

2019

## Discoursing into Interpreting - Sign Language Interpreting Students and their Construction of Professional Identity as Interpreters for Deafblind Individuals

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### Suggested Citation

Urdal, Gro Hege Saltnes (2019) "Discoursing into Interpreting - Sign Language Interpreting Students and their Construction of Professional Identity as Interpreters for Deafblind Individuals," *Journal of Interpretation*: Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 4.

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## Discoursing into Interpreting - Sign Language Interpreting Students and their Construction of Professional Identity as Interpreters for Deafblind Individuals

### Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgments The author would like to acknowledge Professor at Department of Teacher Education, at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, [name] for guidance and comments in progress on this article.

# Discursing into Interpreting – Sign Language Interpreting Students and their Construction of Professional Identity as Interpreters for DeafBlind Individuals

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## ABSTRACT

This article reports on students' process of *Bildung* expressed as their construction of professional identity as interpreters for deafblind individuals. With a qualitative research design and critical discourse analysis, focus group discussions were used to gain insight into which discourses students drew upon when constructing their professional identity at different stages during their education. Data from the focus group discussions were analyzed by using Fairclough's (1989, p. 112) values of features, experiential and expressive values. The findings indicate that students drew upon intersecting and antagonistic discourses in the construction of their professional identity. At the beginning of their education, and before meeting deafblind people, students emphasized discourses that were based on their previous experiences. They mainly described deafblind people by drawing on a care needing discourse, and the interpreter by operating a caring discourse. Later on in their study, students also operated the discourses that were made available to them in class and in the field of practice, such as an independence discourse related to deafblind people, and a technical, a reflective and a collaborative discourse related to the professional interpreter. Students also drew upon a student discourse in all focus group discussions. This entails that during their study, students went through a process of *Bildung*, which was manifested in their construction of their professional identity.

## INTRODUCTION

An individual's identity related to the assumption of a professional role is known as their professional identity (Heggen, 2008). Identity, including professional identity, develops within specific historical and institutional contexts, by using the specific discursive formations, practices and strategies contained therein (Hall, 1996). The context and the discourses that operate there are therefore important.

Identity and professional identity can be seen as an expression of the formation of the self, the process of *Bildung* (Fellenz, 2016; Mortensen, 2002; Schneider, 2012). *Bildung*, as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1999) presents it, is about linking the self to the world to achieve "...the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay" (p. 58). In an educational context, *Bildung* is the meeting of the student's inner strength and capability with the (possibly contradictory) world and refers to the process of self-formation: how students reflect upon their process of becoming professionals. According to Straume (2013), *Bildung* must not be confused with a passive socialization, but could be seen as a personal process which requires some degree of intention, determination, participation, and effort.

This article will focus on interpreting students' process of *Bildung* expressed in their construction of professional identity as interpreters for DeafBlind people. Specifically, it aims to illustrate what discourses interpreting students draw upon when constructing their professional identity and how their professional identity is transformed by interpreting for DeafBlind individuals, as they draw upon and reshape concepts and discourses found in the educational context. A better understanding of students' *Bildung* is relevant to interpreter

educators and supervisors as they strive to facilitate students' learning process. It is also relevant to practitioners and students in their attempt to understand more of how an interpreter's professional identity might develop. This article is based on a project carried out with interpreting students in the second and third years of a Bachelor's program in Sign Language and Interpretation at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, where the focus is on students' professional development and *Bildung* processes while training to become interpreters for DeafBlind people.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study builds on two main bodies of work: work on identity formation and critical discourse analysis (CDA) as described by Fairclough (1989). Each will be outlined briefly below.

### IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Identity and professional identity are based on discourses. They are constructed within the discursive practices that are culturally and historically available to an individual (Burr, 2003; Hall, 1996). Discursive practices give an individual a temporary attachment to an identity position they can actively invest in. However, identity is fractured and fragmented, often constructed across antagonistic and intersecting discourses, and is constantly in the process of transformation and change.

Professional identity builds on personal identity and can be defined as a more or less conscious perception of 'self' regarding the characteristics, perspectives, values, ethical guidelines, qualifications, and knowledge of what constitutes 'me' as a good professional (Heggen, 2008). According to Heggen (2008), an individual's 'professional identity' will constantly be defined and redefined in the field of practice, influenced by different contexts and social practices. This article aims at investigating students' *Bildung* process, as manifested in the discourses they draw upon when constructing their professional identity.

