

## Conference Interpreting as a Social Practice

### A Bourdieusian Theoretical Approach

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*The objective of this paper is to theoretically explore conference interpreting as a social practice, specifically employing Bourdieu's theory of practice and drawing on my application of his notions of field, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990b) reinforced by the voices of the second cultural turn in sociology. It proposes a theoretical framework with which to analyse conference interpreting as a socially-situated activity and interpreters as agents endowed with a specific quantity of resources and competences uniquely acquired in particular contexts of training and enacted with agency in the context of interpreting performances. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the theoretical rationale of sociological research in interpreting to posit the construction of its object as a whole and fill the gap deriving from its partial conceptualization. On this basis, it calls for future empirical works and methodological debates in the flourishing field of the sociology of interpreting.*

#### 1. Introduction

This paper draws extensively upon one of the most relevant theories regarding social practices, which has been elaborated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) through the concepts of *field*, *habitus*, and *capital* that constitute the 'theory of practice', an ontological-epistemological framework that analyses action in social systems. This paper aims to contribute to the flourishing field of the sociology of translation by examining the particular relevance of Bourdieu's key concepts applied specifically to conference interpreting and the particular distinctiveness of interpreting itself as a social practice, integrated by the rational grasp of the second cultural turn of sociology (cfr. Reckwitz, Schatzki, and Warde). It aims to fill the gap in partial sociological conceptualizations of interpreting itself, and to open the circle for empirical investigations. Some final insights will be offered regarding the future role and relevance of a sociology of interpreting in providing a fruitful analytical and methodological tool to address

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interpreting from a holistic perspective, deeply exploring its structure and social contexts, the norms governing them, and the agents and relations involved in this interdependent social environment.

The examples I will refer to as a means of clarifying Bourdieu's practice theory applied to conference interpreting are intended to offer a deeper theoretical understanding of this sociological approach and its workings on interpreting, and to link complex conceptual designs to the reality of the profession.

## **2. Sociological approaches to Interpreting**

Since the early 1990s there have been different attempts at conceptualising the sociological turn in Interpreting Studies. More recently, attempts have been made to specifically introduce the Bourdieusian framework of practice theory into Interpreting Studies (see Gouanvic, 1999, 2007; Inghilleri, 2003; Sela-Sheffy, 2005; Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007; Wolf, 2007, 2010) to highlight the distinctiveness of interpreting as a social activity organized and regulated through social forces (Sela-Sheffy, 2000). Major studies using a sociological approach focused, so far, on a re-contextualization of conference interpreting (Diriker, 2004); a consideration of symbolic and linguistic capital in translation (Gouanvic, 2005), and within the legal field (Vidal Claramonte, 2005); interpreters' intra/inter agency and identity construction (Wolf 2013); interpreters' activities and the consequences thereof (Angelelli, 2011; Sela-Sheffy & Shlesinger, 2011); a first introduction to the sociological backdrop to Bourdieu's thought, describing interpreters as social agents (Inghilleri, 2003, 2005b); an exploration of interpreters' power (Mason & Ren, 2012) and a ground-breaking study exploring the visibility and role of interpreters through a conceptualization of habitus (Torikai, 2009).

Even though increasing numbers of scholars in Interpreting Studies have utilised Bourdieu's framework on a case by case basis, the past resorts to this sociological stance have been rather fragmented, taking the form of isolated borrowings of concepts and their application to disparate translational contexts.

The use of such micro-perspectives and categorisations, which have been instrumental in uncovering the potentials of a sociological study of interpreting, paradoxically simplified what is inherently complex, stripping practice theory of its characteristic of Grand Theory, an abstract and normative theory of human nature and conduct (Skinner, 1990), and whose structural concepts are flexible but co-dependent, making almost impossible to explain one element of Bourdieu's theory without ontologically referring to the others. The rejection of a heuristic, holistic approach uncovers an additional methodological problem, that is the lack of empirical proceedings to support the devised partial theoretical framework with evidence, which have prevented the sociological perspective to be implemented as a useful tool to refine the current body of empirical knowledge concerning interpreting. Moreover, such sociological application

has been focused on various sectors within public service interpreting (cfr. Inghilleri, 2005a) rather than on conference interpreting. On such grounds, this article concentrates on taking a further step in devising a theoretical heuristic tool regarding the less sociologically-explored practice of conference interpreting to make sense of it as a social practice in its whole. In fact, this means a consideration of both the distinctive characteristics of interpreting as a practice, the social trajectory of interpreters as social agents, and the stages which mark the acquisition of interpreting (training) and its utter practical mastery (the realm of professional life). Such heuristic approach is conceived primarily to fill the gap of partial existing sociological conceptualizations of the profession itself, and as a means to lay the foundations of a future empirical investigation of conference interpreting through the lens of sociology.

