Deaf Interpreters' Perception of Themselves as Professionals in Ireland: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

In the extensive literature on sign language interpreting, very little attention has been given to deaf interpreters' understanding of themselves as professionals. This gap may be due to the fact that professional sign language interpreting is often seen to be synonymous with hearing people. The research therefore set out to gain an insight into how deaf interpreters' view themselves as professionals, what their understanding of 'being a professional' is, and what issues are of concern to them. The authors present and discuss findings from an analysis, informed by professionalism theory, of data derived from interviews with 5 deaf interpreters in Ireland who agreed to participate in the study. A key finding is that deaf interpreters struggle with the idea of themselves as professionals due to a number of factors: First, the stigma of the sign language interpreting profession being a hearing dominion; Second, the lack of professional interpreting courses and qualifications available for deaf interpreters; and finally, the low number of interpreting assignments given to deaf interpreters. A second key finding is that deaf interpreters see themselves as autonomous professionals based on expert knowledge. These issues have implications for the recruitment and retention of deaf interpreters into the sign language interpreting profession in Ireland. We suggest that sign language interpreting agencies and institutions develop and facilitate professional training courses for deaf interpreters as an addition to existing programs of professional training and qualifications being offered to hearing students.

INTRODUCTION

The enactment of the *Irish Sign Language Act (ISL) 2017* and publication of the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2021* has ushered in a new era of radical change to the sign language interpreting profession in Ireland. Section 7 of the ISL Act 2017 stipulate that,

> A court or a public body, in compliance with its obligations under this Act, shall not engage the services of a person providing Irish Sign Language interpretation unless the person's competence has been verified by having been accredited in accordance with an accreditation scheme funded by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017-2021 has assigned the task of establishing a national register of accredited ISL interpreters to the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) in Ireland (Leeson and Venturi, 2017). As a national ISL interpreting body, SLIS has overall responsibility for the creation of professional registration and qualification routes for both deaf and hearing ISL interpreters as well as the provision of on-going professional training and development. One of its key functions involves the implementation of appropriate training programmes for all interpreters including deaf interpreters, which is currently in its early stage of development. The ISL Act 2017 also requires deaf and hearing interpreters to be professionally trained and qualified in order to engage in interpreting practice which in line with international standards and practice (Best, 2019).

The need for, and benefits of, appropriate high-quality training and qualification as well as continuing professional development (CPD) for deaf interpreters is recognised in the literature both nationally and internationally (Leeson and Lynch 2008; Brück and Schaumberger, 2014; Mindess, 2014). Indeed, the benefits of CPD for deaf interpreter has also been recognized in a review conducted by Leeson and Venturi (2017). At the same time, the lack of professional development for deaf interpreters has been highlighted as a concern, particularly in relation to appropriate training programs in higher education institutions (Best, 2019; Mindess, 2014). Similarly, Brück and Schaumberger (2014) observe that the lack formal training programmes in most European countries represent 'a major obstacle for the professionalization of Deaf interpreters' (p. 90). The authors suggest that specialized training modules designed for deaf interpreters could be integrated into existing sign language interpreting programs in higher education institutions. Mindess (2009) argues that appropriate training methods and coursework materials that align with the unique skills of deaf interpreters are required.

In Ireland, ISL interpreting training programs are currently available at the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) where interpreting students have opportunity to undertake a four-year undergraduate course and become qualified ISL interpreters upon graduation (Leeson and Lynch, 2008). While many deaf interpreters are without such qualifications, they are currently registered with SLIS and can avail of professional development training in workshops organized by Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (CISLI), a voluntary national membership group representing sign language interpreters. CISLI has as its aim the advancement of the profession including the rights and interests of sign language interpreters and the promotion of best practice in ISL interpreting.

This study is framed within the concept of professionalism with specific reference to the views and experiences of deaf interpreters in Ireland. In this research, professionalism is generally perceived as an activity for which one is in paid employment and holds a recognised qualification from a professional accreditation body (Cruess and Cruess, 2012; Alley, 2019). The theoretical framework is used to operationalize how deaf interpreters' view and experience themselves as professionals and what this means in terms of their views about professional training, CPD, code of ethics and professional relations with hearing ISL interpreters, deaf clients and public body representatives. While much of the literature on deaf interpreting tends to focus on the historical development of the profession, the various occupational roles and jurisdictions, and their distinction from the roles undertaken by hearing sign language interpreters (Brück and Schaumberger, 2014; Forestal, 2011; Sheneman, 2016), there is relatively limited research on deaf interpreters' perception of themselves as professionals in Ireland. Therefore, qualitative interview technique was employed to elicit the views and experiences of deaf people who are working as ISL interpreters. The study was guided by the following research questions: What are the professional experiences of deaf interpreters in

Ireland? What are the key developments in deaf people's career as interpreters? Answers to these questions may contribute to a better understanding of how deaf interpreters conceptualize themselves as professionals.

This study proceeds through four stages. First, we describe the origin and evolution of deaf interpreting and the professionalization of sign language interpreting in Ireland. Second, we review international literature to the terms 'professional,' 'professionalization' and 'professionalism' with reference to the work of Cruess and Cruess (2012) and Baggini (2005) and the different occupational roles undertaken by deaf interpreters which are complex due to the proliferation of terms attached to the roles. Third, we describe the methodology of the study and the phenomenological approach adopted, which allows researchers understand participants by entering into their 'lived experience' and seeing life from their perception (van Manen, (1990). Fourth, we present, discuss and draw conclusions from the research findings clustered around key themes based on the participants' experiences of interpreting in school, social club and public bodies, their thoughts around interpreting practice, professional training and qualifications, code of ethics and professional autonomy. The findings may help promote innovations in developing professional training courses in higher education institutions and professional accreditation groups.

BACKGROUND

Deaf people have historically provided an essential service in interpreting and translation to deaf communities around the world (Brück and Schaumberger (2014). However, their contribution to the sign language interpreting profession has been largely overlooked in academic research, leaving them in a peripheral position relative to their hearing peers (Boudreault 2005). In many countries, sign language interpreting tends to be portrayed as a hearing interpreting profession with basic functions of engaging in signed-spoken language interpreting assumed to be a role befitting those who can hear (Bentley-Sassaman and Dawson, 2012). While this image is slow to change in many cases, it may have created a barrier for deaf people to enter the profession. In Ireland, deaf interpreters account for a small percentage of the total number of ISL interpreters. During the course of this research, we have identified 12 deaf interpreters currently providing an essential interpreting and translation service. Similarly, Boudreault (2005) reported that the number of deaf interpreters in many countries are in the minority compared to figures associated with their hearing counterparts. Despite this minority status, deaf interpreting has always existed throughout history. Its evolution must be understood in the context of the changing needs of deaf communities where new habits, customs, values and knowledge have emerged over time.

