

ISSN: 1579-9794

**Inside Iranian Freelance Simultaneous Conference
Interpreters' Experience: A Thematic Analysis of Narratives**
**La experiencia de los intérprete simultáneo (trabajadores
autónomos) conferencia en Irán: Análisis temático de
declaraciones**

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Fecha de recepción: 27 de febrero de 2020

Fecha de aceptación: 5 de noviembre de 2020

Resumen: Aunque numerosos estudios han examinado las experiencias de los intérprete y los intérpretes simultáneos en diversos casos, pero relativamente pocos estudios han intentado examinar la experiencia de traductores autónomos en una conferencia en Irán, en la que un número creciente de conferencias internacionales está creando demanda de intérpretes de alta calidad para la conferencia. En este estudio, utilizamos el análisis cualitativo de los enunciados para abordar la experiencia de intérpretes simultáneos (autónomos) de la conferencia en Irán y explicamos el efecto de los factores subyacentes en la experiencia de su traducción oral. Dos formatos, la experiencia en la búsqueda de trabajo y la experiencia laboral, se derivan de ocho subtemas. En general, se describen la traducción oral en Irán como una tarea no profesional, lo que significa un evento temporal, intercambio de idiomas que es una tarea orientada a la capacidad. Estos hallazgos podrían ser de interés para muchas partes interesadas involucradas en la traducción e interpretación, así como para los médicos.

Palabras clave: declaraciones, intérpretes simultáneos autónomos, Irán, análisis temático, trabajo no profesional

Abstract: Although several studies have examined translators' and interpreters' experience in various contexts, relatively few studies have attempted to explore the freelance simultaneous conference interpreters' experience in the Iranian context where the increasing number of international conferences has created a demand for quality conference interpretation. In this study, we use qualitative analyses of narratives to delve into the experience story of freelance simultaneous conference interpreters in Iran and

explain the impact of contextual factors on their interpretation experience. Two themes, namely job-finding experience and on-the-job experience, were extracted from eight sub-themes. Overall, the narratives characterized interpreting in Iran as a non-professional occupation that amounts to an ad hoc event, language brokering, and ability-oriented task. The findings can raise some important considerations for stakeholders involved in the field of translation and interpretation studies as well as practitioners.

Keywords: Narratives, Freelance Simultaneous Conference Interpreters, Iran, Thematic Analysis, Non-professional occupation.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade or so, Iran has hosted many international conferences. This, on the one hand, has had much to do with the advancement of information and communication technologies and the swift pace of globalization (Pym, Grin, Sfreddo, & Chan, 2011). On the other hand, the establishments of the UNESCO Cluster Office in 2003, as well as Iran's adoption of a prospective view (Khoshandam, 2016) in international affairs and exchange of specialized knowledge in the last decade, has provided inspiration to share platforms for exchanging data on various areas through holding international conferences. The exponential rise in the number of international conferences, which are expected to be fulfilled with qualified interpreters, has brought a demand for more effective communication channels between the agents.

Recent moves in the sociology of translation and translator studies (Chesterman, 2009) inspired researchers to devote their attention to "the social formations of translators and interpreters as specific professional groups subject to their own social constraints, with their particular access to resources, their status struggles, and sense of professional selves" (Sela-Sheffy, 2016a: 131). The experience of the people who work as translators or interpreters and how they perceive their job and locate themselves as professionals, or otherwise, were the main focuses of most studies. Thus, what we know about the experience of interpreters is primarily based upon empirical studies that investigate the issue employing sociological theories of professionalism and status. Katan (2011), for example, studied translators' and interpreters' perceptions of their working world and the way the field of Translation Studies and university training programs have influenced this world. The results revealed that universities did not significantly affect the perception of the interpreters and that rather than pursue a degree in translation or interpretation, they preferred self-development. He maintained that within the profession-occupation dichotomy, interpreting falls into

occupation category where occupation can be viewed as the bundle of tasks that require some knowledge and skills while profession is an occupation that rests upon a systematic knowledge base, and formal prerequisites and examinations imposed by politically legitimate figures.

Taking an identity view towards professionalization, Sela-Sheffy (2016b) conducted a qualitative study to examine the status structure in different branches of the translational occupation. The results indicated a counter-professionalization trend is emerging in the field in Israel. Despite a growing demand for translators and interpreters in this country, practicing translation and interpreting is neither regularized by professional bodies nor recognized as officially registered professions.

Han (2014) conducted a diary study to explore real-life interpreting practice in China. He found interpreters face problems in their real-life practice: they are given insufficient time to prepare; they are expected to perform a wider variety of interpreting tasks than they thought; they are required to work both into and from their mother tongue.

