

First Lecture...

Being an interpreter can mean a number of things. 'Interpretation' is an umbrella term for a number of slightly different activities. In other words, there are several **types of interpreting**.

You may have heard of **simultaneous interpretation** or **consecutive interpretation**. These are the most widely-known modes.

But did you know there are also several other types and sub-types? Have you ever heard of *whispering*? Or *liaison interpreting*? Or *SimConsec*?

In this post I will cover some of the **main types of interpreting**, explain what makes them so different and what are the typical scenarios in which each type is used.



I also hope this will help clarifying some of the existing confusion about this topic.

Note: To learn more about what interpreters do and how to become one, make sure to check my other post on the subject:

What's an Interpreter?

Before we jump to the main topic of this post, let's just quickly recap what interpreters actually do.

To simplify the answer, we can broadly define an interpreter as a linguist whose job is to translate (or, more accurately, 'render') **oral text** from one language to another.

	Simultaneous	Consecutive
	<p><i>"Translating while listening"</i></p> 	<p><i>"Listening, then translating"</i></p> 
<i>Definition</i>	<p>The interpreter delivers the translation while the speaker is producing the source speech.</p>	<p>The interpreter delivers the translation after the speaker has completed the source speech (or a section of it.)</p>
<i>Equipment</i>	<p>Depending on the exact setting, the following may be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Soundproof booth w/ audio transmitter</i> • <i>Tour guide system</i> 	<p>Depending on the exact setting, the following may be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Notepad and pen</i> • <i>No equipment (liaison)</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No equipment (chuchotage)</i> 	
<i>Typical Settings</i>	Conferences, board meetings, certain tour guides, etc.	Business meetings, press conferences, public service (court, hospitals, etc.), etc.

Translators, on the other hand, work with written text only.

Simultaneous vs Consecutive Interpretation

There are two major interpreting modes: **simultaneous** and **consecutive interpreting**.

Broadly speaking, virtually all other types of interpretation end up being a variation of consecutive or simultaneous one way or another.

But first, let's cover simultaneous and consecutive in more detail before introducing their respective sub-types.

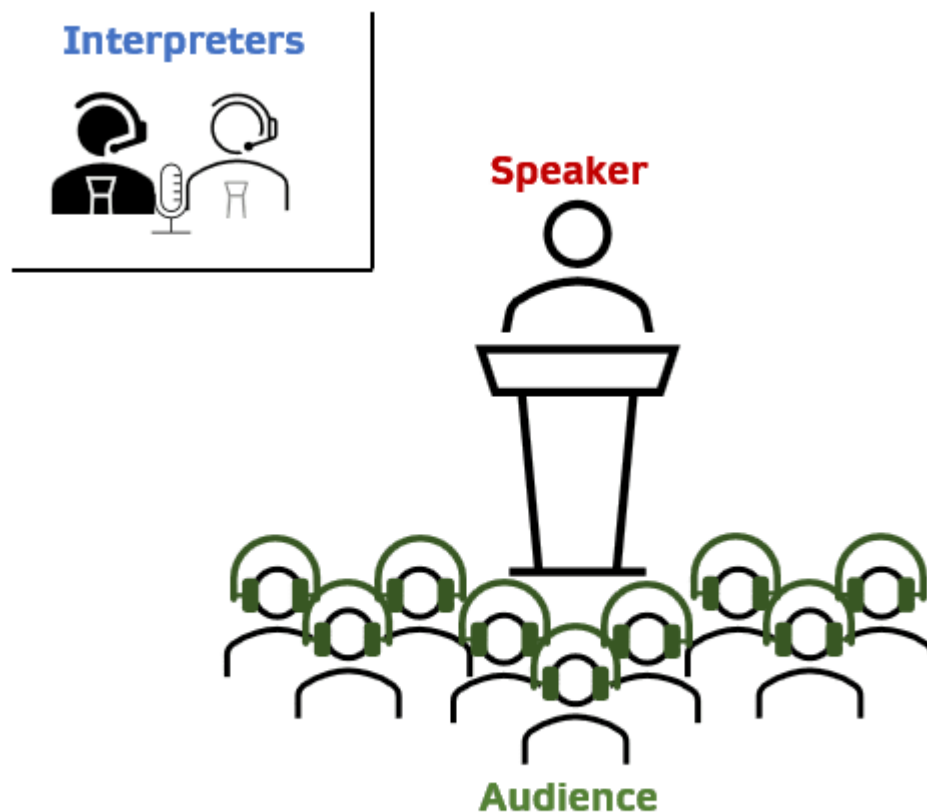
Simultaneous Interpreting

Simultaneous interpreting (SI) is characterised by its extremely high level of immediacy: the interpreter is required to render the

speech into the target language while the speaker is presenting the original text (i.e., virtually at the same time).

This is the type of interpretation that you may be familiar with from high profile conferences and large meetings. Examples include those carried out by the United Nations, the European Parliament, and so forth.

It's also widely used in smaller conferences, board meetings of large multinationals, international court hearings, etc.



In the vast majority of cases, under optimal circumstances, it's characterised by the following elements:

- It's carried out by a team of **two** interpreters per language combination working as a pair.
- They **switch roles** every 20 to 30 minutes. While one interprets, the other takes a supporting role through organising information, taking notes, looking up words, and so forth.
- The interpreters work inside a **soundproof booth** fully equipped with a 2-channel audio transmission system. It normally works like this:
 1. The interpreter listens to the original speech through headphones while this is being presented.
 2. While listening to the original speech, the interpreter translates it into the target language, at the same time, through a transmitter.
 3. The target audience listens to the translated version of the speech through a wireless headphone set equipped with a receiver.

This mode may also be used on certain types of tour guides, in which scenario the operating equipment will consist of a wireless tour guide system.