

Skirts and Suits in Conference Interpreting: Female Interpreters and Male Clients on the Current Romanian Market

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I use semi-structured interviews to examine the relationship between women conference interpreters and their male clients on the Romanian interpreting market in order to understand how highly skilled female interpreters fare on an unregulated market. My findings show that the relationship between male clients and female interpreters moves beyond the linguistic dependency of the employer on the employee to a professional dependency. This shift blurs the boundaries between personal and professional. I argue that women conference interpreters in Romania are dependent on male clients for advancement in their career. This dependence becomes breeding grounds for harassment behaviours to which women respond with tolerance. However, these practices lead to the devaluation of highly skilled professional women as well as to the devaluation of their occupation.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I examine the relationship between women conference interpreters and their clients on the Romanian interpreting market in order to understand how highly skilled female interpreters fare on an unregulated market.

I argue that women conference interpreters in Romania are dependent on male clients for advancement in their career. This dependency becomes breeding grounds for harassment behaviours to which women respond with tolerance. However, this practice leads to the devaluation of highly skilled professional women as well as to the devaluation of their occupation.

It may appear strange to state that there is not a mutual dependency between the conference interpreter and the client, since the client also depends on the interpreter's services. However, because the Romanian interpreting market is relatively new and dynamic, this relationship moves beyond the linguistic dependency of the employer on the employee to a professional dependency of the conference interpreter on the recruiter, one that blurs the boundaries between personal and professional.

Romanian interpreters need key power holders on the market that could help them get access to important job resources: formal and informal recommendations, contacts, access to information, and to networks and other job opportunities. The structure of this market creates a dependency of the interpreters on their clients, on conference organizers, on the companies that provide the equipment for the conferences and on other colleagues. However, the most powerful decision maker is the client. Therefore, the relationship between the interpreter and the client becomes a hierarchical one. Since on the Romanian market this relationship is

established most often between a male client and a female service provider, the power relationship takes the form of harassment practices. These behaviours are most often tolerated rather than reported.

The qualitative research method that I used to collect data about the experiences of both men and women professional interpreters on the Romanian market was interviewing. The interviews were conducted in April with fourteen conference interpreters who work either on the Romanian or the foreign interpreting market with different language combinations, within different age groups, with different professional education and different experiences on the market.

The reason why I am asking this question is to better understand how professional women conference interpreters, with high levels of education and special skills and aptitudes, with knowledge in all the fields of the socio-economic life, social and cultural knowledge of all their working languages' countries, who work under very much pressure and who have so much responsibility are devalued on an informal, non-structured interpreting market. At the same time, it is important to understand how conference interpreters manage to be proud of being part of their profession and keep a high professional level while at the same time they tolerate the practices that devalue their work and their profession and do not organize in a professional organization.

This research aims to contribute to the research on gender, informal labour and skilled occupations by exploring how labour dependence is maintained and reinforced on the informal labour market, how the professional systems that create dependence on powerful decision-makers influence the strategies used by women to cope with harassment behaviours and how the dynamics of the dependence relationships on an informal market lead to the devaluation of skills and professions by focusing on the case of professional female conference interpreters in Romania.

In the next chapter I review the literature on domestic work and informal economy in order to understand how dependence and vulnerability is created and reinforced in other informal work arrangements. My focus in this chapter is on gender and the value of work and gender and the informal economy. I draw on various forms of deference behaviours that characterize the exploitative relationship between the female domestic worker and the female employer and also on the devaluation of skills of domestic workers. Furthermore, I focus the vulnerability of the predominant female workers on the informal market that lack social and legal protection and unionization.

In chapter three I provide an overview of the current situation of the occupation of conference interpreting in Romania. I focus on the status of the Romanian interpreter in the past and the feminization of the occupation and I briefly describe the legislation on conference interpreting in Romania, the introduction of interpreting in the national classification of occupations and the current situation of the interpreter on the Romanian market.

Chapter four describes the methodology that I used to collect the data for this research, starting with the process of locating potential informants, moving on to describe the profile of my interviewees, and finishing with an examination of my position in the research and the limitations.

In chapter five I analyze the manifestations of the power dependency of the female conference interpreter on the male client and the strategies that women use to live through this experience. I start by examining the context in which this power relation develops, and then analyze the types of harassment that women are exposed to. Finally, I focus on the reasons why harassment is a common practice in this occupation and what the interpreters' reactions to these behaviours are.

1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this thesis I examine the relationship between women conference interpreters and their clients on the Romanian interpreting market in order to understand how highly skilled female interpreters fare on an unregulated market. As the Romanian interpreting market is relatively new and dynamic, I analyze how the practices of this occupation promote a professional dependence of the female interpreters on influential male clients for access to jobs, recommendations, social networks and other professional opportunities. At the same time, since this relationship is established between a female interpreter and a male client, I also argue that this dependence also takes the form of harassment¹ practices. These behaviours, which are more often tolerated rather than reported, lead to the devaluation of the highly skilled women as well as to the devaluation of their occupation. Although the main focus of my research is on the vulnerability of highly skilled professional women on an informal labour market, their situation cannot be understood without paying attention to how dependence and vulnerability is created and reinforced in other informal work arrangements. In this theoretical background of my research I am going to address two main aspects. First, I concentrate on gender and the value of work by drawing on the deference behaviours that characterize the exploitative relationship between the female domestic worker and the female employer and on the devaluation of skills that result from this. Second, I focus on the characteristics of the informal labour in order to point out the extent to which gender is an integral part of the exploitative relationship between employer and employee in this setting.

¹ In this thesis, I use the term harassment in a broad sense to incorporate repeated verbal or sexual advances, statements or remarks, intimidation, threats, labour exploitation, association with other occupations and other gender and work related unwanted behaviours which are offensive to the worker involved, which cause the worker to feel threatened, humiliated, mocked, harassed, which interfere with the job performance, which undermine the job security and which create a threatening work environment.

1.1. Gender and the value of work

The complexity of the personal relationship between the employer and the employee in an unregulated work arrangement has been largely documented (Rollins 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero 1992; Lan 2006; Schein 1994). Research in this area has revealed two main dimensions of this personal relationship, one of exploitation and another of empowerment.

One labour arrangement where this personal relationship between employer and employee becomes grounds for exploitation and labour control is the paid domestic work (Rollins 1985: 156; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Domestic employment in particular exposes the dynamics of labour and psychological exploitation which are created and reinforced through demands of deference, of gratitude, of extra services or extra hours of work and also through maternalism in a unique labour bond between a female employer and a female employee (Rollins: 1985). Apart from the exploitative dimension of this power relation, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) and Schein (1994) have shown that the intimacy which can develop between the two parties can also empower the employee in this work arrangement, since the quality of the relationship increases the worker's chances of negotiating better working terms, good work schedules and also offers more possibilities for the employee to get access to other jobs.

Although my research focuses on professional highly educated women, the relationship between the female conference interpreters and the male recruiters is also unequal and this power relation is part of their everyday work experiences in an unregulated work environment. Moreover, since retaining permanent contact with the employer is an integral part of the practices within the occupation, the professional relationship between the female conference interpreter and her client is at the same time exploitative and empowering.

The central pattern of this personal employer-employee relationship emerges particularly in the rituals of deference and maternalism (Rollins 1985; Lan 2006), which are both meant to confirm the inequalities between the two and to assert the superior position of the employer. Deference behaviours are considered to be part of the job requirements of the domestic worker and failure to exhibit such rituals often result even in the termination of employment. Maternalism on the other hand is a form of psychological exploitation that characterizes in particular the “bond of exploitation” (Romero 1992 quoted in Lan 2006: 3) between the two women in this relationship (Rollins, Hondagneu-Sotelo). As such, it takes the form of *quid pro quo* obligations where the employer gives the employee a sense of belonging, gives them emotional support, love, gifts in exchange for loyalty, obedience or unpaid long hours of work and extra services.

Rollins and Hondagneu-Sotelo’s arguments regarding these behaviours that characterize the unequal labour relationship are relevant for my research, because female conference interpreters also have to perform deference behaviours as part of their job. However, in contrast to these findings, I present a somewhat different connection between the deference rituals and the conference interpreters’ career. Failure to perform these job expectations could cut the interpreters off from access to contacts, referrals, networks and could even damage their reputation. At the same time, the maternalism that Rollins addresses in her study as the salient characteristic of the female employer’s power over the female employee finds the equivalent of harassment behaviours in my study. In the case of conference interpreters, the male client’s power over the female interpreter adds a new dimension to the relationship, which takes the form of harassment. This exploitation and harassment within and outside the work settings are particularly abusive because of the gender division of labour created and reinforced within this arrangement, with the male harasser in a position of power and the female victim in a position of provider of services

1.1.1. Deference as part of the job expectations

Goffman (1956) and Rollins (1985) refer in detail to the variety of the deference behaviours and they indicate that in numerous instances several types of deferential rituals are performed together within the same relationship. Rollins refers particularly to the deference rituals that are performed in the unequal relationship between domestic workers and their employers and more precisely to the acts of deference which are expected by superordinate from the subordinate. Both Goffman (1956: 481) and Rollins (1985: 158-173) refer to many forms of deference, of which I will only consider two, the linguistic deference and the deference forms which are part of the communication structure.

There are three types of linguistic deference which extremely common within this relationship between the employer and the domestic worker (Rollins 1985: 158). Namely, except in very few instances, domestic workers are referred to by their first names and are expected to call their employers by their last name or to refer to them in deferential terms, such as “Ma’am” and female domestic workers are always called “girls”, regardless of age. She also points that although most of the domestic workers do not like such behaviours, they accept them, they do not openly complain to their employers and they even adopt this language use in reference to themselves (Rollins 1985: 158-160).

