

## **COMPETENCE-BASED MODEL OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING**

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**Abstract.** The objective of the paper is to build and describe a competence-based model of simultaneous interpreting (SI). To achieve this objective we use descriptive, comparative and interpreting modelling methods. The text is interpreted under an acute shortage of time, with the interpreter's simultaneous talking and listening. The competence-based SI model includes three big components related to language and conceptual translator's thesauri or his/her mental lexicon. The first component is communicative competence related to the language thesaurus. It is one of the core competences for all translation modes, but in SI it should be developed at a very high level. Obviously, there is a trend both in Russia and Europe to train simultaneous interpreters at Master degree programmes, with the communicative competence at C1 or C2 levels, though it has not always been the case. Of course, its acquisition continues in the process of studies at the Master Degree programme, as there is always room for improvement. The second component of the translator/interpreter's competence is specialized or technological competence (sub-competence), which presents a set of key interpreting skills that manifest themselves in a special and unique way in SI, as they are based on the interpreter's ability to resort to three most important SI cognitive mechanisms: inferencing, probabilistic forecasting and anticipation, and compression. Their

first most detailed description was made by G. Chernov (Chernov G., 1987) in the seventies-eighties of XX century. We continue their study through a perspective of the interpretative theory of translation (theorie du sens developed by M. Lederer (2003) and D. Seleskovitch (1998)) applied to the SI teaching methods. The ability to make inferencing and anticipation depends on the third component of SI competence model – the knowledge of extralinguistic information. It includes the knowledge of culture, world in general and specific subject areas. This competence needs to be developed not only in the course of formal training. An insufficient number of contact hours means that students should be motivated to enhance their encyclopedic knowledge in the course of their autonomous work. Life-long learning for an interpreter is a must rather than an option.

**Keywords:** simultaneous interpreting, competences, inferencing, probabilistic forecasting and anticipation, compression

## **Introduction**

The transition to competence-based approaches in Russia's Higher Education Area (HEA) has been hard enough. At present, Russian universities have rather well-aligned three-cycle programmes and curricula that have been redesigned to bring them in line with the new Federal Standards and Bologna requirements. The criticisms of the Bologna system, which may have been brought about by a low level of school students' performance, may lead to a switch-back to an old educational system. Actually, such a set-back be regarded as an anachronism in a current globalised environment. There may be a need to identify the areas of education and knowledge where competence-based approaches should not be applied. But this is clearly not the case with translation and interpreting. Even in the Soviet era the term 'competence' and 'communicative competence' were actively advocated in the area of foreign language acquisition and translation by a number of researchers, for example, by I. Zimnaya (Zimnaya I., 1978). Today such notions and terms as a competence-based approach, modules,

learning outcomes are widely accepted in Russia's HEA and some translation and interpreting university departments can boast of a quality education having designed two-cycle programmes and curricula and combined advantages of both the old and new systems. A good illustration of the case is the Master Degree Programme *Training Translators and Interpreters for International Organizations* at MGIMO-University. A competence-based approach presupposes a need to build a well-defined translation or interpreting competence model. This area of research has been developing with success in Europe (the PACTE, 2005, 2009; Kiraly D., 2013; Gopferisch S., 2009) and in Russia (Gavrilenko N., 2008), among others. These researchers have designed holistic translation models, while we'll focus on specifics of simultaneous interpreting (SI). It has some generic features common of translation, interpreting, and even other areas of procedural and declarative knowledge, and unique characteristics that make it a very complex cognitive process and one of the most extreme types of cognitive brain activity.

### **Objectives and methods**

*The objective* of the paper is to build and describe a competence-based SI model. To achieve this objective we use descriptive, comparative and interpreting modelling *methods*.

