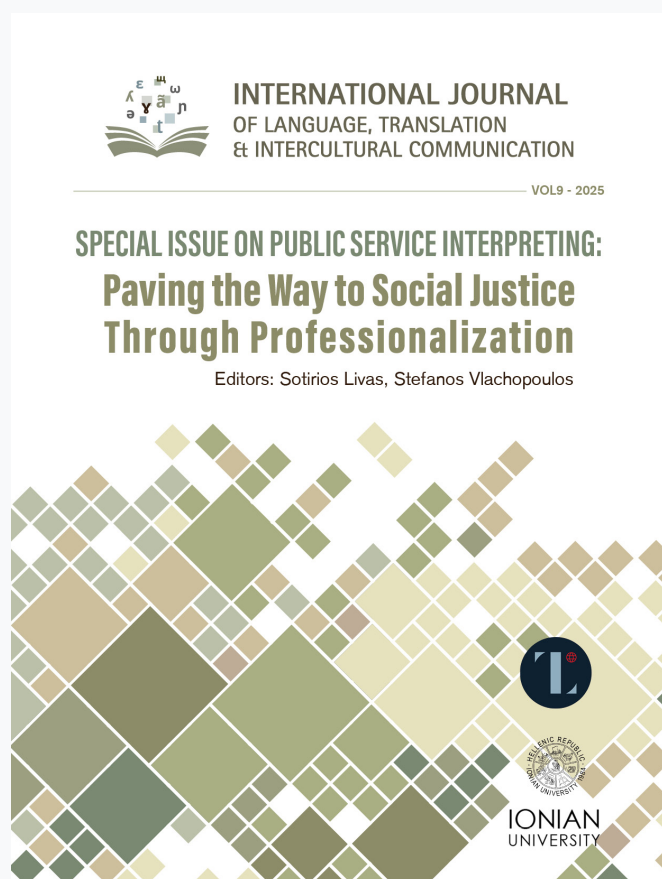


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Public Service Interpreting: Paving the Way to Social Justice Through Professionalization (Special Issue)



## Safeguarding public service interpreting in times of crises

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# Safeguarding public service interpreting in times of crises: Limitations and possibilities of lower-level testing and training.

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## Abstract

*Interpreters are crucial for accessing public services and participating in democratic and legal processes. In Norway, interpreting is regulated by the Interpreting Act, which mandates formal qualifications for listing in the National Registry of Interpreters. Oslo Metropolitan University leads in public service interpreting (PSI) education, offering schemes like the Bilingual Proficiency Test and an introductory course. This scheme, available in around 80 languages, provides basic language testing and limited training, qualifying candidates for the national register's lowest level.*

*The paper examines whether basic language testing and limited training is sufficient for the demands of public sector interpreting. It presents the legal framework for interpreting in Norway, the role of Oslo Metropolitan University in interpreter qualification, and the flexibility of the Bilingual Proficiency Test, particularly its rapid response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees. The paper concludes by evaluating the limitations and potentials of lower-level qualification schemes in PSI.*

**Keywords:** *PSI, certification, national register, testing, qualification, professionalisation*

## 1 Introduction

For many, interpreters are a prerequisite to access public services and participate in democratic and legal processes. Likewise, interpreters play an integral part in public institutions' ability to deliver services and perform their duties for its citizens. Interpreters therefore work in an array of fields and are often present in vulnerable situations, yet the profession of interpreting has largely gone unchecked leaving interpreters themselves to shape their conduct and evaluate their own abilities. To remedy this, public service interpreting (PSI) in Norway is legally regulated through the Interpreting Act which defines a public service interpreter as someone who holds formal qualifications and is listed in the National Registry of Interpreters.

Within the above system, Oslo Metropolitan University is the leading academic and professional environment in the field of PSI in Norway and offers a range of education and qualification schemes for all levels in the National Registry of Interpreters. One of these schemes consists of the Bilingual Proficiency Test and its accompanying introductory course to the interpreting profession. The scheme offers lower-level language testing and limited training and has been offered across around 80 languages. Upon completion, candidates gain access to the national register's lowest level and are, according to the Interpreter Act, qualified interpreters.

