Unfolding occupational boundary work: Public service interpreting in social services for structurally vulnerable migrant populations in Finland

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Abstract

This article explores occupational boundaries in the context of public service interpreting with structurally vulnerable migrant populations, raising questions about what kind of knowledge becomes valued and what kind of intersectional hierarchies are produced within a transforming social service landscape. Drawing on conceptualisations of boundary work and occupational (mis)recognition, we analyse written and oral diaries produced by public service interpreters in spring 2022. The research participants are of diverse professional and ethnic backgrounds and based in different urban and rural regions of Finland. We show how occupational misrecognition, at the structural and at the floor level, impacts on the possibilities of public service interpreters' professional and ethical conduct. As such, it ultimately also affects the right to fair and equal treatment for structurally vulnerable service users who are dependent on interpreter-mediated social services.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, Finland has undergone a rapid linguistic diversification, with increasingly heterogeneous groups of social service users. Many of these

service users need language services, including translation and interpreting. Despite emerging research on linguistic rights and justice, much of this research has been conducted within the fields of law and correctional systems, health care, and education, while social services have received less attention (for a discussion on Finland, see, e.g., Koskinen, Vuori & Leminen 2018). This article seeks to fill this gap by investigating occupational boundary work and misrecognition from the point of view of public service interpreters in social service encounters with structurally vulnerable migrant populations.

Occupational boundary work has important material and symbolic consequences (Lamont & Molnar 2002, 168) that are linked to misrecognition as a form of 'institutional status subordination' (Fraser 2008, 332). Typically, occupational boundary work offers strategies to distinguish oneself from others (Norris 2001), and to differentiate outside as well as within a profession (Svahn et al. 2018). Within both the fields of public service interpreting and social services, boundary work has been marked by continuous struggle for self-definition (Banks 2004; Inghilleri 2005; Jönsson 2019; Sela-Sheffy 2011). This article draws on a contextual understanding of interpreter-mediated social service encounters being defined by certain ambiguities in roles and responsibilities (Tipton 2016). Here we understand occupational boundary work as being primarily linked to public service interpreters' negotiation of occupational status recognition. The notion of (mis)recognition builds on Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2008) multifaceted analytical framework on social justice, acknowledging its cultural and material underpinnings.

The context of our analysis is shaped by the neoliberalist restructuring of public social services taking place in the Nordic countries and beyond, alongside with a migration-driven diversification of the population. The neoliberal shift in the organisation of welfare services builds on new ideals of managerialism and marketisation of services and the responsibilisation of the individual in relation to structural vulnerability (Dahl 2012; Ferguson, Ioakimidis & Lavalette 2018; Kamali & Jönsson 2018; Nordberg 2018). In Finland, marketisation and projectification have been particularly intensified in paraprofessional work and services, which have not been considered as central to public welfare service delivery (Tuori 2013; Nordberg 2018). This cultural-institutional setting arguably sets limits for

occupational collaboration and ultimately for recognising and meeting the diverse needs of service users.

Within the above-described context, this contribution investigates the position and role of public service interpreting as welfare professional practice and as one linked to precarious, ethnicised labour markets. Multilingual welfare service work constitutes a daily professional reality in the Finnish society that is nevertheless challenged by narrow understandings of linguistic diversity as otherness and as a state of temporality and transience that can be surpassed and resolved (see, e.g., Piller & Takahashi 2011; Intke-Hernández & Holm 2015; Holzinger 2020). Drawing on reflective diaries produced by public service interpreters of different backgrounds, we seek to address the following question: how do occupational boundaries and misrecognition play out for public service interpreters in the context of social service encounters?

2. The Finnish context of migration, linguistic rights, and public service interpreting

The increasingly heterogeneous group of service users in Finland creates a complex matrix of needs, which runs parallel to an evolving set of expectations regarding the provision of services. In turn, this heterogeneity paves the way for multi-professional collaboration across occupational boundaries. In social service work involving people in structurally vulnerable positions who do not understand and speak the dominant local languages, the right to high quality public interpreting is key to accessing socially just and equal services.