Previous research concerning development and construction of professional identity is available in many occupational fields, especially in the teaching profession (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). In the field of translation and interpreting, there is more limited research on professional identity. Some research is related to translation and identity (Cronin, 2006; House & Baumgarten, 2005), while other work is related to professional identity (Morris, 2010; Runcieman, 2015; Setton & Liangliang, 2009). Morris (2010) sheds light on interpreters in court settings and their professional identity, their definition of their role, and their self-esteem. Setton and Liangliang (2009) look at Chinese interpreters and translators' attitudes toward their role, status and professional identity. Runcieman's (2015) dissertation focuses on students' construction of the professional interpreter's identity and the development of their identity as an interpreting student, related to the dominant discourses present in their educational context. Runcieman found the dominant discourse that influenced students' view of the professional interpreter's identity was related to 'the interpreter as a language expert,' which saw the interpreter as a competent and skilled professional who transfers language. The students in this study were introduced to discourse that highlighted the interpreter as an active and visible participant in the interpreted communicative event, but this discourse did not influence the way students viewed the professional interpreter's identity.

Regarding sign language interpreters' professional identity, Skaten (2005) conducted a study that focuses on interpreting students' construction of their professional identity in relation to interpreting for Deaf people. Based on students' reflection notes, the professional identity of 'the new interpreter' was constructed. Some typical features of 'the new interpreter' are that she is a young woman without Deaf cultural capital and is dedicated to her choice of profession. As far as the author has been able to discover, there is no previous research on interpreting students' construction of their professional identity as interpreters for DeafBlind people.

## **DISCOURSE AS A THEORY AND A METHOD**

Discourse analysis is based on social constructionism and is referred to as both a theory and a method (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999), as it contains philosophical, theoretical, and methodical guidelines. CDA as applied in this article is based on Fairclough's (1989) framework for description, interpretation, and explanation.

## **THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

In the following description of the study, social order and types of practices and discourses, together with the data and method of analysis will be presented. The study is based on one group of students in one university. It should therefore be regarded as a case study, rather than a broader study with general representation of interpreting students.

## **THE SOCIAL ORDER, TYPES OF PRACTICES, AND DISCOURSE**

The construction of professional identity evident at any given time can be understood as a derivation of previous discursive practices (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999), and a further development of the identity construction that is already in progress (Heggen, 2008). During their studies, students – with their individual social and cultural backgrounds – encounter the interpreting expertise of teachers and interpreters as well as the guidelines and requirements of the educational and professional field. Students will then assess external requirements and expectations in light of their internal values and competencies, and the results of these assessments will appear in practice situations.

In order to provide an overview of possible discourses students can draw upon regarding interpreting for DeafBlind people, and for later analytical purposes, the discourses used in this social domain can be summarized in three constructed orders: 'welfare,' 'the professional interpreter,' and 'education' (see also table 2). The 'education' order is relevant as the students involved are enrolled in a degree program, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that their student status may influence which discourses they draw upon and make sense of, and how they present them.

'Welfare' is a *care needing discourse*, a *caring discourse*, and an *independence discourse*. A *care needing discourse* is identified in common representations of DeafBlind people in society and in the media. Deafblindness is a combined visual and hearing impairment, a specific disability that limits a person's activity and prevents full participation in society (Nordic Welfare centre, 2015). In Norway, there are registered approximately 370 DeafBlind individuals; some are congenital deafblind (deaf and blind before they developed language in their early years) and some acquired deafblindness later in life (Norwegian Resource System for Persons with Deafblindness, 2017), although most DeafBlind individuals have some residual sight and/or hearing. DeafBlind people in Norway are granted specific rights according

to the Act on Municipal Health and Care Services (2011), e.g. the right to a personal assistant (§3-2), and The National Insurance act, e.g. the right to an interpreter (§10-7). The National Insurance act aims to provide financial security and compensation for unemployment, injury, disability, and age (National Insurance Act, 1997), and thus DeafBlind people are perceived as dependent on receiving help.

In the media, DeafBlind people are described as “isolated and lonely,” and as needing “help to interpret what is being said” (Osland, 2012). This points to a *care needing discourse*. This discourse is also in play in the field of practice. NAV<sup>1</sup> (The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), which provides public services including interpreter services, is an important part of the field of practice in Norway, i.e. most interpreting assignments are provided by NAV. When NAV presents DeafBlind people as clients<sup>2</sup>, traces of a *care needing discourse* are found (NAV, 2014b). With its extensive welfare system, Norway provides various services and benefits to help people – including those who are DeafBlind – master their daily lives. Caregiving is embodied in Norwegian laws and public agencies, thus the *caring discourse*. It is an ideal that is appreciated in Norwegian society and fostered throughout their educational system.

At the same time, the media profiles *independence discourse* when they report on DeafBlind individuals who are defending their own legal rights (Osland, 2012) or reaching the top of Mount Everest (Sandmo, 2016). *Independence discourse* is also present in the educational program of Sign Language and Interpreting (SLI) at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL). During their second year at HVL, students are introduced to deafblindness and interpreting for DeafBlind people (with acquired deafblindness). By focusing on equality in interpreted situations and on DeafBlind people’s opportunities to participate in society (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, 2018a), the educational program emphasizes the portrayal of DeafBlind people as resourceful and independent individuals. The focus on equality and DeafBlind people as independent recipients of interpreting services is also present in the field of practice (NAV, 2014a, 2014b). This accentuates *independence discourse*.

