

**HUMAK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

**MA-THESIS**

**From the Municipalities to the  
State**

**- A New Stage in the Development of the Profes-  
sion?**

**A study of sign language interpreters views of the**

**Degree Programme in Sign Language Interpreting (EUMASLI, 90 ECTS)**

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**Degree Programme in Sign Language Interpreting (EUMASLI)**

**ABSTRACT**

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<p><b>Title</b> From the Municipalities to the State. – A New Stage in the development of the Profession?  A study of sign language interpreters views of the new service system.</p>	
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<p><b>Abstract</b></p>	
<p>The interpreting services have been reassigned from the municipalities to the State and The Social Insurance Institution of Finland now has the responsibility for organising the services. The aim of this Master's Thesis is to learn how Sign Language interpreters' profession in Finland has been affected by this transfer.</p> <p>Throughout its brief history, the interpreting services in Finland have always been arranged based on disability and this is still the case after a new legislative amendment entered into force in 2010. Under the Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities 133/2010, the responsibility for organising the interpreting services was reassigned from the municipalities to The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. In Finland, competitive biddings are regulated by the Act on Public Contracts.</p> <p>If a service is outsourced and the employees of the municipality do not provide the service, then it has to be tendered if a certain price is exceeded. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland tendered the interpreter coordinating, interpreting services and the interpreter coordinating software, all separately. Based on the tender, five centralised interpreter coordinating agencies were established around the country and all the interpreting service providers in Finland were compiled on a list, with placing given based on the price and the quality score they had received. The interpreting assignments are given out to the service providers according to their placing.</p> <p>The transformation of the service affected interpreters' work in many aspects. The municipal interpreter centres were discontinued and working as a freelancer was also no longer an option. When the amendment entered into force, every Sign Language interpreter either had to have an employment in an interpreting service company or had to become a private entrepreneur. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland regulated the rules for the execution of the interpreting service strictly.</p> <p>Transferring the interpreting services from the municipalities to the State has been the topic of discussion with the service providers and Sign Language interpreters. The target group of this thesis was Sign Language interpreters. Because this is a sensitive subject the data has been gathered in the form</p>	

of diaries from ten randomly selected interpreters. In the diaries, the interpreters had the opportunity to discuss freely their thoughts concerning their work within the new service system. The data has been studied based on themes that arose from the data itself.

The results show that at the moment the transfer has both a positive and negative effect on interpreters' work and development of the profession. The changes brought on by the new service system and the effects it has had occur frequently in the study material. For example, the effects of the national tender, the centralised coordinating agencies and the new coordination software, as well as the challenges it causes, arise from the material. However, when viewing the results it has to be remembered that the new service model has been in force only for a year now and practices tend to be shaped by experience. As with any change, there are bound to be initial objections to this one also. After the first three-year tendering period the results might be very different.

**Keywords:** The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, national tender, centralised interpreter coordinating agency, coordinating programme, service provider, interpreting service product.

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## 1. Introduction

In its brief history, the Sign Language interpreting services have been through a lot of changes. In Finland, as well as in the rest of the world, family members, relatives and friends of the Deaf acted as interpreters before the interpreting services were initiated. In Finland, Sign Language communication and the purpose of interpreting services were recognised in 1979, when the interpreting services were added to the Act on Disability Care Services. Sign Language interpretation became a profession and official training started developing. The latest big change in arranging the services occurred in 2010, when the responsibility of organising the services transferred from the municipalities to the State. The transfer brought along a few changes in the work of Sign Language interpreters.

When the interpreting services transferred to the State, the responsibility for organising them was given to The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. For the first time in the history of Finnish interpreting services the service was outsourced and tendered in the whole country. Earlier, the interpreting services had been tendered only in Helsinki and Pirkanmaa areas. Elsewhere in Finland mainly municipal interpreter centres and freelance interpreters had provided the service. So the national tender brought changes to the interpreting services in all of Finland. It affected the work of many Sign Language interpreters because freelance interpreting was no longer an option and the municipal interpreter centres were discontinued.

In the nation-wide tendering, Finland was divided into five service regions and five interpreter-coordinating agencies were established. The services were tendered in all five regions and the service providers were put in order based on price and quality. The coordinating software was also tendered and the use of the electronic coordinating system, which was new to all providers, began.

The nation-wide tendering and the new service model include also interpreting services for people with speech impediments. The service is coordinated from the same centralised coordinating agency as Sign Language interpreting services. The service providers for speech impediment interpreting services were also listed based on the

tendering results and the assignments are given out based on that list. So the employees at the centralised interpreter coordinating agencies need expertise also in interpreting for people with speech impediments. In this study I have focused only on the Sign Language interpreting service and its development and excluded the field of speech impediment services.

## **1.1 Subject of the study and the research questions**

The new service model has affected the work of Sign Language interpreters in many ways. The divided regions, new coordinating system, tendering results, outsourcing the services and the new company-based model have all had their effect on the everyday work of the interpreters. People have discussed the changes a lot and that aroused my interest. The transfer from the municipalities to the State is the biggest change in the history of the services. The company-based model has brought particular challenges, as well as competitiveness between the companies, that was created by the tender. The battle for the status of Sign Language interpreting as a profession has been continuous throughout the years. Now the industry is once again facing a new situation.

In this thesis I wanted to study how the interpreters themselves feel about the changes caused by the transformed services, how the change affects the development of their profession and what are the changes in their professional vocabulary. The questions were as follows:

1. How is the new service system affecting the work of a Sign Language interpreter?
2. What possibilities for professional development are created by the new service system?
3. How has the work-related vocabulary changed with the new service system?

Because the subject is still quite sensitive, and the interpreting service companies are in a competitive situation, I wanted to approach the subject as openly as possible. The study focuses on the transformation of the service model, specifically from

the interpreters' point of view. I chose diary as the method of gathering material, so that the interpreters could discuss their thoughts on their work as freely as possible. I also thought that a diary as a medium would give the interpreters the possibility of commenting on any subject or theme related to their work they themselves find essential.

The interpreters who took part in the study come from three different tendering regions, i.e. from the service regions of three different coordinating agencies. Their work experience varies from one to twenty years in profession. So some of the interpreters have experience from several previous service models, some of them have experienced only the current one.

## **1.2 Structure of the study**

The current, state-administered interpreting service system in Finland is still new and, as such, unique. In order to better understand the new service model and the nationalisation of the services, the history of the Finnish interpreting services from the volunteer helpers to the current situation will be briefly introduced.

In chapter 2, the phases of the Finnish interpreting services from the history to the current structure are described from the legislative point of view. The Acts that have affected the interpreting services and the effects they have had are covered briefly. After this, the phases of the profession's development, from the volunteer helpers to the paid professional interpreters and the start of the interpreter centres, are described. The history and status of the profession has been studied earlier e.g. in the Master's Thesis *Fighting for the Status of a Profession? A Study on the work of Sign Language Interpreters in Finland* by Vatanen (1996) but her study covers the subject only to 1996.

Next, there is a description of the transitional period, before the interpreting services were nationalised. In this section, the projects, which aimed to develop and standardise the services, are discussed. As a result of the projects the interpreting services

were tendered on two regions in Finland, while the rest of the country continued with the municipal interpreter centres and freelance interpreters.

Because the tender has changed the entire field of the interpreting services, the tenders are introduced briefly, from the first regional tenders to the national tender. The first regional tenders also brought the first centralised interpreter coordinating agencies. For the services to be eligible for competitive bidding, they had to be productised. This process has been covered briefly with the first tenders.

Matikainen (2007) has studied the customers' views on the effects of the first tender and on the work of a centralised coordinating agency in her thesis *Customer satisfaction survey about the functioning of centralized interpreter relay service to the customers of Uudenmaan tulkkivälityskeskus*. The thesis was a part of her studies in the Degree Programme in Sign Language Interpretation. Also, all the tenders that have taken place in Finland so far have been discussed from the viewpoint of one interpreting service company by Forsén (2011) in *To Produce Services in Public Tender – How did it go for Mokoma<sup>1</sup>?* This was also done for a Sign Language interpreter degree in a University of Applied Sciences.

Because the current service model in Finland is new and there is nothing similar in use elsewhere, the model will be covered in detail in chapter 2.3. The chapter introduces the main aspects of the new Act (Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities) and describes the national tender of the interpreting services, the client and interpreter profiles, the establishing of the centralised interpreter coordinating agencies and their operations model.

Even though the new service model has been in use for less than a year at the time of making this study, a few theses concerning the service system have already been published. Åby (2011) has studied in her thesis *Interpreters' coordination; part of the sign language interpreter services* the coordinating work in the Sign Language interpreting services, focusing specifically on the new, centralised agencies. The thesis by Pakkala (2010), *Service in the customer's own communication method. Modelling the*

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<sup>1</sup> Mokoma is the name of a company offering Sign Language interpreting services.

*accessible videophone service of The Centre for Interpreting Services for the Disabled*, studies the customer service and the clients' possibility to receive service in their own language via video phone calls at The Centre for Interpreting Services for the Disabled. The Centre is a new unit of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, established when the interpreting services were nationalised.

Chapter 3 discusses the development of the Sign Language interpreters' profession in other countries. In addition, the chapter considers the difficulties of defining the professional role of the Sign Language interpreter over the years and also describes the phases of the profession's development in Finland. The interpreter training in Finland has developed over the years from short courses lasting a few days to a degree at Universities of Applied Sciences and, in its part, has affected the evolution of the profession. For this reason, the phases of the interpreter training in Finland are also discussed in the chapter. The end of chapter 3 covers the job description of freelance and self-employed interpreters and considers the role of the interpreter in the business world.

Chapter 4 presents the research methods, the method of gathering material and the respondents of this study. After this, the different phases of the study and the methods of analysis are presented with short examples. The themes that arose from the material are presented by quoting the diaries. The work-related vocabulary changes in the material are presented the same way.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the study through the themes, which arose from the material, reflecting on the theoretical part. Chapter 6 discusses the phases of the interpreting services in Finland from the history to the modern-day situation and, based on the material, considers the changes brought by the nationalisation. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of the study and possible subjects for further study.

## 2. The development of the Sign Language Interpreting services in Finland

The developing statuses of the Sign Language interpreting service and Sign Language itself have been widely affected by the prevailing atmosphere of the society. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the church did strong pioneer work for the Deaf. Also, the different terms used in decrees and legislative documents reflect the predominant attitudes about Sign Language and deafness that have existed over the decades. Most of the decrees issued during 1970–1990 concerning the Deaf or Sign Language are based on the medical view and the general outlook that the Deaf are disabled. Only in the recent decades Finnish Sign Language has attained the status of being a natural and independent language. (Lappi 2000, 71.)

The Sign Language interpreting services have been arranged on the grounds of the clients' disability for almost all of the services' brief history. The Support and Assistance for the Disabled Decree (759/1987, 7§) discusses Sign Language and other methods that aid communication. Administrative Procedure Act (598/1982, 22§) specifies the obligation of the authorities to arrange interpreting and translation services, but when concerning a person using Sign Language the aforementioned obligation is based on the sensory handicap or speech disorder, which prevents the person from being understood. Similar views create the bases for the Criminal Investigations Act (449/1987, 37§) and the Act on the Status and Rights of Patients (785/1992, 5§). (ibid. 71.)

From the beginning of the 1990s Sign Language started to gain the status of a language gradually, supported mainly by the government. In 1990, the Government presented the Parliament with an account on education policies, in which Sign Language users were also acknowledged as a lingual and cultural minority. In 1991, Sign Language was accepted as a first language subject in the Basic Education Decree (176/1991, Section 36). A major change in the legal status of Sign Language occurred on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995 as the completely renewed Civil Rights Statutes of the Con-

stitution Act (969/95) entered into force. Pursuant to section 14, subsection 3, regarding linguistic rights: *“the rights of those, who use Sign Language or need interpreting or translation assistance due to disability, are secured by law.”* In the Constitution of Finland, which entered into force on March 1st, 2000, the aforementioned subsection is included in section 17. (ibid. 72.)

Acknowledging Sign Language on Constitutional level is very important to the Sign Language community. For the first time in history the people using Sign Language were seen as a language and cultural minority. After Uganda, Finland was the second country in the world where the national Sign Language was acknowledged on the Constitutional level. In 1996, after the Act had entered into force, the Ministry of Justice appointed a team to define what the subsection requires in this polity. The team found early childhood education, teaching, Sign Language training and research, organising the interpreting service and providing information to be the most crucial aspects. (ibid. 72.)

The right to receive interpreting services is based on severe disability. So the viewpoint of the legislators is profoundly medical and based on disability. A person is considered severely disabled if s/he has a severe hearing impairment, has a hearing and vision loss or has a speech impediment. Sign Language is still not seen as the mother tongue of the Deaf. (ibid. 75.)

In 1979 the interpreting service was added into the Act on Disability Care Services (581/79). After that, the interpreting service was based on the Act (380/87) and the Decree (759/87) on services and assistance given for the disabled. Since the beginning of 1994 the interpreting services have been under the specific responsibility municipalities have for organising services. The Act requires for the interpreting service to be arranged in such a manner that it is free of cost for the user. The service includes interpretation needed for working, taking care of matters, participating in the society or studying. Even though there are annual limitations on the hours clients are allowed to use on the service, interpreting related to studies must be arranged in the extent that is necessary for the student to manage his/her studies. (ibid. 74-75.)

## 2.1 A brief history - from helpers to interpreting centres

As late as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century disabled people were secluded into their own groups. Varying organizations would arrange the necessary special services for each group of disability. All help and service were voluntary and paternalistic, and protective by nature. There was no profession of interpreter and people with hearing disabilities were often left completely without assistance when they went to the doctor's, to the church, to bureaux or participated in other events. It was thought natural that only close relatives and other contacts understood the methods of their communication. (Vatanen 1996, 41.)

For the close relatives acting as an interpreter often became a way of life. Hearing children of Deaf adults would act as interpreters for their parents even from the age of five. For a child, acting as an interpreter would be difficult just for the fact alone that the child easily takes on more responsibility in the situation than would be expected from someone his/her age, and may feel a need to protect his/her parents from misunderstandings. The parents of the child are expected to be adults in the situation, but the child is unable to distinguish the emotions directed towards the addressee from the emotions directed at him/her, i.e. the interpreter. Therefore, the child has two conflicting roles in the situation, because s/he is both the child of his/her parents and the interpreter representing the adult. (ibid. 42.)

In addition to the close relatives, people working with the Deaf were acting as interpreters in the beginning. This included e.g. pastors, Deaconesses and Rehabilitation Secretaries. Few of them were working full-time and none of them had any formal qualification to work as an interpreter. Also, the close relationship they had with the clients affected both the quality and the substance of the interpretation. Pastors of the Deaf have shared their experiences on how the interpreting was problematic especially in court, because when interpreting the interrogator the pastor had to force the Deaf client to share information they otherwise would not have told a pastor. (ibid. 43.)

The pastors' experiences worked as a basis for the first motions that aimed to make the interpreting services a responsibility of municipalities. Since no other party would accept the responsibility, a position for a Deaconess of the Deaf was created. The war caused a two-year delay, so the first Deaconess was able to start working in 1945. The number of the posts for Deaconesses kept growing until the 1960s. The assignments of the Deaf's Deaconess were similar to those of the other Deaconesses, but they needed Sign Language skills. They were required to be on constant stand-by to go for an interpreting assignment, anytime anyplace. The report that was written of the first year in duty shows that 43% of the job was interpreting assignments. (Paunu&Wallvik 1991, 118-119.)

