

## SPECIFIC COMPETENCES OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETERS

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### Abstract

Simultaneous interpreting (SI) stands as a pinnacle of cognitive and linguistic prowess, demanding a unique constellation of competences that extends far beyond mere bilingualism. This article delves into the intricate web of specific competences that define a proficient simultaneous interpreter. Drawing on cognitive psychology, linguistics, interpreting studies, and practical experience, we examine the multifaceted nature of these competences, categorizing them into linguistic, cognitive, technical, strategic, and inter-personal domains. The article will also explore the acquisition and development of these competences through training and experience, and consider how technological advancements are shaping the future of interpreting competence.

### Keywords

simultaneous interpreting, interpreting competence, linguistic competence, cognitive competence, technical competence, strategic competence, interpersonal competence, interpreter training, expertise, skill acquisition, interpreting studies, language processing.

**Introduction.** Simultaneous interpreters are often described as “cognitive athletes,” a fitting analogy that captures the intense mental agility and stamina required to perform this demanding task. They are not merely conduits of language; they are active processors, analyzers, synthesizers, and communicators who must seamlessly navigate the complexities of intercultural communication in real-time. The specific competences that enable them to perform this role effectively encompass a diverse range of skills and knowledge, extending far beyond simply knowing two languages.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive exploration of the specific competences that underpin successful simultaneous interpreting. We will

move beyond simplistic notions of bilingualism and examine the intricate interplay of linguistic, cognitive, technical, strategic, and interpersonal skills that define a proficient simultaneous interpreter. Understanding these competences is crucial for effective interpreter training, professional development, and the continued advancement of the field of interpreting studies.

Defining interpreting competence is a complex undertaking, as it encompasses a multitude of interwoven skills and knowledge. For the purpose of this article, we adopt a multidimensional framework that categorizes these competences into the following domains:

**Linguistic Competence:** This refers to the interpreter's mastery of both the source and target languages, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. It includes not only a broad vocabulary base but also the ability to understand subtle nuances of meaning, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references.

**Cognitive Competence:** This domain encompasses the cognitive abilities that are essential for processing, storing, and retrieving information during the interpreting process. Key cognitive competences include attention, memory (short-term, working, and long-term), executive functions, and cognitive flexibility.

**Technical Competence:** This refers to the interpreter's ability to use and manage the technical equipment and resources required for simultaneous interpreting, such as headsets, microphones, consoles, and computer-assisted interpreting (CAI) tools.

**Strategic Competence:** This domain encompasses the interpreter's ability to plan, monitor, and adapt their interpreting strategies based on the specific context and challenges they face. It includes skills such as anticipation, simplification, compensation, and risk-taking.

**Interpersonal Competence:** This refers to the interpreter's ability to interact effectively with speakers, audience members, and other professionals in a variety of communication settings. It includes skills such as active listening, nonverbal communication, cultural sensitivity, and ethical awareness.

Each of these domains will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

While fluency in both the source and target languages is a fundamental requirement for simultaneous interpreting, linguistic competence extends far beyond mere bilingualism. It encompasses a deep understanding of the nuances of each language, including:

Interpreters must possess a vast and readily accessible vocabulary in both languages, including specialized terminology relevant to various subject matters.

They must also be able to quickly identify and understand unfamiliar terms and phrases, using contextual cues and reference materials as needed.

A strong command of grammar and syntax is essential for accurately decoding the source language message and producing grammatically correct and fluent target language output. Interpreters must be able to recognize and process complex sentence structures, understand grammatical relationships, and avoid errors in verb tense, agreement, and word order.

Interpreters must be able to understand the literal meaning of words and sentences (semantics), as well as the intended meaning of the speaker, taking into account the context, speaker's intentions, and social conventions (pragmatics). They must be able to identify and resolve ambiguities, interpret figurative language, and understand subtle nuances of meaning.

Interpreters must be able to analyze the structure and organization of the discourse, identifying the main ideas, supporting details, and logical relationships between different parts of the message. They must also be able to recognize different discourse styles and adapt their interpreting strategies accordingly.

Interpreters must be familiar with the cultural references, idioms, and colloquial expressions that are common in both languages. They must be able to understand the intended meaning of these expressions and translate them accurately and appropriately for the target audience.

Cognitive competence refers to the underlying cognitive abilities that support the interpreting process. These abilities are essential for processing, storing, and retrieving information during the demanding task of simultaneous interpreting.

**Selective Attention:** The ability to focus on relevant information and filter out distractions is crucial. Interpreters must selectively attend to the speaker's message, even amidst noise, visual distractions, and competing thoughts.

**Sustained Attention:** The ability to maintain focus for extended periods is equally important. Simultaneous interpreting often requires sustained attention for hours at a time, which can be mentally taxing.

**Divided Attention:** While selective and sustained attention are crucial, divided attention also comes into play, as interpreters must simultaneously listen to the speaker and monitor their own output.

**STM** allows the interpreter to briefly hold information in mind before processing it. It is essential for remembering the words, phrases, and ideas that have just been spoken.

**WM** is a more complex system that allows the interpreter to manipulate and transform information. It is used to hold the source language message in mind while formulating the target language equivalent.

LTM provides the interpreter with a vast store of knowledge about language, culture, and the world. This knowledge is essential for understanding the speaker's message and producing accurate and appropriate translations.

