the training to be practical. However, it is inevitable that an MA course will have more academic or theoretical elements, hence the incorporation of Methods and Approaches. This clearly goes against what most trainees look for in a 'practical' interpreter training programme. Here are some examples of how interpreters think the theory module is simply 'a waste of time':

S5: At very beginning, I was very like, because **when I chose to study interpreting, I just regarded it a very practical course, nothing relating to the theory so much**, because **I think translation or interpretation should be very intuitive** thing, you think you should do translating in this way but there is no reason why. It's just by your intuition. **But now I have to find a reason to justify my translation, that's the most difficult part**. I have to find the theories, to support my choice of that translation. Yeah, so that's the most difficult part, I really struggled at that period when I was in a research.

S8: Uh, it's irrelevant because it's so theoretically and... Yes, **I should say it tells you something, but these things are natural when you are doing interpreting or translation**. You just have no time or just automatically use them. But take the essays; take the commentary as an example. Why should I translate this like this and this not like that. I don't know, I just think this is mental way, but you have to put the theory in. I don't think in real life you don't need that, you just do it automatically. And the most important thing is it starts from 9 o'clock in the morning, and once you get up so early and you are not efficient. Your brain just will not work for the whole day and **you waste lots of time**.

G1: (The translation theory) Is irrelevant at all, but just consumes me a lot of time. **Too time-consuming, and I don't see the benefit at the moment...** I think we can just keep it simple and short, not to read lots of books and do an essay. And someone even fail the essay.

The reason some interpreters are scathing about the theory module is because they simply do not know how to appreciate the academic value of doing research:

S1: (Laugh) To be honest if you just narrow down the study to be an interpreter I think it's the MA course. **Methods and approaches is not that useful.** Because **those scholars just express the simple thing in a very sophisticated way.**

R: Difficult way?

S1: Yes. Now we have a commentary and I read a lot of theory. I realised that those tutors just teach us, instruct those theories in a daily practice in our training. But I know that the theories are the basic so we have to do that course. But if you narrow down... I think it's irrelevant (both laugh). **I think the tutors can do those things, explain the theory by using examples. We can know better rather than just reading a book.**

S2: Yeah, **with possible exceptions of some of the lectures, some of the very general things on very small topics on how the brain processes language.**

R: Oh you mean, Methods & Approaches?

S2: Yes. And I thought, **I thought those models have come with very poor evidences,** so I thought that. **And it depends on the tutor, you know, what they believe or don't believe.** Well, there was no evidence provided by this.

What interpreters expressed here are simply their personal thoughts, and since the two comments are made by two Ss who just started their training, it is understandable that they might still be eager to receive the language-focused training in interpreting, rather than focusing on research. I was expecting that once interpreters entered the work market and started to apply what they had learnt during training both theoretically and practically, they might start to appreciate the value of having some theoretical training in T/I, just as Ss themselves assumed:

S6: **I don't find that particularly useful for me at the moment at least. Maybe when, maybe when I am a professional I will appreciate more.**

In S7's case, although she could not see the point in having a theory module as a trainee, she believes that the training in T&I theory is 'an interesting distraction.' Nevertheless, quite surprisingly, the idea that the theory module is irrelevant or boring remains with some Es even after they have been in the job market for a long time:

E1: On the interpreting side, probably not. Um, for me, the theory modules that we did one, particularly not that useful...But you can't tell anyone! (both laugh) I think **at the time of my training, I didn't think of strategies consciously.** I just practice and then I listen to feedback, people's suggestions and I didn't think about strategies very specifically I just thought about practicing. **No, I don't think they are useful even now.**

E2: **At that time...I thought the translation theory was so boring.**

R: At that time? How about now?

E2: **Now...still!** And it didn't really help me. (laugh) **The theories...couldn't really apply to my daily life, or my career, or my work.** I couldn't really realise, OK I am using this theory in my interpretation and my translation. You couldn't really do that, you know.

The following extract from G3 might help to explain why so many trainees find the theory module the least relevant element in training:

G3: **I think we feel it's irrelevant because we don't really spend time on understanding what it was saying.**

R: Oh, this is a very good point. Because you don't understand, so you think that's irrelevant.

G3: Yeah, I mean **many of us skip the classes**. Yeah, because we focus much more on practicing not on using or realising the theory. **And sometimes understand a theory doesn't help you, I mean even if you understand the theory, you cannot do it.**

R: Yeah, so you further think of theory is irrelevant.

G3: Yeah, like **if you really know a lot about the theory, you can tell and teach people about theory, but it doesn't mean you can be a good interpreter.**

G3 is the only interpreter so far who admits that trainees tend to skip the theory module and pay a lot more attention to interpreting practice. Without having invested enough time, trainees are not able to appreciate the significance of the theory module, not to mention to apply theory to actual interpreting practice.

Another element deemed irrelevant in the training is identified by three Chinese-English interpreters across group N, G and E. They are concerned about the fact that the interpreter training is very EU-focused:

G3: (Laugh) EU topics are not useful for us. **Of course it's still useful to know more about the world, but if I'm going back to Taiwan probably a bit irrelevant.** Or maybe more specifically the UK, like knowing the housing policy or immigrant or their house system.

R: But you are here, you are here learning interpreting.

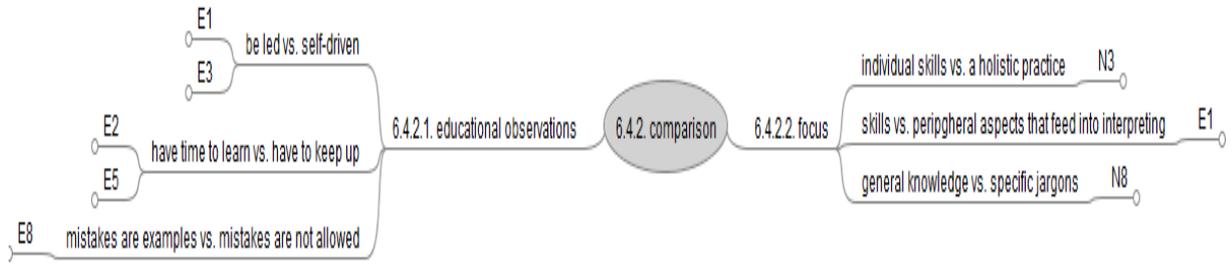
G3: Yeah, I know, but I'm leaving. If I'm staying or applying for PSW, yes, it's important.

N3: I will say, (laugh), forgive me, **all those rules about the EU is not useful at all.** (laugh) **It's too far away from us.** It will never ever be part of a real job.

E3: **Those materials we used at Leeds are mainly about EU or the UK, or Western world, instead of the things mentioned mostly in mainland China or in Taiwan.** That's one thing about the topic, about the terminology, the expressions really.

This point raised by the Chinese-English interpreters seems to have nothing to do with the previous point: that the theory module is irrelevant to real life interpreting practice. But upon closer inspection, these two points in fact correspond with each other since they are both concerned with practicality: a value which is deeply rooted in trainee interpreters' minds. While the majority of interpreters are concerned about how many 'useful' skills they will be able to take away at the end of the programme, the Chinese-English interpreters are concerned about whether the content of the programme can be of use in their future interpreting career in either China or Taiwan. The EU-focus, or the dominance of the Western perspective on the programme, simply seems irrelevant to the environment - the Chinese-speaking world - in which they expect to work in their professional lives.

6.4.2. Comparison: Learning during training vs. Learning at work



The comparison between learning during training and learning at work provides another interesting array of emergent data from practising interpreters (Ns and Es); I did not ask practitioners to make a comparison between learning during training and learning at work. Not surprisingly, none of the trainee interpreters commented on the comparison between these two types of learning, quite possibly due to the fact that they simply did not have enough work experience to make a meaningful comparison.

Initially I did not expect to encounter a lot of reflections comparing learning during training and learning at work. Certainly, the practising interpreters' extraordinary experiences do not surprise me; their narratives are in line with the general principles of any training theme, for example that learning during training is led by tutors and learning at work is self-motivated, and that learning during training focuses on skills and learning at work focuses on practice. Nonetheless, what are noteworthy in their narratives are the genuine accounts regarding what they think about learning in these two settings, and the ways in which these thoughts are consolidated and strengthened by their personal stories. I group their comparisons into two categories for discussion: educational observations and focuses in learning.

6.4.2.1. Educational observations

6.4.2.1.1. Learning is led by tutors vs. Learning is self-driven

It seems self-evident that learning is primarily led by tutors during training, while learning is more self-driven in the workplace. The significance of self-awareness while learning interpreting has been mentioned repeatedly in previous accounts. In the experiences of E1 and E3, the contrast between tutor-led and self-driven learning is further demonstrated by their work experiences. Two reasons lie behind this statement: firstly, interpreting tasks are bound to make interpreters aware of their own strengths and weakness, thus their motivation to learn becomes stronger when they accumulate work experience, as E1 explains:

E1: Learning is very self-driven at work. **It's all about your personal awareness, self-awareness, of, perhaps where you might have any weakness.** And it's you thinking that I didn't do well as I could maybe I need to do this to make sure, all whether I need to look into these things to make sure, I need to have a glossary on this topic, I need to

listen to more of this particular accent, for example. **It's all about you realising what was meant that your performance wasn't as good as you would like it to be.** Perhaps it's as good as it could have at that stage, but what would you do in the future to make it better, so you have to be very self-aware.

Secondly, since work experience gives interpreters the opportunity to understand their specific shortcomings, their learning naturally becomes more self-motivated, as opposed to simply following the tutors' instructions about what to learn during training. This point is illustrated by E3:

E3: Just because when I was a student, I don't know what other things may happen in the real meeting. So the thing we used for our training are just normally the things we find from the internet, so those materials may not be the same to real life meetings. **But after I practiced as a real interpreter for these years, I think I know what kind of things are the things I need to read in my daily life.** So for example, when financial crisis happened, I read a lot of things about financial crisis. And I tried to check all the things that I need to know. But as a student, I think, maybe I just read those headlines, or the news on the first page...I won't go into details. I won't ask myself why and why and why, then go deeper and deeper. **But after I became real interpreter, I think in real meetings, those clients, those speakers, they can go, really, they can talk about things really in a professional way.** So you really need to know those knowledge, otherwise you will be incapable of doing the interpreting tasks. So that's the reason why I get this habit to learn things in different way, to do some kind of research by myself.

6.4.2.1.2. Have time to learn vs. Have to keep up

Another educational observation for learning interpreting during training and at work is that no matter how much pressure they might be under, trainee interpreters have far more time to catch up over the course of the training, whereas practising interpreters have no choice but to keep up. The UN interpreter E5 indicates the importance of keeping going for practising interpreters in the workplace:

E5: In the training course, you don't, you never really have the stress. The mock conferences are quite meaningful, but it doesn't really matter, whereas in real life you suddenly realised that you got to do it, **you got to find a way of keeping going and managing.** And yes, for me, I think what you can't learn because is **absolutely essential to keep going**, and because you can never recreate the full message of a real situation, I mean it matters to you, except the exams. The exam is stressful, but the lessons you can never really create stress and the stress is always there in real life, because in a lesson you can always just stop and get up. You leave the teacher and say, "uh, that's terrible, that's terrible!" But in real life, you just can't.

Both the time pressure and the sole option to keep going push interpreters to be quick learners so as to survive the real-life interpreting assignments. E2 gives an example of how she was forced to be a quick learner at work:

E2: One time I did some interpreting, and I learnt a lot because the speaker was so nice. He was too nice you know. He checked with me all the slides he was going to talk about next day, and he explained all the stories to me, and he tried to shorten the gap of the background knowledge. So was it kind of learning? **I have to learn very fast from his speech. But I don't think I could get that at school.** Sometimes you have to learn very quick from the very first presentation, and then you can go on to do the rest of the meetings because it's all related to each other. **So we have to be a fast learner in working environment.** While we were students, we were allowed to have longer hours to prepare.

6.4.2.1.3. Mistakes are examples vs. Mistakes are not allowed

Another educational observation on learning during training and learning at work is raised by E8. As both an interpreter trainer and a practising interpreter, she points out how interpreters' mistakes are treated differently during training and at work. In the following excerpt, she clearly demonstrates the opposing roles mistakes play in these two settings:

E8: The major difference is that if you if you make a serious mistake, your career is over because your reputation is everything. **The mistakes you make in the classroom are excellent because they raise a problem for everybody**, they can be shared; **whereas the mistake you make in the boardroom or at a meeting, at a conference, if it's serious, can have very serious repercussions.**

The fact that mistakes are not allowed in the workplace might be the reason why interpreting can be a nerve-wracking experience for many. E8 explains why mistakes cannot be treated lightly in real life, by examining the nature of the pressure which eventually causes mistakes:

E8: I think that pressure that we talked about, the fact that it is real and that you get paid for your work but that you have to deliver the goods. That feeling is the responsibility, yes. **Responsibility, accountability and ownership and owning what you have said and realising that your interpretation is used for the minutes.** I've afterwards had to look at my interpretation in writing for the minutes, and think "Oh God, I could have said that nicer, or I shouldn't have brought that word back in or I think I made a mistake there". It's a lot of responsibility and particularly for example, a lot of these trade union meetings or major corporate meetings are about plant closures for example, and your interpretation, **if you're interpreting for the workforce and, well, thousands of jobs could be on the line if something just isn't communicated properly.**

Having become aware of the pressure to make no mistakes, since these might affect all parties participating in the communication, interpreters should find a balance between fluency and accuracy, especially during the transitions from trainee to practitioner.

6.4.2.2. Focus in learning

According to practising interpreters, the focus of learning varies during training and at work.

6.4.2.2.1. Individual skills vs. Holistic practice

N3 describes what she learnt from training as a set of individual skills, while interpreting at work is a much more holistic practice:

N3: **When I was on the course, interpreting is a skill, but now interpreting is a profession** for me.

R: What do you mean by that?

N3: **In training, we learn about different skills**, um, your focus is to polish, is to deliver, is to perfect the skill. **But at work, I don't see interpreting as separate skills but as a whole thing.**

6.4.2.2.2. Specific skills vs. Peripheral aspects that feed into interpreting

E1 also thinks learning about specific skills is the key issue during training, but learning at work focuses more on peripheral aspects that feed into interpreting. She said that when she started to learn at work, skills were no longer a concern anymore since she had already attained them. Instead, she pays more attention to other issues that benefit her general interpreting performance:

E1: Like I said, in my experience of learning.....I just practice, practice, practice. So now like I said, **I'm not focusing on skills now because I know I've got skills**. Some of my current students have issues with analysis skill. Or they have issues with their note-taking. All those skills are necessary in order to be a good interpreter. And so I will be very much advising them to focus on those specific skills and develop the specific skills and do whatever they can to help them with specific skills. So maybe not me, other learners, their learning stage, have to focus more on the skills that make up good interpreting. Whereas my skill, **what I'm focusing on isn't skill of interpreting. For me, it's kind of a peripheral thing that feed into interpreting rather than being about interpreting themselves.**

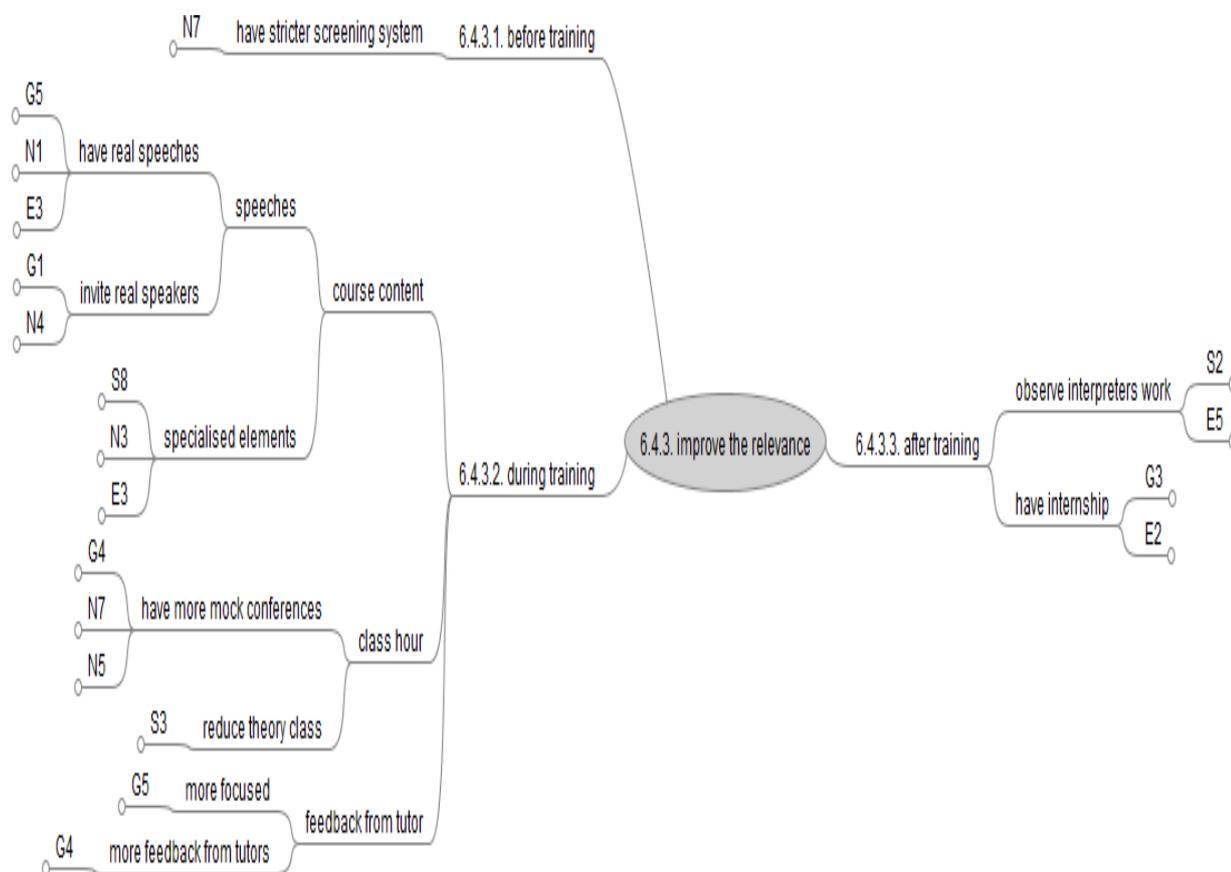
6.4.2.2.3. General knowledge vs. Specific terminology

N8 is more explicit about how the learning focus differs during training and at work. Since she works for the EU, she uses this experience as her point of reference, mentioning the relevant key areas to which EU interpreters should pay attention, particularly the EU-specific jargon, which is obviously more specialised than the general knowledge that interpreter training offers.

N8: I think the Leeds training wasn't actual interpreting, because we didn't have any experiences in interpreting whatsoever. We had a lot of general knowledge though... Whereas here, I really felt through the past few months that I've been desperately trying to come to terms with terminology that used to be the protocol meetings and how the institutions, and how the whole thing work together. So in that sense, **it's less about learning to interpret, it's more about learning the institutions to which you work.** That obviously helps because at the end of the day, you know the first time you go to one of those meetings, you could be an incredible interpreter but if they talk about such and such procedure, you've never heard of these procedures before, **it's not necessarily standard English terms, it's Euro jargon. It's Euro speak.** And you simply don't know that when you first go in. So that's why, you know, so important to learn that. I realised that which is very different to university. **At university we were always told that interpreting is not about translating the words literally, you know, it's about getting the ideas across. And of course that is still true. However, when you are in a very specific environment, you need to get the terminology right. It's no longer an idea. When they are talking about procedural things, you know, you have to get it right because there is specific vocab that you need to use. And you simply need to learn that. And then in that case it's a literal translation from language into the next.** So that's something quite new.

According to all the interpreters, they are aware of the shift of focus in learning from training scene to workplace after stepping into the job market. Thanks to such awareness, interpreters are able to adapt their learning methods and approaches. At the same time, due to their acute awareness of the differences between learning during training and learning at work, they point out the gap in between, which will be presented in the coming section, 6.4.3.

6.4.3. Suggestions for improving the relevance of learning during training and learning at work



A benefit of conducting exploratory research with interpreters is that they not only point out problems, but also spontaneously generate solutions to these problems without request. Below are the suggestions proposed by interpreters to make learning during training more relevant to interpreting practice at work. Their suggestions can be roughly grouped according to timing: before training, during training, and after training. Since these suggestions are proposed by interpreters across all groups, I believe that they are especially valuable since their application might enable the training to cater better to the needs of learners.

6.4.3.1. Before training

N7 raised the point that training does not sufficiently prepare students to adapt to a changing market, in which much more specialised knowledge is required. He proposed that the programme should be ‘more selective and more demanding’ in the pre-training screening system, because to be an interpreter, ‘the language skills are the basics, but it might be better to have a mixed composition’.

6.4.3.2. During training

As suggested by interpreters from all groups, measures during training were believed to have the potential to render the training more relevant to real life

interpreting practice. These measures, as suggested by interpreters at all stages, can be divided into two dimensions: the choice of course content and class hour arrangement.

6.4.3.2.1. Choice of course content

Two issues have been raised by interpreters with regard to the choice of course content: source of speeches and the addition of specialised elements.