### **3. Interpreting as a social practice**

Bourdieu conceives the social world as a space within which agents occupy structured positions in accordance with the amount of capitals they hold (1998). The social space is underpinned by major organizing concept for social analysis, which Bourdieu refers to as ‘thinking tools’: field, capital, and habitus. Interdependent and co-constructed, with none predominant, they are integral to understanding social practices and their functioning. Bourdieu argued for a methodology that would ‘bring together an inter-dependent and co-constructed trio – the field, capital and habitus – (...) each integral to understanding the social world, (...) understood through case-by-case deconstructions’ (Thompson, 2008, p. 67).

To introduce this sociological line of inquiry, the basic conceptualization to be grasped regards that of ‘social practice’. The poignant definition of the concept of practice is given on one hand by Bourdieu, and on the other hand by the practice theorists of the second cultural turn, such as Reckwitz (2002). For Bourdieu, practice is conceived as the dynamic and evolving relation between field and habitus. To understand practice, it is first necessary to look at the field in which it takes place and the habitus of those who engage in that practice. A practice can also be depicted as a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). In this sense, interpreting is a practice; to give a practical illustration, conference interpreting as a practice consists of a complex amalgam of interpreting activities (such as consecutive and simultaneous interpretation), objects commonly associated to the profession (such as headphones and booth), background knowledge in the forms of understanding and pre-assignment preparation, language skills, know-how of interpretation techniques, states of emotions and professional inter-relations that need to be acquired and mastered both for the good outcome of the interpretation process and to reach high standards in professional life.

Furthermore, interpreting can be defined as an ‘integrative practice’, that is ‘the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life’ (Schatzki, 1996, p. 98). Any integrative practice is a collective and historic achievement developed over time by groups of practitioners engaged in the practice itself, and it can be recognised in at least four ways (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012):

- i. In general, as an integrative practice such as conference interpreting starts to diffuse, institutions emerge to make them more widely codified and known, while practitioners teach novices and improve performances. In the interpreting world this institutionalization is very pronounced and occurs through formal vehicles like academic and professional bodies, accreditation systems and training schools. These organizations ensure that the body of training and certification processes are acceptable, typically meaning that the proposed organizations are competent to test and certify third parties, promote ethical behaviour and employ suitable quality assurance;
- ii. The significant amount of time dedicated to the activity, exemplified by the time interpreters engage in the profession;
- iii. The existence of standards of professional behaviour associated with the practice (Schatzki, 2006) as established and codified in national and international Interpreting Code of Ethics;
- iv. Specialised equipment devoted to interpreting activities explicitly confirming their mutual association with the activity itself, like notepads, pens as necessary support for consecutive note-taking on one hand, and booths, sound systems, microphones associated to simultaneous interpreting on the other hand, and so forth.

#### **4. Conference interpreting through Bourdieusian lenses: Habitus, field, and capital**

The professional life of conference interpreters is determined by an infinite amount of interactions, not only under the form of interpreted events, but also as relations with colleagues, clients, interpreting agencies, and institutions. In order to grasp these interactions, it is important to first understand the circumstances and the place where these are produced. In other words, interactions have to be considered in their respective social space, in the field where they occur (Bourdieu, 1966) to locate the object of investigation in its specific historical, local, and relational context. Indeed, ‘field’ is of poignant importance in Bourdieu’s work, and his writings are concerned with specific investigations of fields: for example, education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), literature (Bourdieu, 1996), housing (Bourdieu, 2005) and so forth.

