

Professional Consecutive vs. Simultaneous Interpreters' Required Competence Catalogue

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Abstract

This piece of research will address the concept of professional consecutive vs. simultaneous interpreters' required competence. The concept of competence denotes a set of aptitudes and expertise that professional consecutive and simultaneous interpreters must have a good command of them in order to fulfill their target language communicative goals. Professional Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreters (PCSI) work within the realm of interlingual communication which requires certain sorts of oral communicative competences in the working languages, intellectual merits, and certain cognitive and meta-cognitive skills. The optimal required competence catalogue for PCSIs has always been on-the-spot and controversial. Accordingly, this study has been designed to look into this issue from diverse angles using the comparative descriptive tool of analysis to have a broader image of what is the optimal competence catalogue required for PCSIs.

Keywords: Language competence, Interpretation competence, Models of Interpretation Competence.

Introduction

Professional interpreters are deemed to be mediators between two languages; source language (SL) and target language (TL). In principle, they must grasp linguistic and other sub-linguistic competences to fulfill their communicative tasks. In 1965, the concept of competence was first tackled by some formal linguists (e.g. Noam Chomsky) whose main interest at that phase was to define linguistic competence. In the last few decades, research into interpretation competence theories has prospered manifestly in the general sense. Nevertheless, some features of this field are still thrust and questionable, namely, the optimal required competence catalogue for professional consecutive vs. simultaneous interpreters (PCSI). Competence in the field of interpretation is crucial, since it mirrors the output of interpreters' training, experience, as well as their skills and aptitudes to embark on this profession. Recently, Many theorists have developed a variety of models of interpreters' competences paying more attention to the required competences for professional interpreters (e.g. Gile, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009; Deborah and Carol 2003; Al-Salman and AL-Khanji 2002; Nolan, 2005; Kermis, 2008). This may raise two important questions; is there a clear cut catalogue of PCSIs required competence? Are the required competences for professional consecutive interpreters the same as required for simultaneous interpreters?

In what follows, we will present some salient definitions and classifications of interpretation competence, then; look at some traditional and diachronic views in addition to some moot points among interpretation scholars on the models of professional interpreters' competence. Second, we describe and compare comparatively interpretation scholars and neurolinguists' stands of competence. After that a synoptic catalogue of PCSIs required competence will be put forward in an attempt to answer the aforementioned questions.

Interpretation Competence Defined, Classified and Modelled

Interpreting profession is demanding; it requires a high level of proficiency in the working languages (SL and TL). This proficiency must base on several types of competence. There is no rigorous definition of competence, since this issue has been approached in many different trends whose main focus was to define and determine what the language competences are. Chomsky (1965) reveals that linguistic competence is the perfect knowledge of an ideal user of the language in a homogeneous speech community. His well-known distinction between language competence (the speaker-listener's knowledge of language) and language performance (the actual use of language knowledge in real life situations) spurs many scholars' interests to find out what are the exact parameters of this perfect knowledge (competence). During the era ranging from 1970s to 1980s, many applied linguists with a chief interest in the theory of language acquisition and the theory of language testing gave their significant contribution to the development of the controversial concept of competence (Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007).

The applied linguists Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) state that communicative competences are classified into (1) grammatical competence (e.g. language learner's knowledge of morphology, phonology, syntax, and so forth), (2) sociolinguistic competence (e.g. discorsal and pragmatic competence), (3) strategic competence. Neubert (1994, p. 412), on the other hand, offers three main components of competence; language

competence, subject-matter competence and transfer competence. Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2007) suggest that actional competence (the ability to comprehend, analyze and produce all significant speech acts and speech act sets) should also be included in communicative competence. These scholars made two significant changes in the terminology of the Canale-Swain's standpoint of competence (1980): (1) that sociolinguistic competence can be modified into sociocultural competence (the cultural knowledge needed to interpret effectively) and (2) that grammatical competence can be re-labeled as linguistic competence to explicitly embrace sound system and lexicon, as well as grammar (e.g. syntax and morphology) (p. 42).