To make speech materials more relevant to real life interpreting practice, interpreters propose two ideas: one, have real life speeches to practice from, and invite external speakers. G5, N1 and E3, three interpreters across three groups, propose having real life speeches after the second term because these real speeches **'are in written languages or maybe some slogans like that as this is what we encountered in real work.** (N1)' E3 gives another reason for using real speeches:

E3: **We may provide some real-life materials to students so that they may find the outside world is not ideal**, because we were kind of learning in the lab. Everything is perfect: the pronunciation from the teachers very clear, and they choose simple languages instead of using the awkward language to express their ideas, and they use oral English or Chinese instead of written languages to express ideas. But for a real interpreter, he or she should prepare for all the situations, the best situations and the worst situations. I think that's the first thing we need to add to the programme.

Meanwhile, the idea of having external speakers with specialised expertise but who know nothing about interpreting is also popular, as exemplified by N4's statement:

N4: **I think they can invite some real speaker.** Yes, or real clients, not from former students, cause former students know interpreting, **from the people know nothing about interpreting, clients they know nothing about two languages.** They come to the class and listens to the performance. I think **their feedback will be more real and closer to the real job market.**

6.4.3.2.2. Class hour arrangements

Next, adding more specialised elements into the course content is favoured by some interpreters. This would help by **'giving more chances to those interpreters who want to focus on just one particular field** (S8).' In consideration of which field N3 refers to as particular fields, it could be **'finance, economy, engineering... because that's one of the big thing here in the freelance market.'** E3 proposes including some cultural elements to meet the potential need for students from China or Taiwan:

E3: They need to not just only follow those topics with students from other European countries. **We need to find some cultural topics which is only relevant in China, mainland China and Taiwan of course.**

This point corresponds with one of the irrelevant aspects raised by some Chinese-English interpreters in the previous part, about the EU-focus of the training, as discussed in 6.4.1.1.2. Since the EU-focus has been mentioned both as a less-relevant training element and as a point for improvement, and given the fact that

Chinese-English interpreters outnumber other interpreters in the chosen programme, this need in interpreter training to provide more region-specialised elements in the course can be seen as a significant one.

6.4.3.3. After training

A number of interpreters suggest having post-training observation or internship opportunities, in order to make the training more relevant to real-life interpreting practice. As a trainee interpreter, S2 thinks that if it were possible to ‘get an interpreter who is allowed to be filmed for a day in a conference’, she could gain a better idea about the interpreting profession, even as a beginner. Likewise, as an experienced interpreter already, E5 makes a similar suggestion:

E5: **It’s good to go and visit, for example, the EU.** I know not everybody gets the chance to do that but **it’s a real eye opener about the reality.** I was able to go when I was in Leeds and I found it very interesting to listen to the real interpreters. You didn’t actually hear. I found at Leeds that was one thing actually that we didn’t really hear real interpreters working. **Our teachers listen to us working but we never really listen to them working,** and when I went to the EU for the first time for visit when I was still at Leeds and listened to the English booth when the interpreter is working. **It was a big comfort to me in a way to hear that they also sometimes had trouble or didn’t understand some specific words.** (laugh) They weren’t perfect but they managed to find ways of dealing with it. So, perhaps you don’t have to go to the situation to do that. Perhaps the teacher could let you listen to them sometimes or teach you some tips.

From what both trainees and practitioners say about the potential interpreting observation opportunities, we can see that interpreters have various reasons to observe practising interpreters. When S2 suggests filming a working interpreter, she basically wants to get a rough idea of real life interpreting practice. In the case of Gs, Ns and Es, while they already know what to expect from working as an interpreter, the observation experience could help them to identify their weaknesses, or comfort them by demonstrating that other interpreters do make mistakes at work.

Another suggestion made by interpreters is to have volunteer or internship interpreting opportunities after training. Interpreters propose this idea with different expectations: while G3 would like to receive authentic feedback from real service users, E2 sees the internship opportunity as the point for novice interpreters to start networking—which is significant in the interpreting profession. Below are their narrative excerpts, demonstrating their views:

G3: Maybe we can have volunteer intern. Internship opportunity, like to be **volunteer interpreter to a certain organisation,** maybe collaboration or something. **So that we can receive feedback from real customers.**

E2: Something we can do might be **having more internships after training.** If you study here (Taiwan), especially university X and Y, once you are in, you are a student here, some professors offer you some chances to go out with them, or they do some internships. And **they started to build up their network, when they are still students.** **So when they graduate, they already have work experience.**

Generally speaking, the suggestions made by interpreters to make the training more relevant to their professional role might not be deemed applicable by trainers or programme designers. However, these suggestions indicate room for improvement, and can thus be treated as points of reference.

6.5. Summary: Learning at Work

This analysis about learning at work leads to a few conclusions. Firstly, first interpreting experiences have an impact on interpreters' professional lives; it is from their first interpreting assignment that they start to relate what they have learnt during training to what they do at work. Secondly, learning at work is more about abstract strategy development than skill consolidation compared with that of learning during training. In particular, the strategies that interpreters develop at work are to do with people and the profession. Thirdly, by reflecting and comparing learning during training and learning at work, practising interpreters are able to generate some constructive suggestions to improve the relevance of the training to actual interpreting practices. Learning themes generated in this chapter, however, do not reflect the social nature which is integral to situated learning practices. Hence the next chapter, Chapter 7, will be dedicated to examining practising interpreters' learning at work as a process of participation using the concept of the Communities of Practice.

Chapter 7

Findings IV: Learning as Participation

7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter 6: Learning at Work, we have seen that different interpreting markets generate different lessons for practising interpreters to learn, the contrast between the private freelance market (market A) and the in-house positions in international organisations (market D) being particularly striking. But what it is really like to be a practitioner in the private market or in an international organisation, has not yet been explored. That is why in this coming chapter, Chapter 7, the idea of learning as participation is going to be analysed according to the concept of the Communities of Practice, exploring how practising interpreters take part in these two markets.

Chapter 7 aims to answer the final research question in this study: **What is it like to be a practising interpreter?** In the previous chapters, learning themes generated from both trainee and practising interpreters are compiled. Even though those learning themes are contextualised, entailing both individual learning efforts as well as working and learning with people, the application of skill and development of strategy are constructed predominantly as individual attainments. Domains such as the social, cultural and emotional are presented only as a set of external factors that might have influenced learning at work, not as facets of learning itself. The findings in this chapter depict learning as *a process of participation*, and *an experience of becoming* a member of the CoP based on the belief that there is a socially and culturally constructed ‘hidden curriculum’ (Colley et al., 2003: 476) for practitioners. Such a hidden curriculum may entail contents for either the teaching curriculum or the learning curriculum covered in 2.2.3., and plays an important role in the process of becoming an interpreter in the market, mediating between training-generated backgrounds and the demands of the workplace. My interest in ‘how the person is defined by as well as defines relations’ within a community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 53) leads me to call upon the key issues for practising interpreters, which might have the potential for me to understand the ‘hidden curriculum’ for practising interpreters.

Bearing the curiosity about the hidden curriculum in mind, I originally intended to discover what it is like to be a practitioner in the interpreting community; how interpreters engage with each other in their professional world, what kind of doubts novice interpreters might have, and what professional insights

experienced interpreters can offer to inexperienced ones. Intangible issues regarding the long-term development of interpreters will be addressed, with special emphasis on how a member in the community of interpreters should engage with the other members of this community. Since these queries can only be addressed by practitioners already involved in a community of practising interpreters and who have experienced becoming an interpreter, only practising interpreters, i.e. Ns (novice interpreters) and Es (experienced interpreters) were required to answer the relevant questions in the interview sessions. In the second half of this chapter, the professional vision of practising interpreters of interpreter development are presented. It is interesting to note from the narrative data that what concerns trainee interpreters in terms of interpreter development coincides with what practising interpreters would like to share with less experienced ones.



Finally, before we embark on the examination of learning interpreting as a process of participation, it is important to note that the differences between working in the private market as freelancers and working in international organisations as staff interpreters will be the focal point of this chapter. It may therefore be worth revisiting Figure 5 from 3.5.1.4., in which the interpreting labour market has been divided into four sub-markets. I was lucky enough to have recruited participants working in all the sub-markets, but the data indicate that when referring to their work experience in these markets, participants' answers tend to fall into market A or market D. Even if participants come from market B or market C, since the majority of them also have work experience in market A or D, they tend to share their views regarding the latter rather than the former. At the same time, market A (the private freelance market) and market D (the in-house positions in international organisations) are distinct from one another in many respects; these differences will be clarified in the coming paragraphs.

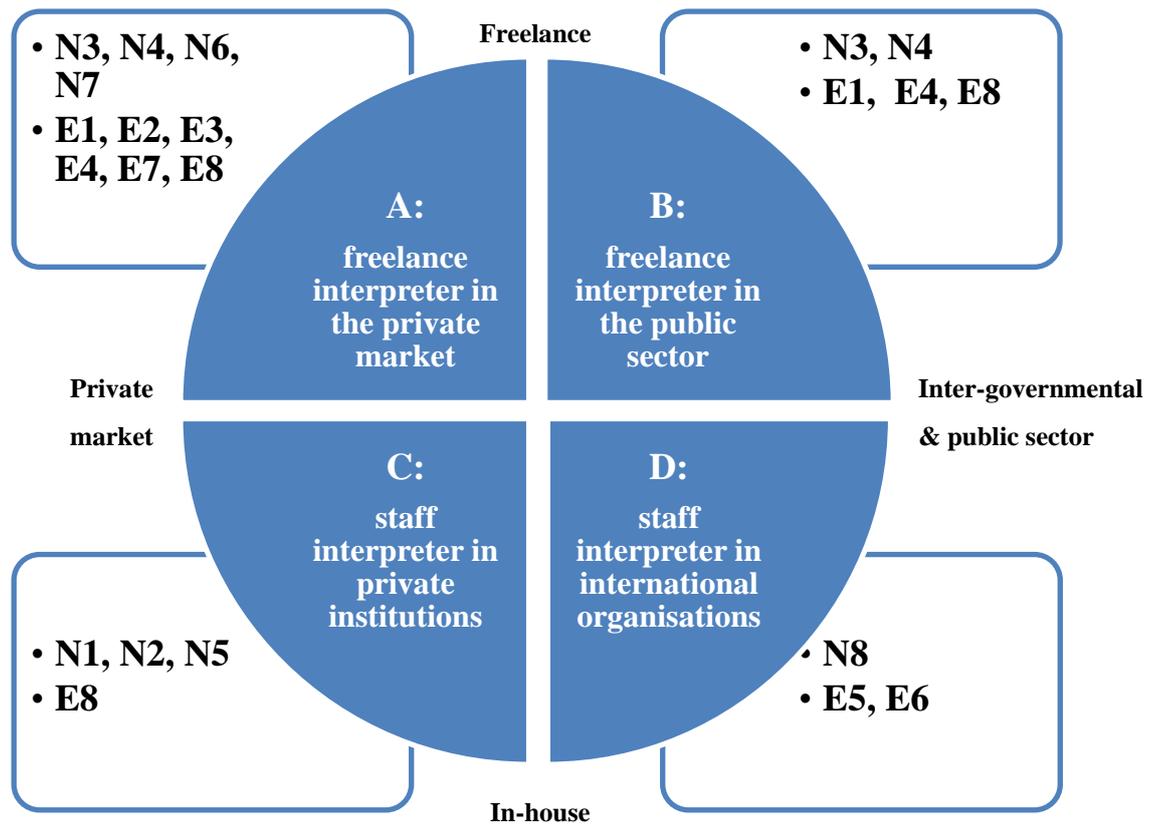


Figure 5 Division of the Interpreting Labour Market & the Composition of Participants

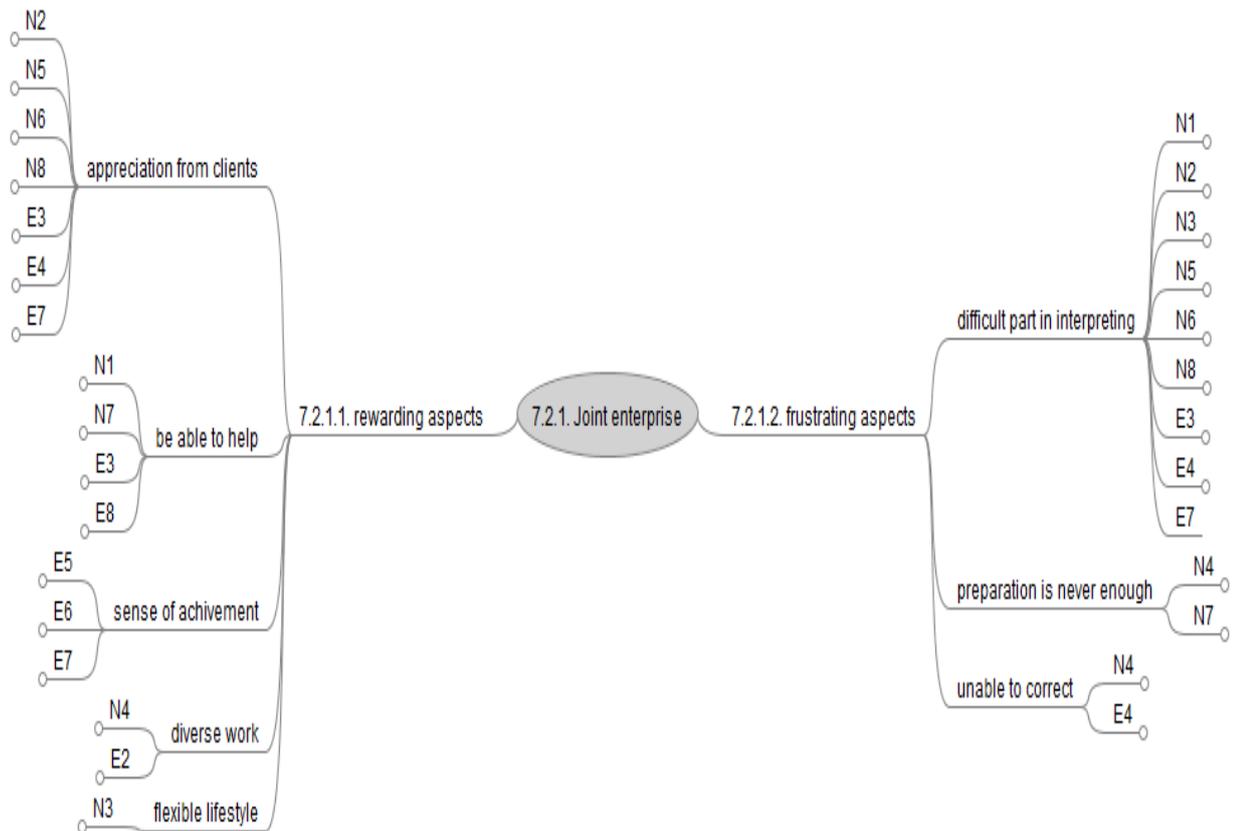
7.2. The Communities of Practice of Interpreters

As mentioned in 2.2.4., Lave and Wenger (1999) define the CoP as a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping CoPs. From a sociocultural perspective, the CoP is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge since the CoP identifies the context of workplace learning. Understanding the CoP of practising interpreters is therefore crucial to understanding the working knowledge for practitioners.

In order to understand the community of practising interpreters (hereafter refer to as CoPI), nothing can better represent the community than the shared practices and perspectives of its members. Members in the CoP engage in typical patterns of reasoning, inquiry, and production; Greeno, Pearson and Schoenfeld have shown that such patterns are readily identifiable and recognisable: ‘We get embedded in a field, we pick up the practice and perspectives of the people who inhabit the field. Those practices and perspectives are a part of our competence and a sign of our

membership in the community of practitioners in that field' (1999: 139). The compiled narrative accounts of practising interpreters serve as a source for identification and recognition of patterns of practice and perspectives of the members of the CoP; identified features include joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement of CoPI.

7.2.1. Joint enterprise—the interpreting practice experienced by practitioners



Active practitioners are constantly engaged in the pursuit of all kinds of interpreting experiences, to enhance their professional expertise in interpreting as well as to fulfil their personal career goals. Their collective participation results in an accumulation of practices that reflect both the structure of the community and social relationships among its members. These practices are thus the property of the community created over time by their sustained pursuit of a joint enterprise—in the case of practising interpreters, their joint enterprise is the interpreting practice. In Wenger's words, a joint enterprise 'plays a central role in defining the circumstances under which... members feel concerned or unconcerned by what they are doing' (1998: 81). Although the focus of this study is not the investigation of interpreting practice but rather understanding how practice is perceived from a learner's perspective, a fraction of the narratives still reflect practitioners concerns about the

interpreting practice, dividing the practice into ‘rewarding aspects’ and ‘frustrating aspects’. Given the diverse nature of interpreting practice, it will be challenging to address each and every concern that practising interpreters raise, but since they have voiced how their experiences shape their feelings about the interpreting practice, I believe that those rewarding aspects and frustrating aspects can reveal how interpreting practice is a joint enterprise in a CoPI.

7.2.1.1. Rewarding aspects

The rewarding aspects that practising interpreters share regarding interpreting practice are very much in line with issues of perception and the nature of interpreting work which initially attracted them to undertake training, as reported in 4.2.1.2. and 4.2.1.3. Seven interpreters, accounting for almost half of the practising interpreters interviewed, state that receiving appreciation from the clients is the most rewarding aspect of their work. N8 describes vividly how the chairperson in the EU would prompt the delegates to thank the interpreters at the back:

N8: Probably the best is that **at the end of the meetings, the chairperson will say, well I'd like to thank the interpreters working in the back.** They are not obliged to say it. As you know, often you will find that, you know the German delegates will turn to the German booth, do signal and say thank you; the Italians will always look at the Italian booth and say thank you. But often it doesn't happen for English booth because everybody is listening to English booth. Or not everybody, but you know perhaps the Brits, the Dutch, the Finnish... so you don't have that same connection with your delegates. Because you are not, you are never a hundred per cent sure which delegate is listening to you. But then, every now and then, you would experience certain delegates, you know, not even that solely delegates from the UK, but people who have been listening to the English booth, **they would turn round, just to give you a smile or nod, just to say thank you.** And that's really really nice. It's a wonderful feeling. Because you think, **you know they realise that you are there, they realise that it's tricky and they sort of appreciate the effort that you are putting in.** So that's really nice.

Another four interpreters share similar feelings, indicating that the most rewarding moments are those when they are able to offer help, as described by E8:

E8: **Seeing people who initially couldn't communicate and disagreed reach an agreement through active communication that you have facilitated.** Particularly in very aggressive trade union meetings, where union members and the members of the body owners or business or whatever, will simply not agree and bringing the consensus up, enjoying a happy ending. Yes, that's wonderful.

For other practising interpreters, the rewarding aspects lie in their enjoyment of the work in its own right. Three Es claim that it is the interpreting practice that brings them a sense of achievement. For E5, he enjoys “defeating” the challenging content as a UN interpreter:

E5: **I like it in a quite difficult in way but you can manage it.** It's not the level of difficulty that challenges you but you feel a sense of achievement when you do it that you are not panicking, getting lost, or ... **I like it to be quite challenging without just being discouraging.** That's a great different for me ... be able to do it in a clear and elegant way of English, and that's quite difficult, and I like to feel that it challenges me, and I manage to ride in the challenge and to achieve the challenge. I love that.

E7 works in the private market, and enjoys it when her audiences in the conference are able to respond to the speaker at the same pace, despite the language barrier:

E7: Um, the most rewarding thing for me is, **when I feel and see that my listeners, my audiences are reacting to the speaker the same way, and almost at the same time expected as the listeners in original language.** That is the most rewarding thing if the audience feels after conference or whatever, they feel that they haven't missed out anything, they have the same information as they talked during the breaks to the listeners of the original language, and that they have the feeling that I have passed the same information as the listeners of the original speech.

In addition to receiving appreciation from service users, feeling able to help, and the sense of achievement, two other practising interpreters cite the diversity of interpreting practice as rewarding, as described by E2:

E2: The most rewarding aspect is that **I can witness people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate.** This is really encouraging to me. I don't think...of course money matters, but lots of accomplishments come from this aspect to me. Once I also did an interpretation for a theatre group. **It was a great great fun to me.** The payment was not that OK at the time when I worked for them. It was 2006. I really liked this opportunity. I worked for them for two months. And I had to interpret and host different kinds of theatre groups from different countries. And the payment was awful. It was 2000 NT one day only. But I had great fun with them! So, from then, **I learned a lot from different cultures and I also kind of introduce them to know our culture.**

Finally, N3 thinks that the free lifestyle that interpreting practice affords is very rewarding:

N3: **This new idea about how to work and live, and how to balance your work and life, it's definite, yeah a positive influence for me.**

7.2.1.2. Frustrating aspects

Practising interpreters also report frustrating aspects when conducting interpreting assignments. Nine interpreters, or more than half of all the practising interpreters, claim that encountering difficult content in interpreting can be extremely frustrating and demoralising. The difficult content is described by N1 as 'when you don't know how to express it in all the languages you have'. The immediacy of interpreting practice is what makes the difficult content even more unpleasant, as expressed by N2:

N2: The frustration is just like I cannot go on anymore because **it's too difficult, it's too technical, but I have to go on.** That moment is the most frustrating moment.