These behaviours are also part of the conference interpreters’ everyday work experience and they consider that this type of treatment is characteristic of the Romanian male clients. Although they feel offended by the familiarity that their clients show towards them to which they are not allowed to reciprocate, they do not confront their clients. Furthermore, in my study of highly trained conference interpreters the characteristics of these deference behaviours are experienced as verbal harassment and are considered particularly depreciative towards their work and their skills. However, since the kind of relationship that interpreters manage to develop with their clients is valued even more than their job competences, these behaviours are more often tolerated than reported. Another aspect that is

important to indicate is that apart from the non-structured informal labour market where these deference behaviours are maintained and tolerated, gender is also a key player in this field. By this I mean that these interactions that take place on the labour market are particularly abusive when the relations of dominance and submission are created through strong connections between masculinity and power and femininity and submission. Moreover, women react to these behaviours in gendered ways, meaning that their tolerance and lack of assertiveness reinforces the gender inequalities within the labour market.

Apart from the above mentioned acts of linguistic deference, employers also reinforce this unequal relationship by limiting the domestic worker's possibility to start a conversation and by limiting the conversations that she has (Rollins). At the same time, the familiarity that the employer may convey towards her employee gives them privilege to ask the domestic more personal questions than the domestics have the right to. This intrusive behaviour shows that the female employers are curious about the worker's race, that they want to know everything about their employees in order to gain control or that they want to confirm the stereotypical assumptions they have about certain categories or certain races. However, given their vulnerability (especially in the case of the live-in domestic workers) Rollins states that the domestic workers have to conform to this type of linguistic exploitation and to reply to such questions in a satisfactory manner. At the same time, they cannot choose not to reply or to tell their employers that they feel uncomfortable being asked about private matters.

This type of deference is also performed by the conference interpreters in their relationships with their clients and I analyze how this familiarity that recruiters show towards interpreters allows them to ask more personal questions regarding the female interpreters' background, education, experience on the market to which interpreters feel that they have to answer in a satisfactory manner. Moreover, my findings show that the interpreters consider

this type of deference as a condition of work and opportunity to show openness and interest in providing services to that particular client.

1.1.2. Devaluation of skills

Domestic work is understood in broad terms, since there is no standardization regarding the types of assignments that it entails. At the same time, employers do not clearly define the tasks of the workers and expect them to “read the signals” and anticipate their work requirements. In addition to the control that employers exercise over the types of work behaviours that they want to extract from their workers, they also try to impose their power over the management of the time of the domestic workers, reduce domestics to “unskilled labour and subject them to constant supervision” (Romero cited in Hondagneu-Sotello 2001; Hondagneu-Sotello).

In line with these findings, I also argue that the lack of clearly defined job requirements and lack of knowledge regarding what the job of a conference interpreter entails also contribute to the devaluation of skills even in the case of highly educated professional conference interpreters. In my study, interpreters’ work is commonly associated on the Romanian market with secretarial duties and very often their job requirements vary according to the demands of the employer, who asks them to play hostesses, to cater for conferences, to make coffee, to pick up the documents for the seminars at the reception of the hotel and give them to the participants, to arrange lunches and dinners and other menial duties.

Domestic work is not considered real employment but more often a temporary situation, sometimes an intermediate stage before marriage or before getting a “real job”(Lan; Hondagneu-Sotello). At the same time, since it takes place in the private home and the chores associated with household are seen as a “woman’s calling” and also as “expressions of

women's natural love for their families", the domestic labour is unskilled and it is depersonalized and devalued (Lan 2006: 13-14).

While analyzing the feminization of domestic labour and the role of women as "the major agents of labour management at home", Lan argues that women employers still view the housework and childcare as their duties. Given the fact that women employers transfer some of their duties as mother, wife and daughters in the house to the domestic workers, they attempt to overcome their feelings of guilt and insecurity regarding their violation of the tradition of domesticity by transferring the menial duties and dividing the tasks of the mothering work that she handles (reading books to the children, helping them with homework) and those that she assigns to the caregiver (changing diapers, cleaning the playroom). By doing so, they are actually reinforcing the beliefs in the natural skills of women for housework and the invisibility of this type of work.

Within the context of my findings, I find that in the case of conference interpreters the invisibility and the lack of value assigned to this occupation can also be explained through the same belief that Lan indicated, that "girls" have specific qualities or skills, which were either acquired "naturally" or "through socialization" that make them more suitable for specific types of work.

1.2. Gender and informal work

The literature on the informal economy addresses the characteristics of two main sectors: that of the "sweatshops, child labour, outwork" and other unregulated work arrangements where "the employment relationship is not recognized or protected" (ILO 2002: 1-4) and that of the skilled workers, who organize as self-employed or who earn additional incomes and who are in the position to opt out of the formal labour market and establish themselves as entrepreneurs (Mattera 1985 quoted in Losbe, Else and Kingslow 2002: 16). These two

sectors are occupied both by men and women, but women tend to be marginalised, next to the black people and the immigrants, in the most vulnerable jobs, that lack protection, where their contribution is invisible, which are not unionised and which isolate them in exploitative working conditions (ILO 2002; Mattera 1985; Bernasek 1999).

Both Hoyman (1987: 74-75) and Losby *et al* (2002: 15) argue that working in the informal economy is rarely the result of women's choice but more often the result of being forced either because of the barriers from the formal economy that prevent them from accessing jobs (discrimination, low incomes, impossibility to balance work and family responsibilities) or because of a combination of access only to low status jobs in the service sector and their acceptance of gender roles that determines them to return to the maternal roles. Women are more likely to be found in these informal work arrangements because they provide more independence, more opportunities for flexible work practices and therefore enable them to take care of the household responsibilities and children and also because women have certain natural skills that can be marketed in the informal economy.

In addition to these arguments, I find that in certain skilled professions which are dominated by women, the characteristics of the two sectors of the informal economy can be found together in the same work arrangement. More precisely, in my study conference interpreters are part of an unregulated work arrangement, but since they are skilled workers, they can opt out the professional status of employee and establish themselves as freelance entrepreneurs. At the same time, indeed, more women can be found in this informal work arrangement, but my research shows that conference interpreters are never forced to be part of the informal labour force, but that they choose this type of arrangement because it offers more flexibility and better chances to increase their earnings and to advance their careers.

The work conditions that characterize the informal sectors where women are over-represented (especially home-based work or street vending), are generally inferior to those in

the formal sector in terms of earnings, work arrangements, legal and social protection, unionization and job security (Renaut 2004). Under these circumstances, they are not able to sign formal written employment contracts, their working hours are irregular, the services they provide vary according to the demands of the employer and they have no voice to make their work recognised and represented (Renaut 2004). According to the International Labour Organization, the poor quality of the work conditions, the absence of rights of work and the lack of unionization all contribute to the vulnerability of the female workers on the informal market.

The above characterization of the informal market can be adopted in my study, since the interpreting market in Romania lacks regulations and written rules regarding the occupation of conference interpreting. At the same time, my findings show that even if the under the existing legislation, clients have to sign written contracts with the service providers, this practice is not common on the Romanian market and the consequences of this lack of clearly stated working conditions are not beneficial for the work of interpreters. Namely, they are expected to be constantly available to the needs of their employers, they are required to do extra services or to work more without compensation and there is no professional association or union to represent their interests in this work relationship.

One aspect that the literature that I have consulted on the informal economy only mentions but does not address in detail in the context of the informal market is the gendered relationship between the employer and the employee. Renaut (2004:3) states that the workers on the informal market have no power to bargain their work conditions or their compensation with their employers. The International Labour Organization (2004) describes the relationship between employer and employee in the informal economy as being “less stable” and indicates that work relations usually develop between a male employer and a female employee. The literature on domestic work focuses on the dimensions that the hierarchical relationship

between the employer and the domestic worker takes in the context where both parties are female: maternalism practices, managing feelings of guilt, insecurity, jealousy through various strategies that establish a clear distinction between “the maid” and “the madam” in the house (Lan 2006; Rollins 1985). However, none of these analyze the gendered nature of these exploitative relationships that establish between the male recruiter and the female employee in the informal labour market.

In my findings, gender is an integral part of this relationship between a male client and a female service provider. The professional dependence of the interpreter on the client because of the informal structure of the market takes a new dimension, that of the male dominance over the female which results in harassment behaviours. Following Acker’s arguments, this division of labour, with the male client in the position of power holder while the woman is powerless and dependent on the client’s resources is a gender division. At the same time, male clients are the ones who create these gender divisions and the informal systems of the occupations maintain them. As I have shown in the previous part, the interactions between the male client and the female interpreter, where the client takes the liberty to show a degree of familiarity towards the female interpreter that cannot be reciprocated and controls the conversations that she has, also enact a gender dominance-submission pattern where men are the actors and women have a submissive position.

At the same time, as MacKinnon (1979: 18 quoted in Acker 1991) shows, “the gendered definition of some jobs includes sexualisation of the woman worker as part of the job”. In this context where harassment becomes part of the everyday work experience of the female interpreter and where there are no professional association to trace these incidences, the gender domination of the male client becomes invisible.

2. CONFERENCE INTERPRETING AS A PROFESSION

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the current situation of the occupation of conference interpreting in Romania. In the first part of this chapter I provide a short analysis of the place of women in the labour market and I focus on the status of the Romanian interpreter in the past and the feminization of the occupation. The second part of this chapter is a brief description of the legislation on conference interpreting in Romania, of the introduction of interpreting in the national classification of occupations and the current situation of the interpreter on the Romanian market.

2.1. Romanian women and the labour market

According to the National Agency of Employment, in Romania, women's employment rate (women aged 15-64) for 2006 was 58.2 per cent, a 12 per cent increase since 1999, as indicated by the National Report on Equality between Women and Men (2002: 8). At the level of the European Union, women's employment rate for 2007 is 58.3 per cent for the EU-27, whereas at the level of Romania women represent 52.8 per cent of the employed population. Men represent a larger proportion among the employed (64.8) (European Commission 2009: 28).