DEAF INTERPRETING: THE EARLY YEARS

The earliest evidence of deaf people engaging in the practice of 'interpreting' emerged in a newspaper report about a Puritan Church examination which took place in 1680 (Carty, Macready, and Sayers, 2009). The reporter wrote that the deaf husband had written down his wife's answers that she signed to him. At the time, deaf people were sometimes called upon to interpret or translate in the court houses where deaf individuals were summoned to appear before a judge. The court cases were typically reported in newspapers which give some indication that deaf interpreting had taken place at a particular time (Adam, Carty and Stone, 2011). The earliest account of similar activities taking place in Ireland was the *Drogheda Argus* report published in 1884. The reporter stated that a deaf interpreter, Maurice Heuston, had used

'the dumb alphabet' to relay to the court what the deaf witness had said in evidence[1]. In 1886, another Irish newspaper reporter from the *Cork Constitution* witnessed a sermon taking pace at St. Mary's Shandon Church in Cork. He wrote that 'a deaf mute missionary' called Francis Maginn had 'interpreted in finger and sign language' while his hearing brother, Rev. C. Maginn, pointed at the words in the script. Francis then translated the script into sign language for the 30 deaf people in attendance. Although Francis was born in Cork, he was sent to the Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Children in Bermondsey, London and later taught at the Margate Institution for the Deaf (Caul, 2006). He is widely known as one of the key founders of the British Deaf Association. The organization was established in 1890 to address concerns about the rise of oralism that outlawed British Sign Language in many schools for deaf children (Ladd, 2003). There are distinct texts that refer specifically to what Bienvenu and Colonomos (1990) call 'relay interpreting' performed by deaf children in special residential schools (Adam, Stone, Collins and Metzger, 2014). The practice of relay interpreting typically occurred in schools where a policy was created to prohibit sign language and punish language offenders (O'Connell and Deegan, 2014). For example, inside a classroom a hearing teacher with no knowledge of sign language verbalizes instructions to deaf students. Having heard what the teacher said, the student with partial hearing passes the information to another student who then relays the information to the rest of the class (O'Connell and Lynch, 2019; McDonnell and Saunders, 1994). Hearing teachers were recruited in Irish special schools for deaf children to provide a program of oralism. Spoken language was used during class and students were forced to lip read the teacher. Many students turned to another student who had enough hearing to be able to understand the teacher. As a result, these students developed interpreting and translation skills which they were able to use after they finished school (Adam, Stone, Collins, and Metzger, 2014). They assisted deaf adults with writing letters or translating newspaper reports at a social club centre (Forestal, 2011). The service was useful for those with literacy problems or limited range of sign language skills. The service was sometimes offered in exchange for other services such as shoe repair or dress making (Adam, Aro, Druetta, Dunne and Klintberg, 2014).

ROUTE TO PROFESSIONALIZATION

Deaf interpreting has always developed in response to the changing cultural and linguistic needs of the deaf community in Ireland. Indeed, deaf interpreters have often provided an essential service to deaf community members. Yet, this service developed slowly as a responsive evolving process towards professionalization. To chart its historical progression, it is necessary to position deaf interpreting in the historical context of ISL interpreting in Ireland. Leeson (2008) suggests ISL interpreting has a long history dating back to the 18th or 19th century but the first coordinated attempt at providing an interpreting service probably dates back to the 1980s and the era of deaf social clubs. The evolution of ISL interpreting is said to have begun with the establishment of the 'Institute of Interpreters in Ireland' in 1982 which opened the way towards a formal sign language interpreting profession. The National Association for the Deaf (NAD – now operating as Chime) and a number of deaf leaders were instrumental in progressing the establishment of the 'The Institute' as an ad hoc group comprising a small number of existing lay interpreters (*Contact*, Winter 1982). The new group was headed by the National Chaplaincy of the Deaf with responsibility for organising and

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[1] The *Drogheda Argus, 21st June 1884.* Heuston was probably the first deaf interpreter in Ireland. Cormac Leonard, email/text communication to the authors, 25th October 2019.

promoting interpreting services within the deaf community. At the time, it was assumed that hearing people would provide interpreting services aimed at breaking down barriers in accessing information and resources available predominantly in spoken and written English. Although deaf people were known to engage in interpreting and translation activities in the school and the deaf social club, it is not known why they did not consider themselves members of this cohort of ISL interpreters. It was in the early 1990s when things began to change and interpreter training opportunities became available for both deaf and hearing interpreters.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Undoubtedly, the decade of the 1990s brought about some significant changes to ISL interpreting. Progress towards professionalization began in 1992 due to the availability of the interpreter training courses provided by TCD and Bristol University in the United Kingdom (UK). According to Leeson and Lynch (2008), the program was funded in part by the European Commission (EC) under the Horizon program with twelve places on offer, ten for interpreter students and 2 for ISL teachers. It was run on a full-time basis for a period of two years during which students devoted 50% of their time in Bristol and the rest in Dublin. In May 1994, a total of nine students were awarded the Diploma in Deaf Studies (Interpreting) while two students received the Certificate in Deaf Studies (ISL teaching). The second Horizon Program of sign language interpreting was established in 1998 with Cork Deaf Enterprise as the lead partner and Bristol University and University College Cork the academic collaborators. Similar to the previous one, the diploma course had to be completed over a two year period while the certificate was for one year. A total of ten students (including the first formally trained deaf interpreter) were awarded the Diploma in Deaf Studies (Interpreting) and three students received the Certificate in Deaf Studies (ISL teaching).