R: Okay, and there is nothing you can do about it, just keep going.

N2: Yeah, just keep going, just cannot stop. **Even though, you know what you are saying, it's actually rubbish, but you have to say, you have to speak.**

The practising interpreters' constant awareness of their inability to perform the task well and their frequent concern about making mistakes, reflect on the one hand the challenging and fascinating nature of the interpreting assignment but on the other hand highlight issues that practising interpreters need to address at all times. E4 has summarised this shared frustration well:

E4: **There never has been a meeting when I can say ‘Oh. I have done 100% correct.’ No. Always, there are always mistakes all the time. Just big or small.** Yes. But anyway.

The second frustrating aspect mentioned by practising interpreters originates from the first concern, and is that preparation is never enough. Considering that interpreters often have to work under the pressure of time, with few preparation hours between various assignments, it is often the case that the interpreter is the most novice attendee in a specialised meeting—as N7 describes, ‘you even understand less than your audience’. In the excerpt below, N4 highlights a few areas in which interpreters constantly feel under-prepared:

N4: You just cannot know everything about the task you are going to do no matter how much you prepared for the task. You will meet some words or the terminologies, the things that you just did not understand at all. So they give you one week for preparing the task. **It’s never enough.** Even give you one month you still have a lot to prepare.

What deepens the constant frustration for practising interpreters is that, in addition to the fact the content is difficult and no amount of preparation is ever enough, interpreting practice is something that you can never redo:

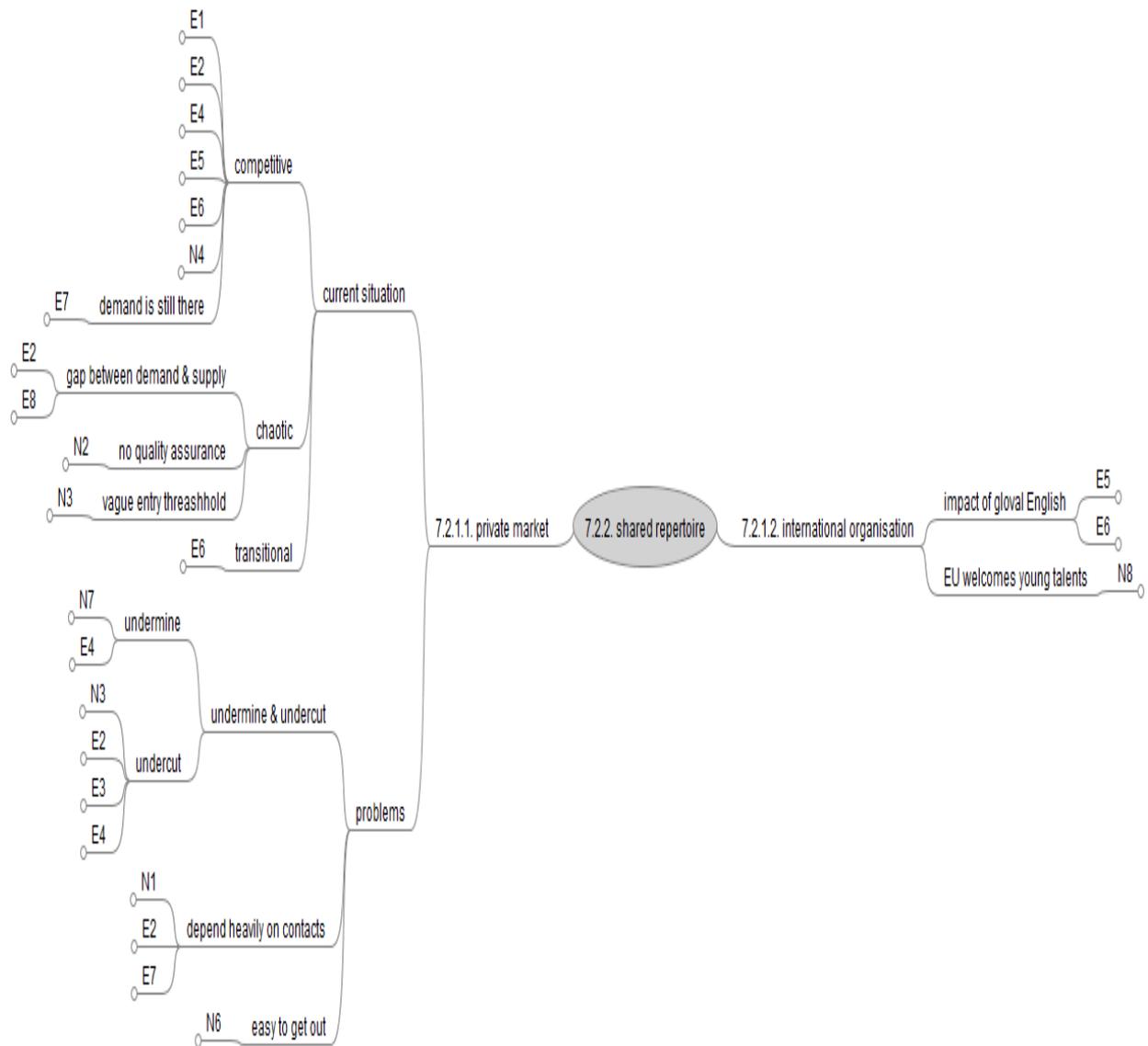
N4: And when we only have one go you cannot make it wrong. **It is not like other work, you did something wrong you can redo it, but interpreting you just.... You just get one go.** I think sometimes it is pretty unfair. Because at that occasion you just cannot realise, maybe just seconds after you realise what they are talking about. I think only having one go is the very frustration to me.

E4: Sometimes, you know, **there are so many things that are out of our control.** I already said it, if I made a mistake, I already made it and hopefully next time will be better. **I cannot redo it.**

Both rewarding and frustrating, interpreting practice outlined as a joint enterprise by practising interpreters reveals the complementary aspects of the interpreting profession; and it is because of the existence of the joint enterprise as a platform for professional practice that practising interpreters are able to articulate their shared experiences.

7.2.2. Shared repertoire—the interpreting market as perceived by practitioners

When outlining the shared repertoire of a CoPI, the interpreting market is the main focus. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there were originally four sub-markets in the interpreting labour market, yet the narratives demonstrate that the participants of this study fall overwhelmingly into two main categories, which are the private freelance market (market A) and staff interpreter positions in international organisations (market D). These two markets also represent dichotomous ends of the interpreting workplace, and are thus deemed worthy of discussion separately.



7.2.2.1. Market A: the private market

When describing the private freelance interpreting market, three adjectives came up repeatedly: competitive, chaotic, and transitional. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on these adjectival descriptions.

7.2.2.1.1. The competitive private market

Almost all of the group E interpreters, though well-established themselves, describe the interpreting market primarily as competitive. Here are some of their descriptions:

E1: It's **a difficult world to get into**.

E2: If they want to be a freelance interpreter, **to me it's almost impossible!**

E4: **I think there are a lot of competition definitely...** There is a lot competition.

E5: I think **it's quite difficult to start as an interpreter** and even when I started it was quite difficult.

E6: I think **interpreting market are more heterogeneous than they have in the past**. There are a lot more conferences. But they are happening in many more types of conditions.

Glancing at these statements, it is evident that the competition in the interpreting market is characterised by three elements: difficulty in entrance, difficulty in being a freelancer, and difficulty in being an interpreter now compared with in the past. Fortunately, despite the competitiveness, most practising interpreters still believe that there is a market, but interpreters need to strive to enter. E7 runs her own interpreting agency, and she is particularly confident about the fact that the market is competitive yet offers enough jobs for all interpreters:

E7: I know. I know everybody is always telling negative things. But I don't accept any negative things. Ok. So.

R: So what makes you so positive and so firmly believe that there are jobs for all of us?

E7: **Because human beings communicate with each other**. There is no other way of using... well there are, many ways of communicating with each other. But they will always use their languages in order to communicate. I am aware of the fact that young managers they all go to foreign countries in order to study in a different language, most of the time English. So actually my language combination, for instance here in Austria, I could say well, young people all know English there will be no conferences at all for none of us at some point in time, because they all know English and everything will be done in English and many things, many conferences are held in English. So there had been many more medical conferences with interpreters than nowadays. **But still, there is enough work for us**. And then, **I am so sure that there will always be people who will understand that it is better to speak in your mother tongue and to have interpreters, and also are willing to pay for it instead of doing everything in English and not being able to speak the way that they feel**.

7.2.2.1.2. The under-regulated private market

Parallel to the fierce competition, the interpreting market is perceived as under-regulated in a number of respects. The most obvious cause of the chaos in the market is the imbalance between demand and supply. In the excerpt below, E2 clearly points out the imbalance:

E2: I really think **the mechanism here is not established**. So that **the clients don't know where to find the interpreters and the interpreters don't know how to get in**.

While interpreters are unable to enter the market due to the fierce competition, interpreting service users have difficulties knowing where to look for interpreters. In addition, yet another imbalance strikes the private market: between the shrinking market and the increasing number of interpreting students, as observed by the interpreter trainer E8:

E8: I think it's getting less and less. I think it's really shrinking. **But we have more and more interpreting students year by year**.

The second cause of chaos in the interpreting market is cost-cutting, often by interpreting agencies, resulting in a lack of quality assurance in the interpreting service. N2 has only one-year work experience in the market, but she finds such cost-cutting particularly irritating:

N2: There are so many translation companies now, very fierce competition. They try to bring down the price. And either to bring down the cost, they would just **ignore the quality and they invite unqualified interpreters to do the job**. Very messy.

The third cause of chaos in the interpreting market is suggested by N3. As a practising interpreter, she finds the ambiguous entrance level to the interpreting market very frustrating:

N3: See...from outside, when you stand outside of the market, you look around you see so many foreign companies here, so many foreigners, so many business happening, so many communication, so many meetings, conferences, you think, Oh! There is a great demand for high quality interpreters. So if you're good, you definitely are going to get something. But then **you walk around and around, like you are walking in a circle and you find no entry to this world, to the world of the interpreter. That's very frustrating**, yes. So there's no way for you to make that breakthrough, and you don't know how, apart from lying in your CV, apart from that, I had, **nobody have ever give me any advice to how to, about how to start your career as interpreter**.

N3's comments not only indicate the non-existence of a widely-accepted mechanism for novice interpreters to enter the market, but also once more reinforce the previous two points: imbalance in demand and supply and a lack of quality assurance.

7.2.2.1.3. The transitional private market

E6 is the only interpreter who sees the private market in a more positive light. He thinks that, since we are now living in a rapidly-changing world, the current situation in the market is but a reflection of the broader environment. He sees the transitional nature of the market as diverse, and proposes ways for interpreters to adapt to this transitional environment:

E6: How do I view the interpreting market at the moment? I think **it is transitional**. It is definitely transitioning. **I think in the future the interpreter will have to be more versatile than perhaps we had been in the past**. And I think **we have to get used to new technologies**... In the US there is a lot of interpreting going on which could be conference interpreting, but some of them are not taking place in the conference interpreting traditions. There is also a lot of public service interpreting which is becoming much and much more professional. Court interpreter in the states is a very big deal. Working for national government is becoming more and more important. **So I would say that the interpreting market on one hand is expanding but the interpreting is becoming much more head-genius**. It is not possible to think that the interpreting market will just be the EU, UN. That's it. That's what I think some people thought in the past. The interpreting market is much more than that and interpreters will have to grab that.

According to the reports of practising interpreters, regardless of the adjectives they choose to use to describe the private market, one overarching phenomenon emerges: the private interpreting market is highly under-regulated. On the one hand, trained novice interpreters find it hard to enter; on the other, service users do not know how to gain access to trained interpreters. We can therefore say that the bridge between the service provider and the service user is disconnected, or even non-existent in some emerging interpreting markets such as Mainland China. Under-regulation is the cause of the majority of the chaotic scenarios in the interpreting labour market, such as interpreters undercutting or undermining each other, and translation agencies make the most of the chaos to benefit from those service users

who do not care about the quality of interpreting but only opt for cheaper services. In this under-regulated market, problems and issues concern practising interpreters. Their reflections and experiences are presented in the coming section.

7.2.2.2. Problems in the private market

7.2.2.2.1. Interpreters undermine and undercut each other

As a result of the under-regulation of the interpreting market, practising interpreters experience various problems. The most significant issue mentioned by interpreters from both Asian and European markets is that interpreters tend to undercut each other; they neither refer jobs to each other, nor do they expect referrals in return. E7 reflects on the tough beginning of her interpreting career, when she was constantly worrying that she would not be able to pay someone back as a novice interpreter:

E7: That's why I always...as I said in the beginning, when I started off, nobody gave work to me, nobody. And I thought that cannot be it. There must be possibilities that I can get work. So I tried to provide myself with work. I want to provide others with work. And **I never wanted to feel like most of the colleagues to have the feeling if I am getting you an assignment, you need to give me an assignment, otherwise I will never ever talk to you. That's just ridiculous**And I knew from the beginning that I was in the situation. I was in the situation that if somebody took me on an assignment, I knew that I couldn't pay them back. I knew that I didn't have the possibility to give an assignment to them. So I was always worried, if I will get an assignment again because this person will perhaps assign me once, twice, but at the third time, if I don't give anything back and there is a job, they will just not tell me anymore and will tell others that I am a bad interpreter because I didn't give them any jobs! And that's not fair.

Practising interpreters show strong resentment towards those colleagues who tend to undercut. For N7, undercutting colleagues is 'useless and annoying'. The undercutting practice, well summarised by E4, might lead to complete disaster for the interpreting profession:

E4: **At the end of the day, it's ourselves who would suffer.**

A lack of understanding of the interpreting profession leads to another vicious circle regarding interpreters' remunerations. Particularly in the Chinese-English interpreting sector, price cutting seems to be a norm prevalent among interpreters based in Taiwan, mainland China, and here in the UK. N3 went back to Beijing after training and found that the Chinese-English interpreting market in the government sector is stagnant; while novice interpreters find it hard to enter the market, senior interpreters are suffering from long working hours and low pay:

N3: I have met before who work as professional interpreters with governmental institutions, all these people, they're working as full time staff at the government institutions, and they were paid extremely low, so they, they kind of, they do interpreting jobs all the time, but they, they were, their work are not appreciated as it should be. OK, so you see all these things happening, all these high level meetings, **I think I don't know, but my guess is that all these high level meetings, um, were occupied by these very low-paid, senior interpreters.**

E3 is another freelance interpreter working in Beijing. She describes how she suffers from the intense competition:

E3: For the Chinese market, it is chaotic, it is not that serious, but I don't know why lately those interpreting companies may come to you and say, 'There is an interpreting task, would you like to do it?' But they offer very low price. If you say, 'I can't do it. It's too cheap for me, I can't do this.' And then they will come to other interpreters. So **they have a lot of backups**. The other thing is, for example they want to use you, or hire you as an interpreter, but maybe after several days they will say, there might be some changes. The schedules might change with the clients. They will find some excuses but behind this, I may think, **they found some interpreters to offer cheaper prices**. Oh, **that's very annoying**.

R: I think what you mean is that interpreting market in China at the moment is not that fully-established.

E3: Yes exactly. **It is awfully-regulated**.

From what N3 and E3 mentioned, we can see that as an aspiring market, the Chinese-English interpreting market in China is expanding rapidly but is not yet fully fledged, since both novice interpreters and experienced interpreters still suffer from frequently fluctuating interpreting offers and sometimes need to deal with hidden rules. On the other side of the strait, the Taiwanese freelance interpreter E2 also blames translation agencies for exacerbating the competition in price:

E2: And also the clients don't want to pay to the interpreters... **or maybe they pay well to the translation agents but the agents cut down the price**.

Sadly, here in the UK, the Chinese-English interpreting market doesn't seem to benefit from the slightly more regulated European interpreting market. The act of undercutting each other can be seen in accepting assignments at a much lower price than the market price, as E4 describes in the example below:

E4: It's ridiculous. Like occasionally I got... I remembered very well. Once I got this email. Um, advertised, I don't know how did they get my details get from some agency, saying there was a job locally and the rate they offer you wouldn't believe. **100 pound a day for 8 hours and it doesn't cover your travel cost**.

7.2.2.2.2. Depending heavily on contacts for work opportunities

In addition to the above mentioned difficulties in the interpreting private market, it might be rather discouraging for some novice interpreters to learn that personal networking is crucial when entering the market. N1 has been struggling in the freelance market in China ever since she finished training, and she realises that without the help of senior interpreters to help those inexperienced ones in, it can be extremely hard to start out as a freelancer:

N1: I think maybe it's the same as in the UK. **If you do not have any senior interpreter to help you to lead you into the market, it's very difficult for you to do freelancing**. But still, if you are very good, very good, you might have chance. But for most interpreters, it is very difficult.

Her point is supported by E2. She admits that even in international organisations people tend to use experienced interpreters, thereby indirectly blocking the way of novices:

E2: Especially from what I experienced in these associations, and governmental organisations, **they did need a lot of interpreters. But they don't really work with new, or young graduates. You really have to have some network there.** That's the thing.

What N6 says summarises the current situation and the difficulties of the private interpreting market:

N6: Um, it's **not easy to get in, and it's pretty easy to get out.**

The issues and problems described by interpreters reinforce the statement earlier that the private interpreting market is very poorly regulated. On the one hand, qualified interpreters are suffering from the consequences of a lack of regulation and vicious competition, while on the other hand, interpreting service users do not have access to qualified interpreters. Of course, some of the blame can justifiably be attributed to conflicts of interest, power struggles, and even human nature. But this is too simplistic an explanation and fails to take into account the factors that have been discussed.

7.2.2.3. Market D: in-house positions in international organisations

Of the 16 practising interpreters, E5, E6 and N8 are staff interpreters in international organisations. They could not offer so much insight into the private interpreting market as other participants, so they shared their observations of the interpreting market with international organisations.

7.2.2.3.1. Impact of global spread of English

The first issue raised by staff interpreters in international organisations is the suffering status of the English booth. E6, a UN interpreter, explains how the prevalence of English can threaten the status of staff interpreters in the English booth:

E6: I think **there is also an issue of globe English which is kind of a double-edged sword.** At one hand, it shows some people are appreciating interpreting when they have it because it means that they do not have to speak English, But also people often say that: ' Well, you can speak English, we can do it without interpreters.' So that's something we will have to deal with as well. In short I would say that **interpreting is becoming a more daily fact of existence, a form of human interaction which is also becoming more diverse.**

The EU interpreter E5 gives an account of how her interpreting colleague complained to her that an increasing number of delegates prefer to use their limited English instead of employing interpreters to do their job in the English booth.

E5: **Often in the meeting people just speak in English although it's quite frustrating for us in English booth.** And also I was talking to a colleague as well as a friend just yesterday from the Spanish group. She said she is easy to have doubt about continuing interpreting because she finds **it's very frustrating from English all the time which is bad English and badly spoken.** She says "I'm frustrated because I can't do a good job and all day long, I do something that's, I can't do a good job because the delegate's speaking too badly and it is happening more and more and that's the trend that's going to continue." That's not really the market but that's the future interpreter cause people know English. And occasionally people say that there might not be having any English booth anymore, or just have relays from other booth.

The growing number of English speakers working in international organisations mean less and less work for interpreters in the English booth. This might sound positive in the first instance, but in fact, the inconsistency and long waiting hours can be challenging for interpreters, as E5 explains:

E5: There might be whole day that you don't switch your microphone on at all. Or even worse, maybe you have to switch it on maybe once or twice, but in the meantime you have to concentrate on the meeting very well, you can't listen all day long to the meeting which you know nothing about. So you have to really do something. That might be very difficult technical terms, and you are making efforts to it. Of course because you are not involving in the meeting. That's most frustrating—you **do almost nothing and the little thing you do do, you do it badly and that, that's a lot of English As are talking about.** It's just frustrating to organise for English As really.

What E5 and E6 report regarding how rarely interpreting work is distributed to the English booth resonates with N8's first working experience, which was presented in 6.2.4. N8 was paid for a full day for her very first meeting as an EU staff interpreter in the English booth, yet did not once even turn on her microphone since all delegates present at the meeting spoke in English!

The suffering status of the English booth in the international organisations should be noted by those interpreting learners with English as their mother tongue. The shrinking market in the English booth might suggest to English As that they develop more B or C languages to cope with the changing market, especially if they are hoping to work in international organisations.

Interpreting is in competition with the trend of globalisation, and English as a global language is one particular issue that brings a threat to the dynamics of the interpreting sector in international meetings. If increasing numbers of delegates who are non-English natives are willing and able to use English as a medium for communication in the international arena, this should originally be regarded as a success of the English language; however, the spread of the English language can bring tension to the interpreting profession. Also, the prevalence of the English language can be seen as counterproductive to the current trend towards learning interpreting—when increasing numbers of people do speak English, interpreters, especially interpreters with English A, are in danger of losing their advantages. Given the fact that only interpreters in the English booth report that the rise of English as a global language negatively influences their interpreting duties and that none of the interpreters with other language combinations make the same claim, it can be assumed that the unequal nature of the language ecology reflects itself in the supply and demand of the interpreting market.