Dam and Zethsen (2013) investigated the occupational status of Danish conference interpreters and translators employed in the EU. The authors intended to examine the translators' and interpreters' self-perception of their position on the status continuum, which is closely connected with professionalization. Out of eight, they drew upon four defining criteria for a profession proposed by Weiss-Gal & Welbourne (2008), namely remuneration, education/expertise, visibility/fame, and power/influence. They found that, in terms of remuneration, influence, and prestige, interpreters did not rate their occupational status significantly higher than translators. In relation to expertise and skills, both interpreters and translators consider themselves as highly skilled experts. As for visibility, the interpreters viewed themselves as moderately visible, while translators said they are invisible to the clients. However, the two groups were found to differ significantly in the way outsiders view them: unlike translation, interpreting is perceived to be a highly skilled activity.

The related studies in Iran addressed various issues involved in interpretation such as quality of male and female interpreting (Hasanshahi & Shahrokhi, 2016), strategies to deal with culture-specific terms (Asadi, 2013; Eskandari & Nejadansari, 2013), and challenges in the establishment of professional status for Iranian translators (Kafi, Khoshsaligheh & Hashemi, 2018).

The unprecedented rise in the need for communication across linguistic and cultural barriers and the complexity of real-world situations of interpreting

in different contexts call for studies on interpreters' working world to shed light on the professional status of this group. The present article follows Wayatt's developmental approach to expertise and professionalism, which, rather than emphasizing traits and criteria to define professional areas, holds there is a natural predisposition towards translation, which can progress to trained skills, competence, and expertise. The approach does not deny the necessity of training and education to move towards the professional/expertise end of the continuum. Yet, it states that "translation ability can evolve under favorable external circumstances (i.e., the need for translation services) and internal conditions (i.e., the translator's conscious effort to develop)" (Whyatt, 2017: 50). Moreover, an expert is "somebody skilled or knowledgeable: somebody with a great deal of knowledge about, or skill, training, or experience in, a particular field of activity" (Whyatt, 2017: 50).

Given that conference organizers are facing more and more demand for efficient conference interpreters, it looks like the time is ripe to let the conference interpreters' account of interpreting for conferences in Iran be heard. Assumedly, narratives are rich sources of information for learning about socio-psychological aspects of working conditions. As Baker (2016: 247) puts it, "Narrative is understood as a story that unfolds in time, with a (perceived) beginning and a (projected) end. A narrative is constructed and exploited; it is populated by participants, real or imaginary, human or non-human, in a configured relationship to each other and to the unfolding story." Narratives encompass information about people and social conditions (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) emphasize that continuity and interaction constitute the foundation of an experience. Continuity refers to the chain-like nature of experiences where later experiences build up from previous ones and modify the experiences that come after. Integrity implies individuals are connected with their social contexts, and as such, their experiences are shaped by the transaction between their needs, purposes, and capacities, and their environment. Thus, conference interpreters' experience of their interpreting career refers to that construction which is shaped by the interaction between the interpreters' schemes and the impact of the situational environment and other agents in their working life.

Using thematic analysis to investigate their narratives, the researchers could look into the interaction of various factors involved in shaping the interpreters' experiences. It is believed that interpreters' narratives can help us deepen our understanding of interpreters' job status and professionalization in Iran. Moreover, since their performance would mainly hang on working conditions, the quality of teamwork, and technical equipment

(AIIC 2011), much can be learned from studying the freelance simultaneous conference interpreters' (FSCI, henceforth) narratives.

1. THE CONTEXT OF IRAN

No official data exist regarding authorized or even active translators and interpreters in Iran. What is known is that freelance translators and interpreters abound in number (Kafi et al. 2018). We may assume that translation and interpreting are freelance careers in Iran, where the formal qualifications or licencing are not required to offer services. Currently, three official translator associations have been set up in Iran, namely the Iranian Association of Certified Translators and Interpreters (IACTI), Iranian Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA), and Tehran Translators and Interpreters' Association (TIAT) with the objective to raise translators' status, offer financial and moral support, and act as a link between translators and authoritative bodies (Kafi et al. 2018).

It is worth mentioning that the 4-year bachelor translation training program in Iran was established about three decades ago. The curriculum, which has only recently been refined, dated from 1990. Iranian universities do not offer any Interpreting program at graduate and postgraduate levels. There are three introductory courses on interpretation embedded within the translation training program at the BA level. At MA and Ph.D. levels, there are only limited courses that deal with theoretical aspects of interpretation. Professionals of this field in Iran are trained under the supervision of the Foreign Ministry and the Broadcasting Organization "without necessarily having to pass the academic prerequisites (Shafiei & Barati, 2015: 27). The program has been shown to fail to train translators and interpreters for the market demands (Khazaei Farid & Khoshsaligheh, 2010; Khoshsaligheh, 2014).