Earlier, in mid-1990s, the NAD adopted a solution for established ISL interpreters who had been unsuccessful in securing a place on the Horizon program by organizing the Sign Language Interpreter Development and Education Programme (SLIDE) (Leeson and Lynch, 2008). The program was run in conjunction with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) in the UK with the intention of increasing the number of interpreters as quickly as possible. It involved a six-month open learning program together with two five-day residential blocks designed to train interpreters in the "core components relevant to the interpreting profession, such as ethics, language processing, professionalism etc." (Leeson and Lynch, 2008, p. 41). The course participants were mainly drawn from a pool of existing interpreters within the deaf community. No formal certification from a nationally recognized accreditation body were issued upon completion.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The establishment of the Irish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (IASLI) in 1994 paved the way for deaf people to enter the ISL interpreting profession (Leeson and Lynch, 2008). The group was initially formed in response to calls for the development of professional interpreting standards and practice and the training needs of ISL interpreters. A small number of existing ISL interpreters including the first Horizon graduates helped set up the organization. The aim was to advance the development of the new ISL interpreting profession and develop a code of ethics in line with European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI) guidelines. Once IASLI became affiliated with EFSLI, members were able to network with sign language interpreters from European countries. The number of interpreters registered with IASLI increased over time and by the turn of the 21st century there were approximately 40 members. Unfortunately, no record exist to indicate the number of deaf interpreters in the

IASLI register. While operating as a small voluntary organization without an office base and staff members, IASLI found themselves in difficulty particularly with regard to a lack of funding and the ability to effectively represent the professional needs of ISL interpreters. The organization disbanded in 2007 as a result of the problems (Leeson and Lynch, 2008).

According to Leeson and Venturi (2017), the Council for Irish Sign Language Interpreters (CISLI) was established in May 2011 with the overall goal of advancing the profession including the rights and interests of interpreters. CISLI is the professional standards body for the ISL interpreting profession that work in close partnership with deaf-led organizations for the future benefits of ISL users and interpreters and to uphold a code of conduct of deaf and hearing interpreters including disciplinary procedures. One of its key functions is to uphold high professional interpreting standards for deaf and hearing interpreters and maintain the reputation and status of the profession. Through a Code of Ethics, CISLI provides deaf and hearing interpreters with clear professional guidance regarding professional conduct and standards of practice. Leeson and Venturi (2017) describe the four different categories of membership in CISLI as follows: Active Membership, Associate Membership, Student Membership and Affiliate Membership. Active Members is exclusively open to deaf and hearing professional interpreters who have completed a third level interpreter training qualification or have successfully competed assessment processes through Irish Sign Link and SLIS. It is also open to those who hold Membership of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters under the UK-based National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCDP). Student Membership is accessible to students enrolled in a recognized third-level interpreter training program and Affiliate Membership is open to non-interpreter individuals and organizations. It must be noted that currently registration with CISLI does not provide interpreters with statutory recognition of their professional status but rather recognition in terms of their education and qualifications received from CDS at TCD and through locally accredited assessment conducted by Irish Sign Link and SLIS.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION AUTONOMY

The literature affirms the operation of a number of key interpreting agencies in Ireland from the mid-1990s onwards (Leeson 2008; Leeson and Lynch 2008). In 1994, Irish Sign Link was formed as an interpreter booking agency by "a working group comprising organizations of deaf people, service providers, interpreters and ISL teachers" (Leeson and Lynch 2008, p. 43). The new agency was funded by the former National Rehabilitation Board (NRB), a government body replaced by the National Disability Authority (NDA). Some of the key functions of NRB were transferred to Comhairle (now operating as Citizens Information Board). According to Leeson and Lynch (2008), Irish Sign Link had no legal standing to give ISL interpreters 'licence' to practice. In the period between 1998 and 2006, Irish Sign Link held office at NRB headquarters in Dublin where it organized a number of accreditation sessions in 1999, 2002 and 2006. Candidates were assessed on their interpreting knowledge and skills. When Irish Sign Link was disbanded in 2007, SLIS was formed to take its place. The organization is currently funded by the Citizens Information Board to meet interpreting demands and facilitate access to services for deaf people (Leeson and Venturi, 2017).

SLIS went into operation initially as a booking agency but later served as a referral agency. In June 2009, SLIS organized an internal assessment of interpreters during which three deaf interpreters passed the assessment conducted by a panel of experts. As things turned out, no follow-up session took place in the subsequent years – an unfortunate outcome for existing and future deaf and hearing interpreters. However, the passage of the ISL Act 2017 marked a

significant milestone in the professionalization of ISL interpreting. SLIS also received state funding from the Citizens Information Board to develop a quality-assurance and national registration system for deaf and hearing interpreters under the terms of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS). SLIS operates as a national organization focusing on elevating the professional standards of ISL interpreting. It also acts as the gatekeeper to the ISL interpreting profession. A Quality Development Officer was appointed with overall responsibility for the development and implementation a professional registration and quality assurance scheme for ISL interpreters. The aim is to achieve quality assurance by setting the requirements for entry into interpreting, establishing a register of interpreters who meet the admission criteria. Other goals include Continuing Professional Development for interpreters and a formal complaints mechanism. These are significant recent developments which, if successfully implemented, will bring the organization in line with standards attained by national interpreting bodies such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in the United States. It is noteworthy that RID has publishing a guidebook entitled *Interpreting for Deaf People* which contains details of a code of ethics and standards (Boudreault, 2005).

ROUTE TO PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

There are currently two routes to interpreter qualifications in Ireland: qualification in the Bachelor of Deaf Studies (ISL interpreting) awarded by TCD and qualification from the UK-based Signature National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). The four-year, full-time honours degree program leading to a Bachelors of Deaf Studies qualification (interpreting) is available at Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS). CDS which was established in 2001 in response to a growing concern among deaf community members regarding the lack of formal training courses in ISL interpreting and research into ISL (Leeson, 2008). CDS is currently the sole academic centre in Ireland providing for the training of ISL/English interpreters and ISL teachers. Signature is a voluntary organization providing training and learning opportunities for interpreting student leading to Level 6 NVQ Certificate in Irish Sign Language to register with the from the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCDP) in the UK. The Signature qualification in ISL interpreting is offered on a full or part-time basis either in the west of Ireland or Northern Ireland. In the west of Ireland, Evelyn Conroy and her husband, Martin, established the Conroy School of ISL in 1999 initially as an interpreting agency. The name was later changed to Centre for Sign Language Studies to expand into an academy for interpreter training and ISL teaching. It is through the academy that the Signature courses in ISL interpreting are delivered. In order to obtain the NVQ Level 6 award from NRCDP, students must complete five units, four of which are mandatory. Apart from CSLS, there are a number of other interpreting bodies established in Ireland: for example, Bridge Interpreting based in Dublin and the Kerry Deaf Resource Centre (KDRC) in the south-west of the country. Unlike CSLS, neither of these groups provide interpreting education and training. The difference between the two is the Kerry-based group operate as a voluntary organization. It is significant that both organizations were founded through the efforts of practicing ISL interpreters.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Brück and Schaumberger (2014) define deaf interpreting as an 'emerging and evolving profession.' The term 'profession' refers to an 'occupation whose core element is work based upon the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills' (Cruess and Cruess, 2012, p.260). The etymological roots of the word is in the Latin 'to profess' – to declare oneself to be an expert in some skill or field of knowledge (Baggini, 2005). Research has shown that sign language interpreting is an occupation that requires specialist skills and knowledge of