Discourses summarized as ‘the professional interpreter,’ are *technical discourse*, *reflective discourse*, and *collaborative discourse*. *Technical discourse* is at play when interpreting for DeafBlind people and is taught through interpreting, guiding, and descriptions techniques. DeafBlind people have different degrees of impairment requiring different communication methods: spoken language, written language, tactile signing, fingerspelling (hand alphabet), sign language in an adjusted sign space (Berge & Raanes, 2011), social haptic (Lahtinen, 2007), or a combination of these. Even though the majority of the DeafBlind individuals have residual hearing, students are introduced to all of the different communication methods and techniques during their second year (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, 2017a). The second-year curriculum and plan of practice also emphasize the interpreting techniques, thus, *technical discourse* (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, 2018b).

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<sup>1</sup> NAV was originally an acronym for "The New Labour and Welfare Administration" (in Norwegian: Ny arbeids- og velferdsforvaltning), but is now acknowledged as a word.

<sup>2</sup> In Norwegian, the term is ‘bruker’ [user]. This is translated to the equivalent term ‘client’. It is not the term in itself that entails a *care needing discourse*, but when used by NAV, which provides public services to those in need, the term entails such a discourse.

By presenting and discussing the Sign Language Interpreter Ethical Guidelines in class during the second year, students are introduced to *reflective discourse*. The Ethical Guidelines, which are also important in practice, describe what an interpreter is and what an interpreter should do, including promoting equal participation and facilitating communication between the parties (Tolkeforbundet, 2017). The Ethical Guidelines also present the interpreter as a reflective professional who effectuates decisions made on-site when there is not time to describe everything by conscientiously choosing what to describe (Tolkeforbundet, 2017). When students are taught how to adjust the interpreting techniques to different DeafBlind individuals (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, 2017b), *reflective discourse* is emphasized.

At the same time, collaboration with involved parties, i.e. between DeafBlind individuals and student interpreters or between interpreters working together, is emphasized in both class and in practice (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, 2017b), and thus, *collaborative discourse* is made available to students.

Discourses that are available to students during their study program can be different and contradictory. For example, *care needing discourse* and *independence discourse* both come into play. The goal of the learning process in professional education is to develop deeper insight into the profession and does not necessarily lead to consensus without tension (Heggen, 2008). Tensions and plurality can derive from several different contexts, between educational institutions and professional field of practice, or between the professional identity as an individual biography and various collective identities associated with the educational institution and the professional field (Heggen, 2008). It is these tensions that contribute to learning and development.

## FOCUS GROUP DATA AND ANALYTICAL METHOD

Focus groups were used to gain insight into students' thoughts and experiences. In these focus groups, students could discuss and explore issues that were important to them and engage in discussion designed to gather their perceptions on a chosen topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Participants in this study were students in the Bachelor's program for Sign Language and Interpreting (SLI) at HVL. Out of 14 volunteer students from the second year, who had never worked or interacted with DeafBlind people, four students were recruited. The students were female, had Norwegian as their first language and were aged 22-40. The students participated in three focus group discussions (FGDs) at different stages in the study, with the researcher and a member of the teaching staff as moderators. The researcher wanted the group to discuss students' thoughts and experiences before, during, and after their practicum related to meeting DeafBlind people and interpreting for DeafBlind people.

The first FGD took place after four weeks of instruction and two weeks of role-play, but before their first practicum (in March 2012). The second FGD was held after their first week of practicum (in April 2012), and the third after one week of role-play and the students' second week of practicum (in November 2012). In addition, students recorded their own observations during their placements and participated in reflection groups. They then discussed their observations with the other students in the focus groups.

To ensure that the students' perspectives were emphasized in this project, students were included as both participants and co-researchers. As co-researchers, the students could include their participation as part of their academic training and in writing a Bachelor's thesis.

Therefore, in addition to FGDs, the students were involved in the project's planning, implementation, and analysis phases by participating in reflection groups with the researcher and another member of the teaching staff. In the reflection groups, the following questions were addressed and decisions made: when to hold the FGDs, how to transcribe the FGDs (addressed before the first FGD), possible methods for analyzing the data (after the second and third FGD), and the process of the project (before the first FGD, after the second and third FGDs). In this way, the students did research and developed their own practices. This can be seen as a form of *interactive action research* (Postholm, 2007). Although methods were generally discussed in two reflection groups, the data analysis was done individually.

All FGDs were conducted at HVL. The first two FGDs lasted two hours. The third, where students' research questions were used as a guideline, lasted four hours (over two days). In the FGDs, both the researcher and a member of the teaching staff facilitated and aimed to create an open atmosphere to enable good discussion among the students. According to Wilkinson (1998), by giving students' increased control over the discussion, the researcher's power and influence is reduced. Students' active participation and contribution to the interaction in the FGDs suggests that they participated freely. Students also signed informed consent forms and the research was undertaken in accordance with the Norwegian Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law, and Theology (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016), and Data Protection Official for Research (Norwegian Centre for Research Data, 2017).