In 1959 The Newsletter of the Deaf printed the first public wish for qualified Sign Language interpreters. The Finnish Association of the Deaf discussed the issue in its General Assembly and in January 1962 the discussions were put into action; the first interpreter training course was arranged. The course lasted for one weekend and 35 people with Sign Language skills attended. This course was arranged only once and no further courses were planned so the situation remained the same:" the interpreting service" continued with self-taught interpreters. (Vatanen 1996, 45-46.)

In 1964 The Finnish Association of the Deaf issued a report for the Ministry of Justice, which presented views on the court interpretation for the Deaf. The Association demanded better competence of both Sign Language skills and the knowledge of legal system for those working as interpreters in court. Attached to the report there was a list of people who had agreed to interpret in court and were also competent to do so. The Ministry of Justice dispatched the list to all city courts and judges of jurisdictional districts as an attachment of their general letter. An updated list was sent six years later. (ibid. 46.)

In the early 1970s Deaf awareness, which originated in the United States, spread also to Finland. The ideology emphasized the right of the Deaf to be equal members of the society. The Finnish Association of the Deaf ordered for a research on the societal status of the working Deaf population. The research showed clearly the need for special service and interpretation. There was initiative to create an interpreter network, but even though the need for interpreting service and interpreter training

was also clear, The Finnish Association of the Deaf did not have the resources for advancing the issue. (ibid. 46–47.)

Nevertheless, The Finnish Association of the Deaf continued their task of creating an interpreter network. The plan was to build a national network and the interpreting services in Sweden and the United States were used as models. The aim was for the interpreting service to be free of charge for the Deaf, paid by the society. This way, the equal participation in the society would be possible. The Finnish Association of the Deaf completed an inquiry on people who would be interested in working as part-time interpreters. The only criterion was the person's own judgement on his/her skill and abilities to work in such profession. 70 people applied. (ibid. 47.)

In 1974, The Finnish Association of the Deaf founded a Committee of Special Services to research the possibilities for creating a national interpreter network. From 1976 the committee continued its work under the name Interpreter Committee. Eventually this committee persuaded the Ministry of Education to found a Sign Language team, and one of its tasks was to determine the need for Sign Language interpreters. In 1977 The Finnish Association of the Deaf applied for funding from Finland's Slot Machine Association (short, RAY, in Finnish) to start a tentative interpreting service. In negotiations held between The Finnish Association of the Deaf, Finland's Slot Machine Association and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health it was stated that the interpreting service would be able to commence in 1978 with funding from Finland's Slot Machine Association, but The Finnish Association of the Deaf could also ask the municipalities to fund the service for a while. Progress had been made without the help of legislation. Two towns had started an interpreting service with the municipalities' effort and by 1979 there were five different regions with municipal interpreters. (Salmi&Laakso 2005, 279.)

With funds received from Finland's Slot Machine Association, a two-part interpreter trainer seminar was finally arranged in 1977. The topics covered in the seminar included interpreter's tasks, salary, responsibility and the ethical issues in interpreter's work. A proposal on the content of interpreter training, including a practical training period, was drawn up in the same year. (ibid. 280.) The first interpreter training was held in autumn 1978; it was a weekend-course funded by Finland's Slot Machine As-

sociation. The course was brief and the goal was to give the interpreters the readiness for consecutive interpreting in different community affairs. Thirty people with previous experience of interpreting were invited. Some of the trainers were deaf; others were experienced Sign Language interpreters. In 1978, two interpreter training courses were held for interpreters of the deaf and blind, also. (Roslöf 2007, 57; Salmi&Laakso 2005, 280.)

In July 1979 the proposal made by The Finnish Association of the Deaf for arranging the interpreting service as disability care was finally accepted, and interpreting service offered for the people with severe hearing disabilities was added in the medical care under the Act on Disability Care Services. The ruling whether or not a client was entitled to the interpreting service was made by the social service committee of the applicant's home municipality. Having the interpreting service in legislative documents was an acknowledgement of the necessity of Sign Language communication. After the Act had entered into force The Finnish Association of the Deaf and the National Board of Social Welfare gathered a list of people, who were over 18 years old and had Sign Language skills. These people were then sent an inquiry on their interest in working as an interpreter. From these inquiries a list, which had 49 people who were working with the Deaf and 196 interpreters on it, was compiled. (Vatanen 1996, 50–51.)

But it took time for the amendment in the Act to affect practices: creating the list of interpreters, guidelines how to apply the Act, and a dispute over the salary postponed the starting of the interpreting service until 1980. In 1981 the National Board of Social Welfare issued regulations, that a Deaf person could receive maximum of 120 hours of interpreting services a year. For the deaf-blind this limit was 240 hours per person per year. The hourly limits were double the limits issued in the past. (Salmi&Laakso 2005, 280–281.)

The interpreting service was an important achievement for the rights of the Deaf but there were many flaws in how the service functioned. Act on Disability Care Services still mentioned that an official would deliberate the applicants' wealth and some of the Deaf had been denied the right to receive interpreting service because the officials considered them to be financially comfortable. Finding an interpreter for studies was

also problematic. The service had to be applied for from the National Board of Social Welfare and the decision could take months. The deliberation on income and wealth stuck with the interpreting service and other aid for the disabled until 1988, when the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act, replacing the Act on Disability Care Services, entered into force. (ibid. 281.)

Finally, helping the Deaf voluntarily in situations requiring interpretation had turned into a professional interpreting service and paid work. Still, there were not enough interpreters and in many places it was difficult to get an interpreter. The Finnish Association of the Deaf attempted to ease the situation by establishing interpreter coordinating centres. The first coordinating centre was opened in Helsinki area in 1984. A year later a centre was opened in Turku. Since there were few full-time interpreters, the responsibility of municipalities to arrange interpreting service did not enter into force until 1994. (ibid. 282–283.)

The municipalities and the State were financially unstable, which affected the municipalities' success rate of providing interpreting services. Before 1994 there were several municipalities that did not provide the funding for interpreting service, pleading small budget, and some of the municipalities provided for only a fraction of the service. Nothing could be done about the situation because the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act of 1988 specified a six-year transitional period. Due to the financial problems of the State the responsibility of arranging interpreting service was almost withdrawn when the Ministry of Finance suggested abdicating the responsibility, explaining this with budget cuts. The Finnish Association of the Deaf fought hard for the preservation of the responsibility, and in October 1992 the Council of State decided it would not be dropped. (ibid. 283–284.)

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health had set an aim that there would be 150 interpreters in 1994 when an Interpreting Service Act would enter into force. This goal was not reached. At the end of 1994 there were only 24 interpreters working at interpreting centres due to the lack of posts. In addition to the interpreters working at interpreting centres, freelance interpreters were needed but still there were less than hundred interpreters in total. At that time, there were 17 interpreting centres. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health estimated that 400 interpreters would be a suffi-

cient amount. This was to be achieved by creating 250 full-time interpreter positions and by using freelance interpreters. (ibid. 284.)

In the 1990s the biggest issue of conflict in the interpreting profession was the freelance status. Due to the lack of posts only few people worked at interpreter centres. This made matters more difficult for both the Deaf and the interpreters. The interpreters' wages also affected their availability, and the grounds for the wages differed in different parts of the country. Even though the number of trained interpreters grew consistently, the lack of interpreters lasted until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2002 the register of interpreters, maintained by the Sign Language centre, had 630 interpreters on it but only a small number of them were working full-time. (ibid. 286.)

The interpreter centres were supported by the municipalities, federations of municipalities and Deaf Clubs. The Sign Language interpreters working at the interpreting centres were responsible both for the interpreting and the interpreter coordinating. The coordinators booked interpreting assignments for other Sign Language interpreters; they had to know when the interpreters were available and revised the schedules of the interpreters to suit the clients' needs. But there were only a few interpreting centres and often the clients contacted the freelance interpreters directly. (Vatanen 1996, 53–67.) When doing so, the client sometimes had to contact dozens of interpreters to find one who was available. In order to ease the trouble that booking an interpreter caused for the clients, the responsibility of interpreter coordination was given to the interpreting centres. But it was not possible to centralise all the interpreter bookings and therefore it was difficult to estimate the total volume of the service. (Topo, Heiskanen, Rautavaara, Hannikainen-Ingman, Saarikalle & Tiilikainen 2000, 158.)

In 2000, there were 24 interpreting centres. Some of them both offered interpreting service and coordinated it. Some of them offered and/or coordinated interpreting service and also teaching service and some of them handled only the interpreter coordination. Some of the interpreting centres had reception hours where the clients could come and take care of their matters. This way they could make interpreted phone calls and make their interpreter bookings in their native language. (Åby 2011, 12.)

The interpreter coordinator needed not only Sign Language skill, but also knowledge of the clients, the interpreters and the area. For the coordinating to be successful, the coordinator needed to know the skills of the interpreters and the communication methods of the clients. The developments in technology and communications have aided the coordinating task. The job becoming permanent and regular working hours have served as motivation to develop the profession further. Also, the clients' awareness of their own rights has caused growth in the number of bookings and has affected the work of the coordinators. (ibid. 13.)

At the beginning, many of the interpreting centres recorded the interpreter bookings by hand. Each interpreter had his/her column in the appointment book and the coordinator wrote the bookings there. The interpreters informed the coordinator of the times they would be available and the appointment book would be revised accordingly. The interpreting centre would offer the freelance interpreters assignments in somewhat random order, and the interpreters had the opportunity of saying whether they would take it or not. Later, thanks to technical developments, the bookings were recorded on the computer. Several coordinators also interpreted and taught Sign Language in addition to their coordinating work. (ibid. 13–14.)

## **2.2 Towards private sector interpreting services and centralised interpreter coordinating service**

The service a client received and the amount of it varied greatly in different municipalities. The future challenges of the interpreting service were taken into further consideration. Topo et al (2000) have discussed the aforementioned challenges in their book. In addition, they have emphasized the need to consider the importance of centralized interpreter coordination for good and functioning interpreting service. In their view, a well-organized service needs a population larger than the inhabitants of one municipality. (Topo et al 2000, 217.)

During the years 2001–2004, The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (since 2009, The National Institute for Health and Welfare) aimed to meet the challenges of interpreting services with their development project of networking the interpreting services<sup>2</sup>. The objective of the project was to achieve the availability of the interpreting service that was set by the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act and to strengthen the quality of the service. The project was carried out as 12 smaller regional projects. There were teams consisting of experts from both the field of Sign Language and the municipal organisations. The project strengthened regional thinking on organizing the interpreting services, and after the project there were several regional change processes in motion. Also, the utilisation of regional resources improved. (Rautavaara&Kokko 2006, 3.)

The Council of State set a project called Paras (reformation of the municipal and service structures) from May 11, 2005 until May 31, 2006; a team responsible for the execution decided that the interpreting services, which follow the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act, would be passed to the Government, and the municipalities responsibility for arranging the services would end. At the time it was decided this would take place in 2009. (Risikko 2007.) Knowing the future reform, many Sign Language interpreters started thinking about the future of their profession and their professional growth. Alongside the existing freelance-based approach new ways of working started developing, little by little. Private interpreting service companies were found, and instead of the interpreter sending a bill to the clients' home municipalities for each individual interpreting assignment, his/her wage was now paid by a firm, which then billed the municipalities for the assignments the employed interpreters had been on. (Forsén 2011, 12.)

### **2.2.1 The first competitive tenders**

In 2005 an amendment concerning the public contracts obligated the municipalities to tender the interpreting services. For this the areas of interpreting services needed to be productised. (Selin-Grönlund 2007, 43.) In Finland, tenders are regulated by the

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<sup>2</sup> In Finnish, the project was called VETURI – *verkostoituvat tulkkipalvelut*

Act on Public Contracts. If a service is outsourced, i.e. if the employees of the municipality are not providing the service themselves, the service has to be tendered if a specific price is exceeded. When making contracts, the contracting authorities have to utilise the existing tendering possibilities and to enable equal opportunities for all companies and communities. All the interested service providers participate in the competitive tendering and the winner is whoever has the most affordable overall tender. (Act on Public Contracts 23.12.1992/1505.)

Tendering the interpreting services was thought to have a positive effect on the development of the profession. The aim was that organising the profession and creating a certain framework would reduce the number of interpreters leaving their profession. In addition, it was hoped that the interpreting service companies would finally have the courage to invest in their staff and to improve their service after signing a contract based on the tendering results. It was also thought that the skeleton agreements would provide the companies with the possibility of free growth. It was hoped that with the tender, the profession would gain more recognition. In the future, the interpretation client would receive professional service and when making a booking would not have to wonder whether or not the interpreter will be paid. (Forsén 2011, 27.)

The interpreting services were tendered as a municipal cooperation in both Uusimaa and Pirkanmaa areas. There were demands for the tender at the Uusimaa area; the municipalities of the area needed to have the service coordinated but none of them had the know-how to do it alone. The prices of the service varied based on the assignment and the provider, and some of the municipalities received hundreds of separate interpreting bills each month. The Uusimaa contract district was created through the VETURI project, and the interpreting service products, e.g. community interpreting and the interpreters' travelling times, were determined in cooperation with the service providers. In order to determine the price-quality ratio between companies corresponding products were needed to be created. (ibid. 27–28.)

In the first interpreting service tender at Uusimaa area, in 2005, overall affordability was defined as follows: 60% was the price of the service and 40% was other criteria,

e.g. quality. The other criteria needed to be measurable, i.e. points would be given to the characteristics of quality also. After the tender, the interpreter coordinating office suggested assignments to the service providers according to the tender results. A booking was first offered to the service provider which had been placed first, and if that provider was unable to take the assignment the booking was offered to the second company, then the third etc. (Matikainen 2007, 17.)

At Pirkanmaa area the interpreting service development project was executed in 2005–2006, motivated by the VETURI project. Fourteen municipalities from the Pirkanmaa area participated. The interpreting services were tendered in 2005 and thanks to the competitive bidding the interpreting resources at the whole region were charted. With the tender, the interpreter coordination became the responsibility of one provider. The time the municipalities previously spent on the interpreting service and its administration could now be spent on the essential tasks of the municipality. (Lausvaara&Numminen 2006, 4–5, 51.)

At Pirkanmaa area the overall affordability was divided as follows: price 70% and quality 30%. The quality characteristics of Sign Language interpreting consisted of the competence of manager and staff, competence development, availability of service, references, regional and temporal scope, reliability of service and the effect of client feedback. By deadline, 28 service providers had left their tender, 8 of these were interpreting services for people with speech impediments. (Forsén 2011, 34.)

The tenders executed at Uusimaa area in 2005 and 2008 differed slightly from each other, mainly because experience gained from organizing the first one helped in executing the second. In 2008, the contracting authorities were much more prepared for inviting the tenders. The invitation was more specific than the previous one in terms of what is required of the service providers. There was already an interpreter coordinating office and it was functioning well, so the only thing put out to tender was interpreting service. Pirkanmaa area did not hold a new tender in 2008. (ibid. 28.)

In the competitive bidding of 2008, negotiation was chosen as the procurement pro-

cedure. In the first phase, the tender was announced and the service providers had to leave their request to participate by deadline. In the second phase of the procurement procedure the service providers were called to negotiations, where the details of service provision and other specifications were discussed. The negotiations were held individually with each service provider. Based on the negotiations the content of the invitation for tenders was defined. Twenty-six service providers took part in the tender; nineteen of them were first-time participants. (ibid. 31–32.)

When comparing the tenders the overall affordability was determined by price and other criteria. The other criteria included the quality of interpreting and teaching services, the quantity of service, the temporal availability of service, the reliability of service and a quality standard that had to be proved by a written quality manual or other such document. The service would be awarded following the overall affordability of the tenders. (ibid. 32–33.)

