

Interpreter Agency Within the Economy of Language Services:

Towards A New Paradigm for Community Interpreters

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

INTERCULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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June, 2024

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### Abstract

This study investigates the evolving landscape of community interpreting services in Canada, in the context of increasing demand and expanding diversity of languages. Despite this growth, interpreters face stagnant or declining compensation, market awareness, and professional standards. Community interpreters endure precarious job security, inadequate remuneration, and lack of recognition. This paradoxical situation, where the demand for services rises while the profession remains undervalued, forms the basis of the research. The central question of this study seeks to identify factors contributing to the lack of professional autonomy and self-governance among interpreters, despite the industry's expansion. Utilizing Bourdieu's theory of social practice, the research explores the interplay between individual actions (agency) and structured social contexts (fields), focusing on the dynamic interaction between a professional's habitus, field structure, and various forms of capital. Grounded in participatory action research (PAR), the study employed semi-structured interviews with 16 actively working interpreters from the Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions. The findings reveal an occupational field characterized by isolation and lack of coordination among interpreters, allowing other agents to manipulate the field. Despite efforts to influence language service agencies, interpreters face constraints imposed by existing field structures and a lack of standardization. The study concludes that community interpreters face both tangible and symbolic challenges. It emphasizes the need to reconsider organizing structures for community interpreting, rather than adapting community interpreting to fit existing frameworks.

This study contributes to the field by exploring the foundational causes that maintain the status quo, advocating for transformative change rooted in realism.

*Keywords:* community interpreting, professionalism, Bourdieu, field structure, Canada

### Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and support of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Uldis Ozolins. His coaching and invaluable insights have been indispensable throughout this process, and I greatly appreciate his patience as this work came to completion. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of my committee member, Dr. Zhenyi Li, for his efforts and thoughtful feedback.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the interpreters who participated in this project, whose openness in sharing their journeys and experiences in community interpreting has been invaluable. I would also like to thank the many interpreters I have come to know and respect over the years, starting from the early days of my career. Together, we have witnessed the growth of the social enterprise sector and the development of language services in B.C.

Thank you to all of you for your contributions to this research, to the field of interpreting, and to my personal and professional growth.

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### Preamble

I first began working as a community interpreter in 1989, having learned Spanish when working as a volunteer on a UNICEF-funded project for 6 months in Ecuador. Upon returning to Vancouver, I wanted to utilize my Spanish skills and was soon recruited by a local immigrant service agency to work in both Spanish and Italian (my mother tongue, but for which there was low demand).

Without training, vetting, orientation, or any onboarding process beyond being informed of the agency's policies and practices, a common practice at the time, I was assigned to a variety of different community-based settings – primarily to do with financial assistance and housing – as Vancouver was experiencing a large influx of Central American refugees during that period. I was enjoying my work and 'helping' the community until I was assigned an appointment at a local hospital. The weight of my incompetence quickly settled on me, and the sudden awareness of the harm that I could inflict due to my limited proficiency in Spanish, lack of situational knowledge, and inadequate skill in medical terminology came at me like a bolt. I stopped the appointment, told the array of healthcare professionals that had gathered in the hopes of speaking to the patient that I would need to call the agency for another interpreter, and left them waiting for the other volunteer. It was at that point that I came to appreciate the critical importance that interpreters have in our community, and that that role is not to be taken lightly. Language proficiency is an essential skill for interpreters, but it is just one of many competences required for the job. I have spent the ensuing years dedicated to the development of standards, training programs, awareness building, and stakeholder engagement, in working towards the recognition that community interpreters so justly deserve.



Since 1989, the sector has come a long way and changed hugely, but the legion of interpreters engaged in this distinctly important work continue to be insufficiently recognized for their contributions. This project aimed to better understand the why, so that we could move towards a better reality.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Interpreting services provided at the community level have seen an evolving transformation in Canada, characterized by a steady increase in demand, and an expanding breadth of languages required (Ozolins, 2010; Delisle, 2015; Runcieman, 2018; Gutierrez, 2021). When first recognized as a unique setting for interpreting, community interpreting in Canada encompassed all community and public service level settings, including healthcare and law enforcement (Hale, 2015; Runcieman, 2018; Gutierrez, 2021). While distinctions have come to be recognized between the diverse settings, interpreters working in this area of interpreting continue in the practice of fluidly moving across healthcare, law enforcement and general public services in the main.

The field has also experienced an interesting paradox: while demand for language interpreting services has increased, compensation levels, market awareness, and expectations of training requirements and professional standards have remained stagnant, or in some cases, have declined. It is challenging to find peer-reviewed studies documenting the trend in growth, but industry reports from the private sector have been informing us for many years that the global market is growing exponentially – the sectors primarily measured are translations and localization, with community-level interpreting rarely gaining mention<sup>1</sup>. However, anecdotal evidence, personal experience, and several local research projects, along with studies done specifically in healthcare or medical interpreting (Provincial Language Service 2019;

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Growth of the industry: <https://www.bureauworks.com/blog/latest-insights-and-statistics-on-translation-industry-trends#toc-a-positive-outlook-for-language-service-providers>

Agger-Gupta, 2001), have demonstrated that remuneration rates have kept steady or have, in some instances, decreased over the years. Moreover, as the industry grows, interpreting in public sector services become expendable:

at virtually all of the hospitals I visited, interpreter services were considered a potential site for resource recapture by the health organization. They faced potential downsizing, despite statistics kept over a number of years showing increased usage and a less than proportional increase in budgeting. (Agger-Gupta, 2001, p. 155)

Gupta (2001), also corroborates that it is difficult to discuss aspects of financial benefits and costs of utilizing interpreters as the data does not exist, and that “the people who are often most directly hurt by budget cutbacks are the interpreters themselves” (p.159).

The central research question of this thesis project investigates why interpreters continue to face poor working conditions, low remuneration rates, and a disempowered workforce, despite the industry's rapid expansion and financial growth. It is the examination of what factors contribute to this disparity and ultimately, an inquiry of the persistent scarcity of professional autonomy experienced by interpreters working in community settings, as reflected in their limited authority and challenging working conditions.

The approach explores the forces at play as situated within the framework of Bourdieu's theory of practice, wherein he emphasizes the interplay between individual actors (agents) and the structured social contexts (fields) in which these actions occur. Framed by this approach, an understanding of professional agency can be distilled from his key concepts of habitus, field, capital, and agency, focusing on the dynamic interaction between a professional's habitus, the structure of the field, and their capacity to mobilize different forms of capital to achieve professional autonomy. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the designation of 'professional' becomes instead a study of a field of practice, and one in which exists

“conflicts and struggles... due to the existence of capital. Depending on the types and amounts of capital that an individual possesses, and in which field(s) they find themselves, they are either at an advantage or at a disadvantage...” (Runcieman, 2018, p. 28). I will expand on the concept of professional, professional field, and Bourdieu’s alternate paradigm in a subsequent chapter.

### **Interpreting Services in British Columbia: An Overview**

British Columbia, the third-largest province in Canada, covers nearly 945,000 square kilometers. While BC is a large province, most of its population – 68.1% – lives in large urban centres. In 2016, the province had a population of 4.56 million, with immigrants making up 28.3% of the population, compared to 21.9% for Canada as a whole. The city of Vancouver had the highest concentration of immigrants, with 40% of its residents being foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2017). Approximately 29.6% of BC residents reported a mother tongue other than English or French, with Punjabi, Cantonese, and Mandarin being the most commonly spoken immigrant languages. However, the linguistic diversity in BC is broad, encompassing many different languages (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In the past six decades, the province of British Columbia has witnessed significant demographic shifts and changes in immigration patterns, necessitating the development of interpreting services across community, social, and healthcare sectors. The growth of these services was catalyzed by the increase in linguistic diversity among residents, who faced challenges accessing vital services due to language barriers. The period from 1960 to 2020 was pivotal, marking the progression of an interpreting profession shaped by structural constraints and societal needs.

Changes to the Canadian *Immigration Act* in 1967 drew a significant number of newcomers to Canada and British Columbia saw a substantial influx of immigrants predominantly from Asia, Europe, and South America. The absence of adequate support for these individuals led to difficulties in their

societal integration, with language obstacles being a major impediment, as public services were predominantly English-centric. In response, community organizations began to provide rudimentary interpreting services, often relying on bilingual volunteers from within the community.

The 1980's brought a further wave of immigration, particularly from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, amplifying the demand for language support services. The period from the early 1980's to the 2000's was characterized by inadequate interpreting services, where ad-hoc responses to language interpreting and translation needs were often satisfied by the rule of proximity rather than by deliberate organizational measures. These responses primarily involved a continued reliance on volunteers rather than the utilization of trained language services professionals or, lacking their availability, implementing organized systemic responses to recruit and train bilinguals to perform the work to set standards. This reality resulted in not only hindering immigrant and newcomers' access to healthcare, social services, education, and other essential services, but also led to a lower quality of care in the provision of the services, and resulted in unnecessary and adverse outcomes (Bowen, 2001).

Consequently, research projects emerged to better understand the needs for language services and operational frameworks. Two of such initiatives included the Health Care Interpreter Partnership Project in 1996 (Bowen, 2001, p. 53), which produced one of the first set of standards for interpreting in healthcare settings, and a provincial research project, the Interpreter Services in Health Care: A Call for Provincial Standards in 2000 (Sasso, 2000), which explored service standards and practices across BC to assess not only the current landscape but also the disposition of service providers – mainly community service agencies at the time that were dispatching volunteers to fulfill both translation and interpreting roles – to participate in a centralized services strategy. At around the same time that these initiatives were being undertaken in BC, the Healthcare Interpretation Network (HIN), based in Toronto, Ontario,

initiated a pan-Canadian project to examine and define standards for both interpreters and interpreting services providers. The HIN initiative involved key stakeholders from across the country, including private language services providers, membership organizations, and public services, and went on to result in the National Standards Guide for Community Interpreting Services (NSGCIS, 2007). The NSGCIS became a foundational document for service agencies intent on offering robust, comprehensive language services. However, without any enforcement or oversight, the choice to subscribe to its 8 ethical principles, defined by 47 descriptive standards, was left up to individual agencies. In BC, many of the language service providers (LSPs) opted to use the NSGCIS as a reference point for their organizational interpreter code of conduct.

The NSGCIS was also instrumental in efforts to initiate interest in an international standard and acted as the basis of the initial draft of the first published standard in the domain of interpreting under the banner of the International Standards Organization's (ISO) – ISO 13611:2014 Interpreting — Guidelines for community interpreting. ISO 13611 was originally published in 2014 but underwent a systemic review and was republished in 2024 as a requirements and recommendations document, rather than a guideline document, and includes significant updates – ISO 13611:2024 Interpreting — Requirements and recommendations for community interpreting.

ISO TC 37 is the technical committee under which the ISO 13611:2014 was published. TC 37 is dedicated to the development of standards pertaining to language and terminology and has five subcommittees under its mandate that work on standards in specific areas of language and terminology. In 2010, subcommittee 5 (SC 5) – Translation, interpreting and related technologies came into being and ISO 13611:2014 was the first standard on interpreting published. It is worth noting that the ISO standards had no significant influence or impact on the professional membership organization in BC – the Society

of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia (STIBC). However, the private sector, under the leadership of the Canadian Language Industry Association /Association canadienne de l'industrie de la langue (AILIA)<sup>2</sup> – a membership organization of language service providers and affiliated services – was much more attentive to these standards, working closely with independent auditors and the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) to support the incorporation of standards and practices in the work of LSPs.

Into the early 2000's, collaborative efforts among service agencies, healthcare services, and interpreters' representative organizations began addressing the challenges of implementing and utilizing interpreting and translation services. This era was marked by a movement from voluntary to more systematic services, addressing quality care and equity in healthcare and other essential services.

Although the period from 1980 to 2020 marked a significant transformation in the interpreting services sector in British Columbia, transitioning, in the main, from ad-hoc volunteer services to a more structured and professionalized system, the field continued to face a paradoxical reality. Despite demonstrated progress in both operations and organization, a growth in the number of language service providers – including many of the previously volunteer-based services which transitioned into social enterprises that continued to be housed in the same agencies in which they were created – and improved access to training programs across a wide variety of languages, remuneration rates and working conditions for individual practitioner interpreters remained relatively unchanged while demand for interpreter services increased (PLS, 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> CLIA – AILIA has now been rebranded as the Canadian Language Industry Association maintaining the exact same organizational and membership structure.

**Professional Associations, Standards and Certification in British Columbia**

In Canada, the concept of 'title protection' ensures that individuals designated as 'Certified' interpreters or translators have received their certification through a member organization affiliated with the Canadian Translators, Terminologists, and Interpreters Council (CTTIC). This certification is a formal acknowledgment of professional competency obtained after passing the CTTIC-developed examination. Although CTTIC oversees the creation, procedural integrity, and marking of these examinations, the actual scheduling and administration is handled through its provincial affiliates<sup>3</sup>. At the time of this research project, the following titles were secured and available as certified professional designations: Certified Translator, Certified Terminologist, Certified Conference Interpreter, Certified Court Interpreter, Certified Community Interpreter and Certified Medical Interpreter. As stated, the titles of certified translator, interpreter, or terminologist are granted by the provincial body where the candidate has applied for certification.

In British Columbia, the Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia (STIBC) acts as the provincial body responsible for administering the examinations that lead to certification. Individuals must apply to take the CTTIC exam through these provincial entities. While STIBC oversees all exams necessary for certification in various specialized interpreting contexts at the provincial level, membership in STIBC and certification are distinct. Associate membership in STIBC does not equate to certified status, and while associate members must pass the STIBC exam, they are not required to pass the

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<sup>3</sup> Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ), one of 2 founding members of CTTIC, withdrew its membership in 2012 and operates independently of CTTIC and the other provincial organizations.



CTTIC exam. The associate membership exam involves an application process which includes an application fee, submission of various documents, completion of an ethics exam, and a less robust version of a certification exam that is marked by only one marker instead of two and which does not include an oral component, only a written portion. In contrast, the certification exam process varies depending on which designation is being sought, but for Certified Community or Certified Medical Interpreter, the process includes an ethics exam, a written exam, and an oral exam in consecutive mode. The exam for certified title is marked by two independent markers.

Certified status, once granted by a membership body like STIBC, is permanent, but an interpreter cannot claim to be a certified interpreter of any agency unless they maintain their membership in good standing. If a certified interpreter relocates, for example to Ontario, they must join the local affiliate, such as the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO), to have their certification recognized through that provincial organization.

The pathway to obtaining certified status involves first qualifying as an Associate Member and then pursuing specialized designations. Up until the early 2000's, there were no title designations for Community or Medical Interpreter. In 2013, a Canada-wide initiative led by CTTIC and bringing together over 50 stakeholders culminated in the work that initially formalized title protection for Certified Community Interpreter, and subsequently, Certified Medical Interpreter, adding these two designations to the roster of protected titles under the CTTIC banner in Canada. The examination process for both designations followed shortly after but was still relatively new when this research project was conducted.

Alternate processes exist for assessing interpreting skills, one of which is the Community Interpreter and Language Interpreting Skills Assessment Tool (CILISAT), established in 1994. This tool addressed the absence of formal recognition for community interpreting by professional bodies under

CTTIC. The CILISAT is administered by authorized testing centers throughout Canada and is designed to evaluate competencies in sight translation, dialogue, and consecutive interpreting within community settings. Notably, CILISAT operates independently and is not affiliated with any professional membership body but is instead administered by Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Communities (CISOC), a registered charitable organization that was founded in 1993. It would seem, then, that interpreting in community settings was gaining some ground and position within the BC landscape, given the advances made in title designation, certification, and the development of dedicated standards.

### **Education and Training Opportunities**

Interpreter training and education gained prominence in BC in the late 1980s, although accurate records are hard to find. One of the more robust and well-esteemed programs was offered by Vancouver Community College (VCC), with its origins at Langara College in 1979 (Repa, 1991). Initially focused exclusively on court interpreting, offering 180 hours of instruction (Repa, 1991), the program furthered graduates' transition to work in court settings through the support of the BC Ministry of Attorney General subsequent to a report submitted by a BC Government Task Force in 1982. The VCC program's demanding requirement for students to demonstrate high proficiency in both languages resulted in a low pass rate on the entry exam. To address this issue, a pre-interpreting program, which later became a more comprehensive community interpreter component, was introduced to prepare students with lower proficiency levels for the court interpreting program. This addition was intended to increase the number of qualified candidates and improve entry exam pass rates, and ultimately, these preparatory modules did lead to higher enrollment. The program eventually developed two streams: healthcare (medical) interpreting and court interpreting. Over the years, the program evolved and explored different models to

better meet student and market needs, at one point offering a community interpreting program as well as the health and court streams. The program was intended to allow students to complete a full program within one academic year.

The program experienced its peak between 2007 and 2009. However, following the retirement of its founder and lead, the program saw a decline in enrolment and was unable to sustain its costs, and officially closed in 2012. Attempts to revive it around 2015 introduced a distinctly different model with a significant decrease in training hours and the elimination of bilingual instruction, though the language lab remained available for student practice. This new Community Interpreter Program was launched in April 2016. Modeled after Ontario's Language Interpreter Training Program (LITP), it ran for four terms, closing in the early part of the 2018-19 fiscal year, after only 2 years in operation (M. Yue, personal communication, May 2024).