7.2.2.3.2. EU welcomes young talents

Of all the participants in this study, N8 is the only interpreter who passed the accreditation test and started her interpreting career as a staff interpreter for the EU

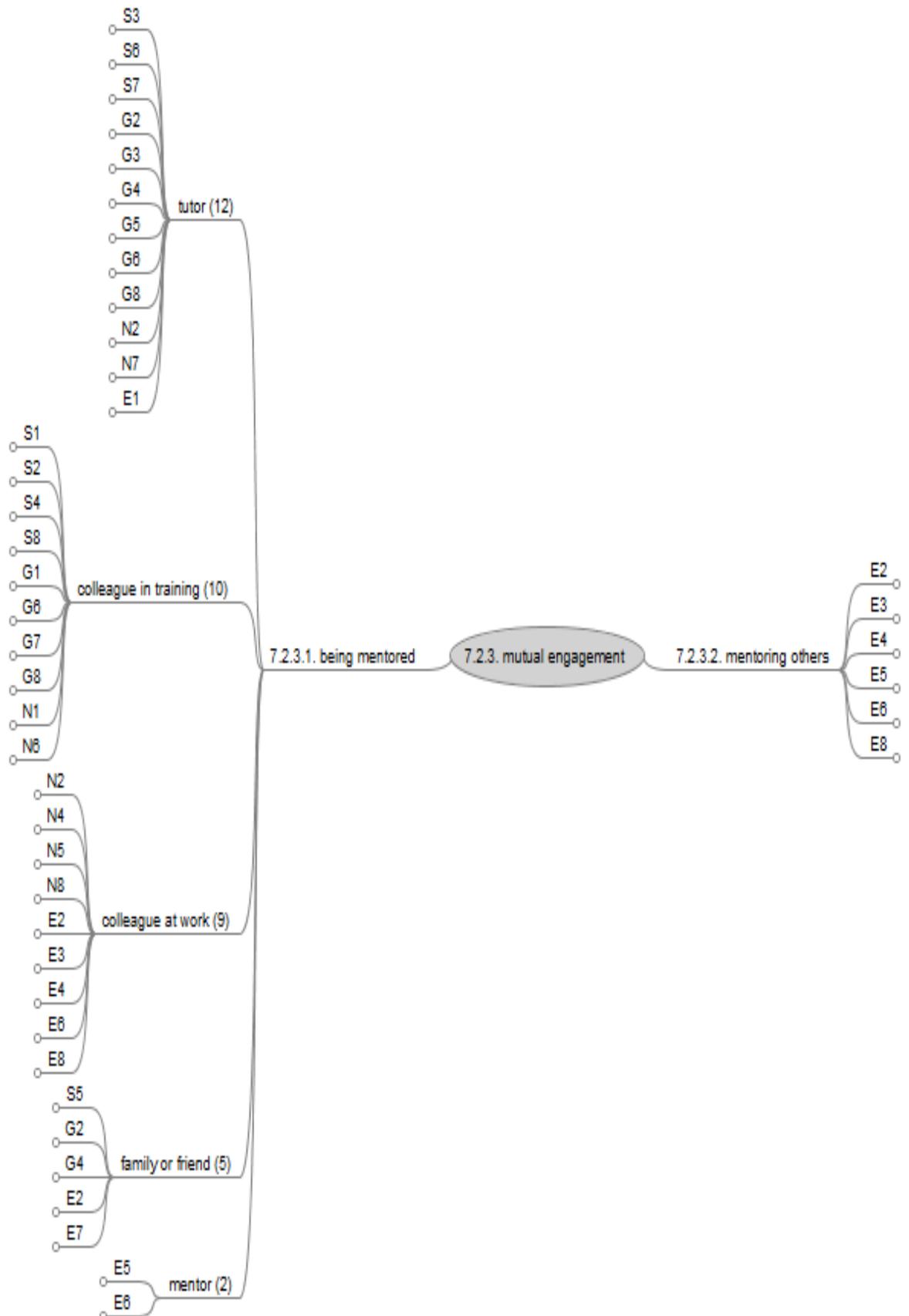
right after training. She indicates that EU policy towards young interpreters is welcoming, as indicated in the following statement:

N8: I could tell you about **the market within the EU**. And it's the campaign, **the EU campaign to recruit more, younger interpreters has been very successful**. And there is a result of that. There were lots of people in my situation, lots of people who started six months before or six months afterwards. Umm, and I think, there were also changes to the conditions as it were. Payment conditions and that sorts of thing. Which means **it's now cheaper to employ younger interpreters**, which is great if you are younger interpreter but if you are experienced, if you have worked more than 250 days for the institutions, suddenly you become more expensive. And therefore, the institutions are less willing to recruit you, unless you have quite exotic language. And that has led to some problems with older colleagues being quite concerned that the market is now being flooded with younger, cheaper colleagues, who aren't very good (laugh). They shouldn't really be there but anyway. All the older colleagues are sort of losing out. So that's the situation within the EU. **Lots of young colleagues who are recently arrived in the past few years or arriving now**.

N8's experience and endorsement of EU interpreting policy can be seen as encouraging for young European interpreters to explore their interpreting career. Given the fact that the private market is competitive and chaotic for novice interpreters, interpreting for international organisations would seem like a better platform for novice interpreters to gain experience.

According to practising interpreters' perceptions of the current market as the shared repertoire for a CoPI, there seems to be a huge difference between the private market and international organisations. The bridge between the demand and the supply is simply missing, providing opportunities for translation agencies to benefit hugely by exploiting the talents of interpreters and making a mockery of the service users' ignorance about the quality of interpreting. On the other hand, in-house positions seem to provide good working conditions for interpreters since none of the staff interpreters complain about it at all. However, staff interpreters in international organisations do have other problems to contend with, such as the threat of global English and the ageing phenomenon among staff interpreters in the EU, indicated by the new policy which welcomes young talent in interpreting.

7.2.3. Mutual engagement—experiences of being mentored or mentoring others



7.2.3.1. Being mentored as an interpreter

Mutual engagement between practising interpreters within a CoPI is an integral part of learning on-the-job. Their mutual engagement demonstrates how the interpreting profession is operated by its members. I originally expected to learn more about how interpreters help each other at work since interpreting requires a lot more team work than individual tasks. Unfortunately, however, when being questioned about how practising interpreters engage with each other, it would appear that there is no such things as an ‘interpreter community’. Most practising interpreters claim that such an interpreter community is not accessible to them, or are seemingly unaware of its existence. Novice interpreters in particular mention that there is no support system in place to aid their transition from trainees to practitioners, or to bring them into the professional circle, so most of the time they have to look elsewhere for support.

The table below shows the sources of support for practising interpreters and the number of interpreters belonging to each group.

| | <i>Ss</i> | <i>Gs</i> | <i>Ns</i> | <i>Es</i> | TOTAL |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| tutor | 3 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| colleague from training | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 10 |
| colleague at work | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| family/friend | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| mentor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |

Table 11: Sources of Support for Practising Interpreters

According Table 11, we can see that tutors are the primary source of support. Over one third of interpreters interviewed said that they would turn to their tutors for help whenever they come across difficulties either in training or at work. In the case of trainees in particular, tutors are their main source of guidance. S6 attributes her preference for approaching the interpreting trainer to “having something in common” with her:

S6: I would turn to tutor X. Because I feel, well. To begin with, **she is Taiwanese. So I feel she might be closer.** Yeah. Closer and know me better. **And also, we, she is a Chinese A, English B, too. So she totally can understand what we are struggling.**

G4 makes a similar point:

G4: I think my tutor will give me some suggestions, **because they experienced what I am experiencing now, so they can give me some suggestions, how to deal with or recover from the hardship.**

Since trainees have no experience in personal development working as interpreters, the tutors are their first port of call for guidance. Trainees turn to tutors

not only because of their bond in the existing teaching/learning relationship, but also with the expectation that the interpreter has experienced what the trainee is going through (in G4's case) or because the tutor has a similar identity and background to that of the trainee (as in S6's case).

Second to tutors, colleagues also play an important role in helping interpreters to cope with difficulties in this profession. A clear shift can be seen between trainees and practitioners in terms of their source of support: while trainee interpreters (Ss and Gs) tend to approach tutors and colleagues from training, practising interpreters (Ns and Es) rely more on their booth partners for help. Colleagues from training are particularly important for trainee interpreters. During training, trainee interpreters do not expect practical advice on interpreting practice, but require more emotional support. In G8's experience, colleagues from her class helped her through difficult times during interpreter training:

G8: I think they help me both academically and personally. So during this period of time, when you have some personal concerns, you will talk to them. And they will listen to you and they will try to share with you their concerns. That is very important. And for example, **I have had some pretty difficult time being on my own, and ended up calling someone to talk, and they saw things from a different perspective.** And this helped me understand my situation. And the other thing is that my fellow student will help me practice. They are really willing to give me a hand, when I needed it. For example, during summer holiday, I had nobody to practice with, someone will say, when I was in China, we can still practice together, we will just be on Skype, I will write a speech and then we will do it together. And that is the kind of help I received from my fellow students.

For Chinese-English trainee interpreters in particular, interpreter training might be their first experience of studying abroad, and the colleagues on the same course function not only as friends but also as personal tutors. They even established an online platform for mutual support:

S1: **We have Weibo, microblog in Sina,** the Chinese version of twitter. (Laugh) and we posted a lot of horrifying... No... **we share a lot of emotions by, on the Chinese version twitter.**

Colleagues at work provide practical support in daily interpreting practice for both Ns and Es. Unlike trainees who primarily give each other emotional support, practising interpreters collaborate more with colleagues, 'trying to explore answers together' (E3).

In contrast to those who turn to someone in the interpreting field, a number of interpreters choose instead to deal with the difficulties with their family and friends who might know nothing about interpreting. E7 explains how she turns to her husband for help whenever she suffers as an interpreter:

E7: I turn to my husband.

R: May I ask is he an interpreter himself?

E7: No. He has a totally different profession.

R: OK. But he can provide support? Emotional support?

E7: All of it. He just understands because I talk to him so much, and from the minute we worked together and he has such a, he is such an intelligent guy and he has such a

great heart and he is just solving everything that I said. And since he has a logical, not logical. Because he has common sense which so few people have. He just thinks with me through all the things, and **with his common sense, with my common sense, and with my expertise, to get there, we find the solution.**

I had originally assumed that given the freelance nature of the interpreting profession, there might be some support system or network in place. Yet according to the narrative data, only two staff interpreters who work in international organisations have access to official ‘mentors’ for any interpreting-related issues. In the EU, the head of the booth is there for all the staff interpreters to consult with whenever needed:

E5: If I feel really with difficulties, **I can go and see with my head of booth** and he’s very nice, if I’m really worried serious worried about something I can go and see him.....You can talk about anything, good points or bad points. Yes you can. He is quite open. **If you get problems you can go and see him**, but I haven’t, I haven’t yet really.

In the UN, an organisation has been set up specifically to help staff interpreters settle any disputes:

E6: **If there is a problem that you have with a particular organisation there actually have professional delegation which is run by AIIC and they can intervene on your behalf.** So that also is a resource.

From observing the narrative data regarding the ways in which interpreters support each other, three trends emerge: trainee interpreters rely heavily on each other and their tutors for both practical and emotional support during training; practising interpreters in the private market rely on their colleagues for practical support, but the ratio is a lot lower than that of trainee interpreters; only staff interpreters in international organisations have direct and legitimate access to an official ‘mentor’ as part of their working conditions.

7.2.3.2. Issues when mentoring less experienced interpreters

The previous section examined how interpreters engage and/or help each other on a peer basis. But how do experienced interpreters mentor less experienced ones? According to Es, issues when mentoring can be rather diverse depending on the needs of the less experienced ones. E2 and E4 draw more attention to the linguistic problems of novice interpreters; E3 shares advice on meeting preparation; E5 and E6 attribute much importance to psychological issues for novice interpreters; E8 prefers to observe the novice interpreter at work, and only intervenes if she finds her partner is struggling.

However, the mentoring issue is a cause for concern for some experienced interpreters, since some have had experiences of being treated impolitely or feeling their advice has been disregarded. The anecdotes below illustrate how a mentor’s good intentions may be misunderstood or taken for granted.

E2: It was a conference for health. We had different translations regarding health in Chinese. You know health in Chinese, one could be 健康(healthy condition), one could

be 衛生(public sanitary). So in that meeting in fact was 衛生, but she kept announcing that 健康會議即將開始(healthy condition conference is going to start). So I felt quiet strange cause all the topic are about 衛生. I told her once but she kept using the wrong expression, so I stopped. **It's because I think it's not polite! I only care if it's too rude or not. If it's really difficult to correct people, especially in Taiwan. These people might think that, oh you are humiliating me or you don't care about my face.** But my partner and I didn't really accept that. We thought wow, this is not 健康 (healthy condition) 會議 (conference), should be 衛生 (public sanitary) 會議 (conference).全國衛生會議(National Public Sanitary Conference).

E4: Recently we had a meeting and we were going to an organisation, and when we talked about the name of the organisation and I noticed this colleague used the wrong name. Because we already worked for this organisation before and I knew what's the name the organisation liked to be called in Chinese. So you know, I said it, I think quite nicely. **I said, 'we are going to visit this organisation and we normally call it such such way.'** She said, **'OK. This is how I am going to call it.'** So I thought that should help. Then at the meeting she started first, so of course this caused the confusion.

In these two stories, E2 and E4 both suffer from a sense of loss. They are concerned about the issues of face which confront novice interpreters with whom they are partnered, yet it was important for them to correct their use of language so as not to confuse the audience. However, their suggestion was ignored and the consequence (resulting in the confusion for the audience) was one that affected all parties involved. E4, an experienced interpreter and an interpreter trainer, explains how she responds to those issues she encounters when mentoring:

E4: I found that those days, young people are arrogant and they are very... they think. I don't know why, but quite a few of them, maybe it's them, maybe it's about me. When I, you know **I worked with young, new interpreters, they don't think they are novice. They want to tell me what to do.** Oh, Yes, so I if... if I tried to tell them, you know, I think in this speech you should use it in this way. No chance.

E4's comment invites discussion of critical issues, such as the degree to which experienced interpreting colleagues can be expected to support less experienced interpreters when working as a team, and how novice interpreters should accept or reject the offer of mentoring from experienced colleagues.

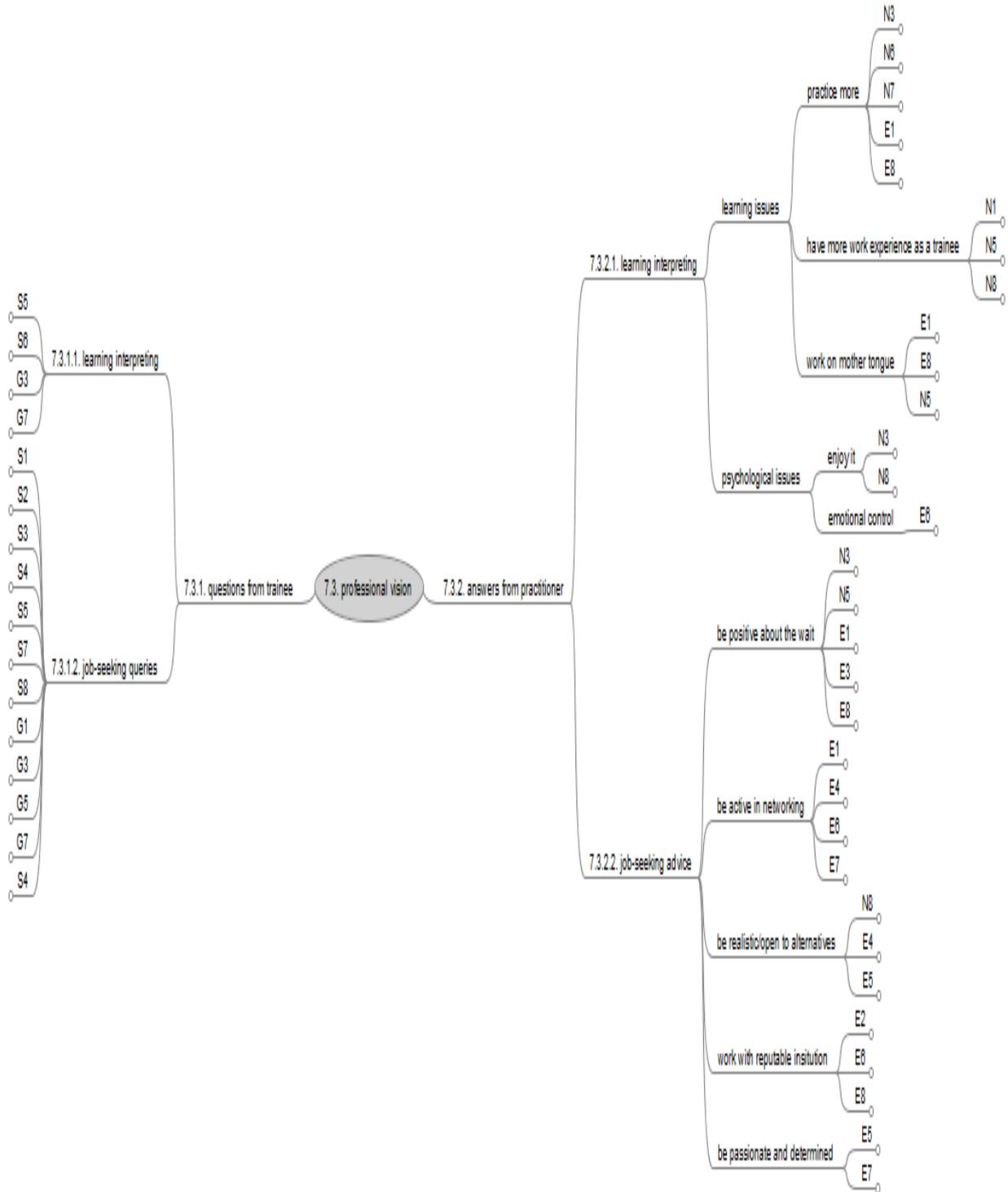
7.2.4. Sub-groups within the community of practising interpreters

From 7.2.1. to 7.2.3., I examine the notion of the CoP in the contexts of practising interpreters. Although the nature of interpreting practice can be very diverse, what interpreters do is still more or less the same, so practising interpreters are able to voice their shared concerns as practitioners within a CoPI. However, when practising interpreters describe the interpreting market as a shared repertoire within a CoPI, things can be quite different. The private market and international organisations, with almost opposing characteristics, are at two ends of a dichotomy, and therefore can hardly be described as having a 'shared' repertoire. While there is fierce competition in the private market, with freelancers suffering hugely from the underregulated recruitment process, the fluctuating payment system and being

undercut by peers, staff interpreters do not need to worry about the aforesaid concerns since their working conditions are protected by contract and by regulations of the organisation. Practising interpreters working for these two markets thus voice very different issues so it makes little sense to describe them as sharing the same repertoire. The mutual engagement between practising interpreters in the private market and in the international organisations further highlights the stark difference between these two markets. While staff interpreters in international organisations have direct access to an official mentor when they encounter difficulties, the majority of practising interpreters in the private market can either turn to their colleagues, or to their family or friends who might have no knowledge of interpreting.

Theoretically, the CoP is defined by three characteristics: a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire, and mutual engagement. Nevertheless, the narrative data in this study suggest that there seems to be an emergence of a number of sub-communities under a CoPI, since practising interpreters have different views and concerns, which is detrimental to the formation of the CoP. The emergence of multiple CoPs of interpreters will be discussed later in 8.3.

7.3. Professional Vision of Interpreter Development



In the previous findings' chapters, we have discussed the characteristics of the learner during training and at work, and explored whether there is such a thing as a CoPI. But there must be something that differentiates practising interpreters (Ns and Es) from trainee interpreters (Ss and Gs), to indicate the development of interpreters. The last set of data examined in this study elaborate on trainee/practitioner differences, focusing in particular on what trainee interpreters would like to learn

from practising interpreters, and what practising interpreters would like to share with trainee interpreters. The data demonstrate an interesting correspondence between trainees and practitioners, since both groups focus on the professional development of interpreters—whilst trainees were eager to know how to develop to become professionals, practitioners were willing to share their professional vision as to what novices should do in order to develop to become professionals. The distinctive coincidence makes this coming section, professional vision in the development of interpreters, stand out from other parts of findings chapters, since the narrative data from trainee interpreters and practising interpreters read like an improvised Q & A session. Trainee interpreters who do not have any work experience are concerned about two issues: learning interpreting as a practitioner and finding work. The suggestions that practising interpreters share with trainee interpreters are directly related to the two issues proposed by trainee interpreters—with no prior arrangement, queries raised by trainees are answered by practitioners. Such a dialogue-style narrative account vividly address how professional know-how can be passed on, providing sound guidance for interpreters pursuing professional development.