Even if the gender gap in the employment rate between men and women in Romania increased only with 0.2 per cent since 2002 (European Commission 2009: 28), women still work primarily in sectors financed by the state budget, where the remuneration is generally lower than the average salary in the economy (Tesiú and Bocioc 2005; Open Society Institute 2002). Just like in 1999, in 2006 the majority of women are still segregated in feminized sectors, such as health and social assistance (77.4 %), education (73.9%), hotels and restaurants (63.2%) or trade (54%), areas of employment where women have lower wages than men (Household Labour Survey 2006). Men on the other hand prevail in constructions,

mining and quarrying, transport and communications, real estate, public administration and defence. Exceptions to this segregation include financial intermediaries, banking and insurance, with high levels of salaries and where women make up the majority of employees (Household Labour Survey 2006; Open Society Institute 2002).

According to the Open Society Institute's 2002 report on equal opportunities for men and women in Romania, girls are still directed towards fields which are poorly remunerated and although they represent 57 per cent of the graduates in tertiary education (Tesiú and Bocioc 2005), women's unemployment rate is still higher at tertiary level than that of men (4.3 % compared to 3.3%) (Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2007).

According to the national statistics, in 2006 in Romania 1.76 million people were registered as self-employed workers out of which 1.46 million in agriculture (Chivu 2009). At the same time, according to the OECD Report on Informal Employment in Romania (2008), the informal economy accounted for 37.4 per cent of the GDP in 2002/2003, more than in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland.

Although there are two definitions used by the National Institute of Statistics, one for the Labour Force Survey and the other for the national census, they both include independent entrepreneurs, liberal professionals, occasional day-labourers and individual farmers among the self-employed population. The statistics between 2000 and 2006 regarding the self-employed with no employees shows that there has been a significant decline (29 per cent) in the number of both men and women self-employed in this period, while both the number of employers and employees has increased.

In what concerns the distribution of self-employed by professions, the number of specialists with intellectual and scientific occupations, the category that incorporates the occupations of conference interpreters, translators, architects, lawyers, journalists, artists and other liberal professions, between 2000 and 2006 there has been an increase from 0.5 to 0.9 in

the number of self-employed in these professions (National Institute of Statistics 2001, 2004, 2007 quoted in Chivu 2009). Although there have not been any special studies carried out on self-employed workers, according to Chivu's analysis of the national statistics, in this category there are approximately 16.000 self-employed persons. In Romania there is no statistical data concerning the salaries of self-employed workers, but given the fact that as Chivu mentions, 30 per cent of the employed population can be found in agriculture, where the large number of workers are self-employed, the number of low-paid jobs is significant.

One very important aspect that Chivu indicates is that in Romania, the self-employed workers are not organised in associations and there are no institutions representing their rights. However, some of the liberal professions have organized in professional associations, which function both as trade unions and as representatives.

2.2. The conference interpreter in Romania

It is very hard to trace the history of conference interpreting in Romania, since, as I have come to find out from my research and from my interviewees, there are no written sources about the current and the past situation of this occupation or about its incumbents. The occupation can be formally traced if we are to consider that training in translation studies and conference interpreting in Romania began after the 1990s, when the department of Applied Modern Languages was founded at the "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca. However, as two of my interviewees pointed out, there was a constant need for interpretation even before the 1990s.

One of the interviewees, who worked both as an interpreter and a translator in a knitwear factory in the 1970s and 1980s in Romania, mentioned that even in the past there was no clear distinction between the occupation of interpreter and that of translator. Moreover, the word interpreter did not exist and the term "translator" was a category just as

broadly used as today. She told me that when she went to make an appointment with a medical doctor, she was registered by the nurse as a seamstress since the word translator and seamstress sound similar in Romanian.

Her duties as the only translator of the factory included translating documents (invoices, order lists), interpreting at meetings with foreign delegates, accompanying delegates to concerts, meals, exhibitions, administering the technical library of the factory and even managing the protocol department (arranging ceremonial events, planning the foreign visits, organizing the receptions, buying the food for these events and organizing the menus for the foreign delegates). Her job description was not clearly defined and often she found herself having to translate documents in five languages, none of which she spoke at a proficient level. Her working day often meant interpreting twelve hours with a single break or even having to sleep at work since the negotiations between the foreign and the Romanian parties would last until early in the morning.

There was no interpreting market at the time and for Transylvania she was the only translator and interpreter whose services were constantly requested. The only references she makes to other translators concern the Romanian Ministries' interpreters, most of whom were also women.

Constantly during the interview she referred to the presence and to the surveillance of the secret police to which she had to report after each meeting with the foreign delegates. She would have to answer questions related to very intimate aspects of her superiors' lives, she would have to report everything she received from the foreign guests (cigarettes and coffee), she had problems because her children were in the German school and she was the only one trusted to travel to the capital city with the foreign delegates and provide interpreting for them.

Her status and her work in the factory is considered to be today that of a staff interpreter. As there was no possibility to become a freelance interpreter, she was an official employee of the factory, receiving a salary and following the regulations of the work organization.

The realities that she described during the interview, that there was no solidarity with the other interpreters that worked for the ministries, that she was required on numerous occasions to provide extra services (buying fruits and making jam for the wives of her employers), the humiliation that she had to endure because some of her clients did not understand what her work involved or the lack of a clear job description are unfortunately dominant characteristics of the current Romanian interpreting market.

2.3. Feminization of the occupation

My interviewees could not tell me whether the interpreting occupation has always been a feminized occupation in Romania or who were the first interpreters on the Romanian market. Since there are no written testimonies regarding the interpreters in Romania, it is very hard to explain the feminization of this occupation.

At international level, ever since the beginnings of this occupation, there was never a difference in payment and status between the male and the female conference interpreters, according to Keiser (2004: 585). However, in the beginnings of the consecutive interpreting there were very few female interpreters and this situation is also considered a result of the fact that conference rooms rarely had good acoustics and the interpreter had to stand up and speak loud in front of hundreds of people. However, when simultaneous interpreting started to be used, the number of women who supported this new type of interpretation was much higher than that of male conference interpreters. Male interpreters considered that simultaneous decreased the prestige of their occupation since the interpreter is in a booth in the background

and diminished their employment offers and their payments. Jesús Baigorri Jalón (2004: 149) even went so far as to ask whether the fact that more women entered the occupation when simultaneous interpretation was introduced consequently determined the loss in prestige of this profession.

In Romania today, the proportion of women conference interpreters who either work on the market or who are in training is dominant. Although the occupation is not valued in Romania, according to my interviewees, this situation is not related to the high number of women practising it, but to the fact that on the private interpreting market the clients do not understand the need for an interpreter, they do not understand the way in which interpreters work, or the effort needed to interpret.

The high proportion of women in this occupation in Romania was explained by my interviewees as being a result of the fact that women have specific qualities or skills, which are either acquired “naturally” or through socialization, such as: “communicative”, “attention to details”, “language skills”, “interpersonal skills”, “and better at understanding messages and getting them across”, “flexibility”, “adaptability”. Another reason given by my interviewees is that in Romania there is a tradition for girls to study languages and for boys to study engineering, law, business studies, so the cliché is that the girls from philology become interpreters.

However, I consider that Fodor’s (1997) theory of “revalued resources” explains how this occupation opened up as a niche for women with language skills following the transformations in post state socialist societies. She argues that because of the state socialist gender segregation on the labour market women possessed human capital in feminized service or tertiary sectors which became revalued in the post-state socialist economies. Therefore, those qualifications which were not valued in the state socialist societies (language

skills, analytical skills) became an advantage for women's employment opportunities after 1989.

2.4. Conference interpreting in the national occupational classification

Conference interpreting is formally recognized as an occupation in Romania since 2008, once it was introduced within the national classification of economic activities. Until 2008, interpreting was to be found in the class of "Secretarial and translation duties".

A second revision of the 2008 National Classification of Economic Activities included interpreting under the name of "Written and Oral translation (interpretation) activities" in the section of "Professional, Scientific and Technical activities", next to legal and accounting activities, architectural and engineering activities, scientific research and development, advertising and market research and veterinary activities. As defined by this classification, the class requires a high level of training and describes the activities of those with specialized knowledge and skills (<http://www.coduricaen.com>).

In the Romanian Classification of Occupations, the interpreter and the diplomatic interpreter are included in a separate class entitled "Social Science and Related Professionals" together with philologist, translator (with university degree) and graphologist.

According to the 2007 occupational profile compiled by the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection, interpreters listen to oral texts and reproduce them in their target language; they provide interpreting services at conferences, debates or other meetings, without changing the meaning that the message has in the source language².

This late introduction of interpreting amongst the national occupations contributed to the reasons why it is difficult for conference interpreters to achieve recognition in Romania

² The language from which interpreting is carried out

and also suggests that the process of recognition of the occupation as being different and independent from the secretarial duties on the Romanian market will be a long one.

The legislation on the authorization and the payment of conference interpreters only regulates the activity of the translators and interpreters that work for the Romanian judiciary system (Ministry of Justice, Superior Council of Magistracy, National Anticorruption Directorate, notary publics, lawyers, executors etc). This legislation (2004/281/MJ; 1997/178/MJ) stipulates that the person requesting the authorization of translator and interpreter must have a degree in foreign languages. The authorization can be withdrawn as a result of two unjustified refusals to provide the requested services in one year. However, this authorization is needed only if the person wants to work as a judiciary (court) translator and interpreter. The other possibility is to become an entrepreneur, a self-employed interpreter, who, just as the other liberal professions in Romania, has to register with The National Trade Register.

2.5. Job requirements

I asked the conference interpreters that I interviewed to tell me in general terms what their job requirements are and what their job description is. According to their own statements, the conference interpreter must have a complex set of skills, which are all necessary in their work, but which are rarely found all together in one person.

The conference interpreters must first of all be fluent in their active languages³ and need to have a perfect understanding of their passive languages⁴. However, this is only a first

³ **Active Language** is the language or languages into which the interpreter is capable of providing professional interpretation.