The ability to plan and organize the interpreting process is essential for managing the cognitive load and ensuring accuracy.

Interpreters must constantly monitor their own performance, listening critically to their target language output and identifying any errors or inconsistencies.

The ability to suppress irrelevant thoughts and distractions is crucial for maintaining focus and preventing interference.

The ability to switch between different tasks and adapt to changing circumstances is essential for dealing with the unexpected challenges that can arise during simultaneous interpreting.

Technical competence refers to the interpreter's ability to use and manage the technical equipment and resources required for simultaneous interpreting. This includes:

Interpreters must be able to use headsets and microphones effectively, ensuring clear and reliable audio transmission. They must also be able to troubleshoot common technical problems, such as feedback, static, and signal loss.

Interpreters must be familiar with the operation of interpreting consoles, which allow them to control the audio levels, select the appropriate language channel, and communicate with the technician.

CAI tools, such as terminology databases, online dictionaries, and speech recognition software, can provide interpreters with quick access to information and support their memory and processing capabilities. Interpreters must be able to use these tools effectively and adapt their strategies accordingly.

With the increasing prevalence of remote interpreting, interpreters must be proficient in using various remote interpreting platforms, ensuring high-quality audio and video transmission, and effectively managing the remote communication environment.

Strategic competence encompasses the interpreter's ability to plan, monitor, and adapt their interpreting strategies based on the specific context and challenges they face. This involves:

- Thorough preparation is essential for successful simultaneous interpreting. This includes researching the topic, familiarizing oneself with the speaker's style, and anticipating potential challenges.



- Skilled interpreters actively anticipate and predict upcoming information in the source language message, based on their knowledge of the topic, speaker style, and linguistic patterns.

- In situations where the source language message is highly complex or dense, interpreters may need to simplify the target language output to ensure clarity and comprehensibility.

- When faced with gaps in their knowledge or comprehension, interpreters may employ compensatory strategies to fill in the missing information, using contextual cues, making educated guesses, or relying on their general knowledge of the topic.

- At times, interpreters may need to take risks to maintain fluency and avoid getting bogged down in details, making educated guesses or choosing less-than-perfect translations.

- Interpreters must constantly monitor their own performance, listening critically to their target language output and identifying any errors or inconsistencies, and then correcting those errors as quickly and unobtrusively as possible.

Interpersonal competence refers to the interpreter's ability to interact effectively with speakers, audience members, and other professionals in a variety of communication settings. This includes:

- Paying full attention to the speaker, both verbally and nonverbally, and demonstrating genuine interest in their message.

- Using appropriate body language, facial expressions, and eye contact to convey empathy, understanding, and professionalism.

- Understanding and respecting the cultural norms and values of the speaker and audience, and adapting communication styles accordingly.

- Adhering to the ethical code of conduct for interpreters, maintaining confidentiality, and avoiding conflicts of interest.

- Collaborating effectively with other interpreters, technicians, and event organizers to ensure a smooth and successful event.

The specific competences required for simultaneous interpreting are not innate; they are acquired and developed through a combination of formal training, practical experience, and ongoing professional development.

High-quality interpreter training programs provide students with a solid foundation in linguistics, cognitive psychology, interpreting theory, and practical skills. These programs should include extensive practice in simulated interpreting scenarios, with feedback from experienced instructors.

There is no substitute for real-world experience. Novice interpreters should seek opportunities to practice their skills in a variety of settings, starting with less demanding assignments and gradually progressing to more complex and challenging ones.

Experienced interpreters can provide valuable guidance, support, and feedback to novice interpreters, helping them to develop their skills and navigate the challenges of the profession.

The field of interpreting is constantly evolving, so interpreters must engage in ongoing professional development to stay up-to-date on the latest research, best practices, and technological advancements. This can include attending workshops, conferences, and online courses.

Regularly reflecting on one's own performance and analyzing strengths and weaknesses is a critical component of continuous improvement.

Technological advancements are not only changing the tools used by interpreters but also the very nature of interpreting competence.

Interpreters must be able to adapt to new technologies quickly and efficiently, integrating them into their workflow and leveraging them to enhance their performance.

With the rise of machine translation and automatic speech recognition, interpreters must be able to critically evaluate the output of these technologies and use them judiciously, while always maintaining human oversight and control.

Interpreters need strong digital literacy skills to manage online research, communicate with clients and colleagues, and navigate the increasingly digital world of interpreting.

The specific competences required for simultaneous interpreting are multifaceted and ever-evolving. While linguistic and cognitive abilities remain fundamental, technical skills, strategic awareness, and interpersonal competence are also essential for success in this demanding profession. By adopting a multidimensional framework and investing in ongoing training, professional development, and self-reflection, interpreters can cultivate the necessary competences to navigate the complexities of intercultural communication and serve as effective bridges between languages and cultures. The future of interpreting competence will undoubtedly be shaped by technological advancements, requiring interpreters to embrace lifelong learning and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of the profession. It's no longer enough to simply be bilingual; the modern simultaneous interpreter must be a cognitive athlete, a skilled technician, a strategic thinker, and an effective communicator, all rolled into one. The continuous

refinement and expansion of these competencies are essential for ensuring high-quality interpreting services in an increasingly interconnected world.

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