The original version of the program, offering bilingual instruction in up to 10 different languages at its peak, proved expensive to run, primarily because of the bilingual component and requisite advanced teaching materials. It struggled with funding, often relying on grants and creative solutions. Relatively high tuition costs deterred potential students, who eventually faced limited job opportunities offering low pay, in a marketplace that favoured freelance work. Even without the bilingual element, the subsequently restructured version of the program never fully secured solid grounding, continuing to experience the low enrolment numbers.

Competing programs with different requirements may have affected the perceived value of the college's robust program. Currently, few programs in the region match the original VCC program's robust standards and diversity of languages. Despite the growing demand for trained interpreters, financial and institutional support remains a significant barrier.

**Language Service Providers (LSPs)**

Language service providers in BC are unique in that they do not fit the model of LSPs in most of the other provinces. Formed primarily from within immigrant or broad-based community services agencies as volunteer-based services, LSPs in BC evolved from these funded, volunteer-focused services into social enterprises, continuing to be housed within the agencies in which they were incepted. Although private, profit-driven LSPs exist in this landscape, the largest and most active providers continue to be social enterprises, all of which are based in the southern part of the province, but whose reach extends province-wide. With one exception, these social enterprises offer broad based interpreting and translation services with most having a focus on community-based interpreting and notably foregoing conference interpreting services. The one exception is the Provincial Language Service (PLS) of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA). As an internal department of the PHSA, the PLS provides services to the healthcare system across the province, as well as to its own agencies. Formed in 2002 - 2003 through an amalgamation of internal language services that were based in 4 healthcare institutions – BC Women’s Hospital, BC Children’s Hospital, the Vancouver Hospital and Health Sciences Center, and Providence Health, the PLS then went on to become a centralized service to health authorities across BC through a shared services agreement. Structured from a series of recommendations in the Interpreter Services in Health Care: A Call for Provincial Standards, (Sasso, 2000), the PLS had been envisioned as a centralized service that would leverage combined resources to respond to language needs efficiently and effectively in healthcare province-wide.

Typical of interpreters in other global regions, interpreters in BC work across all sectors in community-based settings, from government ministry services to healthcare to law enforcement, with

healthcare being a chief setting of work for many interpreters. However, the divide between interpreters that working in community settings, and those that work in conference settings is rarely one crossed in BC. I will expand on this notion in the next chapter.

This study investigated the causes behind the incongruous situation in which what is experienced is a consistent rise in the demand and usage of interpreting services, inclusive of all settings – social services, healthcare and law enforcement – within the province of British Columbia, while simultaneously the status and working conditions of skilled and trained interpreters remains precarious – marked by consistently inadequate rates of compensation and unstable employment circumstances. It is also notable that access and availability of training for interpreters is limited.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review aims to evaluate the union of intersecting factors that influence the autonomy of community interpreters in the language services industry. It is framed by an economic perspective that contextualizes interpreting as a monetized occupation interacting with issues related to system responses, policy formation, and professional role and identity.

### **Interpreting Services: The Evolution of a Profession**

Despite the increasing demand for interpreters in the public sector such as in social services, law enforcement, health, and mental health, the field continues to lack proper recognition. Even with the advancements noted previously, many interpreters working in these settings experience insufficient remuneration and face challenging working conditions (Hyman, 2009). Several studies have highlighted issues in working conditions and compensation of interpreters (Ozolins, 2010; Hlavac & Commons, 2023) and the benefits of using trained interpreters versus untrained bilinguals (Bowen, 2001, Ku & Flores, 2005; Flores, 2006; Hsieh, 2015). The field continues to be marked by unfair working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and a noticeable absence of reverence for the work (PLS, 2019; Access Alliance, 2021). This creates a discord between the indispensability of language services as a commodity and the valuation of interpreters, who are the primary providers and creators of this crucial service.

As an outcome of an increasingly “multilingualized” (Heller, 2003) world, community interpreting has gained prominence, and along with it a need to understand status, role, and industry within the field of interpreting. It has been documented that freelance community interpreters are badly remunerated and work under exploitative conditions. In juxtaposition to this, “the demand for community interpreters has increased exponentially, given the diffuse nature of world migration since the early 1990s” (Runcieman, 2018. p. 2) and the economy of language services (Esser, 2020), which comprises

the provision of interpreting, translation and localization largely brokered by international corporations, is thriving.

Exploring the forces at play that work to maintain the status quo of exploitative conditions imposed on community interpreters, as the key participants and labourers of language services, while simultaneously creating capital and valorizing the delivery of such services within the new economy is important because interpreters are a critical link in the communicative encounter between system and consumer. Language access to public services in multilingual communities, whether facilitated by the inclusion of formalized languages services – such as interpreting and translation – or through a deliberate scheme involving internal bilingual resources or similar, has a ripple effect across populations and the public sphere. Interpreters that work in public services ensure confidential, accurate, and impartial access for non-majority language speakers to critical services such as health, legal, and social welfare. Lack of agency within the language economy allows external circumstances and players to dictate the value and practice of community interpreting, often with impact on those who are most vulnerable in multilingual communities, which includes not only those seeking access to services, but also the corps of community interpreters itself, which predominantly includes immigrants and refugees as practitioners (Esser, 2020). The public services sector also benefits from a professionalized community interpreting field, as their services and practices gain advantages in efficacy and efficiency. Without the collaboration of an interpreter, communicating with their clients would be nearly impossible, and achieving essential comprehension and accuracy would be significantly compromised.

### **Connecting Pierre Bourdieu's Theory and the Field of Interpreting**

Using a critical, realist paradigm, I drew upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his contributions to field theory to move beyond the argument of remuneration, respect, and working conditions, seeking an

approach that would take “a different course; one which begins with the totality, accepts the complexity and seeks organizing structures within it and their underlying generated principles” (Grenfell et al., 2014, p. 16). My goal in utilizing a different lens is to develop a model that probes the fundamental elements influencing the standing and positioning of individual interpreter practitioners and the broader field, particularly in community-based settings. The aim is to understand the forces at play in the field that either contribute to the advancement or pose obstacles to the status of practitioners. In alignment with Bourdieu's insight, "the social world is, to a great extent, something which agents make at every moment; but they have no chance of unmaking and remaking it except on the basis of a realistic knowledge of what it is and of what they can do to it by virtue of the position they occupy in it" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 242), this research seeks to leverage a realistic understanding of the field's dynamics to promote the interpreter practitioner's status and the field of interpreting as a whole.

Using a Bourdieusian lens to examine realities faced by interpreters in community interpreting facilitates the goal of constructing a model that provides a rationalization of the relational dynamics and positions within this field, rather than delineating the various aspects of working conditions which act to maintain the status quo. I believe this approach will contribute to the current body of research by opening different outlets for investigation, utilizing these relational dynamics. Bourdieu's theory offers a framework for understanding the interactions and relationships within the field of community interpreting and is valuable in moving beyond the examination of the interpreter's identity and status towards exploring the dynamic interplay of agents and capital within this practice. My purpose is to develop a schema of transformative change that is rooted in realism.

Bourdieu identifies three distinct, yet interconnected forces at play: habitus, capital, and field. Bourdieu's “theory of practice...incorporates both objectivity and subjectivity to create a theory that



represents the practices and experiences of a social group” (Rhynas, 2005, p. 181) therefore interactions are relational. For Bourdieu the formula is capital, habitus plus field equals a practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994). Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and capital can not only help explicate why interpreters experience challenges in remuneration and agency in the field of community-based interpreting, but acts to subsequently reposition these conditions as opportunities for change.

The notions of habitus and field will be qualitatively explored through the narratives of how interpreters experience the interactional mechanisms in the social arena of occupational relationships, vis a vis the relational dynamics and the real-world experiences they produce (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994). These expressions of relationships identify how interpreters, as agents in their own landscape, can structure their objective realities in the field.

### **Habitus**

In habitus, a central idea of Bourdieu’s model, “lies the tendency to always act the same way in similar situations” (Walther, 2014, p. 13). Influenced by history, politics, class or “social structures” (Waterfield, 2015, p. 2), habitus guides strategies and interaction within the Bourdieusian social fields. In the field of community interpreting, the lack of status that is traditionally accredited to immigrants, refugees and women, populations that characterize the legion of community interpreters, can be construed as influencing structures. Habitus allows us to better understand the unconscious ways in which interpreters engage with, construct, and reconstruct their own identities as agents in the field. As “transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53), habitus is driven by dispositions or assumed rules of behaviour and interaction. Habitus permits the examination of how it is that “nothing is pre-determined; everything is pre-disposed” (Grenfell et al., 2014, p. 12). Habitus is both a product of social conditions

and a set of dispositions that actively shape one's practices and outlooks, mediating the relationship between individual agency and social structure – therefore an agent is both imbued with a predisposition to other elements in the social arena, as well as being transformed by the social space depending on their disposition toward such forces. Additionally, it is the “practical logic of habitus that makes the underlying connection across fields” (Swartz, p. 134), and through this logic, it assumes and transmits established relationships from other fields. It is this ‘connection across fields’ where proclivities to professional codes of conduct, expectations of rules that govern entry and practice, and beliefs of transparent standard operating protocols come to bear and where the friction is most evidently experienced by some interpreters in community interpreting.

The concept of field reveals a space in which interpreters transmit their habitus and act as participants by contributing to the production and reproduction of activities and the objective structure of the field:

a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97)

Bourdieu emphasizes four distinct forms of capital: economic (financial, assets), cultural (knowledge, education, cultural awareness), social (networks, relationships, social connections), and symbolic (prestige, recognition), (Walther, 2014). In his conceptualization of the forms of capital, Bourdieu's notion extends beyond financial resources, and he contends, “it is in fact impossible to account

for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241).

Bourdieu's outline emphasizes the multidimensional nature of resources that individuals can possess, shaping their social positions and interactions within a given field. In the field of interpreting, and specifically in community-based settings, these forms can assume diverse characteristics and representations. The various forms of capital can be understood through an assortment of means and assets. Economic capital can be exemplified by the value interpreters contribute to enhancing efficiencies in public systems, as well as their own economic dependencies or prerogatives tied to their continued role. Cultural capital is manifest in the embodiment of bilingualism as a skill, the varying rigor in training and education implementation, and the presence of accrediting bodies. Cultural capital can also be embodied in the nuanced awareness of interpersonal and intercultural skills that interpreters exemplify as they navigate the tightrope between neutrality and empathy.

Cultural capital is also manifested in the roles that institutions, clients, or policymakers take on as gatekeepers and stewards of the field, wherein they act to shape and recognize interpreters' work and by default controlling entry to the field and determining cultural significance. For example, Kozan (2017), contends that community interpreting is more defined by the institutional settings within which they work, rather than in alignment with the professional status of translation and interpreting “interpreting appears as more of a service than a co-activity, as it pursues the needs of an institution rather than those of an individual” (p. 27).

Social capital is apparent in both the personal and institutional networks of freelance interpreters. Social capital is also associated with relational power in the hierarchy of language services that

interpreters retain and may furthermore be produced in the occupational freedoms and access to occupational arrangements that allow practitioners to manage work/life demands.

Symbolic capital is reflected in the image that interpreters may unknowingly co-design in partnership with governance structures – which is that of a community concerned with equity and access and in doing so, adopt a certain “investment in the game (*illusio*)” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1994, p. 98). While this may also be a form of symbolic capital, it is one that is not ascribed with a significant enough weight that it imbues external validation and recognition in interpreting – specifically interpreting in community settings. Symbolic capital with more consequential impact is best found in how a field of work is recognized by outsiders as having value, as demarcated by symbols of status and prestige. For many professions, these status symbols are characterized by activities such as title protection and recognition, exclusive training, and certification through membership bodies that provide oversight and enforcement. Noordegraaf and Shinkle (2011), also argue that “symbolic capital can be cultural capital...It is thus a form of capital that is in a sense “transubstantiated” and recognized as the legitimate token of status” (p. 78). In the field of interpreting, such recognition is mainly bestowed to the domain of conference interpreting over community interpreting.

Establishing tangible and real-world markers for each designated form of capital supported the interview process and the development of relevant questions; an accessible understanding of Bourdieu's concepts is important to eliciting comprehensive responses that draw on interpreters' experiences and ideas.

### **Exploring Role and Agency**

Community interpreting has been defined as “interpreting in institutional settings in which public service providers and individual clients do not speak the same language” (Norström, 2010, p. 3). The recognition of interpreting in community settings only came after much debate about its existence at all as a professional designation within the sector. While conference and courtroom interpreting had been formally recognized since the early 1950s (García-Beyaert, 2013), the role of the interpreter as a cross-linguistic communication professional in public services has largely been relinquished to external influences to define (Ozolnis, 2010; Kozan, 2017; Runcieman, 2018). In exploring the impact external players have had on the development of the field of interpreting, García-Beyaert (2013), asserts that:

Even in the absence of conflicting interests, undetected clashes among different players in the conception of what the internal good of interpreting is could become an invisible source of tension that can hamper a healthy evolution of the profession... [a case of] different players understanding interpreters’ roles differently (p. 57).

Conceivably, this molding of the profession from external forces has had some influence on the unequal power distribution within the field and may have contributed to the shift in interpreting studies from “studying cognitive processes in the interpreter to studying interpreting processes in social institutions” (Pöchhacker, 2013, p. 69) given the vested interests of these external players. Interpreters are active members within a communicative encounter: they are contextually situated between interlocutors that do not share a language, do not share a culture, and may also not share an understanding of the organizational system in which they are involved (Angelelli, 2004). Thus, the interpreter’s role is “a central one in these persons’ mutual communication, due to her unique access to the two languages in

which they talk” (Wadensjö, 2002, p. 355). The reality, however, is that community interpreters often fulfill roles that fluctuate between a traditionally normative ideal of non-invasive, impartial, strict language-only interpreting (Leanza, 2010; Angelelli, 2004; Roat and Crezee, 2013) and to that of “essential partners...to the interaction” (Angelelli, 2004, p. 98).

The critical importance of interpreters in public services has long been acknowledged, especially in health and legal settings, which continue to be the largest consumers of interpreting services (Pöchhaker & Schlesinger, 2007; Bischoff, 2010; Angelelli, 2004; Pochhaker, 1999; Ozolins, 2010). Interpreters act as participants in the co-construction of meaning as language conduits and intercultural interlocutors: contextualizing communication in the physical environment as well as the conceptual setting of cultural frameworks (Dysart-Gale, 2005; Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013). Interpreting is more than the restatement of words from a source language to a target language – interpreters must first understand and then reframe a conceptual construct: “they have to understand the context of the questions and make a validity claim of the words in their own culture” (Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013). Thus, the thrust of interpreting is not in language proficiency, although proficiency is critical and essential, it is in the application of language in combination with communicative skills, intercultural understanding and contextual, as well as situational, knowledge.

The degree to which the role of the interpreter is not understood can be measured by the multiple modes of reactive and ad-hoc responses, employed globally, to the crisis of communicating across languages (Ozolins, 2010). The ‘interpreter’ has variously been family members (e.g., minor-aged children, spouses & siblings), friends, neighbours, and coincidental staff members (Reynolds & Orellana, 2009; Valero-Garcés, 2014; Rosenberg, Seller, & Leanza, 2008). Leanza (2010), in reviewing three influential works by leading researchers in the field of interpreting and language studies, clearly identifies

that the gap between “professional rules and basic description of the practice” (p. 336) is often where the role of the interpreter becomes situated. In an effort to bridge what is seen as solely a language gap, service providers employ various forms of language assistance. However, in doing so, they inadvertently overlook critical issues such as confidentiality, impartiality, and accuracy – issues that are central to public sector services and their clients. This oversight can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the standards and ethics that govern the profession. However, one could argue that any professional working in an environment governed by policies and standard operating procedures, particularly in law enforcement or healthcare settings, is intentionally neglecting their duty to exercise due diligence. Given the nature of their work, these professionals should be fully aware of and attuned to the significance of standards. This disregard also amplifies how the nature and act of communication is recontextualized within a multilingualized state, and disabused of the same import and gravity afforded it in same-language settings. In multilingual contexts, the responsibility of conveying the message accurately and confidentially is left to anyone, undermining its significance.

### **Professionalism and Interpreting**

While a concept of profession has been defined by many researchers in many different schemas (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011), Bourdieu contends that a profession is nothing more than a folkloric construct that has been “uncritically smuggled into scientific language” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 242) and that its whole social conscious is integrated without critique. Bourdieu argues that if we, instead of using the notion of ‘profession’, look at the aggregate and the “symbolic imposition” required to produce it, and consider field rather than ‘profession’, then the landscape becomes “a structured space of social forces and struggles” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 243).

The category of profession refers to realities that are, in a sense, “too real” to be true, since it grasps at once a mental category and a social category, socially produced only by superseding or obliterating all kinds of economic, social and ethnic differences and contradictions, which make the “profession” of “lawyer,” for instance, a space of competition and struggle.” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 243).