There has been a growth of the foreign-born population in Finland since the early 1990s when the number of asylum seekers increased due to wars and conflicts, especially from Somalia and former Yugoslavia. Still, in 1990, only 0.5% of the population in Finland had another native language than Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi. At the end of 2020, it was 7.8% or 432,847 persons (Official Statistics of Finland 2022a). The largest language groups were Russian (84,190 persons), Estonian (49,551), Arabic (34,282), English (25,638), and Somali speakers (23,656), followed by Persian/Farsi (16,432) and Kurdish speakers (15,850) (Official Statistics of Finland 2022b). This roughly reflects the list of most commonly interpreted

languages in the country, with Russian, Somali, and Arabic being the most required (Määttä 2017; Koskinen, Vuori & Leminen 2018). Alongside an increasing number of asylum seekers, the population who speaks languages other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi has increased due to labour migration, family migration, and international student migration. In 2020, 21,160 persons applied for a first residence permit based on family grounds (39.6%), work (41.4%), studies (16.6%), and other grounds (3.4%) (Finnish Immigration Service 2022).

Language policy in Finland has traditionally established different approaches for: 1) the national languages: Finnish and Swedish, 2) the separately mentioned languages, Sámi languages, Romani, and sign languages, and 3) all other languages (The Constitution of Finland, section 17). Those residents belonging to the category of other languages have the "right to maintain and develop their own language and culture" (The Constitution of Finland, section 17). However, languages used in public authority interaction are Finnish, Swedish, and in some cases stipulated by the Sámi Language Act, the Sámi languages. For other language speakers, linguistic rights are often granted through the right to interpretation and translation of documents. These rights to interpretation and translation are regulated by several Acts governing specific administrative sectors. However, there are some common underlying principles across languages. Access to interpreting or translation services should be granted in all situations that may affect the person's civil rights. Moreover, access should be granted in situations initiated by the authorities, even though the right to interpretation does not necessarily imply interpretation into their preferred language (e.g., Tallroth 2012).

Public service interpreting therefore has its own legislative framework, and costs are covered by the municipalities and the state. Yet, this regulatory framework does not provide clear guidelines as to the authorities' responsibilities to procure interpreting or to the qualifications of interpreters (Karinen et al. 2020). Public service interpreting remains an unregulated occupation (see also Vuori et al. 2022). Despite the existence of undergraduate and professional degree programmes in public service interpreting, there is no requirement for licensing or certification to serve as a public service interpreter. Many interpreters who work in the field lack training and are inexperienced, and many suffer from poor

working conditions and a devaluation of their occupation (Koskinen, Vuori & Leminen 2018; Karinen et al. 2020; Vuori et al. 2022).

While there is no register of qualified public service interpreters, the situation is slightly better for legal interpreters. Since 2016, the Finnish National Agency for Education has maintained a Register of Legal Interpreters. The purpose of this register is to "help authorities and private individuals find a legal interpreter who is sufficiently qualified to serve in legal matters" (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). However, the register only includes some languages and it does not prevent public authorities from using non-registered interpreters within the legal and correctional system (see also European Union 2010).

With the marketisation of the welfare state, public service interpreting has been outsourced to private companies and subject to regular tendering processes (Koskinen, Vuori & Leminen 2018; Karinen et al. 2020; Vuori et al. 2022). The failure of companies to procure stable and secure working conditions for interpreters and deliver quality services has further contributed to the destabilisation of the professional status of interpreters within the social services sector.

This trend has also been identified in other national contexts, such as the UK and the Netherlands (e.g., Gentile 2017), although research remains scarce in the Finnish context. A Swedish study (Tiselius 2022) concludes that while public action has contributed to the provision and professionalisation of interpreters, the same public bodies have contributed to salary stagnation and market disruption. When qualification is not linked to education, interpreters are not trusted as qualified professionals. When interpreting is not valued by the purchasers, "the market is easily disrupted as the will to create stability in the provision of the service lacks" (Tiselius 2022, 14). A report by the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Karinen et al. 2020) shows that tendering practices have been criticised for not paying attention to the conditions and quality of the services, only to the costs.

