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Research on the Competencies of Liaison Interpreters in China*

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Against the rapid growth and professionalization of the interpreting market in China, liaison interpreting has become a routine yet under-researched service characterized by diverse settings, bidirectional turn-taking, close interpersonal interaction, and blurred boundaries between interpreting and other support tasks. Drawing on competence theory in human resource management, particularly Boyatzis' performance-job-environment fit and the Onion Model operationalized by L. M. Spencer and S. M. Spencer, the study conducts a job analysis of liaison interpreting in terms of job scope, job goals, and job roles. Results indicate that liaison interpreter's competencies are organized into five domains: traits, attitudes, social roles, general knowledge, and skills. The findings clarify the multidimensional nature of liaison interpreter competencies and offer practical guidance for interpreter self-development, MTI curriculum design, and competency-based recruitment, training, and performance management in interpreting service providers. It also provides behavioral descriptors to inform assessment rubrics.

Keywords: liaison interpreter, competence, Onion Model, Behavioral Event Interview (BEI)

Introduction

With globalization, cross-border business, and expanding public-facing exchanges, interpreting services increasingly permeate everyday institutional and commercial interactions. In China, industry reports indicate rapid growth in language service providers and a rising demand for interpreters across domains such as enterprise negotiations, tourism, healthcare, education, and government-related exchanges (China Academy of Translation, 2014; Translators Association of China, 2012). International market research similarly points to sustained growth in interpreting needs across multiple delivery modes, suggesting an expanding and diversifying client base (CSA, 2015). Within this landscape, liaison interpreting—typically bidirectional, face-to-face, and embedded in dynamic turn-taking—has become at least as common as conference interpreting, yet it remains comparatively under-theorized and frequently misunderstood in terms of what constitutes competent performance (Gentile, Ozolins, & Vasilakakos, 1996; Pöchhacker, 2003).

A major reason for this gap is that much competence-oriented research in translation studies has focused on written translation competence and its subcomponents (PACTE, 2011; Pym, 2003; Neubert, 2000). Although scholars have distinguished "interpreting competence" and "interpreter competence", current models often remain at a relatively general level and are not closely anchored in the requirements of a given practical task (Wang, 2012; Pöchhacker, 2003). Moreover, professionalization-oriented discussions emphasize that interpreter evaluation should go beyond linguistic transfer to include professional norms, ethics, flexibility, and interactional

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management—elements that are particularly salient in liaison settings (Bao, 2005; Ozolins, 1995). Consequently, educators (e.g., MTI programs), employers, and novice practitioners may lack a clear, behaviorally grounded description of liaison interpreter job content and the competencies needed for superior performance.

To address this problem, the present study draws on competence theory from human resource management, where competencies are conceptualized as underlying characteristics causally related to effective or superior job performance (Boyatzis, 1982; L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993). Following the "person-job-environment" fit logic of performance (Boyatzis, 2008) and adopting the Onion Model as an analytic lens (L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993), this research aims to (a) clarify the job content and workflow of liaison interpreting and (b) identify key competencies of liaison interpreters in relation to concrete work situations.

Accordingly, the study investigates two research questions:

1. What is the job content (scope, goals, and roles) of liaison interpreters in authentic professional contexts?

2. What competencies are required for competent liaison interpreting performance, and how can these be described behaviorally?

Literature Review

Previous Studies on Competency

The competence approach emerged from dissatisfaction with explaining workplace performance primarily through intelligence tests or academic credentials. Early managerial thinking, exemplified by scientific management, assumed that work could be decomposed into observable motions and optimized through selection and training. Later psychological work argued that high performance depends not only on cognitive ability but also on problem solving, social functioning, and context-sensitive behavior. White's conceptualization of competence highlighted motivation and effective functioning beyond "intelligence" alone.

McClelland's influential critique—testing for competence rather than intelligence—shifted attention to underlying characteristics that predict job success, motivating the use of competency-based assessment in selection and training (McClelland, 1973). Building on this tradition, Boyatzis developed managerial competence profiles and advanced a performance theory emphasizing fit among individual characteristics, job demands, and the organizational environment (Boyatzis, 1982; 2008). L. M. Spencer and S. M. Spencer systematized competence modeling practices and popularized behaviorally anchored approaches to identifying competencies from superior performers (L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993).