Bourdieu calls us to not passively accept social categories as given but to actively construct these categories through sociological inquiry that is attentive to the nuances of power and symbolism that may be at play in how these categories are traditionally defined. Having come late to the landscape of interpreting, structurally occupied, and dominated by conference interpreting since the formal inception of AIIC in 1953, interpreters that work in community-based, public sector settings may find that the nuanced approval of what is accepted as professional delineation and protocols may not suit their reality. Nor do their realities suit the existing organizing structures of the interpreting profession as defined by AIIC and similarly aligned bodies. Indeed, any attempt to generate clarity and understanding could benefit from a Bourdieusian view of field versus profession, as its origins were those of struggle:

the field of interpreting is partly developed in and by ongoing conflicts, not only concerning what defines professionalism, but also about issues of control over resources and social status.

Conflicts of interest can be traced between various groups of interpreters, between interpreters and the professionals they assist, between interpreters and lay people, as well as between interpreters and the institutions in which they work (Wadensjö, et al., 2007, p. 3)

Exploring professionalism from a Bourdieusian perspective involves understanding various forms of capital central to his theory of practice. Symbolic capital, in particular, plays a crucial role within a field of practice. Understanding professionalism through this lens highlights its importance in attaining



status within the field. Symbolic capital – which has no tangible form other than through designated and acknowledged indicators such as degrees, certificates, badges, etc., – can be exchanged for other forms of capital, including economic capital, which may have more salient significance to an agent in the field. Symbolic capital is essential in that it is a validation from others, of others, that there is intrinsic value in the work, or efforts being performed. Without external validation, forms of compensation can be difficult to acquire. Indeed, many academics in interpreting studies have turned to better understand professionalism within the context of interpreting.

This implies a range of individual and collective efforts, including struggles to achieve a certain social status, suggestions to define standards of best practice, to control access to professional knowledge – theoretical models and practical skills – and to control education and work opportunities. (Wadensjö, et al 2007, p. 2)

Professional certification protects the title of professional which imbues a symbolic entitlement to expertise and exclusivity, through signaling competence, gravitas, import, and a designated arena of practice.

Professionalism refers to the occupational behaviours and practices of workers who not only have full-time jobs but also possess a clear sense of what their work is about and when it is effective. Some sort of collective – traditionally called a “profession” – guards and maintains this self-awareness. (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011, p. 68)

Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) give examples of social workers, police officers, doctors, lawyers, and engineers as having the workings of a professions, and explicate that professionalism ...exists when workers are part of an occupational association that institutionalizes a technical base (knowledge and skills) as well as a service ethic (some sort of calling or higher purpose).

This, in turn, calls for an autonomous space or jurisdiction that enables members of an association to control their own behaviours and practices (p. 69).

### **The New Economy: Language as Capital**

Language is an important but overlooked issue in today's multilingual, globalized, and integrated societies, where it acts as both a tool for marginalization and a tool for integration of immigrants (Harrison, 2007; Lambert, 2001). Research on the globalized new economy (Heller, 2003), brings the "interplay between economic interests, labour selection, gender, language ideologies and language practices" (Duchene, 2009, p. 27) to the foreground. Heller (2003), defines commodification as that "which renders language amenable to redefinition as a measurable skill, as opposed to a talent, or an inalienable characteristic of group member" (p. 474).

However, McGill (2013), makes a distinction between language itself and the packaging of language, such as in the case of interpreting or translation: language, therefore, is not the commodity, but rather the bundle of language plus specialized skill or, what Urciuoli (2008), calls, the "worker-self-as-skills-bundle" (p. 211). For McGill (2013), "to define a linguistic competence as an economic resource, it would be necessary to describe how one person or firm had special access to that competence" (p. E97). Understanding the commodification of language as package rather than skill is helpful but does not address the issue of power relationships in the economy of the language industry. If interpreting is marketable and can be well monetized, why are interpreters – or in this case, community interpreters – not profiting?

Inghilleri (2003), brings a focus that contextualizes interpreting within Bourdieu's theory of practice. Inghilleri (2003) investigates the use of interpreters within the environment of political asylum interviews and seeks to define a framework to "extract and analyze the underlying principles which

generate the activities, practices and/or rules associated with interpreting activity in a *range* of contexts” (p. 244). In further studies, Inghilleri (2005), contends that Bourdieu has been significant in better understanding the role of interpreters as agents within the production and reproduction of interpreting activities. In much of her work, Inghilleri (2003), focuses on the situational position of the interpreter and the “complex question of agency [that]... has been considered of primary importance in the endeavour to make descriptive theoretical approaches more ‘agent aware’ and translators and interpreters more visible as social actors” (p. 142). Other scholars have also turned to Bourdieu’s theories on society and social practices to frame the power relationships and issues of agency in interpreting and translation (Navarro, 2006; Gouanvic, 2005). Navarro (2006), enthusiastically embraces Bourdieusian theory as an appreciative approach to understanding power and conflict, “social struggles are the main facet of social arrangements in any specific field” (p. 14). McGill (2013), couples Bourdieu’s idea of capital forms with the economics of Adam Smith and concedes that it is

plausible to imagine that individual actors and firms collect rents on linguistic (and more broadly communicative) competences insofar as such individuals and firms exploit these competences in a manner which is similar to a farmer exploiting the soil or the owner of an oil well exploiting a petroleum deposit (p. E89).

Considering language merely as *the* characteristic talent overlooks the essential skills, educational backdrop, and foundational competencies required to transform a bilingual individual into an interpreter. Furthermore, it diminishes the full range of competencies that constitute a fully developed interpreter, reducing their abilities to mere language proficiency.

It is against this backdrop of emerging ideologies and converging research that the issue of interpreter agency, or lack thereof, is explored.

### **Systemic Responses and Policy Formation**

Research has consistently shown a lack of commitment and involvement from macro-level authorities in the formulation of language policies and language planning (Ozolins 2010; Matras & Robertson, 2015; Eser, 2020). When language is framed within macro-systems and policy formation, it takes on three personalities – language as problem, language as right, and language as resource (Harrison, 2007). In the context of community interpreting, particularly in B.C., all three distillations are evident: community interpreters are immigrants and refugees themselves, mediating communication between minority language speakers and public services. Various studies have demonstrated that a combination of interrelating factors must be in place for interpreter services to gain traction and salience (Ozolins, 2010).

Analyzing results from a survey on the utilization of readily available professional interpreter services at Geneva University Hospitals in Switzerland, Bischoff and Hudelson (2010), found that the provision of interpreter services alone does not result in their utilization, nor does the acknowledgement that interpreters improve communication and service delivery. Whereas Bischoff and Hudelson (2010), recommend provision coupled with proactive legislation, Harrison (2007), who studied foreign-born, bilingual social workers that were practicing in Australia, found that “while acknowledging the symbolic value of legislation and policy, the vast majority of informants felt that addressing the language attitudes of the majority Anglophone population via education was a more productive course of action” (p. 88). Matras and Robertson, (2015), in a mixed-method design study using quantitative data and ethnographic interviews to measure responses to language diversity in Manchester, England, corroborate previous studies (Ozolins, 2010, Roat and Crezee, 2015) in demonstrating that even in highly multilingualized communities, the approach from systems of macro-governance has been hands-off, leaving ad-hoc

responses to be generated by micro-level organizations. It becomes clear that there is a complexity of factors interacting when it comes to systemic responses to interpreting services.

### **Domains in the Field of Interpreting Practice**

Community interpreters have been around for a very long time – much longer than the version of the interpreter that was established as a professional designation in the mid 20th century in Europe, (Baigorri-Jalón, 2014, Runcieman, 2018). Yet it is the conference interpreter that continues to dominate as the quintessential image of interpreter, replete with headsets, sitting among technical equipment, and usually in the company of esteemed individuals, be they influential businesspeople, academics or politicians. Conference interpreting, through the successful efforts of many organizations but primarily the work done by AIIC in the 1950's (Pöchhacker, 2022), arranged the mechanisms necessary to differentiate a class of practitioners from others in the same field – mechanisms such as entry to the field requirements, educational processes, standards and codes of conduct and ongoing oversight and continued professional development – and establish conference interpreting as a profession (Ranciman, 2018).

The community interpreter, while fundamentally engaged in the same professional efforts, is significantly different from the conference interpreter in ways that have more to do with setting and clientele than with professional competences, (Runcieman, 2018; Pöchhacker, 2022; Ozolins, 2010). But these differences of where and who they serve can have profound implications for the community interpreter's identity, prestige, support, and financial security, among other things.

Whilst not negating the importance of conference interpreters, community interpreters are becoming increasingly important in contemporary society. However, although conference interpreters are still seen as being highly trained professionals (with relatively high remuneration

within the interpreting profession) community interpreters are less visible, and sometimes treated as though they were hardly a profession at all. (Runcieman, 2018, p. 11)

This literature review will not delve deeply into the comparisons and distinctions between community and conference interpreters. However, it is important to emphasize that isolating community interpreters as the sole agents in the field, without acknowledging the shared space with conference interpreters, would result in an incomplete application of Bourdieu's theory of practice, which hinges on understanding the dynamics of conflict and struggle within the field. To take a broader view of interpreting as a field of struggle and production, and to include in that frame of view interpreting in all domains – conference, court, community/public services – uncovers a scenario in which the internal struggles of the field imitate the external hierarchies of society, and as such the field then becomes driven by these structural elements of society, rather than the personal intentions of the agents – substantiating the notion that “external influences are always retranslated into the internal logic of fields” (Swartz, 1997, p. 127).

The links among the interpreter's evolving role as an intercultural interlocutor in community settings, the dynamic interplay between different agents in the field, the significance of language as capital, along with the responses at the system and policy levels concerning language access, indicate a research gap. A more comprehensive exploration encompassing all these aspects is necessary to better understand the position of the interpreter within the context of the new economy.

### Chapter 3: Methodology - Research Design

In this section I will discuss the methods used in designing the research approach, the development of questions used in the interviewing process, and the data collection methods. Grounded in the principles of participatory action research (PAR), this study utilized semi-structured interviews to explore perspectives of interpreters in the field of community interpreting. Adopting a co-researcher model, participants were actively engaged through the interviewing process, with the ultimate objective of delineating factors crucial to a model supporting interpreter agency and autonomy. This collaborative approach was designed to transform PAR principles into co-constructing innovative solutions by aligning theory and action to enhance the existing system (Greenwood & Levin, 2006; Argyris & Schön, 1991).

#### **Research Approach**

Bourdieu's theory of practice served as the theoretical framework for the formation of the questions, individual interviews, and subsequent qualitative data analysis. This conceptualization of the interplay between capital, habitus, and field provided a lens to understand the dynamics of community interpreting. While the interviews adhered to a semi-structured format, questions were intentionally crafted to align with Bourdieu's explanation of the four capitals. As this research project is based on Bourdieu's theory, which highlights the interaction of various factors in a field of practice, it focuses on the observable actions related to the four forms of capital. Habitus and field will be similarly explored and integrated into the findings and conclusions, providing a deeper understanding of the roles that interpreters play in the field of practice.

**Situating Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice**

Bourdieu's theory of practice supported the formulation of the interview questions – which were designed to elicit responses to get beyond discussions of working conditions and remuneration – topics understandably significant for freelancers, but which are not the focus of this project. The objective was to explore conditions and realities shaping the interpreter experience that ultimately contributed to the objectionable working conditions and compensation levels. Therefore, establishing a well-grounded appreciation of the role that agency plays in the interpreting field was important. As mentioned earlier, the overarching goal was to contribute to the body of knowledge by moving beyond compensation or measurement of status, pursuing solutions that lie in the complex interplay of interconnected relationships, and patterns of engagement. To illustrate how Bourdieu's theory effectively frames the reality of interpreting in community settings, I employed his concept of capital forms to clarify and organize the participants' contributions.

Table 1 below outlines the application of Bourdieu's theory of practice, detailing the methodology used to structure the inquiry process and questions, (Table 1). I first mapped out how Bourdieu's key concepts of Capital, Fields and Habitus mapped with elements found in the landscape of community-based interpreting. In essence, how are these three notions expressed within the community interpreting domain. This tactic helped establish a schema for more specific and deliberate formulation, sequencing of questions and the overall inquiry process. The example questions drafted at this stage served as an initial course and were not intended to be necessarily used in the interviews.



Table 1: *Framework Approach using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice*

Bourdieu's Terms	Explanation of Terms	Application to Community Interpreting	Question Example
Capital	“Resources function as capital when they are ‘a social relation of power’ because this is precisely what determines value upon resources after interest is manifested (and/or disputed) by people” (Navarro, 2006, p. 16)	Capital as economic efficiencies, social cohesion, cultural communicative and contextual value, and symbolic representation of responsive governance	How do you believe your language skills contribute to the provision of public services? Where do you believe the economic value, if any, of interpreters is most evident?
Fields	A generated system of shared meaning that is influenced by outside forces but which “constitute[s] a network of objective relations between objectively defined positions of force within social space” (Ingherilli, 2005, p. 136)	Community Interpreting as a field or as an “agent” within more historically established fields (healthcare, social services, legal)	Is community interpreting its own field or is it only an agent within a larger field? By what factors do you believe interpreters act as agents within the field of community interpreting?
Habitus	The ways in which agents and capital are organized within a field and “to a large extent ‘pre-determined’ or ‘pre-adapted’ by the particular social and biological trajectory of the agents involved” (Ingherilli, 2005, p. 136)	Historical and social structures influencing interactions between immigrant community, vulnerable populations, women and refugees conflicting with the generation of language services	(If an immigrant) What experiences have you had as an immigrant yourself in interpreter-mediated appointments? (If not an immigrant themselves) What have you experienced in your work with clients from immigrant or refugee communities.

**Recruitment**

I connected with Language Service Providers in the region to facilitate the recruitment process and utilized recruitment devices such as posters and a very simple website, along with an open-invitation letter to encourage interpreters to express interest in the study. The selection criteria were designed to engage a diverse and inclusive dataset, comprising of individuals who met the following requirements:

- Possessed a minimum of 2 years' experience as interpreters in community-based settings.
- Represented at least one of the top 10 language combinations most active in the established regions.
- Had received some education or training in interpreting.
- Worked, on average, at least part-time as interpreters.
- Participants were selected based on their submitted expressions of interest, aligning with the established criteria.

Formal approval for the research project was obtained in accordance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy (2011). Participants were informed about the confidentiality of their information and the anonymity of their identities. Those who agreed to participate signed a consent form outlining the research objectives, the open-ended interview methodology – including recording and transcription – and the potential for findings to be shared with named organizations and published. The form also assured confidentiality, transparency in data usage, and provided a process for verifying the researcher's credentials, ensuring informed consent. It also stated that participants were not compelled to participate and could choose to withdraw at any time without prejudice, with no impact on any future interactions involving themselves and the researcher.

Interviews were conducted with careful consideration to mitigate potential power dynamics by using neutral, diverse locations and clearly communicating the researcher's intent to listen openly to participants' experiences. These measures safeguarded that participants felt safe, secure, and confident throughout the interview process.

By signing, participants provided free and informed consent to participate in the project. The interviews were conducted face-to-face between March and October 2017.

Adopting a qualitative research approach, a total of 18 interpreters were recruited and interviewed; 2 interviews were not included in the final analysis – one candidate did not fit the recruitment criteria so the short interview was not included, although recorded and transcribed; and the other interview was disqualified due to a corrupted recording quality. All participants were actively working as interpreters, apart from one who had recently retired. All voluntarily participated in the research and most also expressed an interest in receiving the final research paper. The interpreters recruited represented a variety of working languages, and all resided and worked in the Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions of British Columbia.

To facilitate accessibility and logistics, interview sessions were conducted in various venues across the Metro Vancouver/Fraser Valley regions. The interviews, recorded for subsequent data collection, followed a qualitative, inductive methodology. The research was framed by qualitative study, adopting an inductive approach during the data collection phase as well. Participants responded to interview questions in a comfortable and informal conversational setting. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded according to emerging themes identified through the interview process.

***Interview questions.*** Ultimately 38 questions were prepared, [see Table 2] each with prompts to support the main question. An additional 5 questions were included to capture demographic data if it did

not emerge during the interview process itself. The 38 questions were organized based on Bourdieu's field theory, with the upfront questions probing for perceptions of self and identity, with the intention to link these responses to notions of habitus and doxa. Not all questions were asked, nor were they necessarily asked as written. Instead, as stated, the interviews took an inductive approach, framed within PAR methods and were participant-driven conversations. The questions were written to be asked in pre-determined order and style, and this intention was kept in mind, even as I built on the comments and responses the participants contributed to the data collection process. The sections of the questionnaire were:

1. Introductory Questions
2. Habitus
3. Social Capital
4. Symbolic Capital
5. Cultural Capital
6. Economic Capital
7. Demographic Data

The approach facilitated personal narratives to emerge and allowed participants to fully describe their varied experiences and perspectives in the context of interpreting in community settings in British Columbia. The participants were honest, transparent, noticeably at ease and openly shared their insights and interactions in their work.