That not many interpreters in Iran are officially employed by institutions, and most of them are freelancers invited for interpretation on demand, provided the incentive for the authors to delve into the experience of conference interpreters as they describe their story of interpreting. Against this backdrop, this study took a qualitative thematic analysis to analyze the narratives of eight FSCIs with regard to their job as conference interpretation.

2. THE STUDY

This section, first, explains the sampling method used to select the participants. It then presents the data collection instrument and process, which is followed by data analysis.

2.1. Sampling method and participants

The current study employed snowball sampling for selecting the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). A peer debriefer (see section 2.3), who is an interpreter trainer introduced the first simultaneous conference interpreter. The research participants grew as the second author of the present study, who was also the interviewer, asked each participant to introduce other FSCIs as potential participants to be later interviewed. This type of sampling aims to have an intentional non-random selection of the participants who are representative of the population, have more information, and/or have experience in the central studies concepts being investigated (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

The end of the data collection process, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008), was determined by data saturation where no new information could be obtained from the participants. The data saturation resulted in a sample of eight FSCIs. Three participants were living in Isfahan and five in Tehran. To keep their identities hidden, a code was assigned to each participant. The detailed demographic information of the participants, as well as their professional information, is provided in Table 1.

Code	Gender	Age	Education	Years of Experience	Mode of Interpreting	Main Occupation
EN1	Male	32	B.A. in Translation	4	SCI* CCI*	EN* Teacher
EN2	Male	33	M.A in English Literature	4	SCI CCI WI* TI*	EN Teacher
EN3	Male	45	M.A in tourism mamagement B.A. in translation	1 0	SCI CCI	News Translator
EN4	Male	46	B.A. in Translation	1 3	SCI CCI WI	News Translator
AR1	Male	47	M.A. in other majors	1 0	SCI CCI	News Translator
EN5	Male	47	Ph. D. in TEFL Certificate in interpreting	1 4	SCI CCI WI	EN Teacher
AR2	Male	48	M.A. in Political science	1 6	SCI CCI TI	News Translator
EN6	Female	34	Ph. D. in TEFL	4	SCI CCI WI	Interpreter

SCI= Simultaneous Conference Interpreting
 CCI= Consecutive Conference Interpreting
 WI= Whispering Conference Interpreting
 TI= Telephone Conference Interpreting
 EN= English
 AR= Arabic
 TEFL= teaching English as a Foreign Language

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

As shown in Table 1, out of eight participants, only one was female. Five participants were above 40. Three majored in English translation at the BA level. Only one of the participants (the female one) had interpreting as her main occupation. The table also shows that only one participant worked in all

of the interpreting modes. It is worth mentioning that for six out of eight participants, the target language, B language, was English, and for one of them, it was Arabic. One interpreter, AR2, had Arabic as his mother tongue, A language, and Persian as the B language. For other participants, Persian was the A language. The participants' work experience ranged from 4 to 16 years, with an average of 9.37 years.

2.2. Data collection

Before collecting the data, each participant was given a consent form, designed based on Berkley University Sample Form. For data collection, open-ended, unstructured interviews, was used. The participants were asked to narrate their interpreting experience as a story. The interviews were conducted by the second author of the present research. The site of interviews, as recommended by Bogdam and Biklen (2003), was set by the participants for their convenience. Interviews with 4 participants took place in their offices, with 3 in a park, and one of them was conducted online using Telegram messenger version 4.2. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer introduced herself, described the aim of the study, and obtained their informed consent. She abstained from verbal comments and showed her interest and attentive listening with non-verbal signals and paralinguistic reactions to encourage the participants to continue their narration (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The interviewer acted as a facilitator rather than a director so that the participants take the central role in the way the interviews would proceed. All the interviews were recorded to enable transcription.

2.3. Data analysis

The present study employed an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) since the emerging themes were linked to the narrations of the participants and bore little relationship to any specific research question. "Inductive analysis is, therefore, a process of coding the data *without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 12). The recorded data were transcribed after each interview session. Once the researchers had transcribed each interview, they imported the data to MAXQDA Plus 12 (Release 12.3.2) software to be sorted, organized, and coded.

