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Ethnicity and interpreting in public sector

This presentation is based on an ongoing research project "Professionalism and language nuances in interpreted witness testimonies" (in cooperation with professor Hanne Skaaden Oslo University College). The project is a case study of a war crime case (Bosnia 1992-1996) from Oslo municipal court in 2008. The analyzed material consists of approximately 130 hours of recorded proceedings, observation notes and interviews. During the analysis of the material it became obvious that different participants constructed ethnicity in different ways. Many of these constructions were related to trust issues. Even though the conflict took place in 1992, the witnesses did not trust interpreters from other ethnic groups than their own. The personal trust was thus foregrounded and the professional trust was backgrounded. This had an impact on both lawyers and interpreters' professionalism. In this presentation I will: 1. describe how ethnicity was constructed in the war crime case by different participants 2. point at the consequences of different constructions of ethnicity 3. describe strategies that both interpreters and professionals can use in cases in which constructions of ethnicity can influence their professionalism.