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A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Interpreter's Identity Management

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Abstract
A lacuna in interpreting studies pertains to what constitutes an interpreter's identities in social and sociopsychological contexts and how they operate, influencing the interpreter's decision-making and behaviours at interpreting-facilitated events. In this research, two key symbolic interactionism frameworks, structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) and perceptual control theory, are drawn on to formulate a symbolic interactionist model of interpreter's identity management (SIMIIM) with a view to investigating higher socio-structural and individual psychological influence on an interpreter's identity management. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of a professional public service interpreter's perceptions of her lived experience of interpreting and the sense of self is undertaken to illustrate the key elements of the model. Issues regarding moral identity, professional identity, social and communicative factors challenging the interpreter's identity management, and impacts of identity nonverification on the interpreter's wellbeing are discussed. Introducing symbolic interactionism to interpreting studies for the first time, it is hoped that this research will encourage further efforts to explore an interpreter's identity management at social and individual levels, which is key to an informed understanding of the interpreter's behaviour and of the issues of interpreting ethics in public service interpreting.

Keywords
symbolic interactionism, identity (non)verification, moral identity, professional identity, interpreting ethics

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1 Introduction

The subject of the interpreter's role has enjoyed much scholarly attention over the past thirty years. Challenging the initial metaphorical idea of interpreters acting as mechanic and invisible conduits, many researchers (see e.g. Pöchhacker 2015) turning to empirical evidence, report and construct various active participating roles assumed by interpreters in interpreting-facilitated interactions. Nevertheless, Tyulenev (2015, p. 24) critiques that such essentialist approaches portray interpreters as "a bundle of fixed characteristics" disconnected from the sociocultural contexts within which they operate and, therefore, neglect agency. With the advent of a recent sociological turn in interpreting studies, a number of sociocultural frameworks are seen to be drawn on in order to theorise interpreting as socially situated/conditioned activities. For example, in conference interpreting, an interpreter's expected neutrality is critically examined through the approach of critical discourse analysis (Diriker, 2004) and the notion of emotional labour (Ayan, 2020). Zwischenberger (2017) undertakes a survey investigating interpreters' role perceptions and the impact on interpreting quality, briefly introducing social role theories. In public service interpreting, Clifford (2004) concludes that other stakeholders may expect interpreters to assume a wider range of roles, which is particularly relevant in the healthcare setting. By far, the most popular social theory used by interpreting scholars (e.g., Angelelli, 2004, 2012; Inghilleri, 2003, 2014; Reine 2010) to contextualise an interpreter's agency constitutes Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus and field. However, critics (Lahire, 2011; Sela-Sheffy, 2014) argue that Bourdieu's theory ignores differences in disposition, motivation and self-perception among individuals, and call for a dynamic framework that can theorise both the macro socio-structural influence and the micro individual differences and changes in interpreters' behaviour. Within such a context, this study explores the sociocultural nexus in which an interpreter operates, and, delves into their internal psychological processes of identity management. It is hoped that this focussed effort to understand and theorise an interpreter's identity and their identity management will contribute to enriching the debate over the interpreter's role through a new perspective.

The interpreter's identity constitutes an under-explored area. More efforts are needed to understand how an interpreter's multiple identities operate, influencing their behaviour in interpreting-facilitated interactions. In theoretical terms, this is reflected in a lack of conceptual approaches to how the reciprocal relationships between social structure, identity and role underpin and elucidate interpreting behaviour. To address the gap, the author turns to sociological and social psychology frameworks developed in identity studies, with a view to formulating a symbolic interactionist model that conceptualises the sociocultural and the social psychological influence on an interpreter's identity-management and role-taking behaviour.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Identity

Identity reflects the meanings of who and what we value. The origin of identity theories that conceptualise how we perceive and manage self-meanings is rooted in symbolic interactionism – thoughts about what makes up identities and how they influence our

behaviour. The symbolic interaction background of identity theories can be traced to the conceptualisation of the nature of the self proposed by, historically, the Scottish moral philosophers (e.g., Ferguson, 1792; Smith, 1966/1759) and, American scholars such as William James (1890) and George Herbert Mead (1934). It is Mead's work that laid the central foundation for much current thinking of self and identity (Stryker, 1980/2002; Burke & Stets, 2009). In the exegesis of Mead's thinking, two related but separate developments of symbolic interactionism give rise to structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) and perceptual control theory, the key conceptualisations that inform the theoretical framework proposed in this paper.

2.2 Structural symbolic interactionism (SSI), identity salience and commitment

The development of identity is shaped in a social web of morphological positions and dynamic interactions where a social person internalises their "positional designations... in structured role relationships" (Stryker, 1980/2002, p. 60). The concept of role is postulated as the key link between society and person, whose self is comprised of multiple identities, i.e., cognitive schemata (Markus 1977) linked to society through roles and positions. Structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) proposes that societies are comprised of multifaceted and differentiated systems, and a social person is often categorised in multiplex positions that may stipulate conflicting and contradictory expectations. Social interactions can take place in independent or interwoven social networks, and multiple interacting counter-roles may be associated with each single role assumed, prescribing conflicting, vague or even ambiguous demands and expectations. This is conducive to identity conflict and role strain with which a person may struggle in their effort to play out different roles or manage multiple identities. For example, at an interpreting-facilitated political press conference (Yuan, 2021), the interpreter may assume the identity of a government official, or a patriot, besides their identity as an interpreting professional. The multiplex social positions that the interpreter holds, which endow them with accordingly multiple identities, prescribe conflicting demands of their behaviour at that press conference. Moreover, in the healthcare communication setting, an interpreter often must not only interact with the medical professional and the patient who directly rely on their interpreting, but also manage interruptions from the patient's bilingual family member who may be keen to intervene, or initiate side conversations with the patient or with the interpreter. Such interactions, taking place in interwoven social networks where interpreters must deal with multiple interacting counter-roles, pose great challenges to their identity verification and role negotiation.