According to Hymes (1992), communicative competence can be defined as the communication abilities of language users. Hymes also revealed that this competence is the sum of convergence of two developments: (1) transformational generative grammar, (2) ethnography of communication. Similarly, some translation and interpretation scholars provided some definitions of the concept competence. For instance, Hurtado Albir defined it as “the ability of knowing how to translate” (1996, p. 48).

Gile's approach (2004) in addressing interpreters' required competences was totally different from others; he asserts on the kinship and partnership between translation and interpretation though the process is different, thus, he categorizes the required competences based on the nature of differences between interpretation and translation process which are as follows:

- 1) Technical constraints' differences: translators usually have longer time to deal with the problems encountered, whereas interpreters only have a few seconds or minutes depending on whether they are working in simultaneous or in a consecutive mode.
- 2) Working environment differences: In conference interpreting, stress may originate in stage fright at high-level meetings or when interpreting for the media, especially in view of the fact that, unlike translators, interpreters cannot correct their initial utterance, and also in the physical environment in the booth. In court interpreting and dialogue interpreting of various types, for instance, much stress is inherent due to the situation environment. conference interpreting, Gile argues, is often associated with an exciting, sometimes glamorous working environment: presidential palaces, international conferences on highly visible, highly topical issues and events, international festivals and sports events, the possibility of meeting and sometimes talking face-to-face with well-known personalities.
- 3) Product differences: The product of interpretation is an oral, which is mentally processed by the listener as soon as it is heard (or seen), at a rate determined by its rate of delivery, generally in the original communication situation. It is highly personal, as its perception by the user of the interpreting service depends not only on its content and linguistic choices in terms of ‘words’ but also on the quality of the interpreter’s voice and on various delivery parameters, including accent, intonation, pauses, articulation speed, etc., Whereas the product of translation is a written text, which is read at the speed chosen by the reader, as many times as the reader wishes and potentially in any communication or non-communication situation.
- 4) Skills and personality differences: Both translators and interpreters have to be familiar with the respective norms of their professional environments with respect to the requirements of professional translation/interpretation. This includes the acceptability and relative merits of various strategies to help them cope with translation/interpretation problems. Translators

are required to produce editorially acceptable written text, while interpreters produce spoken text for immediate processing by listeners. Translators, therefore, have to be good writers and not necessarily good speakers, while interpreters have to be good speakers (and, in dialogue interpreting, good social mediators) but not necessarily good writers. Interpreters have to master the oral form of their passive languages, including various accents, well enough to process them rapidly and without difficulty. (Gile, 1995) (as cited in Gile, 2004, pp. 12-13).

Since the mid 1990s, deep research into interpretation competence has prospered creatively addressing novel aspects of the nature of interpretation and the interpreters' required skills and competences. Kalina and Köln (2000) laid emphasis on the interpreters' goal-oriented approach to find out more about the competences required for interpreters. They believed that the concept of interpreters' required competence includes text production and text processing skills. According to Kalina and Köln, this distinction is depicted from interpreters' teaching and training methodology. Though this distinction of competence looks innovative, it lacks clear connections on the nature of integration of these skills particularly in the problem solving mechanism.

Al Salman and Al Khanji (2002, p. 608) catalog the following model of linguistic and non-linguistic skills and competences as crucial for interpreters:

- 1) Mastery of the active language,
- 2) Solid background of general knowledge,
- 3) Some personal qualities like the faculty of analysis and synthesis, the ability to intuit meaning, the capacity to adapt immediately to change in subject matter and different speakers and situations.
- 4) Good short and long term memory,
- 5) The ability to concentrate, a gift for public speaking, and physical endurance and good nerves.