Although simple in its design, the test and course both play an important role in recruiting interpreters for the public sector at a lower level and has established a minimum standard for PSI in Norway. This allows non-Norwegian speakers to exercise their rights and democratic responsibilities while the public sector can more effectively deliver its services and comply with the Interpreting Act. However, is a basic language test and a limited introductory course sufficient to equip interpreters for the complex task of interpreting in public sector while also

ensuring equality and legal safeguard for their users? This paper explores this question in a Norwegian context and is based on experiences with the Bilingual Proficiency Test and introductory course to the interpreter profession.

The paper begins by presenting the legal framework for interpreters in Norway, how the National Registry of Interpreters organises its interpreters, and Oslo Metropolitan University's role in qualifying interpreters for the register. Next, the paper introduces the lowest level of qualification: The Bilingual Proficiency Test and its accompanying introductory course to the interpreting profession. The paper then presents Oslo Metropolitan University's experience with the flexibility of the Bilingual Proficiency Test and how it is able to meet sudden societal shifts and changing demands in interpreting languages. The section summarises how Oslo Metropolitan University succeeded in quickly qualifying interpreters after the Russian invasion of Ukraine to meet the demands from a sudden influx of refugees and reiterates the importance of lower-level qualifications for interpreters. Finally limits and possibilities of lower-level qualification schemes are discussed before concluding remarks on the role of lower-level testing and training.

## **2 The Norwegian legal framework for PSI**

The Norwegian system for organising public service interpreters is based on a legal framework through the Act relating to public bodies' responsibility for the use of interpreters, etc. (The Interpreting Act)<sup>1</sup> (Tolkeloven, 2022). The act serves two main purposes: Firstly, the act ensures with legal certainty that interpreting services are provided to individuals unable to sufficiently communicate with public services without an interpreter present. Secondly, the act ensures that those in need of interpreting services have access to interpreters who hold an expected level of qualifications and maintain a certain degree of professionalism. The act places the responsibility of providing an interpreter with the public bodies, and it is important to note that the law consequently is limited to interpreting in the public sector.

The above legal framework not only helps formalise the use of interpreters by public bodies, it also recognises interpreting as a profession by defining what is expected from interpreters, their responsibilities when it comes to impartiality and confidentiality, and what formal qualifications they must hold to safeguard the interpreter users. The legal framework forms the basis for a code of conduct for interpreters and facilitates the professionalisation of interpreting. The Interpreting Act sets a standard for public service interpreters by requiring that interpreters hold formal qualifications. To give a better overview of qualified interpreters and their level of qualification in Norway, the act dictates there shall be a national register administered by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi): The National Registry of Interpreters (Tolkeloven, 2022).

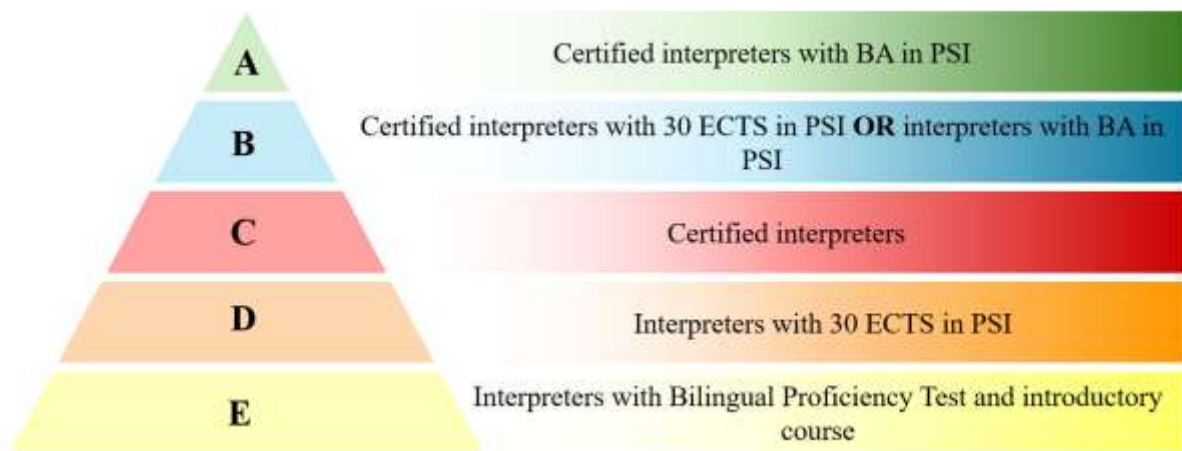
By completing one or several qualifications schemes, an interpreter may apply for listing in the register based on their formal qualifications in PSI. The register categorises interpreters in five levels ranging from A, the highest category with the most qualified interpreters, to E, the lowest category (IMDi, 2024). These categories are language-specific<sup>2</sup> and interpreters need to complete the respective schemes in each of their interpreting languages in order to be listed. One