To resolve the dilemma, Stryker (1980/2002, p. 79) asserts that "the enactment or performance of a role is variable", and that the choices can range from outright rejection of role expectations, discrete role nonconformity and non-performance, to creatively altering expectations and modifying performance where possible. Accordingly, what role-management strategies would be deemed feasible and appropriate are determined by the notions (and influence) of identity salience and commitment. Identity salience refers to the probability that identities, which are organised in a salience hierarchy, will be invoked in various situations (Serpe & Stryker, 2011), producing ensuing impacts on role choice behaviour. Commitment is measured by the number of social networks in

which a person is involved, and the intensity of their relationship to these networks. Structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) posits that the place of an identity in the salience hierarchy is dependent on the commitment, evaluation, network of commitment and the number of persons in the network of commitment premised on that identity. Stryker (1980/2002, p. 83) highlights that "the higher an identity in the salience hierarchy, the greater the probability of role performances being consistent with the role expectations attached to that identity". An interesting question to explore here is what constitutes identity salience when tensions or conflicts between an interpreter's multiple identities, derived from the multiple roles and positions that they hold, are at play in an interpreting-facilitated interaction.

2.3 Perceptual control theory explaining identity verification process

While structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) offers a roadmap bridging society and person through the concepts of identity and role, it does not study how identity is managed at the individual level. In this respect, Burke and Stets' (2009, p. 49) perceptual control theory formulates a more focussed model explaining "the internal dynamics" of identity verification at the individual level and its impact on behaviour. Central to the model are the concepts of identity standard, perceptual input, comparator, and behaviour.

Identity standard refers to "a set of meanings which may be viewed as defining the character of the identity" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 63). The self-reflexive process of identity verification involves developing perceptions of situational meanings and comparing these perceptions to the set of meanings entailed in the identity standard. If the perceived meanings do not match the meanings featured in the identity standard – a phase described as the "comparator", an "error signal" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 66) will be produced to guide the person's behaviour in order to mitigate or eliminate any external disturbances contributing to the discrepancy, and to bring the perceived meanings as close as possible to, or ideally completely matching, the meanings characterising the identity standard. This perceptual control process of identity verification constitutes a never-ending "continuously operating feedback loop" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 77). Burke and colleagues highlight that successful identity verification can enhance self-esteem, while failure to do so leads to distress, and behavioural efforts to either correct identity nonverification or to withdraw from interactions.

2.4 Bases of identity

Having delved into the concept of identity at the socio-structural and the individual levels, it is important to understand how identity is categorised in order to aid our analysis of identity management in interactions. There are three bases on which identity can be conceptualised: role, social group and person. The conceptualisation of the self as an occupant of various roles in the social structure, and how we develop self-meanings while assuming those roles, give rise to role identities. Role identities are premised on the positions that one assumes in the social structure, such as a teacher, a student or an interpreter. Social identities, on the other hand, are based on people's memberships in

social groups with shared beliefs, values or missions, for example, being a member of a political party. Thoits and Virshup (1997) postulate that role identities and social identities reference the self in the aspects of 'me' and 'we', respectively. They suggest that a role identity is developed through a person taking up a role in a situation and responding to expectations and feedback from others as to how one should behave in that role, and the enactment of the role identity helps maintain the broader social structure where the role is embedded. For example, interpreting ethics or codes of conduct provide detailed reference of meanings that underpin an interpreter's role identity by spelling out how an interpreter is expected to behave when assuming the role of an interpreter in interpreting-facilitated interactions. Burke and Stets (2009) argue that role identities and social identities are fluid and can be synthesized, depending on the analytic perspective. For example, 'interpreter' can denote a role identity when the associated meanings underpinning the identity are related to how the individual as an interpreter, occupying the position and role of a linguistic and cultural facilitator of interactions, is expected to behave in line with interpreting ethics or codes. Nevertheless, from a different perspective, 'interpreter' constitutes a social identity in the response by the Charted Institute of Linguist to *The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration's Report*[1] where it highlights "a default requirement for all assignments which have a high impact on a person's life to be handled by qualified UK interpreters". In this context, the identity of 'interpreter' embodies the ingroup prototype in the cognitive process of group categorisation, and it accentuates the ingroup-versus-outgroup distinction to elevate the ingroup status.

The third base of identity is person, which highlights the set of meanings that characterise a person as a unique individual rather than as a role holder attached to a social position or a member within a social group. These meanings are suggested to include characteristics as how "masterful, dominant, controlling or moral the person is... or what the person values" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 125). Fulfilment of person identities can contribute to enhanced feelings of authenticity, as one can be who one really is or represents (Burke, 2004). An important person identity that is studied widely constitutes moral identity, which entails the salience of morality to a person's self-worth (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). Blasi (1984, 1993), one of the seminal thinkers on the idea of the moral identity, sees the concept of identity as the centre of one's essential self, and individuals may vary on the type of identities they consider to be essential to their being. When a person identifies being moral as pivotal to their being, this moral identity is constantly activated across diversified communicative contexts owing to its very high salience in the identity hierarchy, providing the core principle guiding the individual's commitments and behaviour. Blasi (1984) recognises that people may hold different moral aspects as central to their characterisation of moral identity. Some may value care as the essential characteristics to their moral identity, while others may uphold justice as of paramount importance. Nevertheless, when the notion of being moral is deemed most crucial to an individual, it activates the moral identity which inspires moral actions through a sense of reasonability and self-consistency (aligning one's behaviour to the self-perception of a moral being).