The coding procedure started with reading and rereading each narrative to check the data content. More than 50 initial codes were initially generated and established in the software from the transcripts. That part of the data

where each initial code was extracted was attached to the codes, together with a written memo to define the code and provide a first-hand analysis for the excerpt related to that code (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The researchers used comparative analysis to find similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The data analysis process at the second stage generated two main themes, and each theme implied several subthemes. The coding process ended when the researchers decided the conceptual saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

It is worthy of note that the coding process was not unproblematic. To address subjectivity involved with the coding process in thematic analysis, and to enhance the rigor in this approach, five of the transcripts were independently coded by the co-researcher. Wherever the researchers disagreed on the codes, a peer debriefer was consulted to resolve the issue.

To meet the trustworthiness criteria, transferability, confirmability, credibility, and dependability were established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). To enhance the transferability and confirmability of the conclusions, the researchers tried to provide a detailed description of the context by providing an overview of the participants and the coding process. Furthermore, a peer debriefer was consulted in every step of the research to enhance credibility and dependability. The peer debriefer of the present study was himself an SCI and an interpreter trainer.

The credibility of the conclusions was also addressed by member checking (Creswell, 1998). The general themes were sent via emails to three participants as member checks. They replied after three days. None of them disagreed with any theme and two of them mentioned some unnoticed points.

3. RESULTS

The coding process resulted in two dominant themes that could represent the Iranian FSCIs' experience: 1. Job-finding-experience, and 2. On-the-job experience (Table 2). While some of the subthemes overlapped with what has been portrayed in the existing literature, others could be viewed as context-specific issues that might provide significant insight into the contribution of contextual factors in a particular setting. In the following subsections, the themes will be presented along with the related subthemes. Some original data extracted from the narratives are presented in each subsection.

Themes	subthemes
Job-finding-experience	Unsolicited job offer

	Social capital Advertisement
On-the-job experience	Knowledge and skill demand Preparation for a conference Intrinsic satisfaction Extrinsic satisfaction The locus of the problem

Table 2: Themes and subthemes extracted from FSCIs' narratives

3.1 Job-finding-experience

Once the participants had introduced themselves, they began their story describing the way they found their job. Job-finding experience as one of the main themes contained three subthemes: unsolicited joboffer, social capital, and advertisement.

Out of eight participants, four mentioned that they were not seeking jobs and happened to be an FSCI. For instance, EN1 said:

I was doing hotel and hospitality courses when Mr. X, who taught the English course on hospitality, asked me if I wanted to interpret in conferences, and I said: "yes if I can, it would be really cool." You see, I actually stumbled on the career.

He further emphasized, "I entered the job fortuitiously." Another participant, EN2, said, "I entered into the conferences for accompanying foreign guests, and then was chosen for simultaneous interpreting." Although he did not deny the role of his interest, he explained he did not look for the job, but the job came after him.

EN3 shared his experience of job finding by reporting:

...I saw Mr. Y came and said, 'Run, Run!' I asked, 'Why?' He added, 'don't ask anything. I'm telling you just come with me'. Well, literally, he pushed me into the studio, put the headphones on my ears, and.... I asked, 'What is all this about?' He said I should run the program. I said, 'No way!' He said, 'We have heard you can... start, I know you can'. That was the beginning of my experience as a CI.

Having social capital was the reported experience of three participants. In this regard, EN6 stressed the role of having job contacts in finding a job for translators in Iran:

See, it is the matter of having relations and connections, um....you know, what matters is who you know. I was introduced by one of my friends who has been doing conference interpreting for over eight years in Tehran. And, there is more to it than that; even that friend of mine had contacts who could match him to the job.

EN5, the only participant who had attended certificate interpreting programs, said:

Well, sure, I was interested in the job, but as to how I entered, I came across a job advertisement in the Hamshahri newspaper. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs needed an interpreter, and I took the exams.

On the one hand, the above narratives highlight that rather than using a systematic hiring process, most FSCI employers use informal methods and channels for hiring interpreters. On the other hand, not all interpreters are employed based on their knowledge and skills. This can imply that employers may perceive the job as a low-skilled job. Although these narratives can be interpreted as if the employers are prone to simply trust the interpreters' skills and knowledge, paying close attention to the way employers' behavior is reported can indicate that interpretation is viewed as a career that can be immediately available without any effective candidate evaluation process.

3.2. On-the-Job experience

The second emerged theme was the participants' experience of working as an FSCI in Iran. As shown in Table 2, the theme contained five subthemes: knowledge and skill demand, preparation for a conference, intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic job satisfaction, and the locus of the problem.