7.3.1. Queries from trainee interpreters

7.3.1.1. Queries about learning interpreting

As trainee interpreters, Ss and Gs are very keen to receive more tips on learning interpreting. How practising interpreters experienced their interpreter training and how they studied and practiced interpreting are key issues for trainees. S5 raises her concern in the narrative data below, from which we can see not only the queries that trainee interpreters normally have regarding learning to be an interpreter, but also their self-doubt as learners.

S5: I want to know what I should do at this stage of study, what I should do is the most effective. Maybe I'm doing too much research on the topics, because once I got into the internet, I can't pull myself out, and just lost myself. And I ignore the practice part by myself. And I spend time listening but I'm not listening analytically, this's also a problem. And we got a lot of resources but it's also easy to get people get lost in all the resources, so we have to set a kind of plan, just follow the plan, don't do too much. You can just find the right way.

7.3.1.2. Queries about job-seeking

Almost all trainees are anxious about job-seeking tips, or have career-related concerns. S1 describes such anxiety towards the interpreting market: 'I know something, but not a whole picture.' Trainees' queries about job-seeking can be seen as following a slightly linear order: they want to know how practising interpreters entered the market as a fresh graduate from the interpreter training programme (S2,

S3, S5, S7), what are their following experiences (S4, G1, G3), how long did it take for them to become fully-fledged (G7), how interpreters market themselves (S2, G5), and even for those aiming at becoming staff interpreters in international organisations, their queries can come across as detailed as asking about the accreditation exam organised by these institutions:

S8: **What kind of exam should I pass to be a professional interpreter**, like in the UN the big picture? Um, when it comes to me right now, I really want to know what level is the exam in January is like. How long would it be? What can I expect from that? The topics or where are the speakers from?

From these queries, it is clear that entering the interpreting market is a cause for concern for many trainee interpreters.

7.3.2. Advice from practising interpreters

Correspondingly, practising interpreters share their professional vision based on the two aspects in which trainee interpreters are most interested in: on learning interpreting as a practitioner, and job-seeking advice.

7.3.2.1. On learning interpreting

Tips offered by practising interpreters to trainee interpreters on learning interpreting can generally be divided into two types: learning issues and psychological issues.

7.3.2.1.1. Learning issues

To practice more is the first and most effective way to make progress in interpreting, as related by the majority of practising interpreters. In N7's words, **'there is no end to learning in interpreting'**. As an interpreter trainer, E8 provides a practical suggestion on the learning format and time for trainee interpreters:

E8: Just to keep practicing. **Keep practicing actual interpreting**, particularly with sim and for consec. So to dedicate **at least 2 hours a week, preferably split up into 20 minutes segments per day, doing some consec and some sim**. Keep practicing is the only way. Or if you had a longer break after then you know an assignment is coming up, dedicate a significant portion of your time, practicing SI in particular, because that automatic response goes and it takes a little while to get back into things.

Next, three Ns encourage trainee interpreters to try to gain more voluntary interpreting experience during training. N8's narrative below explains why voluntary interpreting is beneficial for trainee interpreters:

N8: Think of the real clients. They are there for a reason. You are not a fake, not conference situation where everybody understands each other anyway. You don't have people necessarily listening to you in order to crack you. **You are literally there to facilitate the communication. And I think we forget. We forget the aim in the university. So I think voluntary interpreting would be very very useful.**

Working on one's mother tongue has been proposed by three practising interpreter, who also contribute to interpreter training, as a the key point under learning issues. Let's have a look how they stress this point first:

N5: Which is you need to **continuously polish your mother tongue**, for English for sure, try to read more newspaper and articles and try to enlarge vocabulary and last but not the least if you are a student interpreter.

E1: Wow, that's a very difficult question. Um, **work very hard on your mother tongue**. This is especially for English A students, who don't work hard on their mother tongue. The long term achievements rather than a short term achievement, so don't get frustrated if it's not something that you dominate in the first three months.

E8: **Work on your mother tongue**. It's always very important. And develop, nurture your mother tongue.

The call for English As to work harder on their mother tongue suggests interpreting learners do insufficient practice in their mother tongue.

7.3.2.1.2. Psychological issues

Some practising interpreters propose a couple of psychological issues for trainee interpreters to bear in mind. Firstly, two Ns think it is very important to enjoy the learning process before becoming an interpreter:

N3: Um, **enjoy it**, enjoy it, don't, don't think that interpreting is a pass-way to success, don't consider it as a way to earn money, to make a fortune, to change your life, no. **Do it with passion and love**, if you love it, you do it, if you don't, don't bother.

N8: And it sounds cliché: **try to enjoy it**. Because a lot of what you learnt, is very realistic and chances are, you've taken that course because you are interested in the way the world works. So just enjoy it. Yeah. Because this is an incredible opportunity to learn about the world without having to study international relations. **It's a great opportunity to really force yourself to think about what's going on in the world**.

Similarly to importance placed on having positive mind, E6 thinks emotional control is essential for trainee interpreters:

E6: **The main thing they should be focus on is emotional control so that they can give the best possible performance regardless of what particular words they may or may not know**. If they have the natural communication ability and they have the emotional control, then the rest will eventually fall into place.

E6 also shares her own tips in controlling one's emotions during interpreting practice:

E6: The way you control your emotions to me, has been just sort of, it sounds bad... It's just sort of playing your minds in a way by saying that you can do this that you say something that is less than ideal, that it's Ok. Either you can correct it or if you cannot correct it then it is not that big of deal. And that you can correct it if it is a big deal and if you don't correct it if it is not a big deal then you don't necessarily have to correct it. Um...And the people come to understand what is going on and you are capable of doing that. I think that is the most...I have my personal... **I have my own limerick that I recite to myself as a pet speech when I think that I am nervous about interpreting**. And that I think it is useful you can come up with some kind of little poem a little sing yourself that you can sing to yourself if you know this is going to be a challenging conference situation. That would be my humble advice.

7.3.2.2. On job-seeking advice

Competition in the interpreting market has been addressed previously. The huge amount of anxiety shared by trainee interpreters regarding entering the market once again draws our awareness to the competition in the interpreting market. Practising interpreters, drawing on their past experience, share their 'professional vision' in terms of surviving in the market.

7.3.2.2.1. Being positive about the wait

The long wait time between graduation from the interpreter training programme and entering the job market can be considerable when compared with other professions. An interpreter might take months or even years before he or she is really established. In response, practising interpreters' suggestion to be positive about the wait and make the most of it is the only solution. I would like to quote E1's words here, to illustrate the point about taking a positive and proactive attitude towards the waiting time. E1 thinks that as long as interpreting skills can be constantly improved, the wait time can be put to good use.

E1: I think you **need to be prepared, to do all sorts of different jobs, whether they will be interpreting or not.** And you **make the most of every single one of them,** and if you are teaching, you get something out of the teaching which can feed into interpreting: if you translating, you get whatever it is in your translation that feeds into interpreting and you see everything as a contribution towards to your interpreting role, which is longer term. And so that's why I was saying about the tip, it's seeing it not as something that's gonna happen immediately but something is gonna to happen in a longer term. Initially you might be a teacher 25% of a time, a translator 15% of the time, an interpreter only 25%, or even less. Over time, you are going to change that balance. So interpreting is going to go up and everything else is going to come down. But that's not going to be the case straight away. So yeah, patience, perseverance, and then obviously **carrying on improving your skills while you are waiting.**

7.3.2.2.2. Being active in networking

The nature of the interpreting profession is working with people. Therefore, how to market oneself is integral to interpreters' development. Four Es think that the importance of active networking cannot be overestimated. In the following narrative excerpts, they talk about effective networking in the workplace.

E1: And initiative. You need to have a huge amount of initiatives. You need to get out there, you need to get to know people, you need to put your name out, and you need to send CVs and not get upset if you don't get any answers back. You know, you need to have a huge amount of initiative. **Make as many contacts as you can make, you get in touch with people when you do dummy booth, you ask people to listen to you, you need to take a huge amount of initiative I think in order to get there.** And you just have to keep going. That's when if you have already got the skills at the end. If you come out of the course and you feel that you are not there yet, then you've got to decide whether interpreting is for you. If it is, then you have to see it again as a longer term thing, you need to work, work, and work. Maybe you come back to university and audit classes, and you act as assistants, you listen or you practice with students, so you do whatever. Or you do volunteering to make sure that you work on your skills.

E6: In the early stages I would say it is good to...what is the first thing you should do for your career development? Decide on where you want to...decide in where you want to work and at the beginning of your career, focus on working in one particular place. Um.. and **learn how the market works in that place, learn who are the main recruiters, introduce yourself in a professional manner, have a business card and once you are in that market just constantly work towards learning how that market works leaning how conference in these market works and constantly improve** will be what I would say. **Try to find someone who will adapt to you**, either in an institution that will adapt you or a private market secretariat or something like that. That will always help. Um...That what I could come up with.

E7: So **make yourself known, get to know established interpreters because when they know you, and when they are now seeing you as competitors, they perhaps will then give you a chance because it works with me like that.** One of the established interpreters she didn't have time at one point, and because nobody else had time, she asked me. And that was my first time when I was in the booth, and I got to know this established interpreter and that established interpreter and then well, actually, nobody gave work to me, which was just me myself giving me work. Again I don't have any recommendation, I'm sorry.

7.3.2.2.3. Being realistic

If active networking has not been effective, or the wait time has become intolerable, practising interpreters encourage novice interpreters to be realistic. Being realistic can mean opening up to other job opportunities, and transferring one's interpreting skills to those jobs, just as N8 describes:

N8: For students, because I have to say a lot of people are very stressed by the whole course. You know, they are horrified to the end of that, actually not many people would go on becoming interpreters. And I think, you need to **be more realistic and look at other options** and... Cuz this is something which came up towards the end.

Being realistic can also mean by choosing the right work base, as explained by E4:

E4: Yes. **You have to just wait for the right time, right place** and then... If I want...understand that London is better, much better than Leeds. **Don't stuck in Leeds if you don't have to.**

R: So you recommend the newly graduates to go to London and try the agencies there?

E4: Yes... Definitely. They have most of the work. I know interpreters who had moved to London. And it worked. You know, their work volume peaks up straight away. But of course the colleagues I know are very good and their work nearly doubled as well. There is nothing here.

R: So the place you resident does make a difference for interpreters.

E4: Yes.. Putting in this way, **many people want to go to work in the UN. If you are in Geneva, I am sure you have a better chance.**

Having an open mind and trying something outside the realm of interpreting and translation can also be a way out, as E5 explained:

E5: As a freelancer, **you should keep your option open. You can't depend entirely on interpreting.**

7.3.2.2.4. Working with reputable institutions

Three Es recommend that novice interpreters find an institution in which to work and develop, at least at the early stage of one's career. E8 gives a very clear account of why it is so important to choose a good institution to work as an in-house interpreter:

E8: I think **if you can be supported straight away by an organisation, like for example SIIC, or a company that really trains you slowly, that I think works.** But to go to the private market as a young person straight away, I think it's pretty tough.

R: Would you suggest the newly-graduated to be an in-house interpreter for a few years?

E8: Yeah. If they can get something like that, yes. If they can get a job within an organisation, **that offers support and mentor and a training scheme, also the possibility to work with set terminology, recurring terminology, recurring clients, meetings that are, in terms of format the same, and then build on it, where they have a proper structure,** I think that's the best a young interpreter could have.

Besides the benefits that E8 mentions of working as an in-house interpreter, E6 states that working with reputable institutions also enhances the possibility of gaining contacts in the interpreting field.

E6: **Do some volunteer interpreting, but for reputable volunteer organisations.** Some volunteers are seen as competitors for local interpreters. Don't work with those kinds of volunteer outlets, but some volunteer organisations such as Amnesty International, Oxfam. Those are good ways to start your career and **it also helps you make professional contacts because you work with professional interpreters** who work in those conferences.

7.3.2.2.5. Being passionate and determined

Being passionate about the interpreting profession, yet being determined to be part of it, is another piece of advice given by practising interpreters. What E5 and E7 mentioned below are worth quoting, since it may be a source of encouragement for novice interpreters:

E5: Yes I think so, because otherwise, it can also get boring if you get really passion about it because meeting is not always exciting. Even though you are interested in the people involved, you will do the 275 meeting for customers called and you don't know what happened to others, you're just in the middle of it, you have to be quite passion about, yeah you have to be quite passionate about interpreting. But I think if you do feel like you're passionate about it, you really should go for it and work for it because **it's not easy, not many people might assist you.** There might be difficulties for you to become an interpreter, it's very difficult. But my husband said to me and my family said to me just try it if want to do it just try it then you will see if it's possible or not. I really got the people say that I did just decide to do it. You got to be quite sure. **You got to be prepared for hard work. If you love it then go through it.**

E7: If you really what to become an interpreter, **never give up.** Just stick to your dream, just make your dream of becoming an interpreter come true. Don't give up. Just visualise yourself as an interpreter, and you will become one. **If you don't do that with all of your heart, if you don't believe in that you can be an interpreter, you will never be one.**

To sum up the informative Q&A session between trainees and practitioners regarding interpreter development, it is understandable that the professional vision proposed by practitioners has more to do with an interpreter's on-the-job disposition rather than specific rules. The coincidence between what trainees would like to explore from the practitioners and what practitioners would like to share with trainees highlights the shared concerns for interpreters, regardless of whether they have work experience. Thus it is justifiable to conclude that, in order to develop to

become an interpreter, it is essential to keep working on learning interpreting and to maintain the right disposition for the mobile and constantly-changing market.

7.4. Summary: Learning as Participation

Chapter 7 presents an analysis that I have found useful in understanding learning through participation with practising interpreters. The narratives from practising interpreters have outlined interpreting practice as their joint enterprise, the interpreting markets as their shared repertoire, and their experiences of mentoring or being mentored as mutual engagement. There is an emergence of a dichotomy between two sub-markets in particular: the freelancers in the private market and the staff interpreters working for international organisations, contributing to various issues regarding mobility and identity, which will be reported later in 8.3.1. and 8.3.2. Also, the knowledge gap between trainee interpreters and practising interpreters has been bridged by practising interpreters, by offering their ‘professional vision’ of learning interpreting and job-seeking. The findings in this chapter make the hidden curriculum visible for a practitioner in the interpreting profession, where learning is characterised more by socialisation than by qualification or experience. Indeed, it is more an issue of transmitting dispositions and attitudes than of merely stating the knowledge and skills required for interpreting tasks.

Chapter 4 to 7 present the key findings of this study, showcasing how interpreters at different stages approach their professional learning. In addition to the findings presented in these four content analysis chapters, emerging themes worthy of discussion in three dimensions-methodological, theoretical, and educational-will be synthesised in Chapter 8, the discussion chapter.

Chapter 8

Discussion

8.1. Introduction

Based on the understanding of the findings of the previous four chapters, this chapter aims to synthesise the key issues in this study and discuss issues emerging from the data. The discussion will be presented in three aspects: the methodological aspects of the contribution of the narrative method in this study, the theoretical aspects on the emergence of multiple Communities of Practice in the context of learning interpreting, and the educational implications for future interpreter training.

8.2. From Narratives to Insights

8.2.1. Working with narrative as an investigative method

This study set out with the aim of using narratives to understand how one becomes an interpreter from a learner's perspective. Selecting interpreter learners highlights the significance of the bottom-up approach that this study seeks to adopt, since it is anticipated that first-hand narrative accounts from learners will provide a genuine picture of becoming an interpreter. The belief that narratives are able to turn the flow of personal experiences into a set of categories to be processed has been made clear in 3.4.2. In the following paragraphs, I would like to demonstrate how narratives in this particular study have confirmed this belief.

In Chapter 4, learner narratives reveal the characteristics of interpreting learners. They either studied languages, had a practical attitude towards the prospect of a career in interpreting, were attracted to the nature of the interpreting profession, were motivated by their previous interpreting-related experiences or were encouraged by significant others before they joined the interpreter training programme. Their understanding of the training was linked to their initial perception of the interpreting profession, thinking of the training as having the potential to equip them with practical language skills for the job market. Interpreting learners demonstrated a high level of consistency when they talked about the prerequisites for an interpreter in terms of relevant knowledge, skills and even personal characteristics. This chapter also demonstrates that two thirds of interpreters in this study had had prior interpreter training, with only one third of the participants considering the chosen programme to be their first and foremost training experience.

In this chapter, narratives have ascribed meaning to temporal experience and personal actions, making the interpreting learners' personal traits and experiences outline the backdrop of this study. Only once we understand the characteristics of the learners can we further get to know how they will learn and develop later on in their professional lives.

In Chapter 5, learner narratives demonstrate learning on the programme, dividing how they learnt during training into three major activities: in-class learning with trainers, group practice with peers, and self-study sessions. All the learning activities during training are designed with two main purposes in mind: the development of background knowledge of an interpreter, and the acquisition of relevant interpreting skills. The learner narratives not only reflect genuine learning experiences with personal stories as supporting evidence, but also shed light on the interpreter training programme by pointing out what works best during training and how it might contribute to professional interpreting practice. In this chapter, interpreters recollect their training experience; their narratives have synthesised the everyday learning actions and events into episodic units in interpreter training.

In Chapter 6, learner narratives indicate that learning at work does not follow an orderly systematic pattern like learning during training, but takes place within three major areas: i) interpreting practice, ii) working with people, and iii) developing understanding of the interpreting profession. Learning at work consolidates interpreters' skills; furthermore, they develop strategies which are tailored to specific scenarios. Practising interpreters also compare the differences between learning during training and learning at work, their narratives validating how past events (training experiences in the past) might have an effect on future events (interpreter training in the future).

In Chapter 7, learner narratives discuss whether there is such a thing as a CoPI in light of the three essential characteristics of the CoP. The narratives identify practising interpreters' shared concerns, both rewarding and frustrating, and outline interpreting practice as their joint enterprise. Practising interpreters' narratives also describe the interpreting market as their shared repertoire, and the ways in which practising interpreters support each other within the profession as their mutual engagement. The findings indicate that the private freelance market (market A) and in-house positions in international organisations (market D) form two dichotomous arenas for interpreters to contextualise their experiences. In the second half of this chapter, the shared aspects of interpreter development for trainee interpreters and practising interpreters leads to the understanding of a professional vision in interpreter development. Narratives in this chapter, once more, make temporal experience and personal actions meaningful.

One of the primary purposes of this study to use narratives as a platform to investigate learning interpreting, determining the effect of understanding how one becomes an interpreter from the interpreters' learning stories. Findings from the data illuminate the fact that learner narratives do have an effect by not only outlining the learning experiences and generating meaning which contributes to interpreters' learning-in-practice experiences interpreters have, but also raising emerging issues for discussion. I believe that narratives have met my expectations by turning personal learning anecdotes into a coherent account of becoming an interpreter.

In reviewing the literature on narrative study in Chapter 3, it has been proposed that narrative's meaning-generating capability, and their potential for turning private concerns into public issues, meant they were an obvious choice as a data collection method. Synthesising insights from four findings chapters, the meaning-generating capability is going to be evidenced in 8.2., while I revisit the idea of situated learning and CoP as demonstrated in Chapter 2 to characterise learning to be an interpreter in 8.3. The potential that narratives have for turning private concerns into public issues will be addressed in 8.4., while interpreters as learners demonstrate how their personal concerns might have an effect on interpreter training as a whole, so as to make a difference to public issues in interpreter training.

8.2.2. Stance of the researcher and the participant

Working within my narrative data as a narrative inquirer, it became clear to me that I have been constructing my knowledge and understanding about becoming an interpreter by writing, on an overall work-in-progress basis. By doing so, I have been expecting others to read my work and to respond in ways that help me to see other meanings that might lead to further retelling. Throughout the course of data collection and data analysis, I have encountered contradictions between my own experiences and other's stories - I used my own experience of becoming an interpreter as a base, along with the compiled profile of reports from other interpreters, from which I build up a generic picture of the development of an interpreter. The reports of others have helped me to see myself in the past through inquiry, which makes it clear that as an inquirer, I am also part of the generic picture; when working within the narrative space, I not only collaborate with my participants but also work with myself. In Clandinin and Connelly's word, I 'become visible with my own lived and told stories' (2000: 62), which provides me with a channel to bring my own personal stories - some long-forgotten, some unnamed, perhaps secret - to light as much as questioning other's learning experiences. On recognising myself as being vulnerable as a narrative inquirer, since I occasionally make my own unknown stories known to my participants, I fully

understand how difficult it can be to stay credible and impartial as a researcher, and how impossible it might be to generate ‘a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self’ (ibid). In other word, I am complicit in this narrative world I create. Being in this world, I need to offer remarks myself as well as offer a research understanding to the other readers.

