

Walczyński, M. (2021). Polish-English certified interpreters in psycho-affectively challenging contexts. *Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E*, 8, 394 – 448. <https://doi.org/10.51287/cttle202112>

## **POLISH-ENGLISH CERTIFIED INTERPRETERS IN PSYCHO-AFFECTIVELY CHALLENGING CONTEXTS**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to bring to light selected Polish-English certified interpreters' working contexts which trigger the activation of those interpreters' psycho-affectivity. In other words, this study aims at illuminating those occupational settings in which Polish-English certified interpreters working in Poland experience psycho-affective factors which – in turn – can affect adversely interpreting quality. The first part of the article presents the concept of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity with its constituent elements – seven psycho-affective factors (*i.e.*, anxiety, fear, language inhibition/language ego/language boundaries, extroversion/introversion/ambiversion, self-esteem, motivation and stress). What follows is an overview of the profile of a Polish-English certified interpreter by referring to some legal and practical issues inherent in this profession practised in Poland. The final section of this article is devoted to the analysis of several occupational contexts (*i.e.*, courtroom, notary's office, police station, hospital) in which the studied interpreters' psycho-affectivity comes into play by

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affecting the interpreters and their interpreting performance. The data for the analysis were derived from factual, attitudinal and behavioural data collected during a qualitative psycho-affectivity-related study conducted among 76 Polish-English interpreters.

**Keywords:** psycho-affective factors, interpreter's psycho-affectivity, certified interpreters, occupational contexts of interpreting, consecutive interpreting

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Interpreting at large is a complex activity that is possible thanks to interpreters' multitasking skills, among which of crucial importance are those of cognitive nature. However, what is also activated in interpreters is their psycho-affectivity. It manifests itself in a whole panoply of moods, attitudes, views, emotions and feelings that are directly related to the interpreters' ways of self-evaluation regarding themselves, their skills and knowledge as well the surrounding environment, including the situational embedding and institutional contexts of interpreter-mediated communicative acts in which they participate.

The article presents a discussion of several observations made in the course of a survey-based qualitative study carried out among 76 Polish-English interpreters on their experience of their

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psycho-affectivity. It seems that the context of interpreting frequently significantly contributes to the experience of the psycho-affective factors. Therefore, the context, understood as a social and/or institutional embedding with its actors (*i.e.*, participants), is a crucial point of reference in the study of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity.

The first part of the article presents the concept of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity with its constituent elements – seven psycho-affective factors (*i.e.*, anxiety, fear, language inhibition/language ego/language boundaries, extroversion/introversion/ambiversion, self-esteem, motivation and stress). What follows is an overview of the profession of a certified interpreter in the Polish context. Reviewing the legal and practical aspects of this job can shed some light on why this occupation is psycho-affectively demanding in different contexts. The central part of the paper pertains to the discussion of the qualitative data obtained during the survey study concerning the aforementioned psycho-affective factors experienced by certified interpreters in various circumstances. In other words, the paper presents several contexts (*i.e.*, courtroom, notary's office, police station, hospital) which are likely to trigger off the certified interpreter's psycho-affective

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factors, which – in turn – can contribute to the decrease in the quality of interpreting performance and its final product – the output.

Generally speaking, the article attempts to show which contexts can be regarded as psycho-affectively challenging for Polish-English certified interpreters. Thus, the paper aims to pinpoint the contextual settings that are likely to affect interpreters by activating their psycho-affectivity and, by extension, by exerting a somewhat negative impact on their certified interpreting performance.

## **2. INTERPRETER'S PSYCHO-AFFECTIVITY: PRELIMINARIES**

The interpreter's psycho-affectivity can be defined as a continually operating module of the interpreter's psychological construction which can only partially be controlled. It is activated by the so-called *psycho-affective factors* – the interpreter's personal characteristics which are responsible for how the interpreter reacts to various stimuli. To put it differently, those are the emotions, attitudes and states linked to how interpreters assess themselves, their skills and expertise as well as other people and the contextual embedding of a given interpreting act (*e.g.*, Walczyński, 2020). From among many such

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factors which are likely to influence interpreting, seven of them have been subjected to a more rigorous study; these are anxiety, fear, language inhibition/language ego/language boundaries, personality dimension (*i.e.*, extroversion/introversion/ambiversion), self-esteem, motivation and stress.

The study of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity can be placed within what may be termed *interpreter psychology* which might be postulated to be a subfield of interpreting studies examining the psychological phenomena occurring in the process of interpreting. Those phenomena may be related to the cognitive and psycho-affective aspects of the interpreter's work. Of the two above-mentioned strands of interpreter psychology, the psycho-affective one seems to be less abundant in the body of research since, for a long time, studies on the cognitive dimensions of interpreting seemed to prevail. Widely recognised interpreting scholars like, for instance, Gerver (1975), Seleskovitch (1975), Moser-Mercer (2008), Seeber (2011) or Gile (2015), have been involved in studying various cognitive aspects of interpreting (*e.g.*, information processing and retrieval, memory, cognitive load, processing capacity *etc.*), enriching thereby the body of research on the cognitive dimensions of

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interpreting and expanding the understanding of what happens cognitively during the process of interpreting.

Although studies on cognitive aspects seem to dominate the psychological inquiries into interpreting, recently there has been a marked tendency to pay attention to the psycho-affective aspects of interpreting, too. The growing interest in the emotional side of interpreting shows that the psycho-affective factors and, generally speaking, the interpreter's psycho-affectivity, can exert some influence on the ways in which interpreters work, thus debunking the myth of the interpreter's emotional neutrality and non-involvement during professional interpreting (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Nartowska, 2017).