A field is a structured system of social positions occupied by individuals and institutions, with its internal logics, rules, regularities, and means of access. They are social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces structured by their own histories and internal logic (Townley, 2014). Each field has its own norms of logic and functioning, that is a ‘doxa’, a common, taken for granted parlance that explicates and legitimates its accepted rationale by individuals in the field itself. Of specific pertinence in this article is the field of ‘conference interpreting’, practised in the modalities of simultaneous, consecutive, and whispering interpretation in the settings of international summits, professional seminars, bilateral or multilateral meetings of heads of State and Government, meetings between chief executives, social and union representatives, congresses and meetings, and so forth. Conference interpreting is sociologically not only ‘an historically generated system of shared meaning’ (Iellatchitch et al., 2003, p. 732), but also a microcosm in which the agents and institutions are integrated and interact with each other in accordance with field-specific, shared rules (doxa) (Bourdieu, 1997). Conference interpreting rules refer generally to high standard of quality and professionalism, neutrality, fair remuneration, working conditions, etc. as for instance espoused by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) or by national codes of standards or professional agreements. Such rules need to be internalized by the interpreters in order to demonstrate appropriate practices and strategies (Bourdieu, 1983) in the light of providing not only high-quality performances, but also to successfully advance in everyday professional life.

Bourdieu (1966) argues that due to their unique rules, fields are autonomous. However, he also qualifies that the autonomy is only relative as fields are embedded in a social space (Walther, 2014, p. 44). For instance, the conference interpreting field may also be influenced by the politics, the economy, medicine, etc. as there is a potential unlimited range of topics that conference interpreters may be required to handle, and various fields they can come in contact with in their professional life; therefore the field of conference interpreting is relatively dependent upon the concurrent existence and activity of others field of practice.

In Bourdieu’s sense, a field is also internally structured in terms of power relations as a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them. Fields are defined by specific stakes – housing, education, employment, etc. – and conference interpreting as a field has defining stakes, which can vary in the form of professional advancement, fair remuneration, accumulation of expertise and competences, prestige and recognition, whose aggregation defines the positioning for each interpreter in the field’s network of positions (Bourdieu, 1972).

After posing that fields as conference interpreting are places of power relations where practices of agents are not arbitrary, it now has to be examined how positions on the respective fields are gained and how such power relations manifest within the social space.

#### 4.1 Capital

Agents' actions – and interpreters' actions- in the field are enabled and constrained by their position within it, depending on the amount of field-specific resources, or capitals, they possess and exploit to occupy dominant or subordinate positions. Therefore, fields are competitive spaces, loci of struggle, with power integral to their functioning. For Bourdieu (2011), the concept of field captures the relatively autonomous social microcosms that constitute a network of objective relations between objectively defined positions of force and competition within social space, with various agents using different strategies to maintain or improve their position. Taking as a basis that a social field is a place of competition and struggles, conference interpreters as social agents need to be endowed with a specific quantity and structure of resources they can put at stake in order to obtain the right to enter and stay in the field. Each field values particular sorts of resources named capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Conference interpreters, on Bourdieu's account, consolidate and advance their position and status in the field through a portfolio of capitals with different amount and composition (Crossley, 2013). The four forms of capital are social, cultural, economic or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). These forms of capital may be equally important, and can be accumulated and transferred from one field to another. Social capital is a 'durable network of (...) institutionalised relationships' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119) and is represented by the interpreter's relations both with other interpreters, and with clients, interpreting agencies, and institutions to establish a network of social connections and secure the profits of mutual acknowledgment. It can be institutionalised and legitimised by memberships of professional and academic bodies (Bourdieu, 1986) allowing access to material and immaterial resources, information and knowledge.

Cultural capital is specifically forged by education and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications, and it is manifested in three forms. In the incorporated (or embodied) state the cultural capital is a durable system of dispositions and represents an interpreter's entirety of intellectual qualifications and human capital (Bourdieu, 1986 citing Becker, 1964; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1985). It encompasses linguistic and cultural competences, mastery of interpreting techniques, background knowledge, areas of expertise, preparation of assignments, etc. The interpreter's culture or cultivation, however, 'presupposes a process of embodiment as it implies a time-intensive labour of inculcation and assimilation' (Bourdieu, 1983 cited in Walther, 2014, p. 10). Hence, the acquisition of embodied cultural capital is assimilated by conference interpreters first through specific training aimed at the mastery of interpreting techniques, and it is constantly increased in professional performances. Linguistic capital is a subtype of cultural capital particularly prominent in the case of language professionals as interpreters. It is defined as fluency in, and comfort with, a foreign language which is used by groups who possess economic, social, cultural and political power and status in