Definitions of competence vary, but most converge on the idea that competencies are stable, performance-relevant characteristics expressed through behavior. Boyatzis defines competence as an underlying characteristic causally linked to effective or superior performance (Boyatzis, 1982), while L. M. Spencer and S. M. Spencer emphasize criterion-referenced prediction of job outcomes and propose that competencies must relate meaningfully to real-world performance (L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993). Broader HR-oriented definitions treat competence as a cluster of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that correlates with job performance, can be measured against standards, and can be developed through training (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

Competence research typically uses methods that elicit concrete performance episodes and infer underlying characteristics. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) provides a foundation for collecting behaviorally rich descriptions of effective and ineffective performance (Flanagan, 1954). Behavioral Event Interview (BEI), developed and refined within the McClelland tradition, asks interviewees to recount critical events and is frequently structured using the Situation-Task-Action-Result (STAR) protocol to support detailed recall (L. M.

Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993). Other tools include surveys and rating scales, focus groups, observation, work diaries, and multi-source assessments such as 360-degree feedback and assessment centers (Boyatzis, 2008). Across approaches, a consistent methodological principle is that competencies should be inferred from patterned behavior under authentic task demands, rather than from abstract self-descriptions alone.

Competence Research in Translation and Interpreting Studies

Translation competence. Translation competence has been a sustained focus since the 1970s, often conceptualized as a multi-component system rather than a single skill (Pym, 2003). Classic definitions view translation competence as the knowledge and skills needed to perform translation and frequently decompose it into sub-competence s such as linguistic, textual, subject, cultural, and transfer competences (Neubert, 2000). In professional education, competence definitions are valued because they guide curriculum design, learning objectives, and assessment (Martínez Melis & Hurtado Albir, 2001).

Among componential models, the PACTE framework is particularly influential. Early versions distinguished communicative, extra-linguistic, instrumental/professional, transference, strategic, and psycho-physiological components; later revisions reorganized these into bilingual, extra-linguistic, knowledge-about-translation, instrumental, strategic, and psycho-physiological components (PACTE, 2011). At the European policy level, EMT (European Master's in Translation) also proposes a set of sub-competence s including service provision, language, intercultural, technological, data-mining, and thematic competence s (EMT, 2009). Collectively, these models underscore that professional performance requires more than bilingual ability, incorporating strategies, tools, and domain knowledge.

Compared with translation competence, interpreting competence has received less systematic attention. Some work emphasizes interpreting competence as a set of sub-competences, but studies vary in scope and operationalization (Kalina, 2001; Gile, 1995; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989). In Chinese scholarship, interpreting competence is often described through bilingual competence, extra-linguistic knowledge, and interpreting skills, with attention to cognitive processing demands such as attention, memory, and rapid response (Wang, 2012).

Importantly, several authors distinguish interpreting competence (competence to interpret) from interpreter competence (competence to function as an interpreter professionally). The latter includes non-linguistic dimensions such as psychological qualities, professional norms, ethics, and physical endurance (Wang, 2012; Pöchhacker, 2003). Related arguments from professionalization research caution against reducing interpreter assessment to linguistic transfer accuracy alone; professional qualities (e.g., ethics, flexibility, teamwork, and role management) are integral to expert performance (Bao, 2005).

Liaison interpreting is commonly described as mediated face-to-face dialogue in which an individual who speaks two languages facilitates communication between parties who do not share a language (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997). While conference interpreting often involves formal settings and may be predominantly unidirectional (into the interpreter's A language), liaison interpreting is typically bidirectional, consecutive, and highly interactive, featuring frequent turn-taking and immediate relational dynamics (Pöchhacker, 2003; Ozolins, 1995). Its contexts range widely, including business visits, negotiations, tourism, institutional encounters, and other small-scale interactions (Gentile et al., 1996).

A key implication is that liaison interpreting cannot be reduced to "message transfer". The interpreter's physical presence, proximity to participants, and involvement in managing interaction (e.g., clarifying misunderstandings, negotiating turns, maintaining rapport) create role expectations that differ from many conference

settings (Ozolins, 1995; Pöchhacker, 2003). Consequently, competence in liaison interpreting plausibly includes interactional management and professional judgment in addition to bilingual and interpreting skills.