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<sup>1</sup> The Interpreting Act has been unofficially translated for information purposes and is available in English: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2021-06-11-79>

<sup>2</sup> The introductory course in category E only needs to be completed once and certain parts of the BA in PSI are not language specific and do not need to be repeated.

may therefore be in category A in Persian, and category D in Kurmanji<sup>3</sup>. A breakdown of the levels and their required qualifications is depicted in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 Categories in the National Registry of Interpreters*

A bachelor's degree in PSI is currently only available at Oslo Metropolitan University, which is also the only institution that administers the National Interpreter Certification Exam and the introductory course to the interpreting profession. The year-long program of 30 ECTS in PSI is offered at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in addition to Oslo Metropolitan University, and the Sámi University of Applied Sciences is in the process of establishing education and qualification schemes for Sámi languages.

Importantly Figure 1 also illustrates the current composition of the register in that the majority of listed interpreters are in the lower categories, however, it is a long-term goal that interpreters hold both certification and education (NOU 2014: 8., IMDi, 2015). Moreover, the separation in levels is also intended to incentivise interpreters to pursue higher levels of qualifications and progress up through the categories (NOU 2014: 8.). Nonetheless, to meet the immediate and often changing demands for interpreting services in the public sector, lower-level schemes are necessary to quickly qualify interpreters for the register or provide some level of qualification for smaller languages which do not justify more elaborate schemes.

To comply with the Interpreting Act, it follows that the register needs to be populated with enough interpreters to meet demands and fluctuating needs in the Norwegian PSI-market. The act therefore provides a dispensation from using interpreters in the register until 31.12.2026 to give the qualification schemes time to qualify enough interpreters and populate the register (Tolkeloven, 2022). Completing the higher levels of qualification, and attaining the necessary language abilities to do so, are time-consuming processes. The strength of lower-level testing and training therefore lies in their ability to bolster numbers in the national register over a shorter timeframe with interpreters who comply to an absolute minimum standard for PSI. The Bilingual proficiency test and its accompanying introductory course to the interpreter profession are therefore important tools for recruiting enough interpreters to the register as well as stimulating the interpreters to seek further qualification through the education schemes and the interpreter

<sup>3</sup> Qualifications are always in the combination of Norwegian and a second interpreting language.

certification exam. In this sense the scheme forms the basis for a qualification system that aids public institutions in complying with the Interpreting Act up until 2027 and in future.

### **3 Lower-level qualification schemes as entryway to the interpreter profession**

A potential public service interpreter's first step towards professionalisation and gateway to the National Registry of Interpreters, is usually through the Bilingual Proficiency Test. A passed test is also a requirement when applying to the interpreter education programs (BA and 30 ECTS) in PSI and systematically ties the register's levels together. The test coordinates languages offered with the education schemes so that interpreters are offered opportunities to progress to higher categories and ultimately towards the Norwegian Interpreter Certification Exam. Therefore, the test forms the foundation of the national register and Norwegian system for PSI. In other words, the test determines the minimum required abilities for interpreters in Norway.

#### **3.1 The Bilingual Proficiency Test**

The Bilingual Proficiency Test was established at Oslo Metropolitan University in 2017 and has since then been conducted in over 80 languages. The test is the recommended starting point for fledgling interpreters and is an oral test that identifies whether a candidate has the necessary bilingual potential for becoming an interpreter. Candidates who pass the test are offered enrolment in the introductory course to the interpreter profession and can upon completion apply for listing in category E in the national register. With the enactment of the Interpreting Act, the test also functions as a quality assurance for already practicing interpreters by barring those who do not meet the necessary language requirements from the National Registry of Interpreters. The Bilingual Proficiency Test therefore is a high-stakes test meant to separate qualified from unqualified and will from 2027 onwards be the deciding factor whether an interpreter may or may not work within PSI. The Bilingual Proficiency Test is organised each semester and offers tests in multiple languages during each period. Around 30 languages have been offered per year on average over the past 5 years and the number of candidates tested has steadily increased over time with 2023 culminating in a record breaking 656 candidates tested in 27 languages (Oslo Metropolitan University, 2024b). While not something that has been fully examined, the increase in interest for the test is suspected to be linked with the end of the dispensation nearing and a greater awareness of the qualifications needed to continue working in PSI.