### **2.2.2 Centralized interpreter coordination**

With the public procurement, centralized interpreter coordination was adopted. Centralized coordination means that the client receives the interpreting service s/he needs with one contact. The interpreter coordinators have access to the timetables of the firms, which provide interpreting service, and the resource information is recorded in a mutual database, which also serves as the basis for billing information. The interpreter bookings are offered to the service providers according to the tender results. (Matikainen 2007, 17.)

The centralised interpreter coordination proved to be a viable solution. A study done by Matikainen (2007) at the Uusimaa area showed that the clients felt the centralised coordination was distinctive and the service easy to approach. The office hours (Mon-Fri 9:00am–3:00pm) of the coordination office were found inadequate. Also, the poor availability of interpreters was mentioned in several answers. The Uusimaa area interpreter coordinating agency started work in June 2006, and the study was carried out during January and February of 2007. At that time, there were 812 clients in the

coordinating agency database. The largest client group that answered were the Deaf who use Sign Language. (ibid. 32–43.)

### **2.2.3 Productising the interpreting service**

During April and May of 2005, community interpreting and interpreting in educational settings, that follow the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act, were tendered at the Uusimaa area. In addition, the teaching of Sign Language, signed speech and sign-supported speech were tendered. The invitation for tenders had also an option for providing interpreting services for people with speech impediment. It was almost impossible to compare the small and large interpreting service companies equally. The tender had to obey the invitation, regardless whether the invitation for tenders was well advised or not. (Forsén 2011, 28, 30.)

The price to quality ratio was determined to be 60% – 40%. In order to determine the price-quality –ratio between companies, the tender had to have corresponding products. In the first tender there were 11 products of interpreting services. The products were as follows:

- Community interpreting, basic level
  - Community interpreting, demanding level
  - Community interpreting, demanding level, co-working
  - Interpreting in upper secondary education
  - Interpreting in tertiary education
  - Teaching Sign Language or signed speech to a group
  - Teaching Sign Language or signed speech to a family
  - Interpreting in seminars and conferences, basic level
  - Interpreting in seminars and conferences, basic level, co-working
  - Interpreting in seminars and conferences, demanding level
  - Interpreting in seminars and conferences, demanding level, co-working
- (ibid. 30.)

The products tendered at Pirkanmaa area different only partially from those used at Uusimaa area. The products from different procurement procedures have been compiled in appendix 1. The competitive bidding executed in Uusimaa area in 2008 had 16 products in total. New products were e.g. remote interpreting, phone call interpreting and basic-level community interpreting with a partner. (ibid. Appendix 2.)

### **2.3 Transferring the interpreting services from municipalities to the State and the new service model**

In Finland, the interpreting services are provided by law. Before the services were reassigned from the municipalities to the State, the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act obligated the municipalities to provide the service to the people entitled. With the new Act the responsibility was given to the State, from September 1, 2009 onwards. Before that, the service had been provided in very different ways around the country. Now the State issued for The Social Insurance Institution of Finland to manage the practical execution of the services. (Pakkala 2011, 7.)

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland was founded December 16, 1937. Initially, it served only as a pension institution, providing the social insurance. From those times, the services have renewed, expanded and become more varied. Today, The Social Insurance Institution of Finland provides the basic security benefits for people living in Finland in different conditions. The customers include everyone living in Finland and those people living abroad who stay within the Finnish social security system. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland provides General Housing Allowance, Basic Unemployment Allowance, Sickness Allowance, benefits for families, rehabilitation, student financial aid and Guarantee Pension. In addition, The Social Insurance Institution of Finland handles the Disability Allowance, immigrants' allowances and Conscript's Allowance. (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland 2011.)

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is responsible for developing the Act. It also monitors the execution of the Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities and the operations of The Social Insurance Institution concerning the service.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman governs the operation of authorities. The disability issue has become a central human rights theme in the international disability politics, and the effects can be seen also in Finnish legislation and disability politics. The importance of the interpreting services will increase, just for the fact alone that in international contracts the human rights concept has been broadened also to areas, which in Finland have been considered a part of social policy and discretionary rights. Today, the general aim in legislative development is to strengthen the independence and equality of the Disabled and to improve their chance of participating in the activities of the society. (Pakkala 2011, 9–10.)

The Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities entered into force on February 19, 2010. The new Act did not amend the grounds on which the interpreting service is granted.

*“Section 1 – Objective*

*The objective of this Act is to promote the opportunities of persons with disabilities to be equal members of society.*

*Section 5 – Conditions for entitlement to interpretation service*

*Person with impaired hearing and vision or with hearing impairment or speech impairment that need interpretation to be able to work, study, use services, take part in activities of society, pursue leisure activities or take part in recreation are entitled to interpretation services. A further condition is that the person is able to express his or her will by means of interpretation and has at his or her disposal a functional means of communication. (Act on interpretation Services for Person with Disabilities, translation by Raija Taurovaara)*

The time limitations also remained the same.

*“Section 6 – Amount of interpretation service*

*Interpretation service shall be provided so that a person with impaired hearing and vision can obtain a minimum of 360 and a person with hearing impairment or speech impairment a minimum of 180 hours of interpretation during a calendar year.*

*Interpretation service shall be provided to larger extent than prescribed in paragraph 1 if it is justified taken into account the client's individual needs. (Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities, translation by Raija Taurovaara.)*

The Social Insurance Institution is not responsible for all interpreting services. Arranging the interpretation in primary education and the education of different communication methods are both still the municipalities' responsibility. Also, arranging the support and services the Disabled need besides the interpreting service, as well as the medical rehabilitation services, are the responsibility of the municipalities. (Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act 1987/380.)

Due to the amendment in the Act, The Social Insurance Institution of Finland established a new unit, which was named The Centre for Interpreting Services for the Disabled. The unit manages the interpreting service application forms and decides on granting interpreting service. Also, the unit serves as the resolution unit for the interpreting services and guides and directs the local offices of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, the interpreting service providers, interpreter coordinating agencies, clients and other parties in matters concerning the interpreting services. The unit has a manager and eight employees, four of which have Sign Language skills. (Pakkala 2011, 21–22.)

It was decided that the transitional period of the interpreting services would be 1.9.2010 – 31.12.2010. During this transition, the municipalities and The Social Insurance Institution of Finland worked in cooperation to transfer information concerning the interpreting service decisions of the clients from each of their home municipalities to the database of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland; in compliance with a specific Act (Act on the right of access of the Social Insurance Institution to client data regarding interpretation services for persons with disabilities 2009/851). The clients of the interpreting service were notified by a letter in August 2010. The letter stated the validity period of the existing interpreting service decision and the contact information of the new coordinating agency, based on the client's home municipality. Notices of the interpreting service were posted on the website of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland in both Finnish and Finnish-Swedish Sign Language. (ibid. 7, 10-11.)

Under the Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities (2010/133) The Social Insurance Institution of Finland decides on both the organising of the interpreting services and the compensation of the expenses. The Institution has the possibility of either providing the interpreting services themselves or contracting them. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland decided to contract the services out to third-party providers. Under the Act on Public Contracts (2007/348) the services had to be tendered. The coordinating system of the interpreting services, the regional coordinating agencies and the interpreting service providers were all tendered. The aim of the new service system was not only to improve the quality of the service, but also to ensure consistency of quality and equality of the service around the country. In addition, the aim was to reach finally all the people in need of interpreting services. (ibid. 11.)

### **2.3.1 National tenders**

The first part to be put out to tender was the coordinating system of the interpreting services. In October 2009, a company called Innofactor Oyj was chosen to be the provider of the coordinating system, and they created an electronic software programme for the coordinating agencies. The system utilises an Innofactor Prime programme, which is browser-based software for e.g. communication and publishing. The software supports also text messages and email. (Forsén 2011, 36; Åby 2011, 19.)

In November 2009, The Social Insurance Institution gave a notification on the tender for coordinating agencies. The country had been divided into five coordinating regions for the tender, based on the existing insurance regions of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. The regions were Northern, Western, South-western, Eastern and Southern Finland. (Forsén 2011, 36–37.) Based on the tender, a coalition of three service providers took over the interpreter coordinating. Five coordinating agencies were established, following the aforementioned regional division, and the interpreter coordinating was regionally centralised to the agencies. The clients of the interpreting services were informed to book an interpreter only through these agen-

cies. The coordinating agency of each client was decided based on his/her home municipality. (Åby 2011, 17-18.)

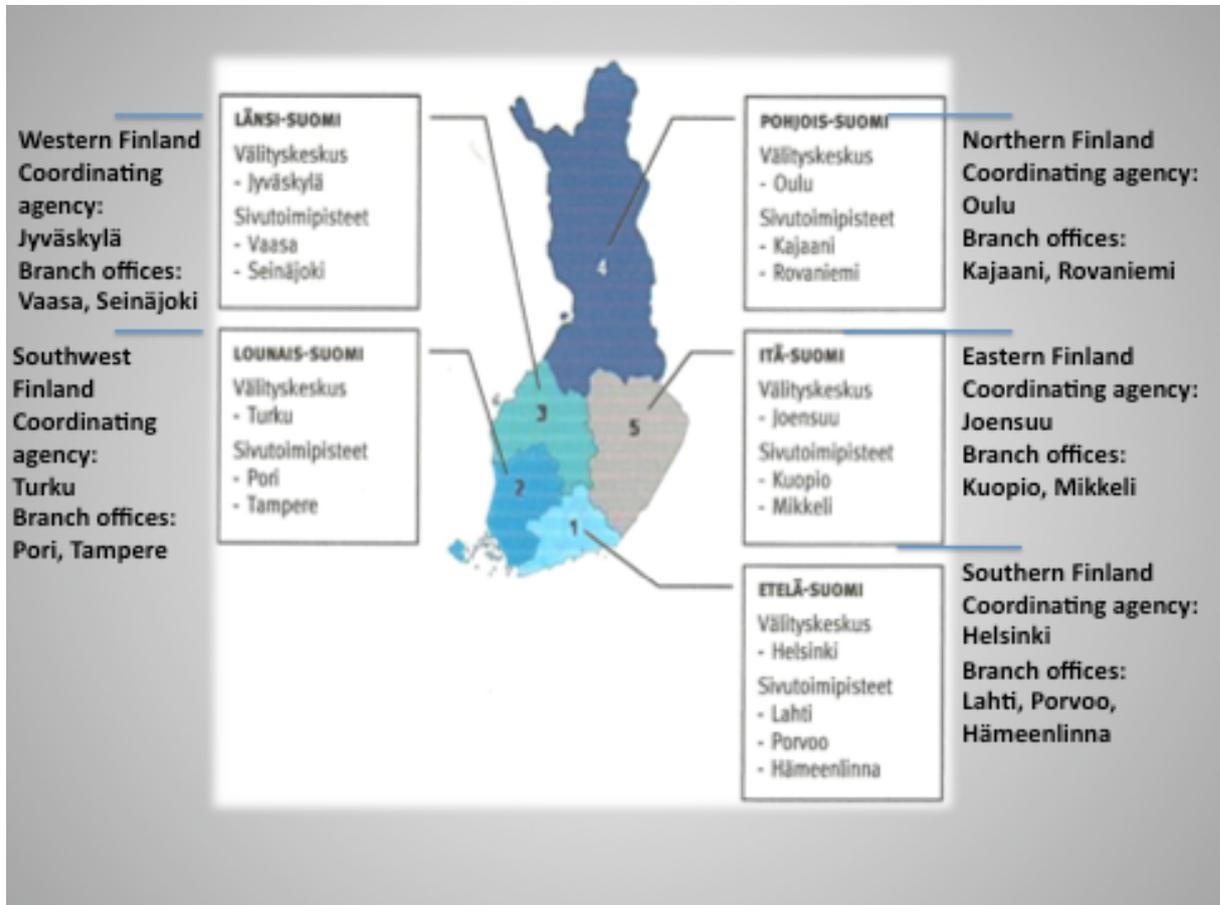


Figure 1: 5 Coordinating agencies on the map

The tender for the interpreting service providers started in January 2010. The services were tendered for the period of 1.9.2010–31.12.2012. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland also reserved an option for 2013. With the bid, the service providers also had to send the information of the latest financial statement of the company. If the company was new, they also had to send a business plan. Each service provider had to also send the following appendices:

- personnel form
- form on price
- form on the person in charge
- form on the availability of the service

- form on the eligibility requirements
- a statement from the Tax Administration on tax debt
- form on the speech to text -interpreting hardware and software
- statements from an insurance company on statutory insurances
- plan of action for the period of 2010–2013
- a statement of being in the preliminary taxation register, or if the company is new a written assurance of registering if chosen to be a service provider
- a statement of being in the company register or the register of foundations, or if the company is new a written assurance of registering if chosen to be a service provider

(Forsén 2011, 37–38)

The criteria for assessing quality were work experience, level of training and temporal availability of the personnel. The bids were ranked, price having a 60% effect and quality having 40%. The results of the tender were announced on July 6, 2010. The contracts with the chosen service providers were signed in the same month, after a period of appeal. There were in total 43 companies chosen to provide the Sign Language interpreting services. (ibid. 37–40.)

### **2.3.2 Profiles of clients and interpreters**

The letter sent to clients concerning the transfer of the client information included a client profile form and a return envelope. There was one profile form for people with a speech impediment, and one for people with either hearing disability or hearing and visual impairment. There were also two kinds of interpreter profile forms: one for the interpreters of people with speech impediment and one for the interpreters of people with hearing disabilities. The forms for the clients and the interpreters were different from each other. (Pakkala 2011, 11.)

Even though the municipalities had sent information concerning the interpreting service decisions and some of the profile information, the information was insufficient. Therefore, each person using interpreting services had to fill out a client profile form and send it to The Centre for Interpreting Services for the Disabled.

The client had to fill in their personal information and all the information concerning their communication. In addition, the suitable methods of contact had to be stated. (ibid. 11.)

Interpreters had to fill in personal and contact information, and also, what language pairs and communication methods they are able to interpret, as well as which client groups (the Deaf, the Deafened, the Deaf-Blind etc.) can they interpret for. Even though the company providing the interpreting service, i.e. the service provider, had to write their available interpreter resources in the tender form, each interpreter working for the service provider had to fill out a separate interpreter profile form. (ibid. 11–12.)

### **2.3.3 Work at the interpreter coordination agencies**

Since September 2010, all the hearing or speech impaired clients have been directed to book interpreters via the coordinating agencies of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. The Institution has given directions how the interpreter coordinating agencies should be operated. In addition to the directions the agencies are regulated also by the contract between The Social Insurance Institution of Finland and the service provider, the initial bidding invitation for interpreter coordinating, and the tender, which the service provider made. (Åby 2011, 18–19.)

The coordinating agencies are open on weekdays, and the coordinating work takes place mainly from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. All five agencies have reception hours when the clients can visit the agency in person. Since March 2011 there has also been an 'on duty' coordinating agency, open on weekends and during evenings on weekdays, where you can book an interpreter for urgent situations when health or safety is at risk. (ibid. 18–19.)

For managing the interpreter bookings, the coordinating agencies use an electronic programme that won the tender for coordinating software. The coordinating is initiated by a booking that a client makes. The booking can be made by email, text message, or letter or by visiting the agency. The booking can also be phoned

in. Once the booking has been received, the client is sent a confirmation message. After this, the coordinator determines the correct interpreting product and records the booking in the coordinating programme. (ibid. 19–20.)

Based on the profile information the clients have given, the coordinating software should search for a suitable interpreter for the bookings of each client. If the information is inaccurate or insufficient, the software is unable to find a suitable interpreter. So the functions of the programme are based on the client and interpreter profiles and on the calendar entries of the interpreters. The programme should suggest an available interpreter for the booking based on the information the client and the interpreters have provided. The coordinating agency aims to pick the overall most affordable interpreter of the suggested interpreters, considering both the tender results and special characteristics of the client. The special characteristic can mean e.g. a hearing and visual impairment. Interpretation-related special characteristics include e.g. a higher difficulty-level of the booking, a special topic or the personal nature of the assignment, like therapy. (ibid. 19–20.)