⁴ **Passive Language**=For interpreters, passive languages are the languages out of which the interpreter is capable of interpreting professionally.

In a meeting, **passive languages are the languages from which interpreting is provided into active languages.** (AIIC's Conference Interpretation Glossary)

requirement, since knowledge of languages is not sufficient to be an interpreter, in spite of what the Romanian recruiters might think.

Another very important requirement is distributive attention. The interpreter listens to the message in a source language, analyzes it and processes it, compresses the information and extracts the necessary information without losing the savour of language and renders it in the target language in a very short span of time, ranging from simultaneous to a few moments.

Knowledge in all the fields of the socio-economic life is fundamental, since the interpreters' services are used in a large variety of domains, from trainings for workers and salespersons to the highest levels of diplomacy. At the same time, they must have social and cultural knowledge of all their working languages' countries. Availability and willingness to work is one of the main requirements for interpreters to get assignments. Especially on small markets, such as the Romanian one, if interpreters do not show availability to travel, they will not get many contracts.

The interpreters must have a pleasant voice and always be aware of their self presentation. For example, the interpreter always has to smile and talk to people, especially when they only have one chance to make a good impression on their clients and their future collaborations depends on these public relations skills.

Apart from the actual job, a very important job requirement is the prior preparation for the assignment. Since the subjects discussed in conferences range from the protection of environment to cathodic protection of gas pipes, the interpreters have to make up glossaries, have to read the literature in that particular domain, have to get used to the specialized terminology, have to consult with domain specialists and so on. That is why it is very important for them to receive any kind of relevant documents related to the conference where they would work as interpreters beforehand.

Spontaneity is a job requirement that interpreters mention very frequently, since they have to think and act fast. At the same time, diplomacy and ethics are also essential. The interpreter has to respect confidentiality, has to be faithful to the speaker and intelligently know when or the extent to which his interpretation should be faithful to the original (nuances of language for example). However, the interpreter's work is most often a team work and he/she has to be aware that for the well being of the message the team spirit and the booth manners are very important.

2.6. The Romanian interpreting market

The Romanian private interpreting market is a very dynamic market, which is still changing and catching up with the foreign interpreting markets. The market is monopolized by the capital city, but there are also some events in Transylvania, mainly in multilingual cities, such as Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Braşov or the Prahova Valley.

Despite the fact that interpretation is very often used nowadays in Romania, there is still a very poor perception of the profession and of the interpreter. Mara (FR-EN), the head of the department of Translation Studies and Conference Interpreting, pointed out that on the Romanian market “you are thrown in a booth and you have to manage”. However, she mentioned that the fact that this situation is not representative only for the Romanian market, but that as the country is fresh out of the transition period, the market in general is “wild” in all domains, but particularly in the domain of the liberal profession, whose status is not clearly regulated.

On the Romanian market, there are different levels of conferences and different types of recruiters.

Conference organizers were categorized by my interviewees as belonging to two classes: “the upper class” and “the lower class”. “The upper class” was defined as that of high

level conferences, where the equipment is functional, where people know what kind of work the interpreters' profession involves, where interpreters are provided with materials from which to prepare for the conference, where contracts are signed and where people pay interpreters at high rates. "The lower class", consists of people who organize a small, unique event, and afterwards they do not use interpreting services anymore. At this level, the organizers do not have any equipment or provide interpreters with the consoles but not with the booths, they do not sign contracts and interpreters find themselves fighting with the organizers to get documents about the conference beforehand. They are reluctant to pay the interpreters because they do not see the reason for it and they were described as having so little experience in conference organization that they do not know the difference between simultaneous⁵ and consecutive⁶ interpreting.

When it comes to the large public, there is one group of people who has been very often described as those who "don't understand how it works but they're grateful" and another group, who "don't have a clue, but they don't care". The first category was described as those who come after the conferences or during the breaks to thank the interpreters and usually express their amazement regarding the conference interpreters' abilities to listen, understand and speak at the same time. The other group, who was referred to as "the spoiled group" are those who are either not able to use the equipment (meaning the headsets) or do not have patience, particularly when the interpreter does a longer pause in order to hear and understand before speaking, and who stand up during the conference and say that the headsets are not functional. This category also includes the persons who are sure that interpreting is a

⁵ In simultaneous mode, the interpreter sits in a booth with a clear view of the meeting room and the speaker and listens to and simultaneously interprets the speech into a target language. Simultaneous interpreting requires a booth (fixed or mobile) that meets ISO standards of acoustic isolation, dimensions, air quality and accessibility as well as appropriate equipment (headphones, microphones) (AIIC's Conference Interpretation Glossary) .

⁶ The interpreter providing consecutive interpretation sits at the same table with the delegates or at the speaker's platform and interprets a speech into the target language after the speaker speaks. The length of the speeches varies. For this purpose the interpreter may take notes (AIIC's Conference Interpretation Glossary).

matter of language skills. They normally express their confidence that they could do it as well and they point out the fact that they do not understand the reason why interpreting is so expensive.

My findings show that the Romanian market is not regulated. My informants frequently referred to different problems which they face on the private market, some of which I will describe in the following.

One of the biggest problems is that there is no quality consciousness among clients and since interpreting is a lucrative business, everyone thinks that it is an easy job and a money-maker occupation. There are a lot of recruiters who hire unqualified, self-appointed interpreters who work for dumping prices and this affects the overall quality of the interpreting services and the rates on the market. At the same time, anyone with a qualification in languages can become self-employed and work in this domain. Since the client requests an invoice for the services provided, even a translator with no skills in interpreting can provide this.

The lack of knowledge regarding the work of interpreters perpetuates itself also at the level of the conference participants and recruiters who consider that interpreters are “some girls who do a similar job to secretarial duties” (Mara, RO-FR).

However, since most of the interpreters who work in Romania are freelancers⁷ and their work is seasonal, with more conferences in spring and autumn and very few in summer and winter, they depend on conference organizers, clients and companies that have the technical equipment, for assignments or for recommendations. According to my interviewees, in Romania, there is no condition per se to enter the market. Interpreters get jobs by

⁷ A freelance interpreter is an interpreter who is recruited on a limited basis.

He or she works for many employers/clients, depending on his/her area of expertise and on demand. Freelance means that the interpreter is free to accept or refuse offers of work and that, outside the period of contract, is accountable to no one and is responsible for his/her own taxes and social contributions. (AIIC's Conference Interpretation Glossary)

recommendations, by chance or through a lot of public relations. Since the situation is so arbitrary on the market, the quality of the interpreting service and the professional value do not weigh more than personal contacts. My informants indicated that in other countries, such as France or Switzerland, where the interpreting market is more organized, students graduating from interpreting trainings can register with what is called a “Secretariat”, a clearing house for job offers that dispatch offers among their pool of interpreters. In Romania, there are no interpreting agencies that would work as intermediaries between interpreters and clients, therefore it is very difficult for young trained interpreters to get access to jobs. That also implies that if the client is not satisfied with the services provided by the interpreter or if the interpreter wants to complain about the work conditions there is no formal body that they could turn to.

Another irregularity that contributes to the vulnerability of the interpreters’ situation on the Romanian market is that very rarely a contract is signed between the client and the interpreter. Despite the fact that signing a contract is required for tax purposes, very few organizers do this. Moreover, even if they do, there are very few who offer a contract that they respect, that they give to the interpreter beforehand or whose stipulations are clear. Because most of the times there is only a “gentlemen’s agreement”, the interpreter often finds himself/herself in the position of having been contracted for certain languages and for a certain type of interpretation and being required to provide other services or having to work very late hours, during breaks and meals or in inappropriate conditions (no soundproofed booths or no booths at all, working alone). At the same time, documents are rarely available before the conference and the organizers do not have the instinct to give the interpreter the programme of the conference, the list of speakers, the presentations or to recommend further readings to the interpreters if they cannot provide the original discourses.

In terms of payment the interpreters are often humiliated and asked to compromise and to bargain with clients who justify the little money they offer on the basis of budgets being limited: “ we can’t give you more but we promise you that next time you will receive more from us”. In these conditions where the market is limited and very often interpreters cannot afford to refuse assignments, the solution is either to accept to work for the minimum price while being disloyal to your colleagues or to take up another job. Most of the interpreters also work as language teachers, interpreting professors or translators.

In addition to the lack of contracts and the informal means of getting access to jobs, the profession is not unionized and there is no professional association representing conference interpreters in Romania.

Apart from what my interviewees called “the dead body” of the Romanian Association of Conference Interpreters (ARIC) that to their knowledge does not exist anymore except for a website that is not being updated, the Romanian Association of Translators (ATR), who represent interpreters as well, but their main focus is on translators and terminologists and some forums and online groups for translators, there is no institution regulating this profession on the Romanian market.

There are two interpreting schools in Romania, one in Bucharest and the other in Cluj-Napoca. The one in Cluj-Napoca is recognised among the European Masters in Conference Interpreting and it trains graduates with different higher education backgrounds (medicine, law, philology, translation studies and conference interpreting etc.). The applicants are 90 per cent women and they are accepted upon passing a general knowledge test, a language proficiency test and an aptitude test. Although my informants stressed the importance of having such training in order to provide professional services on the market, most of those who had graduated from it constantly complained that this programme prepared them for ideal working conditions and most importantly it prepared them for the market of the

European Institutions and not for the Romanian market. Apart from the technical skills that they acquired during the training, the former graduates told me that the training did not teach them how to get jobs on the Romanian market, how to work with a booth partner, how to educate their clients, how to establish limits, how to negotiate with clients and other such practical details that they considered it would help graduates to avoid disappointment and guilt that they are not doing what they were taught to do. Interestingly enough some of the professors I talked to from this training, most of whom have experience as interpreters on the Romanian market, did not agree with these sayings and stated that in informal situations they do give advice on these matters.