The fact that the interpreter's affective side, *i.e.*, the interpreter's psycho-affectivity has been more and more intriguing for interpreting scholars is visible in the growing body of literature written within this strand of interpreter psychology. One reason for developing scholarly interests in the interpreter's psycho-affectivity is that it was brought to light that professional interpreters need not only a set of cognitive predispositions but also specific psycho-affective properties like, for instance, stress resistance or properly developed self-concept. Such

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issues were highlighted, among others, by Brisau, Godijin and Meuleman (1994), who noticed that the interpreter's psycho-affectivity was not taken heed of during interpreter training whereas it should be. For this reason, those scholars attempted to build a “psycholinguistic profile of a trainee interpreter”, which would also encompass selected psycho-affective factors (*i.e.*, self-concept, anxiety, motivation, language ego, stress) which may influence interpreting performance.

Another issue which can be defined as being of psycho-affective nature was studied by Mead (2002), who observed that while interpreting, interpreters may encounter problems, some of which can be attributed to the so-called nervous tension – the ability (or its lack) to control the emotions and mitigate them so that those emotional states have little impact on the interpreting performance quality.

Valer-Garcés (2005) studied another theme that can be classified as belonging to the psycho-affective domain. She dealt with emotional load in community interpreting and stated that because of its nature and the settings in which it takes place, community interpreting is emotionally demanding and stressful. For this reason, some training in

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dealing with psycho-affective issues should be provided to interpreting trainees before they start their professional careers since their emotional stability should not undermine the quality of their performance.

Emotional stability was also a theme of interest for Bontempo and Napier (2011), who also postulated including the education in the field of psycho-affective issues in interpreter training curricula since, as they observed, the levels of emotional stability can point to how well/poorly conference interpreters can perform.

The interpreter's psycho-affectivity was also highlighted in the study carried out by Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2008), who investigated aptitude testing instruments. They observed that rarely were the so-called "soft skills" ("personality, motivation and teachability" (2008, p. 42)) assessed in the testing procedures. However, their development can be a good indicator of whether a candidate can learn interpreting skills and complete interpreter training. Additionally, in another study, Timarová and Salaets (2011) explored the role of soft skills in testing aptitude for interpreting and came to a conclusion that "(...) soft skills may indeed be important, if complementary, contributing factors of



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interpreting aptitude” (Timarova, Salaets, 2011, p. 52).

An interesting endeavour was made by Colonomos (2015), who – in her “Integrated Model of Interpreting” – also drew attention to psycho-affective factors like emotional attitude, stress, self-evaluation or aligning with the speaker – the aspects which are also crucial in the activity of interpreting.

The interpreter’s psycho-affectivity was also researched by Walczyński (2019), who – in a large research project carried out both among interpreter trainees and professional certified interpreters – attempted to show that indeed both groups of interpreters experience the influence of psycho-affective factors, some of which may be facilitative (*e.g.*, motivation) and some of them may be debilitating and inhibitory (*i.e.*, anxiety, fear, language inhibition, self-esteem, stress). He also tried to capture the complex interrelations among the stimulus (*i.e.*, what triggers off psycho-affectivity), psycho-affective factors, interpreter’s behaviours and bodily reactions as well as other factors in what he called “the expanded model of the psycho-affective sequence in consecutive interpreting” (Walczyński 2019, p. 563).

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One more study which shows that the interest in the interpreter's psycho-affectivity is growing is the project carried out by Ruiz Rosendo (2020), in which she concluded that emotions guide conflict zone interpreters' actions and choices. For this reason, the issue of emotions should be a component of interpreter training curricula.

Anxiety can be explained as a state of uneasiness and tension resulting from a person's own perception of a given stimulus as a potential threat (Reevy, Ozer, Ito, 2010). It can have several forms (Heron, 1989); it can be experienced as *archaic anxiety* related to some past and typically unpleasant event or it can be felt as *existential anxiety* referring more to present and future events. The latter type can be subdivided into *performance anxiety*, in which the interpreter may feel anxious about whether he/she will cope with a given instance of interpreting, *orientation anxiety*, which is connected to the fact whether the interpreter will be able to understand what happens, when and how, and *acceptance anxiety*, in which the interpreter worries about whether he/she will be accepted as a legitimate participant in the interpreting event. Quite often, anxious feelings are related to what is known in psychology as *ruminatio*n (e.g., Papageorgiou, Wells, 2004) – obsessive thinking

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about potential problems which may arise during interpreting and the inability to deal with them. Some interpreters tend to overthink about their self-perceived insufficiently developed interpreter competence, resulting in anxiety.

Another psycho-affective factor – fear – is regularly explained with reference to anxiety since both of them can be similar in the way the interpreter behaves. What is different, however, is the type of stimulus: in anxiety, the threat is merely subjective and not existing in the real world whereas as far as fear is concerned, the danger is real and objective. For this reason, it is justified to claim that perhaps all living organisms can experience it as it is “the affect of a motivational system that attempts to protect an organism from physical harm or destruction” (Jones 2013, p. 100). Given the above definition, it may be safely stated that at times interpreters, especially those working in conflict or war-stricken zones, can indeed experience fear (*cf.*, Ruiz Rosendo, 2020).

The next factor – language inhibition resulting from weak language ego and firm language boundaries (Guiora, 1972) – can be explained as a certain mechanism which the interpreter develops as regards his/her language skills and some

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deficiencies in them. The concept of language inhibition and language ego is perhaps more studied within applied linguistics and second language acquisition studies because it revolves around the use of the non-native language (*i.e.*, a second language) (*e.g.*, Zakarneh, 2018). In interpreting, it may be observed among interpreters who realise that their command of the foreign language is not perfect. For that reason, they decide not to use certain not fully acquired language elements (*i.e.*, grammatical structures or lexical items) because they think that any potential mistake may threaten their language ego. Thus, not wanting to take a linguistic risk, they develop stronger language boundaries which make their language ego weaker. It all oft-times leads to language inhibition.