An interpreter's moral identity constitutes an uncharted area. Interpreting codes of conduct offer a detailed reference to the meanings underpinning an interpreter's role identity, i.e., how an interpreter is expected to behave when they occupy the role of

facilitating interlinguistic, intercultural or inter-semiotic communication. These expectations, formalised and stipulated in the form of codes or regulations, reflect role definitions attached to and imposed by external social positions in a range of interactional contexts. Interestingly, despite its focus on **ethics**, which is often considered interchangeable with **morality**, it does not always speak to an interpreter's moral identity, i.e., an interpreter's subjective and internal judgement of what is right or wrong, and just or unfair. For instance, in many ethical guidelines, including the *Code of Professional Conduct* issued by National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), interpreters' neutrality is upheld as an 'absolute' requirement (see point 5.4 and 5.9 in the NRPSI Code). However, interpreting codes issued by various organisations rarely offer helpful explanations on what an interpreter's role identity should be when other counter-role holders in the interaction fail to follow their own professional codes of conduct, or there is a lack of support for other counter-role holders to fulfil their professional identity. This potentially creates an inevitable dilemma for an interpreter having to choose to fulfil their moral identity or their role identity, as this study shows. Therefore, a gap exists on informing how an interpreter should manage their role identity vis-à-vis their person (moral) identity when conflicts and contradictions arise. In other words, the relationship and tension between an interpreter's role identity underpinned by professional ethics and their person (for example, moral) identity informed by social justice, remain unexplored.

2.5 A symbolic interactionist model of interpreter's identity management (SIMIIM)

Informed by the identity theories as discussed above, I propose a symbolic interactionist model of interpreter's identity management (SIMIIM) to conceptualise how an interpreter's identity salience at the socio-structural level and their identity verification at the individual level impact on their interpreting behaviour in interaction. The model is detailed in the Figure 1.

SIMIIM is conceptualised at three levels: the macro-societal level indicated in the green area, the meso-communicative level coded in the white circle, and the micro-individual level expressed in the blue loop. It is important to highlight that SIMIIM, right from the outset, adopts a holistic and constructionist approach to theorising an interpreter's identity and behaviour at interpreting-facilitated interactions. In this model, the analysis of an interpreter's behaviour is inseparable from the 1) communicative contexts where the interactions take place, 2) the pertinent social networks and structures that define the nature and the dynamics of the interaction, 3) the positional relations between the interactional parties, 4) the interpreter's and other parties' respective identity salience, and 5) the interpreter's societal roles prior to entering into the particular interpreting-facilitated interaction.

Like any other competent members of a society, an interpreter has role identities, person identities and social identities. These identities are developed through the social networks that the interpreter belongs to, the social roles that they hold in relation to other role holders, and the unique experience that informs their backgrounds, values and beliefs. These various identities are organised in a salience of hierarchy premised on their
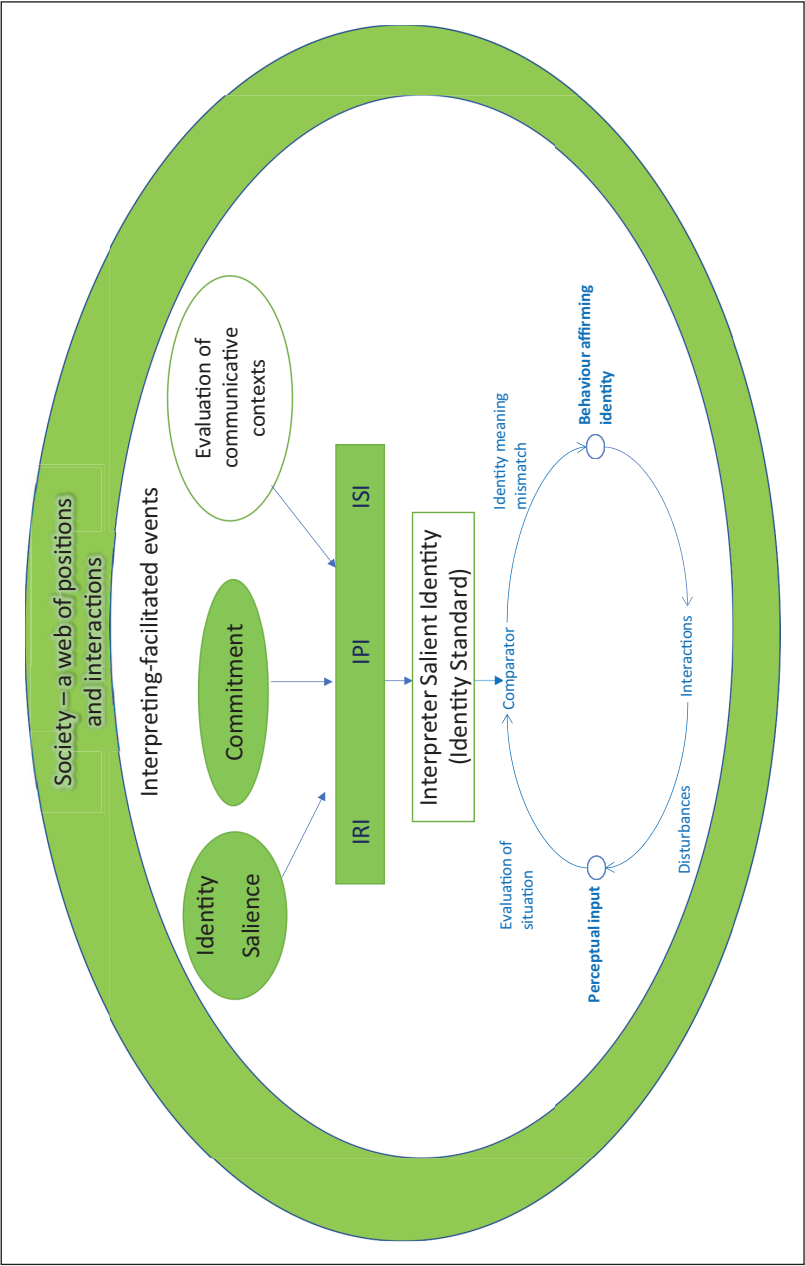
Figure 1. SIMIIM informed by structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) and perceptual control theory.
IRI=Interpreter Role Identities; IPI=Interpreter Person Identities; ISI=Interpreter Social Identities.