The FGDs were videotaped from different perspectives, using multiple video cameras, which were placed in various locations in the room. Video cameras were used to capture all utterances, as SLI students sometimes used signs from Norwegian sign language to emphasize their points. The researcher, the teacher, and the group of students transcribed one FGD each. The transcripts include pauses, the occurrence of laughter, and indicated the use of supporting signs. All participants read through and checked the transcripts.

In the FGDs, the students discussed what they thought and how they experienced meeting DeafBlind people, what they did as an interpreter, as well as how they experienced their practicum.

With FGDs there was an opportunity to empirically analyze the use of language in the social context in which it appeared (cf. Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). CDA as a theoretical and methodical tool also made it possible to analyze which discourses students drew upon and how they handled them.

Through an inductive review of the transcripts, an open review without any predetermined questions or categories, several patterns emerged. The students' use of personal pronouns, *I/you/we*, indicated that the students responded to two identity positions: student and interpreter, e.g. "I'm going to be embarrassed if I forget [what I have learned]," and "When I interpreted for..." Students' responses to an identity position as an interpreter suggested that they were developing a professional identity as an interpreter. Students used spoken Norwegian in the FGDs<sup>3</sup> and thus the Norwegian system of pronouns (Table 1).

*Table 1: The Norwegian Pronoun System*  
(based on Faarlund, Lie, & Vannebo, 1997, pp. 323-332)

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<sup>3</sup> The data in this article is translated into English by the author.



	Singular	Plural
First person	jeg [I]	vi [we]
Second person	du [you]	dere [you]
Third person	Han [he]/hun [she]/ det [it] <sup>4</sup>	de [they]

While reading the transcripts, three main topics were identified: *DeafBlind people/individuals*, *interpreter*, and *student*. In addition, students discussed the relationship between the interpreter and DeafBlind people. The three topics link to the research question: What discourses do interpreting students draw upon when constructing their professional identity and how is their professional identity transformed related to interpreting for DeafBlind individuals? Within these topics, the discourses students drew upon were summarized into the following constructed orders of discourses: ‘welfare,’ ‘the professional interpreter,’ and ‘education.’ ‘Education,’ the social order of being a student in a learning environment, was apparent, although not explicitly discussed, in how the different subjects were presented; the students reflected, expressing their insecurity and their learning. Still, this was not overtly articulated in the FGDs. That may be because everyone involved in the FGD was aware of the students’ situation as learners. The interviewer discourse in the FGDs will not be part of this analysis.

The inductive review of the transcripts also helped clarify which analytical tools to choose. It became clear that Fairclough’s values of features (experiential, relational, and expressive values; 1989) would be a useful framework to investigate which discourses students drew upon when constructing their professional identity. The students did not interact with DeafBlind individuals in the FGDs, but only described the relationship between themselves and DeafBlind individuals. While everyone involved in the FGDs did interact with each other, the student-teacher relationships are not the focus in this article. Therefore, relational values were not considered relevant. Inspired by Fairclough’s values of features (1989), the following analytical questions formed the analysis.

### **What experiential values are presented?**

- Which terms do students use to describe DeafBlind people/individuals?
- How (by which verbs) do students describe the interpreter’s actions?
- How do students present their relation to DeafBlind individuals (*my client*, *I have a client*, or *I interpret for*)?

### **What expressive values are represented?**

- How do students describe meeting with DeafBlind people and being a student in practice?
- To whom do the pronouns *we/I/you* refer?

The transcripts were then deductively analyzed, one analytical question at a time. For example, regarding the description of DeafBlind people, students at one point presented them as “helpless,” “dependent,” and “disabled.” An utterance such as: “Yes, helpless is a word that easily comes to mind [when describing DeafBlind people],” is considered an indication that the student drew upon *care needing discourse*, which relates to ‘welfare’ as an order of discourse.

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<sup>4</sup> In Norway, only the third person singular pronoun is gender marked.

Table 2 provides an overview of the different discourses identified in the FGDs, with examples of students' utterances. In Table 2, the orders of discourses are listed, and each column represents a topic of discourse.

*Table 2: An Overview of Different Discourses Used in the FGDs*

Topics Orders of Discourse	DeafBlind people/individuals	Interpreter	Student
'Welfare'	<i>Care needing discourse</i> (i.e. "helpless is a word that easily comes to mind").	<i>Caring discourse</i> (i.e. "it is easy to do it [help DeafBlind people]").	
	<i>Independence discourse</i> (i.e. "a DeafBlind individual wanted to explain how we should do things").		
'Professional Interpreter'		<i>Technical discourse</i> (i.e. "doing all these techniques").	
		<i>Reflective discourse</i> (i.e. "how do we set the boundaries").	
		<i>Collaborative discourse</i> (i.e. "cooperation [among interpreters] is very important to make an interaction work").	
'Education'			<i>Student discourse</i> (i.e. "I'm anxious about meeting DeafBlind people").
			<i>Collaborative discourse</i> (i.e. "we were very good at supporting each other [as students]").