### **Results**

The text is interpreted under an acute shortage of time, with the interpreter talking and listening simultaneously and activating two speech reception and production channels. The competence-based SI model includes three big components related to language and conceptual translator's thesauri or his/her mental lexicon. The first component is communicative competence related to the language thesaurus. It is one of the core competences for all translation modes, but in SI it should be developed at a very high level. Obviously, there is a trend both in Russia and Europe to train simultaneous interpreters in Master degree programmes, with the communicative competence at C1 or C2 levels, though it has not always been the case. Of course, its acquisition continues in the

process of studies in a Master Degree programme, as there is always room for improvement. In order to achieve this, we should take into account two aspects. The first aspect relates to the text function. If a text belongs to special communication served by LSP, the acquisition of notions and terms of a specific subject area will make interpreting easier. That is why it is advisable in the course of studies to use texts for training and drilling from some limited subject areas. For example, the MGIMO linguistic Master Degree programme focuses on interpreting UN speeches which include such subject matters as politics and international relations, social, economic and legal issues. The acquisition of terms and notions and a certain (sometimes high) informational redundancy of texts from the above-mentioned areas of knowledge will make the training more efficient.

The second aspect that enhances the training efficiency is minding the differences in the world view between the source and target languages (SL, TL). Though C1 or C2 level of communicative competence means that a student is aware of these differences, though it is not always the case. We have devised a system of exercises that highlight these differences. The knowledge of the language asymmetries is also useful for translation, as it improves an idiomatic level of the translated text. Moreover, it is of paramount importance for SI, as it can help to increase the speed of information processing and to avoid language interference. These linguo-specific language structures boil down to metaphoric imagery, metonymic shifts, and implication models at the semantic level, and to significant discrepancies in grammar constructions and stylistic devices in SL and TL. Another important point to be taken in consideration is the direction of translation/interpreting, whether it is direct (to mother tongue) or inverse (from mother tongue), as there are also some specifics in this regard. If the text is interpreted from English into Russian (as these are two languages analyzed in this paper), the main hurdles in interpreting are differences in metaphoric imagery and their frequency of usage, for example: English metaphors *feeding trough*, *foul play*,

*repercussions and reverberations, grass-root, to be in dire straits, to have a narrow escape, etc.*; the second metaphoric meaning: *развевать пепел/развевать иллюзию – to scatter ashes/to dispel an illusion*. Examples of implication language and speech/text models: *the longest post-war delays – самый длительный в послевоенной истории перерыв; ...the damage that could be inflicted by a worst-case scenario – к каким негативным последствиям может привести дальнейшее развитие сложившейся ситуации; compliance – соблюдение всех требований действующего законодательства*. Grammar animism (grammar metaphor) is also typical of English: *Several years of litigation resulted in an out-of-court settlement: Australia consented to pay the island \$73 million over a period of 20 years.* – *После нескольких лет препирательств «зеленый континент» пошел с островитянами на мировую, согласившись выплатить 73 млн в течение 20 лет*. This type of grammar constructions needs a transformation in interpreting/translation. Metonymic shifts are widely used in both languages, as metonymy is one of the universal language tools of nomination and mental tools of cognition: *Many of those who have lost their jobs are still unemployed.* – *Многие люди, потерявшие работы, до сих пор ее не нашли*. Both languages have specific stylistic devices, for example, alliterations in English and couplets (sometimes they are rhymed) in English and Russian. For example: *squalor and misery – грязь и нищета, to toil and toil – тяжело, усиленно трудиться, to do or die – отчаянный, не останавливающийся ни перед чем, doom and gloom – конец света*. When the text is translated/interpreted from Russian (inverse interpreting), the focus should be made on grammar transformations, as the word order in Russian is not fixed, and the grammar subject may follow the predicate. Another important disparity between the English and Russian grammar, which should be taken into account in translation/interpreting is a great variety of grammar constructions/sentences/clauses without subject in Russian, which is an absolute taboo in English. In both cases the

English linguo-specific constructions with grammar metaphors may be used as one of the translation devices, which help to preserve the word order of SL increasing the speed of information processing in SI. These illustrations of some discrepancies between the English and Russian world views (that find expression in the linguo-specific constructions at all language levels) should be mastered by SI Master Degree students.