If we scrutinize Al-Salman and Al-Khanji's model, we will clearly notice that they mingled competences and skills with each other though they are truly different. Deborah and Carol (2003), correspondingly, assert on the integration between interpreters skills and interactional interpretive setting within the training context. They stress on the importance of the pathology of interpreters' speech problems. Finally and based on the interpretation task type, they formulated the competences required for interpreters. Meaning that, each interpretative type calls for a certificate of certain competences. For instance, Medical interpretation requires the following competences:

- 1) Basic linguistic proficiency
- 2) Recognition of ethical issues
- 3) Standards
- 4) Decision-making
- 5) Cultural competence in both cultures
- 6) Health care terminology
- 7) Integrated interpretation skills
- 8) Ability to interpret both oral and written directions

While educational specialized interpreters calls for other competences:

- 1) Knowledge of the purposes, procedures, and goals of the meeting, tests, and treatment.
- 2) An understanding of the need for confidentiality
- 3) Comprehension of school policies and procedures
- 4) Appropriate dress
- 5) Sensitivity to the issues and needs of the participants (Cheng, 1991) (as cited in Deborah and Carol 2003, p. 79).

So, they classified competences based on the SL nature and specialty. They further add that these competences must be attested by certificates from specialized agencies before interpreters embark on their profession (Deborah & Carol, p. 78-80). However, they also mingled competences and skills in their model.

Consecutive interpreters, Gile (2005) reveals, work respectively in two major phases: (1) the listening phase in which they listen attentively to the speaker and take notes, (2) the reformulation phase in which they produce the TL rendition of the speech as the speaker is waiting for them to end before resuming her/his speech. Accordingly, Gile (2005) argues that processing capacity (PC) requirements in the first phase *listening phase* are almost shared with simultaneous interpreting between Listening and analysis, Memory, and production efforts. Consequently, the difference is only in note taking and time lag caused by it, whereas in simultaneous interpreting PC along with cognitive efforts work instantly. In the second phase *reformulation phase*, Gile adds, the consecutive interpreters read his/her notes, reconstruct the speech through the long term memory with the help of the notes, and produce the TL version. Therefore, we can surmise that long term memory is an essential demand for consecutive interpreters along with pacing note taking, listening, and message production.

Interpreters must master two basic competences for fulfilling their TL communicative goals. These two basic competences are procedural knowledge (knowledge of how to perform perfect production which depends heavily on the mastery of connections between stimuli, responses and cognitive skills), the second basic knowledge is the declarative/descriptive knowledge which entails basic information for certain tasks and situations (Riccardi, 2005). Riccardi (2005) also elaborated on the nature of integration between these two basic competences by clarifying that while knowledge about grammatical rules is declarative, the natural application of these rules is procedural. This highlights the significance of procedural knowledge over declarative knowledge, because it is the means of reflecting declarative knowledge which underpins the significance of strategic competence in interpretation as a procedural competence in the course of interpretation.

Other interpretation scholars, on the other hand, started to broaden their research into interpreters' required competence by investigating the role of non-verbal communication situational cues in interpretation (Cecot, 2005; Zhe, 2007). Nonverbal communication, or paralinguistic features as referred by other scholars, may take several forms (e.g. gestures, body postures, intonation, etc.) each of which clarifies or replaces a particular part of the verbal communication; it includes many more elements than one may envisage at first. Therefore, Zhe (2007) asserts on the importance of paralinguistic or non-verbal communication for professional interpreters. When interpreters are in a working environment where the audience will not see them, paralinguistic or non-verbal communication may represent a problem, as the audience

might even be declined to assume that the interpreters have not done a good job. Thus, interpreters need to make sense of paralinguistic/non-verbal communication cues in the course of interpretation (Zhe, 2007). He further adds that intelligence and emotional intelligence are indispensable for interpreting non-verbal elements. Many emotional expressions may appear to be displayed universally. However, non-verbal behavior varies across cultures. In the realm of paralinguistic/nonverbal communication, predictability is exceedingly important for interpreters. Consequently, predictability of meaning in the interpretation is the sum of interpreter's general cultural knowledge and their ability to interpret paralinguistic/non-verbal communication (Zhe, 2007).

