WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

INT 340 Professional Interview Reflection Paper

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 Having misread the course syllabus, I had assumed I would have an extra week to conduct my interview with a professional interpreter and report my results. Yet as Monday morning’s class concluded, I realized my error and fortunately, I was able to email and set up an interview with an interpreter on campus the following day. I relished the opportunity to ask a professional a collage of questions that were relevant my future career. I gathered a great deal of information that informed my understanding of the profession and the ethical decisions related to it. While we discussed many different topics in the interpreting field, in this essay, I will focus on some of the advice and explanation she provided in regards to making ethical decisions when accepting or declining jobs.

 The biggest piece of advice she gave me was “to continually expect the unexpected”. She reaffirmed much of what I knew about every interpreting situation being different and with the clientele being equally so; interpreting jobs will never become “predictable” or “routine”. It is also important that I keep an opened mindset and be willing to accept many of these different jobs. “I am always willing to try new things once,” she says in response to how she determines whether or not to accept a job in an unfamiliar environment, “there are always new opportunities to learn, new challenges to face, and new topics to research. There is so much that we don’t know we don’t know.”

 I then asked her a series of questions related to how she decided to decline jobs. She stated that the main reason she would turn down a job would be if there was an ethical conflict. Here, she imparted another piece of valuable advice: “know your boundaries and stick to them because they will be tested”. Such conflicts could be related to the agency’s policies, the client, or the assigned team. One example she provided of an agency’s policy being unethical, was where they would charge a client for a full hour if the interpreting assignment went more than five minutes over the expected time limit. She deemed this to be an unethical practice and therefore declined assignments that would require her to contract with that agency. She explained personal conflicts with the client consisted of situations where she had interpreted for the client in another setting (e.g. court, after a guilty verdict) and felt it would be uncomfortable for them to see her in another setting. Conflicts involving previous team members generally were resultant of previous teaming experiences where, for example, the interpreter did not want her feedback or other types of support she had to offer.

While discussing the topic of team interpreting, I asked how she would go about declining a job involving team member conflicts. She replied that she would say she “simply wasn’t available on that given day” so as to “not involve the coordinator in my own personal issues with that interpreter”. If she had accepted the job prior to finding out who her team member(s) would be, she would similarly say that she had been “looking at the wrong day on my calendar and really am not free after all”. Other times she may explain that the possible team member “just wasn’t a good fit for me” and in still other situations she would accept the job and afterwards say “Ooh, sorry, can’t stay and talk, I have somewhere I’ve gotta be,” in order to avoid difficult or negative conversations. Each response depended on the specifics of the particular situation. I saw this as yet another example of how interpreters have many possible controls to utilize in reaction to different situations.

My initial list of questions sparked many more as the interview continued and I feel my knowledge has definitely expanded as a result of this experience. It was both relieving and reassuring to hear a professional interpreter discuss all the opportunities for learning there were in choosing to accept multiple different jobs. While talking through the steps of why and how to decline a job you deem unethical, we also explored what exactly makes a job unethical. Doing so helped me more fully realize the importance of pre-assignment controls in the role of analyzing an interpreting situation. I think, like many new interpreting students, I tend to focus on the controls one utilizes during an assignment. This experience highlighted how critically examining an assignment prior to accepting it can alleviate or completely avoid strenuous, negative or harmful situations. I intend to hang on to my findings and to continue to seek out other professionals that I can glean similar advice and knowledge from.