interpreting including a recognized professional qualification (Bontempo, Goswell, Levitzke-Gray, Napier and Warby, 2014). As a profession, sign language interpreting is an occupation that requires specialized intellectual study and professional training for the provision of professional service to deaf and hearing members of society (Witter-Merithew and Nicodemus, 2012). The concept of professionalization can be viewed as a process marked by some kind of organizational control mechanism in place to ensure practitioners meet the entry requirements into a profession (Cruess and Cruess, 2012). Best (2019) argues that interpreting agencies have an important role in the professionalization of sign language interpreting. Similarly, SLIS has an important role in the professionalization of the ISL interpreting profession. In that context, professionalization is seen as a process that aims to improve or upgrade the professional status and practice of sign language interpreters.

In recent times, the discourse on the professionalism of ISL interpreters and the ISL interpreting profession has been dominated by debates and dilemmas with regard to continuing professional development initiated by SLIS. The term professionalism can be described as a 'set of values, behaviours, and relationships that underpins the trust that the public has in' the profession (Cruess and Cruess, 2012, p. 260). Hoyle (2001) sees professionalism as something that confers respectability whereas Englund (1996, p. 7-6) associates the term with having the necessary qualifications, capacity and competence 'required for the successful exercise of an occupation.' Alley's (2019) definition is centred on the idea of being in paid employment in an occupation for which one is an affiliated member of a professional body. Alley further identifies professional autonomy as one of the essential attributes of professionalism. Professional autonomy refers to the freedom to make decisions about possible actions based on knowledge, competence and responsibility without having to ask permission from others in an organization (Holcombe, 2014). However, Witter-Merithew and Nicodemus (2012) finds this concept problematic because interpreters' decision-making is dependent on the views and wishes of the participants (e.g. deaf clients) in an interpreting event. Witter-Merithew and Nicodemus suggest that 'relational autonomy' more aptly describes the autonomous practices of interpreters. Rather than using independent professional decision-making, relational autonomy looks at the social context and social relations of professional practice. That means the right social conditions must be in place for effective decision-making to occur. Both the interpreter and participants agree on the choices they want to make in an interpreting situation.

The professional autonomy of deaf interpreters is similarly dependent on social context and social relations because decisions must align with the cultural and linguistic needs of deaf clients. The deaf interpreter must have ability to be sensitive to the wide range cultural differences which are essential to effective communication and decision-making involving deaf clients from culturally diverse backgrounds. For example, deaf interpreters typically work with hearing interpreters as a team by facilitating communication between deaf and hearing people (Bentley-Sassaman and Dawson, 2012). The interpreting triad involves the hearing interpreter hearing the source spoken language message and translating it into sign language. The deaf interpreter then translates the message delivered in sign language into the signs that are easily understood by the deaf client. To effectively communicate with deaf clients, the deaf interpreter must be familiar with a wide range of idiosyncratic signs that are not easily accessible to the hearing interpreter. Some clients have minimal or under-developed sign language skills as a result of mental health, learning difficulties or long-enduring isolation. Some are foreign nationals with no prior knowledge of the national sign language of the host country. Others use idiosyncratic signs learned at home, school, or other geographical region. Before an interpreting event takes place, the deaf interpreters needs to meet with the client in order to find out what she or he needs. Relational autonomy thus contributes not only to job satisfaction

but also promotes quality of interpreting practices and better interpreting outcomes for the participants.

Deaf interpreters have often been assigned terms such as 'relay interpreter' (Bienvenue and Colonomos, 1990) and 'intermediaries' (Pochhacker, 2004). Intermediaries work between a deaf person and hearing sign language interpreter and typically function as 'messenger, guide, and negotiator' (2004, p.147). Relay interpreting refers to the way a relay chain operates, where deaf and hearing interpreters work as a team positioned opposite each other, so they are face-to-face (Bienvenu and Colonomos, 1990). Adam, Carty and Stone (2011) adopted the term 'ghost writer' as a metaphor for describing deaf interpreter's unique translation skills. For example, similar to the person hired to write literary works on behalf of a narrator, the deaf interpreter writes on paper the information signed by a deaf client. Other labels include 'mirror interpreting' or 'shadow interpreting,' both of which involve the practice of replicating 'every grammatical feature of the message that the deaf client signs' (Boudreault 2005, p. 329). In some cases, deaf interpreters use speech instead of signs to interpret for a deaf client. In other cases, they engaged a wide variety of assignments ranging from 'consecutive interpreting' (Forestal, 2011) to 'television subtitle translations', 'ghost writing' or 'print translations' (Adam, et al., 2011), 'tactile signing' for deaf-blind people (Collins, 2014), 'team interpreting' (Bentley-Sassaman and Dawson, 2012), 'international signs' (Stone and Russell, 2013) and 'picture-drawing' and 'alphabetical signing' (Morgan and Adam, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach to research was adopted due to our focus being on a particular phenomenon (i.e. deaf interpreting) from the perspective of the research participants. The phenomenological approach provided us with a useful means for understanding 'lived experience' as seen through the eyes of deaf sign language interpreters. We took this approach by entering into their field of perception, to see life as these individuals see it. Using the phenomenological approach, we were not focused on biased ideas but rather on how a picture of the participants' social world could be formed (Creswell, 2007). The sampling design used was 'purposive sampling' in which judgement was used to select participants with the foreknowledge that they could provide answers that are necessary for the research. This involved matching participants' background with selection criteria based on country of origin, hearing status, school, language, and interpreting experiences. Participants were selected on the basis that they were deaf and work as sign language interpreters in Ireland. The researcher invited 8 candidates to attend an individual interview and 5 agreed to be interviewed. The gender breakdown of these participants are: 3 female and 2 male. Due to the number of participants available in the country, it was not possible to gain gender balance. Each of the five participants has been given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality: Betty, Chris, David, Laura and Olivia. The following table introduces the study participants:

Hearing interpreters were not selected because they do not share the experience of being deaf. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, and the small sample size allowed for thorough investigation as required for the study. Irish Sign Language (ISL) was the main medium for data administration.