commitments to the networks they are involved in, on how they respond to other's expectations derived from the position they hold in a social structure, and on the importance that they attach to the attributes that determine their sense of self-worth and authenticity. Moreover, other communicative parties in interpreting-facilitated interactions also have their own particular identity salience and commitments well shaped in society prior to entering into interaction with the interpreter. Other parties' identity salience and commitments influence their communicative behaviour, and constitute an integral part of the communicative context within which the interpreter operates. An interpreter's identity salience, their commitment, and their evaluation of the communicative context inform and activate a salient identity that provides the core meanings underpinning the identity standard the interpreter upholds in interaction. The interpreter evaluates and compares whether or not these core meanings match the identity assigned to them by other communicative parties. Should there be an error, the identity verification process at the psychological level will be triggered to propel the interpreter to take actions ensuring the meanings of identity assigned by others in interaction move close to the meanings featuring the salient identity.

3 Method

The aim of this study is to explore an interpreter's identity management in interpreting-facilitated interactions which take place within a web of social structures. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is identified as the suitable methodology to achieve this aim. IPA is underpinned by the philosophies of phenomenology, a philosophical approach to the study of experience, and hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). It constitutes an idiographic approach emphasising an active role for the researcher to develop an insider's perspective of the essence of the lived experiences around a particular concept or phenomenon.

IPA has been widely adopted in social science disciplines such as education (Thurston, 2014), health (Cassidy et al., 2011), dance education (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006), and organisational studies (Tomkins & Eatough, 2014). Nevertheless, few interpreting studies have drawn on this framework. It can be particularly useful for in-depth descriptive and interpretative exploration into interpreters' lived experiences of mediating linguistic and sociocultural differences. Applying the IPA methodology, this study delves into how an interpreter makes sense of self and their experiences of identity (non)verification in interpreting-facilitated interactions. The research procedure includes in-depth interviewing with audio or video recording, transcribing the recorded interview verbatim, annotating the transcription with descriptive, linguistic and conceptual notes, identifying, codifying and analysing the key emerging themes extracted from the data (Smith et al. 2009, Smith & Nizza 2021).

The data constitutes a two-hour one-on-one interview with a professional public service interpreter who has more than 20 years' professional experience and is registered with National Register of Public Service Interpreters. For confidentiality, the interpreter's name and personal information have been anonymised. The interpreter is professionally trained and has qualifications in public service interpreting, police and hostage interpreting. University of Birmingham's ethical procedure was followed

thoroughout. The written agreement for video-recording the interview, and for the recorded content to be used for research and publication purposes, was obtained prior to the interview. The interpreter was informed that she has the right to withdraw from the interview at any stage.

At the interview, open-ended questions were devised to encourage uninterrupted articulations from the interpreter. The questions include "How do you perceive what you are doing during interpreting?"; "Please describe an interpreting experience that stood out for you, what happened?"; "How would you describe yourself or see yourself as an interpreter?"; "What do you think of how others see you or expect you to be/behave?". The interpreter was not informed of the research aims and objectives prior to, during or after the interview. No leading questions such as "did you feel disappointed?" were initiated at the interview. The researcher made a conscious effort not to interrupt the interpreter's talking, providing ample space and time for their reflections, self-corrections, and delineations. These measures ensured that the responses and elaborations constitute the interpreter's own views. Very few prompts from the researcher were necessary throughout the interview, since the interpreter was able to offer, in a naturally flowing manner, their rich insights derived from decades of professional experience.