3. Conceptualising occupational boundaries and (mis)recognition

Theoretically, we build on the scholarly literature on professional boundary work that is in dialogue with the sociology of professions literature (Lamont &

Molnar 2002; Gúery 2014; Colley & Guéry 2015; Biagini, Boyd & Monacelli 2017; Valero-Garcés & Tipton 2018) by conceptualising public service interpreting as welfare service work (Tipton 2016). As such, the notion of boundary work in this study is concerned with the ambiguities of working at the crossroads of two independent yet interdependent occupational fields—social service work and language interpreting—in a time of neoliberal restructuring of welfare services. Social welfare services as well as public service interpreting can be seen to aim at counteracting structural vulnerabilities. Language can be understood as constituting a form of social action in both fields, operating to promote social justice and inclusion and create more egalitarian societies (Piller & Takahashi 2011; Avineri et al. 2019; see also Pohjola 2016; Hall & Valdiviezo 2020).

Ideas of boundaries have also been developed in translation and interpreting studies in previous research (e.g., Dam & Koskinen 2016). Such research has typically related to professionalisation and authorisation processes, drawing on a trait approach (e.g., Ruokonen 2018), a jurisdictional approach (e.g., Monzó-Nebot 2009), or a power approach (e.g., Grbić 2010). There has been a strong focus on large-scale, quantitative investigations of professionalisation projects in different countries, even though some studies have been based on in-depth examination of the agency of individual actors (Svahn et al. 2018). Here, we build on a power approach when we address occupational boundaries in the context of welfare service interpreting, emphasising the street-level processes within which boundaries are negotiated and the way they are interlinked with broader social structures (Svahn et al. 2018). For example, Grúery (2014: 5) has emphasised the importance of conducting research on public service interpreting that seeks to "understand the relationship between the micro-level subjective experiences of individuals and macro-level institutional and structural factors." Public service interpreting has also been featured by internal boundaries of class, gender, ethnicity, and other intersectional divides.

Tipton (2016) understands both social service workers and interpreters as potential change agents, facilitating social change and inclusion in different ways. Therefore, it is fruitful to reflect on the positioning of interpreter–social service worker collaboration, addressing questions of professional recognition, the division of professional knowledge and authority, or the willingness and

possibilities to share professional territory to meet the needs of service users (Tipton 2016; see also Masterson 2002). While the nature of this interdependence is context-bound and under constant (re)negotiation, earlier research suggests that the interpreters are primarily visitors to the field of social service work, rather than entering the field per se (Tipton 2016; see also Tipton 2012).

Public and scholarly debates have typically seen both occupations in different ways as 'semi' or 'quasi' professions. In relation to public service interpreting, the attention to legalism has been argued to downplay its legitimation in other human service work (Ozolins 2010; Tipton 2016). However, currently in Finland, social workers are licensed and registered (Finland. The Parliament of Finland 2015; see also Manssila 2020).

4. Data and data production

The analysis builds on reflective diaries produced during spring 2022 by 16 public service interpreters and interviews with one interpreter. The data constitute written and oral solicited diary entries (N=250) and interviews (N=3) on professional status and identity, everyday work situations in social services, and interaction with social service practitioners and service users.

Research participants were of diverse professional and ethnic backgrounds and based in different urban and rural regions of Finland. They worked in altogether 13 languages and were from both native-Finnish and migrant backgrounds. Not all participants reported their studies or degrees in interpreting, but the vast majority had a professional degree in public service interpreting or they were enrolled in a public service Interpreting degree program. Some also had a degree in court interpreting. Many participants had additional professional or university studies. For the purposes of this study, participants were recruited from a range of languages, backgrounds, and education. While the final sample was varied in many respects, the research participants were comparatively highly educated.