Liaison interpreting is sometimes conflated with community interpreting, but the two are distinguishable by classification criteria. Liaison interpreting is often categorized by communicative mode (dialogue/bilateral), whereas community interpreting is frequently categorized by setting (public services such as legal/medical/education) and social function (language access and equity) (Ozolins, 1995; Gentile et al., 1996). The overlap is substantial—both emphasize face-to-face interaction and often involve power asymmetries—but liaison interpreting also includes business and tourism encounters that community interpreting definitions may exclude (as argued in the thesis). This boundary ambiguity matters for competence research: If "liaison" is treated as an umbrella for diverse contexts, then competence models must either (a) remain broad and role-general, or (b) specify context-sensitive variants.

Despite previous contributions, several limitations remain. First, much of the competence literature is either translation-focused (written) or interpreting-general, offering limited guidance for the specific ecology of liaison interpreting—especially where interpreters may be expected to escort clients, coordinate logistics, or assist with relationship-building alongside interpreting (as described in the thesis). Second, liaison competence research is often fragmented by setting (e.g., healthcare, legal, VRS), which risks producing siloed models that do not transfer across liaison contexts without careful adaptation (Refki et al., 2013; Oldfield, 2009). Third, role expectations in liaison contexts are contested: Some norms emphasize neutrality and accuracy, while practice may require mediation, clarification, and pragmatic adjustments for communicative effectiveness (Ozolins, 1995; Pöchhacker, 2003).

These gaps suggest the value of integrating (a) job analysis to specify liaison interpreter task demands, (b) behavioral evidence to define competencies as observable performance patterns, and (c) competence theory to organize findings into actionable domains for training and assessment (Boyatzis, 2008; L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993; Flanagan, 1954). Such a design can also help reconcile competence concepts from translation studies with human resource management (HRM)'s emphasis on measurable, performance-linked behavioral indicators.

Research Design

This study adopts competence theory from human resource management (HRM) to investigate liaison interpreters' competencies in relation to authentic task performance. The theoretical foundation draws primarily on two complementary strands: the Onion Model of competencies and the Theory of Action and Job Performance.

First, the Onion Model is used as the core competency-structuring tool. While Boyatzis' early Onion Model organizes competence elements from deeper, less trainable characteristics (e.g., traits/motives) to more trainable layers (e.g., skills) (Boyatzis, 1982), this thesis follows the adjusted Onion Model proposed by L. M. Spencer and S. M. Spencer (1993) because liaison interpreting is not only a cognitive-linguistic task but also a social-interactional service in which interpreters take on salient professional roles. Accordingly, the analytic emphasis is placed on five competence domains—traits, attitudes, social roles, general knowledge, and skills—as a framework for describing "what competent liaison interpreters look like" in practice (L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer, 1993).

Second, the study is informed by the Theory of Action and Job Performance, which posits that superior performance emerges when there is a "best fit" among individual characteristics, job demands, and the

organizational environment (Boyatzis, 1982; 2008). In liaison interpreting, the interpreter's performance is shaped by fluctuating communicative goals, changing participant configurations, and constraints of time, place, and institutional/business settings. Therefore, the competence model in this thesis is explicitly linked to job demands: Before identifying competencies, the study first clarifies liaison interpreting work by conducting a job analysis in terms of job scope, job goal, and job role. On this basis, competencies are identified as behaviorally evidenced characteristics enabling interpreters to complete liaison tasks effectively in complex environments. This alignment between competence domains and job content functions as the analytic framework guiding instrument development, data coding, and competence identification.

To answer the two research questions—(1) the job content of liaison interpreters and (2) the competencies of liaison interpreters—the study uses a mixed qualitative-quantitative design combining job analysis, Behavioral Event Interview (BEI), and a questionnaire survey.

Job Analysis-Oriented Study Design

To clarify job content, data were collected from two dimensions: (i) breadth, via prior studies and job advertisements; and (ii) depth, via interviews with liaison interpreting practitioners. Job advertisements were sourced from the internet and restricted to postings released from January 2015. Because many postings did not provide detailed task descriptions, practitioner interviews were used to obtain richer accounts of actual work practices. In addition, the researcher planned to accompany liaison interpreters to observe their performance during real-world tasks and to obtain work diaries where available, so that job content could be described with reference to tasks, responsibilities, and working conditions. The job analysis focuses on what liaison interpreters are required to do, rather than on individual biography, and it organizes job content around role expectations, workflow, and responsibility boundaries.