The interviews that were included in the analysis varied in length from 60 minutes to 1.75 hours, depending on the participant's own comments and storytelling inclinations, and were conducted with an emphasis on participant autonomy. I adopted a hands-off approach, letting the conversations develop organically and permitting participants to express themselves freely. No specific restrictions were imposed on how participants chose to communicate, except for being considerate and respectful of their time commitments. This approach aimed to capture authentic and unrestrained insights from the

participants. Participants were compensated for any parking costs, but otherwise did not receive any other form of compensation.

Participants were provided with some initial information via recruitment channels that provided some background and overview to the research project, and I also designed a very simple website that acted as a source of information and a recruitment strategy. Each interview also began with an introduction to the research topic, to the research, and to the format of the interview.

Table 2: *Question Design Approach*

Capital Forms	What is it?	How is manifested in community-based interpreting?	Sample question(s)
Social Capital	Hierarchical or relational networks that exist to maintain a certain social order and which may support the continuation of social inequities	The personal and institutional networks of and for freelancers and interpreter relational power in the hierarchy of language services	<p>What do you appreciate/like about being a freelance interpreter?</p> <p>How often do you meet up or connect with other interpreters in a professional manner?</p> <p>What professional or other associations or memberships do you belong to and why or why not?</p> <p>What are your interactions with the non-English speaking client base?</p> <p>Do you find that the brokerage through which you freelance may at times request of you tasks that are outside of the interpreter role?</p>
Symbolic Capital	A form of capital which relies on prestige which may be based on the depth or lack of knowledge that circles around a particular agent	The vision that interpreters unknowingly co-design in partnership with governance structures – which is that of a community concerned with equity and access.	<p>What value do you see interpreters having in a multilingual society?</p> <p>Have you ever used your skills as an interpreter to gain admission or access to any resource?</p> <p>What do you hear said in the general population about interpreters? What are some things that you have heard, seen or felt?</p>

Cultural Capital	Embodied, objective or institutionalized forms of capital that are represented by traditional forms of doing, concrete items such as books and resources and credential or accreditation platforms	The embodiment of bilingualism as a talent, the lack of rigor in the implementation of training and education and the availability of accrediting or credentialing bodies	In your opinion is interpreting something that can be done by any bilingual? What comments have you heard said, or said to you about bilinguals versus interpreters?
Economic Capital	The conversion of capital into economic form in its simplest form, but which may also interact with other forms of capital at which point the conversion into monetary form may be affected	The value that Interpreters bring in creating efficiencies in public systems and also in their own economic dependencies on remaining in the role	What percentage of your income comes from interpreting? Is your family income dependent on this income? Are you a sole earner family? What would make/allow you to leave this work? What makes you stay? Have you ever stated or proposed a change to your hourly rate? Do you accept contract terms, or do you negotiate?

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*Note. Questions were not asked in the order noted in this table*

**Data Analysis**

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed as I read through the transcriptions multiple times while re-listening to the audio recordings. This process captured nuances in emphasis, tone, and other non-verbal cues, shedding light not only on the explicit content of the responses but also on the participants’ receptiveness and openness to engage with the questions. These nuances provided a rich context that highlighted the passion and loyalty participants had for the field, each other, and the clients, bringing forward the stories and anecdotes that had the greatest impact on their journeys. Table 3

describes the demographic detail of the 18 interpreters interviewed. The amount of data was substantial. The recordings totalled 22.38 hours of interviews, with a 1.5-hour average per interview – although the range was .75 to 1.75 hours. The recordings of 16 interviews were ultimately utilized as data for this project.

Table 3: *Participant Data*

Identifier	A Lang	B Lang	Sex	Int Yrs	Age Rng	Status	Country Origin	PO	EDL	CTTIC
ACF	Cantonese	Mandarin	F	25+	60+	Imm	HKG	Court Interpreter	PSE	N
BAM	Arabic		M	25+	60+	Imm	IRQ	Pilot	PSE	N
CMF	Mandarin		F	20	51 – 60	Imm	TWN	Artist (BFA)	PSE	C
DAM	Arabic	Dari	M	10	51 – 60	Imm	IRN	University Prof	PhD	A
EPF	Portuguese	Japanese	F	6	41 – 50	Imm	BRA	Doctor	Med. Sch	A
GSM	Somali	Oromo	M	10	31 – 40	Imm	ETH	Student	PSE	N
GCF	Cantonese		F	16	60+	Imm	HKG	Business Owner	PSE	N
MHF	Hindi	Punjabi	F	3	51 – 60	Imm	IND	Tchr Bio/Eng	Grad Deg	N
MSF	Spanish		F	12	41 – 50	Imm	COL	Trans/Int	Grad Deg	N
MCF	Czech		F	30+	60+	Imm	CZE	Nurse	RN	N
MIF	Spanish	Italian	F	8	51 – 60	Imm	CUB	Ent/Tourism	Tour	N
RPM	Punjabi	Urdu	M	13	51 – 60	Imm	PAK	Ecologist - Gov	PhD	A
RTF	Taiwanese	Mandarin	F	5	31 – 40	Imm	TWN	Sys Coordinator	PSE	A
SDF	Dari	Farsi	F	20+	51 – 60	Imm	IRN	Bus - Exp/Imp	PSE	N
SPF	Punjabi		F	6	41 – 50	Imm	ENG	Mother	PSE	N
VHF	Hindi	Punjabi	F	2	51 – 60	Imm	IND	MA in Sp. Ed	Grad Deg	N

The first step in the data analysis involved tagging and commenting on responses, initially organized according to the categories in Table 4.



Table 4: *Initial Tagging and Analysis*

Category	Indicators/Comments
Language/Bilingualism and Communication:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of the transition from being bilingual to becoming an interpreter.</li> <li>• Perspectives on the unique skills, specific talents and challenges involved in interpreting compared to bilingualism.</li> <li>• Bilingualism as a foundational skill for interpreters.</li> <li>• Interpreter's role.</li> </ul>
Professional Journey and Choices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous professional status and career path.</li> <li>• Decision-making process leading to entry into the interpreting field.</li> <li>• Factors influencing career choices and transitions</li> </ul>
Interactions in the Interpreting Field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactions and experiences with professionals in various settings.</li> <li>• Feedback from professionals about interpreter skills/interpreting</li> <li>• Challenges faced during interactions in diverse work environments.</li> <li>• Interactions with LSPs and other agents.</li> </ul>
Perspectives on Colleagues and Professionalism:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspectives and behaviors of fellow interpreters.</li> <li>• Observations on professionalism among interpreters.</li> <li>• Strategies for maintaining professionalism in the interpreting field.</li> </ul>
Job Satisfaction and Economic Aspects:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factors influencing job satisfaction in interpreting.</li> <li>• Economic reliance on interpreting as a profession.</li> <li>• Perspectives on the role and place of interpreters in various contexts</li> </ul>

I then further analyzed the responses and aligned them with Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital forms to contrast an image of the activities, actions and interplays among the stakeholder and influence that each wielded or yielded (see Table 5).

Table 5: *Coding with Bourdieu's Theoretical Framework*

Initial Tagging Codes	As Related to Bourdieu's Theoretical Framework
Language and Bilingualism	Habitus Capital Forms
Professional Journey and Choices	Habitus Field
Interactions in the Interpreting Field	Agents
Colleague Perspectives and Professionalism	Agents Capital Forms
Job Satisfaction and Economic Aspects	Capital Forms Habitus

### **Limitations**

This study was restricted to one geographic location in British Columbia, albeit the most active region for interpreting services, and excluded other areas, particularly rural zones. The data set did not include the full spectrum of languages in demand and was limited to those interpreters that were fully engaged in their work, with a focus on interpreters with 2 or more years of experience. The data set also excluded sign language interpreters, and indigenous languages.

### Chapter 4: Results

The Tower of Babel means 'gates to God', because the tower was supposed to reach God. And God, of course, was not happy about that. Because he didn't want to be disturbed. And what God did was say that every single person who is working on this tower is going to start speaking a different language. And the next day, everybody started speaking a different language. And the Tower of Babel could not be finished. And humanity became weaker because everybody was speaking a different language. And what interpreters and translators do is to help humanity to be strong again, to speak the same language. To be as powerful to the point that even God became threatened. So, this is what we do in our daily lives. We help people to work towards the same goal. We help people to have the same tool to work together. And we help people to speak the same language again, to be strong again, like in ancient times. *EPF*

The interpreters who came forward to participate in this research project demonstrate a deep commitment to the work they have undertaken; many have already been working several years in the field, whether in Canada or abroad. The dedication and the passion they have for the work they do and how it fulfills not only them but also provides incredible, unparalleled benefits to the community they serve in, comes through in the passionate way they describe this work. In fact, and ironically, it is this passion that also acts as an anchor that keeps them working as interpreters, even when the conditions are perilous, the support fragile, and the recognition vague. The fact that these professionals stepped forward and volunteered an hour to an hour and a half of their time to meet with me is testament to their ongoing belief in change, evolution, and the need for a better understanding of the important role that interpreters occupy in multilingual realities, and the need to continue to move forward in the advancement of the profession and the professional.

The findings in this chapter are organized to align with Bourdieu's theory of field by first illustrating concepts of habitus and field, followed by capital forms.

### **Habitus and Field**

I did not expect that habitus would be so salient a characteristic, but it materialized as a thread and a theme throughout the interviews: the habitus of the participants acted as both a motivator and a glue.

The power of the habitus derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation rather than consciously learned rules and principles. Socially competent performances are produced as a matter of routine without explicit reference to a body of codified knowledge. And without the actors necessarily 'knowing what they're doing' (in the sense of being able to adequately to explain what they are doing). (Jenkins, 2002, p. 76).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus can work both as a mechanism for understanding what leads individuals to enter the field, "that love of language, that love of working with people, because I've always worked with people in these kinds of settings, like parents or caretakers of special needs children, so it's, it's feeds into that same kind of environment" (*VHF*), and also as a frame to illustrate expectations interpreters have of the field, and the subsequent frustrations that many experience when certain expectations – e.g., clearly endorsed standards and practices – are not encountered. Here, R expresses her frustrations at what the types of practices she observes in the field:

I feel disappointed... It's not because I'm not happy that I'm devoting myself into this and I feel it's not fair. No, it's not. It's really, because ... why would you possibly risk another person's safety? You're not respecting them. You're not respecting yourself. You're not respecting the field. So why are you doing this? I guess that's my question. I mean, it may sound very black and white. I

understand there are gray areas of course ... like certain professions, yes, you can have a very gray area, that's fine. Politics, it's never black and white. But ... when we're talking about people's safety, health and well-being, including physical, mental, it's not something that should be taken so lightly. *RTF*

What the participants experienced as lacking are clear codes of conduct to inform and guide the behaviour of interpreters, the processes by which interpreters are onboarded and oriented to the work, the standards and practices of the language service providers in the way interpreters are informed of, and dispatched to the various appointments, supportive structures in the field that educate end-users, advocate for fair remuneration, compensation, and working conditions, and a predictability, clarity, and transparency on the certification process. Codes of conduct do exist in various forms, one such resource is the NSGCIS, which many of the LSPs incorporate into their operational policies and which are expressed and appended to the service agreements that interpreters sign with most, but not all, of the agencies. There then is a chasm between what the agencies expect and what the interpreters know, and in this space the field is created and recreated by the players.

I have a medical background. I have done pre-med before I chose...to change my course and [I] didn't go into medicine. So, I have that background. I have years of studying in the English language. My MPhil is in English, like that's a snapshot of my PhD. I [also] have master's degree, and there is no acknowledgement of that at all in the system, as it currently works. Well, I could have all this and still be a poor interpreter...You do want to be acknowledged for what you bring to the table. But to have to literally ask for work, it's also sometimes very demeaning to be perpetually on the phone and to be asking for work. *VHF*

Bourdieu speaks of the dialectical relationship between societal structures (fields) and the internalized dispositions of individuals (habitus): "Dialectical relations between objective structures ...and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are actualized and which tend to reproduce them," (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 3). In fact, this framework is central to Bourdieu's theory of practice, in which he explores how social structures are both produced and reproduced through the practices and dispositions of individuals. In attempting to understand the structures that maintain the status quo for interpreters working in community settings, exploring these connections, as shaped by Bourdieu's frame provides some thoughtful insight. Many of the participants discussed that being an interpreter is an internal calling to the work, and by extension, when this reverence was not perceived in others, it was considered offensive:

So, I asked her why are you doing this? And she said, "Well, I can't find a job. So, this is the only thing I can do right now, but I'm not gonna do this forever." So, almost treat interpretation as a stepping stone or something that just gives her some cash money while waiting for a more meaningful job. So, even again, coming to the screening process, how did she even get hired? And then she obviously doesn't see interpretation as her mission in life. Not to mention is her career path. So, she's just passing time, well, finding more meaningful job. So, that's an insult to the industry. *CMF*

In this comment, C also speaks to the lack of screening process that facilitated this individual's entry to the field, yet another symptom of the disorder that creates confusion and friction in the field. S, a Dari and Farsi speaking female interpreter recognizes that some individuals working in the field are just there to make some easy money:

I know for a lot of people, maybe with children, this is an amazingly flexible occupation. A few hours here, a few hours that they sit, can maintain their family, and there is pay. That's not me. I know for others it is that, for some it's that it doesn't need that much skill, you just go sit and just translate and get paid. That's not me. And I'm very much against that, because that's not the job either. *SDF*

This duplicitous nature of the field does not go unnoticed by consumers, and further reduces the validity and esteem of the work. B, an Arabic interpreter that has worked as an Accredited Interpreter with the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA) for many years, related an anecdote told to him by a high-ranking administrative staff member of the IRB:

I was talking to her one day and she said, "Listen, we have so many people who come here, ask for refugee status, and they ask for interpreters. We then bring them interpreters. When they get accepted into Canada, after the process, they apply to become interpreters." I mean, come on! Be realistic here.

This type of practice can only occur if LSPs – either independent agencies or agencies such as the IRB that maintain internal rosters of freelancers – allow for it to happen. It degrades the reputation of the field and diminishes the professionalism that some interpreters bring and hold in their work.

When interpreters do exhibit a high level of refined professionalism, a quality that should be demonstrated by all interpreters, consumers do take note, however. A is an elderly Cantonese speaking female that has worked as a court interpreter in Hong Kong and as a court, community, and healthcare interpreter in Canada, who well understands the maintenance of role boundaries, and brings with her a sense of habitus that delicately straddles the professional and interpersonal realms:

Dr. Pxxx once told me that, she said, “A, I like you as an interpreter. Do you know why?” I said, ‘there are lots of good interpreters, there are lots of interpreters better than I’. But she said, ‘Because you're committed to your work, you are committed to your work, I can tell some interpreters as just there as interpretation machines, they just interpret. But you are there to help out.’ ...I think is it this is important, because you see, I've seen much... after all these years, I've been through much ups and downs in life, right? ... So very often, when the patient's very upset, or feels very frustrated, I would give the patient an encouraging smile, or a competent smile.

*ACF*

M, a high school biology teacher in India that came from a trilingual Hindi, Punjabi, English speaking family, taught at an English-speaking institution and feels her transition to interpreter was facilitated by her previous professional experience – “I mean, it's like teachers also. Like you're explaining things, you're handling their parents and you're mostly translating, because in India, even if you're teaching in English, parents come who don't know English. So, you're kind of a translator-come-counselor.” *MHF*

And VHF, another Hindi speaking female interpreter says that working as an interpreter also fulfills her own learning and interests – with a background in medical studies and special education, VHF also holds a Masters of Philosophy and working as an interpreter brings to life the very things she studied – like viewing sociological and psychological study in practice:

I'm doing interpretation for me. But for me it's not just interpretation. It's so fascinating like, for hours and hours I can think about the things that ... I've done in the day, [that] the mindset is because of that culture, I know that language, I know, I know that learning theory, I know how



people, not just how they understand, but why they don't understand certain kinds of things. So yeah, really good. *VHF*

Others described working as an interpreter as a means to achieving other life goals. One participant, a trained and experienced medical doctor from South America, came to Canada for a new life, and even though she found herself disadvantaged as a newcomer to Canada, her role as an interpreter allows her to build valuable social networks and learn the cultural norms of the healthcare system. This helps her integrate into Canadian society and move closer to her goal of becoming a licensed physician. The relationships and knowledge she gains from her interpreting work can be seen as a social asset or resource that she is able to leverage to advance her position and can be construed as an example of social capital that also has the value of transforming into other forms of capital, perhaps more significant – such as economic capital.

Of course, my income in [my home country] as a doctor was much higher. My lifestyle was different, but I didn't come to Canada to for the for the money. If I wanted money, I just could just stay in [my home country]. I came here for new experience. I think I am playing different roles, playing different roles. Not only interacting, but many other many other parts of my life. Yeah, I think it's part of the new experience I am experiencing. And it's actually I feel that people tend to treat me better when they know that I am a doctor. But I avoid telling people that I am a doctor because they start expecting me to go beyond the rule beyond the boundaries. *EPF*

And others also describe this sense of giving and getting from the field “So, it's like, you're getting knowledge and you're helping others too... So, you're gaining tools” *MHF*

Bourdieu emphasizes that individuals actively shape the social world, yet the ability to transform it depends on a realistic understanding of its current state and the practical actions possible from one's

specific position within it. Effecting significant change necessitates a clear grasp of the existing social structure and the influence individuals can exert based on their unique perspectives.