Table 1
Demography of participants

Names (pseudonyms)	Age	Qualification	Years of practice
Betty	57	None	Since childhood
Chris	54	Local accreditation	Since childhood
David	44	Higher Education Diploma in ISL interpreting	Since childhood
Laura	57	Deaf interpreting accreditation outside Ireland	Since childhood
Olivia	39	Local accreditation	8

INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview process was semi-structured, and face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants and video-recorded in ISL. They were later transcribed in English. Prior to the interviews, participants signed the consent form on the understanding that their participation was voluntary. This form included a short description of why this research was being carried out. They were informed of their right to confidentiality (using pseudonyms) and to withdraw at any time. That is, de-identification procedure by which personally identifiable information fields within a data record are replaced by one or more artificial identifiers, or pseudonyms. Permission to be video-recorded and quoted was granted. In addition, participants were informed that video-recording could stop at any time during the proceedings. The interview guide employed in the study covered topics such as family, school, hearing interpreters, education, training and qualification. Analytical questions were asked in order to gain a deeper knowledge of the individual's feelings and opinions. We used a series of open-ended questions and exercised a degree of flexibility with questions to make sure information flowed from the participants. The aim was 'to gain information on the perspectives, understanding and meanings constructed by people regarding the events and experiences of their lives' (Grbich 1999, p. 85). Each interview session lasted one hour and was recorded on camcorder. A flexible approach to interview questions was adopted using a combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviewing techniques (Creswell, 2007). The aim was to gain insight into the participants' thoughts, feelings, emotions, views and experiences. A list of closed and open-ended questions was prepared: for example, 1) What was it like for you when you were interpreting or translating? 2) Tell me something about your experience of interpreting; 3) Describe your experience of taking part in training; 4) what are your views about professional training and qualifications? Following an interview, issues raised during casual conversations and observations of body language and facial expression were noted while memories of the interview were still fresh.

DATA ANALYSIS

The video-recorded interviews were uploaded onto a computer from a digital camcorder. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and recordings revisited to gain a deeper understanding of context (Flick, 2002). Transcripts were returned to participants for validation purposes. With

the agreement of participants, all identifiable contents in the transcript such as place names and geography were removed. The returned transcripts were then analysed using the 'thematic interpretive approach' (Miles and Huberman, 1994) with the following questions used as prompts to help identify emerging themes, categories and ideas: What were people doing? How did this happen? What is the meaning of what they said? The questions helped us write a list of words and phrases that link the topic of sign language interpreting with the concept of professionalism. Statements relating to the participants' description of experiences of ISL interpreting were extracted and categorized by looking at 'how' the participants experience interpreting and 'what' they experienced in relation to professional practice. This approach helped us find all possible meanings and perspectives of the phenomenon in order to find a deeper meaning to the experience. We then formulated meanings from the statements and categorized them into themes around childhood, school, family, deaf club, social settings and employment. The process concluded by integrating the themes into description and structure of the phenomenon of 'lived experiences' of sign language interpreting.

RESULTS

In presenting the results of the study, we situate our understanding of the participants' experiences and their interpreting practice in the world of school and the deaf community. We look at the forces that sustain their continuous engagement with interpreting practice. In particular, we look at the factors that promote their investment in developing interpreting skills from childhood to adulthood. The intricate skills learned in childhood form part of their developing career as interpreters, which influences the way they perceive themselves as professionals.

THEME 1: TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING IN FAMILY AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Participants reported that the family context often created opportunities for 'interpreting.' For example, two participants, David and Chris, come from hearing families. Their parents and siblings have no knowledge of ISL. Both of them attended special schools for deaf children as boarders. When they were home with their family during school holidays, one of their school friends called to see them. David and Chris describe the situation as follows:

> David: One day, my friend called to see me at home. I was about five years of age at the time. Both of us signed to each other. We did this without thinking about what we were doing. It was a natural thing for us to do. My parents were watching us. They wanted to know what we were talking about, so I told them. My parents asked him what he wanted for dinner. I was interested in sign language…. I remember it so well because it was my first experience at relay interpreting.

> Chris: When I was home for the summer holidays, my friend visited me. I was about 12 or 13 years old. My parents tried to talk to him but he could not understand them. I signed what my parents had asked him. Then I spoke and told my parents what my friend said in signs. I didn't know that what I was doing was called relay interpreting.

This perception of themselves as 'relay interpreters' stems from the children's act of conveying information from family member to friend and vice versa. Instead of engaging in simultaneous interpreting, they said 'this is what she said' and 'he said that…' When their friend spoke directly to a family member, he could not make himself understood. The friend then relied on David and Chris to tell them what he had said. The process is might best be described as consecutive rather than simultaneous interpreting.

Participants also reported that the school context played an important role in how and why they started engaging in the practice of 'interpreting' in the classroom. For example, Chris and David point out that their teacher's lack of ISL skills affected how they communicated in the classroom. The students were forbidden to use ISL and had to rely on lip reading the teacher. While this created a barrier to class instructions, Chris and David had enough hearing that they were able to understand the teacher and relay information to the rest of the class. For example,

> Chris: When my teacher left, a new teacher came into the classroom. I explained (translated) to the boys what the teacher was saying. The teacher depended on me, so I relayed information to the other boys.

> David: Yes, I waited until the teacher turned around to write on the blackboard. He could not see us, so I was able to relay information to the class. We all supported each other. I told them what the teacher was saying. If the teacher was talking directly to me, I was under pressure to lip-read.

Although school policy prohibiting ISL and teacher's lack of ISL skills made it difficult for the children to understand class instructions, they had the effect of helping David and Chris develop interpreting skills. These skills proved useful after they finished school. Other participants felt more positively disposed to doing translation work when they joined the deaf social club. One participant recall being asked to translate letters and newspaper articles for a deaf member.