Nevertheless, having a dual role as both a researcher and a practitioner might cause some concerns when writing up narrative research. In the following text, I will discuss the complexities of my stance in the research process working with narratives i.e. my dual concerns regarding the relationship between myself as a researcher and a practising interpreter, and the significance of such relationships in the construction of narrative research with my participants, who are also my colleagues in interpreting. It is indisputable that writers of narrative research have considerable power to create different versions of reality, thus creating space that Kristina Medford refers to as ‘mindful slippage... between truth (or our experience of reality) and truthfulness... between what we know (or what we cannot remember) and what we write’ (2006: 853). No matter how mindful they might be, as Sikes points out, narrative researchers ‘are usually, either explicitly or in effect, making a claim to present a legitimate and authentic account of whatever it is they are studying and writing about’ (2010:14-5). Sikes (2010) is also aware of ethical concerns when writing narratives. She notices that the researcher-writer can create a particular version of reality, and that the lives, beliefs and values are implicated in the practice of narrative research. Tony Adams (2008: 181) proposes the notion of narrative privilege as he struggles to meet the responsibility which comes with his representational freedom when writing about his relationship with his father in his auto-ethnographic account:

I must understand, as best I can, how I may (re)present him, tempering any demonising feelings I have while still allowing my story to unfold. My story will change knowing I have control over my father’s portrait, but being aware of this control is necessary when we write about others unable to tell their stories. (cited in Sikes, 2010: 15)

I have exactly the same concerns and worries as those of Adams when I deal with interpreters’ stories. Furthermore, as my personal stories can be similar to those of my participants, my own struggles and concerns seem to be heavier. When I feel like connecting with my participants and we have a lot to share with each other, the construction of narratives go well, with many issues emerging with little effort. The participants do not view themselves as theoreticians, but on most occasions they seem to immensely enjoy answering my questions about their learning experiences

and work anecdotes, taking these conversations as opportunities to explore opinions and thereby engaging in a process of shared reflection.

On a practical note however, as a practising interpreter and a researcher, I have my own decisions to make when receiving stories from my participants. When my participants tell me their stories as interpreters, they are very much making choices about what to share and what to omit, as well as what to emphasise and what to understate, in order to create their personal narrative style while presenting to me a particular impression about their life accounts. For example, when asked about their workload, novice interpreters might exaggerate so that their experiences do not seem so bleak compared with those of their peers, while experienced interpreters may choose to understate when referring to their own professional experiences. I sensed the nuances as an inquirer, yet I chose to keep the original transcript rather than modify the personal stories even if I know that part of the narrative might have been modified by the narrator. Being aware of my stance as a researcher enables me to write up the stories of how interpreters learn interpreting. But being too engaged with their development, or carelessly relating their learning experience to my own, can create unnecessary confusion between the genuine data and my personal beliefs. How to strike a balance between being a detached researcher while demonstrating engagement with interpreters during interview was the most challenging task for me not only during interview, but also in the writing up process.

My dual roles also imply a paradox: I have had to engage more intensely with aspects of interpreting practice, but at the same time remain purposefully detached as a researcher. In my interview experiences with interpreters, I found the paradox even more intense in relation to aspects of the work which we both found distinctly unpleasant. Alongside those enjoyable stories and anecdotes from their training or work were many less pleasant tales of competition, undercutting and undermining in 7.2.2.2. I would like to conclude here that my dual roles as interpreter and researcher are both an asset and a liability for this study. I have strived to avoid my personal stories being included in the final writing process, but I will leave judgment of that to the discretion of the reader.

8.2.3. Negotiating purposes

In stark contrast to other research methods, there is no specific hypothesis waiting to be verified in narrative research. The purposes, results and supporting evidence emerge and develop over time as the research progresses. Reissman (2008) mentions that allowing participants to tell us their narratives as researchers provides opportunities for both sides: as participants negotiating their identities and making

meaning of their experiences, we learn of their stories and eventually get to look into the issues that concern us. Lieblich et al. comment similarly: 'We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell (1998: 7).' But the negotiation of meanings might fail at times, when the researcher's expectations differ from those of the participants.

What I do as an inquirer is to continually negotiate my relationships while making clear the purposes lying behind my research. Part of the negotiation is explaining myself. I found myself continually explaining what I was trying to do; this was especially true when my interview touched upon sensitive or private issues e.g. when I was investigating how interpreters found work at the very beginning, or how student interpreters dealt with failing interpreting exams. The most obvious examples are when practising interpreters are talking about how practitioners undermine each other (see 7.2.1.2.); they very much expressed that they were frustrated with the reality but were reluctant to share their personal stories in as much detail as with other interview questions. Here is one example of how practising interpreters tried to avoid sensitive questions:

R: And last question: any tips that you can share with novice interpreters for career development in early stages?

N7: Do not turn down any cases. Do not undercut each other, but do not over price yourself. Get every opportunity, but don't undercut each other. It's useless.

R: Do you have some bad experiences being cut...

N7: **I don't want to talk about that here.**

When my participants try to avoid answering certain questions, or do not give details to elaborate their points, what worried me is not whether or not I would obtain sufficient data, but the fact that there is a story that cannot be told for circumspect reasons. Familiarity with the topic, willingness to tell, and the different expectations of the researcher and the participants all contribute to the evolving and changeable nature of the narrative research. Participants might understand the question but choose not to disclose, as N7 did in the excerpt above. But more often, they simply do not at heart understand the question from the researcher. It occurred to me during the course of interview that there were certain interview questions which were not in fact understood by the majority of participants. There are a various possible explanations for this:

(1) When the question is too broad

R: Then based on what you know, if someone would like to be an interpreter, what kind of knowledge does this person have to know and what are the skills does he need to do?

S2: **What do you mean? Interpreting in general or conference interpreting?**

R: You can divide your answers.

(2) When the question is not clear

R: Ok. With that experience, would you modify your approach towards learning interpreting?

S3: **What do you mean modifying?**

R: Um...you might see interpreting in one shape and then after that experience, a real-time interpreting experience, would you modify your approach in learning how to become an interpreter?

R: Is there any instance which makes you learn interpreting differently after you started working as an interpreter?

E2: What do you mean learning differently?

R: Like you try to approach interpreting differently.

E2: So you...OK. This is a difficult question I have to think about it. You mean the skills or the performance?

R: Either way is fine.

(3) When the question is too long for the participant to comprehend

R: Then based on what you have learned as an interpreter before, what could you suggest as ways to improve the relevance of the course to our professional role?

G1: What do you mean by that?

R: Um, so if now you can make the suggestion to the course director, what kinds of ways would you suggest for future students, so their learning and training would be more relevant to their professional role as an interpreter?

G1: Um, I think we can do more mock.

(4) When the participant has no idea what the researcher expects them to answer

R: Overall speaking, how does your interpreting experience influence your career development?

E1: What do you mean by that?

R: Because, it seems to me that your learning experience is so positive, that there is no doubt for you to work as a professional interpreter.

E1: Oh, OK. Um, well, yes and no, I guess.

Regardless of the cause of the lack of understanding between the researcher and the narrator, one of the lessons to be learnt is that there is a need for more opportunities - and not only in the field - to allow explanation to take place so that participants know what to expect during the course of narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly propose possible solutions to the gap in understanding of the purpose between researcher and the participants:

We encourage narrative inquirers to establish response communities, ongoing places where they can give accounts of their developing work over time. As the explaining takes place, clarification and shaping of purpose occur. (2000: 73)

Unfortunately, the time scale of this study would not allow for the organisation of such a response community to be, and the sensitive nature of interpreting as an emerging profession might naturally prevent participants from disclosing more. However what has been gathered in the current study can be treated as a point of departure for further studies; if the same group of participants were willing to participate in developing more understanding about the nature of the researcher, it would thus be possible to collect more narratives over time, or to expand on the narrative they gave in the first place.

What became apparent from the points raised above is that during the negotiation of purposes, not only does explaining consolidate my own understanding about the study but also, by working with participants, shapes what is truly interesting and worth reporting from the field.

8.3. From Situated Learning Experiences to Communities of Practice

Since this study begins with the aim of investigating learning interpreting, the conceptualisation of learning constitutes an essential part of this discussion. Below, I attempt to examine learning interpreting through the idea of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) and the Community of Practice (CoP).

According to the original claim of situated learning theory, the concept of learning as participation is the main focal point. Indeed, it is the vehicle for the evolution of practices and the inclusion of newcomers while also (and through the same process) the vehicle for the development and transformation of identities (Wenger, 1998: 13). CoP as a vehicle to conceptualise learning reveals two aspects to examine within learning as participation: mobility and identity. The following discussion will be based on these two features.

Firstly, I will clarify the abbreviations that I will introduce in the coming section. To differentiate between the different stages of development, I refer to trainee interpreters (Ss and Gs) collectively as a community of trainees (hereafter refer to as CoT), whilst practising interpreters (Ns and Es) will be referred to as a community of practising interpreters (hereafter CoPI). CoPI can be further divided into two sub-communities, since the data indicates that there is a substantial difference between interpreters working in the private freelance market (Market A) and those who hold in-house positions in international organisations (Market D). I refer to those freelancers in the private market as belonging to a community of freelancers (hereafter CoF), and those staff interpreters in international organisations as belonging to a community of staff interpreters (hereafter CoS). The discussion will be based on the similarities and differences between these communities. The diagram below represents these communities that will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

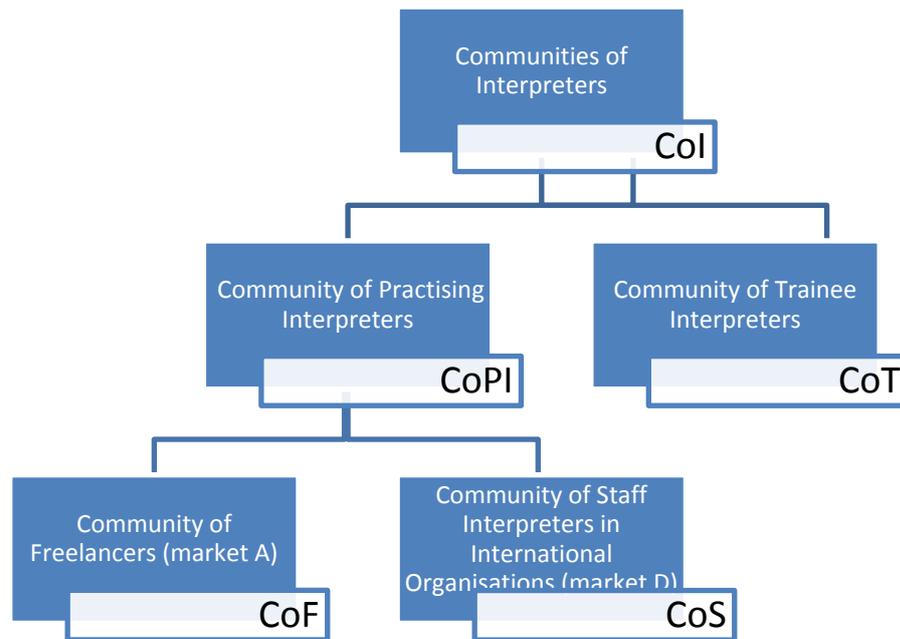


Figure 9: Multiple Communities of Practice of Interpreters

8.3.1. Legitimate peripheral participation of interpreters: Exploring the idea of mobility

Lave and Wenger (1991) propose LPP as a key element to investigating mobility when perceiving learning as participation. In this study, comparing how interpreters learn during training and at work indicates that LPP does not follow an identical pattern. When trainee interpreters learn during training, learning is legitimate, central to the practice—as long as trainees attend training, they have more or less the same practices: they attend interpreting classes, form group practice sessions to refine their skills, and they also engage in self-study. No particular power struggle appears to take place inside the CoT, and it seems that their legitimate participation is secured simply by being a trainee in the training programme. In this way, trainees' LPP is guaranteed but only for the training setting. By the end of the training programme, they are all expected to become functional interpreters. Learning during training for trainee interpreters follows the original claim of LPP, suggesting that learners move from a peripheral position (an absolute beginner in interpreting) to a central position (a functional trainee interpreter) over time, as illustrated in the Figure 10 below.

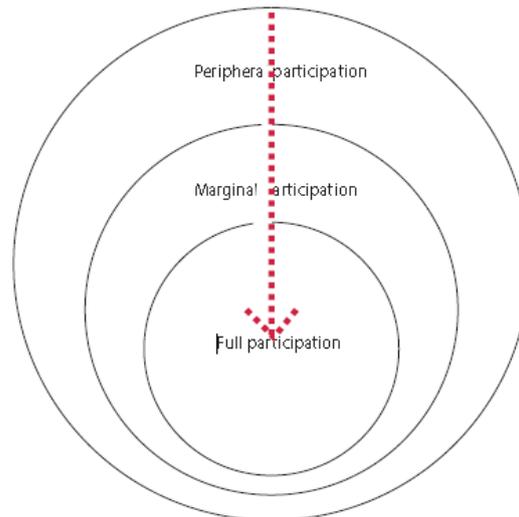


Figure 10: Movement within a Community of Trainees

However, for practising interpreters in a CoPI, there are two sub-communities following two pathways simultaneously. Only staff interpreters in international organisations, or in a CoS, still enjoy a straightforward move from peripheral participation to full participation with seniority as the sole requirement (as long as they have passed the screening mechanism of the international organisations). For those freelance interpreters in the private market, however the length of time at work does not guarantee a smooth and straightforward movement from a peripheral to a central position. In this study, E2 is one of the most senior and experienced interpreters based in Taipei, yet she reflects that the most frustrating thing for her as an interpreter is that ‘several years have passed, but I’m still knocking on the door.’ From what E2 expressed about her years of work experience as a freelance, in a CoF, the idea of LPP as a trajectory (moving from the periphery to the centre) is non-existent. E2’s metaphorical claim reflects not only her isolation but the fact that there is a boundary to the interpreting mainstream interpreters which she cannot traverse. Her (lack of) recognition of interpreter identity is very much social, even when it does not clearly involve interactions with other interpreters. The brutal reality for freelance interpreters in the CoF reveals that the CoF is more like a mobile world with no centre, in which its members move freely around with no set trajectory.

8.3.2. Multiple Communities of Practice of interpreters: Exploring the idea of identity

Based on the understanding that trainee interpreters and practising interpreters do not share identical mobility when learning occurs during training and at work, I attempt, with the purpose of examining the issue of identity construction, to identify the CoPs for trainees and practitioners according to the three prominent features of

the CoP: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire. As discussed in 2.2.2., in the CoP, meaning is negotiated by its members. In other words, members shape each other's experiences and interpretations of meaning. In so doing, they recognise something of themselves in each other. With this recognition, participation is a source of identity which not only shapes the experience of the members, but also shapes the community.

8.3.3.1. Community of trainees (CoT)

As discussed in Chapter 5, learning during training for trainee interpreters is very much based on cooperation. Their *mutual engagement* occurs when they negotiate how to learn interpreting in class, group practice, and even self-study since they follow the topic of the week which is the framework for all the imminent training activities. Trainees share all the learning resources they have; preparing speeches for peers to practise from in class (see 5.3.2.) and group practice (see 5.4.3.), they divide research tasks around the topic of the week for self-study and share their knowledge with peers (see 5.4.3. and 5.5.2.), they arrange group practices based on each other's' needs (see 5.4.1.) and they give each other peer feedback to ensure that all the trainees can make progress in interpreting (5.4.2.). Generally speaking, the interpreter training programme is a peer-collaboration platform in which interpreters learn how to be interpreters not only from their trainers, but also from their peers. The learning experience is based on cooperation, and learning as participation is equally accessible to all the trainees. For trainees attending interpreter training in the same academic year, they share identical learning contexts in terms of what they learn in interpreting. The flexible teaching and learning materials seem to be extremely diverse during the interpreter training, but, in a sense, this diversity of materials demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of the *shared repertoire* for trainee interpreters. This means that when trainees negotiate what to learn among themselves and with their tutors, at least trainees who attend the training in the same year share an identical repertoire during training. Finally, compared with the other two characteristics which define a CoT, *joint enterprise* is particularly strong since the reason trainees join this community is obvious long before they even started the training: they would like to train to be interpreters, they chose the same interpreter training programme and institution, they attend the training in the same academic year and are therefore under the guidance of the same team of trainers, they use the same interpreter training suites and practice spaces, they are under exactly the same academic regulations and their tutors have similar expectations of them. In short, trainees' joint enterprise in the CoT lies in their understanding of why they want to learn to be interpreters. CoT corroborates the concept of the CoP as Lave and Wenger (1991) described.

Nonetheless, the concept of the CoP and its original tenets is not so compatible with learning interpreting at work, due to the striking differences between different interpreting workplaces. Thus in what follows, I will describe the community of freelancers in the private market (CoF) and the community of staff interpreters in the international organisations (CoS), respectively.

8.3.3.2. Community of freelancers in the private market (CoF)

Considering the poorly-regulated private interpreting market (see 7.2.1.), it is doubtful whether it can be referred to as a CoP at all. There are a couple of reasons I make such a claim. Firstly, there is no defined route of entry into the CoF. As demonstrated in 6.2.1. and 6.2.2., almost one third of the participants in this study had had interpreting work experience in the private market prior to receiving interpreter training of any kind. This means that there is no screening mechanism that regulates entry into the private market, and so anyone who can speak more than one language might be able to work in this market whenever there is a demand. Secondly, the three basic features of the CoP often seem to be absent in a CoF. Freelancers do have a *shared repertoire*, which is the private market. But the scale and the nature of the private market is too broad so it is seemingly impossible to identify key resources or artefacts for meaning negotiation. The repertoire of CoF can either be divided by field, by the nature of interpreting assignment (CI, SI or PSI), or by language combination. The broadness and the openness of its repertoire means there is no fundament on which to form a CoP, for in the CoF, the ‘routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced and adopted in the course of its existence’ (Wenger, 1998: 83) are not present—in other words, the “sharedness” implicit in the notion of the CoP is missing. More specifically, they might be present but only in the form of loose, temporary coalitions formed by temporary contracts, due to the one-off nature of interpreting assignments in the private market. The one-off feature of interpreting assignments in the private market is also detrimental to the formation of CoF. Freelancers provide interpreting tasks based on the various, and varying, needs of the clients. The diversity of their work can be an asset to the CoP which has a stable shared repertoire, but the diversity of freelancing work and inbuilt competition in the freelance market means *joint enterprise* is almost impossible in a CoF. Particularly for those interpreters who are in competition for scarce work or share the same language combinations (Chinese-English) where supply exceeds demand, such as E2 and E4, and who do not work in the same place, it is very problematic to speak of ‘joint enterprise’. In 7.4.1.2.2., they both complain about how competition among freelancers creates a vicious circle, yet while they both feel abused, the degree of abuse is not comparable at all: while E2 has to accept a quote

offered by an agent in Taiwan due to financial pressure, E4 can still make her own decision if she is not happy with the quote because she is self-employed in the UK. Under these circumstances, they are both Chinese-English freelancers who provide similar services. Yet it does not make sense to suggest that they are in the same joint enterprise, for they are in no way accountable to each other. In terms of *mutual engagement*, members of the CoF compete with each other rather than collaborate with each other which contradicts a key characteristic of the CoP, as reported in 7.2.1.1. Freelancers undercutting or undermining each other is not something new for practitioners. Furthermore, they do report that there are some support systems in place at work. But still, as demonstrated in Table 11 (in 7.2.3.1.), former interpreter trainers and colleagues are the primary sources of support for practising interpreters who are suffering at work. Some practitioners might still turn to colleagues for professional help when needed, but according to their narrative data, the majority of practising interpreters claim that it is better not to expect your colleagues to cover you as a novice (see 7.2.3.1.), and as demonstrated in 7.2.3.2., when E2 and E4 help or correct their novice colleagues, their attempts were either ignored or rejected.

These findings jar with a key characteristic of the CoP, namely that members are supposed to depend on each other in their mutual engagement. In a CoF, competition trumps collaboration, which collaboration only evident in rare cases. Although the CoF does not have the recognisable tenets of the CoP, I would still like to keep addressing it as a community, as a provisional title to demonstrate that even the chaotic, under-regulated status of the private interpreting market still provides a platform for practising interpreters' learning-in-practice. Furthermore, despite the competition, freelance interpreters could still recognise each other as doing the same job and engaging in the same activity; it is the shared sense among the members of CoF that consolidates my choice of addressing freelance interpreters as members of a community.

8.3.3.3. Community of staff interpreters in international organisations (CoS)

Situated somewhere between the orderly CoT and the patchy CoF in terms of both collaboration and competition is the CoS. To enter the CoS, an interpreter must have adequate interpreter training qualifications and pass the competitive language examinations held by international organisations. The screening mechanism works similarly to that of the entrance exam of the interpreter training programme, thereby only allowing qualified and capable interpreters to enter the CoS. Once successful interpreters pass the examination and become members of the CoS, they are under the protection and regulation of the organisation and the organisation that they work for clearly provides a *shared repertoire* for its staff interpreters. Examples of this shared repertoire range from N8's 'interpreting with text' (a specific practice, see

6.4.3.), N8 and E5's 'EU jargons' (specialised expressions, see 6.4.2.2.3.) to E6's 'long waiting hours in the English booth' in the UN (a particular phenomenon, see 7.2.1.3.1.). The shared repertoire offers contexts for staff interpreters' on-the-job learning to take place. They are not individual interpreters working for random clients like their colleagues in the private market, but part of the organisational structure under which their learning at work is not only an individual effort, but a process of enculturation into the international organisation. Their *joint enterprise* is thus made clear at the outset of their careers: to provide multilingual interpreting services for meetings that take place within the organisation. In terms of the *mutual engagement* between staff interpreters, since their rights and working conditions have been provided for and protected by contracts, little competition exists between colleagues. They simply provide interpreting services according to their language combinations, teaming up with colleagues who share similar benefits and regulations. E6, a staff interpreter in the UN but who worked in the private market before joining the UN, comments that: 'compared with the private market, it's heaven for us to work here.' Yet at the same time, international organisations are noted for politicking and in-fighting: E5 reports that senior interpreters might take advantage of novice interpreters by teasing or making fun of them (see 6.3.2.1.2.), so it is not necessarily the paradise workplace. But generally speaking, issues such as interpreters undercutting or undermining each other are rarely seen in international organisations compared with in the private market. Although not much collaboration can be seen as in a CoT, staff interpreters' learning at work generally follows the key characteristics of the CoP.