Potential participants were approached with an information letter of the research via personal contacts, immigrant associations, two interpreters' Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and the Finnish Association of Translators

and Interpreters (SKTL). We met individually via Zoom with the interpreters who had responded to our announcement. In the Zoom meetings, we discussed the research and the content and practicalities of data production as well as research ethics, including the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and data protection.

Each participant was given a consecutive numerical code for further data anonymisation (such as P1 for participant 1). Further communication and file exchange for the data production was conducted through a protected and secure site provided by the Information and Communication Technology services at Åbo Akademi University. In accordance with the general guidelines of ethical review in the human sciences in Finland, the study design was not submitted to separate ethical board review (TENK 2019).

The participants each produced on average 15 diary entries during approximately two months. Participants had the option of whether to create their entries in written or audio format and could do so in Finnish, Swedish, or English. The participants received monetary compensation for their participation. During data production, participants were able to have Zoom discussions with the researchers and had the opportunity for a feedback conversation at the conclusion of the data production process. They were also offered the possibility to participate in a collaborative data analysis workshop to discuss and further contribute to the analysis of the data, during the fall of 2022.

Broadly speaking, the work situations and experiences described in the entries occurred in social work and social services, which included service meetings in settings such as adult social work, child welfare services, the Social Insurance Institution, Unemployment Office, or reception centres. A typical diary entry was half a page to one page in length. In these diary entries, participants were encouraged to reflect on, among others, the following themes: collaboration with social service practitioners, collaboration with social service users, emotions in interpreting in social services, professional identity and status, and interpreting as work and career. Participants could produce more general reflections on these themes or consider them by focusing concretely on a specific workday or work encounter.

Previous studies that have shown the utility of diaries as data, particularly their ability to prompt reflective thinking, which, in addition to producing data for research may also provide fulfilment for participants (Hewitt 2017). As data, solicited diaries are narrative records of activities and experiences, typically building on a sampling of time. Diaries also have the potential to reduce the recall bias of other research methods, for example interviews (Barlett & Milligan 2021). In this study the aim was, on the one hand, to gather reflective diary records of events and encounters as they occurred during the stage of data production, and, on the other hand, gather reflective diary records of the research participants' general experiences of public service interpreting in social services (Alaszewski 2006). This approach offered greater flexibility and allowed for more rich and nuanced experiences to become part of the data.

Our analysis began by reading the material in connection to our research interest about the interpreters' professional role. We identified and discussed points in the interpreters' accounts in which we recognised boundaries being drawn around the role of the interpreter, either by the interpreters themselves or by the social service officials or service users. We then focused our attention on examples of misrecognition of the professional role, and analysed these at two levels, the structural and the floor level.

In the following, we present our results using extracts from the data that we have chosen as concrete illustrative examples. The original data is in Finnish, albeit one participant wrote in English. The extracts originally in Finnish have been translated into English by the authors. We have adapted the extracts when necessary to ensure anonymity or increase readability.

5. Occupational boundary making as misrecognition in public service interpreting

This study is situated within the wider context of cultural and institutional transformations taking place in the Nordic welfare state, which raises questions related to what kind of knowledge becomes valued and what types of intersectional hierarchies are produced and maintained within the social service landscape. Research participants articulate how different modes of occupational

boundaries are made and negotiated in public service interpreting. These boundaries are discussed from the lens of misrecognition, on the one hand at the structural level and on the other hand at the floor level.

5.1 Structural-level misrecognition

As an essentially unregulated field that lacks uniform standards, public service interpreting takes place where occupational boundaries operate through structural-level misrecognition. The research participants all shared experiences of low and insufficient pay, leading to pressure to accept all the offered assignments and having to work for multiple companies.

> My work situation is good now, there is enough work, but conditions and pay are miserable. I work with five companies at the moment and some of them pay well, some don't. Unfortunately, the company that offers more assignments also pays worse. It's frustrating when you have to negotiate prizes and submit to their conditions or be left without work. (P8)

This interpreter shares how, despite working full days, there is a constant struggle to be compensated for their work given the unregulated and fragmented occupational field. Austerity politics and constant tendering processes without educational or quality requirements have disincentivised companies to prioritise the contracting of trained interpreters—presumably at a higher cost. In addition to sharing their frustration regarding the precarious working conditions and low pay, the research participants write about how these neoliberal structures (including the fact that "Anyone can work as an interpreter, even without appropriate training" (P2)), create a sense of devaluation of their professional knowledge.