4 Data coding and analysis of emerging themes

The recorded interview was transcribed verbatim, in a format that allows space for the researcher to take notes of observations and make sense of the interpreter's comments. Then, the researcher read the transcription very carefully a number of times, entering "a phase of active engagement with the data" (Smith et al., 2009: p. 78) where attention is paid to how the overall interview structure developed, how events and stories were described and how personal feelings/thoughts attached to those events and stories were expressed and elaborated on. During the (re)readings, descriptive, linguistic and conceptual notes (Smith et al., 2009, Smith & Nizza, 2021) were made and coded in three different colours, alongside the interpreter's original wording, to analyze the researcher's interpretations and reflections. In particular, descriptive notes highlight the key objects, events and experiences that the interpreter has reported and reflected on at the interview. They are taken at face value, noted in the forms of key words, phrases or explanations that structure the description of the interpreter's thoughts. Linguistic notes attend to the interpreter's specific use of language and other linguistic features that inform our understanding of the interpreter's experiences, thoughts and emotions. Important features include pronouns use and shifts, pauses, tone, repetitions, hedges, intensifiers, degree of fluency, voice volume, etc.. Conceptual notes require the researcher to engage with the data, the descriptive and the linguistic notes at a more evaluative and analytical level where the researcher actively interprets and conceptualises how the interpreter perceives her experiences. Subsequently, the researcher extrapolated those parts of the interpreter's comments that are associated with the three types of exploratory notes, and start to identify and analyse the emerging themes that weave through the narratives of the interview.

Three key and interconnected themes emerged from the interpreter's descriptions and comments on her sense of self and her perceptions of lived experiences as a professional public service interpreter in the UK: 1) salient contentions between the interpreter's

moral identity and her professional identity contributing to major dilemmas for her role decisions; 2) other parties in the social network presenting significant challenges to the interpreter's professional identity, which prompts her identity verification process; 3) negative impacts on the interpreter's sense of self, her emotional and physical well-being induced by identity management struggles delineated in the first two points.

4.1 Tensions between the interpreter's moral and professional identities

First, the data revealed constant contentions between the interpreter's moral identity and her professional identity as regulated by the interpreting codes of conduct. The inter-preter gave several examples of interpreting-facilitated events where "I went a bit away from my line ... but it is the humanity at stake ... that was really starting to impact on my conscience". Her introspections and reflections on some very difficult decisions that she had to make manifest the extremely challenging dilemmas where she was forced to choose between following her conscience to do the right thing as a moral being, or strictly abiding by the interpreting ethics set out by the regulatory body.

One example relates to recurrent healthcare meetings between a doctor and a mother with her child who was the patient. The purpose of the meetings was to diag-nose whether the child was autistic or not. The interpreter was called upon by the NHS to provide the interpreting service because the mother and the child did not speak English language.

> "For about a year, I was going to these appointments with this mother and her autistic son ... diagnosing autism now is something doctors strive everything they possibly do to not diagnose because it becomes responsible. I mean, the local authority becomes responsible for the care and the NHS of that child then if the child is not diagnosed, there is a pushing off the responsibility."

> "... I know a lot about all these because my closest friend, their son, he's 27, is severely autistic... I know autism upside down because I cared for him when he was a little child, together with my kids, then, you know, I know what autistic behaviour is, you know."

> "I can see this child is autistic and his doctor is finding absolutely everything not to give him a diagnosis of autism... I felt pity for the Mom. I tell you why. Because I knew that child was going to grow up like my friend's child... autism can drive parents to suicide... the mother at that stage was still believing the autism can be cured... I couldn't tell her autism cannot be cured. I know that autism cannot be cured, but I was waiting for the professional (doctor) to tell her that."

> "You know, I'm going to give a push for this because I'm getting fed up. And I said to the doctor, I said, 'doctor just for terminology's sake, for my sake, so I pass information correctly to the mother, to the patient's mother. Is this a diagnosis of autism?'... I said 'for the terminology purpose just to help me, Doctor, is this, an assessment if the patient is autistic because there's different terminology from dealing with autism spectrum'... And he looked at me and I knew from his eyes, when our eyes crossed we knew, we knew what was going on."

"He gave a diagnosis of autism... I think the diagnosis of autism was a little bit pushed by me because, you know, it kind of saying, Listen, I know what's going on here... you see, I did that but truly, I don't think I should have. Can you see my point? I went a little bit away from my line."

"I couldn't come out of that appointment telling that mother this is wrong. You know, so I helped her in that way. But what I'm saying is me doing that is going away from my ethics... Ethics is problematic because you see I am a person, but I am not supposed to get involved. But it's very hard not to get involved because here's your humanity at stake!...You know this child is not their fault that they are autistic. It is not the mother's fault that this child was conceived then became autistic. You know, it's a lot of victims there... You know, and the system is just putting, you know, blinders on and saying, we don't want to know. We don't want to know. We don't want to know."

Interpreting constitutes communicative activities situated in a complex social web of systems constrained by finite resources and bureaucracy. The associated social and systemic imperfections impose burdens on the social members and restrain how they do their jobs and how they behave. As shown in this case, these constraints and systemic problems, within which all the related parties including the interpreter operate, induce contentions and challenges to the interpreter's moral identity vis-à-vis her professional identity,.

Throughout the interview, the interpreter demonstrated a profound understanding of and full respect for the interpreting ethics which regulate how she is expected to interpret: "I am just a link there... I am there to help with the communication, without adding or omitting any messages". There are 18 similar comments underpinning her appreciation of the role she plays in the communication. Nevertheless, when the doctor shows reluctance to diagnose the patient, owing to existing systemic and resource constraints, the interpreter is thrown into a conundrum: should she be influenced by her moral identity guided by social justice, i.e., do what promotes social fairness and helps those that are vulnerable, or should she stay neutral and simply relay what the doctor and the mother say to each other as required by the professional ethics?