The social world is, to a great extent, something which agents make at every moment; but they have no chance of unmaking and remaking it except on the basis of a realistic knowledge of what it is and of what they can do to it by virtue of the position they occupy in it. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 242)

This observance of the realities within the interpreting social arena was something that many of the participants described and the need to exist as a fully engaged participant. In this quote R describes the sense of immersing oneself in the context of the work, so that you fully engage in the interaction – to not act as a secondary player but to almost embody the role of the professional sphere one is asked to enter as an interpreter:

And I think one thing that's really important is if you need to go into a specific field [as an interpreter], you really need to live and breathe that field, even though you're not a practitioner of some sort, but you have to believe that you are a part of it. *RTF*

This comment exemplifies the habitus that professionals transport into the field, and which they produce through their own actions. Bourdieu's theory speaks to the complex interplay between the objective conditions of society and the subjective experiences of its members, suggesting that social realities are both shaped by and shape individual perceptions and actions. D, an Arabic male interpreter who was an academic in his home country and in the US, accepts the loss of professional status that the shift from academia to interpreting produced: "But I am very happy about my job, even though it does not have the status of the faculty member or Dean of the University." Many participants experienced a field that lacked broadly established standards, particularly demonstrated in the lax or non-existent screening

and vetting practices for entry of new interpreters. This is an indication that objective standards are often overshadowed by the subjective realities shaping the field. The selective application or complete disregard of codes of conduct is more salient than their actual presence or utilization. While the NSGCIS is a common reference for many LSPs at the time, the influence of these guidelines appears limited and has not penetrated the consciousness of many interpreters working in the field. Moreover, many participants recognized absent or insufficient protocols around recruitment and onboarding, either through their own direct experiences of how they gained entry to the work, or by observing the experiences of their colleagues:

So basically, I started as like just helping, but then I thought that then I find myself eventually this like 30 years ago, that I'm just putting so much time in it, like it's just all the weekends now all the night and stuff. Because the... need was so overwhelming, and so massive, that the in the beginning before you are more wiser and more disciplined. You just give, and it just consumes your life. That's why I changed that a little bit into more of a professional way. So, there is some structure because you were not too structured. *SDF*

R, a Taiwanese speaking female interpreter, with 5 years of experience working as an interpreter, previously holding the position of a systems coordinator in another field, spoke to this lack of structure in the system, signaled by a glaring absence of quality oversight, and a duty to standards of professional practice:

Because there's no one else. There's no...because there's no system. There's no framework, there's no structure. There's no quality control. There's no nothing. So, when times [are] desperate, you grab what you can. Yeah. And you give them what you think they deserve. And to them, it's convenient. Why not? [speaking in the voice of an untrained bilingual] 'I'm retired. I'm 60. But I

can still work. Let me do this. So, I fall asleep?' On the cell phones talking on their phone. I don't think those are interpreters. *RMF*

However, this passion also acts as an anchor that keeps them working as interpreters, even when the conditions are perilous and the support they receive from agencies and other players in the industry is fragile.

Because if the agencies cannot ever recognize the importance of our roles, it's very impossible to raise the awareness of the public, because they're the ones who negotiate the rate with those clients, right? So, they need to advocate for interpreters, and 'why we are charging this, because these are the reasons'. If they already [saying to the customers], you know, kind of 'oh, yeah, you're right, they don't deserve this much' then, of course, we're not going to be respected or treated, as you know, how we should be. *CMF*

They continued to subjectively experience a sense of fulfillment and gratification that compelled them to persist in work which they value and in which they perceive value:

We are the glue. In a lot of cases. Yeah, the glue...but most of the time, people don't think about it ... what the society views interpreter makes them feel that interpreters are only for those people of minority. Well, in fact, they forget about how, without interpreter, their job would have been very difficult. They forget that piece... But I'm talking about the feeling that, no matter what kind of interpreting I do, I feel valued. Because I know I make the difference, however, the public or the health professional see us. *CMF*

Interpreters develop a habitus, or a set of dispositions, tailored to the specific requirements and expectations of their segment within the interpreting field. Conference interpreters, for example, cultivate dispositions suited to formal and prestigious environments, such as international politics. In contrast,

community interpreters develop dispositions more attuned to interpersonal relations and community-based needs. They emphasize cultural nuances in communication and accept that their role may often be misunderstood (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011).

There are symbolic struggles within the field of interpreting over the definition of legitimate symbolic capital. For instance, the debate on what constitutes a 'qualified' interpreter and the hierarchy between different types of interpreting are part of these struggles. These distinctions can reinforce social distances — for instance, where conference interpreters might be seen as part of an elite professional class by virtue of the clients for whom they work, community interpreters are positioned in a not so enviable fashion by extension of the lower-status groups for whom they provide services – namely immigrants and refugees. This is a phenomenon seen in other fields, for example in law where “the position of lawyers in their professional hierarchy corresponds to the position their clients occupy in the social hierarchy.” (Swartz, 1997, p. 130). It must be noted, however, that this distinction between conference and community interpreters is not spoken to in the interviews. Rather, participants drew attention to untrained bilinguals, also agents in the field, by act of admission on the part of LSPs and other parties.

While structures do exist in the field of interpreting that are available to all subsets of agents in the field, many interpreters working in community and healthcare settings do not recognize these organizing elements as assets for change, instead, describe the field as having no system. However, the fault does not lie with the individual practitioners. Freelancers are not adequately informed about the advantages, ways to utilize these structures, and the actual return on investment of certification or continued professional development. Consequently, interpreters in community settings rely on their own understanding, shaped by their previous experiences or status, to gauge the benefits of these opportunities. But the LSPs, as central players in the field, are both conduits for work, and gatekeepers of the profession

– to use C’s early quote to illustrate this point – “how did she even get hired?” is a question asked by many interpreters committed to their role and work, but that see the chaotic conditions around them.

Many interpreters expressed a frustration at the lack of clarity on how the ‘system’ works. R is a Punjabi speaking male interpreter with 13 years working as an interpreter. He also comes from a highly specialized scientific field in which he holds a PhD:

The way I'm experiencing it, sometimes the flow [of work] is there, sometimes it is not there.

Sometimes even personal favors can come in. Depends on the personal relationships...those are all [my] perceptions. I don't really have anything. But that seems to be it could be that there's no transparency. There are no set rules for that. And they should be set, for the fairness [distribution of work], the rules should be set in a positive way. And also, the engagements of interpreters, by agencies should have some criteria of limitation... [such as] other things that are needed for a job.. something, trainings on those things. I mean, somebody has to do the systems analysis in that and figure out what the situation should be. *RPM*

With a conceptualization of ‘professionalism’ as the frame, habitus shapes how individuals perceive their professional roles, how they behave within their professions, and how they interact with others within their field. It encompasses the professional identity as a set of practices and dispositions that are learned and internalized through professional training and practice.

There are a lot of interpreters at [worksite X], who have lots of riders on where they will work and they will, *a*, only work in Surrey, they will not travel because there's no travel time given. And it takes a lot of time and money to get to and fro. It's not worth it really. So, they have that. And plus, they also many, they do not work at hospitals at all. Oh, they say we don't like it in return. Because it's like a little pocket money. It's not very professional, none of them are looking

at it as a professional, it's easy money and just come have a little social life, you know, nearing retirement age or kind of a thing. So, you just make a couple of \$100 extra so they have a lot of these riders. *VHF*

In the field of community interpreting, practitioners ostensibly operate within a framework that provides equal access to professional resources, such as standards and memberships, like their counterparts in other interpreting settings. However, the practical application and relevance of these resources reveals a disparity in how they are recognized, utilized, and valued across different interpreting contexts. This discrepancy suggests that the social space in which community interpreters' function does not fully mirror the operational norms seen in other areas of the profession. The dynamics within this social arena indicate subtle yet significant variations in the capital—social, cultural, and economic—accrued and mobilized by community interpreters, affecting their professional practice and recognition within the broader field of interpreting. A broader analysis of how field-specific conditions influence professional identity and agency, reflecting a nuanced interplay of power, capital, and habitus, can provide an opportunity for understanding of how the relational positions of the agent subsets in the social arena of interpreting shape the daily realities of the field.

Indeed, action in stable fields is a game where actors are constituted with resources and the rules are set. In the interactions of more and less powerful, the game for the more powerful is to reproduce the order. (Fligstein, 2001, p. 109)

While many of the participants mentioned the role that LSP should occupy, they do not necessarily have any actual access to information about how the LSPs operate or under what mandates they work.

So far, I would say I have no relationship with the agency I work with, because it's been a bit remote, there's no interview, you just send in your papers, and they send you the contract and you sign and never meet.... But other than that, they sit in Abbotsford, and I am in Surrey, so they're just names and voices on the phone. *VHF*

This means understanding the rules, power dynamics, and limitations of the fields they are part of, as well as recognizing their own position (including their power and resources) within these fields. One participant succinctly stated that “then there is something obviously very wrong with the system, whatever system they have” *VHF*, a statement that underscores the lack of transparency and universality across practices. And CMF, expresses confusion as to why an LSP would recruit untrained bilinguals, asking “is it because the interpretation agencies are so desperate they need people who can speak two languages? So, whoever knocks on the door, they kind of go well, yeah, this is this is okay?”

One participant shared her onboarding experience with the agency after she had joined. This participant, *VHF*, is a well-educated individual with a Master's degree in Philosophy and a diverse professional background, having worked in India, the Middle East, and Canada, expresses her frustrations about the lack of an apparent structured, transparent, and cohesive system. Her observations underscore the irregularities within Language Service Providers (LSPs), both internally within single agencies and externally across different agencies.

Now that I have started getting a little bit of regular work, even though it's two hours a day, but I am that's only after I started calling, and then I figured out, you know, like, I was too new to the system. Then somebody told me they forgot to call them call them on a Wednesday, because that's when the next week's work comes in kind of a thing. It shouldn't be like that. You shouldn't have to do that. You shouldn't have to know. *VHF*



Many of the informants in this project were not successful at clearly demarcating the line between interpreters and bilinguals other than citing imposed ‘rules’ – like confidentiality, ambiguous mentions of interpersonal communication/cultural awareness, etc., or mastery of language. While there is this impediment to fully outline the critical distinctions that make interpreters different from bilinguals, the knowledge that they are different is deeply seated. It is felt in the interactions, in the poise and positioning and the pride with which interpreters do their work. But it is also impeded by a systemic laziness that took over 40 years to overcome and that continues to be weak in character and presence.

Maybe nowadays, they're starting to realize the kind of relief when they see interpreter stepping to the door. Before they probably don't really get it because nobody was pushing us. Nobody was really doing something about this whole thing. I mean, we weren't even certified until just June, we just took the first exam for them to feel comfortable and safe with us. Because that's not that I still don't think that's how they see most of us. We need to be really, we really need to have a system, we need to establish a standard for them to look from the outside look at us and think, ‘Oh, here's my interpreter, thank God, you know, I don't know these terms. But he or she is here. Good now, I'm taken care of’. *RTF*

### **Capital Forms**

Within the analytical framework of Bourdieu's social theory, interpreters in community settings can be seen as holders of multiple capitals: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. All can be transformed into other forms of capital depending on the conditions of the social arena.

**Economic Capital**

A reflection on the limited economic capital accessible to community interpreters, a group whose occupational environment is marked not only by a monetarily expanding industry, but also by a rising demand for services, was the spark that germinated this research project. This scarcity of the economic capital possessed by community interpreters, alongside a problematization of the ostensibly limited autonomy and self-determination experienced by this cohort, formed the foundational motivation for this inquiry. Economic capital, in its most traditionally accepted and understood form, is neither a pull into the field for interpreters, nor a motivation to remain in the work. In many cases, the initial compensation and remuneration rates for new interpreters entering the field are unattractive due to their low sums. Unfortunately, the rates have remained un motivating, as they have either stayed the same or worsened over time (PLS, 2019). The way in which the system works, how interpreters are recruited, vetted, and trained is obscure to the interpreters themselves, and the way in which the system is operationalized, e.g. how interpreters are selected for individual assignments, how their practice is evaluated etc., once the individual has been added to an agency roster, remains a mystery – “I wish they had some system, in which they communicated to the interpreter that once you’ve signed how is the work given? Should I be calling you? Will you call me?” *VHF*

This same participant is unclear, and rightfully so, why the rates would decrease, along with the elimination of parking and mileage reimbursements over time – a practice that was initially in place in many of the original agencies.

There are people who signed contracts much earlier who get a huge amount, hugely different amounts from what we do. I actually have no idea why is it working like this, why is it not

translating into better? Is it because, sometimes I wonder, is it because...it's the work that we do in a room with a professional? Are professionals giving us feedback, is there system or not? I don't mean on our little box, this thing [referring to the assignment intake form in which there is a box for the attending worker to add comments], but are they giving feedback to the agencies? Is there a loop of communication there? *VHF*

In Bourdieusian terms, economic capital is bestowed with significant value, and typically, occupations that command higher rates of pay are perceived as having both intrinsic and external value. This valuation not only underscores the societal appreciation of the work performed but also signifies the alignment of the occupation with broader economic and cultural hierarchies. Such financial remuneration serves as a tangible indicator of the agent's position within the social space, reflecting the accumulation of not just economic but also symbolic capital. Likewise, such valuation also encourages, or at the very least acknowledges, the negotiation of rates as a recognized professional exercise.

These complex relationships between the various forms of capital illustrate the interdependencies of capital forms within professional fields and peering through one can offer insight into the inner workings of another. In the statement below, the participant articulated how cultural and social forms of capital – the forms of assets that interpreters bring to an interaction such as language, skills, knowledge, insight – are not able to translate into economic capital.

I think maybe that is the reflection of how the public sees interpreter's role in the society. Maybe they just find that "well, yeah, well, we don't really need you 24/7. We need you, yes, **WHEN** [researcher's emphasis] we need you. So, the time when we need you maybe is not taking up the big chunk of our time, therefore, yeah, we'll pay you, but then you know, nobody will die without you." kind of attitude. I wonder if that's why we get the pay we get. *CMF*

Participants were asked if they had ever attempted to renegotiate their contract terms with LSPs. In BC, with respect to LSPs that have systematized their operations, including standard operating procedures and a policy framework that includes ethical codes of conduct and robust recruitment and onboarding processes, most interpreters are asked to sign a contract that outline the terms and conditions of work, and which states their hourly rate and any incidentals. Most, if not all, interpreters working with LSPs in BC will be paid on an hourly rate with a minimum of 1-3 hours range. The pay range is between \$22/hour-\$31/hour – a rate that has not significantly changed in the 30's years since the payment for interpreter services in community settings was established.

Well, I actually requested to have my rate increase many times...it wasn't until last year or a few months ago...they just added \$2 [per hour] and 2 days ago, I receive a phone call, "Ah C, are you available on this day? Well, with Langley corrections office, they really need someone who is experienced, you're always on only hope" or something [like that]. I [asked], 'How long is it? Oh, one hour? Well, you know, for me to drive all the way to Langley for one hour, and... can you pay at least two hours?' [the LSP replied] 'No, we can't because it's a government service [and] we can't negotiate a rate' ... So, I told myself, you know what, it's a good experience for me on my resume...[and] I have done similar things like this many times. Not, because I'm super nice person, it's because I want to gain experience. *CMF*

While most participants voiced dissatisfaction with the rates, some accepted the reality of the pay levels either because they were second-income earners that relied on other family members to contribute more significantly to the household revenue, had other, more stable income themselves, were only interested in part-time work, were semi-retired, or were working as interpreters as a means to an end. As

M put it “I understand these contract terms. And then again, I don't feel like I am grossly underpaid. I am okay with what I make.” *MSF*

B is an Arabic interpreter that has worked primarily with the Canadian Border Service Agency – a government enforcement agency, and the Immigration and Refugee Board – an administrative tribunal under the Federal government, and more recently began working in healthcare settings through an LSP. He prefers to work with the government because those contracts are more lucrative – “what I like about the government contracts is you get paid a minimum of three hours” BAM, whereas working in healthcare it is a 30-minute minimum and increments of 15 minutes above the first 30 minutes.

E is a medical doctor that had a thriving practice in her home country but choose to emigrate to Canada. She is currently not practicing as a doctor because of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC’s restrictions on foreign trained doctors, but she is planning to take the qualifying exams that will allow her to transition into the BC healthcare system to continue her practice. When asked about her opinion of the compensation and conditions of remuneration, she noted her advantageous standing as a healthcare interpreter.

I accept making \$26 an hour because I don't have to study for the assignments, but I was talking to another interpreter who has no medical background [and] he said that if there is an appointment about knee replacement [for example], he has to study all the anatomy, all the names of the ligaments, all the names of the surgeries and all of the physical exam tests. He has to study 48 hours for that, and I think that in his case, if he makes \$26 an hour, he actually made \$1 or 50 cents per hour, so I think it's very low. It's very low. I accept what I'm paid, because I don't have to expend extra time to study because it's stuff that I already studied in medical school. But I was wondering, what about medical interpreters who don't have a medical background? They have to

study a lot for the assignments. And I think that if the wage doesn't go up, nobody will be willing to work in this field. *EPF*

Compensation and remuneration rates are not only appraised on the face-value of the hourly rate, but also by other forms of compensation, like reimbursements for out-of-pocket costs (gas, parking, etc.), Workers' Compensation coverage and Errors & Omissions insurance, all of which are not consistent in how or whether they are provided across the LSPs in the BC region.