To qualify for the test candidates must be of legal age (18 years) and be able to document Norwegian skills at level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (University, 2024). Documenting Norwegian skills was introduced as a measure to reduce the test's fail rate along with a registration fee of 500 NOK (Audun Korsvold Rådgivning AS, 2018). These requirements ensure that more suitable and motivated candidates apply and signals an expected skill level in Norwegian from those wishing to qualify as an interpreter (IMDi, 2015). The test is offered nationally, and candidates may take the test in person at Oslo Metropolitan University or one of the other 8 test locations<sup>4</sup> via video conference. Candidates may apply and retake the test whenever their interpreting language is offered with the exception that two semesters must have passed between attempts in the same language. This is to allow time for candidates to improve their language abilities between test attempts.

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<sup>4</sup> As of 2024 tests are offered in Alta, Bergen, Bodø, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Tromsø, Trondheim and Ålesund in addition to Oslo.

Although bilingualism in itself does not guarantee an individual's ability to perform the act of interpreting, bilingual proficiency is a part of an interpreter's core competence and required to interpret professionally (Skaaden and Wadensjö, 2014, Skaaden, 2013). The Bilingual Proficiency Test therefore is an oral test that evaluates bilingual abilities and not interpreting abilities. It is first and foremost a language test to identify whether a candidate's language abilities ensure the transfer of information within an acceptable margin of error and thus have the potential for becoming interpreters.

Each test is organized with an administrative supervisor to oversee the test and two examiners to evaluate candidates in their respective languages. The test is conducted by the first examiner orally performing a text in Norwegian, one sequence at a time, and the candidate must repeat the utterances in the other interpreting language without much delay. In this way the test with relative authenticity mimics the task of consecutive interpreting in dialogues (Skaaden, 2013). The second examiner continuously evaluates precision in the transferal of information, knowledge of terminology, grammar, language use and phrasing. The process is then repeated in reverse with examiners switching roles and the candidate is tested by repeating utterances in Norwegian from the second interpreting language. A sound recording is made of each candidate so that the examiners may listen back if needed but are only used during assessment and later deleted. Each individual test normally lasts around 20-30 minutes including the evaluation.

While a written test is useful to check grammar and vocabulary, and is economically and timely efficient to conduct, it does not evaluate bilingual abilities under time pressure or pronunciation. These are the reasons why an oral format was chosen (Skaaden, 2013). The test must also test in both directions, Norwegian to a second interpreting language and vice versa, because, as Skaaden (2013) points out, native-language is not a clear concept for bilingual speakers and first language attrition may take its toll on bilingual abilities over time due to multiple factors (Skaaden and Wadensjö, 2014). Although, the test mimics the act of interpreting, it aims to test bilingual ability and potential for interpreting, not interpreting skills. The format of the test is justified empirically by the candidates' performance depending on their bilingual ability to distance oneself from the source utterance and render the contents in the target language (Skaaden, 2013). Additionally, the performance depends on candidates' memory capacity, as no notes may be taken during the test, and their affective reactions of the test situation (Skaaden, 2013). The test is theoretically underpinned by Giles' (2009) Effort model, where the imbalance between resources required and resources available will cause performance to deteriorate. In our case memory capacity and bilingual ability are the resources needed to pass the test and are necessary part of any interpreter's skillset. Lastly, the oral format is seen as beneficial as this requires a greater effort in training examiners and thus strengthening the test's reliability (IMDi, 2015).

The tasks employed in the Bilingual Proficiency Test consist of texts between 200 – 240 words in length divided in 13 sequences of varying length and complexity. Topics relate to areas common with PSI such as work life or health, societal or legal issues. The texts are generally written in non-specialist language, maintain an oral tone and are logically built to create coherence. The vocabulary should comprise words from what is considered general everyday language among adults, common expressions, and combinations of words, as well as words from the core vocabulary related to the text's topic. The texts should contain at least one relative clause, fixed expressions, enumeration of at least three items, and technical terms used in

everyday speech. Under the test each examiner evaluates the candidate's rendition of individual sequences on an evaluation form as depicted in Figure 2.