8.3.3. Situated learning within multiple communities of practice: Potential for conflict and tensions?

Having understood the CoPI as a semi-professionalised CoP with two uneven pathways (CoF and CoS) occurring simultaneously, I would now like to return to the contexts in which learning occurs. In particular, I will consider the broader dynamics of the interpreting market divisions in which communities of interpreters are embedded, as a compelling cause for the multiple CoPs for interpreters. Based on the understandings of three CoPs for interpreters, it is worth noting that, unlike the harmonious collaborative learning atmosphere which learners enjoy in a CoT, practising interpreters are often not available to help less experienced ones nor do novice interpreters expect help from more experienced colleagues (see 6.3.2.1.2.). According to the original definition of identity information in the CoP, 'each participant in a CoP finds a unique place and gains a unique identity, which is both further integrated or defined in the course of engagement in the practice' (Wenger,

1998: 76). This characteristic is self-evident in the CoT, but is arguably absent in the CoF since homogeneity is neither a requirement for, nor the result of, the development of a CoF. In a CoF, freelancing interpreters as members are diffuse; they participate in the CoF more in the form of competitors than co-operators.

The tension in the CoPI is also in evidence when practitioners from both CoF and CoS claim that there is no norm for experienced interpreters to help the less experienced one (see 6.3.2.1. for market D and 7.2.2.2. for market A). According to the original definition of the CoP, senior colleagues are supposed to help newcomers:

When newcomers join a community of practice, generational discontinuities spread through multiple levels; relations shift in a cascading process. Relative newcomers become relative old-timers. Last year's trainee now helps the new trainee. These promotions are mostly unmarked and often hardly talked about, yet they can have significant effects. Participants forge new identities from their new perspectives. These changes can be encouraging or unsettling. They can reveal progress that had remained unnoticed: you suddenly see all that you have learned because you are in a position to help someone. But they can also create new demands: all of a sudden, you are looked up to and expected to know more than you are sure you do. (Wenger: 1998: 90)

The data from the practitioners contradicts the key characteristics of the CoP, as the old-timers clearly do not feel that they are in a position to help newcomers. Rather, it seems to be the norm for experienced interpreters not to help novice interpreters.

I would like to argue that the broader contexts which stem from the differences and imbalances in interpreting labour markets generate a fluidity and heterogeneity within and beyond communities, which contradict the widely held view in the literature that CoP are homogeneous 'social objects' (Dyck et al., 2005; Swan et al., 2002). To begin with, the term 'CoP' is rather ambiguous, with its related literature 'still evolving' and 'hardly coherent' (Lindkvist, 2005: 1191). When defining the characteristics of the CoP, Wenger (1998) indicates that 'mutual engagement', 'joint enterprise' and 'shared repertoire' are the key components. Such a description suggests a CoP is capable of generating contextualised shared understandings, through the movement from peripheral participation to full participation. However, in the case of interpreters, not all the learning communities accord with this expectation and assumption. Secondly, Wenger (ibid) suggests that CoPs are heterogeneous across several dimensions, such as geographical spread, lifecycle and pace of evolution. Nevertheless, as we can see from the data, the CoF and CoS do not follow a disciplined framework. Individuals develop their identities and

practices through processes such as role-modelling and networking, and achieve their own identity construction from within. The sporadic traces of the CoF in particular are more in accordance with what Brown and Duguid (2001) have posited: individuals may participate in loose '*networks of practice*' across the boundaries of the static understanding of the CoP. In the CoF, the potential cause for tension and conflict is present since they do not simply participate in one community throughout their professional lives but move freely from one to another (e.g. E1 and E8 work for both market A and B), each with different practices and identity structures. The significance of participating in more than one community is that there is considerable scope for difference between how interpreters manage their roles, actions and relationships within and beyond multiple communities. To be fair Wenger did suggest that:

...we engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves and gain different perspectives. (1998: 159)

By stating this, however, Wenger is in favour of the compartmentalisation of practices, arguing that learning and identity are fully situated, with little possibility of transfer across contexts (Handley et al., 2006: 647). Yet, according to the findings from practising interpreters, practical knowledge is very much transferable regardless of the communities they are in, which renders Wenger's belief of the compartmentalisation of practices problematic.

Hardley et al. (2006) have proposed that an individual's continual negotiation of 'self' within and across multiple CoPs might generate intra-personal tensions as well as instabilities within a community; the case of interpreters is no exception. If one experiences a conflict of identity as a newcomer in a CoP, one may choose to maintain marginal participation (Wenger, 1998) to avoid sacrificing his or her sense of self, or may adapt his or her practice to conform with the community norms, simply by 'observing how people work'. Alternatively, an individual may struggle to find ways to move into the centre of the community, being indirectly rejected by other members from participating. E2 describes such a scenario: 'that after so many years, I am still knocking on the door'. Her situation of marginal participation in the CoF undoubtedly creates conflicts of identity in herself, and possibly creates instability in the CoF while she struggles to get in.

The prevalence of such tensions within communities of interpreters and the various forms of participation negate the assumption that a community represents a group of homogenous individuals whose motivations and behaviours can be controlled by management (Wenger et al. 2001), or at least by some clearly

constituted structure. The data also indicate that, even where structural and normative communities have been generated, such as in the case of interpreters working for international organisations, there may still be considerable diversity in the form of, for example, different language combinations (E6, 7.2.2.3.1.) and the needs of the organisation (N8, 7.2.2.3.2.), these may warrant further investigation.

I therefore argue that the market divisions act as broader contexts, generating a fluidity and heterogeneity within the communities of interpreters which belie the idealisation of communities as cohesive, homogenous ‘social objects’ (see also Clark, 2004; Swan et al. 2002). I consider the three major components of the CoP to be problematic when applied to interpreting, since it is self-evident in the case of interpreters that the three components are not necessarily the prerequisites for membership in the community. I propose possibilities for redefinition of the components of the CoP in order to achieve greater conceptual clarity.

8.4. From Personal Stories to Public Issues: Pedagogical Implications for Interpreter Training

After the in-depth analysis of the overall data, various layers of understanding and different perspectives began to emerge. Since this study perceives interpreters as learners, the findings should be able to inform interpreter training. In the current interpreting climate, as demonstrated in 8.3., we have learnt that the private freelance market and the interpreting market in international organisations, in the context of the interpreting work place, represent two ends of a dichotomy. While the former is very much characterised by the tentative and provisional character of interpreting practice, the later provides more structured protection and a stable career ladder for practitioners. One aspect that these two markets appear to share, however, is a common view of the nature of interpreter training, and how the findings from this study might be able to inform the existing training of interpreters. Although most trainee interpreters aspire to an interpreting career, their envisaged career destinations become more and more tentative and provisional over time—this is clear from the overwhelming number of participants in this study who fall into the freelance market. As interpreting markets become split and widely distributed, the central need for interpreter training is to somehow ensure that the training remains linked to real-life interpreting practice, that information moves efficiently among trainees and practitioners, and that the necessary knowledge and skills meet some consistent standards and processes—if possible. Analysis of the

findings has instilled an anxiety in me, as I wonder whether the training is equipping trainees with enough working knowledge or the right kind of knowledge to survive in the interpreting market.

During training, a strong emphasis on skill acquisition means trainees are judged by their skills they demonstrate in interpreting, based on the assumption that the ability to perform interpreting tasks can be standardised, measured, and improved when inadequate. Based on this assumption, what I aim to do in 8.4. is to investigate the interpreter development experiences that this study has addressed, as a point of departure to turn interpreters' personal stories into public issues in interpreter training.

8.4.1. Leveraging the ratio of theory in training

A theory links concepts and themes into an overarching explanation that not only addresses the immediate research question but also creates broader understandings about important issues. Nevertheless, during the course of interview, interpreters seldom talk about their practice in terms of exemplifying interpreting theories. They talk about their training experience, about new ideas regarding the profession, about their own performance either during training or at work, about the whole experience. Throughout the process however, the concept of interpreting practice as the implementation of interpreting theories is absent from their narratives. In 5.3.5., Main instruction in class, only one participant out of 32 mentioned the inclusion of the interpreting theories module, entitled Methods and Approaches, on the interpreter training course. However, as discussed in 6.4.1.2., 11 interpreters from both trainee and practising groups think the theory module is a relatively irrelevant training element which does little to enhance their professional interpreting practice. Furthermore, in 6.4.3.2.2., class arrangement, S3 suggests replacing the theory module with more interpreting practice, 'so that our time can be spent more wisely'. The unpopularity of interpreting theory reflects the fact that interpreter training programme is a skill-based, practical-oriented course.

Furthermore, the interpreting theory module has been attacked repeatedly by interpreters for being disconnected from interpreting practice, its discipline-bound academic knowledge and for failing to provide trainee interpreters with sufficiently contextualised knowledge. Interpreting theories, first of all, do not provide a context for the interpreters in their learning and development experiences, so that it is difficult to inspire interest. Secondly, studying theory contradicts interpreters' expectation of a practical-based training model. Thirdly, interpreting theory, unlike other traditional academic disciplines in which practice is at all times bound to

theory, seems to contribute very little to practitioners' interpreting practice. This should be taken as a point of departure for redesigning interpreter training elements so as to provide more practice-based materials; otherwise the theory module will only fail to achieve its original claim to provide an overarching explanation and to create a broader understanding of practice.

8.4.2. Sustainability in learning interpreting

We have already developed an understanding about learning in 2.2.2. which holds that learning is a fundamental part of daily lives, and is both life-sustaining and inevitable. Measures would be welcome if there are ways to make such an integral part of human nature sustainable. The idea of sustainability came to my mind when I was analysing the data. The learning methods and materials can both be recycled repeatedly in interpreter training, which is such a fascinating idea to me as not only a researcher, but also as a teaching assistant in interpreter training.

In Chapter 5, Learning during training, the three learning activities (in-class learning, group practice and self-study) generate practice materials, such as speeches and shared background knowledge around the topic of the week. A speech for example, can be given by the interpreting trainer in the class (see 5.3.2.), practiced with a different interpreting mode in group practice sessions (see 5.4.2.), and taken as a starting point for further background knowledge in self-study hours (see E3 in 5.5.3.1.). Meanwhile, materials can not only be treated as renewable practice resources, but also as methods in learning interpreting, as found in 5.4.3. Moreover, in addition to speeches as a learning and practice material, the practice modes in interpreting also can be made a sustainable venture. The task and the sequence of group practice are very similar to what tutors guide the trainees to do during class hours. Language enhancement exercises can be introduced in group practice sessions to consolidate the interpreters' language use and register, and the same sort of activity can be used repeatedly in-class with another language combination, or taken home for self-study. The process of learning interpreting and becoming an interpreter, is itself a sustainable process. What we can do as interpreters to promote the idea of sustainability, might be to share the resources with peers during training, or colleagues at work. It is after all, the sharing itself that allows the sustainable tradition to continue.

8.4.3. The place of knowledge in learning interpreting

In the final section of the discussion chapter, I would like to revisit the notion of learning and knowledge that I introduced in 2.2., exploring how a narrative study

with interpreters can generate the ‘right’ kind of working knowledge for future interpreters. The approach I have taken, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, views knowledge as an integral component of activities, along with technologies (tools and sign systems) and the functional skills system, according to which knowledge and action have a reciprocal relationship (Scribner, 1999).

Professional knowledge emerges from a process of reshaping interpreters’ existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices, rather than simply imposing new theories, methods, or materials from training to the workplace. In interpreting studies, it is commonly acknowledged that interpreters have practical experience but they are rarely credited with displaying a theoretical grounding for this practice; this is not surprising when one considers that the majority of interpreters interviewed oppose the idea of learning interpreting theory as part of training. The omission is partly due to the fact that we have not had ways of thinking about the practical professional knowledge in the interpreting field, and in part because we fail to relate practical knowledge to its theoretical implications. Interpreters can in fact ‘know’ something in a variety of ways: directly through lived classroom experiences, vicariously, or intuitively through their professional practices. The narrative accounts from interpreters now serve as a platform for showcasing interpreters’ working knowledge: what do they learn from themselves and others, how do they develop at work, how would they approach professional decision making, etc. Narrative is the spark that illuminates our professional lives: ‘Whether a story of practice occurred last week or a century ago, whether it happened to us as children or as practitioners, whether it was positive or negative, it retains potential for reflection growth today’ (Jalongo, Isenberg & Gerbracht, 1995: 50).

The last point I would like to make here is that by looking at the summary from the findings chapters, an elevation of acquired knowledge and a stronger sense of reflection can be observed. Knowledge is not simplistic as I understood it in 2.2.3. i.e. that knowledge can be divided easily into theoretical and practical knowledge, and that theoretical knowledge is derived from the teaching curriculum and that practical knowledge is derived from the learning curriculum. In the context of learning interpreting, knowledge is intertwined— theoretical knowledge is only present during training, when trainees are required to increase their background knowledge deliberately for the purpose of being an up-to-date interpreter. In the later development of an interpreter, the knowledge generated from learning at work is inherently practical, for interpreters are not required to do any tasks out of context— all the work that they do is contextualised, and ‘learning by doing’ becomes not simply a slogan but a fact of daily practice for practitioners. During learning at work, both skill application and strategy development are intertwined

with practical knowledge which cannot be learnt and taught in a de-contextualised way. Eventually, when learning is taken as a form of participation, the nature of the knowledge gained comes with a social nature. These complex knowledge sets, regardless of their origin, need to be ready and functional whenever interpreters are at work. I would like to argue, therefore, that interpreters are on the one hand unaware of the working knowledge which they have gained through direct work experience, but on the other hand, when questioned in a study such as this one, they are aware of their development and thus able to articulate what they have learnt when reflecting back on their various stages of development. The ability to articulately describe their professional practice to outsiders is exactly what a professional vision requires a practitioner to have at the later stages of development.

8.5. Summary: Three-dimensional Emerging Issues in Becoming an Interpreter

This chapter has integrated the emerging issues from the findings, addressing this study further in its methodological, theoretical and educational perspectives. In 8.2., narratives as the main source of data have been reviewed, consolidating its methodological usefulness in constructing a collective learner narrative. The stances of the researcher and the participants have been examined, revealing a need for the researcher to be cautious when he or she is also a practitioner in the same field as the participants. In 8.3., the theoretical implication of the problematic nature of the CoP has been highlighted. The findings show that when positioning interpreters as learners, more than one CoP emerges from the development processes, of which only CoT is in line with the originally defined tenets of the CoP. When practising interpreters participate in the interpreting labour market, regardless of which pathway they are on, CoS and CoF contradict with the established beliefs about the nature of the CoP at least partially. In 8.4., an educational emphasis has been placed upon interpreter training, questioning the presence of the theory module in interpreter training and supporting the development of greater sustainability in interpreter training, whereby teaching materials, learning activities and devices can all be recycled and reused, contributing to the interpreters' ability to fulfill as well as express their professional vision.

It is hoped that Chapter 8 and previous chapters have answered the three research questions with the support of narrative data. The final chapter will review

this research project, and showcase its contributions, limitations and directions for future work.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

9.1. Conclusions: A Brief Review

The primary aim of this study was to investigate how one becomes an interpreter from a learner's perspective. This narrative enquiry has examined three discrete stages of learning: before training, during training and after training. Returning to the research questions set out in 2.5.3., it can be asked how the findings have fulfilled the aim of this study:

To address the first research question regarding the characteristics of interpreting learners, the narrative data indicates that the majority of interpreting learners have a strong affinity with languages, attending training primarily with the perception of interpreting as a pragmatic career choice. Learners' expectations of training is either idealistic or it is seen as a means to an end which would eventually lead them to be practising interpreters. Training itself can be anticipated to be demanding and intensive. Trainees have given consistent answers regarding their understanding of interpreting events and what is required of an interpreter in terms of proper knowledge and skills, so demonstrating that learners initially had a vague idea about the training and the career path after training. Their pre-training interpreting experiences, both formal and informal, reinforce the idea that they were either good at interpreting and wanted to know more, or that they were not satisfied with the training before and would like to receive more systematic training in interpreting.

To address the second research question regarding learning to be an interpreter, two stages are investigated in this study: learning during training and learning at work. Narratives demonstrate that learning on the programme can be divided into three major activities: in-class learning with trainers, group practice with peers, and self-study sessions. All the learning activities during training are designed with two main purposes in mind: the development of background knowledge and the acquisition of relevant interpreting skills. The learner narratives not only reflect the genuine learning experiences with personal stories as supporting evidence, but also shed light on the interpreter training programme by pointing out what aspects of training contribute most effectively to professional interpreting practice. Next, regarding practising interpreters learning at work, the data indicate that this learning consists of three elements: i) the interpreting practice, ii) working with people, and iii) understanding of the interpreting profession. Learning at work

consolidates interpreters' skills and allows them to develop strategies which are tailored to specific occasions.

Thirdly, to address the final research question regarding being a practising interpreter, the existence of a CoPI, based on the three defining characteristics of the CoP, is discussed. The narratives identify both rewarding and frustrating concerns shared by practising interpreters, thus outlining their interpreting practice as joint enterprise. Practising interpreters' narratives also describe the interpreting market as their shared repertoire, and the ways in which practising interpreters support each other within the profession as their mutual engagement. The findings indicate that the private freelance market (market A) and in-house positions in international organisations (market D) are the two most prominent contexts for interpreters and therefore to understand the findings we need to contextualise their experiences. Examining both the shared aspects and the gaps in interpreter development between trainee interpreters and practising interpreters brings about understanding of a professional vision for interpreter development.

Finally, the discussion chapter addresses emerging issues of this study from three perspectives: methodological, theoretical and educational. Methodologically, narratives as the main source of data have been justified, and the stance of both the researcher and the participant have been examined, revealing a need for the researcher to exercise caution in the dual role of both researcher and practitioner in the same field as the participants. Theoretically, the problematic nature of the CoP has been highlighted: when positioning interpreters as learners, more than one CoP emerges from the development processes, of which only CoT is in line with the original defining characteristics of the CoP. Educationally, the presence of the theory module in interpreter training through more explicit articulation of working knowledge has been questioned while the development of a sense of sustainability in interpreter training has been proposed.

Overall, the professional development of the interpreters is described throughout its various stages and this development they describe with narratives. Also, there is a growing sense of professional vision of interpreters—although not stated explicitly—when practising interpreters do report learning themes in a more concrete manner than that of the trainees. This understanding leads to the conclusion that investigating interpreters as learners enables us to further understand the process of becoming an interpreter through using a bottom-up approach.

9.2. Contribution of the Study: A Reflective Note

As we have seen, story-telling is an effective way of portraying life because it “provides a sufficiently flexible, complex, and individualised format to accurately document authentic experience” (Jalongo, Isenberg & Gerbracht, 1995: 8). Authenticity, reflection, reinterpretation, and response— I believe that these are the features that elevate the interpreters’ stories from the realm of idle talk to the forum of collective learning and growth.

This study demonstrates a three-dimensional space, with the interpreter training programme forming the axis, the learning span for participants to take part ranging from 2002 to 2011 accounting for the sense of the time, and the temporal, storied narrative inquiry constructing and developing the building of the trajectory into an interactive dynamism. The shared habitus, ranging from the design of the training programme, the same group of tutors, the interpreter training suites at the University of Leeds, become the *memory boxes* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 66) to accommodate the narrative insights from my participants, with which ‘people and events of today are retold and written into the research texts of tomorrow (ibid)’.

At the same time, I settled myself in, lived and worked alongside the construction of the project, and came to absorb and write about not only what can be seen and talked about directly but also about unspoken and hidden fragments in order to shape a narrative structure about how one becomes an interpreter. It is fair to mention that my own experience of learning and working as an interpreter is essentially the starting point of such a venture; in Clandinin and Connelly’s words, it is my own ‘livings, tellings, retellings and relivings’ (ibid: 70) that have vitalised this study. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this study was inspired when I began to ask myself how I had learnt to be an interpreter throughout these years. My past experiences have framed both my present standpoints as a researcher and my approach towards my participants. I have constantly referred to my past experiences when designing the research project at the very beginning, comparing and contrasting my stories with those of others during data collection, and have now constructed a narrative account of this experience, in addition to presenting an overall understanding about learning interpreting. I have tried to make myself as aware and reflective as possible in the midst of the multi-layered narrative inquiry space. I anticipated possible narrative threads emerging from my data. Eventually I can be sure that all these livings, tellings, retellings and reliving have helped me to deal with questions about who I am in the interpreting field, and who I can be in the texts that I write on my field experience.