I was told that Ministry X was paying LSP A \$45 an hour for us, but we were getting \$22. We're not even getting half of what Ministry X is paying. And if you don't want to provide us with, you know, insurance, fine, but you've got to realize we might need insurance too, you know, maybe down the road, we might need to be bonded, I don't know. But where are we going to get that income? I don't think people will want to become interpreters knowing that 'okay, well look at all these costs every year and we're only going to make this much' so... I think the agencies have to look at that too. *SPF*

G is a male interpreter who was born in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia in East Africa. He interprets in what are termed 'languages of lesser diffusion' or lower volume demand languages – his languages are Oromo and Somali, and a host of other regional languages particular to the region. He works full-time as the manager of a large retail store and interprets part-time in all community-based settings and is able to continue working as an interpreter because it is not his primary income source.

I think the agencies need to do more... homework and understand, so that so the circumstances of interpreting and what it really takes to interpret and how far this goes is it really, for \$25 or \$24 an hour only for 30 minutes, or for only one an hour enough to compensate that person to travel from here to Delta, is it? So, will it even cover the gas? Will it even cover the time lost in

between? So, so they need kinda to do a little bit homework and say, 'Okay, we need these people, then it's good if we kind of have a minimum payment no matter what it is, whether it's two-hour, three-hour, four-hour', so depending on the job for the travel time, let's do something for them, you know what I mean? *GSM*

Participant VHF, explicates on why interpreters do take on work, even though the hourly rate is insufficient:

I think rate \$35 [per hour] at least to start with would be a good rate if you're not going to give any kind of parking, or travel time...parking is so expensive. Sometimes when ...[referring to the LSP] asks me to go to Maple Ridge for a two-hour appointment, what's in it for me? But I have been that I've done it at the peak of winter – Maple Ridge by public transport. I traveled six hours to do a five-hour appointment. Why? Because I've been sitting at home since I signed the contract.

V goes on to explain during the interview that it is with optimism that she anticipates the rates and the overall feasibility of continuing in this work will improve.

### **Cultural Capital**

Bourdieu's concept of capital extends beyond economic capital to include social capital (networks and connections), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, education), and symbolic capital (prestige and recognition). In professional contexts, these forms of capital are critical for career advancement and professional development. Professionalism can be seen as a form of cultural and symbolic capital, where possessing the right credentials, expertise, and professional demeanor can enhance one's position within a field. Professional identities are “a work in progress, always changeable, mutable, and ultimately

undefinable in their entirety, and yet at the same time bound to the relatively more consistent social and cultural world(s) we live in and move through every day of our lives” (Runcieman, 2018, p. 4) is both shaped by and contributes to one's capital, influencing how professionals are perceived and valued within their fields.

Cultural capital in the form of educational attainment and access to specialized knowledge is marked in the interpreting field by the interpreter’s own adeptness and navigational skills across cultural, historical, and political realms while understanding and adhering to the boundaries of role and professional ethics. In the case of community interpreting, where sadly educational requirements specific to interpreting skills are slim to none in the BC context, interpreters struggle to gain distinction by highlighting other important competences such as proficiency, cultural awareness, interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, knowledge of the specific settings in which they work, and a finesse and adroitness at steering through complex and challenging circumstances, as is witnessed in the case of R. R is a Punjabi male interpreter that has an impressive history as an ecologist and academic. He has guided graduate students in their research, demonstrating a strong capability in both scientific expertise and professional communication. When asked if he’d been given any guidance upon becoming an interpreter in Canada, he mentioned his extensive professional background, by way of explaining what Bourdieu calls “transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53), and said, “well, I have the basic concept of what the needs of interpreting [are] ... having of course positive communication and clear communication, those kinds of things. And anything beyond that is not in the sphere of anybody’s objective for interpreting.” When asked to expand on that answer, to explain ‘sphere’ he said, “nobody owns it. I think the space is there. And within that space, everybody takes his own subspace in that and stays with that... as an interpreter.”



V describes having learned through experience, albeit her time in the field is relatively short at 2 years, but coming from a professional background, and being a well-educated person, she quickly picks up on the strategies necessary to move through these experiences:

But through a little bit of experience, I have now learned to put up my hand and ask them rather than this going on that, you know, “I do understand that this person has some English, but would you want to go through me” or because, again, as you taught us in the course [referring to a interpreting in community settings course VHF had taken through our organization] sometimes family members are not the best people. But more and more in these hospitals, I see that there are family members coming and staff just tells us to leave. Yeah, they say we’ll sign your sheet, but you can leave. *VHF*

In one case, a participant, a female interpreter from Iran, was summoned to a mental health appointment to facilitate communication with a male patient, also Iranian, who was known to be aggressive and had a history of violence towards other interpreters. In many, but not all, mental health professionals are competent to work with interpreters and implement pre and post session debriefs. This was the case in this session and so the psychiatrist disclosed to the interpreter that the patient was a former prison torturer, a revelation that deeply disturbed the interpreter due to her work with victims of survivors of torture.

Within a matter of seconds, I had to decide, ideologically and morally, would I want to do this, do I want to help someone that has possibly caused 1000s of deaths, possibly some of my friends? And then the other side of the brain said that you have a job, and you have a contract. You don't get to pick your patients. And maybe this is a test. This is how you can measure your own strength. So, then I told the doctor I said, I am very uncomfortable with the person's occupation,

however, while, and I don't promise anything, I can try my best. We can start but I want to have the right to end it whenever I feel that I cannot do a good job or basically when I do not want to continue. And he says fair enough. And then I explained to him that what kind of a person this man possibly was and what kind of behaviour he might expect from a woman to begin with. I said I'm a 'no-no' to him. I will not be worth anything to talk to. But I'm not going to look at him. Simply they want you to – women – don't look up. Like you look down and you're just submissive. As I said, these are the plans I'm going to develop. This is how I sit, this is how I speak to him, and then, I guess it will work at least to some level.

It was the hardest thing I have done: value wise – I mean morality wise, but the bloody man liked me so much, that at the break, because it was three hours at that point, he says do you want to have a cigarette? God, I don't want to have anything to do with you, I thought, but I didn't say that. The session was so well that they said that well we are going to call you next time. I said no. I said, I have to know my limits. And this is going to take me a week of trying to get over basically, get it off me. So that's another thing – that know yourself enough – what bothers you, what hurts you, where you're good at or not, and be honest about because if I do bad, that affects everybody in that session too, right? *SDF*

Cultural capital is also located in the interpreter's nuanced understanding of interpersonal and intercultural communication and in how they mediate these interactions within their professional boundaries. E discussed a case where a client had been institutionalized due to a diagnosis of being mentally unfit. Healthcare providers had not had the benefit of an interpreter until the participant was asked to intervene – in this case it was a volunteer as the embassy of her home country who had asked her to assist the patient. It became apparent to the participant that while the patient spoke some English, her

comprehension was limited, and this resulted in her answering the questions she'd been asked in a series of appointments in bizarre and suspect ways – which led to her being institutionalized. This was not the only case that exposed the need to be very accurate in interpreting even though risking irritation on the part of the worker – agent of the public sector service – or even chancing being seen as unprofessional, disoblging, or incompetent.

Sometimes the client answers in English but they didn't understand the question. I know that.

They [the healthcare practitioners] have to learn to get clues, to learn that how ... to understand that the client doesn't... understand the question, English, even if the client speaks English fluently. *EPF*

Cultural capital in community interpreting is an asset that enables interpreters to navigate and succeed within their professional landscape, traversing not only ethnically based culture and language, but also the various settings and fields in which they perform. These continually shifting environments, replete with their own unique dynamics, hierarchies, terminology, and protocols demand that the interpreter gain the skills to critically assess these relationships and their role within the context. Cultural capital is found in the interpreter's ability to handle different types of communication and client interactions effectively. The personal disposition of the individual interpreter can also aid in successfully attaining cultural capital. While this research project did not set out to explore correlational factors such as prior engagement in professional practice, regardless of occupational setting, on the way in which an interpreter navigates these landscapes, through the interviews, it was observed that those practitioners with this prior experience came with not only insights but expectations.

In the settings that I have worked in the time that I have worked, which is clinics and OT professionals and hospitals and all that kind of thing, I think immense, immense [value of an

interpreter], because everything that every service that is trying to be delivered, will go off track if we didn't have that interpretation. Effective interpretation...because it's not just language, there's so much at play there: there's culture, there are cultural values, it's just a whole conundrum of things. And you have to be careful that you're not bringing your own views ... I know that as a professional you have to be [impartial] but even without intruding into the professional space, sometimes you can alert them to what's going on. So, you can always find ways. *VHF*

When questioned about what she meant, this interpreter recounted a case in which she interpreted for a doctor of Korean origin and who was himself not fully fluent in English, and a young mother from the Indian subcontinent, in another language and from a community which has very conservative views on women. The mother needed to bring her child to the hospital monthly for blood transfusions, a challenging task due to her reliance on public transport, a significant burden given her cultural and personal circumstances. The interpreter's role involved subtly conveying the mother's concerns to the doctor. This helped the doctor understand the difficulties the mother faced and prompted an offer of additional support, including connections with support groups and other mothers facing similar challenges.

So I do feel that you know, without intruding into this space – intrusion would be when you're adding-on or you're directing the professional as to how to do the job – but without doing that, I think you can bring in, like simple thing the young mom said was something very helpless about how was she's going to bring her child every month, she was to bring a child every month into the hospital for the blood transfusion... and she's a chit of a girl herself, although she has three children, which is very young, because they marry young. And she has to bring this child by

public transport, which is like no, not a big deal in Canada, everybody does it from nine years old to 90 years old, but it is a big deal for her. So, so I'm not advocating that they provide her taxi fare or something, but I can somehow bring in a little bit. So, you know, like being able to say, So and so is a bit unused to this, this is a new concept for her. So, just that much alerts them to maybe not being... dismissive of her concerns. And so just sometimes when they add a sentence, 'I do understand that you have, you will have problems, but there are support groups that can help you, we can introduce you to other mums who do the same thing. Because if I don't bring in that little bit of subtle explanation of why this person is this thing they could also think of, as you know, just being lazy expecting anything without making an effort. Anything could happen in that context. *VHF*

However, this delicate balancing act can sometimes backfire on the interpreter. As Bourdieu (1991) writes, "The kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field" (p. 230) and with respect to cultural capital states "the volume of cultural capital...determines the aggregate chances of profit in all games in which cultural capital is effective, thereby helping to determine position in the social space" (ibid). Therefore, this form of capital needs to be commonly acknowledged as such in order for it to benefit the interpreter – either in terms of economic capital or in relative position within the field of practice. D, an Arabic speaking male interpreter, speaks of a case in which he interpreted at the hospital for a therapist and a patient with cancer, and he so displeased the therapist that she called the LSP, who in turn contacted him only to say that there had been a complaint filed but did not offer him a chance to explain or correct the version of events.

So, the counselor was asking, 'What do you feel?' And then she [the patient] was saying 'I'm in pain.' What do you feel? At the end, she said, the girl said, 'What do you want to say? How do I

feel? I have lost my life, I have lost my family, doing to my cancer. I'm here, I do not know if I will live for another six months. And you're asking me how I feel'. So, I interpreted exactly the same. And she calls, again, the [LSP] supervisor [and] says, 'your interpreter goes beyond'. So, I do not see justice, if I [may] say this. And because the number of interpreters, there are... a lot of supply and demand, if I leave there are 10 more people who will replace me. But the most beloved of all things in my sight is justice, that I believe this is not justice. If you accuse someone that you have not been adequate, you have to allow him to also respond. *DAM*

G, an Oromo-Somali interpreter believes that regular meetings between LSPs and interpreters would provide immeasurable benefit "because every time you interact with interpreters or with each other, some good things come out" – good things to mean rectifying misunderstandings, clarifying conditions in the field, discussing other agents with whom they work, and any number of other issues that regularly come up.

[To] see what went right, what went not right, and what do we learn from it? Is there any issue with ... anything, with the person assigning interpretation, with the person, with the receptionist, anything, any issues. So, it's always good to have to have a follow up, even if it's five minutes, five minutes, every now and then. So that gives the interpreter, I think, from my point of view, a value of being ... or being valued ... for that for that assignment: 'Hey, okay, I did this, or they kind of said, how did it went? Oh, yeah, I told them what ... went right, what went wrong' and that gives the interpreter, so, the morale and the confidence to say, 'oh, yeah, I have somebody who really values me because, because they want to know what I'm doing, whether I'm okay with it, whether everything is okay with it all', that kind of thing. *GSM*

D described the tenuous relationship that interpreters have with LSPs in this way:

See, there is a fear, as I said to you is a fear of being detected as a boat shaker or whatever.

Everybody tries to present himself or herself as conformist in even the meetings in our organizations that we attend. They want to say 'yes, good, yes, good. Hi'. *DAM*

Doxa, as the ingrained beliefs and values accepted within a specific field (Bourdieu, 1991), might be useful to explicate how community interpreters engage with institutional entities in their field, allowing language service providers (LSPs) and government agencies to dictate their professional duties and conditions. In fact, many of the participants interviewed felt, in the main that interpreters do not receive the recognition they deserve, as B, an Arabic interpreter that works primarily in law enforcement settings as an interpreter, states "What can I do? I'm providing a service. If they like it, they like it. If they don't like it, they don't like it. But that is the general consensus, ... among the interpreters, that we are not respected."

But altering these mutually accepted notions may necessitate some radical changes to the foundational structure of the field, as it relates to interpreting in community settings. But until these changes are at least attempted, community interpreters will continue to bend to the winds around them, all the while isolated in a viscerally experienced interpersonal and intrapersonal vocation.

In fact, isolated, silent, voiceless individuals without either the capacity or the power of making themselves heard, and understood, are faced with the alternative of keeping quiet or of being spoken of by someone else. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 206)

### **Symbolic Capital**

Symbolic capital, as defined by Bourdieu, is the esteem, recognition, or prestige that individuals or groups accrue, often manifesting through various symbols, honors, or status. For interpreters, this

symbolic capital materializes through several vectors such as educational attainment, entry to the field requirements, certification, and even mutually respectful working relationship with institutions in the field, such as LSPs. But participants noted that “They [STIBC] ask for \$200 membership, and then the \$370 for an exam. It's not worth it” BAM.

Symbolic capital is also embodied in the formal credentials and industry-specific training interpreters acquire, lending authority and recognition to their professional stature. The recognition of any symbolic capital held by interpreters is contingent upon the context, and on the habitus of the interpreter – in their ability to recognize the unique forms of capital that they contribute to the community or recognized by other agents in the field:

It's not worth it [on speaking of becoming certified] because there isn't much worth. Yeah, what is happening nowadays, if it was lucrative, yes, I would go for it. But it's not lucrative because... there [are] many organizations that do the interpretation and translation for free. So those guys will not pay. There is no point in it. *BAM*

This embedded valuative element is not universally recognized nor upheld by all those working in the field of community interpreting, resulting in divisions and a fragile tapestry of the industry as a whole for those that need to access its services and practitioners.

So how we present ourselves on a job, I guess determines, speaks for a lot of us... it's like this Chinese saying: "one piece of a rat's shit or poop in the soup ruins the whole soup". Because you have that one tiny mistake from a particular person/interpreter - it ruins everyone else. So, we all need [to watch] our performance, and our competence should be standardized and quality controlled, not by just ...anybody or by the government, it's really up to ourselves. So, they see us from the outside in a way that seeing us as helping them. *RMF*



While symbolic capital may not be easily quantified as other forms of capital, such as economic capital – the traditionally recognized ownership of money or assets, or social capital which wields power through networks or connections, or cultural capital, which garners recognition and prestige through the achievement of educational qualifications or possession of cultural knowledge – it has the tenuous promise of transformation to these other forms of capital, paradoxically, by embodying them while simultaneously maintaining its objectivity as a singular form of capital. A useful metaphor can be found in the theory of holism from the discipline of biology, in which the principle expounds that “The activity of the whole cannot be fully explained in terms of the activities of the parts isolated by analysis, and it can be the less explained the more abstract are the parts distinguished” (Russell, 1972).

Symbolic capital, therefore, encompasses the social honours, prestige, and recognition that come from possessing other forms of capital and achieving a certain status within the social hierarchy, which in turn mandates that those other forms of capital remain authentic and responsive to their structure and embodiments.