As shown in this background chapter, the occupation of conference interpreting in Romania is not regulated and there are no written documents tracing the history of this profession or the situation of its incumbents. The experiences of my interviewees indicate that the irregularities and the confusion that dominated this profession before interpreting schools were created are still dominant on the current Romanian private market.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this research comes from fourteen in-depth interviews that I conducted in April with six male and ten female conference interpreters. To supplement these interviews, I sent five to seven questions over email to five conference interpreters or trainers in conference interpreting.

I conducted interviews mainly with Romanian conference interpreters, who work either on the Romanian market or on the foreign market, with different language combinations, within different age groups, with different professional education and different experiences on the market. Three of my informants were not Romanian, but they have experience as conference interpreters on the Romanian market.

In order to locate potential informants I have used word-of-mouth referrals (insiders of the profession which acted as “guides” in the field and introduced me to the other interpreters) (Ritchie 1995) which have facilitated my access to other interested subjects. At the same time, I have used mailing lists from my previous university groups to identify people who work in this field and I have also put up an add on an online group for translators and interpreters about conducting interviews for a project on the experience of being a conference interpreter in Romania. Networks have proven very useful in this situation, since most of the people I have contacted provided me with email addresses of other colleagues, professors or family members that might be interested in this kind of research.

More than half of my interviewees are graduates of the same university and of the same specialization (“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Letters, Applied Modern Languages Department, MA in Conference Interpreting) or current professors of the undergraduate or postgraduate programmes in conference interpreting.

I was acquainted with some of my interviewees due to attendance of this university and this fact facilitated obtaining their approval to conduct interviews and to schedule them.

Eleven of my interviews were conducted face to face, but I had to conduct five of them on the internet, using an instant messaging application with audio features because of the distance and because they were not available for an interview in April. This method (online interviews) proved to have a rather inconvenient downside to it as whatever technology is offering it is still unreliable at times. Two of my interviews had to be interrupted because of faulty internet connections. Another downside to conducting interviews online is the lack of visual contact (webcams were not available most of the times). During such an interview, seeing the informant's facial expression and body language could have proven useful as I could have adapted my questions or changed their order depending on observation of their reactions. Also, I am unaware of the conditions in which the subjects were interviewed (e.g. I do not know if they were alone in the room or if they were in a quiet space where they could concentrate on our discussions).

I had already contacted most of my interviewees by the end of March in order to establish a provisional interview schedule and with many of them I exchanged a large number of emails regarding my project and the location and time of the interview. However, because of my informants' professional or personal commitments, I had to postpone some of the interviews several times.

Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour, depending on my informants' willingness to talk⁸ about their profession and their interest in the topic and most of them took place within the premises of my previous university. However, especially after a few interviews, I told my informants how long the interviews normally last and if they wanted me to stop after a certain period of time.

⁸ Conference interpreters commonly say that "if you don't like talking, then you shouldn't become an interpreter". This is why the majority of the interviews lasted longer than thirty minutes.

The interviews were conducted either in English or in Romanian and they consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions, designed to provide information on the interpreters' professional background, their experiences on the market, their perceptions of the Romanian and the foreign markets, the way they get access to jobs, the status and the nature of the profession, their views about changes in the occupation, the relationship between interpreters and clients or other contacts, the practices within this occupation etc. Although I created an interview guide beforehand, I was aware that the interview would be semi-structured and I adapted the questions depending on my informants' experiences.

Before the actual interview I explained the interviewees that I was interested in their experience as conference interpreters. Although my informants often asked questions about the research, I tried to postpone these to the end of the interview. I also repeatedly told my interviewees that the information they would provide me with would not be used for any other reason than that of an academic assignment and that the thesis would be available on the university's website. Some of my informants requested my interview questions before the actual interview and I provided them every time. I asked for permission to record the interviews and I also asked my informants whether they preferred that I would use their name in the thesis or a pseudonym. For this reason I decided to protect the identity of my informants so I changed all the names in this thesis and also minor details regarding places names. I also told my interviewees that should they want to read the transcript or the actual thesis, I would provide them with the material and I constantly reiterated details regarding the nature of the research, what happens with the recordings and the transcripts, how the materials will be used.

The interviewees who replied to my request to participate in this research are interpreters or/and trainers of conference interpreters. I considered that their positions as trainers was also very valuable for the research and I tried to help them separate these two

professions that they occupy in order to get insights in the informal training that they provide their students with. By this I mean the informal advice that they give to the future conference interpreters in terms of how they should prepare before a conference, how they should dress at a conference, how to negotiate with the clients, how they should establish their rates on the market and other such things. In this respect I also considered valuable the information that I got from those who were trained as conference interpreters so as to see if they are prepared to face the barriers in this profession.

My position in conducting the interviews was to a certain extent that of an insider, given my previous training in translation studies and conference interpreting and given the fact that some of my interviewees were my former professors or friends. I believe that this position worked to my advantage because I have the basic knowledge related to this occupation and I consider that it was easier to get access to them and to establish a certain intimate rapport with the interviewees. At the same time, given my prior relationship with them and given the fact that I know some of the stories and the relevant names in this occupation in Romania, I believe they more readily accepted me than an outsider and they provided me with insides about this occupation that they would not be willing to talk about in other circumstances. I also believe that the fact that I do not have experience on the market of conference interpreting in Romania allowed me to distance from the occupation and to ask for as much detail and explanations as possible. Even if in the beginning I did not know whether in the fieldwork I should be an overt or a covert researcher, I decided not to hide the fact that I was a graduate of translation studies and conference interpreting or that for this particular research I was coming from a programme in Gender Studies. This position has been more problematic especially in the end of my interviews, when my subjects asked me about the research itself and how I will integrate “gender” in conference interpreting and also about my

experiences in the department of gender studies. The informal talks that followed the interviews most of the times offered me insights into very interesting stories.

The responses to my position as a gender studies researcher varied. Some of my informants related to my questions with interest, even told me what they considered interesting to do research in this occupation or actually recommended me what other things to investigate or to look at more in depth. Many times, they even offered their personal views on certain matters, expressed their support of a study that focuses on their work and their experiences and even contacted me afterwards to send me their thoughts either about the interview or about what other gender aspects they depicted in the occupation after the interview. At the same time, when I expressed the impossibility of finding written articles or books on the occupation as such, many of my informants recommended me web-sites that I should access, studies that I could look up online, movies, researchers that I could contact and even invited me to take part in a movie session about interpreters together with the MA students in conference interpreting.

Others regarded my position as a student in gender studies with resentment and suspicion. They either expressed their reluctance to contribute to my thesis or considered that a research on their experiences on the market is not valuable. In several cases, initially my respondents seemed very interested in my questions and answered as thoroughly as possible. However, at the end of the interview, when I started explaining the purpose of my research, they mockingly referred to gender mainstreaming and female dominated occupations.

I abandoned my initial plan to do participant observation because of time constraints and also because it was very hard to find a conference in Romania in April. At the same time, although the conference interpreters that I contacted in order to access the setting expressed their interest and enthusiasm about my project and agreed to help me with the interviews and provide me with further contacts, their attitudes towards me coming as an observer to a

conference where they would interpret was most of the times reserved. They expressed worries regarding their promise of confidentiality, they stated that actually my presence could be disruptive for their work, despite constantly attempting to reassure them that I would not be in any way intruding in their work. Fortunately, the information that I gathered from the interviews gave me insights as well on how the practices of this occupation are translated in the actual work environment, on the hierarchies within the work environment, on the way interpreters relate to each other in stressful situations and on the job description of this occupation.

4. POWER, HARASSMENT AND TOLERANCE

The relationship between conference interpreters and their recruiters on the Romanian private interpreting market is very complex but, I argue that at the heart of this relationship stands a strong dependence of the interpreters on their recruiters. It may appear strange to state that it is not a mutual dependency, since the recruiter also relies on the interpreter's services. However, I consider that this relationship moves beyond the linguistic dependency of the employer on the employee to a professional dependency of the conference interpreter on the recruiter, one that blurs the boundaries between personal and professional.

Because of "the way things get done" on the Romanian market, the Romanian interpreters need key power holders on the market that could help them get access to job opportunities, provide future formal and informal recommendations, provide access to important networks and contacts. The structure of this market creates a dependency of the interpreters on their clients, on conference organizers, on the companies that provide the equipment for the conferences and on other colleagues. However, the most powerful decision maker is the client. Therefore, the relationship between the interpreter and the client becomes a hierarchical one. Since on the Romanian market this relationship is established most often between a male client and a female service provider, the power of the client over the interpreter takes the form of harassment practices, behaviours that are most often tolerated by the conference interpreter.

In this chapter I analyze the manifestations. the gender specificity of this power dependence of the female conference interpreter on the male client and the strategies that women use to live through this experience in order to examine how this power relationship affects women conference interpreters on the Romanian interpreting market. I start by examining the context in which this power relation develops, and then analyze the types of

harassment that women are exposed to and also their associations with other female dominated occupations. Finally, I focus on the reasons why harassment is a common practice in this occupation and what the interpreters' reactions to these behaviours are.

4.1. Dependence of female conference interpreters on male clients

In Romania, it is crucial for freelance conference interpreters to network and establish relations. Without networking, they remain unknown and have no access to conferences. For young interpreters, it is impossible to start work unless someone recommends them. However, the networking takes places informally and not through professional networks or associations.

Ten years after accessing the Romanian private interpreting market and the institutional market (the market of the European Institutions), Mara (FR-EN), the head of the department of Translation Studies and Conference Interpreting, is convinced that even if you are a very professional, scrupulous and qualified interpreter but you do not have contacts and what interpreters refer to as “PR (public relations) skills” you may work very little. This belief is largely shared by all the conference interpreters I spoke to. When I asked them what a graduate of a training in conference interpreting should do in order to access the market and also what they do in order to advance their career, some of them started enumerating a number of marketing strategies that the interpreter can employ, such as sending resumes to translation offices, contacting foreign cultural centers, giving out business cards, contacting agencies that provide interpreting, setting a profile on the internet, registering on various professional sites, taking internships with the European Commission or the European Parliament and the list goes on.

