

Introduction to Simultaneous Interpreting



What are the barriers that interpreters overcome?


Clearly, that barrier is first and foremost linguistic. Hence, a definition such as ‘immediate oral translation’ is acceptable. Interpreters only exist because of that language barrier, and they must obviously have sufficient linguistic knowledge if they are to translate correctly.

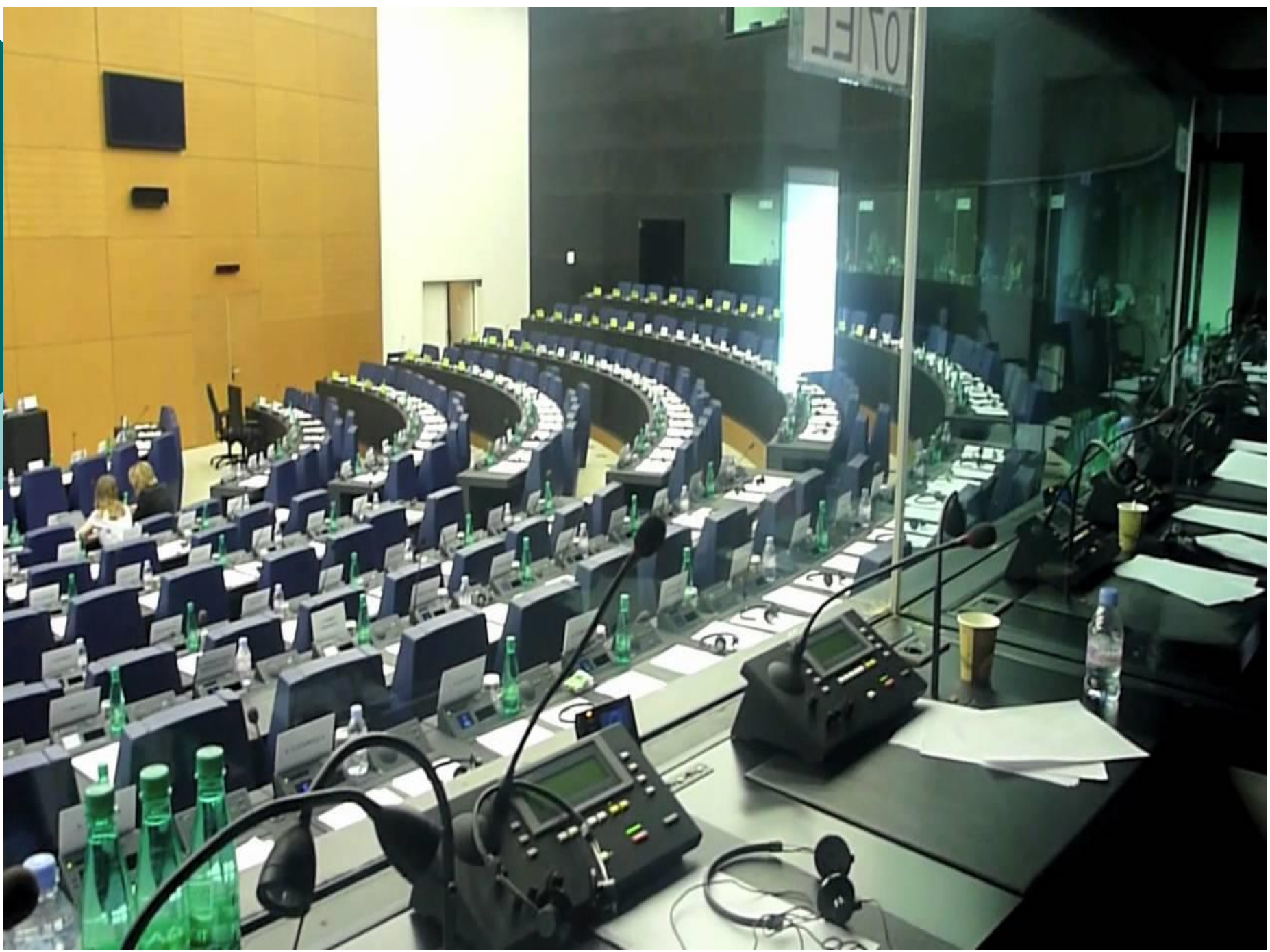
- But the barriers to communication, and therefore the role of the interpreter, are more than that. People from different countries may not only speak different languages but have behind them different bodies of knowledge, different educations, different cultures, and therefore different intellectual approaches.
- The conference interpreter must be able to provide an exact and faithful reproduction of the original speech. Deviation from the letter of the original is permissible only if it enhances the audience’s understanding of the speaker’s meaning. Additional information should be provided only if it is indispensable to bridge the culture gaps referred to above: it should in no way involve the interpreter’s adding their own point of view to that of the speaker.