|  |   |          |                 |          |          |          |                |
|--|---|----------|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|
| NAME OF CANDIDATE: .....   |   |          |                 |          |          |          |                |
| CANDIDATE NUMBER: .....  |   |          | LANGUAGE: ..... |          |          |          |                |
| <b>44 – Et forskningsprosjekt om livsstil og helse (220 words)</b> |   |          |                 |          |          |          |                |
|  | <b>Sequences</b>  | <b>A</b> | <b>B</b>        | <b>C</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>E</b> | <b>Points*</b> |
| 1.   | En gruppe leger gjennomførte i fjor et omfattende forskningsprosjekt der de undersøkte folks livsstil og helse. |          |                 |          |          |          |                |
| 2.   | Personene som deltok i undersøkelsen, var mellom 45 og 79 år gamle, og de kom fra ulike sosiale lag.            |          |                 |          |          |          |                |
| 3.   | Deltakerne var friske, og ingen hadde kreft, hjertesykdom eller andre alvorlige helseplager da studien startet. |          |                 |          |          |          |                |
| 4.   | Studien så på hvordan røyking, alkoholinntak, fysisk aktivitet og inntak av frukt og grønt påvirket helsen.     |          |                 |          |          |          |                |

Figure 2 Example of evaluation form

Each sequence awards point from 6 – 0 points according to the below criteria:

- A. Very good rendition with nuances intact - 6 points
- B. Few or minor inaccuracies in the rendition - 5 points
- C. Several or severe inaccuracies in the rendition - 3 points
- D. The meaning partially disappeared - 1 point
- E. The meaning was completely lost - 0 points

The score from the sequences is converted to a percentage of maximum achievable points (78 points = 100%) and is weighted as half of the task result. In addition to evaluating a candidate's rendition of sequences, the examiners evaluate pronunciation and grammar/phrasing on the following scales:

**Pronunciation:**

- Native like/Very good pronunciation (100-85%)
- Clearly perceptible accent, but not difficult to understand (84-75%)
- Disturbing accent/accents that severely reduces understandability (74% and below)

**Grammar/phrasing:**

- Native like/Very good grammar/phrasing (100-85%)
- Some mistakes, but not difficult to understand (84-75%)
- Disturbing mistakes/mistakes that severely reduce understandability (74% and below)

The choice of the above scales and their criteria is a pragmatic one as they capture the nuances of the test's construct (bilingual ability) and take the examiners into consideration. Despite the complexity of "Native-like" from a theoretic standpoint, the term was chosen with the bilingual examiner in mind. Although not necessarily linguists, the examiners have an intuitive understanding of what is "native-like" when evaluating candidates in their own native language. "Disturbing accent" was similarly chosen because it is part of a bilingual reality and a common descriptor in bilingualism. In the Bilingual Proficiency Test it is used to evaluate whether pronunciation impedes the understanding of the listener (examiner). The scales of *pronunciation* and *grammar/phrasing* are each weighted as a quarter of the result. The two tasks (the renditions to and from Norwegian) are rated separately and to pass the test candidates must achieve a score of 80 % on both tasks.

Recently the development of new tasks for the Bilingual Proficiency Test has increasingly utilized AI. The basis for new texts is created with assistance from AI and further developed and refined according to the administrative staff's established criteria. The work of creating new tasks is done in collaboration with examiners through annual seminars. By involving representatives from interpreter education, the interpreter certification exam and examiners ensures the difficulty, validity and reliability of the test is maintained (Skaaden, 2013).

On the topic of reliability, working across multiple languages presents some challenges. In a small interpreter market such as in Norway there are difficulties finding qualified examiners in smaller and new language communities. Problems of legal incapacity also arise often forcing bilingual professionals outside the sphere of interpreting being recruited and trained as examiners. While the scales used in evaluation are easily understandable, they are subjective to a certain degree. To maintain reliable tests, training of examiners is paramount. Gatherings such as task seminars and biannual training seminars allows examiners to meet fellow bilingual professionals and share experiences. Closer inspection of results and conducting double rating from select tests show that results are generally stable when comparing examiners and how they rate candidates. Other challenges that affect reliability are testing in non-standardised languages, languages with great regional variances (Moroccan Arabic vs standard Arabic) and what is considered non-specialist language across multiple languages.

Despite the challenges of reliability that are presented when testing across multiple languages, the test is considered highly valid (Skaaden, 2013). Since 2017 the average rate for passing the test is 42 %, although there are variations across languages, and this rate is slightly declining (Oslo Metropolitan University, 2024b). All candidates that pass are offered enrolment in the introductory course to the interpreting profession to continue their path of professionalisation.