In community interpreting, as explored through this research project, many of the elements that would form the foundational merits of cultural capital, discussed above, are diluted and diminished by the presence of antithetical entities and practices, as demonstrated by the comments. Many of the participants spoke of their ‘space’ being occupied by others who were effectively, or seemingly, bilingual but not necessarily interpreters – family members, bilingual staff, friends, etc., – that through the virtue of presence and agreeableness were also accepted into the domain of the interpreter:

I mean, usually happens when the ... client brings along a family member who has English, to varying degrees. Sometimes they're very fluent, they're born and brought up parents, sometimes they have just functional English. That's the time when your space shrinks dramatically, unless

you're very careful, because it becomes a direct communication between the family member and the professional. *VHF*

One participant described a time when an English-speaking adult daughter of the patient accompanied the patient to the appointment. Upon starting the session, the attending doctor started speaking directly to the daughter – bypassing the interpreter completely even though the interpreter had clarified their role and presence. The interpreter professionally intervened and suggested that, since she had been booked, the doctor benefit from her presence, to which the doctor replied:

Oh, you know, I'm talking to the daughter because I want her to know what her dad is, you know, this is the situation, so she knows too at home she can help. Oh, no, I totally appreciate your help because I need you to be here. Now I have two helpers instead of one. *CMF*

When asked how she felt toward the doctor's response, C replied,

You feel a little patronized. You feel like 'oh, okay, if that's how you see me, while I'm just one more helper to provide some safety blanket, you might as well say, oh, well, since you're already booked, you might as well sit in the room' kind of ...tone, right?

A different participant also described another session in which a doctor, having kept both the interpreter and the client waiting for well over an hour, proceeds to dismiss the interpreter prior to initiating the session. Since doctors that work within the federal and provincially funding healthcare system – mainly in institutionalized settings such as hospitals and other centres – do not pay for interpreters out of their own earnings, nor do they have to bother with the administrative end of things such as securing and following up on the attendance of an interpreter as it is done through a centralized system – one can assume that what was at issue in this case could have primarily been a need to make up

for lost time by eliminating the interpreter, it quickly transformed into a struggle of power and dominance over who dictates how to proceed.

The doctor made us wait for like an hour and a half, really. And with a little bit of time left, he wanted to talk to the client, and he told me, 'Okay, you know what, you can go now.' And then I say, 'well, I'm booked until this certain amount of time, I can stay, and I should stay.' And he said, 'Well, it's fine. I don't think I need you because the client speaks some English' and I was like, 'well, some is not all. I'm here for a reason. And I think we should have the client decide.' So, he asks the patient and the patient said, 'I want you to stay' in English and I asked him a few more times in Mandarin, 'do you want me to stay here' He said, 'yes, I want you to say please stay with me so I feel safe.' Then the doctor said, 'you know what, guys, it's not up to you to decide. I'm the doctor, I decide. You can go now please go. *RMF*

Recognizing that any persistence might escalate and produce undesirable consequences, for both the interpreter and the client, the interpreter left, but did call and report the incident to the agency with which she was contracted.

The field is the social arena in which agents (individuals or groups) and their social positions are located. Each field has its own rules, structures, and forms of capital that are valued. Professional fields are characterized by specific norms, practices, and hierarchies. Professionalism and professional identity are shaped by the dynamics of the field, including the struggle for recognition, authority, and capital. The field determines what constitutes legitimate professional practice and identity. But with a lack of cohesiveness in community interpreting, establishing these definitions as mutually accepted ones proves to be challenging.

Respondents referred to the concept of professionalism in various ways – those that came into interpreting already pre-disposed to understand the concept often commented on the comportment or manifested behaviours of those they felt were not acting in a professional manner. Many of those interviewed mentioned comments from the service agency representative – doctors, nurses, officers, social workers, etc., - that indicated prior unpleasant or unproductive experiences with other ‘interpreters’.

I feel it's very unprofessional. The whole atmosphere there becomes very ... not everybody's like that there, there are some who are very clued on to the fact that this is a work environment. *VHF*

Symbolic capital can be endorsed by the efforts of LSPs as a co-construction achieved through the relational functions between agents in the field. However, this collaborative achievement hinges on the mutual respect and recognition among all parties involved. If LSPs fail to respect interpreters, this disrupts the foundational dynamics necessary for building symbolic capital. In such cases, it raises the question: what are the implications for the professional standing and efficacy of interpreters when their contributions are undervalued?

So, with [Agency X], I don't know what the deal is, you know, I feel like they're still paying me like I'm a high school graduate, working for them. But...then when they have an urgent request, such as very more important, like Crown Counsel or correction office or Ministry of Children, family urgent issue, they always [ask] for me, ‘please, we need someone who is quote, unquote [indicates quote marks], more experienced. *CMF*

Observations of informal networks that benefit long-standing interpreters, combined with unclear operational protocols (such as whether to call or be called), seemingly unfair distribution of assignments, and inconsistencies in how competency influences an interpreter's perceived value or the

level of work they are assigned, reveal significant challenges in the equitable organisation and utilization of interpreter resources. This in turn results in confusion and fosters a sense of distrust in the system.

I sat at home for months and then after [Agency X] started calling me a bit, but then also it smacked of leftover appointments that no one else would take - like an hour here or not *their* kind of a thing. And ... I would...have taken that also in my stride. But I knew I knew, right, left and center, people all around me being called again and again for two appointments a *day*... [for] three departments. They're... rushing around trying to do that and you're sitting at home and you're giving your five days a week availability - full day. But I think that's the community thing. This Punjabi community has very deep roots here and it works on the basis of who you know, it's like I give you work I you know, that's the system generally I'm not talking about interpretation. *VHF*

Other participants spoke of a lack of networks or connection between the interpreters themselves, of not having access to any similarly situated space where they could collectively discuss experiences and simply create some collegiality.

There is no formal interaction between interpreters. We need to sit down with other interpreters and share and see I have gone through this difficulty. How do you deal with it? What do you suggest? There is no communication. So, to me, this is one of the weaknesses of the system. *DAM*

Many bilinguals are permitted to call themselves interpreters simply by virtue of being recruited by an LSP and being seen to have automatic approval as a default. However, many of these individuals lack the necessary skills as mentioned earlier in the case of the IRB comment, leading to a perception that interpreting is an unskilled occupation. This perception, in turn, results in poor recognition and remuneration for interpreters. There was one setting in particular that was the scene of a high volume of interpreter-assisted appointments across many different language groups. This setting, a corporate service

of the provincial government which provided oversight on workplace safety and compensation and training mechanisms for back-to-work training, often had multiple interpreters working simultaneously in the same language groups – each client would have an interpreter even if the space was being shared by another client who spoke the same language undergoing the same process. This apparent redundancy was due to the case-management structure of the operation, but it also allowed for multiple interpreters in the same language combinations to be working together and/or be observed. This scenario soon became a space of conflict and showcased quite effectively how the allowance of untrained, unvetted interpreters poisoned the whole class of interpreters. One participant, M who was educated in Columbia, held a graduate degree in languages, and had acted as an official interpreter to the Columbian government prior to migrating to Canada, shared a story of her experience in this setting, illustrating how the unprofessional behaviour of other interpreters impressed upon those observing that the work simply involved ‘talking’ as evidenced by the client comments:

And he saw the other interpreters and he told me ‘Oh, my goodness, I see how you get it. You just don't sit down here speaking your own language and get paid I don't know how much, but I imagine it's a lot of money, just to sit on your ass and talk, and I bust my bones out there in that construction site to get a broken arm. *MSF*

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In British Columbia, interpreting in community settings is an umbrella term that continues to include healthcare and law enforcement settings, as well as general public services, such as those funded and administered by federal, provincial, or local governments. Because this delineation of settings is not as defined as it may be in other jurisdictions, many of those interviewed work across many sectors – from courts to mental health and everything in between. Moreover, those interpreters that have an impressive resume of work as interpreters, have not only witnessed, but have been participants – willingly or unwillingly – in the evolution of the profession and industry as it shifted in BC. So, the participants in this study will interchangeably refer to all the different settings in which they work when offering their experiences to the study. As explained in the introduction to this research project, healthcare was a primary setting for many of those interviewed, but not all, and some interpreters distinctly expressed a preference for specific settings – be it healthcare or legal.

As mentioned, the interpreters that came forward to participate in this research project are committed professionals, that had already been working many years in the field, whether in Canada or abroad, some for over 20 years. The dedication, the passion, and the love they have for the work they do and how it fulfills not only them, but the clients and the society writ large, is evident in the impassioned way they describe the work they do, and the clients they serve – “I find that at the end of the day, I feel like I've done a few good things today.” *CMF*

The interview data revealed an occupational field facing structural challenges in its efforts. Interpreters often work independently, pursuing similar objectives but lacking coordination and cooperation. This lack of unity creates opportunities for other agents to influence the field to their advantage.

There are many entangled and interconnected realities that work to obstruct progress and advancement of the recognition required for community interpreters. These realities in turn give rise to other adverse conditions that continue to subvert efforts for promotion and advancement. The two most salient themes are:

- The absence of a clearly, collectively defined expression of the professional role of interpreters in community settings – even among the interpreters themselves.
- Accessible and relevant mechanisms of support and education to foster a collective consciousness and alliance.

These conditions amplify the exploitation of interpreters through the utilization of untrained bilinguals in response to increasing demands in the marketplace, a practice primarily seen in the operations of LSPs but also in other institutional settings, and the control and influence that external agents – service providers, doctors, lawyers, etc., – exert in the definition of who is an interpreter and how the role is to be fulfilled.

Despite the escalating need for community interpreters, the profession remains largely undervalued and unrecognized. Often working as freelancers, interpreters face precarious job security and scant benefits. Compensation is frequently inadequate, particularly for those in community and social services. This disparity between the growing demand for interpreters (Runcieman, 2018) and the diminishing acknowledgment of the profession, particularly felt in community interpreting, presents a profound paradox.

There is transformational value in certain elements that have the capacity to shift an endeavor from task to profession. One such element is the application of the title ‘professional’ to the undertaking: a bilingual can be seen as ‘helping’ people communicate, but a professional interpreter performs a wholly



different role, one that incorporates a comprehensive awareness of language, communication, systems, culture, interpersonal dynamics, role boundaries, and traits that include an ability to empathize, without crossing professional lines. The title of ‘professional’ is a symbolic one, a capital in symbolic form, and along with it comes important external recognition that the person holding such a title has earned it, rather than a bilingual who was simply born with or developed an ability, to speak two or more languages. In fact, Noordegraft and Shinkle (2011) state that “what is at stake in any field is symbolic capital” (p. 78).

While there are mechanisms in place that can move this capital form forward, there are still impediments that continue to interrupt its progression in the case of community interpreting, and it is exactly this predicament that this research project sought to explore, through the indicators of self-determination and autonomy that individual interpreters have within the field of practice. With standards, a certification scheme, training, protected title, and formalized LSPs organized to provide professional services, in place – in addition to a history of collaboration among service providers in BC – why is there a significant lack of any forward movement? While accepting a fundamental limitation in consumer and practitioner awareness around the existence of standards, and the low profile of the ISO standards – which may explain perhaps the significant discrepancies in the ways in which interpreters are trained and operationalized, which in turn diminishes the calibre of interpreting services – there are still many pieces of the puzzle missing.

In the guise of being cost-effective and objectively harmless, utilizing untrained interpreters can have dire consequences, including miscommunication and potential harm to individuals who are requiring services (Bowen, 2001, Ku & Flores, 2005; Flores, 2006; Hsieh, 2015; Access Alliance, 2021). The recognition of adverse outcomes in the utilization of untrained, unvetted bilinguals should be well established in the realm of LSPs but as such practices continue, they then become another contributing

factor in the rising employment of untrained interpreters, especially in community and social services settings, and the continued eroding of the professional status of interpreters. Many of those practitioners in the field that are labeled ‘interpreters’ are not equipped with the requisite skills, working to uphold the residual perception of interpreting as an unskilled profession, which in turn contributes to their poor recognition and remuneration.

The interviews that were conducted in this research project demonstrate that these two elements hinder and contribute to the state of the community interpreting industry in BC. These elements, the non-compliance of observing or recognizing standards, the absence of a unified presence and collaborative working environment, the lack of a platform for open exchange of ideas and networking, insufficient screening and onboarding mechanisms on one end, and a seemingly open gateway to the field of work at the other – it’s a tug of war, with the interpreter in the middle. However, these factors are still only symptomatic of the condition.

The data led me to take a step back and question what exactly was being investigated. As noted above, the mechanisms that act to promote a profession were all ostensibly in place at the time that these interviews took place: educational programs – albeit tenuous at the time, certification schemes, codes of conduct, language service providers, institutional policies, to name the most critical, yet the field continued to experience similar conditions to what had historically been the situation. In the exploration of the concept of ‘professionalism’, an important notion in the establishment and advancement of an occupation, it became apparent that it was not sufficient to keep only community interpreting in view, but to broaden the perspective to also include conference interpreters, and from there gain a better understanding of the relational realities between these subsets in interpreting and observing any consequential impact.

In short, scientific work aims to establish an adequate knowledge, both of the space and of objective relations between the different positions which constitute the field and of the necessary relations that are set up through the mediation of the habitus of those who occupy them, between these positions and the corresponding stances, i.e., between the points occupied in that space and the points of view in that very space, which play a part in the reality and development of that space. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 242)

To gain an understanding of the field requires examining how different positions in the field are related and how individuals in those positions, guided by their habits and dispositions, mediate these connections, which requires “identifying the dominant and subordinate positions for all the participants in the field” (Swartz, 1997, p. 142). Therefore, it was important to include all the agents in the field, because the relational positions of interpreters working in conference versus community settings defines not only how an interpreter is revealed to be such, but also the pathways by and through which practitioners achieve symbolic capital – status which then is transformed to economic capital. By delineating distinctive ranks of interpreter practitioners – or subsets of agents – typically defined by the settings in which they work (e.g., community v. conference), within this space, and by extension the forms of economic and cultural capital within and at centre of the practice (Swartz, 1997), we can hope to better explore the perplexing paradox that exists in the field. It is these spatial positions and the corresponding perspectives, which significantly shape the reality and development of the field and form the complex web of interactions. Moreover, it can guide us to uncover the strategies used by individuals to categorize and organize, and bring to the forefront how these strategies are employed to either maintain or reshape the structure of the field. This process is particularly crucial in understanding how groups are formed to protect the interests of their members within that space.

In other words, the objective delimitation of constructed classes, of regions of the constructed space of positions, enables one to understand the source and effectiveness of the classificatory strategies, by which by means of which agents seek to preserve or modify the space, in the forefront of which we must place the constitution of groups organized with a view to defending the interests of their members. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 242)

If we consent to a notion of the field of interpreting as a social arena – “a structured system of social positions...the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants “ (Jenkins, 2002, p. 85) in which interpreters (agents within the field) engage with institutions according to set rules and allotment of capital, we can then explore the subsets contained within and examine what distinctions are produced or generated by these subsets and as well as their driving motivations. This approach then guided the final analysis of the data.

As reported in the introduction, the history of interpreting services generally experienced a shift from consecutive interpreting mode, which dominated the landscape of interpreting, to the adoption of technical equipment – intending to make the interpreting endeavour more efficient – and the parallel move to simultaneous interpreting mode to work in partnership with such technology, precipitated the founding of AIIC and with it a set of standards, beliefs and dispositions that positioned the interpreter as a disembodied voice – “a common notion of the machine model of interpreting was that interpreters should be ‘invisible’.” (Llewellyn-Jones, et al., 2013, p. 58). The work done by Llewellyn-Jones et al., (2013), on interpreter role-space is useful in amplifying the significant differences between what occupies the conference interpreter – machines and technology – and what occupies the community interpreter – interpersonal dynamics and co-construction of meaning while balancing on the wire of objectivity – “When interpreting a face-to-face conversation, the interpreter is clearly participating in the interaction

and, consequently, must also cooperate.” (Llewellyn-Jones, et al., 2013, p. 58). If both these realities and their contextualized roles exist and are governed by the same rules of play within the field, who’s reality gains prominence over others’?

This leads to the inclusion of perhaps a third factor of these persistent realities, the ever-present market forces, briefly mentioned above as a condition experienced by LSPs, and a perennial situation in many different fields. In the world of interpreting, the growing needs and the expanding diversity of languages required, combined with an urgency for immediate, on-demand services by those requiring interpreting services, contributes to the use of untrained, unvetted interpreters. But while, to all appearances, interpreting services are being delivered, the lack of a standardized approach, which disregards best practices for training and testing, and excludes a robust, professionally driven response, results in a perpetual decline of quality and oversight.

Occupations struggle to become or remain professions through the tools of the state and the use of legal boundaries, such as certification (educational credentials) and professional registers, which mark out professional terrain, admitting or excluding aspirants. This is further enforced in the market where certain bodies become dominant in providing particular services. (Runcieman, 2018, p. 21)

And while other agents in the field have tools or processes at their disposal, such as professional memberships like AIIC, or high-profile clients concerned with proper certification for conference interpreters, community interpreters are a disassociate, distributed group of lone practitioners unable to cohesively form an organized influence on the field and very reliant on the goodwill of LSPs to speak for them: “In fact, isolated, silent, voiceless individuals, without either the capacity or the power of making

themselves heard and understood, are faced with the alternative of keeping quiet, or of being spoken for by someone else” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 206).

Interpreters struggle to influence the main players in the field, the language service agencies, but while the intentions are to actively participate in and shape these social fields through their individual actions and struggles (for example, negotiating remuneration or anticipating an alliance for advocacy), they are also limited by the existing structures of the field which includes a lack of standardization across LSPs. The "constraints of necessity" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 242) therefore are experienced through the realities of the limitations and necessities imposed by the current structure of the field, the lack of intention, interest, allegiance that agencies have, which influence how the proactive actions of the interpreters ultimately affect any real change in the overall landscape.