- The conference interpreter, in a way becomes the delegate they are interpreting.
- They speak in the first person when the delegate does so not translating along the lines of ‘He says that he thinks this is a useful idea...’*. The conference interpreter must empathize with the delegate, put themselves in someone else’s shoes, espouse their cause. The male interpreter must be able to say. ‘Speaking as a woman who has gone through four pregnancies...’ in a perfectly natural and convincing manner.
- The interpreter must be able to do this work in two modes, consecutive interpretation, and simultaneous interpretation. In the first of these, the interpreter listens to the totality of a speaker’s comments, or at least a significant passage, and then reconstitutes the speech with the help of notes taken while listening; the interpreter is thus speaking *consecutively* to the original speaker, hence the name.

- Some speakers prefer to talk for just a few sentences and then invite interpretation, in which case the interpreter can perhaps work without notes and rely solely on their memory to reproduce the whole speech. However, a conference interpreter should be able to cope with speeches of any length; they should develop the techniques, including note-taking, to enable them to do so.




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- The second mode of interpreting is simultaneous. Here the interpreter listens to the beginning of the speaker's comments then begins interpreting while the speech continues, carrying on throughout the speech, to finish almost at the same time as the original. The interpreter is thus speaking *simultaneously* to the original, hence again the name. In most cases nowadays simultaneous is done with the appropriate equipment: delegates speak into microphones which relay the sound directly to interpreters seated in sound-proofed booths listening to the proceedings through earphones; the interpreters in turn speak into a microphone which relays their interpretation via a dedicated channel to headphones worn by the delegations who wish to listen to the interpreting. However, in some cases such equipment is not available, and simultaneous interpretation is whispered (so-called 'chuchotage'): one participant speaks and simultaneously an interpreter whispers into the ear of the one or maximum two people who require interpreting services.



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- Clearly, simultaneous interpreting takes up less time than consecutive. Moreover, with simultaneous it is much more feasible to provide genuine multilingual interpreting, with as many as six languages (UN) or even eleven (European Union).
Given these advantages and the proliferation and widening membership of international organizations, more and more interpreting is being done in simultaneous. But all conference interpreters should be able to work in both modes, as one can never rule out being called upon to work in consecutive.
 - From this brief description it is clear that whether working in consecutive or in simultaneous, the interpreter has first to listen to the speaker, understand and analyse what is being said, and then resynthesize the speech in the appropriate form in a different language (the difference being that in simultaneous the interpreter begins resynthesizing before having been able to hear the totality of the speech to be analysed - a problem we shall return to).



- It is also clear that conference interpreters work in 'real time'. In simultaneous, by definition, they cannot take longer than the original speaker, except for a few odd seconds. Even in consecutive they are expected to react immediately after the speaker has finished, and their interpretation must be fast and efficient.
- This means that interpreters must have the capacity not only to analyse and resynthesize ideas, but also to do so very quickly and when working under stress. Besides the technical difficulties of consecutive and simultaneous interpretation the interpreter is faced with the problem of working in different contexts and with a vast range of subjects.
- In conclusion, the one thing the interpreter will not lack in their work is variety. Apart from the differences mentioned above, the interpreter will be confronted by different physical working conditions, from the cosy conversation of two individuals, through the proverbial smoke-filled room of political and diplomatic negotiations, to the large lecture theatre with hundreds of participants, and above and beyond that the field trips where one has to shout above the machines in an industrial plant or trudge through the mud to describe the merits of organic farming *in situ*. Above all, the interpreter will be faced with a literally infinite range of subject matters.

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- A *passive language* is a language out of which an interpreter is capable of interpreting. An *active language* is one into which they are capable of interpreting. An interpreter's 'working languages' are the sum of their active and passive languages. It should be noted that *source* and *target* on the one hand, and *passive* and *active* on the other, do not have the same meaning, the first two referring to a specific circumstance, the latter to the general interpreting capability of an individual.
 - *Retour* means an interpretation where the interpreter is working into an active language other than their mother tongue
 - *Relay* refers to a situation where a meeting is multilingual and not all the interpreters understand all of the languages used.



Thank
you!!