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PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING: minimally required competence in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes

The competences detailed below are meant to be of a generic nature and would have to be adapted to regional interpreting contexts, traditions and legislations when applied. However, such regional traditions or legislations cannot be called upon to minimise or fail to recognize the need for the proposed competences in any way.

1. Definitions

1.1 Public Service Interpreting:

PSI comprises:

Interpreting in legal settings (criminal procedures and civil cases)

Interpreting in asylum settings

Interpreting in health settings

Interpreting in educational settings

Interpreting in social settings

1.2 Competence

“The concept of competence [...] does not seem to be a univocal concept [...] . In cognitive psychology, competence has been defined as a ‘roughly specialised system of abilities, proficiencies or skills that are necessary or sufficient to reach a specific goal’ (Weinert 2001, 45, cited by Lesznyák 2007, 168). Lesznyák states that Weinert identified seven ways in which the term competence was used, but that there was no single common conceptual framework for competence”. (Robert, Remael & Ureel (fc.), *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*).

We therefore need to work with a pragmatic definition on a consensus basis because

“the commodification of competence into certifiable competencies privileges the KSA (knowledge, skills and attitudes) worldview” (Winterton, J., Delamare-Le Deist, F., Stringfellow, E. (2006). *Typology of knowledge, skills and competences: clarification of the concept and prototype*. Cedefop Reference series: 64. Luxembourg: Office for Official publications of the European Communities, pp. 29-30.)

A competence is the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and personality traits which a person uses to function in accordance with the demands placed on them in a specific context (work, training, social, cultural contexts).

(English translation from Dutch, from Educational Expertise Centre Rotterdam, www.oecr.nl, see also: <http://slideplayer.nl/slide/2124064/>)



We suggest not considering “personality features” and to limit the components to what can be ‘tested’ and trained:

- knowledge
- skills
- attitudes

2. PSI competence: knowledge, skills and attitudes

The knowledge, skills, attitudes and personality traits discussed below are considered essential components that make up the competence profile required for PSI in the following contexts: see 1.1

Remark: the wording is provisional, the order of the bullet points is random at present.

2.1 Knowledge

2.1.1 General knowledge

- to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the organizational/institutional systems involved in the assignment. In other words, have comprehensive knowledge of the overall national system within which the assignment is carried out and have comprehensive substantive and procedural knowledge of the structures and functioning of the local/regional legal system, health system, educational or other sub-systems within which the interpreting assignment is carried out.
- to understand the need in all cases, for interpreters and the collegiate of professionals working at the front line, to design protocols for joint working with other professionals (e.g. doctors) to ensure correct understanding of complex messages.

2.1.2 Cultural knowledge

- show awareness and understanding of relevant cultural factors and being aware of and conversant with cultural differences
- show awareness and understanding of one’s own cultural and emotional, political or other bias/position

2.1.3 Specific Interpreting-related knowledge

- have thorough knowledge of the ethical code applicable to the interpreting context and the highest standards of professional conduct
- have thorough subject-area knowledge relevant to the assignment.
- master at least two languages (spoken or signed)
- know and be able to distinguish between informal, formal, and highly formal discourse
- have excellent command of relevant terminology and its functional equivalents in the working languages
- have full insight into the role of the interpreter, including introductions, positioning, turn-taking, and how to/whether to intervene (e.g. to ask for clarification or for other reasons)
- have very good working knowledge of interpreting equipment (such as microphone, audio and videoconferencing technology) that may be required for interpreting in a given setting
- have excellent knowledge of the existence and availability of research and terminology management tools



- have a thorough understanding of the roles of the different interactants in the interpreted interaction in the PSI setting in which one is working, for instance, the role of judges and lawyers in a legal setting, the role of doctors, psychiatrist, nurses, administrators and others in health settings.

2.2 Skills

2.2.1 General and intercultural communicative skills

- have the ability to engage in the interactive facilitation of communication
- have the ability to communicate orally or in SL and express ideas clearly and accurately
- have the ability to assess the meaning of behaviour and gestures, tone, values and roles of the participants of the communicative event, as well as linguistic differences and similarities
- have the ability to manage one's own cultural and emotional, political or other bias/position
- have the ability to build rapport and to exhibit self-control and impartial behaviour

2.2.2 Interpreting skills and interpreting-related linguistic skills

- show the ability to apply the ethical code appropriate for the given interpreting context
- demonstrate high language proficiency in the working languages to the level of the professional context and discourse at hand, corresponding to accepted standards of language proficiency C1, C2.
- show the ability to facilitate communication by interpreting between two or more languages to this level of proficiency
- show mastery of the various interpreting modes and techniques: consecutive, simultaneous, and whispered simultaneous interpreting along with sight translation, in accordance with the interpreting context and regional traditions
- show the ability to render a message accurately and idiomatically from the source language into the target language, in the interpreting mode appropriate for a given setting
- display memory skills and note-taking as required in the given interpreting context
- show the ability to render these messages faithfully and to interpret the substance of all statements without any additions or omissions
- show the ability to make quick linguistic decisions regarding lexical or terminological choices and the appropriate level of formality
- show the ability to manage linguistic and vocabulary choices that convey information about the speaker's socioeconomic, educational and cultural background courteously
- show the ability to know if, when and how to conserve para-linguistic features of the source message such as hesitations, false starts and repetitions
- show the ability to provide appropriate delivery and demonstrate poise
- show the ability to distinguish between and render informal, formal, and highly formal discourse and their communicative implications
- show the ability to recognise and translate relevant terminology and/or its functional equivalents in the working languages
- show the ability to address, where needed, permitted and appropriate, a cultural misunderstanding, and be consciously able to gauge the need and scope for such an intervention
- to show the ability to use interpreting equipment (such as microphone, audio and videoconferencing technology) that may be required for interpreting in a given setting and the ability to develop suitable strategies for the efficient use of the information sources available



2.3 Attitudes

- show an ability for stress management
- show awareness of the sensitivities that linguistic and vocabulary choices may hold, e.g. with regard to conveying information about the speaker's (socio-economic, educational) background
- show the ability to self-monitor and self-correct
- show adherence to the highest standards of professional conduct and ethics
- deploy strong communication and interpersonal skills in order to cope with the demands of working effectively in challenging situations amid cultural and linguistic diversity.
- show respect, courtesy, tact and sound judgment in their interactions with others.
- demonstrate a commitment to life-long learning : have the will and aptitude to remain up to date with changes in interpreting skills required in the contexts one works in, including research skills, technical skills and other practical skills as one encounters or can anticipate the need for them.