The second component of the translator/interpreter's competence is specialized or technological competence (sub-competence), which presents a set of key interpreting skills that manifest themselves in a special and unique way in SI. For example, switching from SL to TL and vice versa, the ability to listen and talk at the same time. We regard these skills as aptitudes that may be improved in the course of drilling. Meanwhile, the focus should be made in the course of training simultaneous interpreters on their abilities to use three most important SI cognitive mechanisms: inferencing, probabilistic forecasting and anticipation, and compression. Their first most detailed description was made by Chernov in the seventies-eighties of XX century. We continue their study through a perspective of the interpretative theory of translation (*theorie du sens* developed by Lederer and Seleskovitch) applied to the SI teaching methods. The abilities to resort to these three mechanisms are generic abilities and skills, as these mechanisms are used in broader contexts, not only in SI, but in this interpreting mode they manifest themselves again in a unique way. First, inferencing means the ability to derive implicatures in the SL text. To be able to do this, the interpreter has to be well-versed in presuppositions of both SL and TL – knowledge shared by the speakers and information recipients. On the basis of different types of classifications we have devised a concise classification of presuppositions that coincides with that of implicatures, as implicatures depend on presuppositions:

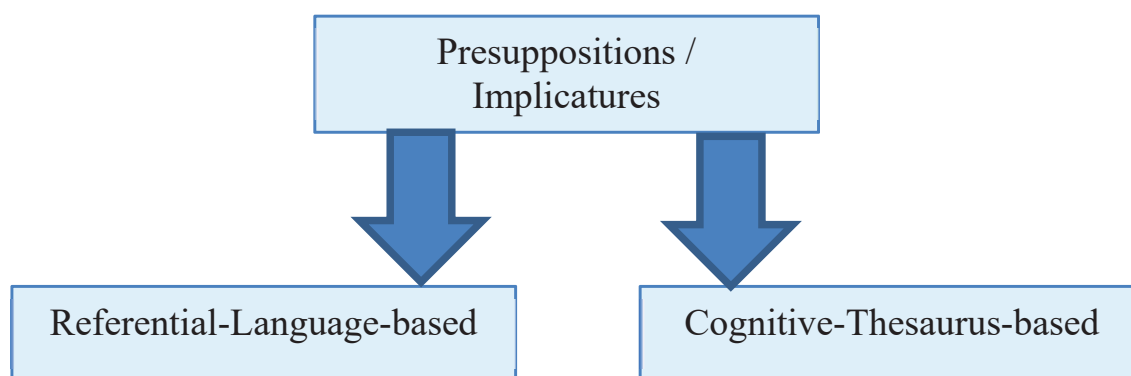


Figure 1. Classification of presuppositions/implicatures

*Referential-language-based* presuppositions relate to the interpreted text, to its linguistic structures, with their disparities reflecting the differences in the world view between SL and TL. As it has been mentioned above, the knowledge of linguo-specific ways of expressing the thought increases the speed of information processing in the course of SI, and enables the interpreter to derive language-based implicatures. *The referential* presuppositions, as well as implicatures, depend on the text function and its discursive features. Texts belonging to specific subject areas served by LSP makes interpreting easier, as the interpreter can be familiar with terms and notions from a specific LSP, which are usually repeated in a linear unfolding of text information. LSP denotational function presupposes a good logical structure and argumentation of the text: its good cohesion and coherence, with certain informational redundancy that makes anticipation easier. Good cohesion and coherence are expressed in co-referent chains, repetitions, logical connectors and the presentation of information in terms of theme and rheme (or a sentence functional perspective). *Cognitive-thesaurus-based* presuppositions reflect the text's extralinguistic information relating to a broad pragmatic context: knowledge of cultural context, of world in general and of a specific subject area, topic and the communicative situation (speakers, recipients, deixis) of the event to be interpreted simultaneously. This knowledge depends on the interpreter's conceptual thesaurus, and it makes it possible to derive cognitive-thesaurus-based

implicatures. Both referential-language-based and cognitive-thesaurus-based implicatures facilitate probabilistic forecasting and anticipation, as the latter is also based on presuppositions and anchor words expressing the key text information. As far as the interpreter derives implicatures and makes inferences, he/she also can also anticipate sense unfolding. If the sense forecast is not confirmed by the linearly presented information of the interpreted text, the interpreter makes adjustments and corrections.