Throughout the FGDs students were quite similar in which discourses they drew upon and how they emphasized them. This may indicate that the students went through similar developmental phases. The discourses and quotes presented were equally distributed across the students. The occurrence of the different discourses is not quantified across each student in the different FGDs. Nevertheless, the study was conducted as a holistic assessment of which discourse(s) dominated the different FGDs and which discourse(s) were less pervasive (or absent). In addition, some linguistic elements could be defined under different discourses; therefore, an impressionistic assessment was appropriate.

## FINDINGS

The three main topics in the focus group discussions – *DeafBlind people/individuals*<sup>5</sup>, *interpreter*, and *student*, were all identified as significant in how students constructed their professional identity as interpreters for DeafBlind people. Due to the close relationship between the topics, for example that DeafBlind people affected the work of students/interpreters, elements emphasized in one topic had an impact on the others. During student discussions, different types of discourse emerged which were summarized into orders of discourse: ‘welfare,’ and ‘the professional interpreter.’

Below each of these topics and types of discourses will be presented in more detail, with representative extracts from all three FGDs. Although the topics are described separately, students’ use of the pronouns *I*, *you*, and *we*, sometimes made it difficult to distinguish between their two different identity positions: the position of interpreter and of student. For example: “In that sense, *we* were interpreters,” “*I* [interpreter] used haptic communication to describe,” “It is better if [DeafBlind individual] could have told *me* [student] what *I* did wrong and what *I* could do better,” and “Add things that *you* [student] have learned.” Their identity as interpreters is also emphasized when they refer to the interpreter agency: “[I could] go to the interpreter services [NAV] and get help there.” Students responded from the identity position of interpreter in all three FGDs, which indicates that their construction and development of a professional identity was current. also refer to a group of students, or to a DeafBlind individual and themselves as interpreters: “*We* [students] don’t know much about the individuals,” and “When *we* [DeafBlind individual and interpreter student] had passed the music pavilion.” Nevertheless, in most cases it was possible to distinguish between the identity positions. Below, each topic will elaborate to provide a more comprehensive view, starting with *DeafBlind people/individuals*, then the *interpreter*, and finally the *student*. Within each topic, the FGDs are presented chronologically, starting with the first FGD, then the second, etc.

### DEAFBLIND PEOPLE/INDIVIDUALS

DeafBlind people impact affect how interpreters work and were the topic in all three FGDs.

#### FIRST FOCUS GROUP

In the first FGD two different types of discourse related to DeafBlind people were identified: *care needing discourse* and *independence discourse*.

The *care needing discourse* was identified when students described DeafBlind people by using words like “helpless,” “dependent,” and “disabled.” As they stated: “Yes, helpless is a word that easily comes to mind [when describing DeafBlind people],” and “This person [DeafBlind] can’t see much or maybe not hear much. What can I say, it’s easy to say they are helpless.” A *care needing discourse* was also present when students applied NAV’s way of presenting DeafBlind people in an interpreting context: “I can only hope that *the client* understands haptic communication,” and “Have to do it [describe], and then it is up to *the client* to decide.”

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<sup>5</sup> The nouns ‘people’ or ‘individuals’ in DeafBlind people and DeafBlind individuals are not used in Norwegian language. Since students in the first FGD mostly talked about DeafBlind people as a group, the term DeafBlind people is used. From the second FGD, when students saw DeafBlind people as individuals, both the terms DeafBlind people and DeafBlind individuals will be used.

To a small extent, students presented a completely different and contradictory view of DeafBlind people when they described them as adaptable and experienced. Thus, *independence discourse* was identified. According to the students, DeafBlind people “who have gone through such a change [reduction of sight and/or hearing] must be very good at adapting themselves to different situations,” and “they have done it [meeting students and giving them feedback] before.”

*Care needing discourse* was emphasized in the first FGD. At this point in their study, students had not yet interacted with DeafBlind people, and it was hard for them to grasp the *independence discourse* they had been introduced to in class. As they explained: “I picture that DeafBlind people need help with everything the moment they leave their house, but at the same time I know that some of the DeafBlind individuals that we are going to meet during our practicum, take the bus by themselves.... But I haven’t seen it with my own eyes, so I don’t believe it until I have experienced it myself,” and “I think my picture of DeafBlind people will constantly change during my studies, and maybe long after that as well.” Their willingness to discuss potential shifts in their perspective draws upon *student discourse*, where students are expected to reflect on what they have learned in class.

## SECOND FOCUS GROUP

After their first practicum in the second FGD, students equally drew upon *care needing discourse* and *independence discourse*.

The *care needing discourse* was identified when interpreter students described DeafBlind individuals as “lacking two senses,” and “There is just so much they can take in.” They still described DeafBlind people as clients: “So, it’s something about meeting *the client*...” and “*The client* asked that question.” In this way, students highlighted DeafBlind individuals’ weaknesses and why they needed care as clients, which is similar to how they are presented by NAV and in the Norwegian welfare system.