However, I was struck to find out that in spite of the numerous possibilities that interpreters have to increase their visibility, all of them told me “you can do all this, but it is useless”. Otilia (FR-EN) tells me bluntly that “when you want to get a job...you wait for it to

find you...there is no way to try and find a job as an interpreter”. These statements are also supported by some of the interpreters’ career tracks, as many of my informants told me stories about their colleagues who did not manage to get interpreting assignments – despite being considered valuable assets when they graduated from the Master’s programme – and had to change their professions.

My interviewees’ statements indicate that since the interpreting market in Romania is monopolized by the capital city, getting access to jobs on this market is, I believe, almost entirely by chance. Mara reinforced my assumption and explained:

The market is very limited. The smartest step is to move to Bucharest. [...] ⁹But it is enough to know some colleagues who could introduce you to different clients, who could take you with them and afterwards you can develop a “portfolio” of clients and through them it is easier to establish yourself on the market.

Constantly my interviewees stressed the importance of making oneself known on the market through someone who already works or who knows conference organizers, people owning the technical equipment and most importantly someone who could introduce the interpreter to key clients. Therefore, this professional system requires a constant need for formal and informal recommendations and creates a dependency on powerful actors that can help the interpreters’ access to opportunities on the market and also advance their career.

On the Romanian interpreting market the large majority of interpreters are women and as my informants recall, their clients are predominantly men. Some of them told me that it sometimes happens that the conference organizer is a woman, but the key actors that recruit and pay the interpreter are men. Olivia (SP-EN), 3 years of experience on the market, describes this common situation:

⁹ Missing part of the quotation, for further explanation: “Then you have to make connections with the few conference organizers on the market, then with companies that have the technical equipment (booths, microphones etc), but in order to get on their lists you need some recommendations. The best network is that formed out of interpreters: former graduates, older colleagues, who work, who know people, who could call you to work with them.”

I almost always worked for men. I can't even remember any woman. Men are always my clients. And that implies...another disadvantage: if you're young and you're nice to them, you're quite often sexually harassed and you have to deal with it.

The practices within this occupation and the fact that the interpreter is a service provider results in subordinate-superior relationship between the interpreter and the client. However, since the interpreting occupation on the Romanian market is female dominated, another power relation comes into play, that of the male client who can provide access to important resources over the female interpreter who needs referrals, access to job opportunities, access to important networks in order to succeed in her career. My findings show that in this context harassment becomes a regular practice within this occupation.

4.2. Gendered manifestations of harassment

So far I have attempted to briefly examine the practices within this occupation that create a power relation between the conference interpreter and the client. Apart from this professional dependence of the interpreter on the client, the fact that it is a woman who provides the interpreting services, this power relation often leads to the interpreter being exposed to different types of harassment. In the following, I will examine the most frequent behaviours that my interviewees talked about.

As I have already mentioned, the interpreting occupation in Romania is female dominated. During my interviews, all of the male and female interpreters reported either having experienced harassment personally or having heard stories from their colleagues of such incidents. In these situations, as described by my interviewees, the perpetrators were all men, most of them clients or conference participants, and the harassed were mainly women conference interpreters aged from twenty-four to sixty and all of them were women with

complex skills and a high level of education. In only one instance one of my male informants contacted me after the interview to tell me that harassment of both male and female interpreters is commonplace in this profession. What I was surprised to find out is that harassment is part of the everyday life of the conference interpreter and that it takes place either within the actual work setting, during lunches and dinners or outside of it. As Robert tells me with anger, the harassment in this occupation takes various forms and the experience seems to be something that interpreters have to come to terms with:

In our profession, there are a large number of small harassments (including sexual harassment). Especially when the interpreter accompanies an official delegation on a trip, “the girls” are “courted” by all sorts of delegates and politicians, “the boys” are taken for “porters” (from carrying the luggage to doing all sorts of small errands) and are confronted with all sorts of other indecent proposals.

As he indicates, the most common types of harassment are verbal harassment, but at the same time, he mentions instances when interpreters are asked to carry out other functions than what their job description entails and incidences of sexual harassment. Incidences of unwanted sexual jokes, remarks or advances were also described by the other informants, but the experience of physical harassment was never mentioned during my interviews.

The relationship between the employers and the employees are manifested in various ways on the labour market. However, in the case when dependence is the key characteristic of this work relationship and when the labour division of work positions the power in the hands of a male employer who can provide resources to a female employee, the relationship becomes particularly abusive because gender becomes an integral part of this relationship. Therefore men in these interactions are always the skilled actors, whereas women are the unskilled workforce, providing support and services.

My findings show that the most common form of harassment that conference interpreters speak about is the verbal harassment. My informants repeatedly stressed that the most frequent type of verbal harassment is being called by their first names and being referred

to as “the girls”, regardless of age or level of education. There seems to be an understanding among clients and conference participants that the interpreters are women. In several instances, my interviewees recall having been called “the girls”. Cezara’s story suggests that this type of treatment is representative in particular of the Romanian clients.

Once, I worked in Romania with three colleagues hired by European Union. One of them was a mother of 2, the other one did not have children, but she was almost 40, another colleague was pregnant and then there was me...I cannot say that people would consider me to look very young or like a teenager. We worked for the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, and we were constantly referred to as “the girls”. We were “the girls”. “The girls who translate” will do this, the girls from translations will do that. But we were not girls. We each had a certain age, we were well dressed and the foreigners treated us as formal as possible.

This story also indicates that the interpreters feel offended and humiliated by these instances and that they perceive them as mocking and depreciative towards their work and their profession. However, none of my informants reported having acted against this offense or having confronted their clients. This situation is problematic since it may actually suggest that they accept the superiority of their male clients.

Being called by their first names shows a certain familiarity between the two parties, but it does not imply that the interpreters can respond with same type of familiarity. They are expected to call their clients by their last name. This use of language also conveys a power relationship between the client and the conference interpreter and also confirms the inequalities within this relationship. At the same time, since gender is part of these interactions, these inequalities are also maintained through the socio-cultural power of male dominance over the female.

Apart from this, Mara (RO-FR) explains that due to the lack of knowledge regarding this profession, in Romania the label of “the girls from translations, who translate...” is commonly used when reference is made to the interpreters. Clients calling interpreters by their first names and referring to them as such suggests that they consider this occupation one that “the girls” are well suited to do. Since in Romania there is a tradition for girls to study

languages and for boys to study law, engineering or business studies, and since people in Romania discredit humanities, these labels imply a degree of disrespect towards women who work as interpreters. At the same time, the assumptions that women are naturally gifted for certain occupations reinforces the gender hierarchies in the workplace where the skilled occupations are understood in terms of “man’s work” and unskilled work is labelled as “feminine”. However, my findings suggest that these stereotypical linguistic references that are made in formal professional environments are similarly used for male interpreters, although these are less frequent and are more often it conveys disrespect, and not harassment.

Olivia (SP-EN) spoke about the sexual remarks and jokes that she is often exposed to when she negotiates the payment for the interpreting services:

When they hear the amount of money you ask, they go: “What are you going to do? Are you going to give us some striptease session? Why are you asking that much?”

This type of humour that actually reduces women to sexual objects rather than professionals puts interpreters in a vulnerable position and also devalues their competencies. Sometimes these remarks or “flirty comments” turn into real sexual invitations. Otilia (EN-GE), 4 years of experience on the market, remembers several instances when she was asked to come in the client’s hotel room “to discuss things further”:

There was a time when an inspector asked me if I wanted to go to his room. We were talking and when he said this, I realized that this is enough, that it was a long day and that we have to work tomorrow.

The sexual jokes and the remarks that interpreters are faced with on a regular basis sometimes escalate and turn into sexual advances that put interpreters in uncomfortable positions. Ada (EN-FR), 3 years of experience on the market, speaks about the jokes that she sometimes gets in a very detached manner: “I had some jokes like..maybe you don’t remember the number of your room tonight and you can come to 113..but this is taken as a joke”. However, Carolyn’s

story suggests that when the jokes become more serious she experiences them as being overboard:

Politicians are always a bit flirty. So that's also part of the job. If you're a young woman interpreter they kind of try to flirt with you because you're the only woman so they have to talk to you and take you nicely. I felt uncomfortable because a guy over 60 started coming on to me all the time.

Only in one instance an informant mentioned indecent looks, but in some cases female interpreters talked about intimidation or actually feeling threatened by their clients. Olivia tells me that it always happens that older clients make explicit sexual invitations to the interpreters and that in these situations the interpreter must have enough sense of humour not to feel intimidated and upset:

One morning I had to go to Satu Mare to a conference on social programmes and my client was 65-year old Spaniard, from Madrid, so he was a grandfather. When he saw me and my colleague, who is also blue eyes and was blond at the time and really sweet, after quite an ecstatic look, his first words were "oohh, that's great! So tomorrow morning at 8am I expect both of you in my room with breakfast in bed".

Such situations serve to devalue the role of conference interpreters and also create a sexualized image of the conference interpreter that reinforces the authority of men in this work setting. Moreover, given the fact that "the gendered definition of certain jobs includes the sexualization of the female worker" (MacKinnon 1979), especially in work settings where women are service providers, the low value that this occupation has on the Romanian market can also be explained by these images which reinforce the gender inequalities within the workforce.

As shown in this subchapter, the most common forms of harassment that women conference interpreters experience in Romania are sexual remarks, jokes, indecent looks, but also sexual invitations and intimidation. I will now examine what are the extra services that female conference interpreters are expected provide and what are the most common occupations that they are regularly associated with.

4.3. Association of interpreters with other female dominated occupations

The above examples show that my female interviewees are particularly exposed to verbal harassment from the male clients, but at the same time, they report incidences of non-verbal sexual harassment and even intimidation.