> Betty: I translated letters into ISL for deaf people. Sometimes a letter from a bank or the tax office. One day, a deaf person wanted to write a letter of complaint. I helped write the letter while he signed what he wanted to say in the letter.

Participants stated that they offered translation work on a voluntary basis (e.g. see David's comment below). Betty, for example, provided a valuable voluntary service to deaf people, particularly those who had literacy problems. She found the experience was real a source of learning for her career as professional interpreter. It created in her a desire to continue doing interpreting work. At the time, Betty had no real idea what the future held for her. There were no interpreter training available in the country which might have inspired her to undertake training and embark on an interpreting career. The timeframe was in the 1980s when the Institute of Interpreters was established and headed by a hearing interpreter. Back then, the idea of sign language interpreting was strongly associated with hearing people.

THEME 2: DEAF INTERPRETERS' EXPERIENCE OF BECOMING PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS

The next theme to emerge from the data was designated 'becoming professional interpreters' with the word 'becoming' implying a period of transition, where participants moved from being in voluntary towards doing paid interpreting work. The idea of being in paid employment is directly linked to Alley's (2019) conceptualization of professionalism. Although some participants worked in a voluntary capacity in the past, all of them had done paid interpreting work.

> David: My first professional interpreting job was done in my early 20s. I remember because it was the first time I got paid. I was delighted to be getting paid because for so long I had been a volunteer interpreter.

Chris: It was not part of my job to do interpreting but my boss asked me to do it for a hearing social worker who had basic ISL, and a deaf client. I had no choice. Yes, I got paid but it felt odd.

While all participants valued their time doing interpreting work, some were critical of the lack of interpreting work available to deaf interpreters:

Chris: Sometimes I am asked to do film work, like translate subtitles into ISL. I get interpreting work maybe 3 or 4 times a year… more ad hoc or spontaneous. Therefore, I don't see interpreting as a good career for me so I work freelance instead. Of course I get paid for doing interpreting or translating, but for me it is not an occupation, like a real job.

Chris: They [interpreting agency] didn't offer me much work. I had something like 3 assignments in one year. Hearing interpreters get more work, something like 4 or 5 assignments a week, or more.

Participants were asked a series of questions related to the concept of professionalism, including their perception of themselves as professionals. The questions elicited answers indicating that they equated professionalism with getting paid for interpreting. More probing questions led to interesting findings where participants equated professionalism with having the necessary training and qualifications.

THEME 3: DEAF INTERPRETERS' VIEWS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

The desire to undertake professional training courses in interpreting was evident in the views shared by the participants regarding their interpreting knowledge and skills. Some of the participants had completed an assessment with SLIS while others qualified through participation in the Horizon program. Others qualified through local agency-led accreditation.

Olivia: Someone encouraged me to go for the accreditation session. I knew I had interpreting skills but I didn't want to go because I had no training. I was nervous.

Laura: I wanted to do the accreditation but I kept saying to myself, 'no, I don't have any training.' A hearing ISL interpreter said that I didn't need training because I had enough work experience. All I had to do was do the exam. Looking back, I'm glad I went for it. I'm very grateful… I'm now registered with the agency.

Some participants expressed a strong desire to undertake interpreting training courses offered at university but were not prepared to give up their current full-time job due to the risk of getting very little work.

Betty: I wanted to be a qualified deaf interpreter….hearing interpreters gained an interpreting qualification after they had done the accreditation. I was an experienced interpreter but had no training or qualification in sign language interpreting.

Chris: I was fully aware that I was not a qualified interpreter….I didn't know anything about a code of ethics. I needed formal training.

There was an acknowledgement from the participants that the successful completion of the agency accreditation assessment did not mark the end of their learning required to be professional interpreters. They developed knowledge and experience from interpreting work. Some participants, however, were unclear about their status because the qualification was not nationally recognized compared to graduates of the Deaf Studies program (interpreting) at

Centre for Deaf Studies, TCD. Others such as David and Betty had more training opportunities from which they obtained a qualification:

> David: I was very young when I went abroad to do an interpreting course at university. The course helped improve my knowledge of interpreting. For example, I discovered new terms like 'relay interpreter' and 'deaf interpreter.'

> Betty: I did a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course for deaf interpreters [outside Ireland]. I was trained by a famous deaf interpreter. I also attended a lot of interpreting workshops here, which was important.

In the interviews, there were clear indications that participants were dissatisfied with what they perceived to be a lack of professional training and qualifications *specifically* for deaf interpreters similar to what is currently being offered in Germany where deaf students can undertake a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sign Language Interpreting from the University of Hamburg (Rathmann, 2014). The program has been modelled on the course taught to hearing students and designed specifically for deaf interpreters. Some participants expressed a general feeling of disappointment regarding what they saw as a lack of available deaf interpreter training courses and workshops in Ireland. However, these comments pre-date the deaf interpreting workshops that have been organized in recent times.

THEME 4: DEAF INTERPRETERS' PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES AS PROFESSIONALS

In exploring the theme of being a professional, three main areas emerged: perceptions of relations with hearing ISL interpreters, perceptions of relations with deaf clients, and perceptions of relations with public bodies (e.g. police).

PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONS WITH HEARING ISL INTERPRETERS

Some participants displayed a sensitivity to the power context in deaf/hearing interpreter relations. This was evident in how participants felt about their qualifications but this was more particularly cute when they judged their professional interpreter identity on the basis of how hearing interpreters perceived them:

> Betty: I have sometimes been mistaken for a special needs assistant (SNA) working in the deaf school.

Betty clarified this by stating that deaf SNAs often operate in a subordinate role to hearing teachers in a classroom environment because they do not have a professional teaching qualification. For example, they have been known to perform interpreting duties during class which is above and beyond their prescribed role. Betty argues that by promoting role comparison, the hearing interpreter was attempting to solidify deaf interpreter's stigma associated with occupying a low social role. Similarly, when David expressed a wish to join an established interpreting group, a hearing interpreter discouraged him.

> David: I see myself as a professional deaf interpreter. However, I know a few hearing interpreters who don't see me the same way. When I expressed a wish to join an interpreting group, they said: 'No, you can't. We don't need deaf people on board.' Others said: 'I'm not sure,' or 'I don't know about that.'