### 3.2 Introductory course to the interpreting profession

Upon passing the Bilingual Proficiency Test, candidates are offered to enrol in the introductory course to the interpreter profession (abbreviated as TAO). The course has been offered to potential interpreters at Oslo Metropolitan University since 2018 and has, together with the Bilingual Proficiency Test, successfully established a standardised minimum requirement for working as an interpreter in the public sector. The course is free of charge and offers a limited introduction to interpreting as a profession. The purpose of the course is to grant participants insight to their responsibilities and what is required of interpreters from bilingual, ethical and technical standpoints. The course also emphasises the importance of professionalisation in

interpreting and encourages participants to continue their professional development through education, thus rising in the national register's categories. Once the course is completed, participants can apply for the lowest listing (category E) in the National Registry of Interpreters.

In its original format, the introductory course to the interpreting profession was conducted over three days in a classroom setting, requiring attendees to travel to Oslo from all over Norway. The course was fully digitalised in 2022 to make it more readily available and has since been offered for participants through the digital platform Canvas Catalog. Today the course is held over two and a half weeks each with a maximum of 32 participants. Course content is not language specific, meaning a mix of languages and often varying experience levels meet during the course which helps enrich digital lectures and discussions. The common denominator is that each participant has passed the Bilingual Proficiency Test and demonstrated that they possess the requisite bilingual skills for becoming an interpreter.

The course is labour intensive and divided into four modules. Each module consists of an asynchronous self-study part followed by a digital lecture. The self-study parts are comprised of varying media for participants to read, listen to and watch, and these relate to each module's topic. Quizzes at the end of each self-study part ensures retention of each module subject. Before each digital lecture, participants must also complete submissions in the form of smaller reflective writing assignments or media recordings of interpreting exercises. These submissions are used as examples and shape parts of the succeeding lecture and discussions. The pedagogical approach of the course is based on dialogue with a focus on active participation, peer discussions and roleplay exercises. Modules and their activities are completed chronologically and after completion participants will have achieved category E listing in the register along with the following learning outcomes (Oslo Metropolitan University, 2024a):

- Been introduced to interpreting as a profession and the importance of professionalisation
- Gained insight to the contents of the Interpreting Act and requirements for interpreters
- Gained insight of your own role as interpreter and an interpreter's responsibilities and place in communication
- Gained insight of language and how you can work with language and translation
- Completed interpreting exercises

It is important to note that one does not become a fully-fledged interpreter after completion and there are obvious limitations to what one can achieve in a course spanning over only two and a half weeks. The course is therefore not meant as an alternative to other qualification schemes or to replace more elaborate ones. Although interpreting skills are discussed and put to practice in limited exercises, the course is not meant to teach interpreting techniques. Instead, the course must be understood as an introduction to interpreting as a profession, giving the participants a basic introduction to the profession and increasing their awareness of the expectations placed on them in the field of PSI. This growing awareness is summarised in feedback from one participant:

*I learned about the Interpreting Act, language, the role of the interpreter and the importance of context in interpreting through the self-studies. This made me think about how I act as an interpreter and what I can do differently. I liked being able to share experiences, I received good tips and saw challenges in interpreting from a different perspective.*

The course is intended to impart an awareness among the participants so that they may consider their responsibilities and role as interpreters in the context of the Interpreting Act. The

introductory course introduces an ethical conduct for interpreters as outlined by the act and the importance of qualifications and professional conduct. In this way the course plays an important part in inspiring and stimulating the candidates to progress through the higher qualification schemes and assists in the professionalisation of interpreting. An increased awareness of this professionalisation process and its importance is also something participants demonstrate after finishing the course:

*This was my first course in interpreting. There was a lot to learn which made me aware that I need to change the way I interpret (...) This is incredibly useful for anyone starting out as an interpreter. It isn't just to show up and start interpreting!*

*The course was rewarding, and I have learned many ways of continuing to develop as a professional interpreter.*

While it is acknowledged that the Bilingual proficiency Test and introductory course alone does not produce a fully trained professional, interpreters completing these are after all listed in the National Registry of Interpreters and are thus considered “qualified interpreters” by definition (Tolkeloven, 2022). As we will discuss in more detail later, there are some obvious pitfalls to this. It is therefore of great importance that users of interpreter services are educated on the differences between the register’s levels of qualifications as well as the importance of stimulating interpreters to pursue further education and training.