The personality dimension is another aspect of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity, which needs a brief explanation. Generally speaking, all people's personalities can be classified as extroversion (*i.e.*, seeking the source of positive emotions in the external world), introversion (*i.e.*, seeking some positive reinforcement in one's own thinking and feelings) and ambiversion (*i.e.*, the intermediate dimension located all along the personality dimension continuum from one pole – extroversion to the other pole – introversion). The extreme

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dimensions are also related to some external properties like, on the one hand, sociability and talkativeness in the case of extroversion and, on the other hand, solitude and reticence in the case of introversion (Reevy, Ozer, Ito, 2010). However, some studies on interpreters' personality dimensions have brought attention-grabbing observations. For instance, Schweda-Nicholson (2005) found that not all interpreters need to be extroverted to be good at this profession. She states that:

Although it was predicted that most interpreters would be Extraverts, the data clearly demonstrate that the profession attracts quiet and retiring Introverts as well. Along with additional evidence cited to this point, this result may partially derive from the fact that interpreters dwell in the mind when working. (2005, p. 124)

Self-esteem is another factor of psycho-affective nature that needs to be discussed. Generally speaking, this is a psychological construct (also sometimes referred to as *self-concept*, *self-efficacy*, *self-worth* (cf., Habrat, 2013)) which defines how a given person identified himself/herself, what attitude this person has towards himself/herself and how he/she assesses himself/herself with respect to his/her worth in the contexts in which he/she happens to be (Coopersmith, 1967). Self-esteem can

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be high/positive and low/negative. It may also vary, depending on the yardstick adopted. In the case of interpreters, it may be *global/general* (how interpreters see themselves in general), *situational* (how they assess themselves and their skills in a given interpreting situation), *task* (how they view themselves with reference to a given interpreting task). There is also *intermediate self-esteem* which manifests interpreters' view of their competences or skills (*i.e.*, linguistic skills, interpreting skills *etc.*).

Motivation is also part of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity because it may determine the achievements of interpreters (and for this reason, it is also referred to as *achievement motivation*). Generally speaking, all people can manifest *internal* or *intrinsic motivation* arising out of their internal needs for excellence or external/extrinsic motivation, which is brought to light when there is some external reward waiting for a given person (*e.g.*, Reevy, Ozer, Ito, 2010). Interpreters demonstrate both types of motivation – some of them want to perform well because of their high internal standards of work while others are guided in their work by external incentives, like remuneration.

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Finally, there is stress which has already been given relatively much attention in interpreting research (*e.g.*, Kurz, 2003; Korpala, 2017; Riccardi, 2015) since it has been proved to be nearly omnipresent in interpreting. It encompasses a wide array of psychological and physiological reactions to various stimuli. Sometimes, stress can be motivating and hence it is known as *eustress*. It can also be negative and – for this reason – it is referred to as *distress*. On the whole, quite often interpreters report the experience of stress and its influence on their performance.

All the seven factors can constitute the components of the psycho-affective sequence (Gorman, 2005) which is a complex network of interrelations among a stimulus (*i.e.*, contextual embedding, including other people taking part in the interpreting act, input text properties *etc.*), the experience of the psycho-affective factors, interpreter's verbal behaviours (*i.e.*, the way he/she delivers interpretation), interpreter's body reactions (*e.g.*, sweating, increased heartbeat) and other factors (*e.g.*, cognitive abilities, technical factors *etc.*). In the section of this study devoted to psycho-affectively challenging contexts, what will be demonstrated is how the selected institutional settings can contribute

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to the activation of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity.

To conclude, emotions felt by interpreters and the concept of the interpreter's psycho-affectivity only recently have been given more attention within interpreting scholarship. Therefore, there are still quite a few intricacies that need to be accounted for; however, what is already known from those few studies examining the impact of emotions on the interpreters' work is that in their professional endeavours, interpreters experience various emotional states, feelings and attitudes which can potentially influence their decisions and choices, thereby affecting in one way or another interpreting performance. Thus, an emotionless, totally neutral and psycho-affectively untouched and unresponsive interpreter is just an idealised theoretical construct with little relevance to the real-life practice of interpreting.

### **3. POLISH-ENGLISH CERTIFIED INTERPRETER'S PROFILE**

Interpreting is typically categorised, depending on its different modes. It can have several other forms and one of them is certified interpreting. However, since the focus in this article is on Polish-English



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certified interpreters, the Polish understanding of this term is provided below.

Whereas in other countries the term *certified interpreter* may refer to, for instance, the interpreter who became certified by a special association (e.g., American Translators Association) or industry institution on the basis of the interpreter's previous experience, achievements or qualifications or who obtained such a title from state institutions (e.g., from Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation) (cf., Kubacki, 2012), in Poland, this designation is used with reference to a person who has successfully undergone the testing procedure organised by Poland's Ministry of Justice. Since in Poland there is no formal division between certified translators and certified interpreters (however, for this article concentrates on the working contexts of *interpreters*, the term *certified interpreter*, rather than *certified translator*, is consistently used throughout this text), candidates have to take the examination which consists of two parts – the translation part and the interpreting part. The interpreting test can be taken only after the candidate has passed the translation test. Obtaining the passing grade for both parts is tantamount to passing the entire examination which is the

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prerequisite for the formal procedure of registering a candidate as a certified translator/interpreter.

The work of certified interpreters (and translators) is regulated in Poland by the *Act on the Profession of a Certified Translator* of 2014 [In Polish: *Ustawa z dnia 25 listopada 2004 r. o zawodzie tłumacza przysięgłego*] and the regulations of the Minister of Justice. Let us now take a look at selected provisions of the said act. It may serve as a basis for constructing a profile of a certified interpreter. First, such a person must be a citizen of Poland or another member state of the European Union or the European Free Trade Association. Secondly, a certified interpreter must know the Polish language and have full capacity to perform acts in law (*i.e.*, the ability to independently and legally valid perform legal acts like, for example, conclude contracts, take out loans, rent a flat *etc.*). Thirdly, a certified interpreter cannot have been punished for intentional tax offences nor for unintentional offences against the security of business transactions. As regards the very practice of interpreting, under the act, certified interpreters are obliged to provide their services diligently, fairly and impartially. They also have to adhere to professional ethics, which, among others, means

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maintaining the confidentiality of secret information which they acquire in the course of their work.