> I am a professional interpreter; I have worked a lot in order to gain a good position. (--) I see my role as an interpreter in that I am an official interpreter; I am not anyone's friend or assistant. (--) In Finland, an interpreter is not considered as an official, it is more like, well, someone came to interpret. This has to change, in my view, and it

will only change if there is an official register, and after that we can get rid of all the incompetent interpreters that ruin the role [of the interpreter] for the rest of us. (P12)

As seen in the above extract, while education and training are a way of counteracting occupational misrecognition, further boundaries are simultaneously drawn against low-skilled, often newcomer interpreters. However, there are also divides in the access to training. Research participants pointed out that it is difficult to organise and receive training especially for rare languages in Finland.

The current transformations have brought with them increasingly stressful and hectic working conditions with a lack of recovery time and breaks. An observable consequence of the tendering processes is the growing share of companies offering interpreting assignments based on immediate response, particularly in the Helsinki area.

The competition in this field is fierce and instant interpreting jobs are distributed according to the reaction time of the interpreter, so you have to have your phone with you even in the toilet if you wish to get assignments. (--) Previously, in interpreting there was such a concept as recovery time, but nowadays that is not considered as something interpreters are entitled to. (P2)

Research participants also reflected on how on-demand interpreting services are challenging the professional code of ethics and the quality of interpreting services since there is no time to prepare for the work event. The harsh competition between the dominant companies on the market is reflected already in their marketing language: "The only interpretation service you need—available in seconds," "The world's fastest interpretation app," "From 8 hours waiting time to 12 seconds" (https://tulka.com/), referring to an app for finding interpreters quickly.

Moreover, research participants write about how the outsourcing of public interpreting from municipalities to private companies has implied a general sense of insecurity following from a lack of support or collegial network and a lack of work counselling.

Interpreting work is very lonely. An interpreter has no work community or counselling. I work for several companies. Not one of them organises work counselling. Interpreters have many WhatsApp groups, and I also belong to them, but most of the interpreters are only a list of names to me. I have known some interpreters since training, and some I have gotten to know in waiting rooms while we wait for an interpreting event to begin. (--) Nowadays, with more distant interpreting, you never meet interpreters. (P3)

The work is lonely, and no employer offers us work counselling. We have to deal with the situations we encounter at work by ourselves. There is a lot of change, situations change, people change, places change, so I need to adapt all the time, and that is a challenging feature in my work. (P15)

As shown in the above excerpts, many participants wrote that they felt isolated in their work, not having an occupational community within which to share the experiences and challenges they face. This sense of community was lacking in the companies for which the participants worked. Earlier research has shown that interpreters form a heterogeneous group which poses challenges to community formation, a situation that has exacerbated due to the increase in distance or remote interpreting (Määttä 2017; Vuori et al. 2022).

In the second quote, the sense of loneliness is contrasted with a constant flow of people, places, and situations. This juxtaposition coincides with the reported experience of having to "adapt all the time" to settings managed by others, referring to limited agency and autonomy. Additionally, the sense of loneliness is linked to the insecurity caused by recurrent interruptions in collaboration created with welfare service providers, due to constant tendering procedures. Therefore, the restructuring of social services and public service interpreting seems to reinforce existing constraints to professional capability, agency, and autonomy (see, e.g., Bischoff, Kurth & Henley 2012).

While most research participants have had to acquiesce to working under these precarious working conditions, there are also examples of protest and mobilisation in an effort to draw the professional borders and influence working conditions.