Competence Identification: BEI Plus Questionnaire

Competencies were identified through a two-stage process. First, a pilot was conducted to familiarize the researcher with BEI procedures. Because resources were limited, the formal BEI stage included three liaison interpreters who had more than one year of liaison interpreting experience. Their selection prioritized richness of liaison practice experience rather than formal job titles. Each interview lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours and followed the BEI protocol: initial questions on career path and current responsibilities, followed by elicitation of critical incidents. Interviewees were asked to describe six liaison interpreting events—three most satisfying and three least satisfying—to generate contrasting evidence of effective and ineffective performance. During recall, the interviewer used the Situation-Task-Action-Result (STAR) structure and follow-up probes (e.g., what was done, why, what effect was intended). Interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed; performance descriptions were abstracted and used to populate a preliminary competence pool.

Second, a questionnaire was constructed based on literature review and the preliminary competence pool derived from job analysis and BEI. The questionnaire used a matrix (Likert-type) scale and asked respondents to rate the importance of each competence option based on their liaison interpreting experience. Due to time and resource constraints, data were collected online from 37 professional liaison interpreters (full-time or part-time). Competence items were grouped into the five Onion-Model domains (traits, attitudes, social roles, general knowledge, skills), with 10 options in each domain. The survey results were then used to examine the perceived importance of competencies and to support the final identification of liaison interpreter competencies within the five-domain framework.

The questionnaire sample comprised 37 liaison interpreters. Most were early-career: 97.3% were below 27; education was mainly B.A. (97.3%) with M.A. (2.7%). Work/study affiliations were concentrated in schools (56.76%) and enterprises (21.62%), with freelancers (10.81%) also represented. 59.46% reported prior interpreting training. Respondents worked across 10+ liaison settings (highest: enterprise 72.97%), and came from 14+ Chinese provinces (e.g., Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Liaoning) and abroad. Gender was not reported in the provided data.

Results and Discussion

Job Content of Liaison Interpreting

Sources of evidence for job content. Job content was synthesized from two primary channels. The first was interviews with three experienced liaison interpreters, which provided detailed, event-based descriptions of what interpreters actually did in authentic assignments. The second was job advertisements collected online, which offered a market-facing description of expected duties, though these were often vague and incomplete. In addition, both respondents and a management group contributed perspectives on job content. The management discussion lasted nearly two hours, while individual interviews with professional interpreters in this job-content-oriented phase were kept within thirty minutes.

Core roles performed by liaison interpreters. Across the accounts, liaison interpreters are described as performing multiple roles rather than functioning as a single, fixed “language conduit”. These roles include that of an interpreter, who understands what one party says and renders it into the other language accurately enough for communication to proceed; a mediator, who manages the interactional atmosphere—particularly when tension rises—and helps prevent misunderstandings from escalating; and a facilitator, who supports the parties in achieving their communicative or transactional goals, such as reaching agreement, clarifying terms, or completing a visit efficiently. This role multiplicity is consistent with the study’s premise that liaison interpreting is embedded in complex social interaction and that effective performance requires more than linguistic transfer alone.

Typical duties and responsibilities. The job scope reported by interviewees extends well beyond interpreting in a narrow sense. In terms of pre-task preparation, liaison interpreters may prepare or check materials before meetings, learn industry background and the relevant relationships among companies, clients, and stakeholders, and identify the goals the client wants to achieve so that preparation can be aligned accordingly.

Regarding on-site interaction support, interpreters are expected to ensure both parties understand questions and answers thoroughly, explaining content more than once if needed. They may clarify ambiguous or contested terminology by pausing the interpreting and prompting parties to agree on a key term first. They also manage turn-taking and maintain a workable conversational rhythm in frequent back-and-forth exchanges, while supporting rapport building through activities such as small talk and discussing hobbies when first meeting to reduce interpersonal distance.