Kermis (2008) proposed the following model of competencies required for professional interpreters as an attempt to clarify how demanding interpretation profession is:

Professional Interpreters' Competence

Common

- 1) Linguistic Competence
- 2) Comprehension Competence
- 3) Production Competence
- 4) Subject Area Competence
- 5) Cultural Competence

Specific

- 1) General Knowledge
- 2) Memory Skills
- 3) Public Speaking
- 4) Moral Competence
- 5) Stress Tolerance

(Kermis, 2008: 46)

In her model, Kermis categorized professional interpreters' required competence into two major sets; (1) common competences which could be shared with professional translators and (2) distinctive competences for professional interpreters. This has been an ingenious attempt. Nevertheless, Upon deep scrutiny of Kermis' standpoint of interpreters' required competence, it turns out that Kermis mixed skills and competences together. For instance, stress tolerance and memory skills have been classified as competences though they are skills as outlined by Kermis herself. They could be technically grouped into physical and cognitive skills respectively. Even if other interpretation scholars will consider them as competences, they could be classified under the cognitive and physical competence. Moreover, Kermis common competences for interpreters lack key competences essential for both professional interpreters; for instance, strategic competence is crucial and essential competence for interpreters (Celce-Murcia et al. 2007; Al-Khanji et al. 2000). Another common competence missed by the Kermis' model is the ethical viability/neutrality, as this issue is critical to the interpretation profession (National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services, 2007; Baker and Maier, 2011).

Some psycholinguists and interpretation scholars have questioned about the role of interpreter's personality in the course of interpretation (Leontiev, 1981; Nolan, 2005). The

concept of personality has existed in the field of psychology almost from the moment it appeared as a science; this concept is integrated of mental features and a combination of individual characteristics. Some psychologists generally believe that personality traits determine the concrete behavior and beliefs of mankind (Leontiev, 1981). According to Leontiev, there are other valuable factors other than the integration between mental features and the combination of individual characteristics; these valuable factors are motives of activity which probably play a fundamental role in personalities. She validates this notion by exemplifying that:

When a child's personality is being formed, a great deal depends on the motives which condition the activities of the adults surrounding him and on the motives and aims set for the child...the child must be taught to evaluate his behavior, and that of others, against the yardstick of their motives (p. 19).

It seems that Leontiev's view of personality in language production and learning is deemed to be innate in mankind what is important, then, is the motivation of these mental features and the combination of individual characteristics to better shape the personal traits intended for effective language production and learning. However, some scholars (e.g. Nolan, 2005) and despite of the dissimilar terminologies share the basic idea with Leontiev by asserting on the role of willingness in the effective communication process.

Nolan (2005) argues that interpreters must adapt their willingness to learn by keeping up today's pace of time in interpretation, such as knowledge of new events, neologism or any new language use in the working languages. In this sense, interpreters might be compared with physicians who must keep abreast with any changes in his/her medical domain. Moreover, He also adds that another vital personality trait interpreters must clasp is public speaking skill. Nolan asserts on this trait as a result of his observation that many expert interpreters may freeze up and mentally blocked when they are on the stage, under lights, facing the audience, or interpreting for very important persons. Nolan's view is made with special reference to conference interpreters.

In closing, research into interpreters' skills and competences in the general sense has rapidly increased over the past decades. though many scholars vary in their understanding and access of the definition and classification of interpretation competence, they share one basic point that competence is based primarily on linguistic competence in the SL and TL. What differs is the rigorous details; minor or sub competences such as, cultural, subject-matter, transfer, strategic and so forth. On the other hand, other potential distinctive competences between consecutive vs. simultaneous could be the span of memory (e.g. short/long term memory) and concentration competence or processing capacity (PC) as referred by Gile (2009) which entails that consecutive interpreters must have the competence of pacing note-taking intervals with listening and production in consecutive interpreting, where as in simultaneous interpreting the pacing competence include listening, comprehending and coordination, and TL oral production simultaneously without any time lag.

Neuroscientists and Neurolinguists' Viewpoint of Competence

To have an overall view of interpreters' competence, my feeling is that we should look at this issue from different angles by addressing Neuroscientists and Neurolinguists' viewpoint of competence. Neuroscientists and Neurolinguists have accumulated a substantial body of research on the nature of humans' brain structure (e.g. individuals' personal cognitive differences, memory

strength span, analyzing and comprehension, concentration, and language response/reaction systems) to investigate how communication competence is set, developed, retained, interrelated, activated, deactivated and so forth. These matters perplexed them and made them strive to identify these areas and their functions in communication aptitudes.