local and global society. Bourdieu interestingly highlights that linguistic capital presupposes not only linguistic competence, but also an interrelation between linguistic competence and situation competence: ‘linguistic competence is learnt in situations, in practice: what is learnt is, inextricably, the practical mastery of language and the practical mastery of situations which enable one to produce the adequate speech in a given situation’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 647). This provides an interesting perspective with regards to the interpreter’s performance, who should convey the speaker’s message adopting the same register, terminology, and intention in the setting and situation where the speech occurs, hence referring to the conjunctural configuration of context-dependent renditions and the necessary linguistic and practical mastery of interpreters, who are again at the same time called to learn, adapt, and adjust their delivery to the context and the speaker, in a constant process of practise assimilation and improvement. In the institutionalized form, cultural capital for conference interpreters takes the form of ‘a certificate of cultural competence, e.g. a formalized academic qualification (diploma) that is socially sanctioned by an institution’ (Walther, 2014, p.10). Finally, the objectivized form of cultural capital exists in the form of material objects, e.g. books, technological tools, etc. that are transferable in their physical state and are physically utilized by interpreters in their practice.

Economic capital extends to remuneration and all forms of economic possessions. Symbolic capital is the degree of an interpreter’s accumulated prestige and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition on the conference field itself (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p. 7) as it consists in the acknowledgment of capital by the entirety of the other competitors (Bourdieu, 1997), in the forms of other interpreters, clients, interpreting agencies, and institutions, resulting in professional advancement and social status.

The four forms of capitals are interrelated, and they can be transferred or exchanged against others as a form of currency as a means to ensure or advance the position occupied by an interpreter in the social space (Bourdieu, 1986; 2006). For instance, conference interpreters may capitalize on their knowledge of different languages (and thus on their cultural and linguistic capital) inasmuch as these enjoy a prominent position in the labour market as a means of exchange for remuneration (economic capital) and prestige (symbolic capital). The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital and the position occupied in social space, where interpreters’ strategies are concerned with the preservation or improvement of their positions on the field: ‘such lucky players are able to use their capital advantage to accumulate more and advance further (be more successful) than others’ (Thompson, 2008 p. 67). To perform effectively interpreters must have accumulated the appropriate capitals, understood the configurations of the field, and mastered the ability to use capital effectively (Townley, 2014). As Inghilleri (2005b) states, the possession of different forms of capital in relation to interpreters bestows status and prestige on

its owners; capital (or a lack thereof) positions conference interpreters within the field in specific ways, and it can come to serve as the basis for the professional domination of some over others. This confrontation between the interpreters located within the field is always constituted in relation to the distribution of specific forms of capital – it involves a struggle to gain symbolic and material advantage with respect to social and professional positioning, to confer ‘strength, power, and consequently profit on their holder’ (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 4). Each is the product of an investment strategy, takes time to accumulate and has the potential to induce profits for the interpreter who possesses it.

According to Bourdieu, it is through the workings of habitus that the practice is successfully linked to capital and field. To this extent, the next section will be devoted to theoretically explore the workings of habitus.

#### **4.2 Habitus**

The concept of habitus lies at the core of Bourdieu’s practice theory, and it has become an increasingly useful tool to examine how social actions and relations are internalized and experienced as natural, and how it generates an infinite range of appropriate actions. In this section I propose an understanding of habitus based on the actualizations given by the author in his writings; I subsequently map its relationship to conference interpreters to operationalize habitus in training and in interpreting performances using examples from past literature and shared common knowledge about the practice, to illustrate how this concept can be further fed into empirical proceedings.

The habitus ‘informs agents on how to orient their actions to relate to the familiar, and to adapt to new situations. It ‘translates’ (...) into schemes of perception, thought, and action (dispositions) that enable the individual to function in the field’ (Townley, 2014 p. 46). The habitus integrates past experiences acquired through life trajectories, and it is how ‘our history informs the present (ways of being, acting, and feeling), its influence on the choice we make and the actions we take’ (ibid.).

Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus to account for the manifestation of the social world within the individual, and for the principles of social organization as embodied: it is ‘a socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world -field- and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world’ (1998, p. 81). As clarified by Reay (2004) one of the crucial features of the habitus is that it is embodied, and hence composed not only of mental attitudes and perceptions, but also of body attitudes, and that ‘this is expressed through durable ways of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking’ (Bourdieu, 1990a cited in Reay, 2004). It is a ‘system of durable, transposable dispositions, which functions as a structuring structure’, that is internalized ways of know-how and competences, both mental and



corporeal (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 12). Since there is a difference between primary and secondary (or specific) habitus, with the former informed by early familiar and socialization processes firstly began during childhood, the latter developed within specific spheres of activity (Bourdieu, 1998), the interpreter's habitus can be depicted as a form of specific 'interpreting' habitus. I identify the interpreter's habitus as an aggregation of encounters with foreign languages which possibly helped foster their sensitivity to interpreting and to the acquisition a set of dispositions moulded into linguistic capital, world knowledge, interpreting skills, and inter-relational skills. The interpreter's habitus is the result of dispositions acquired through education and specific interpreting training, and then fortified into practical mastery of the profession through encounters with the field of interpreting and peer interpreters in the same social space. In the interpreter's case, he or she would have been likely in the position to develop with the primary habitus an appreciation for foreign languages and cultures, predisposing the holders of such dispositions to pursue adequate interpreting training and to form a specific interpreting habitus. Practical mastery is finally achieved by interpreters when activities become embodied and turned 'into second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990a p. 63), and their engagement with the interpreting practice is able to be adapted to various situations through invention and improvisation after long immersion in the field itself. Indeed, the habitus is 'permeable and responsive to what is going on around' (Reay, 2004, p.434). Current circumstances are internalized and become yet another layer to add to the previous ones, and hence the habitus is continually re-structured by interpreters' encounters with the social and professional space, 'from restructuring to restructuring' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 134).

#### **4.3 Habitus in training and practice**

Habitus can be transformed through a process that raises the individual's dispositions; it would account here for an example of how interpreters, attending specific training, can transform their initial habitus into an interpreting habitus. I will do this by emphasizing the dynamism of the habitus in interpreting training, and by considering that a sense of habituation is necessary for the acquisition of the practice.

Interpreting as a social practice is a coordinated entity composed of several competences (such as language and cultural knowledge, background knowledge, interpersonal competences, interpretation skills, analytical capacity, ethical behaviour, and so forth) and as a series of performances, whose existence necessarily depends on the specific interconnectedness of the aforementioned elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. It is only through successive moments that the interdependencies between elements that constitute a practice such as interpreting are acquired, and then sustained over time (Warde, 2005; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Every element is gradually acquired by practitioners through repetition and social experiences, through a 'myriad of mundane social processes of learning

and training, until the individual acquires a set of dispositions which literally mould body and mind, becoming a second nature' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.12), until their acquisition and the formation of an interconnection of habituated conducts and specific competences. Wacquant (1995) emphasizes the ability of the body to be retooled through training to imprint bodily schemata and cognitive states that make a competent interpreter, who is trained to go through a series of crystallised set of prescribed tasks and actions of increasing difficulty to be accomplished step-by-step to enhance cognitive consistency.

The training of interpreters presupposes a regimen in which the habitus is worked upon to extend cognitive and bodily capacities through repeated exercises and actions of increasing difficulty, managed through routine adjustments, involving a pedagogy in which the development of interpreting competences occurs through calibration, in the form of presentation of good technique and correction of poor technique. It is a 'earning process of explanation, demonstration, practice, feedback and extension exercises which deconstructs technique down into its key elements so that these can be practised and mastered, and then synthesized into a larger movement (Noble & Watkins, 2010, p. 528). By providing means of expression which enable practical skills to be consciously organized around explicit principles, the training makes possible an adequate mastery of the principles of the practice, and it rationalizes the disposition.

Another crucial part of the refinement of the interpreting techniques is that 'practising the practice' naturalizes such competences. Indeed, both during training and professional life, these elements are acquired exercising the habitus through constant repetition to perform them naturally. Routine adjustments and continuous calibration naturally follow this path, since they are necessary to refining and improve the interpreter's performance during encounters. In this process, the habitus is also constantly subject to new experiences being an 'open system of dispositions', and it is 'endlessly transformed' through a dialectic with its social environment (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 116; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). It is in this dialectical relationship between the body and mind of the interpreter and the interpreting practice itself that interpreters find the form *par excellence* of their structural practical apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the practice, as Noble and Watkins underline:

'as beginners they need explicit instruction regarding technique; as intermediate players they have developed an ability to link elements (...) and hence need practice to develop their rhythm to concentrate on the result of the action rather than the action itself; as advanced players with high levels of skill they can co-ordinate all the aspects of the game' (2010, p. 535).