The Act on the Profession of a Certified Translator (2014) also has several provisions which make the profession of a certified interpreter challenging (or even difficult). First, certified interpreters should not refuse to interpret unless they have a serious reason to do so. In practice, it means that rarely can certified interpreters be exempted from the obligation to interpret for courts, prosecutors or the police. Secondly, the remuneration for interpreting services provided for judiciary institutions is regulated by the Minister of Justice and, sadly, it is far below the free market remuneration rates. Thirdly, the work of certified interpreters is controlled by the officers employed in the provincial governor's offices who may not have sufficient knowledge of what this job involves and of the conditions in which it is performed. Fourthly, for interpreting in a negligent, unfair, partial and careless manner, certified interpreters may be punished by the Translators' and Interpreters' Disciplinary Committee – they can be officially admonished, reprimanded, fined financially, have their certified interpreter's right suspended or deprived.

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As presented above, the many requirements which Poland's certified interpreters have to meet as well as the difficult contexts in which they typically work (*i.e.*, courtrooms, police stations, notary's offices, border guard stations, immigration officers *etc.*) make this profession a psycho-affectively demanding since this occupation is at times linked to emotional burden and the resulting experience of the psycho-affective factors. In the last part of this article, a few of those challenging psycho-affective contexts will be discussed, based on the outcome of a study into the Polish-English certified interpreters' experience of psycho-affective factors presented in greater detail in Walczyński (2019).

#### **4. POLISH-ENGLISH CERTIFIED INTERPRETERS IN PSYCHO-AFFECTIVELY CHALLENGING CONTEXTS**

The discussion to follow is based on the results obtained in the course of a research project entitled "Psycho-affective factors in consecutive

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interpreting” (Walczyński, 2019), for which two groups of participants were recruited. One group was composed of three subgroups of trainee interpreters at different levels of interpreter training while the other group included practising Polish-English certified interpreters. It is just the latter who are the focus in this article.

The data were obtained by surveying 76 Polish-English certified interpreters who, in July/August 2018, answered a rather lengthy online 46-item questionnaire about their experience of the studied psycho-affective factors and their impact on their consecutive interpreting performance. The questionnaire contained the factual questions, in which the respondents were asked to provide information on their age, gender, education, experience in consecutive interpreting and in certified interpreting. In the main part of the questionnaire, the certified interpreters were requested to present their opinions concerning their attitudes and behaviours (*i.e.*, attitudinal and behaviour data) related to the experience of the factors in question. Some questions were preceded by explanations of the terms used to avoid confusion and misperception. Generally speaking, thanks to the use of the surveying method, it was possible to obtain a wealth of data showing a variety of

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perspectives on the studied certified interpreters' psycho-affectivity and its impact on interpreting.

Before the discussion of the psycho-affectively demanding contexts, it seems justified to present some descriptive statistics regarding the sample in question. As aforementioned, the answers to the questionnaire items were obtained from 76 respondents, of whom 55 were women (72%) and 21 men (28%). Their ages were varied – the youngest respondents was 29 whereas the oldest – 74. Generally speaking, the mean age was 46 years old (and the median – 44). The average experience in providing certified interpreting services was calculated on the basis of the year in which the respondents obtained the official right to perform this type of interpreting. Thus, the mean experience expressed in years was 14.5 (and the median – 14) with the most extensive experience being 43 and shorter than one year being the shortest period of working as a certified interpreter. Hypothetically, like in every profession, with growing experience in a given job position and becoming more and more familiar with the conditions of performing the job, it can be assumed that the longer the certified interpreters' experience is, the less likely they are to be under the influence of the psycho-affective factors. However, this does not necessarily have to

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be so, as is evidenced by the views which the respondents expressed on their psycho-affectivity, some of which are presented in the sections below.

Another essential aspect of the study was related to the frequency of performing certified interpreting. Four categories (*i.e.*, very often – several times a week, often – several times a month, rarely – once/twice a month, very rarely – several times a year) were presented to the respondents who were asked to choose the one matching the reality of their occupation. Six respondents (8%) declared that they perform certified interpreting very often, 19 (25%) – often, 23 (30%) rarely and 28 (37%) very rarely. Again, it might be assumed that the growing frequency of performing certified interpreting may lead to a less intensive experience of the activity of the studied psycho-affective factors because the more people perform a given professional activity, the more accustomed to it and its embedding they grow and the more aware of its challenging aspects they become. However, this statement conflicts, at least partially, with the respondents' opinions gathered in the course of the study, a few of which substantiate the claims made in the sections below.

One more issue which needs a brief explanation prior to the discussion of the psycho-affectively

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challenging contexts is the very term *psycho-affectively challenging/demanding context*, which has already been referred to several times. For the purpose of this article, it should be assumed that a psycho-affectively challenging/demanding context of certified interpreting is an institutional setting, with its actors, *i.e.*, participants in a certified interpreter-mediated communication act, which is likely to activate the certified interpreters' psycho-affective factors and influencing, mostly negatively, the process of certified interpreting. This being so, in quite many cases, psycho-affectively challenging contexts can be regarded as the stimuli in the psycho-affective sequences, in which the interpreter's psycho-affectivity is triggered externally by, for example, other people present during interpreting, the institutional embedding, the gravity of the interpreted matter, to name but a few. Of course, it must be remarked that not all certified interpreters find the same contexts psycho-affectively demanding since some are quite comfortable working in, for instance, courtrooms while for others, such interpreting work may involve a great deal of emotional burden and the negative influence of their psycho-affectivity. However, since of relevance to this article are those psycho-affectively challenging contexts, the opinions of those respondents who do not find them demanding



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are not discussed (a full discussion can be found in Walczyński (2019)).