Neuroscientists and Neurolinguists, using especial empirical tests, argue that the left hemisphere is responsible for logical thought and language functions (e.g. speech, song, and writing). This indicates that there are cerebral areas in the left hemisphere that control speech. The right hemisphere is controlled by the left hemisphere, and the right is in charge of such things as the spatial-relation skills, the perception of rhythm, and abstract or intuitive thought. They also stated that a particular part of the brain can be detected as a hint of higher intelligence as it has developed later in evolution than other parts; this part is called the cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex is responsible for higher intellectual functions in addition to language functions (Steinberg, Nagata, and Aline. 2001).

Finally and based on their ad hoc experimental tests, they proposed the following classification that almost demonstrates areas responsible for language competence in conjunction with their functions:

- 1) Frontal Lobe - Plays an important role in reasoning, planning, parts of speech and movement (motor cortex), emotions, and problem-solving.
- 2) Parietal Lobe – Responsible for the perception of stimuli related to touch, pressure, temperature, and pain.
- 3) Temporal Lobe – Involved in the perception and recognition of auditory stimuli (hearing) and memory.
- 4) Occipital Lobe - Concerned with many aspects of vision.
- 5) Brainstem – Part of the brain that connects to the spinal cord. The brain stem controls functions such as heart rate, breathing, digestive processes, and sleeping.
- 6) Cerebellum – Coordinates the brain's instructions for skilled, repetitive movements, and helps maintain balance and posture.
- 7) Wernicke's area – The part of the brain that is important in language development.
- 8) Broca's area – The part of the brain important for speech. (Virtual Labs Interactive Media (2007) Stanford University)

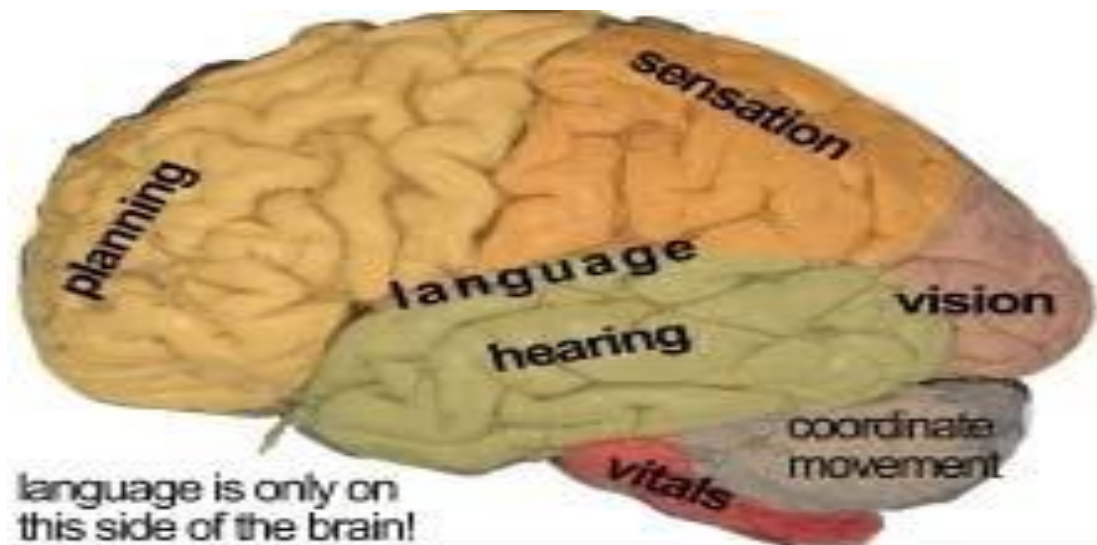


Figure 1 Language/communication competence areas and functions in mind Adapted from Virtual Labs Interactive Media (2007) Stanford University

Empirical experimental studies recently contended that both cerebral hemispheres' massive and synchronized activation is required when interpreters are engaged in the course of simultaneous interpretation (Tommola, 2000, 2001) (cited in Kapranov, 2008). The partnership established between Neurolinguist Franco Fabbro and interpreter trainers played an essential role in the progress of conference interpretation in the early 1990s. The investigation of lateralization patterns in interpreters was the center of this partnership, but primary findings proposed more equally balanced involvement in both hemispheres in interpreters which were contradicted by mysterious results, thus, the evidence is inconclusive (Gile, 2006).