The participants had mixed responses about whether interpreting requires professional knowledge and skill. While most of the participants (n=5) stated that the job requires formal education to be offered by professionals, three participants seemed to perceive interpreting as an occupation that can be performed by any near bilingual requiring no special training. Concerning the knowledge and skill demand of the job, EN5 reported:

I took and passed professional translation and interpreting courses, for around seven years... [it started] before my first experience, and continued even after I started as an FSCI. It is not what most people and interpreters think. You need training; you need to acquire some skills and develop them, for example, how to deal with ideological issues. The point is that, unfortunately, we don't have anything as on-the-job training courses for interpreters in Iran.

AR1 and EN4 gave prominence to the role of being professionally trained, obtaining qualifications by attending programs at the university level, and meeting the technical requirements of interpreting activity. AR1 said:

I need to know what to do in a particular situation when I encounter problems; see, it is a decision-making process; the decisions cannot be made off-the-cuff. I mean, you have to decide what to do instantly, but you should be able to say why you made that decision.

EN2 said he did not assume the job requires a high level of specialized knowledge and skill. He explained:

I liked to enter into the field, but I did not mean simultaneous interpreting; I mean, tourism and taking tourists and stuff like that was something I was interested in, but to be honest, I think, although my degree has nothing to do with translation and interpreting, I am doing as well as my other colleagues. I think since my major was literature, I am even a better option because, usually, English literature students have a better command of English.

The narratives describe the mixed perceptions of the participants with regard to their job as an occupation or profession.

Preparation for conferences was another reported aspect of their on-the-job experience. The participants mentioned the significance of having time to familiarize themselves with the subject matter, content, and specialized terminology of the conference theme. Concerning preparation, two positions were found in the narratives.

A group of them (n=4) acknowledged the importance of pre-conference preparation and having general ideas about the topic, but reported they agreed to run a conference without this requirement being met, and even if they are asked to do so on short notice. Most of the participants in this group agreed that periods as short as a week are not enough for an interpreter to prepare her/himself for a conference the theme of which is new to her/him. For example, EN4 said:

Interpreters are not walking encyclopedias; I know I cannot, um, be a good interpreter in economics, a good interpreter in politics, or science. If in a conference, um, these are not treated as separate areas requiring different interpreters, the result won't be good. But, I honestly accept any offer on whatever topic and whenever it comes.

AR2 stated:

Interpreters should have information about the topic of the conference. For example, if I go, um, to the ambassadors of the

Middle East countries, to interpret a conference there, ... well I have to know how things are in the Middle East; what is, for example, Iraq's position on, um, a particular issue; what do Palestinians say, what do Syrians say, what do Iranians say.... In reality, we do not know who the speaker is; we do not have any manuscript; sometimes, we prepare ourselves by looking through a list of words related to the conference topic.

The tendency to accept interpreting in conferences without preparation might be attributed to their willingness to estimate their abilities and their intention to improve their interpreting skills by experiencing different situations. Although not overtly mentioned, their tendency can equally be attributed to their motivation for making money. In this regard, EN1 said:

I feel simultaneous interpreters in other countries have a better situation than us. I feel the reason is that, um..., they do it more regularly than us, ... they are put in the situation more frequently, and this helps them, ... um, to feel comfortable to have words ready,... um, ... but we [interpreters] cannot do anything to have more conferences, if there are more conferences that's ok but, the interpreters, if they had free time, they could work on their interpreting performance.

The participant believed that there are a limited number of conferences in Iran. On the other hand, he stated that they need to experience real situations to become more proficient.

The second group (n=4), though, explained they would agree to interpret only when they are familiar with the topic of the conference and have enough time to prepare themselves in advance. EN2 shared his anger with some conference organizers:

We tell those who call us if your conference's subject is specific, you should tell us a week or two earlier and specify the subject; tell us its specific domain. Sending just some power points is not always enough, or for example, don't say psychology, the psychology of what, and then we'll tell you if this is our job or not, and if it is, we need time to get ready for the task.

What is inferred from the narrative is that FSCIs do not regularly receive the related documents; if they do, they do not have sufficient time to cover them and study some relevant supporting materials.

Apart from the experience of conference interpretation, the narratives revealed some characteristics of FSC interpreting in Iran that provoke degrees of job appraisal, which was named intrinsic job satisfaction. Three features of interpreting were put under the on-the-job sub-theme: the job brings them self-

confidence, gives them pleasure and contentment, and makes them experience self-worth.

For example, EN3 said, "the job involves a good amount of travel to different parts of the country and it is good and it is fantastic." EN4 stated that:

Simultaneous interpreting gives you a good feeling, when um, you have a large number of audience, ... it feels good, you are proud of yourself because you think you are introducing a concept to a large number of people who don't know [it] or know a little about it, and the result is that you are motivated to stay in the job.