However, does **neutrality** actually exist in this scenario? Could the interpreter have stayed neutral at all, and how? If the interpreter did not challenge the doctor implicitly as has happened, and simply just interpreted the messages, knowing why the doctor was so reluctant with the diagnosis, would she have achieved being neutral? How could she be neutral, in that scenario, when she knew the social reasons for the attempts of non-diagnosis? Had she decided to not intervene following the interpreting ethics, she would have become an accomplice to the flawed healthcare system that could do the young patient injustice. In this case, not taking a stand, i.e., trying to remain neutral, is an act of taking a stand in its own way. As the interpreter summarises it: "here's your humanity at stake!". These constitute very difficult ethical questions that few existing codes of ethics have addressed.

The extracts illustrate the conflict between the interpreter's moral and professional identities, which frustrates her. She eventually decides to follow her humanity and help the disadvantaged, despite knowing that this action flouts the ethics. The extracts show the greater priority that moral identity occupies compared to professional identity in the identity salience hierarchy. Moreover, it can be seen from her descriptions that her social

identities – as mother and close friend to a mother with an autistic child – also play a significant part influencing her behaviour in this particular communication. These two pertinent social identities provide the interpreter with inside knowledge of the challenges that the patient and his mother are going through, and the urgent medical and social support that they need to tackle these challenges. The interpreter's deep commitment to these two salient social identities is seen to have influenced her decisions and behaviour. Therefore, at this interpreting-facilitated healthcare communication, the interpreter's moral identity, alongside her social identities are seen to have been activated as the salient and dominant identities impacting on her behaviour and on the dynamics of the interaction. This example paints a rich picture of the complex and underlying societal, institutional and interactional challenges to an interpreter's ethical judgement, and the sophisticated and covert systemic issues that push the interpreter's and the doctor's professional boundaries.

4.2 Other parties in the social network

Second, it is observed that other parties in the social network challenge the interpreter's professional identity, which prompts her identity verification process. Symbolic interactionism highlights that individuals and their identities are considerably shaped and influenced by the social networks in which they are embedded and by the counter role-holders involved in the networks and the interactions. A public service interpreter's identity management accordingly operates within such social constraints and dynamics. Three types of challenges have emerged from the interview, which are induced by other communicative parties in interaction and by institutions that use interpreting service. These challenges pose significant threats to the interpreter's fulfilment of her professional identity and propel her to take actions to rectify the situation by completing the identity verification process.

First, other communicative parties attempt to use the interpreter as a tool for their own ends, as observed in the following extract:

> "...I do the interview at the police station with the CID investigation detective. And I also do the private consultation with the solicitor. And you really have to know, because with the private consultation solicitor, the person – that's the person that's been arrested – says everything in absolute confidence, like they are talking confessionary in a church with a priest. And then I go into the interview, I do the interview. And at the end, sometimes they go... it happened to me a few times that was totally off the books. They should not have done that. They turned to me and asked: xxx, didn't they say that during the interview? Did they say that? I cannot recall that. The detective was trying to see if I would fall and say something that was said in the private consultation with the solicitor. This is very dangerous. If someone is not qualified and wants to please the police, because the police are the client, they could say something."

Here, the interpreter gives an example where one communicative party in the interaction, i.e., the police investigation detective attempts to involve the interpreter in the communication by actively encouraging the interpreter and leading her to contribute a particular type of information that can potentially criminalise the defendant. This fundamentally jeopardises the interpreter's role as an independent party, and in turn, her professional

identity. The detective's calculated move, despite the interpreter's detailed explanations of what and how she interprets at the beginning of each assignment, constitutes a major disturbance to the professional interpreter's identity verification and prompts her behaviour to eliminate such disturbance and complete the identity verification process. The interpreter also emphasises the danger of using unqualified interpreters (see 4.2.3) who do not fully understand a public service interpreter's professional identity, and are therefore likely to violate the professional ethics.

Such risks, as reported by the interpreter, also exist in healthcare interpreting settings, where "in a mental health assessment to release a patient, they asked me many times if the patient was coherent". In this case, the interpreter is invited by the health professional to become a key member of the team for assessment and diagnosis. The interpreter has clearly seen this as a disturbance to her professional identity as she commented "never can I put myself into risks of diagnosing people. I just try to portray. I say to the mental health professional, 'I would like to reassure you that any word the patient mentions, I will translate, even if that's not coherent."

These comments demonstrate that other professionals at the interpreting-facilitated interactions may perceive and actively invite an interpreter's contribution as an important assistance to achieving a particular goal. Such a perception or action, whether calculated or owing to a lack of understanding of an interpreter's professional identity, constitutes a disturbance that triggers a qualified interpreter's identity verification process.

Second, contrary to the above cases where the interpreter is seen as an ally or a tool by other parties in the interaction, threats to an interpreter's professional identity can also arise from behaviour of attempting to simply eliminate the interpreter from the interaction:

> "Then you have the interfering family member that suddenly becomes a linguist who doesn't want you to talk. The family member wants to interpret and tells you to shut up..."

> "I even met this NHS midwife... The clinic called me and asked me to interpret for an appointment between this NHS midwife and a pregnant lady who doesn't speak English. I started to interpret. The midwife looked at me. She said: 'Stop. I want the patient to talk'. So I stopped. She was extremely rude as well. I stopped and the patient looked at me. I said 'you need to talk to explain'. The patient said 'But I can't'. The midwife said to the lady 'I want to know in English. You know, you need to start learning English'. It got to a point, I said, 'I'm very sorry to interrupt, once again, because obviously you don't need my, my professional service, but if you really don't need me, why are you paying me?' I said 'this lady will not learn this language during your 10-minute appointment. Now, do you really want all the history of this lady's previous pregnancies or don't you?' I said 'if you don't need me anymore. Can you please sign me off and I'll go?' You know, you sometimes you have to be quite assertive and kind of put the foot down and say, you know, don't tell me to shut up. I am here to provide the service that your boss the NHS is paying for. Let me do my job as you are doing yours."