Finally, one methodological comment must be made: all the quotations which are used below to substantiate certain statements were expressed by the respondents originally in Polish. However, for the purpose of the study (Walczyński 2019), they were translated by the principal researcher – the present author (who is Polish) – into English and anonymised. Therefore, every time there is a reference to some interpreter, the pronouns “he/she” are used since, because of the need to adhere to the principle of anonymity which the respondents were guaranteed, it is impossible to decode the gender of the authors of the opinions quoted. Moreover, the quotations were directly borrowed from the chapter on Polish-English certified interpreters’ experience of psycho-affective factors, in which the respondents’ answers are discussed at a greater length (Walczyński, 2019, pp. 455–551).

#### **4.1. Courtroom contexts**

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Generally speaking, the setting of a courtroom is definitely a psycho-affectively challenging context since it triggers a wide array of emotions, feelings and attitudes not only among those who appear there occasionally as litigation participants (*i.e.*, as plaintiffs, defendants or witnesses) but also among those who have to be there for professional purposes (*i.e.*, judges, attorneys-at-law, barristers *etc.*). For 20 respondents (26%), courtroom interpreting is the most frequently performed type.

Courtroom interactions, including those related to certified interpreting, often involve the visible imbalance of power in which one party (usually the one with more institutional power, like, for instances, judges or prosecutors) dominates over another. It is perhaps one of those elements of this institutional setting which is likely to induce people's negative emotional reactions. On the whole, people are somewhat reluctant to participate in litigations because, more often than not, such circumstances are likely to bring stress, anxiety, sometimes even fear, and those negative feelings are not what people voluntarily want to experience.

The context of the courtroom is likely to contribute to the development of the certified interpreters' experience of anxiety. For example, court

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proceedings in which the certified interpreter is involved sometimes do not go smoothly and become very lengthy and tiring for the people involved, including the certified interpreter. With a view to this, one interpreter commented that having such previous experience of working for a very long time during one court session brings about his/her experience of archaic anxiety since he/she remembered the past interpreting act during which he/she felt unwell and uncomfortable because of his/her illness and fatigue (*i.e.*, “Feeling unwell, for example when I had to interpret for five hours in the court immediately after the inflammation of the larynx, still weakened and coughing”). Existential anxiety in its three forms (*i.e.*, performance anxiety, orientation anxiety and acceptance anxiety) can also develop in the course of court interpreting. Some respondents remarked that, because of an atypical language variety used by litigation participants, they become anxious about whether they will be able to understand spoken messages correctly and render them in the target language (*e.g.*, “When the person accused, convicted or interrogated is not always proficient, then [I am anxious that] maybe I will not understand him, maybe he will not understand me, and maybe it will have a significant impact on his future fate, or maybe I will meet him on the street”). Others declared that they develop anxiety because

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they are afraid of the potential critical remarks other parties may make with reference to the certified interpreters' command of English or interpreting skills (e.g., "Fear of criticism, fear of making a mistake, fear of a situation in which I will not know how to interpret").

Interestingly enough, although – theoretically – there should be no experience of fear since there should be no objective danger for the certified interpreters as courts tend to be well-protected places, some respondents stated that courtroom interactions can sometimes lead to the interpreters' experience of fear. One reason for this is the aggressive behaviour of other people involved in a trial (e.g., "A very aggressive attitude of a suspect who was suspected of serious crimes"; "Abnormal behaviour of the participants of the trial. It has happened to me twice during my work. When interpreting criminals in the prosecutor's office; when interpreting an accused schizophrenic woman, with whom I was left alone "for a moment" by the police; and maybe when interpreting another arrested man with whom I had to stay in custody. Quite often – I say it based on my experience – interpreters are treated as the foreigner's babysitter and the fact that he is a criminal does not matter especially when – during the hearing – we have to

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provide the details concerning the interpreter’s residence address”; “Aggression of the “other party” in the courtroom”; “Contact with criminals; a prolonged interpretation interfering with other plans”; “Once I happened to perform interpreting in the criminal case in which I was afraid of the accused and sat next to him (interpreting him) for a long time”). The opinions clearly show that what the certified interpreters may experience during courtroom proceedings is fear since – in their eyes – there is a threat existing in the court environment.

Another psycho-affective factor which the respondents can experience when providing certified interpreting services in the courtroom context is language inhibition. The experience of this psycho-affective factor can result from the respondents’ awareness of the imperfection of their linguistic and interpreting competence. Thus, they may be unwilling to take the linguistic risk in using those language elements which they are not certain of. In most cases, this is related to the use of specialised terminology which court trial participants may use when, for instance, making digressions (*e.g.*, “Digressing on the topics belonging to the areas in which I do not specialise, for instance, in the description of accident injuries during a court trial”; “Unfamiliarity with the subject

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or the nature of the interpreting situation”). Another reason for language inhibition may be the linguistic behaviour of other people. What it means is that the certified interpreters admit to language inhibition caused by some comments made by native speakers of English, by means of which they try to undermine the certified interpreter’s competence (*e.g.*, “Behaviour of the participants of the trial”; “Usually if an educated native language user participates in the trial. He is always better”; “When a native English person tries to show that the certified translator does not understand the slang word used in his village in County X and shows in the courtroom that, for example, the funeral reception is known as “wEEght” *etc.*”).