Moreover, half of the participants (n=4) stated their satisfaction with the job because they thought it boosts their confidence. AR2 said:

In my opinion, it (interpreting) is really useful for getting more and more self-confidence, ... um, well, especially if the interpreter, is in a situation that, [s/he can be] among people, this boosts her/his self-confidence, gives her/him a good feeling, you feel your job is necessary to these events.

The above-mentioned responses might imply that they perceive this job as a means for self-empowerment and self-esteem to manage and satisfy their in-built need for development. In fact, intrinsic job satisfaction can be perceived to be derived from those factors which instigate self-accomplishment.

Notwithstanding the features that give causes for job satisfaction, they referred to some external features attributable to issues such as workplace stress, low income, and the sense of thinking positively of oneself. Interestingly, the analysis of the narratives demonstrated, unlike intrinsic features of interpreting, extrinsic features are less closely linked with job satisfaction.

One source of dissatisfaction was occupational stress, i.e., the tension they experience when interpreting at a conference. They also accentuated the impact of heavy workload and busy schedule on their stress level. For instance, EN3 commented, "*Sometimes, there is a heavy workload, ... I remember, once I wanted to say something else but since I was tired and under high pressure, I couldn't clearly say the phrase and the meaning changed and it caused trouble.*"

The adverse effect of stress on the quality of interpreting has also been mentioned by Pochhacker (2003). In the member check process, one of the participants stated that occupational stress could be a positive and enjoyable

factor if only professional working situation and facilities could be provided in a conference.

The occupational stress and the existing working situation discourages many interpretation volunteers from entering into the adventure, as believed by some participants. EN4 revealed an interesting point about novice interpreters, *"I know many people who, on seeing the working condition, decide they want neither its bounty nor its haughty."*

Almost all the participants (n=7) believed FSC interpreting in Iran is a low-paid job. The participants expected their demanding job to be balanced against a fair income. AR2 pointed out:

As for the payment, I think the facts speak for themselves. I don't know many interpreters who can live their lives just by interpreting. As far as I know, interpreting is not a full-time job for many Iranian people." EN6, the only participant whose main occupation was interpretation, added, "the payment is not fixed, and it is not reasonable; moreover, most translators and interpreters are on zero-hour contracts; they are invited to interpret when required, when there is an international conference. And, as you may know, there is no insurance.

However, some common concepts emerged from the participants' responses, which rooted in their satisfaction with the honor, respect, and prestige attached to the job. For example, interpreters reported that in Iran, they receive public respect. At least people recognize the value of their career and consider it as a high-status job. EN4 reported:

In comparison to translators, interpreters are more respected and valued in Iran because not only interpreting is more difficult than translation, but also everyone who knows a little bit of a foreign language tries his hand in translation, but not in interpreting.

AR2 said, "We are treated as high-rank officials, thank God, they (people) respect us, and I think this is the nice part of the job."

The last subtheme, the locus of the problem, emerged from those part of the participants' narration which reflected what gives rise to the challenges they face in their workplace in the context of Iran. All the extracted data collated to generate the sub-theme revealed that they referred to the challenges they face in their workplace and, in the end, put forward their hypotheses as to the source of the problems. The subtheme was extracted from four codes: misconception of the hiring staff, workplace culture, interpreters, and training courses.

The first code refers to how the hiring staff or the conference organizers view interpreters and interpreting (n=6). For this group of people, as the participants reported, interpreters are those human beings who know more than a language, are responsible for everything that goes wrong in the conference, do not have a significant role in the conference, and do not deserve to be paid much.

In this regard, EN4 shared his frustration with most of the conference organizers in Iran:

Well, the point is that we do receive little attention from our bosses and organizers. They never appreciate us and the things we do; they underestimate us. If we just say something, I mean if there is any objection from interpreters, the organizers retort: "that's the way it is," or "this is not such a big deal," and sort of 'you are not moving mountain here,' "if you cannot do this, there are lots of other people out there to be called for interpreting."

In the narratives of the participants, the researchers could find parts that could depict the dominant culture of the workplace. Almost all the participants' descriptions of their working experience exhibited references to some intractable problems traceable in the workplace culture of Iran. The features could be attributed to the mental constructs of people involved in the working world rather than technical issues. Non-synergistic bend of mind, result-orientedness, valuing quiet interpreters, competition spirit, and lack of systematic incentive system were the salient sources of the problem.

With regard to the non-synergistic bend of mind on the part of the people involved, the participants (n=5) directly or indirectly stated that Iranian are not good at mutual collaboration; they mostly fail in teamwork, and do not know how much collaboration may contribute to their up-datedness.