At the same time, students activated a contradictory *independence discourse* when they referred to DeafBlind individuals as independent in such statements as, “Very thorough and [he] wanted to explain how we should do things,” and “He [DeafBlind man] went ahead on his own.” At this point, students had also discovered that “[DeafBlind individuals] are as different as we are.”

## THIRD FOCUS GROUP

In the third focus group these two discourses, *independence discourse* and *care needing discourse*, were still in play.

*Independence discourse* was mostly in play at this point. By using phrases such as “very independent,” and “she [DeafBlind woman] had all the power,” when discussing DeafBlind individuals, the *independence discourse* was identified. Students even experienced DeafBlind individuals demanding favors: “She was very independent and knew what she wanted... she was confident and had high self-confidence... she gave me the jacket and said: ‘Go to the locker with it’... I tried to suggest putting it under the table, but no, she wanted me to go to the locker with it. She didn’t give in,” and “She [DeafBlind woman] said: ‘Well, educated interpreters, they serve us the food.’”

However, based on their experience with insecure DeafBlind individuals, students still, occasionally, drew upon *care needing discourse*. They explained: “I discovered that he didn’t follow my guiding signals, no, nothing. He seemed very insecure,” “I did experience that a DeafBlind individual told me not to interpret because she only wanted to chat with me,” and “[In new situations] the interpreter becomes a safe harbor [for DeafBlind people].” In these and similar quotes, traces of *care needing discourse* can be found. The term ‘client’ was still used by students, and sometimes they added the DeafBlind individual’s communication method when talking about them: “I interpreted for a client, who uses spoken language<sup>6</sup>,” and “I interpreted to a client who uses tactile communication.”

The conflict between independent and demanding DeafBlind individuals (*independence discourse*) on one hand, and DeafBlind individuals who only wanted to talk to the interpreter (*care needing discourse*) on the other, confused the students: “To us students, it’s confusing if they can’t hold on to their independence, because it’s important.” This conflict was also pointed out to students in their practicum: “We were told [during our practicum] that; yes, at school you learn how to be neutral and not to act as a companion and not to do favors. But we [as educated interpreters] do. That’s just the way it is.” Nevertheless, students emphasized *independent discourse*.

Although *independence discourse* was important to students, it is when intersecting and antagonistic discourses were made available to students that they transformed and developed. Students also went through transformation and development as interpreters, as will be presented below.

## INTERPRETER

As presented above, during the FGDs the students occupied the subject position as an interpreter. Before and after their practicum, students described being an interpreter by using different experiential values (e.g. different verbs to describe the interpreter’s action).

### FIRST FOCUS GROUP

In the first FGD, two different discourses were identified when students described the interpreter: *caring discourse* and *technical discourse*. The two discourses were equally drawn upon by students.

*Caring discourse* was identified when students pointed out that being an interpreter was doing something more than just interpreting. They explained: “It’s mostly because I’m going to be so physically close... because I want them to know that I think of this as something more than a job, and I want them to consider me as something more than an interpreter,” and “It’s easy to do it [help them].” Helping and caring for DeafBlind people was how “we have been raised, and we have learned that we help people, we just do.” Students also a few times described their relationship with DeafBlind people with terms such as “*my interpreter client*,” or “we are *having* different [clients].” In Norwegian and in this domain in particular, by using the term ‘my client,’ the focus is not on providing a service, but on having power and giving care. Therefore, traces of *caring discourse* are found.

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<sup>6</sup> In Norwegian, this term was used; ‘spoken-language-client’ (translated word by word). The other example: ‘tactile-client’.

The second discourse, *technical discourse*, was identified when students talked about the importance of practicing interpreting techniques correctly in a given situation. As the students pointed out: “DeafBlind people are more dependent on us doing it right, that you guide them correctly and not hit a barrier or a door, or whatever,” “We have learned all these techniques,” and “What I’m supposed to do as an interpreter is pretty much standard routine.” *Technical discourse* was introduced to the students in class, and most of the time, students operated this discourse when they described their relationship with DeafBlind people by using the phrase “to interpret for [DeafBlind people].”

Students struggled in the intersection between *caring discourse* and *technical discourse*: “I think it’s going to be hard [not to help]. Not only because what we think, but also because people around us. If people give you an ugly look for not helping a DeafBlind individual, then it’s going to be hard to resist,” and “I think it’s going to be a huge adjustment phase.” To cope with that struggle, students “put on a mask and think that this is what it is going to be like [as an interpreter].”

## SECOND FOCUS GROUP

Experiential values regarding how students describe the interpreter were also present in the second FGD. *Technical discourse*, *reflective discourse*, and *caring discourse* were identified.