> "...There is a lack of respect or lack of understanding this is a proper profession. I think we should be recognised as a proper profession. I think that lots of issues will be ironed out naturally."

These examples illustrate how other role-holders in the interpreting-facilitated interactions attempt to deny the interpreter her professional identity. Their behaviour communicates

their perceptions of the interpreter's presence as undesirable. Such dismissiveness contributes to an mismatch between the core meanings entailed in the identity standard that the interpreter upholds, and the identity deprivation imposed on her. This, as reported in the interpreter's comments, prompted her to take resolute actions to redress the mismatch and to achieve identity verification. This is in line with the SIMIIM.

In society, interpreters always interact with other social members who are embedded in their own social networks with their commitments. These social members may already have their preconceived goals or perceptions prior to entering the interaction. Their agendas, whether pre-existing or developed in the course of the interaction, can pose threats and disturbances to an interpreter's professional identity. Exacerbated by a lack of understanding of an interpreter's identity and role, a public service interpreter is seen to have to constantly fight in order to have their professional identity verified in interactions and recognised in society.

Third, damages to public service interpreters' professional identity can be caused by the courts and Ministry of Justice outsourcing the interpreting service. As highlighted from the symbolic interactionist perspective, the shaping of an interpreter's professional identity is premised on other social members who have direct or indirect impacts on the interpreting-facilitated events. Within the immediate communicative context, other parties involved in the interaction, their attempts to use or to ostracise the interpreter – driven by their own agendas – will have a direct impact on the interpreter's identity management strategies. At a higher social level, policy makers and organisations that regulate the interpreting service, government institutions as decision-makers on how to source interpreting service, and commercial interpreting agencies that secure service contracts, they all influence the recognition and reputation of public service interpreters' professional identity.

Throughout the interview, the interpreter expressed her concerns that the courts and Ministry of Justice have decided to outsource interpreting service to private interpreting agencies, which allegedly employ unqualified interpreters for cost-saving purposes. She commented that this has damaged an already struggling profession.

"We were very respected when we were just on the National Register and the court service would go through the National Register or Charted Linguists to get their interpreters. When this got into commercial setting since they gave the tender to an agency... of course, the agency's aim is to make a profit, like any other enterprises and they go to people that are not qualified so they can pay less... I notice a decrease of respect for us."

"I have a lot of colleagues who went for teaching, they went, some of them went to become solicitors because they've got so much court experience... then you see people doing it just for the money... if they don't interpret correctly, it can change lives... your responsibility to repeat exactly what's being said is huge... I went one time to Bart's hospital because the patient was going to be taken out the wrong organ. Because the interpreter said it wrong, and blood tests showed that the organ is absolutely healthy... you cannot do that... Once it went into the private arena, tendered to private companies, money changes everything. I mean the Bigword now they've got the contract, previously it was Capita, and then it's the Bigword got the contract for the NHS and Ministry of Justice, it's, the profession is, dying... it is just appalling."

The comments depict a profoundly negative impact on the public service interpreter's professional identity induced by Ministry of Justice's and other institutional clients' move to tender interpreting contracts to private agencies who recruit unquailed people. These institutional and agent stakeholders play a key role in reshaping the societal and structural environment in which an interpreter operates. It has led to two consequences where people lacking professional competences are wrongly assigned the role identity of an interpreter, and where people with adequate competences and experiences actively disassociate themselves from the role identity of an interpreter. The first unfavourable change, should it continue, will fundamentally harm the recognition and professionalisation of public service interpreting in the UK as it will redefine the core meaning of being a public service interpreter in this country. By the same token, should qualified individuals continue to abandon their identity as professional interpreters owing to identity nonverification, the impact of such individual choices will ultimately jeopardise the institutional stakeholders' normal operations. These consequences reflect the essence of symbolic interactionism between society and individuals, and demonstrates that individuals, through a patterned response/choice, can contribute to structural changes[2] at a higher level.

4.3 Impacts on the interpreter's sense of self, her emotional and physical wellbeing

Numerous identity studies (e.g., Miller & Kalkhoff, 2020; Stets & Burke, 2014; Yang & Zhang, 2021) have shown that identity non-verification has a negative impact on an individual's emotional, mental and physical wellbeing.

> "I cried at that moment, you know... It got to me... It gets very difficult... And the cowardly way to go forward is once you leave the job, walk away. That's your protection mechanism. You become a bit of a turtle, you become a tough, you've got you've got a tough shell. You have to, to be able to do the job... because you see the problem that I had the ethical problem I had with that case, because I shouldn't. But I did because I'm a human being. After all, I start liking you and you know I start admiring her courage... How can I not do that, that was really starting to impact on my conscience. If she goes there, sooner or later, they will know she's there... and they will find her... And she'll be killed and that I didn't want on my conscience... yeah, I didn't want that on my conscience, I only met her as a professional. But I didn't want that on my conscience... the constant fight of not getting involved, it is the constant emotional pull, you know, of not getting involved, of being impartial, of being, you know all this constant push and pull, and you know, you need to do this in a certain way, in a certain way, because you need to be impartial to be independent. Yeah, it's the frustration because we know what it takes, you know how much skill is needed. You know how much this job takes out of you. Emotions, and so on to keep everything going and to do the right job in the right code of conduct with the right ethics... because it's very easy to know that you need to be cold and disconnected, it is all very nice if you are ill-natured... but I am not and I am a human being."