If a client has both a hearing and a visual impairment, a so-called “interpreter circle” can be created for him/her. This means that the interpreters, who are familiar with the client’s communication methods, are listed for the client in the coordinating programme. The people on the list are chosen by the The Centre for Interpreting Services for the Disabled in cooperation with the client. If a circle of interpreters has been chosen for a client, the client will receive an interpreter from that circle, even if this overrides the tender results. (Pakkala 2011, 12.)

Primarily, a suitable interpreter is always searched for in the coordinating region of the client. If necessary, the search can be made national. The coordinating software enables the booking to be transferred to the agencies of the other coordinating regions as well. (Åby 2011, 20.) But there has been discussions over a ‘30 kilometres rule’ The Social Insurance Institution of Finland has made, which can override the tender results. According to this rule an interpreter living more than 30 kilometres away can be disregarded, giving the booking to the next service provider who has an interpreter living closer to the location of the as-

signment. In practice this means that interpreters living more than 30 kilometres away from cities and growth centres will, little by little, be left without bookings and interpreting can no longer be their main profession. (Forsén 2011, 58–59.)

The coordinating is not based only on the electronic software. The booking is always handled by a coordinator, who looks for a suitable interpreter assisted by the coordinating programme. The service providers open up their interpreters' calendars in the electronic programme for at least four weeks at a time. The coordinating work proceeds in four-week periods and each day the coordinators take care of the bookings of the next 28 days. (Åby 2011, 20.)

When an interpreter is found, the coordinator places the booking in the interpreter's calendar. The client is informed that an interpreter has been found. The client is also informed if the agency has not been able to find an interpreter. For the coordinator, the work on this specific booking ends here. The booking has been placed in an interpreter's calendar, but the service provider has the option of placing the assignment with a different interpreter in that company. In some rare cases, if there are solid reasons, the booking can be returned to the centralised coordinating agency. In these cases, the coordinating process begins again. (ibid. 20.)

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland had certain qualification requirements for the employees of the coordinating agencies. According to these requirements, there has to be at least one person present during the reception hours, who has at least K-level competence in Sign Language. In addition, at least one of the employees has to have a Sign Language interpreter training and at least three years of work experience as an interpreter. In the coordinating agencies of Eastern and Northern Finland, the employees are required to have fair competence in Swedish, and in Southern, Western and South-western agencies the Swedish language skills have to be good. At least one of the coordinators needs to have three years of work experience as an interpreter coordinator. (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland 2010, 20.)

There is a Commission of Interpretation Affairs in Finland, which has representa-

tives from various organisations in the Sign Language community (The Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters, 2011). The Commission has compiled a summary of the characteristics an interpreter coordinator should have. In the summary the characteristics have been divided into three categories: content-related know-how, cooperation skills and problem-solving skills. (Laine 2010b, 8–9.)

The aforementioned categories have been further defined as such:

The content-related know-how:

The interpreter coordinator

- has good knowledge of the interpreting field and updates his/her knowledge constantly
- has the ability to discern the role of the interpreter in varying situations
- works as a community interpreter him/herself so that s/he understands what interpreting means and has the ability to discern the demands of the interpreting process correctly
- understands the process of the interpreting services
- has the ability to discern what kind of skills the interpreters do and do not have, and the ability to utilise this knowledge
- knows the client groups and their special characteristics well
- has good knowledge about the Deaf community
- if necessary, is able to direct an interpreter who is facing an unfamiliar assignment

- has good competence in Finnish Sign Language
- enables high-quality interpretation
- understands not to book the interpreters' timetables unreasonably full

The content related know-how:

The interpreter coordinator

- works in cooperation with The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, the service providers and also interpreters individually, treating each of these clients equally
- has good and flexible communication and customer service skills
- assists in creating mutual guidelines for the coordinating agencies and the service providers
- plays a role in building cooperation between the service providers
- has the ability to assess and predict the need of interpretation and control it, if necessary
- accepts his/her responsibility for the work that s/he has done
- understands the process of competitive bidding

Problem solving skills:

The interpreter coordinator

- has geographic knowledge of the coordinating region
- is familiar with the bureaux and other places of business in the region and understands the networks of authorities
- is meticulous in recording the bookings
- is able to perform without directions, using his/her common sense
- understands inadequate and incorrect Finnish
- has good IT skills
- is able to concentrate and organise, and works well under pressure
- knows how to apply the labour legislation, understands the content of the collective labour agreements which apply in the interpreting industry, and the effective recommendations

(Laine 2010b, 8–9)

Laine (2010b, 8) says in her article that a good and functional interpreter coordinating agency would ensure flexible work of interpreters. The service providers wish that practices, which have been proved viable, are kept and developed further. The interpreter coordinator should have versatile skills and the ability to adapt to the environment and service system, which are undergoing a change. In addition, the coordinators are expected to be active, able to anticipate matters, and to acquire information and coordinate efficiently. (Laine 2010b, 8.)

### **3. The development of the Sign Language interpreter's profession**

Interpreters are professionals who provide a service. As with the clients of other professionals, the interpreting service clients also have certain expectations of the quality of the service. As trained professional the interpreters follow a code of professional ethics, which should act as a cornerstone of their work. The interpreting service clients expect a certain level of competence and professional conduct from the interpreter. During the interpreting assignment the client should be able to concentrate fully on his/her business, and the interpretation should not disturb the situation. The interpreter also has to remember that s/he is responsible for the interpretation on behalf of all participants. The more professional the interpreter acts, the more confident the clients are. (Demers 2005, 209.)

Interpreting is a complex linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural process. The interpreter is often the only bilingual/bicultural person present at the assignment. The choices which the interpreter makes or doesn't make during the assignment could potentially affect the lives of all participants in various ways. Community interpreting especially is always about human interaction, which can often be very unpredictable. Additionally, in many assignments there are people who have never worked with an interpreter before. (Swabey&Gajewski Mickelson 2008, 51–52.)

Throughout the history of interpreting, the clients, interpreters, trainers, researchers, employers and many other parties have attempted to define the role of the interpreter with various methods and theories. In the course of over forty years the definition of the role has been affected by the client group, legislation, the code of professional ethics of interpreters, the interpreter training and professional organisations. Particularly the new, inexperienced interpreters have always hoped for clear guidelines to help them practice the profession and make decisions during interpretation. The code of professional ethics is one attempt to help resolve these kinds of problems. (ibid. 51–52.)

### 3.1 Challenges of the role definition

Interpreting has been necessary and in use long before interpreting became a profession and the professional role had to be defined. It can also be assumed that as long as there have been people using Sign Language, there have been others who have interpreted or translated the language. There is only little recorded historical information of this but since we know that the Deaf have rarely lived completely isolated from the hearing community, it is safe to assume that interpreting has always existed in some form. Even in Martha's Vineyard in the United States, where quite a high number of deaf people lived until at least the mid-1800s and where everyone, hearing or deaf, seemed to use Sign Language, there were still situations when someone was asked to interpret. For example if someone was visiting and could not sign but needed to communicate with the Deaf. (Janzen& Korpiniski 2005, 166–167.)

When analysing the role of the interpreter and the definitions the profession has had in different times, Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson (2008) have named the following phases: Interpreters as helpers, conduits, communication facilitators and bilingual-bicultural specialists. The definitions convey the development of interpreters' profession in different eras from the 1960s until today. (Swabey & Gajewski Mickelson 2008, 51.) In addition, interpreters have been perceived as cultural mediators and to act as allies. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 166–170.)

In the first phase (helpers) the interpreters were mainly friends, family members or other people familiar with the deaf person. There was no training; the "interpreters" had been informally advised by the deaf person him/herself and by the Deaf community, which gave them a so-called insider's perspective on the language and culture. Actually, it has been difficult to preserve this perspective later in the official forms of interpreter training. In the role of a helper the "interpreters" often made decisions for the Deaf and professional secrecy was almost non-existent. (Swabey&Gajewski Mickelson 2008, 51–52.)

The interpreter as a helper emphasised the general opinion of the Deaf as disabled. It was assumed that in addition to interpreting the interpreter took care of all other necessary matters. (Pöchhacker&Shlesinger 2008, 339.) As helpers, the interpreters

offered their help and advice in conveying the messages between the hearing and the Deaf, and many people felt that offering such help was very admirable. All this strengthened further the opinion that the Deaf were incapable of taking care of their own matters without the intervention of the helper. (Roy 2008, 349.)

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the study of Sign Language increased and simultaneously Sign Language gained recognition as a natural language. Deaf communities around the world started feeling more proud of their language and culture, and started refusing help from outsiders. When the Deaf were no longer automatically sent to boarding schools, more and more started going to their local schools and the need for educational interpreting increased. The volunteer helpers were no longer a sufficient answer; professionals were needed instead. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 167.)

In 1964, a group of interpreters, Deaf and other parties involved had a meeting in India to discuss issues related to Sign Language interpretation. A national organisation for the United States, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), was founded in this meeting. An essential part of the early years of RID was to draft a code of professional conduct to instruct the work of interpreters. In addition to ethical principles, the code instructed interpreters not to share their personal opinions during assignments, unless they were asked to do so. By sharing his/her personal views the interpreter might affect the result, which altogether should not be the interpreter's responsibility. The helper model was no longer sufficient. (ibid. 167–168.)

A new era of interpreting was about to begin. But it took time for the frame of mind to change; the old role of the helper was still present in some situations, and the work of many interpreters was affected by the strong connection they had with the Deaf community and culture. Similarly, some of the Deaf still expected the interpreters to act as they had before. (ibid. 167.) But many interpreters wanted to detach themselves from the role of a helper. The new role, interpreter as a conduit, is very neutral and has even been called machinelike. The aim was to be as invisible as possible, to interpret everything and do nothing but interpret. The role of interpreters as conduits was identified in the early 1970s. (Swabey & Gajewski Mickelson 2008, 53.)

A lot of interpreters felt the role had changed for the better, believing it would benefit the profession if the deaf client were in control of the situation and the interpreter act-

acted like a machine. But the deaf clients were not happy with the change. (ibid. 53.) Within a few years the interpreters took deliberate distance from their deaf clients and refused to do things for them. During this period, the phrases “just the interpreter” and “facilitating communication” were popular. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 168.)

Many important milestones were made during the conduit model. The interpreters fought to gain professional respect and recognition. The former helper-model was replaced by a trained interpreter who followed the code of professional conduct. Interpreters also began to examine their professional role more closely and to define the skills necessary to move toward professionalization. Still, it is possible these new ideas were taken a bit too far. The view of interpreters as conduits seemed to have too strong of an effect on their behaviour, and cultural conflicts occurred between the clients and the interpreters. (ibid. 168–169.)

The completely neutral role in an interpreting assignment the interpreters have pursued has caused a lot of discussion and the subject has been the focus of many different studies<sup>3</sup>. Metzger (1999) studied interpreting in medical settings and found out that interpreters generated contributions to the discourse of the principle participants. Some of the contributions enhanced the communication while others detracted from it. Roy (2000) showed in her study that e.g. the subject interpreter actively participated in the creation of turns, and the results of Wadensjö (1998) prove that the interpreter is never a bystander in his/her work assignments, but very much a participant and it is impossible not to affect the situation somehow. (Janzen& Korpiniski 2005, 169.)

Occasionally problems arose also because many interpreters took the code of ethics too literally, fearing they would otherwise be breaking the code. Interpreters worked alone and the days were often very long. Interpreter training courses were taught without qualified teachers, based mainly on the personal interpreting experiences of the trainers and without official curriculums. The training courses were often very

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<sup>3</sup> Metzger, M. 1999. *Sign Language Interpreting: Deconstructing the Myth of Neutrality*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, Roy, C.B. 2000. *Interpreting as a Discourse Process*. New York/Oxford:Oxford University Press, Wadensjö, C. 1998. *Interpreting as Interaction*. London and New York: Longman.

short and no fluency in the interpreted languages was demanded of the people chosen for the training. There was little teaching material and no standard of what the interpreter should know when s/he has completed the training. (Swabey & Gajewski Mickelson 2008, 53–54.)

According to Swabey & Gajewski Mickelson, the interpreter started to be viewed more as a communication facilitator. Interpreters started preparing themselves better for the assignments and teamwork increased. They started to put more focus on the setting of the interpretation: location, lighting and other factors. (ibid. 54.) The facilitator description was based mainly on the basic theory of communication; that in every communication situation there is always a sender, a message and a receiver. According to this concept, interpreter is the channel, which enables the message to be transferred from the sender to the receiver when those two do not share a common language. (Roy, C.B. 2008, 350.)

The facilitator notion held strong for a while because the attitudes towards Sign Language started changing, both in the Deaf community and among the professionals of this field. Sign Language started gaining more recognition as the natural language of the Deaf. In addition, people began to understand that not all deaf people use Sign Language but e.g. sign-supported speech instead because of their competence in spoken language, and that there are deaf people who do not sign at all. No matter what the communication method of the deaf person was, each of them was entitled to receive interpreting services. The interpreter started to become more of “a language and communication-mode expert”, who enabled communication according to the personal needs of each client. (ibid. 350.)

The next change started to take shape late 1970s early 1980s. The Deaf emphasised a view that the best way to depict their community was through their culture. Interpreters also understood they were working between not only two languages but two cultures as well. The interpreters needed to understand the cultural differences and how those differences affect language and communication. People started talking about interpreters as cultural mediators but also as bilingual and bicultural specialists. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 170.)

But Mindess (1999) questions the interpreter's role as a mediator. She feels the word is better suited for describing a lawyer or a relationship therapist, who work with a couple planning a divorce. According to her, "...*The one thing that all mediators have in common, however, is that they are called in to help resolve some type of disagreement that the parties involved are unable to solve on their own.*" In her view, the only connection between the traditional role of an interpreter and a mediator are confidentiality and neutrality. Even though both an interpreter and a mediator work between two participants who do not understand each other, it is not suitable for the interpreter to air his/her personal views on the subject, whereas for the mediator this is allowed. The thought of an interpreter as a bicultural mediator is more wishful thinking than a reality. (Mindess 1999, 153–154.)

The dissatisfaction with the view of interpreters as cultural mediators gave rise to, once again, a new definition. The idea of interpreters as allies begins with the attitude of not working *for* the Deaf but *with* them, and supporting their interests and their goals as *they* see themselves, and not like the interpreter sees them. Yet, Mindess (1999) views this definition to be more a step back, towards the old helper model. (Janzen & Korpinski 2005, 170–171.)

None of these models presented here put much focus on sociolinguistic or sociocultural factors and their effect on the work of interpreters. Also, the fact that the interpreter inevitably affects the situation just by being present is often ignored. It has been expressed that a model of interpreting based on sociolinguistic paradigms is the best way to describe the complete dynamic of interpreting. The sociolinguistic model focuses on the interaction of the participants and recognises the various sociolinguistic variables that can affect the work of the interpreter. In addition, it recognises the effect the interpreter has on the situation. (Napier 2002, 20.)

In the sociolinguistic model the interpreter is no longer expected to be invisible or to focus only on understanding the language, but expected to discern and consider the situation as an entity, in relation to the participants, the objectives and the message which is being delivered. The interpreters have been said to be, in a way, members of a third culture. This is based on the fact that the interpreter is often the only person in the situation who is able to discern the effects of the different cultures and adjust

the language s/he uses, based on his/her views. The interpreter is no longer a person who does not affect the interaction in any way. Not only is the interpreter able to affect the situation him/herself, but also s/he is likewise affected by the participants, the language, the cultures and the social norms of each situation. (ibid. 20.)