Performing the techniques was still important to students when they “interpret for” or “guide” DeafBlind individuals, thus the *technical discourse*. However, after meeting DeafBlind individuals, they changed from focusing on the techniques themselves, to focusing on the technique recipients. Students pointed out that interpreters have to make “adjustments to each and every one of them [DeafBlind individuals],” “There is more than one right way to do things, only with different clients,” and “It is not my need that is the primary requirement, it is the clients’.” With this new orientation, and by asking questions such as “How do we set the boundaries?” students opened up to a reflecting way of considering how to interpret, and traces of *reflective discourse* were found.

Students also drew upon *caring discourse*, but to a far lesser degree. At this point in their study, students still claimed that they had to “look after [DeafBlind people].” For example: “I feel that it is the uneducated part of us that is left that claims that we have to look after DeafBlind people,” and “If you have a client that say ‘you have to decide,’ then it’s easier to be their companion.” This also included doing favors for DeafBlind individuals: “We have to offer favors, right.” By pointing out their responsibility for DeafBlind individuals who need care, students operated the *caring discourse*: “I had him [DeafBlind man] again the last day,” and “He [DeafBlind man] wasn’t the same as the one I had the first day.”

Students continue to utilize different and antagonistic discourses as they transform and develop their professional identity. They explained: “I’m not very excited about meeting new people, but I feel that I have changed. I’m not sure if I can say that I have changed into an interpreter, but at least to something similar,” and “Okay, now I actually am an interpreter, as they have spoken about. I’m not being myself, I’m not shy anymore.” They are aware of their change in identity and are in the process of constructing their professional identity.

### THIRD FOCUS GROUP

According to the experiential values present in the third FGD, four different discourses were identified: *reflective discourse*, *collaborative discourse*, *technical discourse* and *caring discourse*. The first two discourses were emphasized in this FGD and the third was only occasionally in play. *Caring discourse* was mentioned, but the students explicitly rejected it.

*Reflective discourse* was identified when students explained that “[You have to] be ethically conscious about how you say things and answer them [DeafBlind individuals],” and when they discussed ethical boundaries: “What is ethically possible, what is practically possible, and what is natural to do.” Students had internalized the ethical guidelines for sign language interpreters, and when challenged, trusted their feelings: “I just felt that...this is not okay,” and “I felt like, I’m not supposed to do that.”

When students discussed how they worked together with DeafBlind individuals and other interpreters to give the best interpreter service, *collaborative discourse* was identified. They explained: “We [interpreters] have to open up, to ask them [DeafBlind individuals] to find out, to do a good job [as interpreters],” and “I just think that cooperation [among interpreters] is very important to make an interaction work. It’s not about us [the interpreters], it’s about making the best possible experience for the participants [DeafBlind individuals].” By this, students also expressed their orientation toward DeafBlind individuals, as recipients of their services.

Students still drew upon *technical discourse*, but mostly as a way of excluding other activities: “Since we are going to be interpreters, we have to maintain a focus on tasks that involve interpreting, guiding and describing, and that does not involve carrying a suitcase.” *Technical discourse* was also in play when students described their relation to DeafBlind individuals: “I interpreted for a client...” and “At that time I interpreted for...”

At this point in their study, students distanced themselves from *caring discourse*. When they experienced DeafBlind individuals who expected favors from them, they took a stand: “I don’t think it’s okay when they [DeafBlind individuals] make demands,” and “It’s easier [to do favors], but I’m not interested in running around like a crazy rat.”

During their study, students transformed their practice of becoming interpreters for DeafBlind people. In this process, they also used words with different values to describe meeting with DeafBlind people, being students in a group, and being supervised, as will be presented below.

### STUDENT

‘Education’ as an order of discourse is also available to students. When students reflected and expressed their insecurity in the FGDs, they actualized a discourse related to this order, namely *student discourse*. To some extent, when they described working in a team where they supported each other, they drew upon *collaborative discourse*.

### FIRST FOCUS GROUP

Students presented different expressive values in the first FGD. Regarding meeting DeafBlind people, being a student, and being observed by supervisors, students used adjectives and

adverbs such as “anxious,” “thrilled,” and “fun.” In example: “Most of all I’m anxious about meeting DeafBlind people,” “I’m both thrilled and anxious about the practicum,” and “I think it’s going to be fun [to act as an interpreter], actually.” Feedback was important to students: “You can’t see yourself when you do something... so I have to get feedback from someone,” and “It’s best if they [DeafBlind people] give you feedback.” By expressing their fear, excitement, and their expectation of feedback, students actualized *student discourse*.

### SECOND FOCUS GROUP

In the second FGD, students still drew upon *student discourse*. Students presented expressive values such as “nervous,” “enjoyable,” and “scary,” about meeting DeafBlind individuals for the first time, being in practice, and being supervised. They stated: “I was very nervous in the beginning, but that faded. When I started guiding, I was calm and thought it went great,” “I thought it was very, very enjoyable,” and “It was scary, many people were watching me.”