When asked why this was the case, David's response was, 'sometimes they don't treat me as equal to hearing interpreters. I am used to it.' To the question, 'why did they not treat deaf

interpreters as equals?' he replied: 'because they think we are deaf clients….we cannot be interpreters.' This is a perception that is also pointed out by Laura in the following quote:

> Laura: I was told by a hearing interpreter that deaf interpreters should not be involved in interpreter organizations, that they were more like clients than professionals. How sad. I know other interpreters who disagree with her but there are a few who have the same opinion.

The link between deaf interpreter and deaf client conferred to Laura and David the status of being subordinate to hearing interpreter. The following extract from Betty illustrate this point:

> Betty: Sometimes a hearing interpreter took control by leading the interpreting situations. I felt excluded which affected my confidence. I think the hearing interpreter did not expect to be working with me. She may have felt that my being there made her look incompetent. She did not want me to work with her. She didn't realise that the agency had booked both of us… not my decision.

The assumption of negativity was underpinned by the hearing interpreter's fear of being viewed as incapable of performing her duties independently if she was in partnership with a deaf interpreter. This fear was also present in findings from previous research in the field reported by Bentley-Sassaman, and Dawson (2012).

PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONS WITH DEAF CLIENTS

One participant reported that a deaf client did not understand the role of deaf interpreters. Tensions and contradictions arose when the participants attempted to explain her role in the interpreting situation. For instance, she stated that many deaf clients often did not have a good understanding of her job especially when she was working with a hearing interpreter.

> Betty: One deaf client did not know what a deaf interpreter was supposed to do. He had not heard of the term 'deaf interpreter.' He assumed I was there to support him. When I explained that my role was to interpret, he was surprised. He said: 'You an interpreter? No, I don't need another one.'

With this lack of knowledge common among deaf clients, Betty believed it important for the deaf interpreter to explain clearly her role in team interpreting.

> Betty: I always try to make sure the deaf client understands what was going on. One time after the end of a hospital appointment, a client kept asking me personal questions. She saw me as a friend or confidant. This can be hard if the client doesn't see you as a professional.

When a deaf interpreter works with the deaf client for a period of time, the client tends to develop a strong sense of trust. This allows the client feel comfortable enough to open up by signing about intimate details. This can happen when there is a pause in the interpreting activity and other people are engaged in conversation. This can also lead the client assuming the deaf interpreter is a friendly confidant or peer rather than professionals.

PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONS WITH PUBLIC BODIES

Some participants report examples of intentional or unintentional social exclusion by public body representatives such as the Garda (Police) which rendered the deaf interpreter invisible. For example, David describes his experience of working in a Garda station:

David: I worked with a hearing interpreter at a Garda station where a deaf person was held in custody. The Garda treated me like I was invisible. He never looked at me. Instead he focused his attention on the hearing interpreter by asking her questions. I don't think the Garda saw me as a professional. When we were discussing the date of the next appointment, the Garda turned to the hearing interpreter and asked her when she was available. He did not check with me at all. There are some people who cannot imagine that a deaf person could be a professional.

David believed that some people lacked the patience to listen to what he had to say. He was referring to the kind of behavior that sent a message to anyone who was present that his views and opinions were not important and therefore not worthy of attention. This raises questions about standards and procedures to follow with regard to how people behave towards deaf interpreters and how this should be dealt with. On the other hand, it may be difficult to translate theoretical knowledge into real life situations.

THEME 5: DILEMMAS AND DECISIONS

Some participants express the view that knowing the deaf clients' cultural and linguistic needs as well as being confident about decisions are necessary. Although participants did not use the word 'autonomy' during interviews, they identified knowledge and confidence as important attributes for deaf interpreters especially when faced with situations that create dilemmas and require effective decision-making skills.

Chris: We were in the psychologist's room. The deaf client sat in a corner. There were two social workers present [in] the room [including] the psychologist... The hearing interpreter and myself were also present. The client felt intimidated by the number of professionals in the room. Everyone was talking. Using school-based signs, she shared some information about herself. She did not want others to know. One of the social workers asked me to interpret for the group. At the same time, the client signed quickly, 'no, no, don't tell them!'

In the situation described above, the deaf interpreter demonstrated knowledge of 'sign-based signs,' which refers to idiosyncratic signs learned at a school for deaf girls. The client implored with Chris not to reveal to the social worker what she had said. This left him with a predicament: should he tell the social worker or do as the client's wishes? The next comment illustrate how Chris created the social conditions of relational autonomy necessary to support the participants in the interpreting situation (Witter-Merithew and Nicodemus, 2012).

Chris: I was faced with a kind of dilemma that I had not been trained to deal with. To tell or not to tell? I explained to the girl that it was my job to interpret at the meeting, that anything she signed will be translated. She understood, so I signed her comments to the hearing interpreter who then interpreted in spoken language. It was not easy to make that decision.

This relational autonomy was exercised in the social context and social relations of professional interpreting practice. The client's understanding that David's job to interpret what she had said indicates an acceptance of responsibility that goes along with the disclosure of personal information to the interpreter. In another example of relational autonomy, Chris is figuring out the client's school background to help him understand that the client had limited ISL.

Chris: We were all sitting in a large room: the solicitors, barristers, social worker, hearing interpreter and myself, with the deaf client who was being charged with a crime.

The meeting was about an impending court case. The barrister asked the client: 'Are you going to plead guilty or not guilty?' The client didn't understand the meaning of the word 'guilty.' I told the group I needed more time to explain the meaning of the word. I used different signs to help him understand what he was being asked. He nodded but it was clear he had no idea what I was talking about. I made the decision to introduce pictures showing a court room and the inside of a prison. I explained the difference between 'guilty' and 'guilt' and he said he understood. It was a tricky situation.

Chris added that he had turn to the legal team to explain the client's school background. When he was attending school, the client was placed in a segregated building separated from the main school building. Some of the signs used were associated with that particular school house. In doing so, Chris promoted a condition of relational autonomy in the social context of school. Chris said that he had consulted with the hearing interpreter about this particular task before communicating with the legal team members.