Another psycho-affective factor which is mentioned by the respondents as the one ensuing in the context of a courtroom is stress which, like the above-presented factors making the courtroom a psycho-affectively demanding context, occurs quite frequently (64 certified interpreters (84%) declared it). Generally speaking, the respondents declared that their stress often results from internal stressors – the certified interpreters’ thinking and awareness of their deficits in, for example, target language specialised lexicon or domain-related knowledge. Some of them stated that they are aware that what

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may stress them out is the topic discussed during the trial, with which they are not familiar (*e.g.*, “During court interpretations, lack of familiarity with some concepts; in the case of other interpretations, lack of familiarity with the processes (*e.g.*, financial)”; “Unexpectedly appearing issues from other fields of knowledge than those previously announced (*e.g.*, the civil case concerns compensation for complicated medical complications)”). However, what is perhaps more common is the experience of stress resulting from the so-called external stressors, residing outside the interpreter himself/herself. One reason for this is the already mentioned imbalance of power. The interpreters notice that one party is stronger than the other in the language used – the statements made by the representatives of the judiciary may be stiff, complex, ambiguous, verbose or flowery, which makes interpreting difficult (*e.g.*, “Carelessness and inaccuracy of the statements of state officials leading to the ambiguity of meaning”). Moreover, among the most commonly enumerated extrinsic stressing agents are, of course, other people participating in the trial and their behaviours. For example, what stresses the respondents is the fact that the certified interpreters are not given due respect as legitimate participants in court proceedings, without whom the court-based event could not take place because of linguistic

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barriers (*e.g.*, “Lack of the parties’ understanding of the role of the interpreter”; “The behaviour of other people, lack of understanding of the character of our profession”; “I am particularly stressed by the lawyers of the parties – for the reasons I described earlier (their superior behaviours towards the certified interpreter and formulating linguistically complex sentences to undermine the interpreter’s competence or obstruct the interpreting process)”; “I associate the negative feelings mostly with courts because of the high level of stress (of all people present), stringent requirements, within which I do not really feel confident (the flowery speeches of attorneys, the domain issues – legal issues, where you can stand, when you can speak). Every so often there is audio- and video-recording of the interpreting performed at times totally with no preparation when the court refused access to the files. And, at the end, several months of waiting for very meagre remuneration”). Two answers provided by respondents to the question concerning the reasons for their stress are particularly interesting. The study participants highlighted that what brings about their stress is the fact that they are underpaid when interpreting for the court (*e.g.*, “The blatant behaviour of the court accounting department and the practice of some judges and registrars to give as little remuneration as possible or nothing at all; the



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interpreter should come to the court at her own cost and the invoice for the service is given half a year later”; “The awareness of the low salary for interpreting for the judicial authorities when, at the same time, it is possible to earn a decent wage and receive payment on time and the awareness of rates which have been unchanged since 2005<sup>1</sup> while the economic reality has changed dramatically cause stress and reluctance”).

As has been demonstrated, there are quite many reasons for which the certified interpreters participating in the study found the context of a courtroom psycho-affectively challenging. What comes to the fore from the above is that the courtroom, with its main actors who are often involved in the visible imbalance of power, sometimes aiming at downgrading the role of a certified interpreter, is undoubtedly a setting which can be regarded as a stimulus triggering the certified interpreter’s psycho-affectivity. This, in turn, can lead to some deficiencies in the quality of interpreting performance since a certified interpreter

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<sup>1</sup> In October 2019, the remuneration for certified translation and interpreting services provided for state institutions was officially increased. However, it is still below the free-market rates for such services.

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who experiences anxiety, fear, language inhibition or stress is less likely to provide a certified interpretation of acceptable quality. The awareness that a potential blunder made by the adversely psycho-affectively affected certified interpreter can change the course of court proceedings may demonstrate even more vividly that the courtroom context is psycho-affectively demanding and burdening.

#### **4.2. Notary's office contexts**

As many as 27 certified interpreters (35%) taking part in the study mentioned the notary's office as the most common certification-requiring setting in which they interpret consecutively. However, this is a negative psycho-affective context only for a rather small number of the respondents. Those who find it difficult claim that the setting of a notary's office can activate the experience of at least a few negative psycho-affective factors. Let us now take a look at those aspects of certified interpreting in a notary's office which may highlight that occasionally it can be a psycho-affectively demanding context.

As regards the respondents' experience of anxiety, there were just a few statements which could validate the statement that the notary public and

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his/her office can be the stimuli in the psycho-affective sequence with anxiety as the most prominent factor. While in the research corpus consisting of the study participants' opinions, there were no mentions of archaic anxiety, there were a few which point to existential anxiety. For instance, the certified interpreters develop performance anxiety in the notary's office context since they are uncertain of their lexical resources and thus may not perform linguistically as well as they would like (*e.g.*, "Predicting that there will be a sentence/vocabulary/phrase that I will not know and I will not be able to get out of it"; "The fact that I do not know the exact professional term (but it rarely happens and takes a short time)"). Sometimes, on the basis of the respondents' answers, it is difficult to show which type of existential anxiety develops because there are both the notary's office interpreting context and the people involved in it that may provoke such anxious feelings (*e.g.*, "Misleading the interlocutors, by misunderstanding the interlocutor, especially when he speaks quickly or with a strange accent or about the topic I am not really"). Interestingly enough, one respondent provided a few reasons for his/her anxiety, stating that it is both his/her thinking about his/her language

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skills<sup>2</sup> (*i.e.*, rumination), insufficient experience in interpreting as well as other people, including the notary public, that can be regarded as the stimuli to negative, anxious feelings (*e.g.*, “Most often because of the awareness of my imperfections and little practice in interpreting as such and they also result from the previous unpleasant experiences with officials, notaries who at all cost want to show their superiority/importance”).

Another psycho-affective factor, the experience of which contributes to the view that the notary’s office may occasionally be psycho-affectively challenging is language inhibition which is likely to appear when – like in the courtroom – the certified interpreter notices that the parties appearing before the notary public may directly or indirectly express some criticism of the interpreter’s language skills (*e.g.*, “Apprehension of the third parties’ negative assessment, suspecting the interpreter of having no competence. Fear of making a mistake, of interpreting imprecisely”).