It is possible to take the sociolinguistic model a little further, towards the interactive model. This gives consideration to extra linguistic, as well as sociocultural and sociolinguistic factors that can all affect the process. The factors affecting the interpreting have been divided in three categories: the participants, the message and the scene. The participants include the person sending the source language message, the interpreter and the person receiving the message. Message refers to the information presented in the interpreted situation and scene refers to the physical and psychological context in which the interpreting takes place. The interpreting process has been defined as translating information between not only two languages but also two cultures and communities. (ibid. 21–22.)

Throughout history the interpreters have striven to define their profession, to understand its content and to develop it further. As knowledge has increased and skills have improved it has been easier to make appropriate choices. Mindess (1999) has suggested that instead of studying each definition and era as separate entities, it would be more important to assess which valuable and useful practices could be acquired from them. It is important to remember the effect cultures have on communication. There is always the possibility of a clash when different cultures meet. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 171.)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) refers to the right of deaf people to use professional interpreters. Interpreter training and further development of the profession have an important role in defining the profession and the professional role. The training has developed from short courses lasting a few days to complete Degrees demanding fulltime studying, but no country has yet achieved all that is necessary. Over times the development of the interpreter training has been affected by e.g. religion, culture, politics and national legislation. Technology, which develops all the time, offers new possibilities and challenges.

Sharing information between countries and cooperation both have an essential role in developing the training. (Scott Gibson 2009, ix.)

### **3.2 The developmental phases of the profession and the training in Finland**

In her Master's thesis in educational sociology *Fighting for the Status of a Profession? A Study on the work of Sign Language Interpreters in Finland* (1996), Tuula Vatanen has studied the historical phases in Sign Language interpreting and its development into a profession. Vatanen focuses mainly on community interpreting and on how the interpreter's role has changed from the patronising attitude of the early days to pure translation of language. She defines three developmental phases in the historical analysis: the era of self-taught interpreters, the era of part-time interpreters and the era of full-time freelance and interpreting centre interpreters. (Vatanen 1996, 19.)

The first phase in the historical development of the Sign Language interpreters includes the basic requirements of the profession. In order to get things done some kind of message relaying was necessary between the Deaf and the hearing people. At first, and for the longest, the close friends, relatives and acquaintances met this need. They interpreted voluntarily. At the time the work was more like "interpretative relaying". (ibid. 43–44.)

In these interpretative situations they used Sign Language they had learned at home and practices learned in everyday situations. The methods were Sign Language and so called "home signs", which were clear for people who had regular contact with the deaf person but for others they were occasionally vague. The "Sign Language" used in these situations was often more like signed speech. The main object was to take care of the task at hand. The interpreter was not specifically in the role of an interpreter but more of a helper or an assistant and may have occasionally participated in the conversation and answered for the deaf person. (ibid. 43–45.)

Adding the interpreting services in the Act on Disability Care Services enabled interpreting to become a paid profession. According to Vatanen (1996) this started the so called second phase of professional development, i.e. the era of part-time community interpreters. Interpreting became a part-time profession for many. In many places the low number of interpreting service clients prevented interpreters from working full-time. The assignments were often close to the interpreter's home and there was no work community. The clients sent their bookings directly to interpreters. (ibid 56, 58.)

Interpreting becoming a profession created a few problems in the relationship of interpreters and clients. Especially the older deaf people were used to the interpreter helping them with other matters also, if necessary. On the other hand, the hearing clients were not always ready to accept an interpreter in meetings, which covered intimate details of the deaf person's life. So both parties needed to be informed how to act in interpreted situations. (ibid. 56.) A search for mutual trust between the Deaf and the interpreters began. Since 1988 The Finnish Association of the Deaf has organised training courses for the clients to teach them how to cooperate with interpreters. (Salmi&Laakso 2005, 282.)

With Sign Language interpreting becoming a profession, the interpreters felt the need to organise. Helping the Deaf voluntarily in situations requiring interpretation had turned into a paid profession in the matter of a few years. Establishing an interest group for interpreters became a pressing topic. The hourly-based salary for interpreting was irregular. Interpreters often had to wait long for their paycheques and the position of freelance interpreters was unstable. (ibid. 282.)

The interpreting services in Finland were for long based on the work of freelancers. The interpreters worked either full or part-time. Freelance interpreters did not have regular employments and they were paid by the social office of the client's home municipality, under the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act. Only after the interpreter centres were established, full-time interpreters were hired and this started the so-called third phase mentioned by Vatanen (1996), i.e. the era of fulltime freelance interpreters and interpreter centre interpreters. (Vatanen 1996, 64–67.)

The Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters was established in October 1982. With the developing professional role, composing a code of ethics became a current topic. It was understood that interpreters are humans as well, not machines, and that status comes with certain power. In 1980 The Committee of Interpreters set a team to draft the code of ethics. They received material e.g. from the United States and Sweden. In 1982 the code was released, and it affected both the interpreter training and the work principles of interpreters. In 1984 the principles of interpreting for the deaf-blind were added to the code. (Alanen&Lauronen 2001, 17.)

In 1982 The National Board of Education set a team to research the regularisation of interpreter training. The training was assigned under The National Board of Education and in autumn 1983 it became a one-year vocational training, aiming for skills of simultaneous interpreting. The course consisted of 25 weeks of student credit. Only three years later, in 1986, the training was made a two-year vocational training. The studies consisted of Sign Language interpreting, Sign Language teaching, and interpreting for both the deaf-blind and the Deafened. Sign Language skills were removed from entrance qualifications. (Roslöf 2007, 57.)

In autumn 1988 the training was lengthened into a three-year institute-level vocational training. The main aspects of the training, in addition to foundation studies, were e.g. pedagogy and interpreting studies. Yet, some of the graduates have criticised the insufficient Sign Language education. The interpreters who had finished one of the preceding short courses were given the possibility for continuance and specialisation education to match the qualification the three-year training offered. The Finnish Association of the Deaf was responsible for the training, in cooperation with the Folk High School of the Deaf. (ibid. 58.)

In 1998 the training was lengthened again. This time it shifted to the level of University of Applied Sciences and became 140 weeks of student credit in length. Full-time studies took usually three and a half years. The study of elective courses was tightened so that each student had to choose their field of specialisation and it became impossible to study sections of several different fields, like teaching sign-supported speech or interpreting for the deaf-blind. The aim was to improve the student's skills in one selected subject. In autumn 2003 the degree was lengthened to four years

and 160 weeks of student credit. After this, the people who had finished the institute-level upper secondary education were offered the opportunity to study 40 weeks of student credit as additional studies to receive a University of Applied Sciences Degree. (ibid. 58.)

Both the Finnish society and the Sign Language community have developed rapidly during the history of interpreting services and the interpreter's profession. Changes in the work life have brought constant challenges to the training as well. New fields of specialisation have been added to the Degree Programme, e.g. special interpreting and communication methods of different client groups, and studies on remote and mobile interpreting. The Master's Degree in the level of University of Applied Sciences has brought the possibility for courses related to the changes in business and working environment and leadership. (Nikoskinen 2010, 25.)

Processes aiming to develop the interpreting services have been under way for a long time in Finland. A change, which reshapes the whole profession, is the transfer of interpreting services from the municipalities to the State and to the responsibility of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. It was considered that organising the interpreting services for a larger population than separate municipalities have would strengthen the services. From the viewpoint of interpreter's profession it was believed the transfer would improve the working conditions and the legal status of interpreters. When the employment issues have been fixed, it will be easier to focus on working more efficiently and developing the quality of work. The new model for organising the services would also improve the possibility for enterprise, which would bring new companies to this professional field. (ibid. 17.)

Nationalisation of the interpreting services brought the need for tender and centralised service provision but affected the labour market of interpreters as well. Freelance based interpreting is no longer possible, the interpreters have to work as employees of companies or become entrepreneurs. This is expected to clarify not only the role of the interpreter but also the role of the client. All of the aforementioned facts are expected to improve the system. The changes are also hoped to reduce the number of interpreters changing profession. (ibid. 21.)

### 3.3 Sign Language Interpreters in business

Nowadays, for many interpreters good language and interpreting skills are just a part of their job. But if you are a freelance interpreter you also have to market these skills. Interpreters are in business. You can either work for a company that provides interpreting services, or work as a freelancer. The quality and quantity of the freelance interpreter's work affect directly his/her income. Both options give the possibility to work either full or part-time. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 176.)

The advantages and challenges of work are almost the same for freelance interpreters and sole entrepreneurs. There is no guarantee of available assignments but the possibility to choose your working hours, and in some cases also the assignments you take, differs from those who work as employees in a company. In some cases sole workers may even have the possibility to choose assignments that are within their comfort zone, or within a specialised field that they are skilled in. And other times they are forced to accept whatever work they are offered. The available work is often community interpreting, ranging from health care to seminars and conferences and everything in between. (Demers 2005, 206–207.)

A sole trader has to market his/her work, negotiate wages and work conditions, and study the laws surrounding income and taxes. For these reasons many choose to work for an employer. This saves them from a lot of trouble, and often it is enough to do the work, report the assignments and fill out the tax return. When you employ yourself, you are responsible for both the invoices and the invoicing software. The fact that your timetable is different every day is challenging. You have to know how to estimate the length of the assignment, the time it takes to get there and back, how much time it will take to find a parking place etc. In addition, you have to take care of the accountancy and the necessary receipts. (Janzen&Korpiniski 2005, 176.)

A sole interpreter has to accept assignments, which can vary greatly. You have to be able to work with a lot of different people, and not all of them are professionals. Sometimes the nature of the assignment is revealed only after you have arrived and

may have to decline for one reason or another. Occasionally you have to do a lot of advance preparation for the assignment. When you are your own employer you also have to negotiate your pay for the preparation on case-by-case basis. Still, every responsible interpreter aims to provide the best possible quality of work, and s/he cannot afford to do less. (ibid.176–177.)

## 4. Methodology

The aim of this thesis was to study Sign Language interpreters' views on the transfer of services from the municipalities to the State. Nationalisation of the interpreting services brought a new service system and a lot of changes. The centralised coordinating agencies, the new coordinating software and coordinating the bookings according to the tender results have been new practices for most participants. This thesis aimed to study how the changes have affected the interpreters' work and what possibilities does the new service model provide for the development of the profession. I wanted to study this theme specifically from the interpreters' viewpoint, because in my work as an interpreter I have noticed the theme causing a lot of discussion.

The qualitative study aimed to emphasise the personal views of the participants and give them the possibility to discuss the issues they found essential. Within qualitative study I chose the grounded theory. Where other strategies emphasise a specific method, analysis or description, the grounded theory is more of a general methodology for developing the theory and is rooted in systematically collected and analysed data. The theory develops during the study, in interaction between the data gathering and data analysis.

The grounded theory is not a new practice. The theory has been discussed first in 1967 in Glaser and Strauss's book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. In their book Glaser and Strauss discuss their view that theory can be developed around the themes which arise from the data, and the conclusions for the hypotheses do not necessarily have to be drawn from existing theories. When published, the work of Glaser and Strauss provided systematic strategies for qualitative research practice. (Charmaz 2006, 4-5.)

According to Glaser and Strauss the defining components of grounded theory practice include constructing analytic categories and codes from data, not from preconceived deduced hypotheses. It also includes simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis, advancing theory development during every step of data collec-

tion and analysis and using the constant comparative method, which involves comparison making during every stage of the analysis, memo-writing to elaborate categories and to define relationships between them, and conducting the literature review after developing an analysis. (ibid. 5–6.)

Analysis of the material can be divided into following practices: open coding (the disaggregation of the data into units), axial coding (recognizing relationships between categories) and selective coding (the integration of categories to produce a theory). These do not necessarily have to be used separate from each other, the researcher can switch from one practice to another when analysing the data. For an inexperienced researcher it may be necessary to transcribe the data when it gets into contact with theory at an early stage. (Gray 2009, 502–503.)

Open coding is usually done in the early phases of the project. It consists mainly of the researchers estimates and perceptions of what each phase could mean. The researcher may also note relationships between matters at this stage and maybe suggest possible hypotheses. Axial coding is coding, where the essential characteristics are chosen for further analysis, i.e. a specific category is expanded. Selective coding involves integrating the entire data. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme. 2008, 165.)

The material for this thesis has been gathered during May and June 2011, and the theory has been built around the gathered data, partly following the themes, which arose from the material. The material gathering has been presented in more detail in chapter 4.1.1.

## **4.1 Journals**

I chose diaries as the method of gathering material. Due to the sensitive subject matter I wanted to avoid highly structured methods in order not to lead the participants to some specific direction with the questions. The tender has created a competitive situation between service providers. Since I also work as an interpreter for one provider I wanted to be as distant from the respondent as possible.

I felt that an interview would be too structured as a method. An interview form would be too restricted and the answers would possibly be tied to alternatives. A thematic interview would have given the participants the possibility to answer in their own words but I feared the questions would have still led the answers towards a specific direction. Even an unstructured interview, where the themes can be discussed in depth and the interviewer can adjust the following questions based on the answers, would have the risk of leading on the participants.

Diaries as a qualitative method of gathering data bring out the personal views participants have on the theme and emphasise their personal voice (Hirsjärvi&Hurme 2008, 28). Diaries are, in a way, a self-administered questionnaire. The form of the diaries can vary from completely free form to structured text, which answers to specific questions. Diaries are a successful method also when it is not possible to be observed etc. Using diaries as a method saves the researcher a lot of energy. (Robson 2002, 258.)

But diary leaves a lot of responsibility for the keeper. Also, a free-form diary leaves a lot of room for the respondent's interpretation concerning the instructions. Using diaries to gather material presents other risks as well: The writer may wish to please the researcher or wish to create a certain image of himself/herself, and as a result gives a false report. But this is possible with other methods as well. (ibid. 258.)

I chose diaries as the method also because it would enable me to gather as much information as possible on how the nationalisation of the interpreting services affects the regular work of Sign Language interpreters. I wanted to give the interpreters the opportunity to comment on anything they felt necessary, without leading them on in any direction. Of course, there are risks in such free instructions, as well as there is the risk of interpreting the material wrong when analysing it. In addition, keeping a diary without specific instructions gives the writer the freedom of recording either detailed observations and carefully analysed thoughts or just brief notes in few words.

#### 4.1.1 Gathering the material

The material has been gathered during May and June, 2011. In April 2011 I sent an email to a number of Sign Language interpreters inquiring whether they would like to participate in my study. The email was sent to interpreting service companies I chose from a service provider mailing list. I was hoping to find participants from large (in this case, companies which employ approximately a hundred people are considered large), middle-sized and small companies, and also from sole traders. The Helsinki area office of the company I am personally employed at was excluded from this inquiry. I did not want my persona and my opinions to affect the responses, and there would have been a possibility for that had the people I work with participated in the study.

My aim was to find respondents from as many coordinating regions as possible. Since both Uusimaa and Pirkanmaa areas already had previous experience of small-scale tenders, I wanted to include also interpreters from regions where the competitive bidding occurred for the first time with the nationalisation, and therefore there would be no previous experience of the changes which are brought on by the tender.

In the email (Appendix 2) I sent for the interpreters I introduced myself and my studies briefly and explained the subject of my thesis. I explained that I was looking for interpreters who would be willing to report their work in a diary in May-June for two weeks, which they were free to choose. This for the reason that during the given two months some of them may be on holiday or working part-time, which means their work would differ weekly. If I had set a specific two-week period for them, some of them could have been off-work during that time, and this would have narrowed the number of participants.