(--) there are a lot of positive signs: interpreters have finally woken up and become activated, they are more organised now than ever before, and the union and Kieliasiantuntijat ry [Language Experts—an organisation for people specialising in multilingual communications] have also reached out to [public service] interpreters for collaboration. The issue has been in the media a lot during the last year. Even parliament members and officials have woken up and become concerned and aware of the problems in the field of interpreting. [There is] willingness to fix these problems. This is a great thing and it gives hope. (P15)

Interestingly, in this excerpt, the participant writes that the union and other advocacy organisations in the field of professional interpretation and translation have only recently started to reach out to public service interpreters. This seems to suggest professional boundaries and bordering from and within the field itself. In the quote below, the interpreter protests by not accepting assignments through companies that decrease prices.

I don't get work offers every day, but this might also be because I am not in the lists of the biggest companies. If I were, I might get more work offers. However, the conditions and pay with these companies are an insult, and I refuse to work in a way that is harmful for my profession. Should I accept the conditions and pay in these companies, it would damage my profession. (P15)

However, this strategy comes with a cost—one is forced to choose between contributing to the worsening of the working conditions or not working, highlighting the limited agency or autonomy of the interpreters.

In addition to the predominantly negative experiences of precariousness, the research material also includes examples of how the transition from being an employee to becoming a freelancer brought a sense of self-sufficiency and flexibility:

At least for now I'm satisfied. If I get a phone call from the day-care, for example, that my child has caught a cold and I have to pick [them] up… this happens all the time… (--) Then I might be at the Social Welfare Office from 10 to 11 and they call me

at 10.30. (--) I can tell them that I will be there in half an hour. When the interpreting has finished, I pick up my child, I call the interpreting company and tell them that the rest of the day I only accept phone-interpreting jobs. (P16)

That way, interpreting could become a portfolio career fulfilling a variety of roles and demands and offering flexibility for some interpreters who were able to make the neoliberal structures work for them.

5.2 Floor-level misrecognition

Alongside structural-level misrecognition, occupational boundaries operate at the floor level through the misrecognition of public service interpreters as potential change agents or facilitators of change. As discussed above in relation to the work of Tipton (e.g., 2016) and others (e.g., Masterson 2002), the division of professional knowledge between social service professionals and interpreters is complex and under constant (re)negotiation, and, at the same time, marked by public service interpreters being considered visitors to the field of social work.

Our research participants shared experiences on occupational misrecognition and professional hierarchies in the form of being closed out by public service professionals.

> We went through medicine receipts and gym receipts, vouchers and the Social Insurance Institution decision. We phoned the Social Insurance Institution, but the social worker forgot to include the interpreter in the phone call, and I was left on hold. Later the social worker was sorry about this. The social worker told the interpreter what the worker at the Social Insurance Institution had said and asked me to tell this to the service user. (P8)

The above example describes a situation in a service meeting in which the public service official reaches out to another official to ensure some issues or for consultation, and does this over the interpreter (and the service user). Moreover, the interpreters wrote about a constant lack of prior information on work encounters—on the issue to be addressed, the professional field in question,

contact information of the social service worker, and information about the service user.

> Onsite interpreting during a house call. I only receive the address, not the phone number of the worker or the subject of the meeting. (--) Interpreters can work without preparing vocabulary. However, it is emotionally important to know the subject of the meeting. I find that interpreters are respected when they are informed what the meeting is about. (P5)

In this example, the participant indicates that receiving prior information is a sign of respect, and therefore, not receiving information reflects lack of respect. Research participants wrote about how interpreters are not seen as experts and professionals who "commit to the same confidentiality requirements as they [social and health care professionals] do" (P15), emphasising that they are entitled to further information in order to do their work well. This is also against the ethical code of interpreters and therefore forces the interpreters to work against it:

> It is stated in the [Finnish] ethical code of interpreters that interpreters should prepare for the interpreting assignment thoroughly and with sufficient time. Prior information is essential for that. It is, however, a general practice in the field that the interpreters do not receive much information beforehand, other than the name of the person who has ordered the interpreting and the service. (P2)

These examples connect with professional recognition and the quality of the service, and ultimately, the rights of the service user. Expressions of occupational misrecognition ultimately contain negotiations on the actual role and position of the interpreter in relation to social services.