Almost half of the narratives reflected taking the process for granted and overlooking its role in improving quality. EN6, for example, mentioned:

I have been doing interpretation for four years, and I have not seen anyone care about howness; all they are concerned about is the result of our job. If we make a mistake, no one cares about the reason behind it to prevent something bad. They don't ask you if you can run the program for two hours non-stop, if you need anything, if you have any problem, nothing.

Three participants pointed out that those interpreters who do not say anything and quietly do what they are assigned to do are valuable assets. AR1 said, "as soon as you object, you become the bad guy, you know, they don't come to you for conferences anymore, they like silent employees."

Two expressed their resentment against the dominant culture of encouraging competition in all the institutions. EN4 mentioned:

Here, as you know, since our childhood, we are, sort of, encouraged to compete with our friends, we are always compared with each other; if our parents, or now our bosses want to make us change or improve ourselves, they compare us with others. Another thing is that, instead of exchanging information, we hide new information from each other. If I am successful in my job, I don't say what I do.

The participants' descriptions indicate the internalized shared values that shape the core of workplace culture in Iran. Their experience might imply the orientation of people involved in the conference interpreting could strongly affect the task of interpreting.

While the participants mentioned a range of problems faced by interpreters in Iran, they (n=5) agreed that the interpreters themselves can be the source of, at least, some challenges. On the one hand, they confessed that most of them do not have an excellent command of their B language and are not professionally skilled; on the other hand, they do not even try to improve their skills. Moreover, they stated they do not demand reasonable wages and refrain from their voice being heard so much so that employers do not take them and their career seriously.

EN3 shared what once happened in a conference:

.... she was interpreting; everything was going smoothly at the conference until, towards the end of the event, the host said, in Persian: *lotfan sokhanran azizemun ra babate sokhanrani amoozandeshoon tashvigh befarmaeed* (lets' put our hands together for Mr. X and his informative speech). The interpreter translated like: Now let's encourage our speaker for his informative speech. She mixed up this *Tashvigh konid* (applause) with that one (encourage). What do you think happened next? Nothing. Cases like this happened in the future. She knows her English is not enough; still, she does nothing. She never asks for help.

EN5 emphasized:

Employers don't have a real understanding of the job; once an employer compared me to Google Translate." But, he added, "What you see is the result of translators' and interpreters' actions, they present themselves as weak figures, so they would say, "people use Google Translate, so, you translators and interpreters can do the same?"

EN2 had a similar opinion:

We are busy, everyone is, but we do not plan for our self-development, we do not even ask what some of our successful colleagues do; sometimes, I feel we shirk our responsibilities, it is obviously in our own interest to change ourselves, we need to move on.

The fourth extracted code addressed the shortcomings embedded in the system of training. Those interpreters (n=3) with a translation academic background raised the issue, describing that at the BA level, they pass many theoretical courses without knowing how to apply them in their translation practice. They also insisted their teachers mostly neither were translators nor had an academic degree in Translation/Interpreting Studies. Another reported shortcoming was the teaching approach in translation courses where the teachers mostly asked the students to read their translation to be later commented by the teacher or peers. EN1 and EN3 emphasized that they do not have any hands-on practice, experience, or an interpreting practicum. Almost all the participants started the job with low mastery of interpreting skills. It is only after years of working in this field that the participants believed they have discovered the reality of the working situations and build up a true-to-life perception of interpreting.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The narratives of the participants outline the inextricable interconnection of social, cultural, and institutional context with the working experience of interpreters. They can describe how their experience is shaped and influenced by contextual factors.

The major themes of the study, i.e., job-finding experience and on-the-job experience, can boil down to one overarching meta-theme of 'interpretation as a non-professional job.' The results of the present study, which intended to obtain a general picture of what it is like to be an FSCI in Iran, portray freelance interpreters as non-professionals with the term 'non-professional' carrying a range of connotations.

Their job-finding experience (see section 3.1) and conference preparation stories construct the image of conference interpretation as an "ad hoc" event (Buhrig & Meyer, 2004) in Iran, suggesting that interpreting can be conducted by whoever available in the immediate situation. This can also be supported by the way interpreters are recruited without any regular external procedure or, even without an intentional job-seeking experience and predefined job requirements. The results are in line with Katan (2011) and Whyatt's (2017) account that in many countries, translation and interpretation are inclined to be considered as a non-professional performance since formal qualifications or licencing are not required.