The power dependence of female service providers on male clients also manifests through an exploitation of the services provided by conference interpreters that results in this occupation often being mixed up with other female dominated occupations.

I have shown the forms of harassment that the unequal relationship between the client and the interpreter entail, and in the following I will concentrate on the frequent practices that associate conference interpreters with other feminized occupations and on the extra services that the interpreters are expected to provide for their clients.

The relationship between the client and the interpreter in the work environment sometimes takes the form of an abuse of power. For example, Roxana (GE-EN) recounts that she was aggressed and threatened that she would never work again on the Romanian market if she refused to interpret while being off duty. She tells me that she was invited to have dinner with the participants at a conference and with the foreign trainer and while they were eating, one of the participants came to her table and told her to interpret what he had to say to the trainer. Although she accepted in the beginning, she realised that the participant was not going to stop recounting his life story. She consulted with the foreign trainer and she made the decision not to interpret more than five minutes because she was not supposed to work during meals. When she communicated this to the participant she remembers that he got very aggressive and told her that she “must” interpret because he has important things to share, that her job cannot be that difficult since she is only speaking and that if she “dares” not do what requested, he would make sure that she would never work again. Unfortunately, this experience is not singular in Romania and the male client often feels that he has the power to request longer working hours and extra services.

Apart from these common types of harassment that my female informants went through as part of their everyday work environment, several other women reveal that many of their clients, especially high officials, consider them “personal accessories” that they are entitled to. At the same time, they explain that the work that they have to do as freelance conference interpreters varies according to the client’s demands. Since most of the interpreters do not have a clear job description and since they do not sign contracts with the beneficiaries, this often results in confusion between the job of a professional conference interpreter and “a pretty smiling personal assistant” who is ready to make a cup of coffee if necessary during a meeting among businessmen.

There are a number of explicit services that women in particular are required to fulfil. Even though my female informants are hired to interpret at different meetings, they find themselves having to play hostesses, to cater for conferences, to make coffee, to pick up the documents for the seminars at the reception of the hotel and give them to the participants, to arrange lunches and dinners, to give out pencils, to make photocopies or pick up the evaluation survey filled in by the participants at the end of the seminar. Sometimes, they are even asked to do the shopping for the delegates, as Timea (EN-FR), 20 years of experience on the market, tells me:

It happened to me and not only with politicians but also with administrators in ministries. Especially if you travel as their interpreter to various events or meetings outside the country, they invariably want you to do their shopping. Buy the perfume for the wife.

Most often, interpreters are required to provide translation services apart from interpreting and be tourist guides for foreign delegates. Olivia’s words reveal such realities:

I had to make coffee, I had to translate jokes at dinner parties or at lunch, I was asked to do so many other things, you can’t even imagine. I’ve been a tourist guide for innumerable times for foreign guests who just want to visit the town...so I’ve been about twenty times at the History Museum with them and thanks to this opportunity I know so many things about this town you can’t even imagine...

Clients regularly require that both female and male conference interpreters provide various services apart from interpreting since they are interested in their profits and consider that one person can take over various tasks: when women are expected to play hostess or make coffee, men are expected to help the technicians, to move the furniture or to be porters. This situation is the same for both the younger and the older generations and this lack of a clearly defined job description was perceived by my informants as resulting in their occupation being commonly mixed with a large number of other occupations.

At the same time, although my interviewees were hired to interpret from one language into another and they were afterwards asked during the conference to interpret in or from another language. Ada (EN-FR), was once asked if she had French in her language combination because the speaker, who was English, was not using his native language, he “would speak” in French. Her booth colleague, who was her professor, told the conference organizer that they had been contracted for interpretation from English into Romanian and not from French, so they asked the speaker to use his native language. Another similar request was made to her at a conference where she was asked to interpret from English into French, a practice that is called “retour”¹⁰ and that requires additional training and an extra set of skills and when she refused, she was called stupid by the organizer. These instances can be even more harmful for the interpreter’s reputation when they are asked to interpret from a language they do not have in their language combination. Mara recalls that her colleagues had to work from Italian even if they were recruited for the languages that they had in their combination. In these instances, Mara says that the interpreters have to handle the situation as well as they can, even if it is a big conference or a negotiation:

¹⁰ The French term *retour* refers to interpretation in both directions using two languages. For example, "I know your A language is French and your B is English, but do you do a *retour*? (= Do you interpret from French into English as well?)

I think that's what defines the interpreting occupation: no matter what happens, you have to say something. You cannot be silent. Once you are in front of a microphone, you cannot panic, you cannot block, you can improvise, but that comes with experience.

A characteristic of the Romanian employers that was frequently mentioned by my interviewees is that they have the tendency "to make the most out of every penny they feel they give the interpreters" and therefore many times they request their services at dinners or lunches or even during breaks.

Since most often interpreters do not sign contracts with the clients, where they could stipulate when the working day ends, what services they provide and what rates they have after a certain hour and since the interpreters have to keep the clients for future referrals and jobs, they find themselves in the impossibility to refuse to work more than it was agreed in the beginning and to do extra services. Under these circumstances, it is very difficult to be respected and trusted by the participants, especially in the beginning of the conferences, if they see that the interpreter also provides other services for them, according to Roxana (GE-EN):

People going to seminars, who were probably not accustomed to interpreters, saw us in the morning handing out the documents and they said "oh, so these are the hostesses for the event". And then we saw that they didn't really trust us for the first hour because they said: "What are these girls doing in the booth? They are supposed to cater for us, to organize the event and they're also interpreters?"

Apart from the extra services that the interpreters are expected to provide, another important aspect is what they are assumed to be. The most common association is with secretaries and in Romania there is a stereotypical understanding of what secretaries are. Many of my interviewees expressed anger and annoyance at these situations and they explained that this confusion is related to the fact that very often clients use their personal secretaries for interpreting services and therefore the role of the interpreter becomes diffused.

Several interviewees recalled stories when they went to the reception of the hotel to take the key for their room and when they said that they were the interpreters, they were directed towards the band that was singing for that particular event.

These misunderstandings, which are wildly shared by the clients, explain the trivialization of the roles of conference interpreters, the lack of respect and willingness to acknowledge their skills and the qualifications.

Given the common associations with secretarial duties and the expectations to provide extra services or to work longer hours, it is clear that women conference interpreters are in an unequal relationship with the client and this vulnerable position is very often tolerated.

4.4. Conference interpreters' reactions to harassment

So far I have attempted to analyze the ways in which the interpreters' dependence on the male client for contacts, future recommendations, future jobs and reputation can lead to different forms of harassment within the job, ranging from verbal harassment to common associations with other female dominated occupations. My findings show that women are aware of these power relations and react to these everyday behaviours using certain strategies that would allow them to maintain contact with the male clients and that live through the experience.

In this section I analyze the different gendered reactions that women conference interpreters resort to in these working settings that rely on professional contacts and that create a dependency on the powerful male client.

Women conference interpreters seem to consider that the jokes, the sexual remarks, the sexual gestures, their associations with secretaries or with hostesses are part of their working life and that this is the price they have to pay in order to stay in this profession. Only one of my interviewees told me that she actually felt harassed and aggressed by her client. The other ones did not label these behaviours as "harassment" but spoke about them in terms

of “indecent or inappropriate proposals” that are unpleasant and make them feel uncomfortable. They are bothered by these instances, they do not like them, but they do not speak of them in terms of harassment.

I tried to find out why they consider that these incidences happen and how they react to them. Interpreters think that these incidences occur very often and they list among the main reasons their young age, their attractive appearance, their gender and their willingness to help their clients and to communicate with them. As Otilia tells me, the “funny comments and jokes” that she received happened because she is friendly with her clients: “To me, it happens because I’m nice, friendly, open to people. Some people don’t realize where the limit is and they try to push the boundaries.” At the same time, these types of behaviour seem also to depend on the interpreter herself, on the attitude she conveys, on the way she looks at people and Timea (EN-FR), 20 years on the market, even explained that she was “lucky” not to be exposed to such comments because: “I’m not excessively beautiful or anything like that and I wasn’t even when I was in my twenties or thirties. I wasn’t the sort of person who invites men swarming around and I never had that kind of problem at all.” Although there may be a “profile” of the interpreter who has to face these attitudes, the common understanding is that “it happens” on a regular basis, with or without reason and the interpreters’ reactions are also quite varied.

The most common response to “indecent” looks, comments, or jokes is to try to “laugh it off” or ignore the particular incidence. They consider these to be disadvantages of their job and when they talk about them they try to justify each of these behaviours by saying that “this is taken as a joke” or “if you don’t have enough sense of humour you can be a bit intimidated if not upset because of that”. Olivia explains that it is very important to keep a professional relation with the client and that “her way out of it” is to always respond with a lot of sense of humour”. Still, this willingness to tolerate harassment as part of the job and not

openly counteract these behaviours are also gendered ways of reacting to the male dominance. These are the expected female behaviours and by ignoring them or “laughing them off”, women conference interpreters reinforce the gender inequalities in this work setting.

Female conference interpreters know that these incidences happen to everyone in the profession and they consider it almost a common “condition” of their work. When they describe these situations they always refer to them as “funny stories” and it seems that their way of coping with these situations is by attempting to discuss them openly and with a smile on their face.

Another very common way in which women respond to their client’s unwelcome behaviour is by declining it gently and politely. Carolyn, 6 years of experience on the market, tells me that you have to be clear that you do not welcome such attitudes, but she also stresses the fact that you have to stay polite as much as you can:

The thing is that you cannot be rude even if someone makes you an offer that is indecent. You have to be nice because it’s a client or part of a conference so you cannot be rude. Be firm, but in a nice way.

In general, women conference interpreters realize that there is little that they can do in order to stop these behaviours, particularly in the cases when the clients have access to important resources and for these reasons they try to be polite and to some extent tolerate it. Mălina (GE-EN), 2 years of experience on the market explains that being open and friendly to the clients, making a good impression, talking to them and showing her willingness to travel and to work, even when she is tired after a long day is part of the job and all these are very important for her career.