The third psycho-affective factor, which is quite common is stress. It is a fact that this psychological and physiological reaction can ensue from a variety

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<sup>2</sup> This may also be related to language inhibition.

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of stimuli, of which the notary's office interactions can be an example. When asked about stress, the respondents stated that, in this particular institutional context, this psycho-affective factor may be related to some uncertainty of the interpreting act. To put it differently, it may happen that the attention during notary's office interpreting is directed to the themes the certified interpreter may not be familiar with and this can bring about stress (*e.g.*, "It happens (in the case of interpreting for companies/in a notary's office) that I am not very familiar with the subject matter discussed during the interpretation"; Lack of sufficient knowledge (or my subjective feeling of lack of knowledge) induces anxiety in me and thus stress"; "New vocabulary or concepts that I do not even know in my mother tongue"; "Vocabulary that appears unexpectedly outside the expected themes"). Like in the case of courtroom interpreting, in the context of a notary's office, there are several external stressors, among which are the interpreting act participants and their inappropriate behaviour(s), the topic, the exchange on which is interpreted and, generally speaking, the institutional embedding of the legal profession of a notary public (*e.g.*, "The behaviour of people – many times the parties have had a neglectful attitude towards my work (in the notary's office; I do not know where this comes from). Other things do not

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stress me”); “Context (notary’s office), subject matter of interpretation, uncertainty as to how the certified interpreter is treated”).

On the whole, although the respondents did not provide an extensive collection of answers in which they would refer to the notary’s office in which they work, just from the handful of the opinions quoted above it may be extrapolated that the notary’s office, with its constituent elements – the notary public, the appearing parties, the matters dealt with by means of the notary – at least for some certified interpreters – is likely to induce the certified interpreter’s negative psycho-affectivity and, for this reason, this context may be regarded as another psycho-affectively challenging setting for certified interpreters.

### **4.3. Police contexts**

Like the courtroom setting, the context of a police station may also be thought of as the environment which is likely to evoke a great deal of negative psycho-affectivity among the certified interpreters. However, since only nine respondents (12%) mentioned this context, the body of the textual material (in the forms of the open-ended answers to the questionnaire items) provided by the study

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participants on their psycho-affective experiences at the police station is less abundant. Nevertheless, certain trends which allow drawing some tentative conclusions about the police-related contexts as psycho-affectively difficult can be observed.

In the part of the questionnaire devoted to the study of the respondents' anxiety, there were just a few remarks pointing to the fact that indeed sometimes the certified interpreters working at a police station can experience the impact of this psycho-affective factor. One reason for which the negative experience of this psycho-affective factor may occur is that it happens quite often that the certified interpreter does not know whom he/she will be interpreting at a police station or what topics will be raised and, because of this, there is little room and time for preparation. Generally speaking, it may be assumed that anxiety, plus other adverse psycho-affective factors, can result from, as one certifier interpreter wrote, "the contact with the criminal world" (*e.g.*, "I never know whom I am to interpret – how that person speaks, how much that person understands. I often don't know the nationality of that person"; "Insufficient information about the topic of interpreting; awareness or knowledge that other less known topics can be raised, too"; "Lack of the possibility of preparation"; "Unfamiliarity

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with the topic which will require interpreting, no possibility for 100% preparation”; “Court and the police – you never know what to expect”).

The context of a police station is also the institutional setting, in which the certified interpreters can experience fear. At times, they have to work for the police by mediating linguistically between police officers/interrogators and those accused of some crime/the interrogated. The latter can exhibit some aggressive behaviours, threatening in this way other people involved in the bilingual interrogation (*e.g.*, “Two cases of fear are as follows: a Swede was stopped by border guards while smuggling (he was intensively waving his arms and violating my personal space) and an incarcerated English recidivist engaging in ruthless car thefts. Then the thought came to me that if they wanted it, they could hurt me...”).

The respondents’ language inhibition can also be linked, at least partially, to the context of police interpreting but, unfortunately, the certified interpreters participating in the study did not offer much explanation why it may happen during police-setting interpreting. Therefore, it may also be hypothesised that certified interpreters may again become intimidated by other people (*e.g.*, native



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speakers of English), the apparent imbalance of power or being in the centre of “the criminal world”.

The police context of interpreting is often not the most convenient for certified interpreters for one more reason – the low pay they receive for interpreting for the police brings about their demotivation. Thus, like in courtroom interpreting, the certified interpreters experience a low level of achievement motivation because they realise they will not be adequately remunerated for their services. It is perhaps only thanks to their professional attitude and the statutory obligation imposed on them by the Polish Act on the Profession of a Certified Translator (2004) that they perform such services (*e.g.*, “Salary to a small extent because it is too low. Rather, a sense of indispensability in performing this function [of a certified interpreter] and professionalism in its performance”; “In the case of orders from outside the circle of “statutory obligation”, the motivating factor is the financial factor, while the rest – only the statutory obligation”).

The final factor which even more substantially corroborates the statement that the police setting is a psycho-affectively challenging context is that it is rarely stress-free. When asked about why they

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become stressed during interpreting for the police, the respondents provided several causes. One reason for this is the language component – some speakers participating in such interpreting may speak a strange accent, too fast or use uncommon phrases (*e.g.*, “Lack of cooperation (too fast speech), awareness of responsibility for my words”). Secondly, the certified interpreters often mentioned the so-called human factor, which means that they are stressed by the linguistic (*e.g.*, comments) and non-linguistic behaviours of the people participating in a given interpreting act, including those belonging to the authorities – police officers (*e.g.*, “Other people’s behaviour, lack of culture, male chauvinistic remarks I heard at the police station and during other interpretations (*e.g.*, I was called “a girl” – I was 36 years old, I interpreted negotiations between two big companies and after hearing such words I felt like going out and slamming the door), lack of a microphone sometimes and the need to shout to the whole room”; “Representatives of the authorities, subject matter of the interpretation”; “The behaviour of other people, lack of understanding of the character of our profession”; “Sometimes the behaviour of the persons interrogated (several times I had the opportunity to experience more or less disguised threats)”). Thirdly, even working conditions can lead to the