In the email I gave only the subject of my thesis, nothing more, because I did not want to set their thoughts in any specific frame. I asked for those interested to contact me and promised to send additional information once I knew the group of participants. Ten interpreters contacted me. I sent each of them another email (Appendix 3), where I gave further instructions. I asked them to keep a free-form diary for two weeks.

I instructed that everyone was free to choose the most convenient way of recording their notes. On the content of the diary I did not want to give specific instructions, so I only asked them to write entries on matters which have been brought on by the nationalisation of the interpreting services. My thesis subject was included in the email once more.

I set the return date for June 13, 2011. Eight diaries were sent to me by this date. The remaining two I received early July. So I received all ten diaries eventually, everyone responded. Nine diaries had been written on a computer and one by hand. The length of the diaries varied from one to five pages, with 1.5 line spacing. Two of the diaries were notably shorter than the rest. The form of the diaries varied also. Five were written as diaries, four had notation form, mainly listed things. One had been structured according to different themes. It also had an introduction paragraph. Each diary was viable for the study.

Two participants had mentioned in their diaries that professional confidentiality had affected the entries. This had been explained with the “small circles” of the industry and the small number of clients. The interpreters worried that the client, the interpreter and the company could be recognised from the text if certain assignments had been analysed in detail. They had this fear even though I had explained in my email that the material would not be a part of the thesis as a whole and that I would try to discuss the cases so that confidentiality would not be breached. The interpreters also wished that their work region would not be mentioned in connection with their notes.

#### **4.1.2 Respondents**

The participating interpreters come from three of the five coordinating regions. They had from one to 27 years of work experience. So the interpreters with one year of work experience had worked only within the new service system. I find this an advantage because it is good the study involves interpreters who cannot compare this system to the previous ones. It is also an advantage that some of the respondents have worked for a long time. Someone who has worked for over twenty years has worked

during all the service models and seen the professional role develop, phase after phase.

Eight of the respondents had finished the four-year interpreting degree at a University of Applied Sciences. The training is 240 credits in length. Two respondents had finished a three-year institute level training, which was 120 credits, but had later updated their degree to match the University of Applied Sciences level. One respondent interprets only for the deaf who use Sign Language, three additionally for people with a hearing disability and six for the deaf-blind and for the two aforementioned client groups. One of the respondents also works as a speech to text interpreter.

Following the wishes of the interpreters I will mention neither their regions nor the companies they work for. As mentioned before, my aim was to reach interpreters from companies of different size. This was met well since the respondents represent large, middle-sized and small one person companies.

## **4.2 Data analysis**

I began the first phase (open coding) of data analysis by retyping the diaries. Even though only one of the diaries had been hand-written on cross-ruled paper I wrote them again, including the nine which were recorded electronically. It was 30 pages of material in total. The material was completely in Finnish. This for the reason that I was worried I would not find enough participants if I asked them to write in English. After retyping the diaries I started reading them through, without making any notes at this point.

After reading all the material I went on to find reoccurring themes in the text by making my own markings on the side of the paper. The comments on the side of the paper were made using the Word Comments tool, marking different themes with different colours, so that it was easier to go back to them in the next phase of the analysis.

After picking out the themes which arose from the data, I counted the times each theme occurred. An occurrence in this case means a section, where the theme has been criticised or commented on positively, or its current effects on the work have been discussed. As we can see clearly in the next diagram, the centralised coordinating agencies have been discussed the most frequently. The number of comments is shown on the right.

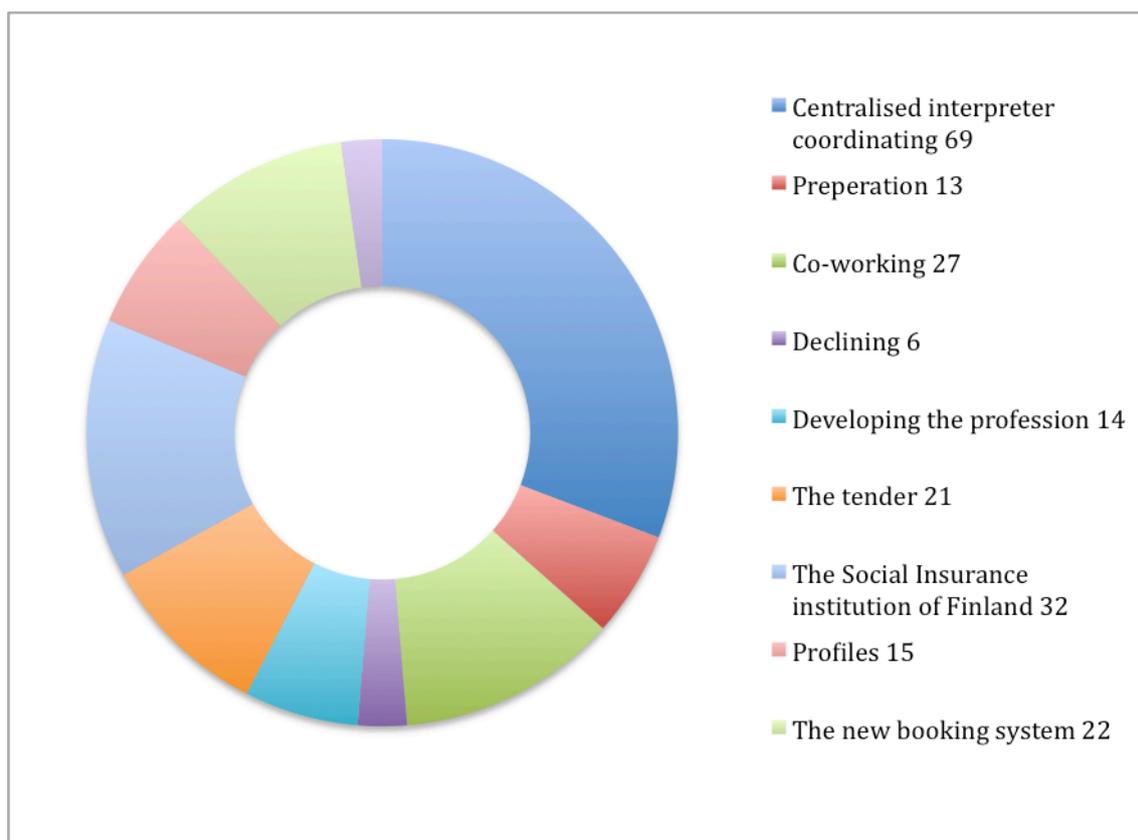


Figure 2: The frequency of the themes, which arose from the data

In the next phase I chose the most central themes of the data for further analysis and aimed to develop each theme separately (axial coding). In the nationalisation of the interpreting services the main theme appeared to be The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, which has defined the new service model and the modus operandi, and therefore affects the Sign Language interpreters' work in many ways. Under The Social Insurance Institution of Finland there were in total nine different sub-themes. I have dissected each of the nine sub-themes and recorded the positive and negative effects according to what was mentioned in the diaries. In the figure below there is an example of this process, concerning one sub-theme.

After examining each sub-theme separately I aimed to understand the complete picture by analysing the relationship of the themes (selective coding). As we can see in the figure below, nationalisation of the interpreting services and the responsibility of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland affect all the sub-themes arising from the material. The effects of reorganising the services are almost all in relation to each other and in relation to interpreters' discussion on the changing profession.

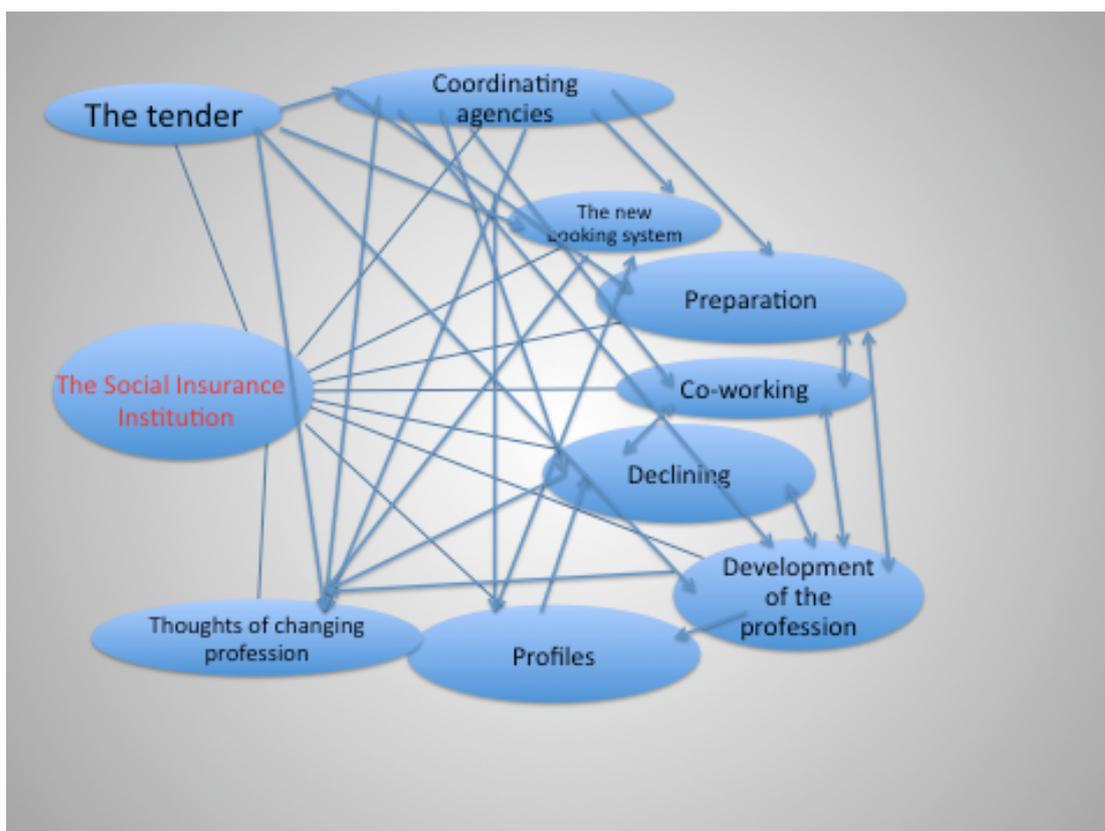


Figure 4: Analysis of the relationships between the themes

#### 4.2.1 Themes chosen from the data

I wanted to study how the new service system affects the work of Sign Language interpreters and what kind of opportunities does it offer for the development of the profession. In addition, I wanted to examine how the professional vocabulary of Sign Language interpreters has changed. I have tried to answer these questions by analysing themes which arose from the diaries of the interpreters. As said in the previous chapter, The Social Insurance Institution of Finland surfaced as the main theme of the data, as the organiser of the services and as the participant which regulates the

service. There are in total nine chosen sub-themes. They are the following: tender of the services, centralised interpreter coordination, coordinating software, preparing for the assignments, working as a pair, declining an assignment, development of the profession, client and interpreter profiles, and thoughts concerning changing one's profession. From these, centralised coordination, coordinating software and the client and interpreter profiles have been directly brought on by the new service system. In addition, the data shows the new service model has made it more difficult to decline assignments and affected the frequency of co-worked assignments. The current situation has raised thoughts of changing profession in some of the interpreters; one reason being that there is not enough work in all the regions due to the new service system.

#### 4.2.2 Examples of the themes chosen from the data

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland as the service organiser awakes a lot of thoughts. The tender, which took place at the time of the service transfer, affects the work in many ways. The data shows that the competitive situation, which was caused by the tender (chapter 2.3.1), is thought to affect the providers so that the profession is no longer developed; to succeed in the next tender everyone will concentrate on developing their companies instead.

(Citations translated from Finnish into English by Riikka Karppinen)

*"...nykysysteemi ei anna paljon mahdollisuutta ammattikäytänteiden kehittämiseen. Eri firmojen tulkit kyllä tapaavat tulkkauksissa, mutta kehittäminen (jos sitä tapahtuu) jää firmojen sisäiseksi, ei alaa yleensä koskevaksi. Lisäksi onhan elintärkeää pärjätä kilpailutuksessa silloin saa töitä tulkkien taidoista riippumatta. Tämä ehkä suuntaa kehittämistä bisnesasioihin taitojen kehittämisen sijaan."*

*(" - the current system doesn't give a lot of opportunities to develop the professional practices further. The interpreters of different companies still meet at assignments, but the development (if there is any) is within the firms, it doesn't concern the whole industry. Because surely it is vital to succeed in the tender, then you will receive*

*bookings whether the interpreters are skilled or not. This may focus the development on business matters instead of skills.”)*

*” Kilpailutus kolmen vuoden välein voi johtaa keskusten selviytymisestä keskittymiseen, ei enää yhteiseen alan kehittämiseen.”*

*(“The tender every three years may lead to the centres focusing on surviving, and no longer on developing the profession together.”)*

The national tender affects the amount of work also. At some of the regions, there is not enough work for even those service providers, which were placed halfway in the tender results.

*”Tulkkiaika auki klo 8.00–21.00. Ei yhtään keikkaa. ”*

*(“Interpreter time open from 8am to 9pm. Not a single booking.”)*

In other words, the interpreter had opened his/her work calendar for 13 hours that day to receive assignments, but nothing was offered for the whole day. The concern for the sufficiency of work and for the financial situation is clear.

*”Hieman epäilyttää, että miten tulee pärjäämään taloudellisesti koko hiljaisen kesän...”*

*(“I’m slightly worried, how am I going to manage financially during the whole quiet summer...”)*

*”...olen alkanut erityisesti talvella miettiä jotain toista sivuammattia...”*

*(“- - especially during the winter I have started to think about another part-time profession...”)*

Another matter that causes concern is the so-called “30 kilometres –rule” (chapter 2.3.3) set by The Social Insurance Institution of Finland.

*”...yli 30 km:n päässä suurista kaupungeista ja kasvukeskuksista asuvat tulkit jäävät vähitellen ilman työtilauksia tai tilauksia tulee niin vähän, että tulkkina toimiminen ei enää voi olla päätyö...”*

*(“ - interpreters living over 30 kilometres away from big towns and growth centres will gradually be left without bookings or there will be so few of them that interpreting can no longer be your full-time job... ”)*

The most discussed theme is clearly the centralised interpreter coordination. The material shows that coordinating agencies' practices differ from one region to another. At some of the regions the interpreters are satisfied with the work of the agency.

*”Olen kuitenkin yleisesti ottaen äärimmäisen tyytyväinen Kelan tulkkivälityksen toimintaan. Palvelu on mielestäni lähes aina todella ystävällistä ja myös asiantuntevaa. Mielestäni yhteistyö tulkin ja Kelan välityksen kesken toimii ainakin meidän alueellamme äärimmäisen hyvin.”*

*(“But generally I am very happy with the work of the interpreter coordinating agency. The service is almost always very pleasant and professional also. As far as I'm concerned, the cooperation between an interpreter and the coordinating agency of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland works very well at our region.”)*

*”...muutaman kerran olen huomannut kalenteriini ilmestyneen keikan, jolle en ole vielä kokenut olevani valmis menemään. Silloin olen saanut välityksen siirtämään tulkkauksilanteen jollekin kokeneemmalle...”*

*(“ - a few times I have noticed the type of bookings in my calendar, which I don't feel ready for yet. On those occasions I have talked to coordinating agency and they have agreed to move the booking to someone more experienced...”)*

Then, at some of the regions the cooperation has been found very problematic at times. The problems have been caused by e.g. the lack of additional information or inaccuracies concerning the booking, and difficulties in declining assignments. Occasionally bookings, which the interpreters' themselves have found too demanding for their skills, have been placed in the interpreters' calendars. If the interpreter has wanted to decline the assignment, pleading professional ethics, it has not always been possible.