> Sometimes I feel that very few social officials understand how demanding my work is. I sometimes feel that some officials think that an interpreter is only a person who knows two languages, but this is not the case. As a trained interpreter, I am much more than just a person who knows more than one language. I am not, however, a walking dictionary. (P15)

Here the research participant touches upon the difficulties many expressed in demarcating the boundaries of their professional role (see also Martin & Valero-Garcés 2008; Bischoff, Kurth & Henley 2012) as a rather mechanical tool of translation or something more than that. These negotiations typically concern ambiguous expectations related to the interpreter as a neutral vehicle of information and/or as a cultural interpreter to both directions. In the example that follows, the research participant emphasises the strict language interpreting role of the encounter:

> The interpreter is contracted by the public authority for the service user. That way the role of the interpreter is clearly to interpret the discussion between the purchaser and the non-Finnish speaking service user. The interpreter is not a support person, adviser, babysitter or a driver, not even a translator in the context of interpretation. I have come across all kinds of desires and requests, more so in face-to-face interpreting. (P2)

> I have been in situations where a social service worker has not been able to give advice on how to fill in a form for the Social Insurance Institution for example (--) Even though I have known how to do it I have thought that I will not intervene, because it is not my job to give advice but to interpret from one language to the other. From time to time this has felt frustrating, that I have not been able to intervene or comment on something, especially when the service user looks somewhat helpless and does not get help from the professional. (P15)

The second quote above shows how positioning oneself strictly within the ethos of neutrality may lead to situations that challenge the rights of the client. However, a reference to neutrality seems to be a marker of professionalism to many participants. It serves as a boundary against non-educated newcomers who typically are portrayed as not following the code of conduct by being non-neutral during interpretation—even though neutrality is vaguely and sometimes contradictorily articulated in the diaries. However, there are also examples of situations in which the interpreter has pushed the boundaries, bringing interpreting closer to cultural brokering:

> The service user did not understand the term 'tiliote' [bank account statement]. In this situation it is not the job of the interpreter to open these concepts and I turned to the social worker to explain this. For the word 'maksusitoumus' [financial obligation or bond] there is no equivalent concept in Arabic, so in this case the interpreter has to explain the meaning. (P8)

Some participants explicitly stated that "As an interpreter, I am not merely a language expert but also a cultural expert. In addition to interpreting, I can also explain to the Finnish service provider why the service user might be nervous" (P15). The participants therefore produced contradicting accounts over whether they, as interpreters, should only convey what is being said, in which case it would be the task of the service provider to unravel any unclear situations or concepts, or whether their role as interpreters includes cultural interpreting and/or a more explicitly active role to intervene in unclear or conflicting communication. In the latter case, the interpreter would open up different terminology to the service user and, also, explain to the social service official differences in the meanings of concepts, or why the service user might be reacting in a certain way (see also Bischoff, Kurth & Henley 2012). Tipton (2016) has argued for a shift towards more holistic approaches, beyond an ethos of neutrality, recognising the coordinating role of the interpreter. However, this seems to be not so straightforward in the Finnish context of unregulated public service interpreting.

The officials' knowledge, experience, and understanding of the interpreter's role and how to work with interpreters varied considerably. According to participants, it is never possible to know whether an official will know how to work with an interpreter unless the interpreter had previous knowledge working with a particular official. Participants wrote more broadly about how the unclear position of public service interpreters challenges collaboration and gives rise to uncertainties in relation to the responsibility for governing the interpreter–mediated space.