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certified interpreters' experience of stress. Small rooms in which interrogations take place, no access to fresh air, malfunctioning equipment (*e.g.*, recording devices) or too many people in one room can all invoke and intensify the negative experience of stress (*e.g.*, “Noise (*e.g.*, when I am surrounded by other people talking to one another), interjections by other people”; “Sometimes my discomfort and stress are caused by working conditions. Recently I was interpreting at the police station for 7.5 hours at night and nobody even offered me a glass of water (I did not take it with me because it was supposed to be there two–three hours long) although in the meantime the officer on duty brought tea several times to the policeman who interrogated the injured Pakistanis. They were also not offered anything to drink”; “Sometimes unfavourable working conditions at the police station or in the court – in a cramped, stuffy room, *e.g.*, for several hours without the possibility of drinking water. It is impossible to predict when the interpretation will end”; “Working conditions, a few other people in one room at the police station – it is loud, it is not possible to focus, the time is late, the accused often use vulgarisms”).

All the arguments provided above, supported by the certified interpreters' opinions excerpted from the research corpus, seem to suffice to state that the

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police-related contexts are psycho-affectively challenging or even difficult and burdening for the certified interpreters. As illuminated above, the certified interpreter's psycho-affectivity can be activated by a whole panoply of stimuli. Perhaps, a good summary of the argumentation presented above would be the words written by one study participant about why he/she feels stressed in the police context: "There are (police, prosecutor's office, court) very unpleasant cases, related to human tragedies. They always cause stress and some discomfort".

#### **4.4. Medical contexts**

One more context which is worth outlining here is the context of medical interpreting. In fact, in the study, it was included in the category of other types of certified interpreting (with five respondents (7%) marking this option<sup>3</sup>). Actually, only one certified interpreter decided to share his/her views on his/her

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<sup>3</sup> Other types which are not discussed in this articles because, as emerged from the study, they are not so much psycho-affectively difficult and, in fact, the respondents declared more positive experiences there, were interpreting for private companies (five respondents; 7%) and registry office interpreting (10 respondents; 13%).

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experience of medical interpreting. The information obtained is interesting and therefore worth discussing. Moreover, the data would make it clear that hospitals are highly psycho-affectively burdening settings for interpreting.

In the questionnaire part devoted to anxiety, the certified interpreter stated that what he/she experiences is not only anxiety (with its subjective than objective threat) but also fear with the objectively existing danger in the form of a potential demise of a patient. Thus, the respondent remarked that potential medical complications are those stimuli which are responsible for that person's experience of anxiety and stress (*i.e.*, “When interpreting during deliveries, I start to feel the patient's fear; if there are complications and we suddenly find ourselves together in the operating room”).

Moreover, the same certified interpreter spoke about the development of language inhibition resulting from the medical context in which he/she is obliged to provide interpretation. Consequently, lexical problems can crop up and, instead of a specialised lexical item, the interpreter uses some circumlocutions (*i.e.*, “My mind locks up and does not give me professional vocabulary, I just have to

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discuss it. For example, the doctor yells that he must use forceps, and I have shaking hands and a metaphorical hole in the head, so instead of telling the patient the word “forceps”, I have to describe the device to grip the child’s head and remove it from the birth canal”).

Finally, along with anxiety, fear and language inhibition, there emerges stress. Generally speaking, interpreting in such sensitive medical contexts is bound to be a stressful activity so it is not surprising that this psycho-affective factor is experienced by the certified interpreter. The potential complications and the unpredictability of events which may unfold, for instance, in an operating theatre, can all add to the experience of distress (*i.e.*, “Unknown unknowns – the unpredictability of events in the operating room in an obstetric ward”).

All in all, although the research material obtained in the course of the study on the Polish-English certified interpreters regarding the medical context as psycho-affectively difficult is not rich, the hospital environment is definitely one of such emotionally engaging settings with quite many stimuli which may trigger the experience of the negative psycho-affective factors, of which anxiety,

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fear, language inhibition and stress seem to be prevalent.

## **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

As has been shown in this article, Polish-English certified interpreters work in quite many contexts since their presence is officially obligatory during various events in which people of different linguistic origins participate. Even though they may be able to communicate, the certified interpreter is needed to mediate between them linguistically and to sanction the validity of, for instance, certain legal events and acts. However, as discussed above, some of these contexts can be psycho-affectively challenging, difficult and burdening as they activate the certified interpreters' psycho-affectivity. To put it differently, in the contexts of a courtroom, notary's office, police station or hospital, certified interpreters can experience the negative impact of their psycho-affective factors.

The study presented in this article has brought to light that the most commonly experienced adversely affecting psycho-affective factors in the above-discussed psycho-affectively challenging contexts are anxiety, language inhibition and stress. Fear may also ensue in specific contexts (*e.g.*, during a trial,

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police interrogation, surgery or child delivery). However, because of the nature of its stimulus, it is not as frequent as the other three. Of course, due to space limitations of this article, the issue of other factors, especially those whose influence is more positive than negative (*e.g.*, self-esteem or personality dimension), and their interrelations has been left unaddressed here although even from the cursory analysis of the respondents' statements it transpires that they also emerge during interpreting in the contexts presented above.

On the whole, it can be concluded that the profession of a certified interpreter involves interpreting in psycho-affectively challenging contexts. Although the extensive experience in certified interpreting can indubitably help overcome the negative impact the psycho-affective factors can have on the manners of delivering certified interpreting, many interpreters still admit that some contexts are more likely to trigger their negative emotions, feelings, attitudes and states than others and among such settings are the four environments discussed in this paper.



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