*”Usein tulkkauksilanteet saattavat myös olla jotain aivan muuta kuin mitä tilauksesta voi päätellä.”*

*“Often the assignments involve things you could never have guessed based on the booking information.”)*

*”Kelan työntekijät eivät ainakaan voi tietää tulkkien taitotasoa nykysysteemillä...”  
 (“ - - with the current system it is impossible for Kela’s workers<sup>4</sup> to know the skill level of the interpreters...”)*

*”...oli tulossa keikka toukokuun lopulla, joka tuntui minulle liian haastavalta. Aikaisemmin talvella minulla oli ollut suht samantyylinen keikka, josta luopuminen ei onnistunut...*

*... Tuntui siis, että luopuminen onnistuu, jos oikea tyyppi on puhelimessa...*

*Molemmissa tapauksissa olin ajoissa liikkeellä ja molemmilla kerroilla luopumisen syy oli sama, eli tuntui liian haastavalta. Silti tulos oli eri...”*

*(“ - - there was an assignment coming up late May, which I felt was too challenging for me. Earlier in the winter I had had a similar type of booking, which I was not able drop...*

*... So I felt that it would be possible to drop an assignment if the right person answered the phone...*

*In both cases I called them well in advance and at both times the reason was the same – I found it too challenging. Yet the result was different...”)*

*”Joskus olen saanut jonkun minulle liian vaativan tasoinen tulkkauksen taisteltua kalenteristani pois, mutta se on vaatinut sisäiseltä välitykseltä kovia ponnisteluja. Tämä sotii mielestäni tulkkien eettistä säännöstöä ja profession kehittymispyrkimyksiä vastaan”*

*(“Sometimes I have won the battle of declining a booking too demanding for my talent, but it has taken a lot of effort from the internal coordinator<sup>5</sup>. This, I feel, goes against the interpreters’ code of ethics and the efforts of developing the profession.”)*

*”Kelan välitys ja Kelan tulkkaukspalveluiden tiedotus antaa kuvan hyvin hierarkkisesta, komentavasta ja toteavasta tavasta vaatia palvelun toteutus...”*

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the interpreters have used the common Finnish abbreviation, Kela, for The Social Insurance Institution of Finland and then “Kela’s workers” for the employees of the centralised coordinating agencies.

<sup>5</sup> Internal coordination: Some of the service providers have an employee/employees who further arrange(s) the received bookings to the company’s interpreters.

*(“The coordinating agencies of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland and their public relations appear to be very hierarchical, authoritarian and declamatory in their demands for the service to be...”)*

The new electronic coordinating software has been found awkward, but it has also been noted to have some good aspects.

*”...tuntuu aina, että on jokin juttu, mikä ohjelmassa mättää. Ohjelma ei yksinkertaisesti sovellu tulkin työhön.”*

*(“- it feels like there is always something wrong with the software. It just isn't suitable for interpreter's work. “)*

*“Yhtenä esimerkkinä vaikka välitysohjelma, joka ei toimi lainkaan”*

*(“For one example, the coordinating software which doesn't work at all...”)*

*”Todella hyvä uusi käytäntö on se, että tilauksessa on sekä tulkkiparin että asiakkaan yhteystiedot. ”*

*(“One really good practice is that the booking has the contact information of both the assigned interpreting partner and client.”)*

The interpreters feel that the possibilities to prepare for the assignments have decreased. They feel it is inconvenient that e.g. a booking in your calendar may be transferred to another interpreter only a few days before the assignment. In addition, they feel that preparing for the assignment in advance is not appreciated anymore the way it has been

*”Suuri vahinko on nykyään etukäteisvalmistautumisen arvon lasku. Sillä on suuri vaikutus tulkkauksen onnistumiseen, mutta se on nykyisin vain jotenkin ohitettu.”*

*(“The great shame nowadays is the devaluation of advance preparation. It has a big impact on the quality of the interpretation but somehow it is just overlooked these days.”)*

*”Henkinen valmistautuminen on yhtä tärkeää kuin materiaalin lukeminen. Tähän nykyinen systeemi antaa huonot eväät tietojen puutteen takia...”*

*(“The mental preparation is just as valuable as reading specific material. The current system doesn’t enable this; there is a lack of information...”)*

*”...teen hyvin paljon sellaista keikkaa, jonka saan tietää samana päivänä kuin tilanne jo on...”*

*(“- - nowadays I do a lot of work which I receive on the day of the assignment...”)*

The new service system is seen to have clearly improved the possibilities for co-worked assignments. Usually, two interpreters are assigned for every booking lasting over two hours. This is found to be a major improvement compared to previous practices. Before the interpreting services were nationalised, when the municipalities carried the organising responsibility, the opportunities to work as a pair were scarce. In general, the interpreters felt the increased co-worked assignments have a positive effect also on professional development.

*”Hyvä puoli nykysysteemissä on että esim. tämän illan tulkkaukseenkin laitetaan automaattisesti kaksi tulkkia, vaikka tilaus on 2 tuntia.”*

*(“The good thing about the current system is that e.g. the booking tonight also has two interpreters automatically, even though it is for 2 hours.”)*

*”Mielestäni on aivan mahtavaa, kuinka nykyään saa niin hyvin paritulkkausta... asia on muuttunut radikaalisti. Silloin kun kunnat olivat palvelun järjestäjiä ja kustantajia, ei paritulkkausta saanut kovinkaan helposti järjestymään...”*

*(“I think it absolutely great how easily a partner is assigned... this has changed radically. When the municipalities organised and paid for the service, it was quite difficult to arrange a co-worked assignment...”)*

*”Mielestäni on siis hienoa, että sekä tulkkien jaksamista, että myös tulkkauksen laatua tuetaan...”*

*(“So I think it’s great that they support the interpreters’ wellbeing, and also the quality of the interpreting...”)*

*”Rakentavinta ja antoisinta minusta on työskennellä toisen yrityksen tulkkiparin kanssa...”*

*(“I find that working with a colleague from another company is the most rewarding and constructive method...”)*

They also found a few disadvantages. Some of the interpreters felt there was not always a need for two interpreters, even if the booking was for over two hours. Also, the interpreters found it distracting that pairs change constantly and not all interpreters have partnering experience or interest in it.

*”...tunnin keikka kuurosokealle tulkkiparin kanssa... tilaukseen ei kuitenkaan olisi tarvinnut paria. Kelan pitäisi pyytää ”koulutusta” itselleen saadakseen tietoa asiakkaista. ... Mielestäni olisi tärkeää, ettei paritulkkausta toteuteta turhaan, sillä tällöin joku toinen asiakas voi jäädä ilman tulkkia.”*

*(“- a booking for an hour for a deaf-blind, with a pair... but the pair wasn't necessary. Kela should ask for a “training” to receive more information on the clients... I think it is important not to book unnecessary partners, because another client may be left without an interpreter at that time.)*

*”Paritulkkauksen laatu on nykyisin epätasaista, koska osa uusista tulkeista työskentelee 1+1=1 –periaatteella, eli paikalla kaksi tulkkia, jotka työskentelevät vuorotellen, yksin... Liekö kilpailutus(oman firman etusija) vai koulutuksen puute vai asian arkipäiväistyminen syynä?... ”*

*(“The quality of the co-worked assignments is inconsistent nowadays because some of the new interpreters work according to a ‘1+1=1’ –principle, i.e. there are two interpreters present who work in turns, alone... I don't know whether this is caused by the tender (one company higher in the results than the other), lack of training, or that pairing has become ordinary...”)*

The client and interpreter profiles (chapter 2.3.2) created for the new coordinating system were meant to ease the search for “the right” interpreter for each booking. With the help of the profiles the system was supposed to find a match automatically e.g. an English speaking interpreter for assignments requiring English language skills or an interpreter trained in guiding for a deaf-blind client requiring a guide. The profile forms were sent to the clients, either in Finnish or Swedish. This caused problems for many of those clients, whose native language is Sign Language.

*"Kelan asiakasprofiilit ovat usein tulkille huono apu. Niitä pitäisi päivittää todellisten kommunikointitapojen mukaisiksi."*

*("The client profiles that The Social Insurance Institution of Finland has are often misleading for the interpreter. They should be updated to match the actual methods of communication.")*

*"Itse en valitettavasti pääse profiiliani päivittämään..."*

*("Unfortunately, I cannot update my profile myself...")*

*("Asiakkaiden on pitänyt täyttää asiakasprofiililomakkeet, jotka ovat suomen- tai ruotsinkielisiä, joista he eivät ole ymmärtäneet välttämättä tarpeeksi."*

*("The clients were asked to fill in client profile forms, which were written in either Finnish or Swedish. It is possible that they didn't understand everything.")*

*"...useat asiakkaat ovat täyttäneet lomakkeen väärin ja siitä seuraa nyt se, että asiakas voi*

*saada vääränlaisen tulkin tai tulkki asiakkaan tietoja lukiessaan saa aivan väärän kuvan asiakkaan tulkkaustarpeesta."*

*(" - many of the clients have filled in their forms incorrectly, which now means that the client may receive an unsuitable interpreter, or that the interpreter is completely misinformed on the interpreting needs of the client after reading his/her profile.")*

#### **4.2.3 Examples of the new work-related vocabulary**

When analysing the material it is possible to see a slight change in the work-related vocabulary of Sign Language interpreters. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (in short, *Kela*, in Finnish) as the service organiser is mentioned several times when commenting on e.g. the centralised coordinating agencies. Even though The Social Insurance Institution of Finland has outsourced the coordinating work, a coalition of three service providers was chosen to produce it, the agencies are still referred to as "Kela".

*"Kelan pitäisi pyytää "koulutusta" itselleen saadakseen tietoa asiakkaista..."*

*(“**Kela** should ask for a “training” to receive more information on the clients...”)*

*”**Kelan työntekijät** eivät ainakaan voi tietää tulkkien taitotasoa nykysysteemillä...”*

*(“- - with the current system it is impossible for **Kela’s workers** to know the skill level of the interpreters...”)*

*”**Kela** oli katsonut (juna+ratikka) reitin oppaasta...”*

*(“**Kela** had looked up the timetable (train+tram) in a guide...”)*

A clearly new work in the industry is ‘interpreter service product’. To enable the tender, interpreting had to be productised (chapter 2.2.3). This has apparently been adopted in the interpreters’ vocabulary as well.

*”Asiakas on erittäin tyytyväinen tällaiseen **tuotteeseen**...”*

*(“The client is very satisfied with this type of **product**...”)*

The new service system obviously does not have an established name yet; there are different names for it in different situations.

*”...**nykysysteemi** ei anna paljon mahdollisuutta ammattikäytänteiden kehittämiseen...”*

*(“- - **the current system** doesn’t give a lot of opportunities to develop the professional practices further...”)*

*”...jonka kehitystä **uusi systeemi** rajoittaa...”*

*(“- - **the new system** is restricting its development...”)*

*”...**nykyisen** välityksen joustamattomuudesta vanhaan verrattuna...”*

*(“- - the inflexibility of the **agency working at the moment** compared to the old way...”)*

With the tender “business thinking” has entered the industry, which can be found in the material several times.

*"Tämä ehkä suuntaa kehittämistä **bisnesasioihin** taitojen kehittämisen sijaan..."*  
*("This may focus the development on **business matters** instead of skills...")*

With the new coordinating software the interpreters are also required to use an electronic calendar, in which they mark the times they are available for bookings. The time which is opened in the calendar has started to be referred to as the "interpreter time".

*"**Tulkkiaikaa** auki klo 6.00-18.00."*  
*("Interpreter time open from 6am to 6pm...")*

The new service system has transferred the interpreters' work from municipal interpreter centres and freelancers to private interpreting service companies and sole entrepreneurs. Interpreters have either employment including a monthly salary, or they work on hourly basis. If an interpreter works on hourly wage, they can decide when they work and how much. So in a way, they have some of the freedom that freelance interpreters had, with the difference that an hourly employee works for an interpreting service company. The term "hourly employee" also appears to have stabilised with the new service system.

*"...**tuntityöntekijän** statuksella..."*  
*("- - with the status of **an hourly employee**...")*

The client and interpreter profiles were brought on by the new coordinating software and, based on the data, have become a part of the interpreters' work-related vocabulary.

*"Itse en valitettavasti pääse **profiiliani** päivittämään"*  
*("Unfortunately, I cannot update **my profile** myself...")*

*"...englannin kieli otetaan pois **profiilistani**..."*  
*("- - English will be taken off **my profile**...")*

*"...aihe liittyy **profiilissani** mainitsemaan erityisosaamiseeni..."*

(“ - - the theme corresponds with a special know-how I have mentioned in **my profile...** ”)

“...**profiili** on ihan väärä tai outo.”

(“ - - **the profile** is all wrong or weird.”)

With the nationalisation of the interpreting services the coordinating system of the services changed, and the centralised interpreter coordinating agencies started. But those service providers which employ several interpreters need to have also internal coordinators. After the assignments have been given out to the companies following the tender results, the internal coordinators place them on their interpreters' calendars. This appears to have established terms such as “centralised coordination” and “internal coordination”. Some of the interpreters still use “Kela's coordinating agency” also, when they mean the centralised coordinating agency.

“**Keskitetyt välitykset** eivät oikein suostu/voi päättää mitään...”

(“**The centralised agencies** are somewhat reluctant / unable to decide anything...”)

“...**sisäisen välityksen** kautta...”

(“ - - through **internal coordination**...”)

“...vaatinut **sisäiseltä välitykseltä** kovia ponnisteluja...”

(“ - - has taken a lot of effort from **the internal coordination**...”)

## 5. Findings

Based on the material gathered for this study it can be said that at the moment the new service system affects the work of Sign Language interpreters. The effects are both positive and negative. In their diaries the interpreters criticise changed practices and matters brought on by the new service system. The practices caused by the new service system and their effects on the development of the profession, which were presented in chapter 2.3, can be easily found in the data. The new service system both hinders the advance preparation and makes it more difficult for interpreters to assess if an assignment is too demanding for their skills and if they should decline that assignment.

The profession has developed in phases, from volunteer helpers to interpreter centre employees and freelance interpreters. The same developmental stages of the professional role can be found in Finland as has been found internationally (Chapter 3). With the nationalisation of the interpreting services a new phase has begun; the services are paid by the State and the production has been outsourced to private companies. This has quickly turned companies into competitors and introduced business thinking, which, following the municipal responsibility of organising the services is unheard of in the field of interpreting services in Finland.

Entrepreneurship and freelance-based interpreting were briefly compared in chapter 3.3. Same themes can be found in the data. The concern for the amount of assignments has been stated clearly several times. Dividing your work hours between preparation, actual interpreting, travelling back and forth, reporting the work, billing and running a business presents new challenges for the interpreters to consider.

## **5.1 The effects of the new service system on the work of Sign Language interpreters and the development of the profession**

The interpreters criticise The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, the organiser of the services, from many angles and they feel the Institution affects the work and the work conditions. The centralised coordinating agencies have opinions both for and against them. Analysing the material it can be said that there are more negative opinions than there are positives. In addition, the data shows clearly that the practices of the five coordinating agencies are not consistent, at least not yet, for clear variations can be found. Also, the proficiency of the coordinators was criticised.

The new service system is seen to have caused a competitive situation, which is felt to have a negative effect on the solidarity of interpreters and on the development of the profession. The respondents view that general development of the profession has changed into internal development of the companies, focusing on being successful in tender and securing the standing of the company.

In transferring the organising responsibility from the municipalities to the State, clear improvements have also occurred, e.g. in arranging co-worked assignments. In the current system the aim is to assign a pair of interpreters every time the booking is for at least two hours. The respondents find this to be a very positive change and feel this will greatly improve both the quality of interpreting and the professional wellbeing of interpreters.

