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**The professional status of conference interpreters
in the Republic of Ireland: A qualitative study**

[Status zawodowy tłumaczy konferencyjnych w
Republice Irlandii: Studium oparte na badaniach jakościowych]

STRESZCZENIE W JĘZYKU ANGIELSKIM

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Summary

This doctoral thesis, submitted to the University of Silesia in Katowice in 2021, is entitled "*The professional status of conference interpreters in the Republic of Ireland: A qualitative study.*"

On 1 January 2007, Irish became the 23rd official language of the European Union. Although the country has a long history of language contact, conference interpreting in the Republic of Ireland is a relatively new field of activity and has evolved largely in response to the recognition of Irish at the European level. This thesis, therefore, provides a comprehensive overview of the professional status of conference interpreters in the Republic of Ireland.

The major research questions posed in this project are outlined in the introductory chapter. In short, they seek to examine, in the first instance, whether there are good grounds to state that there is a viable conference interpreting profession in the country. Secondly, the project examines, in general terms, the professional status of conference interpreters working in the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter 2 of the thesis opens with a definition of the concepts of "profession" and "professional status", both from a lexicographical and an academic approach. Subsequently, in order to contextualise the discussion of professional status in the conference interpreting profession, an overview of historical and contemporary aspects relating to the profession is given. Widely accepted to have begun with the adoption of simultaneous interpreting at the Nuremberg Trials after World War Two, the scope of the conference interpreting profession is outlined and analysed. Starting with the first simultaneous interpreters and proceeding up until the present day, particular attention is paid to changes made to the selection, training, and development of conference interpreters over the last seventy years, as well as aspects including the changing occupational prestige of the profession and its wider perception. This analysis is then supplemented by a study of the role that professional organisations play within the conference interpreting profession, with particular focus on AIIC, the

International Association of Conference Interpreters. It is the only global professional association representing the interests of conference interpreters. The chapter concludes its survey of historical and contemporary aspects by discussing the concept of professional status within the conference interpreting profession itself. At this point, Tseng's (1992) professionalisation model, which provides the core theoretical framework for this research study, is introduced and discussed.

Chapter 3 of the thesis focuses on the Republic of Ireland and its history, society, and language. It starts by outlining the unique origins, role, and status of *Gaeilge*, the Irish language. In charting its changing fortunes over the past millennium, an overview of how the Irish language went from omnipresent to moribund is provided, paying attention to key events in Irish history such as the Anglo-Norman invasion, the country's annexation by England, and the tragedy of the Great Famine. Following the country's independence, the revitalisation of Irish as the first official language of the Republic of Ireland is also discussed, as well as the decision to make Irish an official language of the European Union. Logistical aspects of the implementation of Irish in the EU institutions are also examined, particularly focusing on the linguistic derogation currently in place regarding the full use of Irish at EU level. In this regard, comparisons are made with the implementation of Maltese as an official EU language, as well as observations regarding the current status of Irish language provision in the EU institutions. Subsequently, an overview of the translation and interpreting professions within the Republic of Ireland is provided, and special attention is paid to the Irish Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA) and their important role in ensuring best practice and appropriate standards are upheld. Building on this analysis, possibilities for interpreter training in the Republic of Ireland are presented. The major focus here is on the MA degree in conference interpreting offered by the National University of Ireland, Galway, which represents the only training course for conference interpreters in the whole country. In addition, it is the only course in the world offering future conference interpreters the option of training with Irish in their language combination. However, other forms of interpreter training are also mentioned, including the provision of final-year modules in interpreting studies within undergraduate degrees in applied languages offered by

several Irish universities in Dublin and Limerick. Subsequently, an overview of the current state of interpreting studies research in the Republic of Ireland is provided.

Chapter 4 provides a comparative approach to the historical and contemporary situation regarding the conference interpreting profession in the Republic of Ireland. This is done by selecting four case studies from elsewhere in the European Union: Croatia, Malta, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In the first instance, the rationale underpinning the choice of case studies is outlined, with particular attention paid to population size, availability of relevant scholarly and other literature, as well as the researcher's language skills. Subsequently, the historical and sociolinguistic background to each case study is outlined, before an overview of relevant conference interpreter training options in each market is given. Finally, information regarding the professional landscape for conference interpreters in each country is provided, including details of relevant professional associations. Following the presentation of each of the four case studies, the conference interpreting profession in each country is compared and contrasted with the current situation in the Republic of Ireland, providing scope for discussion of the similarities and differences.

Chapter 5 of the thesis examines the study's methodological approaches. It outlines previous methods utilised by other interpreting studies researchers who also sought to examine similar phenomena in different markets. This chapter also presents the results of the online-based pilot study, which did not obtain the quality of data that had originally been envisaged. In the light of this experience, the methodological approach was amended, and it was decided to proceed with semi-structured interviews with conference interpreters active in the Republic of Ireland. This chapter also outlines any possible limitations to the study, including any potential challenges to ensuring a representative sample is obtained, as well as possible issues regarding data collection procedures.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the interviews conducted with six active conference interpreters, as well as analysis of their responses in line with Tseng's (1992) theoretical model. The presentation of the data largely follows the format of questions posed in the semi-structured interviews. Regarding the two major research

questions, the findings illustrated conclusively that there was indeed a conference interpreting profession present in the Republic of Ireland, although very small in terms of the numbers of professionals. With regard to the professional status of conference interpreters, the interview data positioned the conference interpreting profession in the Republic of Ireland to the formalised development stage of Tseng's (1992) professionalisation model; that is, the country had the necessary training available, and practitioners were aware of the importance of quality and best practice, as well as the important role played by professional organisations within the wider conference interpreting profession. However, the findings from the interviews illustrated that the final stage of Tseng's (1992) model has not yet been attained, which denotes full professional autonomy. In other words, this is where the professional title of conference interpreter would be accorded legal protection and thus would be subject to governmental regulation. It is noteworthy, though, that some participants did call for such developments through the development of a state-accredited examination procedure for conference interpreters.

Chapter 7, the final chapter of this thesis, outlines the concluding remarks. As such, it restates the fact regarding the existence of a viable, functioning conference interpreting profession in the Republic of Ireland, as well as situating the evolution of the profession and its practitioners at the formalised development stage of Tseng's (1992) model. This chapter also outlines future predictions regarding the development of the conference interpreting profession in the country. Given that the research for this thesis was conducted before the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, attention is also paid to the role of technology and its potential impact on the wider conference interpreting profession and the professional status of conference interpreters. In addition, it was also noted that with regard to conference interpreting in the Irish context, it still remains to be seen whether the scheduled lifting of the derogation on the use of Irish in the EU institutions will have an impact on the domestic profession as well.

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