Liaison interpreters also perform substantial logistical and escorting duties. These include meeting clients at airports and preparing name signs, arranging transportation, dining, accommodation, and itinerary details, checking locations ahead of time and scouting routes and venues to save client time, and accompanying clients continuously—sometimes “from dawn till dusk” across multi-day tasks—interpreting even during meals when conversations continue.

Additionally, interpreters may provide supplementary language services, such as offering information beyond immediate utterances when it supports communication, and in some cases assisting with written work

related to the task, for example helping modify a paper or supporting a thesis discussion with a mentor. Notably, the work is portrayed as time-consuming, context-switching, and often unpredictable, with interpreters managing both communicative and practical constraints in real time.

Job goals and the importance of facilitating communication. A recurring theme is that liaison interpreting differs from conference interpreting in its primary goal: facilitating effective communication rather than merely producing a verbatim rendering. Interpreters emphasize enabling mutual understanding, aligning interpretations with the parties' purposes, and intervening when the interaction itself becomes a barrier—whether through semantic mismatch, cultural misunderstanding, or interpersonal tension.

Variability of job content and the need for pre-task consensus. The study highlights that liaison interpreting job content varies greatly across clients, companies, and occasions. Different customers require different combinations of interpreting, escorting, coordination, and interpersonal support. Consequently, the findings stress an operational point: Whether clients and interpreters reach consensus on job content before cooperation begins may substantially affect perceived competence and service quality.

In summary, liaison interpreter work is comprehensive and role-diverse. Interpreting is central, but effective service often includes mediation, facilitation, preparation, and logistical coordination. Because the scope is not fixed, clarifying expectations early is necessary for smooth cooperation and for evaluating performance fairly.

Identification of Competencies of Liaison Interpreters

A total of 37 professional liaison interpreters completed the online questionnaire, including both full-time and part-time practitioners. The respondents represent a young, mostly undergraduate-educated cohort: 97.3% were below the age of 27, and 97.3% held a bachelor's degree. In terms of affiliation, 56.76% were associated with schools, 21.62% with enterprises, 10.81% were freelancers, and smaller proportions were linked to interpreting companies, government departments, or other organizations. Approximately 59.46% had received interpreting training, while 40.54% had not. Respondents' liaison interpreting experience was predominantly on the shorter side, with 51.35% having less than one year and 40.54% having one to three years. They reported working across a wide range of settings, most commonly enterprises (72.97%), schools (59.46%), and travel contexts (51.35%), and were geographically distributed across more than fourteen provinces of China and abroad. The sample thus includes both trained and untrained interpreters, reflecting the diversity of pathways into liaison interpreting practice.

The questionnaire used a matrix rating scale with importance decreasing from six (most important) to one (least important). For each of the five domains, respondents rated 10 competence items, producing average scores and rankings within each domain.

Traits. The top-ranked trait competencies emphasize reliability under complexity and responsiveness to changing conditions. Being responsible received the highest mean score (5.78), followed by being flexible (5.62), meticulous (5.49), and proactive (5.48). Being patient, composed, and considerate tied at 5.24. Lower-ranked traits include being outgoing (4.70), far-sighted (4.68), and imaginative (4.32). The study notes that being outgoing is not rated as highly as might be assumed for a face-to-face service role, which serves as an important empirical correction to common stereotypes about liaison interpreting.

Social roles. In this domain, respondents most strongly prioritize professional norms and trust-related obligations. Awareness of observing professional ethics and awareness of protecting confidentiality tied for the highest mean (5.84), followed by punctuality (5.81), customer service awareness (5.73), and teamwork (5.54).

Mid-level items include subjectivity consciousness (5.38) and equal status in conversation (5.24), while lower-rated items include benefit-bias awareness (4.95) and role diversity awareness (5.03), although these still received relatively high means overall.

Attitudes. The attitude domain places strong emphasis on interactional principles and independent problem handling. Observation of the politeness principle ranked first (5.65), followed by independence of solving problems (5.62), effort of explaining cultural misunderstanding (5.59), and devotion to liaison interpreting and observation of the cooperative principle (tied at 5.54). Endeavor of producing a win-win situation followed at 5.51. Lower-ranked items include obedience to assignment allocation and conscientious effort to finish one's job (both 5.41), and consideration of listeners' expectation (5.05). Even the lowest attitude mean remains above five, indicating that respondents generally view attitudinal factors as highly important.