At the same time, conference interpreting is carried out through frequent performances or assignments in their professional life, which guarantee practical and regular enactment and

reiteration. It is through continuous performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the pattern and techniques provided in interpreters' training are subsequently reproduced by interpreters in real-life assignments (Warde, 2005; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Later on, along with other competences, these acquired dispositions will result in the complete formation of conference interpreting practice and in its appropriate management, or practical mastery, which is likened to a 'feel for the game' - an interpreter's sense of how to operate within the established norms of the field (Inghilleri, 2005a), which may be easily recognized in the issues widely discussed by previous studies, ranging from the discussion of accuracy and faithfulness; semantic, syntactic, and lexical choices in relation to the rendition itself; neutrality, invisibility, and power both within and beyond the interpreted encounter (cfr. Angelelli, 2004; Davidson, 2000; Metzger, 1999; Bélanger, 2003; Berk-Seligson, 1990; Fowler, 2003; Jacobsen, 2003; Roy, 2000; Wadensjö, 1995, 1998a and 1998b).

I have outlined how competence is achieved in training when practitioners return explicit processes to the realm of unconsciousness. However, I will discuss further on how the habituation of interpreting behaviours needs to bring those same behaviours to consciousness in order to alter it in the course of everyday assignments.

Even though successful interpreter training and practice are in need of capacity and crisis management, thus requiring the interpreter to resort to conscious coping strategies (Gile, 1995, p. 190), it is also what Bourdieu devaluates in his framework the modalities of habitus consciousness: he conceives habitus as having the potential to generate a wide repertoire of possible actions in a specific field, but he also proposes that individuals act in habitual, conventionalized ways, with strategies working below the level of consciousness, excluding deliberation (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 53), refusing the idea of social actors as conscious, calculative rational beings, although he does allow for the possibility of 'rational choice' under specific circumstances (ibid., p. 131). In his formulation, individuals' adjustments to the external world are all apparently working under the realm of unconsciousness. Indeed, at the core of Bourdieu's habitus lies the tendency to always act the same way in similar situations, as 'the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 12), he also suggests that habitus operates at an unconscious level unless individuals confront events that cause crisis and self-questioning. Nonetheless, following Daniel Gile (1995) I suggest that conference interpreting is a constant 'time of crisis' for its very cognitively challenging, time-constraining nature and modalities in which it is carried out. This would account for the fact that conference interpreters' habitus operates more on a conscious level because individuals are constantly confronting events that cause crisis and self-questioning in relation to their language rendition. Therefore, the example of conference interpreters at work can account for a conscious reworking of habitus allowing for the possibility of change, equipping the habitus with 'a far greater agentic function' (Noble &

Watkins, 2010, p.526). Since Bourdieu does not completely deny the character of inventive strategy intrinsic in the habitus (1990a) it is a question of to *what degree* - and not *if* - interpreters are creative when interpreting in real assignments, and *by what* conscious choices supported by their habitus are caused and linked to. Actions are dependent upon the interplay between habitus and circumstances in the field, and thus habitus is not immutable. Their relationship shapes and influences the enacted practice. Actions are, at the same time, influenced by options available and how these are perceived through dispositions (Townley, 2014).

In the supposed example of a conference setting with simultaneous interpretation provided, the interpreter needs to organize his language output from a limited set of linguistic cues continuously unfolding, while actively checking for mistakes, omissions, additions, cultural explanations, and facing problems such as speed, variety of accents and intonations, with no interruption or thinking longer than a few seconds. The habitus should then unconsciously guide the interpreters' simultaneous delivery on the basis of their previous experiences and strategies already sedimented, while making them operate at the level of consciousness to choose from a range of creative linguistic possibilities to achieve the goal of a successful communication performance. In real performances, the habitus would therefore unconsciously influence the interpreter's actions and reactions, directing him or her towards the *correct, accepted, pre-disposed* way of practising, putting at work a selection of forms of conduct and coping strategies acquired through past experiences and based on present resources. Gile poses that 'in spite of interpreters' preparation strategies, problems do arise in interpreting situations (...) and are encountered regularly' (1995, p. 191). I argue that it is exactly when problems arise in performances that one can investigate the interpreter's strategy and the extent of habitus consciousness, on the basis that 'in everyday situations (...) it is defined as a tactic (...) when it becomes a conscious endeavour, as opposed to an ordinary, subconscious process' and that 'interpreters do not choose the tactics at random. They seem to follow rules, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously. These rules help select one tactic over the other' (ibid., pp. 192-201)

Bourdieu accepts that habitus has degrees of change in response to the individual's experience (1990a) that there are two levels on the spectrum of creativity that are mobilized by the habitus: creativity and consciousness of the practice can be revealed in agentic and self-monitoring reflection, which can be retrospective/analytic and projective/synthetic, where interpreters consider their actions within the context of the situated performance, which involves the active and creative monitoring and self-monitoring of conduct which can be brought to discourse (Giddens, 1984, pp. 4-7), highlighting an awareness of what they have done (analytic capacity) and what they can do (synthetic capacity) while interpreting (Noble & Watkins, 2010, p. 530).