However, due to the lack of enough qualified interpreters in many languages, The Bilingual Proficiency test and its accompanying course has demonstrated that lower-level qualifications are important to set a minimum standard for PSI and to stimulate further qualifications. It is also an important measure to single out those who do not yet have the minimum necessary language skills to work as an interpreter and to avoid the extensive use of unqualified interpreters, which today are responsible for 41 % of the interpreting assignments in public sector in Norway (Agenda Kaupang, 2024). With a shorter timeframe in comparison to the other qualification schemes, the test and course has also proven to be pivotal in times of crises where there is a need for rapid qualification of interpreters when sudden influxes of migrants and refugees changes the needs for interpreter services (Skaaden and Wadensjö, 2014). It has also proven useful for qualifying interpreters in more marginal languages of lesser diffusion (newly arrived languages), where there is yet not possible to offer wider education.

#### **4 Qualifying interpreters in times of crises**

After some challenging years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022 marked a return to “business as usual” for the Bilingual Proficiency Test. With news of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February it quickly became clear that an influx of refugees would be in need of interpreting services. One week after the invasion Oslo Metropolitan University was in dialogue with the Norwegian directorates of immigration (UDI) and integration and diversity (IMDi) to begin planning an extraordinary effort to quickly test and qualify interpreters in Ukrainian.

As a sign of solidarity with Ukraine, and to incentivise applicants, the registration fee of 500 NOK was waived. Including an expected moderate increase in applicants, there was only an estimate of 40 applications for tests in Ukrainian. However, at the end of the application period, there was a total of 287 applicants. The Bilingual Proficiency Test’s presence on social media was an important factor in recruiting candidates and the initial Facebook-post (Figure 3) about the extraordinary testing garnered substantial engagement and was widely shared. Subsequent posts were used to inform and update audiences on the application and testing process.



Figure 3 Initial post on Facebook about extraordinary testing

Applications and tests during this period were continuously processed and planned, and the university opened an extraordinary enrolment to the education schemes in PSI. Candidates for the education program were therefore identified and prioritised for testing. Tests in Ukrainian began March 7<sup>th</sup> and were conducted in addition to ordinary testing in other languages. This meant that test capacity was doubled, with ordinary tests held during the day and Ukrainian test held during evenings. An introductory course to the interpreter profession was also planned to quickly qualify the first few candidates who passed the test and shortly after the first course ended March 27<sup>th</sup>, 13 new interpreters in Ukrainian entered the national register. To effectively test all Ukrainian candidates, the testing period was extended and the last tests in Ukrainian were held on May 13<sup>th</sup>. It is worth noting that during the extraordinary period ordinary tests were also held and offers of testing had to be reduced or postponed in other languages so as not to exceed the capacity or workload of the administrative staff.

At the time testing began, the National Registry of Interpreters had 9 registered interpreters in Ukrainian. Of all applicants 171 were eligible to undergo testing of which 80 passed the test. Since then, Ukrainian has been offered multiple times at the Bilingual Proficiency Test and the register is now populated with 172 interpreters of which 55 have also completed 30 ECTS in PSI (category D interpreters). The National Registry of interpreters also show whether interpreters work fulltime or otherwise. Many interpreters are therefore listed as part time interpreters meaning that there is still a need for qualifying in Ukrainian, especially so in regions outside Oslo. At the time of writing other qualification schemes in Ukrainian underway and more interpreters are expected to enter the higher categories in the register in near future.

The extraordinary effort in qualifying Ukrainian interpreters has resulted in multiple learnings. Providing interpreters to the public sector was also dependant on working closely with other institutions such as the Norwegian directorates of immigration, and integration and diversity. This cross-sectorial collaboration was crucial in effectively setting recently qualified interpreters to work and contact information of qualified candidates was continuously shared with to the Directorate of Immigration. Those who failed the test were referred to the Directorate of Integration and Diversity where they were informed on other ways they could offer language assistance in their respective municipalities.

The challenge of predicting the number of applicants and thus affecting planning is even more challenging in unexpected situations. Even so the above demonstrates the flexibility of lower-level testing and training and the potential for scaling the qualification scheme up or down depending on needs. The deciding factor is human resources in the form of enough administrative staff and examiners. In order to sustain and manage testing of the above scope, the administrative staff responsible for the Bilingual Proficiency Test and introductory course was pushed to its limits, forgoing or pausing other tasks to concentrate on the planning, logistics, coordination and execution of tests. The important societal mission to support incoming refugees was a motivating factor that united the staff in their effort. Over the course of the invasion, Norway has seen an influx of 72,000 Ukrainian refugees, as reported by the Directorate of Immigration. For these refugees, qualifying interpreters help ensure their access to public services, legal safeguard and inclusion in Norwegian society.