> The officials have the responsibility to know the legislation concerning interpreting and translation (--) I do not, however, feel that it is my duty to educate officials in these matters in an interpreting assignment. (P2)

Interpreting by phone, instant interpretation [no time to prepare] (--) Child welfare services, social worker and service user (mother), emergency placement of the child. The social worker talked very quickly and in long segments. I tried to pause the talk but did not manage very well. Also, the mother talked a lot and furiously. Finally, she started to cry, and I could not understand what she was saying. The social worker has to proceed quickly when arranging the placement. However, it would be important to try to speak calmly and take pauses in order to make sure that the interpreter is able to interpret everything. The process is unknown to most parents. (P5)

The second quote is an example of a situation in which the state enters into the private life of a family and exerts heavy authority by carrying out an emergency placement of the child. The situation unfolds quickly. Talk is intense, and there is a need to proceed rapidly while still fulfilling a certain procedure. The interpreter is significantly limited in their ability to interpret since the social workers are not incorporating interpreting, its meaning, conditions, or prerequisites into their professional practice and communication strategies. The training social work students receive on working with interpreters generally varies from non-existent to limited/sporadic, and may depend on individual programmes and even teachers, something which can partly explain the narrow space left for interpreting.

Similar to findings in previous research (Tipton 2016; Vuori et al. 2022), our data has shown how, at the floor level, the professional role of public service interpreters becomes drawn and shaped by public service officials in their daily encounters and interaction with service users. In addition, we have discussed how interpreters themselves understand and produce the confines of their professional role, at times as a direct response to the expressed assumptions by officials or the service users.

6. Concluding discussion

Situated within the wider context of cultural and institutional transformations taking place in the Nordic welfare state, this article examined the ways in which

occupational misrecognition occurs for public service interpreters working in social services at the crossroads of two independent, yet interdependent, occupational fields. We argued for the fruitfulness of investigating occupational boundary work from the perspective of public service interpreters, addressing questions of professional recognition, division of professional knowledge, and the willingness and possibilities of sharing professional territory to meet the needs of service users (Masterson 2002; Tipton 2016).

At the structural level, the analysis showed how the research participants articulate experiences of occupational misrecognition as precarious work. They refer to poor working conditions and low pay, increasingly stressful and hectic work environments, a limited sense of autonomy, and a general sense of insecurity and loneliness. Furthermore, at the floor level, they refer to experiences of being closed out by public service professionals, a lack of prior information on work encounters, ambiguous expectations related to the interpreter role, and uncertainties in relation to the responsibility for governing the interpreter-mediated space.

This study has also provided evidence related to the ways in which occupational misrecognition impacts the public service interpreters' ability to conduct their work professionally and ethically. As such, it ultimately affects the right to fair and equal treatment for structurally vulnerable service users who are dependent on interpreter-mediated discussions in the social services. This impact may also have deeper implications for the forming of trust in social institutions. Officials' misrecognition may also translate into service users' mistrust in the interpreter.

Hence, based on our analysis, instances of occupational and linguistic injustices seem to be insufficiently identified and addressed by institutional strategies and actors (see also Fraser 1995; Holzinger 2020). The occupational boundary work of public service interpreters falls in the larger context of professional hierarchies within welfare state professions and social and health care services, in which social work itself battles for professional role clarification and professional status recognition (Tipton 2016; Nordberg 2018; Jönsson 2019). Many of these interpreters are themselves of migrant background, something which risks reproducing intersectional occupational hierarchies. We argue, in line with Norström, Fioretos, and Gustafsson (2012), that the devaluation of interpreters can be linked to a

general misrecognition of non-dominant language speaking individuals and subsequently to wider questions of democracy, equality, and justice (see also Vuori et al. 2022).

Interestingly, professionalism and occupational recognition and the cultural/ethnic 'other' were presented as mutually exclusive also in the reflections produced by the interpreters in our data. While education and training were identified as ways to counteract occupational misrecognition, new boundaries were simultaneously drawn against newcoming interpreters, often described in terms of cultural othering. We agree with Bonotti, Carlsson, and Rowe (2021), who, in a recent special issue on linguistic justice, migration, and the nation-state, write that individual and state-centred approaches to linguistic injustices, which have been predominant in liberal perspectives, risk overlooking deeper forms of intersectional hierarchies and disadvantage that would require other theoretical perspectives building on critical race theory, feminism, and postcolonialism.

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