Gile (1995, pp. 194-197) distinguishes between ‘reformulation tactics’ and ‘preventive tactics’, which I layer with retrospective/analytic habitus-guided strategy and projective/synthetic habitus-guided strategies. Retrospective/analytic strategies, for instance, encompasses analytic and self-reflexive monitoring: mistakes, incorrect word choice, incorrect numbers, misunderstandings, reconstruction of the segment with the help of the context, delaying the response, replacing a segment with a superordinate term or a more general speech segment, etc. (ibid.).

Projective/synthetic strategies are intended to produce synthetic anticipation as automaticity during the course of a game – but it does this through very creative and conscious reflection, and involves the active monitoring of habitus to influence the present and future moments of the performance and avoid likely moments of crisis. Examples include: interpreting two languages with a very different structure, in case of missed sentences, changing the order of the syntactic and lexical elements in the sentence, taking notes, changing the ear-voice span, segmentation, changing the order of elements in an enumeration, etc. (ibid.).

There is, thus, a constant dialectic of habitus automatization and habitus creativity, a mastery of conscious and unconscious strategies driven by the interpreter’s habitus on the basis of previous experience and rationalized improvisation aimed towards a successful performance, as a means for interpreters to reflect upon their performance and alter it as they see fit. By drawing together these examples, habitus can be viewed as a ‘complex internalized core from which everyday experiences emanate’ (Reay, 2004, p. 435). Interpreters immersed in an interpreted event may choose from a range of available choices, but at the same time the choice inscribed in the habitus are limited; these same choices are also bounded by the framework of external field circumstances that makes ‘some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable’ (ibid.).

The conceptual force of the habitus lies in its attempts to account for how regularities of behaviour become established and maintained through what Bourdieu terms *strategies*, ‘the product[s] of the practical sense as the feel for the game, for a particular, historically determined game’ and that presupposes at the same time the capacity for invention and adaptation in social situations (Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 62-63). Habitus demonstrates how interpreters as social agents immersed in the field of interpreting can be determined and pre-disposed to certain actions and strategies in real-life professional encounters, and yet be acting too. From a sociological stance which does not exclude cognitive and neurological aspects, the habitus is what enables interpreters to feel at home in the field of interpreting as that world is ‘embodied’ in them, as it is through the workings of habitus that they sediment their knowledge of such world in a taken-for-granted sense (Inghilleri, 2005a). Since ‘ideas like those of habitus (...) were intended to point out that there is a practical knowledge that has its own logic’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 252) and it was conceived as a method, it can provide for an empirical investigation of the experience

of interpreters immersed in the social spaces which make their experiences possible. Habitus, then, is a means of viewing structure (the profession of conference interpreting) as occurring within small-scale interactions (interpreted events) and activity within large-scale settings (e.g. the field of conference interpreting, but also the field of court interpreting, healthcare interpreting, etc.) taking into account the social and professional trajectories of interpreters as social agents.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper I have approached Bourdieu's theoretical framework and his main concepts of field, capital, and habitus to investigate their relevance and application to the profession of conference interpreting. The conceptualization of conference interpreting as a social practice in the light of the relationship of habitus, field, capital, has proved useful for providing food for thought regarding the trajectories and actions of interpreters immersed in acts of interpreting within particular socio-cultural contexts and the specific agency they have on the complex of networks in which they operate.

This article calls for the opening of innovative research trajectories on how conference interpreters are involved in different socio-cultural professional contexts, and of what appears to commit them to the specific social practice under investigation; how their expertise is disposed and acquired through the habitus, and their account for their 'taken for granted' sets of dispositions and for their level of agency and positioning in the interpreted event. Furthermore, the role of the habitus in practice acquisition could open the path for revised training methods which would stress the importance of socio-cultural factors lying ahead in professional life.

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### About the Author

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