The above comments relate to a case where the interpreter has worked with a human trafficking victim for four years. The victim had been kept as a sex slave by the traffickers for more than 14 years before she managed to escape through three other countries and then finally arrive in the UK. The interpreter facilitates the treatment sessions

between the psychiatrist and the victim that take place every fortnight. In the meanwhile, the psychiatrist and the interpreter understand that the victim is preparing for her application to the Home Office for indefinite leave to remain in the UK. The victim possesses important evidence of her harrowing experience that is available in non-English languages. The evidence, as reported by the interpreter, constitutes court documents and TV footages on the victim's case reported in those three countries. Such evidence is crucial to support the victim's application, but there is no funding available for it to be translated into English. The interpreter has not been commissioned by anyone to translate the evidence which is over 100 pages. Appreciating an exceptionally substantial threat to the victim's life, should her application to remain be unsuccessful, the interpreter, as reported during the interview, decided to translate all the evidence for free, and asked the psychiatrist to tell a white lie that the cost of translation had been budgeted for in the funding for the victim's psychiatrical treatment.

The interpreter bursts into tears twice at the interview talking about this case. The contention between her moral and professional identities profoundly impacted her emotional and physical wellbeing. At the interview, the interpreter elaborated at length, the impact on her emotional wellbeing caused/triggered by the victim's heart-wrenching experiences. The interpreter reported that translating the substantial amount of evidence, while also trying to complete other paid work as the sole bread earner in her family, affected her physical wellbeing. However, the interpreter concludes that she is proud of her action. The repeated comment that "I didn't want that on my conscience" communicates a salient commitment to the interpreter's moral identity. The interpreter also expressed her belief that by doing the translation for free, she has not acted in outright violation against the interpreting ethics. This example demonstrates that at an interpreting-facilitated event where the interpreter's two salient identities call for different courses of actions, the interpreter may seek to verify the identity that occupies a higher position in the identity salience hierarchy, while trying to adopt strategies with a view to mitigating identity-nonverification for the other identity.

The interpreter also commented on the negative effects of identity nonverification induced by social stakeholders' actions:

> "I said to my husband. I said, this is going to take me straight to early retirement... Because it's frustration. It's a little bit of anger. It's a little bit of every disappointment."

The interpreter makes this comment when broaching on the impact of institutional clients' outsourcing interpreting services to private agencies that put profit before quality. As reported by the interviewee, it has caused much anger and frustration amongst professional interpreters who feel their professional identity can no longer be verified and recognised with this unfavourable change at the higher level. This leads to their actions disassociating themselves from that identity.

5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the concept of identity constitutes a useful point of departure from which to explore interrelated topics on interpreters' behaviour, role management and

wellbeing. I propose a SIMIIM, in order to theorise macro socio-structural and micro socio-psychological influences on an interpreter's behaviour. To illustrate the model, IPA of a public service interpreter's perceptions of her lived experience as a linguistic and cultural facilitator, and of her sense of self, is conducted to expound how interpreting-facilitated interactions take place within a web of social networks and structures, and how an interpreter's behaviour could be influenced by their own identity salience, commitments and other parties' interactional goals. The study indicates/demonstrates that, in public service interpreting, interpreters may face contentions between their moral and professional identities, which not only influence their behaviour, but also impact on their emotional and physical wellbeing. Moreover, other parties in the interaction, and institutional stakeholders at a higher level, can pose direct and indirect challenges to an interpreter's identity verification, which prompts the interpreter to adopt a range of strategies, which include taking decisive actions, fulfilling professional identity verification, and even disassociating themselves from the professional identity in protest. It is also discovered that identity contentions and identity nonverification can negatively impact on an interpreter's wellbeing.

This research constitutes the first effort to theorise an interpreter's identity from the symbolic interactionist perspective. It is hoped that it can offer a holistic and socially dynamic approach to exploring an interpreter's behaviour and decision-making at macro socio-structural, meso communicative and micro socio-psychological levels. A limitation of this study is that it is based on the report from one professional interpreter. Going forward, it is important that data from more subjects should be gathered to consolidate the model, and allow discovery of other types of interpreter's identity at play during interpreting-facilitated interactions. In addition, the concepts of an interpreter's moral and professional identities, and how these two are related, warrant more in-depth studies to effectively address existing problems in interpreting ethics. The topic on interpreter's identity management and wellbeing has emerged as a meaningful pursuit for future research. Finally, the applicability of the SIMIIM to other types of interpreting, such as conference interpreting and signed language interpreting, could be examined with a view to improving or formulating a more sophisticated model that can explain an interpreter's behaviour across a diversified range of communicative contexts. Hopefully, this research has served the purpose of enticing further enquiries along these lines.

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Notes

1. See https://www.ciol.org.uk/ciol-response-independent-chief-inspector-borders-and-immigration%E2%80%99s-report-%E2%80%9Cinspection-home-office%E2%80%99s (accessed 3 December 2020).
2. In January 2022, Lord Wolfson commits a full independent review of court interpreting standards with a view to rectifying the problems. (https://www.expertwitness.co.uk/articles/news/lord-wolfson-commits-to-a-full-independent-review-of-court-interpreting-standards)

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Biography

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