General knowledge. Results in this domain emphasize bilingual proficiency and cultural knowledge, aligning with the expectation that liaison interpreting demands rapid, bidirectional switching. Source-language ability ranked first (5.84), followed by bilingual switching ability (5.78), target-language ability (5.76), knowledge of source culture (5.73), and knowledge of target culture and knowledge of discourse communication (tied at 5.59). Lower-rated items include knowledge of interpreting theories (4.86), interpreting skills as a knowledge item (5.14), and knowledge of the interpreting market (5.08). This suggests that respondents consider practical language and cultural knowledge more crucial than theoretical knowledge in day-to-day liaison performance.

Skills. Skill items reflect the interactional and pragmatic orientation of liaison work. Expressing the intention of speakers ranked first (5.76), followed by understanding the aim of communication (5.73), analyzing the discourse of the conversation (5.59), dealing with inappropriate wordings (5.49), and reproducing what the speakers truly meant (5.46). Lower-ranked skills include quickly grasping needed information (5.34), balancing turns (5.22), note-taking (5.03), adjusting interpreting strategies (5.03), and standard pronunciation and intonation (4.92). The ordering is notable: Skills linked directly to communicative purpose and speaker intention outrank traditional technique-focused items like note-taking.

In summary, respondents view liaison interpreter competence as multi-dimensional. High-performing liaison interpreting is not framed as "accuracy only" but as purposeful and interaction-sensitive communication support. Ethical trustworthiness and confidentiality are foundational; language and cultural competence remain central; and key skills prioritize intention, goals, and discourse management.

Discussion

This discussion interprets the findings in light of the study's competence framework and the practical ecology of liaison interpreting described by the interview data.

Job content explains the breadth of liaison competence. The job content results show that liaison interpreters frequently perform tasks extending beyond interpreting as a narrowly defined linguistic activity, including arranging transportation, dining, accommodation, and schedules, greeting clients, sustaining rapport, and maintaining continuity across long and multi-day workdays. Within conversations, they are expected to ensure understanding, manage misunderstandings, and sometimes intervene to stabilize the interaction. These realities make it difficult to evaluate liaison interpreters solely through conference-interpreting criteria such as "accuracy" or "delivery" in an abstract sense. Instead, liaison performance depends on how well interpreters integrate language work with interaction management and service support, providing a direct rationale for a competence model that includes traits, attitudes, and social-role awareness alongside linguistic and technical skills.

Role multiplicity as a central explanatory factor. The study's role findings—interpreter, mediator, and facilitator—help explain several questionnaire patterns. If the interpreter also serves as a mediator, then politeness, cooperative attitude, and the ability to handle inappropriate wording become essential, because the interpreter is partially responsible for keeping the exchange workable when tension, face-threatening acts, or interpersonal distance appears. If the interpreter also functions as a facilitator, then understanding the aim of communication and expressing speaker intention outrank technique items such as note-taking, since facilitation requires an orientation to ends—shared understanding, agreement, and progress—rather than to form alone. If the interpreter is also a service provider, then customer-service awareness and punctuality become core social-role competencies, and responsibility and proactivity become top traits. In short, the competence profile aligns strongly with the job content: the broader the role, the broader the competence requirements.

Trust-related social roles: Ethics and confidentiality. Across social-role items, professional ethics and confidentiality both received the highest mean (5.84), suggesting that for respondents, competence begins with trustworthiness. Liaison interpreters often access sensitive business information, personal details, or internal communications during close-proximity interaction. If confidentiality cannot be assured, the interpreter's linguistic ability may become irrelevant in practice, as clients may withhold information, limit access, or end cooperation altogether. The emphasis on ethics and confidentiality also reflects market realities noted in the article: The interpreting service industry is described as professionalizing yet still facing inconsistent norms and occasional unprofessional behaviors such as last-minute absence or renegotiation. In such a context, ethical and professional-role awareness becomes a visible signal of reliability.