## **5 Limits and possibilities of lower-level qualification schemes**

At the outset of this paper, we ask if a basic language test and introductory course is sufficient to equip interpreters for the complex task of interpreting. We also ask whether a qualification scheme such as the Bilingual Proficiency Test and accompanying introductory course to the interpreter profession sufficiently ensures a degree of equality and legal safeguard for recipients of interpreting services.

The time pressure due to the Interpreting Act's dispensation period necessitates lower-level testing and training to populate the national register and is understandably the main driving force of the Bilingual proficiency Test and introductory course. This raises the question of what role the scheme will have in an idealised future where there are enough interpreters to cover most of Norwegian PSI needs. Compared to its counterparts, the test and course are scalable and more flexible which opens for a targeted approach when qualifying interpreters in specific situations.

As we have pointed out there are obvious limitations to what can be achieved through a basic bilingual proficiency test and a limited introductory course to the interpreting profession. Although the proficiency test mimics consecutive interpreting, it is first and foremost a language test. The bilingual ability a candidate has documented by passing the test is merely a prerequisite for the act of interpreting and further qualifications. The setting of the test and its format does not take other modes of interpreting into consideration and while managing the stress of a test situation demonstrates a candidate's composure, it does not fully mirror how they perform the act of interpreting outside of a test environment. Therefore, the test is limited to evaluating a candidate's *potential* for interpreting and does not test or give a holistic impression of the candidates' aptitude for interpreting.

Similarly, the introductory course to the interpreting profession also faces limitations. A short course over two and a half weeks cannot possibly equip participants with all they need to be considered professional interpreters. As already highlighted the course's intention is not to fully train participants, but to foster an awareness of interpreting as profession, the importance of qualifications, and the responsibilities entailed. One of the main aims of the course is thus to stimulate the participants to pursue further education and professionalisation through the university's bachelor's program. While limited, the scheme shows how to forge the path for wider professionalisation within the interpreting field and is a recruitment channel for higher levels of education and qualification. Category E is a stepping stone for the higher categories and is not intended as a replacement. Rather than viewing category E as a standalone form of qualification, we strongly emphasise that as a qualification scheme, the Bilingual Proficiency Test and accompanying course must be understood as part of a greater qualification system and is only the first step in the right direction of the Norwegian model for qualifying interpreters. For the Bilingual Proficiency Test and introductory course to succeed in funnelling interpreters into the higher categories, they must be part of a cohesive strategy to increase the degree of qualifications in the register in the long term. The goal, as previously stated, is that in future interpreters in the National Registry of Interpreters at a minimum have completed education in PSI (NOU 2014: 8., 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Seen in isolation, the Norwegian low-level scheme falls short in some regards when qualifying interpreters for the important work they do. It is however a step in the right direction regarding professionalising interpreting which has been, and to some degree still is, rife with self-proclaimed "professionals". In addition, ensuring practicing interpreters have the necessary prerequisites, namely bilingual ability and an awareness of their role, raises the minimum expected standard and thus improves the quality for interpreting services. The answer to our initial query is therefore not a definitive one.

The Bilingual Proficiency Test and introductory course to the interpreting profession forms the minimum requirement to be listed in the National Registry of Interpreters in Norway. Even though the test and course must be considered limited and basic, the candidates are granted the title of "qualified interpreters" upon completion. Although there are obvious pitfalls to the qualification scheme, we have argued that lower-level schemes have proven necessary to be able to rapidly qualify enough interpreters, especially in times of crises and for languages of lesser diffusion. Lower-level language testing and interpreter training must not be seen as a panacea for unqualified interpreters in isolation, but as a first step in an effort to professionalise the field of PSI. They must be understood as recruitment tools for the higher categories in the National Registry of Interpreters and it is necessary that the scheme is accompanied by a cohesive strategy for qualifying interpreters to higher categories in the register in the long term. Lower-level testing and training fulfil multiple needs but most importantly plays an integral part in the Norwegian system of ensuring effective public services, equality and legal safeguard for recipients of these services.

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