The account of FSCIs may reflect another connotation, i.e., language brokering, carried by non-professional job in Iran, which can be conducted by bilingual adults. This might be drawn from those parts of the narratives which depict conference interpretation for interpreters and conference organizers as mediation: it lacks institutional support; it does not require planning for preparation; it can run for a long time; more and more experience results in their skill development and boosts the interpreters' confidence (Esquivel, 2012; Orellana, 2017); some reasonable command of two languages and some mastery over some technical terminologies and messages suffice to do the tasks. The findings of the current study are also consistent with those of Han (2015), who found that most interpreters experienced 'last-minute preparation' mode while expecting 'advance preparation' (Gile, 2002).

The mixed responses of the participants as to the knowledge and skill demand of interpreting together with the misconception of the hiring staff who perceive interpreters as any bilingual who can transmit the message across languages represent another aspect of non-professional view on interpretation. In fact, the stories tell us the people involved in interpreting occupation in Iran regard the task as an ability rather than competence or proficiency (Whyatt, 2017) that "goes beyond the sum of the two language proficiencies" (p.53). As can be seen from the statements, among various defining traits of a profession (Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008), knowledge base, skill, and academic study were the traits that make the bulk of interpreting profession for the participants.

The features that pictured the job as non-professional can be summarized as follows:

- a. relying on social capitals rather than meet some predefined criteria for entering into the field,
- b. enjoying no professional autonomy to make job-related decisions and being obliged to follow what organizers, who are not themselves insiders to the profession, expect them,
- c. not being remunerated for what they do, and
- d. imposing no restriction on receiving professional education in a higher education system that provides the required distinctive knowledge, skill, and expertise.

As to the on-the-job experience of the participants, the narratives suggest that some intrinsic and extrinsic factors might contribute to their perception of interpreting. Among the intrinsic determinants of job satisfaction, Herzberg (1966) introduced, namely sense of success, sense of importance to the organization, the nature of work itself, responsibility, and growth, and extrinsic determinants, i.e., salary and benefits, job security, working conditions, supervision, and interpersonal relationships at work, some were

mentioned by the participants. The narratives revealed the conference interpreters' positive reception by the public as the only extrinsic determinant that could be interpreted as a motivator. Low levels of income and challenging working conditions though were sources of their job dissatisfaction. The stories also indicated they value their job because it has some glamorous working factors (Dam & Zethsen, 2013) that bring them self-worth and self-confidence. These results partly match those observed in the literature. In line with Dam and Zethsen (2013), FSCIs in the current study could be interpreted to enjoy moderate to high status due to the supposed appealing lifestyle. However, the job cannot be considered a high-paid job, and this has been reported as a factor that can be linked to the economic sources of job dissatisfaction.

The participants ascribed the problems partly to their workplace culture. As the members of an organization, interpreters, hiring staff, and organizers, all share values manifested in the practice of the group and shaping the perceptions and attitudes of the members. From the narratives of the FSCIs, one can see how the stakeholders involved in the field commonly misconceived interpretation. In fact, workplace culture cannot be considered in isolation from national culture, societal culture, and the goals of an organization (Johnson, Chy & Killough, 2009). As misconceived as interpretation is by the hiring staff, the participants' non-professional viewpoints of the nature of the practice deserve attention, and the results are in line with Johnson et al. (2009: 321) who suggest that workplace culture has "greater influence over work styles and perspectives than an organization's procedures and policies."

Overall, the findings of the present study are consistent with much of the existing literature on interpreters' occupational status, expectation, and self-perception, while providing a broader perspective on the contribution of contextual factors in the quality and experience of interpreting in Iran.

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Code	Gender	Age	Education	Years of Experience	Mode of Interpreting	Main Occupation
EN1	Male	32	B.A. in Translation	4	SCI* CCI*	EN* Teacher
EN2	Male	33	M.A in English Literature	4	SCI CCI WI* TI*	EN Teacher
EN3	Male	45	M.A in other majors - B.A. in translation	10	SCI CCI	News Translator
EN4	Male	46	B.A. in Translation	13	SCI CCI WI	News Translator
AR1	Male	47	M.A. in other majors	10	SCI CCI	News Translator
EN5	Male	47	Ph. D. in TEFL	14	SCI CCI WI	EN Teacher
AR2	Male	48	M.A. in other majors	16	SCI CCI TI	News Translator
EN6	Female	34	Ph. D. in TEFL	4	SCI CCI WI	Interpreter

Themes	subthemes
Job-finding-experience	Unintended job offer Social capital Advertisement
On-the-job experience	Knowledge and skill demand Preparation for a conference Intrinsic satisfaction Extrinsic satisfaction
The locus of the problems	Misconception of the hiring staff Workplace culture Interpreters Training courses