Trait priorities reflect complexity management. Trait rankings highlight responsibility, flexibility, meticulousness, and proactivity—traits that map neatly onto liaison interpreters' operational burden. Responsibility is required because liaison tasks are often end-to-end service engagements where the interpreter's failures can disrupt not only communication but also the client's schedule and outcomes. Flexibility is needed because topics, participants, and situational constraints shift rapidly and interpreters must adapt to unexpected changes. Meticulousness supports the accuracy and completeness of both language transfer and logistics, and proactivity helps interpreters anticipate needs rather than merely reacting. A notable result is that being outgoing ranks lower than these operational traits, suggesting that liaison competence is less about extroversion and more about disciplined, adaptable performance under variable task demands. Rapport-building matters, but outgoingness alone does not substitute for responsibility and control.

Attitudes foreground interactional principles and cultural mediation. The attitude domain is dominated by the politeness principle, independent problem-solving, and explaining cultural misunderstanding—a pattern reflecting the deeply interpersonal nature of liaison interpreting. The politeness principle functions as a practical guideline for managing face and maintaining cooperative interaction, especially when interpreters are physically close to parties and visibly part of the encounter. Independent problem solving is necessary because liaison interpreters often operate without institutional scaffolding in unpredictable environments, requiring rapid judgment and on-the-spot resolution. Explaining cultural misunderstanding emphasizes that liaison interpreters bridge not only languages but also cultural frames and expectations, particularly in informal talk and relationship-building contexts. Together, these priorities suggest that competent liaison interpreters adopt an interaction-first orientation: They treat the conversation as a social process that must be kept functional, not merely as a sequence of sentences to translate.

General knowledge: Language and culture over theory. General knowledge results strongly prioritize source-language ability, target-language ability, and bilingual switching, followed by cultural knowledge and discourse communication knowledge. This aligns with liaison interpreting being bidirectional and turn-rich, requiring constant switching and contextual alignment. Meanwhile, knowledge of interpreting theories received the lowest mean (4.86) within the domain—not implying that theory is useless, but suggesting that practitioners perceive immediate performance needs as more pressing in daily liaison work than formal theoretical frameworks. In training contexts, this result can be read as a caution: Instruction that remains at a purely theoretical level may not translate into perceived competence unless it is operationalized into task-relevant behaviors and strategies.

Skill priorities: Intention and communicative aims over traditional technique. In the skills domain, expressing speaker intention and understanding the aim of communication rank above note-taking, pronunciation and intonation, and even turn-balancing. This ordering is consistent with the study's core claim that liaison interpreting is fundamentally goal-directed facilitation. Liaison interpreters are evaluated not only by how accurately they render words but by whether the parties achieve understanding. Conveying intention requires pragmatic competence—interpreting implied meanings, managing ambiguity, and preserving the illocutionary force of utterances. Handling inappropriate wording indicates that liaison interpreters may need to manage face-threatening content in ways that keep communication viable, an action that goes beyond literal transfer but serves the job goal of successful interaction. Note-taking and strategy adjustment are not dismissed (means around 5.03), but the typical structure of liaison interaction—short turns, frequent back-and-forth, and immediate need for pragmatic alignment—may reduce reliance on long-span memory support techniques compared with conference-style consecutive interpreting.

Integrating job content and competence: Performance-fit. A central interpretive thread across all findings is that competence is best understood as the interpreter's capacity to match personal characteristics and behaviors to job demands in context—the logic of the performance-fit perspective used in the study. Because liaison tasks often include escorting and logistics, responsibility, meticulousness, punctuality, and customer service become core. Because interaction is frequent and unpredictable, flexibility, independent problem solving, and discourse analysis are essential. Because success depends on mutual understanding and relationship management, politeness, cultural mediation, and intention-oriented interpreting rise to the top. The competencies identified here are therefore not abstract ideals; they are anchored in work realities described by practitioners and rated by a group of liaison interpreters with experience across multiple settings.

Conclusion

The results provide a structured profile that can support three practical needs raised in the article. First, for interpreter self-development, novices who are unclear about job content can use the job analysis and competence profile to understand what the work involves beyond language transfer. Second, for training and curriculum design, trainers can design learning activities—case studies, role plays, and simulations—aligned with the competencies, especially those related to interactional management, ethics, and service orientation, rather than focusing exclusively on interpreting technique. Third, for recruitment and evaluation, service providers can use domain-based competence descriptors to evaluate interpreters more comprehensively, matching candidates to liaison assignments where role complexity and client management are central.

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