Other Neurolinguists examined the link between language/communication competence, production, and directionality, for instance, Ullman (2001) reveals that L2 grammatical competence is acquired explicitly and is represented and activated in a left temporal spot together with L1 and L2 vocabulary. Grammatical competence in L1, on the contrary, is acquired completely centered along the frontal-basal ganglia circuit. Accordingly, L2 Production compared to L1 will be mediated and managed by explicit metalinguistic competence rather than by implicit grammatical competence which is procedurally represented (Ullman, 2001; Abutalebi and Green, 2006).

I would like here to affirm that research into the connections between language competence and brain is still lacking, in view of the fact that the brain structure is very intricate and there could be other undetected spots and functions in the human brain. Nevertheless, what matters for interpretation scholars is how to better enhance this competence to achieve their communicative goals. In the light of the above reviewed about the concept of interpreting competence, a new brief catalogue of PCSIs required competence will be put forward as an attempt to have an inclusive image of this issue.

Based on the aforementioned and discussed models and approaches of competence, we can conclude that it is not easy to come up with a clear cut definition or catalogue for

competence, since it incorporates many factors and viewpoints. Consecutive interpreters' competence cannot be discussed or examined apart from simultaneous interpreters' competence, as well as both of them cannot be analyzed apart from language/communication competence, since they all share the same interlingual communication realm. The following brief developed catalogue will almost illustrate this issue differentiating between required shared and distinctive competences, skills and personal traits.