Whichever direction this study might take, and whatever its implications, as the inevitable sense of the temporal plotline flows, as my presentation and my reader come together, this moment of confluence should be marked by a sense not only of what is to come but also with a sense of the past, which has been revealed within our three-dimensional inquiry space. Therefore I would like to conclude the discussion by recognising learners and their stories as resources. It is the told stories of our shared past that have created a platform for further analysis as well as catering to the educational needs of future interpreters.

9.3. Limitations of the Study

Despite the contributions made by this study, the scope and timeframe of a PhD project entail several constraints needing discussion. The first limitation lies in the sampling of the participants. The participants of this study were trained solely by the same interpreter training institution, which might imply that the findings of this study reflect primarily the pathways of development of interpreters trained by the chosen programme only. This could mean that interpreters have a very different learning experience elsewhere. Also, language combination and the interpreting mode were not taken into account when recruiting participants, which might have eliminated the dynamics of training and learning elements for interpreters. But as exemplified in 3.5.2.2., the purpose of this study is to understand how learning is approached at different stages of interpreter development, also the chosen programme has been acknowledged to have a relatively typical mainstream interpreter training framework comparable with other major interpreter training institution internationally. I therefore believe that the bias could not influence what this study aims to know—learning interpreting from a learner’s perspective.

The second limitation is that the research is grounded in group responses, categorising interpreters depending on their training and working time as interpreters. However, to accumulate a better understanding about how one becomes a professional, it is better to have a longitudinal investigation on the same subjects over a certain period of time. The ideal research design is to have a fixed number of interpreters, trace their learning experiences as trainees and their development as professionals. But given the fact that a PhD study has a timescale of only three to four years, it is almost impossible to follow the same group of subjects over a longer period. As an alternative, I have made the best possible use of interpreters at four

stages of development, in the hope that similar results have been generated to those of a longitudinal research.

In light of these limitations, this research attempts to propose the following implications for future research, which may be able to address some of the aforesaid limitations.

9.4. Possible Directions for Future Work

This study has identified several topics that can be taken further in future research. First of all, more specialised study can be carried out on interpreter training and interpreter development with interpreter's working mode, language combination, training framework, specialised field, and even the interpreting sub-market being taken into consideration. At the moment, this study simply provides a point of departure for initial understanding. In the future, I plan to conduct research based on resources available, to further understand how interpreters as learners approach learning interpreting within various contexts. This, in time, will hopefully contribute to a more comprehensive and effective framework for training interpreters. Secondly, since narrative is the sole source of data in this study, other research methods can be implemented to investigate how one becomes an interpreter, such as observation, focus groups, or reflective journals. Given the right research design and resource, quantitative research methods such as questionnaires might also be useful for analysing learning interpreting. In addition, it might be useful to benefit from the technology, by establishing a data set tracing interpreter training and interpreter development with much wider data, incorporating all the relevant information and processing the development of interpreters both qualitatively and quantitatively.

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates that my ethnographically-informed research design can reveal and describe how one becomes an interpreter from a bottom-up learner's perspective. For researchers, it revisits the nature of learning and knowledge, challenging the concept of the CoP, and provides room for further exploration in narrative study with interpreters. For interpreters or interpreter trainers, it offers concrete learning experience in the form of a practical guide in terms of learning interpreting and interpreter development. Finally, for myself, it fulfils my desire to explore learning interpreting, which has always been a passion in my life.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Modules Description, MA Conference Interpreting and Translation Studies (2013-2014), University of Leeds

Compulsory modules:

Candidates will be required to study the following compulsory modules:

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------------|
| Methods and Approaches in Translation Studies | 30 credits | Semesters 1 & 2 |
| Interpreting Skills – Bidirectional/ Two Languages | 30 credits | Semester 1 |

Optional modules:

Candidates will be required to study one of the following 'summer project' modules:

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Dissertation: Translation Studies | 30 credits | Semester 2 |
| Extended Translations | 30 credits | Semester 2 |

Candidates will be required to study 15 credits from the following modules:

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: French | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: German | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Italian | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Portuguese | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Russian | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Spanish | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Arabic | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Chinese | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Consecutive and Bilateral Interpreting: Japanese | 15 credits | Semester 2 |

Candidates will be required to study 15 credits from the following modules:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Simultaneous Interpreting: French | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: German | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Italian | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Portuguese | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Russian | 15 credits | Semester 2 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Spanish | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Arabic | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Chinese | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Simultaneous Interpreting: Japanese | 15 credits | Semester 2 |

Candidates will be required to study 30 credits (to one direction) from the following language modules.

Native speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Greek or Japanese may choose to translate only out of English into their mother tongue.

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Specialised French-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised German-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Italian-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Portuguese-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Russian-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Spanish-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised English-Arabic Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised French-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised German-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Italian-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Portuguese-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Russian-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Spanish-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Arabic Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Arabic-English Translation | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised English-Chinese Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Arabic-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Chinese Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Japanese Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Specialised Chinese-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Japanese-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Chinese-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Japanese-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Japanese Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |

Candidates may study up to 30 credits from the following optional modules.

Candidates may not select a module from this group that they have selected in another group.

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------------|
| Principles and Applications of Machine Translation | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Computers and the Translator | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Introduction to Screen Translation | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Corpus Linguistics for Translators | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| English for Translators | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| English for Interpreters | 30 credits | Semesters 1 & 2 |
| Genres in Translation | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Writing for Professional Purposes | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Arabic Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised English-Arabic Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Arabic-English Translation | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised English-Chinese Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Arabic-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Chinese Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised English-Japanese Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Chinese-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Japanese-English Translation A | 15 credits | Semester 1 |
| Specialised Chinese-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
| Specialised Japanese-English Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |

| | | |
|--|---------------|------------|
| Specialised English-Japanese Translation B | 15 credits | Semester 2 |
|--|---------------|------------|

Elective modules:

Alternatively, candidates may study up to 30 credits of electives offered within the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, the Language Centre, or (with the Programme Director's agreement) elsewhere in the University.

Appendix 2: Biographical Data of the Participants

| reference | Year on the training course | Years working as an interpreter | Language combination | Current occupation | Base | Gender |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|--------|
| S1 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| S2 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: English B: German | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| S3 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| S4 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: English B: Spanish | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| S5 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Male |
| S6 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| S7 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: English C: French C: Spanish | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| S8 | 2011-2012 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| G1 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| G2 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| G3 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| G4 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Male |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------|--------|
| G5 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| G6 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Male |
| G7 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| G8 | 2010-2011 | 0 | A: Chinese B: English | Full-time MA student | Leeds, UK | Female |
| N1 | 2009-2010 | 1 | A: Chinese B: English | In-house interpreter | Chongqing, China | Female |
| N2 | 2008-2009 | 2 | A: Chinese B: English | In-house interpreter | Beijing, China | Female |
| N3 | 2008-2009 | 2 | A: Chinese B: English | Freelance interpreter for private market | Beijing, China | Female |
| N4 | 2008-2009 | 2 | A: Chinese B: English | In-house interpreter | Beijing, China | Female |
| N5 | 2008-2009 | 2 | A: Chinese B: English | In-house interpreter | Shenzhen, China | Male |
| N6 | 2006-2007 | 4 | A: Chinese B: English | Freelance interpreter for private market | Zhanghua, Taiwan | Female |
| N7 | 2006-2007 | 4 | A: Chinese B: English | Freelance interpreter for private market | Taipei, Taiwan | Male |
| N8 | 2009-2010 | 1 | A: English C: German C: Spanish | Freelance interpreter for the EU | Brussels, Belgium | Female |
| E1 | 2004-2005 | 7 | A: English B: Spanish | Freelance interpreter for private market | Leeds, UK | Female |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|----|--|--|------------------------|--------|
| | | | C: French | | | |
| E2 | 2004-2005 | 7 | A: Chinese B: English | Freelance interpreter for private market | Taipei, Taiwan | Female |
| E3 | 2002-2003 | 8 | A: Chinese B: English | Freelance interpreter for private market | Beijing, China | Female |
| E4 | 2005-2006 | 6 | A: Chinese B: English | Freelance interpreter for the EU | Leeds, UK | Female |
| E5 | 2002-2003 | 8 | A: English B: Spanish | Freelance interpreter for the UN | Geneva, Switzerland | Male |
| E6 | 2003-2004 | 7 | A: English C: French C: Portugese | Staff interpreter for the EU | Brussels, Belgium | Female |
| E7 | 2002-2003 | 8 | A: German B: English | In-house interpreter | Vienna, Austria | Female |
| E8 | 2008-2009 | 10 | A: English & Greek C:French, German, Russian | Freelance interpreter for private market | Leeds, UK | Female |

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Group S: Student Trainee Interpreters

1. How do you understand the process of learning to be an interpreter? What is involved in learning interpreting?
 - (1) What motivated you to be an interpreter at the very beginning? What was it that attracts you to get the interpreter training?
 - (2) As an interpreting student, what exactly is interpreting in your understanding?
 - (3) Based on what you know, if someone would like to be an interpreter, what kind of knowledge does he have to know and what are the skills does he needs to do?
 - (4) Can you briefly summarise your interpreting learning or training experiences so far?

2. How do you learn interpreting on the course?

3. Are there lessons to be learnt for making interpreter training more relevant to the professional interpreting practices?
 - (1) Which aspect of the interpreter training program is most significant to you? Or is there anything that you learn from your course that you think at the moment is irrelevant, or less relevant to your interpreting career?
 - (2) Do you feel that there might be a gap between your interpreting training and real interpreting practice? If so, what are the gaps?
 - (3) Based on what you have learnt as an interpreter before, what could you suggest as ways to improve the relevance of the course to your professional role?

4. What is your experience like in the interpreting community? What kind of support can you get from the community?
 - (1) If you are encountered with frustrations or difficulties during your course, who would you turn to for help?

5. How is the interpreting profession in the perspective of interpreting learners?
 - (1) Is there anything you would like to ask if you could get access to a professional interpreter?

Group G: Graduate-to-be Trainee Interpreters

1. How do you understand the process of learning to be an interpreter? What is involved in learning interpreting?
 - (1) What motivated you to be an interpreter at the very beginning? What was it that attracts you to get the interpreter training?
 - (2) As a graduate-to-be in MA Conference Interpreting and Translation Studies, what exactly is interpreting in your understanding?
 - (3) Based on what you know, if someone would like to be an interpreter, what kind of knowledge does he have to know and what are the skills does he needs to do?
 - (4) Can you briefly summarise your learning or training experiences in

becoming an interpreter so far?

2. How do you learn interpreting on the course?
 - (1) As an interpreting student, what kind of learning is involved in class and outside classroom?
 - (2) Have you done any interpreting assignments?
 - (3) (If yes) What was it like? (If no) What would be the cause for you to modify your approach learning at the moment?

3. Are there lessons to be learnt for making interpreter training more relevant to the professional interpreting practices?
 - (1) Which aspect of the interpreter training program is most significant to you? Or is there anything that you learn from your course that you think at the moment is irrelevant, or less relevant to your interpreting career?
 - (2) Do you feel that there might be a gap between your interpreting training and real interpreting practice? If so, what are the gaps?
 - (3) Based on what you have learnt as an interpreter before, what could you suggest as ways to improve the relevance of the course to your professional role?

4. What is your experience like in the interpreting community? What kind of support can you get from the community?
 - (1) If you are encountered with frustrations or difficulties during your course, who would you turn to for help?

5. How is the interpreting profession in the perspective of interpreting learners?
 - (1) Is there anything you would like to ask if you could get access to a professional interpreter?

Group N: Novice Practising Interpreters (alumni graduated for 1-5 years)

1. How do you understand the process of learning to be an interpreter? What is involved in learning interpreting?
 - (1) What motivated you to be an interpreter at the very beginning? What was it that attracts you to get the interpreter training?
 - (2) As someone working interpreting, what exactly is interpreting in your understanding?
 - (3) Based on what you know, if someone would like to be an interpreter, what kind of knowledge does he have to know and what are the skills does he needs to do?
 - (4) Can you briefly summarise your interpreting learning or training experiences so far?

2. How do you learn interpreting before and after entering the interpreting market?
 - (1) Please tell me about your learning on your interpreting degree. Any aspects regarding learning how to be an interpreter, such as learning strategies, materials, or your personal learning tips, can all be covered.

3. How do interpreters develop from trainees to practitioners?
 - (1) How did you start your interpreting career? What was your very first paid interpreting assignment like?
 - (2) Do you think you continued to learn as an interpreter after you entered the interpreting market? If so, how was it different to your learning on the course?

4. Are there lessons to be learnt for making interpreter training more relevant to the professional interpreting practices?
 - (1) Which aspect of the interpreter training program is most significant to you? Or is there anything that you learn from your course that you think at the moment is irrelevant, or less relevant to your interpreting career?
 - (2) Do you feel that there might be a gap between your interpreting training and real interpreting practice? If so, what are the gaps?
 - (3) Based on what you have learnt as an interpreter so far, what could you suggest as ways to improve the relevance of the course to your professional role?

5. What is your experience like in the interpreting community? Do you receive any support or assistance as an interpreter?
 - (1) Do you have anyone to turn to when you are encountered with difficulties as an interpreter? (mentoring, supervision)

6. How is the interpreting profession in the perspective of interpreters?
 - (1) How do you think of the interpreting market at the moment?
 - (2) Being an interpreter, what are the most rewarding aspect and the most frustrating aspect for you?
 - (3) Is there any guidance or suggestions that you would like to share with current learners or novice interpreters?

Group E: Experienced Practising Interpreters (alumni graduated over 5 years)

1. How do you understand the process of learning to be an interpreter? What is involved in learning interpreting?
 - (1) What motivated you to be an interpreter at the very beginning? What was it that attracts you to get the interpreter training?
 - (2) As a professional interpreter, what exactly is interpreting in your understanding?
 - (3) Based on what you know, if someone would like to be an interpreter, what kind of knowledge does he have to know and what are the skills does he needs to do?
 - (4) Can you briefly summarise your learning or training experiences as an interpreter so far?

2. What are the characteristics of learning before and after entering the interpreting market? What are the major influences upon their learning at different stages?

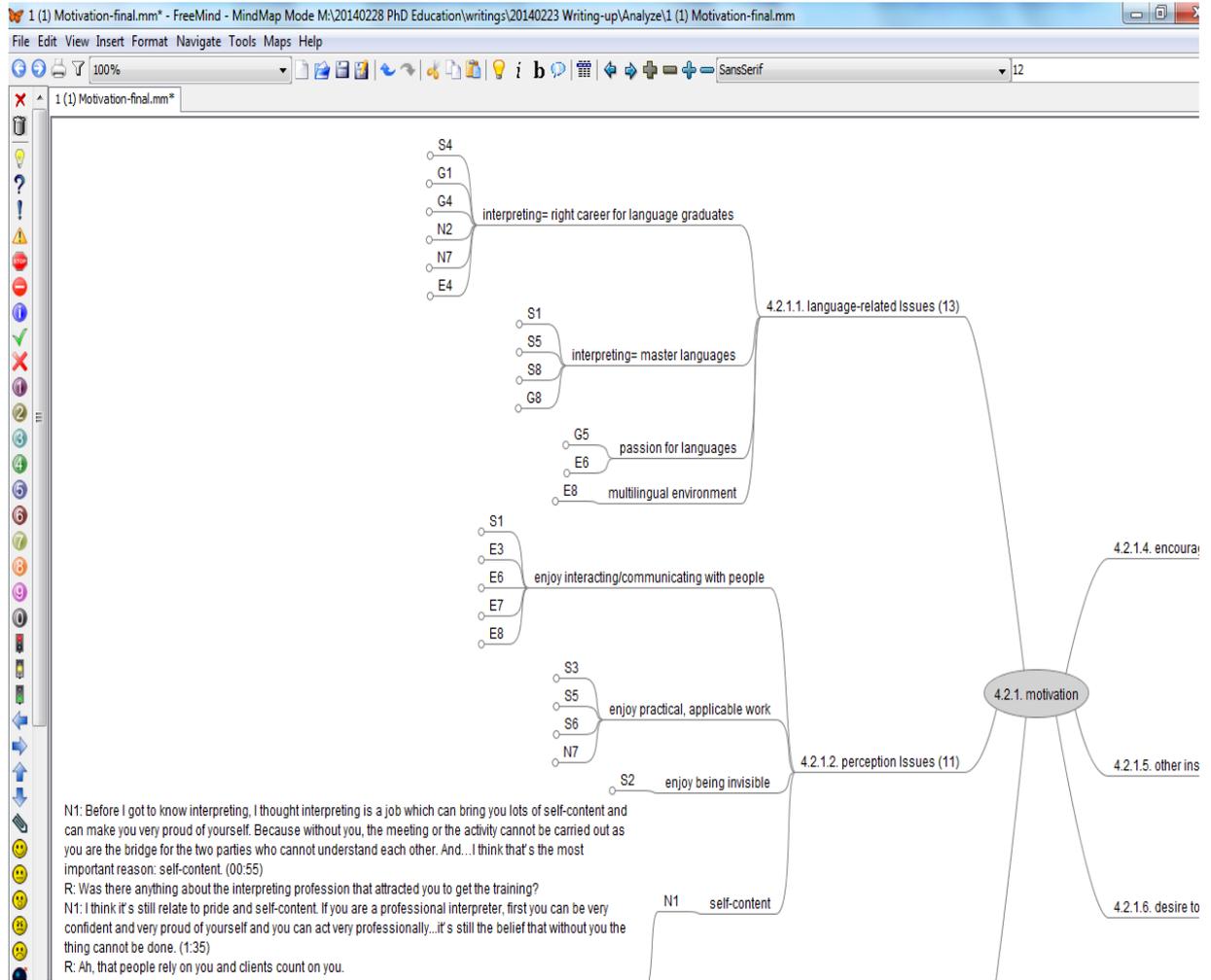
- (1) Please tell me about your learning on your interpreting degree. Any aspects regarding interpreting learning, such as learning strategies, materials, or your personal learning tips, can all be covered.
3. How do interpreters develop from trainees to practitioners?
 - (1) How did you start your interpreting career? What was your very first paid interpreting assignment like?
 - (2) Do you think you continued to learn as an interpreter after you entered the interpreting market? If so, how was it different to your learning on the course?
4. Are there lessons to be learnt for making interpreter training more relevant to the professional interpreting practices?
 - (1) Which aspect of the interpreter training program is most significant to you? Or is there anything that you learn from your course that you think is irrelevant, or less relevant to your interpreting career?
 - (2) Do you feel that there might be a gap between your interpreting training and real interpreting practice? If so, what are the gaps?
 - (3) Based on what you have learnt as an interpreter so far, what could you suggest as ways to improve the relevance of the course to your professional role?
5. What is your experience like in the interpreting community? Do you have any mentoring as an interpreter?
 - (1) Do you think yourself as a professional interpreter yet?
 - (2) Do you feel like you are part of the group of 'professional interpreters'
(If Yes) Why? What makes you consider yourself as part of the community?
(If NO) Then who do you think is in the community already? Can you think of anyone?
 - (3) Do you have anyone to turn to when you are encountered with difficulties as an interpreter? (mentoring, supervision)
 - (4) Have you had any chance to mentor or supervise less-experienced interpreters? If yes, what are the issues that you will pay attention to when you are guiding them?
6. How is the interpreting profession in the perspective of interpreters?
 - (1) How do you think of the interpreting market at the moment?
 - (2) Being an interpreter, what are the most rewarding aspect and the most frustrating aspect for you?
 - (3) Is there any guidance or suggestions that you would like to share with current interpreting learners or novice interpreters?

Appendix 4: Themes for Coding

| Major Themes | Student interpreter | Graduate-to-be interpreter | Novice interpreter | Experienced interpreter |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. interpreters' background | (1) Motivation in interpreting learning | (1)Motivation in interpreting learning | (1)Motivation in interpreting learning | (1)Motivation in interpreting learning |
| | (2) Expectations to interpreting |
| | (3) Impression about interpreting |
| | (4)Understanding about interpreting | (4)Understanding about interpreting | (4)Understanding about interpreting | (4)Understanding about interpreting |
| | (5) knowledge & skill for an interpreter |
| | (6) training experience | (6) training experience | (6) training experience | (6) training experience |
| 2. learning interpreting during training | (1) learning during training |
| 3. interpreting experience | (1) first experience | (1) first experience | (1) first experience | (1) first experience |
| 4. learning at work | | | (1)Learning at work | (1)Learning at work |
| 5. feedback on training | (1) most significant aspect during training |
| | (2) irrelevant aspect during training |
| | (3) suggestions to improve the |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | relevance | relevance | relevance | relevance |
| 6. Being an interpreter | | | (1) Being an interpreter | (1) Being an interpreter |
| | | | (2) the interpreting market | (2) the interpreting market |
| | (3) mentor/support between interpreters |
| | | | | (4) experience in mentoring novices |
| 7. Professional vision of interpreters | (1) Queries to experienced interpreters | (1) Queries to experienced interpreters | (6) guidance on learning interpreting | (6) guidance on learning interpreting |
| | | | (7) guidance on interpreter development | (7) guidance on interpreter development |

Appendix 5: Mind-map Diagram for Analysis



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