Advance preparation for assignments was found problematic within the new service system because an assignment may be taken off an interpreter's calendar and given to a cheaper service provider only few days before the assignment is to take place. New bookings may also be placed in the interpreter's calendar the same day the bookings are for, which makes advance preparation almost impossible.

The new electronic coordinating system was found awkward and unfit for the purpose. Almost every respondent felt the client and interpreter profiles were troublesome and obstructed the work because the profiles have a lot of misleading information in them and the communication methods of the clients are in many cases incor-

rect. So interpreters are often provided with false advance information due to the client profile. Still, one respondent found the client profiles a useful tool.

Declining overly demanding assignments was found problematic; even appealing to professional ethics was not always a good enough reason. There has been an obvious change in this with the nationalisation of the interpreting services. Before the new service system it was possible to decline. But one of respondents wrote that declining an assignment too challenging was occasionally possible, so regional variations of the practices exist in this as well.

Two of the respondents wrote about their fears for insufficient bookings and that they had considered changing profession or finding a part-time job. They mentioned that with the new service system the situation has changed in regions, where there had been enough work before. None of them were on the bottom of the tender results, but in the middle of the list.

Based on the material the new service system enables developing the profession within the companies but has made collective cooperation and development of the profession, which existed before, more difficult. According to the respondents the mutual solidarity between interpreters has declined after the interpreting industry became company-based, and this was considered to affect the development of the profession.

## **5.2 Changes in the work-related vocabulary**

Nationalisation of the interpreting services has brought new vocabulary to the industry. This vocabulary is strongly connected to the changes which arose with the nationalisation. Within the first year several new terms have been established in the interpreters' lexicon due to the service system. Most of these were presented in chapter 2.3 and occur several times in the material of the respondents.

Before the interpreting service tender and the nationalisation nobody was talking about centralised coordinating agencies, internal coordination or interpreter time. In addition to the employed interpreters with a monthly salary there are now interpreters working on hourly basis and they are referred to as the hourly interpreters. The job description of the hourly interpreters is quite similar to what it used to be for freelance interpreters. But in the new service system it is no longer possible to work as a freelancer.

The interpreting services had to be productised for the tenders. Each interpreting service product was priced separately. The product can now be community interpreting, co-worked community interpreting, interpreting assignment of a demanding level, interpreting in educational setting, interpreting at seminars and conferences etc. The terms interpreting service product or just “product” appear to be also a part of the interpreters’ lexicon.

The client and interpreter profiles created for the electronic coordinating software occur several times in the interpreters’ diaries. They are talked about by using either the aforementioned words or only the word “profile”. Every interpreter knows what is meant by this. The coordinating system itself and the electronic software used by interpreters still have several different names, and it appears that an established term has not been found yet.

The data shows that not all new matters have an established term yet. The new service system has been given varying names in the diaries. “The current system”, “the system at the moment” and the “new system” all are found in the material. Also, the centralised coordinating agencies are sometimes called “Kela’s coordinating agency” or just “Kela” (the Finnish abbreviation for The Social Insurance Institution of Finland). Neither of them is actually correct. The Social Insurance Institution is buying the service from the providing companies.

Some of the vocabulary used before the nationalisation has become unnecessary with the change. For example, after the municipal interpreter centres were discontinued there are no longer interpreter centres; they have been replaced by interpreting service companies. With the discontinuation of the interpreter centres, also municipal

“interpreter positions”, i.e. permanent interpreters’ contracts with the municipality stopped existing. The positions have been replaced with employment on monthly salary.

It has only been a year since this change started. Some of the vocabulary is already fixed, but some of it is clearly still taking shape. This goes for the work practices as well. But the vocabulary already shows the transfer from municipal services towards the company-based system and towards the concepts it entails.

## 6. Discussion and analysis

The first interpreter training course in Finland was held in 1978, it was only one weekend long at the time. But the aim was to be finally able to respond to the interpreting needs of the Sign Language community, in some way at least. In 1980 the interpreting services were initiated. In 1984 the first interpreter centre was established and in 2000 there were 24 interpreter centres in Finland. Eleven years later there are over forty private companies in Finland providing interpreting services. These services are paid for by the State.

In 1979 the interpreting services were added to the Act on Disability Care Services. Later the organising of the services was provided in the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act. In 2010 the Act on Interpretation Services for Persons with Disabilities was enacted. This Act defined the organising responsibility to be transferred from the municipalities to the State. The right to use these services was still, 31 years later, defined based on disability even though the rights of the Sign Language community had been secured by law in 1995.

There has been a battle for the professional status of Sign Language interpreters as long as there have been interpreters. Now, with the nationalisation of the services, the work has transferred from the municipal sector to the business world.

In 2010, before the nationalisation of the interpreting services, the coming change was expected to redirect the industry strongly. According to the results of the study by Nikoskinen (2010) the change was expected to strengthen the organising of the services, the terms and conditions of interpreters' work, and the legal status of the profession. With the employment conditions of interpreters finally settled, it would be possible to focus on efficiency and develop the quality of work. The new service system was hoped to bring new companies in the industry and encourage interpreters to become entrepreneurs. In some aspect, this did become a reality. Then again, the only options were to become an entrepreneur or seek employment at a company

since interpreter centres were discontinued and freelance work was no longer possible.

The tender results govern the allocation of bookings to companies, and within the companies to interpreters. The amount of work an interpreter receives is based on many factors; doing your job well is no longer enough. The training and work experience of the interpreters affect the quality points of the company, and through that, their result in tender. It is good the interpreter training is changing and developing with the industry, and with the new Master's Degrees the two Universities of Applied Sciences provide opportunities for the interpreters to educate themselves further.

Both positive and negative effects concerning the new service system can be found in the data of the thesis. Especially the centralised coordinating agencies are criticised. But the respondents justify their opinions and the examples are closely related to the interpreters' work. A surprising find in the material is the clear regional variation in the practices of the centralised coordinating agencies, even though all five have been given the same instructions by The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. The data shows also strong critique of the variation in the practices of single coordinators.

When studying the critique of the centralised coordination agencies it has to be acknowledged that the interpreters working for the larger service providers are not usually allowed to contact the agencies directly, but have to handle issues via the internal coordinating employee of the company. The internal coordinator contacts the centralised agency. Only in some cases of urgency, a change or other pressing matter concerning an assignment, are the interpreters allowed to contact the centralised coordinating agency directly. For the smaller companies, and especially for sole traders, this is different. They have to contact the agency themselves for there is no internal coordinating employee.

The new electronic coordinating software is also heavily criticised. It has been found to obstruct and delay work. According to some of the respondents it is even completely useless for coordinating Sign Language interpreter bookings. Advance preparation for assignments is also considered more difficult nowadays and thought to

have lost value in the new system. Declining assignments an interpreter feels inadequate for is difficult.

But there have been also positive effects. According to the material, e.g. the increase in the number of co-worked assignments has been found an improvement for the development of the profession. This is also considered to have improved the quality of interpreting. The aim is to assign a pair of interpreters for all bookings of two hours or more in length. This could be viewed not only to improve the quality of interpreting but also to increase the amount of interpreters' work.

The surprising find in the material is that despite of all that the work has decreased in some regions after the tender. There is not enough work for even those providers who finished in the middle of the result list, and two of the respondents have already considered changing profession or finding a part-time job to sustain their living standards. For the development of the profession, this is a step backwards. When the municipalities had the responsibility of organising the services, changing profession was somewhat common among interpreters. It was explained with the unstable nature of the profession. The theme has been studied by Alanen and Lauronen (2001), among others. The situation was not expected to get worse with the nationalisation, but on some regions this is the case.

The number of clients on different regions can be assumed to be the same as a year ago, or at least no major change has occurred. The same goes for the number of interpreters. The need for interpreting services can also be considered to have remained the same. So the reason for the notable decrease in the amount of work could possibly be in the reorganising of the services and in the different allocation of work. It is unfortunate if interpreters start seeking for other professions due to this alteration in the services.

The new service system has been in force for a year now. Transferring the interpreting services to the State has been a big change in the Sign Language interpreting industry. After the first year, the system can still be considered new, and in analysing the results of this study it has to be remembered that change often causes, especially in the beginning, opposition and the old known practices are sometimes hard to give

up. The first period of tender will surely affect the next ones, and both the service providers and the State as the buyer will have more experience and practical knowledge of what works and what should be developed.

## 7. Conclusions

This thesis discusses the reassignment of the organising responsibility of interpreting services from the municipalities to the State, and the changes the new service system has brought. The aim of the study was to discover Sign Language interpreters' thoughts concerning the new service system and learn how it has affected their work. In addition, the aim was to discover the possibilities the new service system offers for the development of the profession and how the vocabulary of the profession has changed in this transformation.

The data was gathered in the form of diaries due to the sensitive subject matter. This method gave the respondents the possibility to keep their distance from the researcher and express their thoughts freely, without being influenced by set questions. There were only ten respondents and they represent three different coordinating regions. They kept a diary of their work only for two weeks. So the sample is small and the results of this thesis cannot be generalised to apply to the entire field of interpreting services.

Even though the sample is small and the material was gathered for only a brief period, the data clearly shows the transfer has affected the work of interpreters. There are strong statements in the material of the effects the new service system has had, both on the interpreters' work and the development of the profession. Based on the thesis material the professional vocabulary can also be said to have changed on some parts. The changes are clearly in relation to the new service system. All the changes caused by the new system that have been presented in this study occur several times in the material. The effects of the transfer are considered both positive and negative. But the negative effects occur more frequently in the data.

The respondents of this study were interpreters. There has been no previous study on how the nationalisation of the interpreting services has affected the work of interpreters. So the limited existing literature on the subject also complicated the study. The studies concerning the new service model have focused on the centralised co-

ordination, and on the customer service of The Social Insurance Institution of Finland and how contacting them via a video phone has worked. There is only a year of experience of the new service system. It would be useful to repeat the study e.g. after the second tender period, with a larger sample so that all of the five coordinating regions would be represented.

The first tender period has surely only advisory capacity and the new service model is still taking shape. After the second period the effects the change has had on the established system would be easier to pinpoint. It would be interesting to study whether the critique presented in this thesis remains the same, does the situation improve or do the interpreters grow accustomed to the flaws. It would also be interesting to know whether the new service system will cause interpreters to change profession or will the fears of insufficient work expressed in the material prove to be unnecessary.

The field of interpreting services is very business-oriented at the moment, and it is difficult to say, which of the interpreter's roles presented in chapter 3.1 would best describe the current situation. It would be interesting to study this theme in depth once things have settled. Has the industry taken a step back and has one of the old definitions resurfaced, or has some completely new definition emerged?

The interpreting service clients would also be an interesting subject of study. It can be assumed that the service has changed also for the clients, since the tender results largely define which interpreter the client receives and how the clients' requests can be met. Based on the material of this study there has been some improvement from the viewpoint of the interpreters. It would be interesting to study how the interpreting service clients perceive those improvements and what are their thoughts on the service in the new system.

The Sign Language interpreting service has been through a lot of changes during its thirty year history in Finland. The path from volunteer helpers to company-based system and competitiveness between the interpreting service companies has included many changes and affected the development of the profession strongly. What will be

the course of development with the outsourced services and business life remains to be seen.

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## APPENDIX 1: Interpreting and teaching products in different tenders

### **Uusimaa area 2005**

Community interpreting, basic level

Community interpreting, demanding level

Community interpreting, demanding level, co-working

Interpreting in upper secondary education

Interpreting in tertiary education

Teaching Sign Language or signed speech to a group

Teaching Sign Language or signed speech to a family

Interpreting in seminars and conferences, basic level

Interpreting in seminars and conferences, basic level, co-working

Interpreting in seminars and conferences, demanding level

Interpreting in seminars and conferences, demanding level, co-working

Coordinating the interpreting services

### **Pirkanmaa area 2005**

Community interpreting, basic level

Community interpreting, demanding level

Interpreting in educational settings, basic level

Interpreting in educational settings, demanding level

Community interpreting, assignment longer than one day

Community interpreting, seminars and conferences, assignment longer than one day

Teaching Sign Language, signed speech or sign-supported speech

Coordinating the interpreting and teaching services

### **Interpreting and Teaching Products in 2008**

Community interpreting, basic level

Community interpreting, basic level, co-working

Community interpreting, demanding level  
Community interpreting, demanding level, co-working  
Speech to text interpreting, basic level  
Speech to text interpreting, demanding level  
Remote interpreting, basic level  
Remote interpreting, demanding level  
Phone call interpreting, basic level  
Phone call interpreting, demanding level  
Interpreting in educational settings  
Interpreting in educational settings, co-working  
Bookings for several days, basic level  
Bookings for several days, demanding level  
Teaching a group  
Teaching a family

### **The national tender in 2010, The Social Insurance Institution of Finland**

Community interpreting, basic level  
Community interpreting, co-working  
Community interpreting, demanding level  
Speech to text interpreting, basic level  
Speech to text interpreting, demanding level  
Speech to text interpreting, co-working  
Speech to text interpreting, assignment longer than one day, basic level  
Speech to text interpreting, assignment longer than one day, demanding level  
Speech to text interpreting, assignment longer than one day, co-working  
Interpreting in educational settings  
Community interpreting, assignment longer than one day, basic level  
Community interpreting, assignment longer than one day, demanding level  
Community interpreting, assignment longer than one day, co-working

## APPENDIX 2: First email

*Hello!*

*I'm a student, in a way, and currently working on my thesis...*

*I know that we all receive a lot of these emails all the time. But since I'm in need of a little assistance and material, I send the most humble plead, knowing that we all have our hands full as it is. So, please read a little further...*

*I got my institute-level Sign Language interpreting Degree in 2000, and finished additional credits in 2007, and hopefully will graduate from this Master's Degree called "European Master in Sign Language Interpreting", EUMASLI in short.*

*My thesis studies the effects that The Social Insurance Institution of Finland has had on the profession of Sign Language interpreters. I am looking for a couple of interpreters, who could keep a diary of their work for two weeks. The form of the material is optional, notes will do. There will be no record of names or company, not even of the geographical area of the participants.*

*The notes may be as informal as you wish and in Finnish, of course. My thesis will focus on how this change affects the work and development of the profession.*

*There is no need to worry about confidentiality. I will be the only person processing the material and only parts of it will be published in the thesis.*

*I was hoping to have all my material ready before the summer holiday, so if you could send your notes in May-June. Each participant is free to choose the two-week period in those months that fits his/her work the best.*

*With Best Regards, waiting to hear from you,*

## APPENDIX 3: Second email

*Hello,*

*First, a Big Thanks for your help, it is really necessary!*

*So, the idea is to keep an informal “diary” for two weeks. You can record your notes in any form that you feel the most comfortable with. The aim of my thesis is to analyse the changes that happen in the work of interpreters and in the development of the profession due to the transfer to The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. I don’t want to lead you into any direction, so I won’t give you specific guidelines. So, the idea is to make notes of the things you deal with at work, of the changes that have been brought on by the Institution, good and bad, whatever you are going through. Also, I wish that you consider the possible effects of the new coordinating software and the coordinating agencies.*

*I hope that everyone could find the suitable two weeks for this in May, but if not, then June will be alright too. For me to go through and analyse the material in time, I would prefer if you could send your notes no later than on week 24.*

*The current name of the Thesis is:*

*From the Municipalities to the State – A New Stage in the Development of the Profession? A study of Sign Language interpreters’ views on the new booking system.*

*So there... :)*

*Thank you, and good luck with the writing!*

*Let’s wish for sunny days!*