One participant demonstrates a degree of accountability – another attribute of professionalism in the following extract where she found herself having to justify her actions or decisions:

Laura: I had an interpreting job at the Garda station one night. The Garda asked me if the client was lying. It was not my job to determine whether the person was lying or not. My job was to interpret for the Garda and deaf client. It was up to the officer to decide if the clients' comments were false. So, I told the officer it was not up to me to tell him, that I was there to interpret. I could not get involved in the investigation. I was glad that I made the right decision.

This interpretation of accountability as related to performance in having to justify actions is interesting. This pointed to an expectation that deaf interpreters should be accountable only in terms of their own prescribed roles and responsibilities. In justifying her decision to distance herself from the investigation, Laura recognised her own accountability as a deaf interpreter.

DISCUSSION

This study presented the findings of the interviews that were conducted with 5 deaf interpreters as part of the research study. The starting point is the key research questions that we attempted to answer: What are the professional experiences of deaf interpreters in Ireland? How do deaf interpreters perceive themselves as professionals? The interviews generated a considerable amount of data as participants discussed their perceptions of what it means to be a professional. The thematic statements were extracted from the raw data and categorized into five themes. The first theme, 'interpreting in family and school contexts,' looked at examples of deaf children engaging in what Bienvenu and Colonomos (1990) describe as 'delayed consecutive interpreting' in which one deaf person passes information to another deaf person after he or she has heard the words spoken by a hearing person (e.g. teacher or family member). The second theme, 'becoming professional interpreters,' acknowledges the importance of engaging in voluntary interpreting in the deaf social club centre as a means to enhancing interpreting skills and gaining valuable interpreting experience. The term 'becoming' denotes something that is transitional where participants move from being volunteers to becoming professional and the notion of 'professional' is equated with being in paid employment. The third theme, 'views about training and qualifications,' underscores the importance of professional training courses and qualifications as part of being a professional ISL interpreter. It also recognises the need for continuous training and development of interpreting skills as part of CPD with guidance from a professional body such as SLIS, CISLI and CDS. The fourth theme, 'perceptions of themselves as professionals' brings into focus how deaf interpreters are

perceived by hearing interpreters, public body representatives and deaf clients. The fifth theme, 'decisions and dilemmas' looks at examples of the conditions of relational autonomy and accountability. It found that relational autonomy appeared to be determined by social context and social relations.

The main point to emerge from the cluster of themes was that participants demonstrated awareness of what it means to be a professional. Their perspectives were also affected by how others perceived them as professionals. For instance, despite reporting a great sense of job satisfaction, the participants reported facing role stereotyping when fulfilling interpreting responsibilities. For example, deaf interpreters experienced discrediting when hearing interpreters associated them with deaf clients on the basis of having similar audiological identities. Similar to research by Reinhardt (2015), this implies a power imbalance where deaf interpreters are seen as subordinates in relation to hearing interpreters (Russell and Shaw, 2016). It also suggests the appearance of a deafness associated stigma. The term stigma is not only a physical mark but also a negative attribute or to use what Goffman (1963) terms 'a spoiled identity.' The question of how deaf interpreters deal with the stigma is beyond the scope of this study as research into this phenomenon necessitates a separate research project for the future. In this study, participants indicate that hearing interpreters see commonalities between themselves and SNAs due to the associated subordinate roles of SNAs in education contexts. The impact of role stereotyping by deaf clients appear to be minimal, perhaps because labels such as 'confidant' or 'advocate' contain more positive connotations of identity. This role misconception may be attributed to a lack of awareness on the part of deaf clients. The strong level of trust that clients built with deaf professionals allowed them to feel comfortable and this may have induced in them a belief that deaf people operate as a confidant. This study's findings also suggest that deaf interpreters experienced feelings of exclusion by public body representatives and hearing interpreters. Public body representatives are more likely to treat deaf interpreters as 'invisible' due to a failure to reconcile 'a deaf person' with the concept of what 'a professional' means (David). The findings correlate with Sforza's (2014) study illustrating how hearing interpreters are more likely to engage in occupational politics with each other while deaf interpreters have been found to be excluded from this dynamic. In contrast to how hearing interpreters and public body representatives perceived them, deaf interpreters in the present study were proud to identify as professional ISL interpreters and derived a great sense of satisfaction working in a hearing dominated profession (Boudreault 2005).

There was recognition that central to being a professional is having the required interpreting and translation skills and being in paid employment (Alley, 2019), professional training and qualifications (Bontempo et al., 2014) and knowledge of the deaf community (Adam et al. 2014). Much of these descriptions were allied closely with what Cruess and Cruess (2012, p. 260) described as 'a mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills' and what participants stated as 'knowledge of interpreting,' (David) and 'training or qualification in sign language interpreting' (Betty). These descriptions also fitted with England (1996) and Hoyle's (2001) understanding of professionalism as quality, qualification and competency. Such ideas are tied up with Bontempo et al.'s (2014) argument regarding sign language interpreting as a recognized profession. Deaf interpreters in this study demonstrated specialist skills in 'relay interpreting' (David) and 'translating letters' (Betty) and 'translating subtitles' (Chris) into sign language. This finding is in line with McDermid's (2010) research showing deaf interpreters' competency in the use of different modes of interpreting: interpreting, translating, gesturing, miming, tactile signing, picture-drawing and alphabetical signing. Although most of the participants are without nationally-recognized qualifications, many have demonstrated the quality, skills and competency necessary for professional interpreting (Adam, Aro, Druetta,

Dunne and Klintberg, 2014). The findings support Witter-Merithew and Nicodemus (2012) that relational autonomy is influenced by social relations and social context of sign language interpreting situations. In the social context of deaf interpreting, relational autonomy calls forth understanding deaf culture and the various idiosyncratic signs associated with particular school settings.

CONCLUSION

Although this article is a small sample study, the research's contribution is to highlight the challenges faced by the participants in the sign language interpreting profession. The findings strongly emphasize the need for improved institutional support programs for deaf interpreters in Ireland. Both the positive and negative experiences of deaf interpreters need to be publicized to raise awareness of the issues faced in their line of work. Unfortunately, time constraints did not permit a follow-up of the interview questions with the participants. For example, questions on how participants responded to the stigma associated with being deaf interpreters would have yielded a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. Nevertheless, we believe the results laid the groundwork for further study into this interesting phenomenon. Finally, the participants' strongly held beliefs about specialized professional training courses in Ireland merits further attention to understand the experience of pursuing professional training.

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