### **Professionalism and Certification**

Bourdieu’s critique of the traditional views of labour and compensation by highlighting how symbolic elements – such as titles and the prestige they carry – can fundamentally shape professional landscapes and economic rewards is very much in evidence in the work explored in this project. Bourdieu warns that the rewards that come with high-prestige titles can become ‘autonomous’ from the rewards of the work itself. This autonomy refers to a decoupling where the compensation or benefits associated with a title are not strictly related to the work performed. In community interpreting, where financial compensation is generally low regardless of certification or professional titles, the disconnect between the title ‘professional’ and actual rewards is clearly evident. This situation can explain why interpreters often choose not to pursue certification. They question the logic behind investing time and money in a professional title that does not yield tangible returns. This individualistic approach ultimately undermines

the collective well-being. Furthermore, there is no existing process or mechanism to unify the collective. Bourdieu contended that although individual producers – e.g., interpreters – believe they are acting independently, in essence they are subscribing to a larger influence when they ignore an overarching framework, (as cited in Swartz, 1997),

The logic of the functioning of the fields of cultural-goods production, together with the distinction strategies which determine their dynamics, cause the products of their functioning, be they fashion designs or novels, to be predisposed to function differentially, as means of distinction, first between the class fractions and then between the classes. The producers can be totally involved and absorbed in their struggles with other producers, convinced that only specific artistic interests are at stake and that they are otherwise totally disinterested, while remaining unaware of the social functions they fulfill, in the long run, for a particular audience, and without ever ceasing to respond to the expectations of a particular class or class fraction. Thus, the connections between fields, like the oppositions within fields, stem from structural factors, not the intentions of actors (p. 132).

### **The Possession of Symbolic Capital in Interpreting**

The twentieth century saw the established acceptance of conference interpreting as a profession, under the guardianship of AIIC, which was established in 1953 and already grounded in protocols, standards, and testing mechanisms (Pöchhacker, 2022). As international migration gained traction, the latter part of the twentieth century experienced, what Pöchhacker refers to as, “the shift from interpreting in contacts between nations, to interpreting in contacts within societies” (p. 151), and subsequently shift in the role of the interpreter, complete with the complexities found in interpersonal and intercultural interactions. However, this newly formed and emerging area of interpreting was not folded into the

already defined status of professional interpreters. By extension, and theoretically speaking, community interpreters should have enjoyed the same prestige as conference interpreters in so far as both are engaged in the same professional act with the same professional skills.

Conceptualizing professionalism as symbolic capital means professions are occupational networks nested in what Bourdieu terms the field of power. “Professionalization” is then a process of struggle over the attainment of professionalism as symbolic capital. Such struggles are always also struggling over legitimate definitions of professionalism” (Noordegraaf & Schinkel, 2011, p. 89).

There are symbolic struggles within the field of interpreting over the definition of legitimate symbolic capital. For instance, the debate on what constitutes a ‘qualified’ interpreter and the hierarchy between different types of interpreting are part of these struggles. Before there were conference interpreters, there were community interpreters (Baigorri-Jalón, J. 2015), but with the formalization of conference interpreting in 1953, conference interpreting gained prominence in the field of interpreting. These distinctions can reinforce social distances – for example, conference interpreters might be seen as part of an elite professional class, whereas community interpreters are positioned as serving lower-status groups.

Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011), state it is here where Bourdieu’s dismissal of profession as an object is best understood, saying that in Bourdieu’s approach, a sociologist “can never forego his or her own work of construction by readily accepting, without critical scrutiny, the constructions by these actors themselves as the definitive framework of the social reality under study” (Ibid, p. 73).

Symbolic capital arises from the recognition that others grant to an object, thus bestowing it with a validation that this inherently elusive property might otherwise lack. This concept raises an important



question: How can identical work be symbolically recognized as professional in one domain, yet fail to receive comparable prestige in another? In her Doctorate Thesis, Gutierrez (2021), found through her own experiences as an interpreter, that the institutionally-based context of community interpreting gives rise to power dynamics, and writes “I contend that the sophisticated discursive devices already existing within institutional frameworks make it hard for the discourse and practices of community interpreting and interpreters to be considered and potentially obtain recognition” (p. 8).

As previously discussed, a significant development occurred in Canada with the establishment of a nation-wide collaborative initiative under the leadership of the Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council (CTTIC) in 2012 (CTTIC, 2012). This initiative, titled the Canadian Coalition on Community Interpreting (CCCI), was launched more than 40 years after the need for community-based interpreting services became distinctly apparent, a need met at the time by ad-hoc services compromised, more often than not, by a corps of volunteers – unvetted, untested and untrained.

Of course, there are distinguishing characteristics between the two settings, and perhaps these qualities are significant enough to sustain a substantial divide between the two types of interpreting endeavors. These characteristics may manifest in various forms: the nature of engagement, which, as Pochhacker (2022) notes, ranges from interpersonal to international; the location or specific space where duties are performed; and the clientele for whom the services are rendered.

In the world of conference interpreting, the physical separation and defined boundaries between the audience and the interpreter create a formal atmosphere, while the use of specialized equipment lends a sense of prestige and awe. The clientele for conference interpreters encompasses a diverse group, including elite politicians, world leaders, multinational corporations, and thought leaders. Although interactions may appear interpersonal, they are subtly governed by strict protocols, expectations, and

oversight. Consequently, the significance of these clients, the formality of the settings, and the elevated expectations of the interactions imbue the conference interpreter with a heightened sense of importance.

In contrast, community interpreting takes place in more intimate settings where the interpreter, client, and service provider occupy the same physical space. There is, primarily, not any specialized equipment to create distance between them. Although the clients often include immigrants or refugees, community interpreters also serve other marginalized groups such as indigenous populations, the deaf or hard of hearing, and, in Canada, speakers of official languages in minority contexts, as noted by Bowen (2010). These settings lack formal oversight, and often the roles of the interpreters are not fully understood by the other parties involved. Despite these differences, the fundamental duties of the interpreter remain consistent across both settings.

Professional membership bodies are typically gateways to professional titles and mechanisms for the maintaining of symbolic capital. Conference and court interpreters have enjoyed this prestige through international membership bodies such as AIIC, and national bodies such as CTTIC in Canada. But for many interpreters working in community settings, this conventional device is not successful in producing any significant access to symbolic capital, which in turn could facilitate important economic capital. The fees for professional membership may not seem objectively prohibitive, ranging in price from \$130 for the initial application fees to over \$500 for on-dossier certification<sup>4</sup>, but they can add-up during the initial onboarding stages to certification, and require ongoing annual membership fee payments once certified.

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<sup>4</sup> On-dossier certification is not governed by CTTIC, as the examination processes are, but instead lie within the scope of the provincial organization. The practice includes acknowledging and verifying the experience and education of the applicant in lieu of their gaining certified title through the exam process.

Associate membership also requires an annual due. And while these fees may not seem inordinately excessive, interpreters working in community settings receive no tangible return on their investment thereby decreasing any investment value they may bring, and for some the fees may constitute a significant enough portion of their income for them to be a deterrent. Hence, for both financial and rational reasons, together with the fact that certification for community and medical interpreters is a recent addition, professional membership is not a readily accessible tool, nor an enabling mechanism to symbolic capital – elucidating Bourdieu’s contention that social and cultural capitals function to reinforce social hierarchies and inequalities within a field of practice.

The professional membership body, in effect, remains elite through factors that inhibit the inclusion of all interpreters – be it because community interpreters neither receive nor see the benefit of professional certification. In the context of interpreting services in BC, access to membership acts as a barrier that permits those with the financial means, economic capital as well as the habitus to recognize the value of this capital factor, to access the professional title. This effectively reinforces the status and privilege of those who can afford it and who gain by it, while excluding those who cannot, which ultimately serves only to hurt the field of practice itself.

The struggle faced by community interpreters is both tangible and symbolic. What is immediately visible does not capture the full extent of the power dynamics at play, which are rooted in relational power. Instead of attempting to mold community interpreters into the framework of conference interpreters, perhaps a more effective approach would be to branch off and establish a new paradigm, similar to how ASL interpreters have developed their distinct professional associations, complete with standards, professional and educational protocols, and position papers. This fresh start could better

address the unique needs and contexts they operate in. The bigger picture, often out of sight, emphasizes the necessity of rethinking and reinventing rather than merely adapting existing structures.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

Bourdieu argues that genuine understanding requires a reflective and nuanced awareness that emerges from the close alignment of social positions and the shared dispositions or habits (*habitus*) of individuals.

But comprehension within established forms would remain empty and formal if it did not often mask a kind of understanding which is both more profound and more obscure, and which is built on the more or less perfect homology of positions and the affinity of the *habitus*. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 158)

But this presumed association can lead to dissonance as those that enter the ‘professional’ field of community interpreting are predisposed to certain conditions as nurtured through lived experiences, but subsequently encounter a field of practice that is in disarray and fraught with struggle. Interpreters that remain in the field, then, come to understand these unspoken rules, and this embodied understanding becomes a way to navigate the contradictions inherent in ideological discourse. As Bourdieu contends (1991), ideological discourse often operates with a certain duplicity, presenting itself in a particular way while concealing or betraying its underlying social interests. As stated in Chapter 1, certain agents in the field, e.g., institutions, clients, or policymakers, utilize a form of cultural capital to enact roles as gatekeepers and custodians of the field. They influence and validate interpreters' work, thereby controlling access to the field and defining its cultural, symbolic and ultimately economic importance.

Like a priest who has the means to make the lay person carry the responsibility for the failure of the cultural enterprise, the great priestly prophecy thus guarantees the complicity of the interpreters who have no option but to pursue and recognize the necessity of the work, even

through accidents, shifts and lapses or find themselves cast out into the darkness of 'error' or even better, 'errance'. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 155)

Moreover, community interpreters enter a field that is often obscured—perhaps not intentionally—by the actions of bad actors and the presence of nefarious practices. These issues may stem from malpractices that have been objectively instituted, as community interpreting has historically struggled to gain position and recognition. Moreover, the broader field of interpreting continues to be dominated by conference interpreting, which enjoys prestige through its symbolic representation, title designation, and professional protection, effectively leveraging these vestiges of status to maintain its position (Runcieman, 2018). It is this nod to title versus the labour of an occupation, even when the work remains fundamentally the same, that gains traction.

It is the symbolic scarcity of the title in the space of the names of professions that tend to govern the rewards of the profession and not the relation between the supply and demand for a certain form of labor. It follows that the rewards associated with the title tend to become autonomous with regard to the rewards associated with work. In this way, the same work can receive different remuneration depending on the titles qualifications of the person doing it. (Bourdieu, 1990, pp 240-241)

As Bourdieu (1991) suggests, that symbolic value attached to professional titles can become separated from the actual work performed, creating a scenario where the prestige of the title holds more sway over rewards than the nature of the work itself. The work of community interpreters is challenging and requires technical, cognitive and relational skills, as does conference interpreting. But the same prestige is not given to those interpreters working in community settings, even though title designations

have now been implemented; interpreters in these settings still find it difficult to justify the, albeit objectively minimal, costs in the face of their return on investment.

But the struggles for symbolic power do not exist solely between conference and community interpreters, in fact I would say that this binary is not even recognized by most community interpreters. Rather, the friction is most evident in the conflict between untrained bilinguals and those that have attempted to access and secure credentialing as an interpreter – as best can be accessed given the resources available. Bourdieu contends that individuals actively shape their social world – or field of practice, and that the ability to transform it depends on a realistic understanding of its current state and the practical actions possible from one's specific position within it. Therefore, effecting significant change necessitates a clear grasp of the existing social structure and the influence individuals can exert based on their unique perspectives, as was articulated in Chapter 4.

The constraints of the necessity inscribed in the very structure of the different fields still weigh on the symbolic struggles, which aim to preserve or transform that structure. The social world is, to a great extent, something which agents make at every moment; but they have no chance of unmaking and remaking it except on the basis of a realistic knowledge of what it is and of what they can do to it by virtue of the position they occupy in it. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 242)

Untrained bilinguals are legitimized by those LSPs that recruit and dispatch them. So, in effect, the struggle is not between professional interpreters and untrained bilinguals, who are singular individuals that seize the opportunity to utilize their language abilities to gain economic advantage. No, the space where field development is being hindered or anchored in place is the space occupied by these influential agents – that bestow legitimacy and validate bilinguals to perform as interpreters – whether by default, in responding to increasing demands, or by design.

This research project set out to understand why it is that interpreter working in community settings continue to experience working conditions and remuneration rates that are suboptimal, especially as the demand for interpreters in these contexts continues to grow in volume and breadth. In the process of inquiry, the perspective was expanded to embrace all interpreters as agents within a field of practice, to explore the interplay and hierarchy of the various positions. I believe that factors inherent in the nature of community interpreting, particularly in that it involves constituents (migrants) who are disenfranchised, disempowered, and disorganized, contribute significantly to the ongoing problems in the field. Yet, this essentiality of the field is further aggravated by the apparent disordered structure of interpreting service providers, characterized by singular, unmonitored, and impulsive practices in recruitment, distribution, remuneration, and industry advocacy and intensified by a relinquishment of any shared, collegial duty from one segment of the field to another (e.g., conference interpreters to community interpreters).

The disingenuous practice of recruiting and onboarding bilinguals and then reselling their services as ‘interpreters’ is an insidious hinderance and further reinforces the notion of interpreting as an unskilled profession, thereby decreasing the value of any symbolic, social, economic, or cultural capital that the unique set of competences required of interpreters would inherently hold. But to hold these agents, the LSPs as the sole perpetrators of this condition, ignores the role that all agents have.

These are the ‘intrinsic constraints’, Bourdieu (1991) emphasizes as dictated by their essential needs. Despite engaging in symbolic struggles to alter or maintain these structures, the underlying limitations persist. And until the internal struggles are attended to, the current conditions will continue to persist.

Interpreting services in community settings in BC found its origins in the voluntary sector, where bilingual community members, many having experienced similar circumstances to the clients they



stepped forward to help, and in acts of good faith, gave without asking for remuneration above compensation for out-of-pocket costs, and subsequently agencies at the forefront of this response moved into monetizing these services. In some cases, agencies moved towards a business model without necessarily subscribing to the need to modify the product or service being delivered or left open opportunities for other agents to also capitalize on such services, thereby transforming the exchange to one of economy.

The rise in demand and subsequent responses developed rapidly, and while interest and efforts in setting standards, education, and training were competently and collaboratively pursued, those in the most strategic positions in the marketplace – the LSPs – to effect change were not mandated to commit to or endorse these efforts, despite their selective participation and seeming compliance. Perhaps the sector is still in this intermediate phase, where the transition has yet to expose the hidden costs and efforts involved in maintaining the illusion of altruism in the good-faith economy, and economic activities are masked by social norms and mutual goodwill.

The historical situations in which the unstable, artificially maintained structures of the good-faith economy, break up and make way for the clear, economic (i.e. economical) concepts of the undisguised, self-interest economy reveal the cost of operating an economy which, by its refusal to recognize and declare itself as such, is forced to devote as much ingenuity and energy to disguising the truth of economic acts as it expends in performing them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 114)

As quoted in Chapter 2, Bourdieu (1991), contends that individuals can alter their social world through active participation, but meaningful change can only happen if individuals have a realistic awareness of the social structure and their position in it. Without this clarity, the field continues to be enigmatic and unmanageable.

I know we are not supposed to say interpreters are there to help, but you do actually end up helping. So that's a big thing. And at this point in my personal journey, where I am, I know I need more money. But I think this is what I'm enjoying at the moment. So, I am still sticking to it in the hope that I get more work. *VHF*

For as much as the work is important and rewarding, the struggle becomes overwhelmingly difficult. *VHF* persevered as a community and healthcare interpreter for a couple more years but, forced by the reality for financial security, left to work in another field, ultimately resigning a role she had come to love.

This research project explored and uncovered critical themes that characterize the positioning of community interpreters both within the world of interpreting and the broader world of professional occupations and real-world economies, and the findings contribute to the current body of knowledge by adding a novel tangent for study. Perhaps interpreters that work in institutionally-based, public sector settings, be it healthcare, law enforcement, education, and such, would be better suited to follow the path taken by sign language interpreters, over attempting to fit to the same mold as conference interpreters, and create their own international association. One that does not have them adjusting to the realities of that profession, but which responds to the very real circumstances and supports that community interpreters require to mature as a field and not to feel as if they are square pegs trying to fit into a round hole. The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) intentionally chose to represent community interpreting, along with conference settings, to acknowledge that the world extends beyond Europe: this decision was driven by the recognition that most sign language interpreters are based around the globe, not just in North America or Europe, and that their practice, which emerged from community settings,

continues to include all settings, and emphasizes a strong connection to consumer organizations (D. Russell, personal communication, April 2024).

Subsequent research can build on this work in the pursuit of schemas and strategies intended to counter the disorganization and dilution of the field. These findings reveal salient and material structures inhibiting the full evolution of the sector and restraining the professional autonomy of the interpreters involved.

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