The third SI cognitive mechanism is compression. Its manifestation in the course of interpreting depends on two factors: on the direction of interpreting and the speaker's speed. English is more implicit and the examples above illustrate its more implicit presentation of information. If the text is interpreted from English into Russian, the interpreter has to use explication or explicitation. In order to catch up with the speaker, he/she has to resort to sense compression based on the redundancy of text information. In case of inverse translation (from Russian into English) the interpreter has to compress the sense using linguo-specific English semantic and grammar structures. If the speaker's speed is above 100 – 120 words per minute, the interpreter has to resort to compression eliminating redundant information, no matter what is the direction of interpretation.

All the three cognitive mechanisms interact in the course of SI. The specifics of their interaction and methodological aspects of SI teaching related to the respective skills' acquisition present an interesting and promising area of research.

The scheme below illustrates the interaction of the SI cognitive mechanisms:



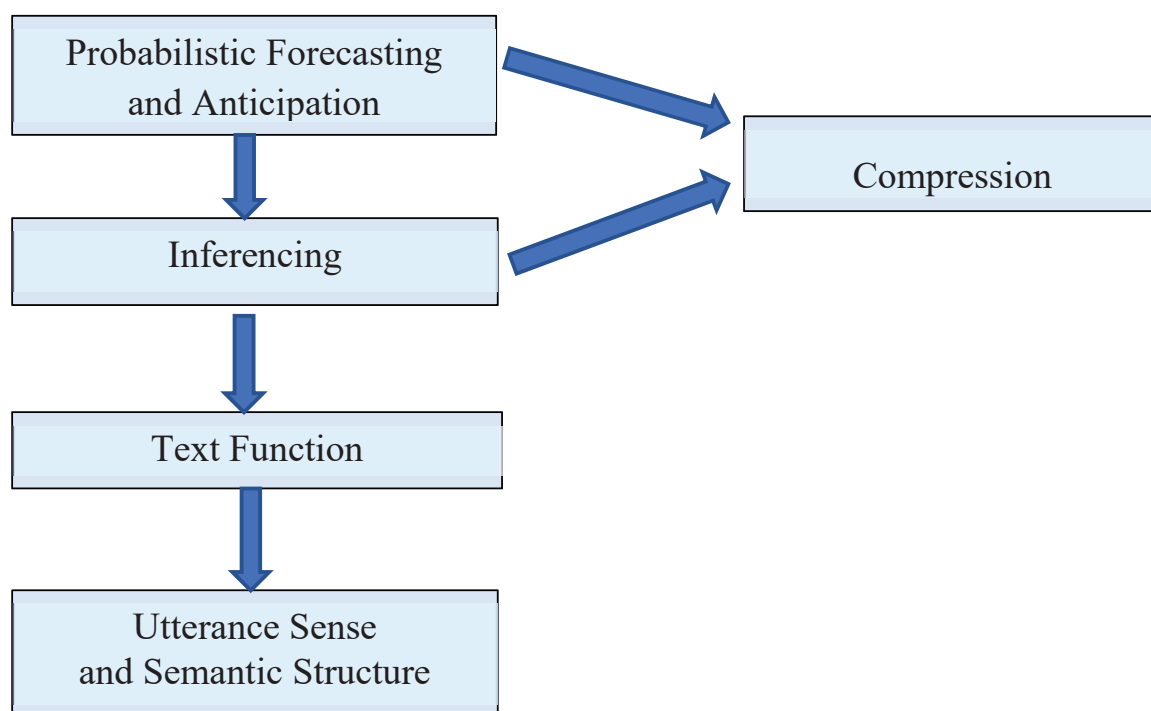


Figure 2. Interaction of cognitive mechanisms in SI

The third component of SI competence model is the knowledge of extralinguistic information that includes the knowledge of culture, world in general and specific subject areas of knowledge. This competence also represents a generic ability relating to the interpreter's conceptual thesaurus that needs to be developed not only in the course of formal training. An insufficient number of contact hours means that students should be motivated to enhance their encyclopedic knowledge in the course of their autonomous work. Life-long learning for an interpreter is a must rather than an option.

### **Conclusions**

Our findings present the SI competence model consisting of three components: the communicative, specialized or technological and extralinguistic competences (or sub-competences), which include, in their turn, a variety of skills and abilities. Their mastery can be achieved in the course of training simultaneous interpreters at the Master Degree programmes level, which is proven by a high level of students' performance and their subsequent job experience.

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