*Collaborative discourse* was also identified when students worked together: “We were very good at supporting each other,” and “We had a support-team. It went well and you felt incredibly secure,” even if it did not always work: “Too many people had an opinion about what I did... so I felt overruled,” and “I wasn’t given the time or space to describe thoroughly... it was very disturbing... very, very frustrating.”

### THIRD FOCUS GROUP

*Student discourse* was still identified in the third FGD. Students described practice as being on and off stage. Onstage interpreting was “fun” and “educational.” Offstage, between interpreting assignments, was “exhausting” and “scary.” They explained: “It was very fun to be there, very educational,” “I have heard from others that it was going to be incredibly exhausting,” and “I thought it was scary.”

All three of these topics, *DeafBlind people/individuals*, *interpreter*, and *student*, were evident in students’ construction of their professional identity, or process of *Bildung*, as interpreters for DeafBlind people, and students presented different and antagonistic discourses in their construction. How students spoke and the discourses they drew upon developed and changed throughout their practicum. Their description of DeafBlind people, what an interpreter does, and the relation between DeafBlind individuals and interpreters and students evolved. Thus, their professional identity evolved as well.

### DISCUSSION AND CLOSING REMARKS

Students’ *Bildung* process of becoming interpreters for DeafBlind people and constructing their professional identity started as early as the first FGD. By using the pronouns *I*, *you*, and *we* referencing their role as an interpreter as well as a student, they responded to an interpreter identity.

Students’ former experiences and discursive practices from their upbringing and before they started the Bachelor’s program, such as *caring discourse* and *care needing discourse*, dominated their construction of professional identity in the first FGD. Nevertheless, after being introduced to *independence discourse* and *technical discourse*, students began to draw on those. Reflecting back on what they had learned in class, it is apparent the students were actively engaged in their professional development and in the process of *Bildung*. Altogether, students



struggled with the intersecting discourses and described the role of interpreter as a mask they put on. Still, by presenting DeafBlind people as clients, a term used in the practice field (e.g. by NAV), they showed promise in the profession they are entering.

Between the first and second FGD, students experienced interpreting situations themselves. This led to a change in which discourses they drew upon when constructing their professional identity. Their process of *Bildung* continued. Even if students still utilized *care needing discourse* and *caring discourse*, *independence discourse* and *technical discourse* were more actively in play. In addition, students drew upon *reflective discourse* when they considered adjusting their interpreting services to DeafBlind individuals, and *collaborative discourse* when they expressed support towards each other as students. They also started to articulate how they were “not being myself,” but had “changed into an interpreter... or something similar.”

After their second and last practicum, in the third FGD, the composition of discourses students drew upon when constructing their professional identity changed further. Students operated *reflective discourse*, *collaborative discourse*, and *technical discourse*. Students still emphasized *independence discourse* when discussing DeafBlind people, but they occasionally played out *care needing discourse*. At this point, they distanced themselves from *caring discourse*.

As students in this study had never worked or interacted with DeafBlind people, it was expected that the discourses they drew upon in the beginning of the study were essentially based on discourses previously available to them. During the program, students invested in the *Bildung* process of becoming an interpreter for DeafBlind people. Responding to an interpreter identity, students were given different discursive practices to which they could relate. However, in order to pass exams, students were required to apply the knowledge and discursive practices presented in their specific educational program. When confronted with antagonistic discourses in the field of practice, students might strategically have chosen discourses from the educational field.

## SHORTCOMINGS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In this article, data have been analyzed with a CDA approach. The selection of a different analytical approach would have highlighted other aspects of the data. In addition, the interaction between students and DeafBlind people has not been subject to research in this project, but it would be of interest to explore the relational values in an interpreting situation.

In choosing a qualitative approach, the researcher's background and knowledge were actively used as a tool in the interpretation process (Fejes & Thornberg, 2015), which required the researcher to have a reflexive approach to the research process. Because of these choices, the researcher also influenced the constructions of discourses (Börjesson & Palmblad, 2007). Discourse analysis requires the researcher to ‘put aside oneself’ to prevent his/her own judgement from prevailing (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). The author of this article has interpreted for 19 years and has taught interpreting for DeafBlind people for 13 years, which certainly influenced the analysis, interpretation, and explanation.

Data analysis is always a based on interpretation. The constitution of one category or discourse is not done without ambiguity, and categories (discourses) might overlap. Even if some of the statements clearly indicated that students drew upon a specific discourse, others

were not that evident. Nevertheless, by reflecting on the choices made and being transparent in the analysis, this article contributes knowledge to the field of professional interpreting.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

Students' *Bildung* process is apparent in the development of their professional identity as interpreters for DeafBlind people. The students' capability and inner strength combined with field education and experience interpreting for DeafBlind individuals strengthened their development of character, as it appeared in the FGDs. In this process, students drew upon specific discursive practices available within their unique historical and institutional context. Students took an active part in this process. By participating in practice and attending FGDs, students contributed and consciously worked with themselves, indicated by the open and free discussions in the FGDs. They underwent the process of *Bildung* and constructed their professional identity.

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