At the same time, female conference interpreters are aware of the repercussions that a very strong complaint against their clients might have on their career. Olivia tells me that since she had many fights with her clients because of the way they treated her and because of

the lack of respect towards her work, she gets less assignments in Romania:

I made a huge scandal of course he never called me again. I'm famous now because I am the only one who had a fight with him, who dared, and of course I am poorer now because of that fight.

Faced with the possibility of unemployment, women conference interpreters try to tolerate these incidences and to compromise. Even when they find the clients' requests humiliating, very few of them strongly object. Carolyn, who was very often expected to provide various services by her clients, tells me that at present, even if it still happens very often to be asked to make coffee, she does not accept this behaviour: "Well, I'm not here for that. Just ask your secretary or your assistant, we're interpreters and we're not supposed to serve you".

Some of my interviewees explained that their willingness to accept certain requests depends to a large extent on the relationship that they establish with the clients. For example, if Olivia likes the person she works for, then she is happy to work late or to accompany delegates to dinners and help them communicate and she considers that it is her choice to do so.

Others seem to be more aware of the existing power decision that their clients have. For example, Timea (EN-FR), 20 years of experience on the market, is not that rigorous about her requirements in comparison to her colleagues and she would skip a "precious" lunch break or she would accept to work at a press conference without her booth partner when this takes place after the conference, because she thinks that it is not in her interest to refuse the client if she ever wants to get a job: "I don't want to alienate him by saying no". Many interpreters say that in the beginning of their careers they did not refuse to provide extra services or to work late in the evening or during meals because they considered that these were opportunities for them to show their clients that they were available and willing to work. Roxana felt that if she did not respond to the client's needs for interpretation during lunch and dinner, he would not contact her anymore. This may indicate that young female interpreters in

particular are more willing to compromise in order to access the market and that once they are more established in this profession they tend to refuse assignments for personal or moral reasons, they start educating their clients in matters such as payment, working day, work conditions, and services they provide.

However, the fact that interpreters are aware that they have to tolerate certain requests from their clients and to provide extra services, sometimes even outside what they consider to be their job description, suggests that there is a certain power relation between the interpreters and the clients and also that the interpreters know that they cannot leave their jobs and find something else.

By harassing the female interpreter, the male client puts her in a vulnerable position and also devalues the professional skills of the interpreter. In addition, since the harassment is part of the everyday experience of conference interpreters and because it is hard to trace, as it is not formally reported, the consequences of these behaviours are also invisible. Therefore, under these circumstances, the gender inequalities of the labour market, where the male is the power holder and the female is the unskilled labour force become invisible. As I have already pointed out, the harassment takes the form of sexual jokes, sexual remarks, sexual advances, indecent looks, asking the female interpreter to provide extra services and to work longer hours and from languages for which they had not been contracted, repeated sexual advances and other similar requests, but it is impossible to trace the employment consequences of these requests. Particularly since there is no professional association that could represent the freelance interpreters rights in front of the clients, women find themselves on their own in these situations and the only way to cope is by refusing it politely or by laughing it off.

Female conference interpreters share their harassment experiences and talk about them, but they consider these to be part of their job, just as having to talk to the clients and participants during breaks and meals. Mălina (GE-EN) constantly tries to be nice to the

persons who are organising the conferences, tries to show her availability to work in the future with that client, tries to answer the clients' questions regarding her education, her language combination, her experience on the market, or her background. This is what interpreters refer to as "public relations" skills, which are fundamental in getting information about assignments, in getting support from key actors in various domains, in getting recommendations and therefore in advancing their careers. In general, it is considered appropriate that the client asks the interpreter more personal questions than the interpreter can ask. Just as in the situation where the client calls the female interpreters by their first names or "the girls", in these instances none of my interviewees reported having told their clients that they prefer not to answer certain questions. Moreover, as Mălina tells me, interpreters think that it is very important to answer the questions of the clients in order to show openness and interest in providing services for that particular client.

In this professional system where there is no professional association that could regulate the relationship between interpreters and clients and that promotes dependency on the client, the gravity of these situations and the consequences of the reactions to these types of behaviour. In other words, these practices are invisible and through them the clients are able to maintain their power in this relationship and to intimidate the interpreter. In this setting where women are objectified, their competencies and their skills as interpreters are trivialized.

In conclusion, women conference interpreters consider harassment part of their job and believe that the reasons why these practices are so common are because of their young age, their attractive looks and their openness towards their clients. To some extent, they consider that it is their fault that these unwelcome behaviours occur. The most common strategies that female conference interpreters employ in order to cope with different types of harassment are either "laughing it off", ignoring it or declining in a polite, gentle way.

Because of the professional system that promotes the dependency on the male client and since these behaviours are not reported, these behaviours become invisible and hard to trace. At the same time, through this harassment women become vulnerable and insecure about their professional competences and skills. In addition, their submissive reactions to these gender manifestations of the male dominance and the fact that these harassment behaviours become components of the work relationship reinforce the gender inequalities and even make them invisible.

4.5. Summary

In this chapter I have shown the implications that the current structure of the Romanian interpreting market, which requires the interpreter to use contacts and informal networks in order to access the market and advance their career, has on the relationship between the conference interpreter and the client. Since this dependence is gendered, with the power in the hands of the male employers who provides contacts, job opportunities and future recommendations for the female service provider the power relation between the male client and the female interpreter encourages different types of harassment behaviours. The most frequent practices that interpreters are exposed to are sexual jokes and remarks, sexual advances, intimidation, indecent looks, expectations to provide extra services, to work for longer hours and from other languages than the ones they had been contracted for or associations with other female dominated occupations, in particular with secretaries. In most instances interpreters state that they feel humiliated by these behaviours, but react in gendered ways, they do not act against these offenses and do not confront their clients. Moreover, they do not label these behaviours as harassment but in terms of “indecent or inappropriate proposals” that are part of their everyday working life and that this is the price they have to pay in order to stay in this profession. In this setting, the most effective strategies they can

employ in order to cope with it are to “laugh it off”, to ignore it or to tolerate it. However, since these practices are impossible to trace, they become invisible and they objectify and intimidate the woman interpreter and more importantly they reinforce the gender inequalities within the labour market. At the same time, these practices reinforce the power of the client and devalue the skills and the competences of the female conference interpreter.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have examined the relationship between women conference interpreters and their clients on the Romanian interpreting market in order to understand how highly skilled female interpreters fare on an unregulated market.

First, I focused on the strategies that conference interpreters use in order to get access to job opportunities and to advance in their career. My findings showed that in spite of numerous possibilities that conference interpreters have to increase their visibility (sending resumes to translation offices, contacting foreign cultural centers, giving out business cards), on the Romanian market the only strategy that functions is making oneself known through someone who already has contacts among conference organizers and most importantly through someone who could introduce the interpreter to key clients. I argued that this professional system, which requires a constant need for informal and formal referrals, promotes a professional dependence on power holders that can help the interpreters' access job opportunities and advance their career.

I also argued that since on the Romanian interpreting market the large majority of interpreters are women and their clients are predominantly men, a gendered power relationship develops between the female service provider and the male client and becomes grounds for harassment behaviours. I have found that in the context of an unregulated interpreting market, where the male client can provide the female interpreter access to important resources within the occupation, harassment becomes a regular practice.

At the same time, I have found that harassment is part of the everyday professional life of the conference interpreter and that it takes place either within the actual work setting or outside it. The perpetrators are all men, most of them clients or conference participants, and the harassed are mainly women conference interpreters aged from twenty-four to sixty, all of them women with complex skills and a high level of education.

Having examined the most common types of harassment within this occupation, I have found that both men and women conference interpreters are exposed to various such behaviours. Most commonly, interpreters were faced with verbal harassment (being called “girls”, being referred to with their first name, regardless of age or education, flirty comments and sexual jokes) but at the same time, they reported incidences of sexual advances, indecent looks and even intimidation and threats. I have found that in the context of an unregulated interpreting market the incidences of exploitation of the services provided by the interpreters and their common associations with other female dominated occupations (especially secretarial jobs) are commonplace in Romania. These instances are meant to confirm the inequalities within the employer-employee relationship, to heighten the power dependence of female conference interpreters on their male clients and they imply a degree of disrespect towards those who work as interpreters.

Focusing on the strategies that women use to cope with these common incidences of harassment, I argued that although female conference interpreters find these experiences uncomfortable, they are more often tolerated rather than reported. According to my findings, women conference interpreters seem to consider that the jokes, the sexual remarks, the sexual gestures, their associations with secretaries or with hostesses are part of their working life and that this is the price they have to pay in order to stay in this profession. Very often they consider that it is their fault that these unwelcome behaviours occur. The most common strategies that they employ in order to cope with different types of harassment are either “laughing it off”, ignoring it or declining in a polite, gentle way. Because of the professional system that promotes the dependency on the male client and since these behaviours are not reported, they become invisible and hard to trace.

Combining these findings, I argued that in this unregulated organizational system that promotes professional dependence of the female interpreter on the male client and that

becomes grounds for harassment, women's competences and skills as interpreters are trivialized.

The reason why I attempted to research this field was to better understand how professional women conference interpreters, with high levels of education and special skills and aptitudes, with knowledge in all the fields of the socio-economic life, social and cultural knowledge of all their working languages' countries, who work under very much pressure and who have so much responsibility are devalued on an informal, non-structured interpreting market. At the same time, the question that still remains is why conference interpreters tolerate the practices that devalue their work and their profession and do not organize in a professional organization that could help them formalize their skills, bargain with the power holders and prevent the exploitation that they are faced with.

However, there are limitations to the findings of my research, as I have focused only on the experiences of the female conference interpreters in Romania. I consider that future research is needed in order to understand how token men in this occupation experience their position within this occupation and how they cope with the common stereotypes regarding men who work in a feminized occupation on an unregulated market.

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