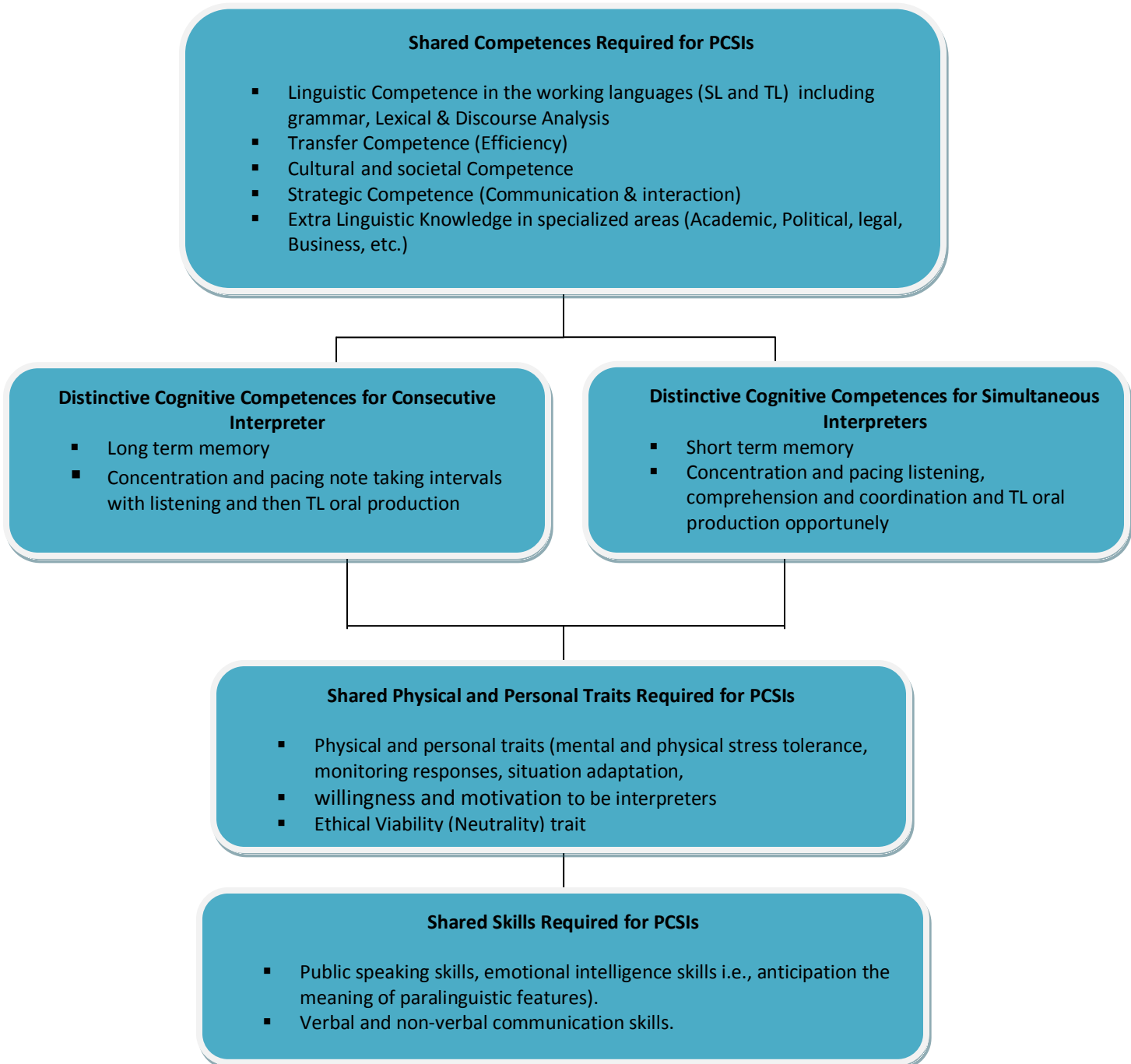


Figure 2 A brief inclusive catalogue of PCSIs' required shared and distinctive competences, skills and personal traits

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper has given an overview of competence as a broad term which calls for certain sorts of expertise and aptitudes that professional interpreters need to have a good command of. PCSIs work within the realm of interlingual language. Thus, they share basic required competences. Both of consecutive and simultaneous interpreters share the same grounded competences and skills with few distinctive competences required for consecutive interpreters that are pacing note taking with listening and TL oral production, as well as very good long term memory. In the current study, the researcher attempted to develop and unify a new catalogue of PCSIs' required competences based on the aforementioned and compared views and models in an attempt to unify the previous research into a comprehensive clear cut catalogue of PCSIs required shared and distinctive competences and skills. Besides, differentiating briefly between competences, skills, and personal traits.

If we scrutinize the previous catalogue, we will realize how demanding it is to be in the realm of interpretation profession. Competences can only be activated and presented through certain skills and personal traits. As the previous brief catalogue necessitates, PCSIs required competences are almost the same irrespective of diverse terminologies used by some interpretation scholars. Yet, it is worth pointing out that what distinguishes consecutive and simultaneous interpreters' required competencies are of two facets; (1) memory (consecutive interpreting calls for long term memory while simultaneous interpreting calls for short one), (2) concentration competence (consecutive interpreting calls for pacing note taking with listening and then production with intervals, whereas simultaneous interpreting requires pacing all the effort listening, comprehending and coordinating, and finally TL oral production opportunely with no intervals). Studies differentiating between competences and skills required for certain types of interpretation (e.g. press conference interpreting, conference interpreting, media interpreting, and so forth) are suggested for future research.

Notes:

1. Chomsky's well known distinction between competence and performance is inspired by structural theorists, namely, de Saussurean distinction (1959) between sign systems and convention which embrace langue (language) and parole (speakers' speech acts).
2. The new catalogue of PCSIs required competences was adapted and developed according to the description and comparison of various models presented in the previous literature, among others, Al-Salman and Al-Khanji, 2002; Nolan, 2005; Kermis, 2008; Gile, 1995, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009.
3. Some scholars use the concept of competence in diverse terminologies based on their field of interest, for instance, linguistic/language competence (e.g. Chomsky, 1965), communicative competence with reference to foreign/second language learning (e.g. Canale and Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al, 1995; Rababah, 2002), while other scholars employ the concept translation/translational competence with reference to translation (e.g. Campbell, 1991; Schäffner, 2000; PACTE, 2005, 2011). Interpretation scholars, on the other hand, employ the concept interpretation competence/skills in connection with interpretation (e.g. Gile, 2004, 2005, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2004).

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