

STRESS MANAGEMENT AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

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Abstract. *The article describes issues on psychological and cognitive challenges interpreters face, reviews research on stress mechanisms and coping strategies, and discusses practical methods including mindfulness, breathing techniques, anticipation strategies, and preparation routines. Literature from psycholinguistics and psychology highlights that interpreters who regulate stress effectively are better able to manage cognitive load and maintain performance quality. Simultaneous interpreting places interpreters under significant stress due to cognitive demands, time pressure, and audience expectations. Stress management and emotional regulation are therefore essential skills for sustaining accuracy, fluency, and professional endurance.*


Keywords: *simultaneous interpreting, stress management, emotional regulation, coping strategies, performance quality, interpreter training, resilience, mindfulness*

Introduction

Emotional regulation, defined as the ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional reactions, plays a crucial role in mitigating stress during interpreting. Without effective regulation, interpreters risk fatigue, reduced accuracy, and even burnout. Psychological studies indicate that stress can impair working memory and attentional control, both of which are vital for interpreting tasks. Conversely, positive coping strategies enable interpreters to maintain concentration and deliver high-quality interpretations despite demanding conditions. Interpreters are required to listen, process, and render speech into another language almost instantly, while maintaining fluency and accuracy. This real-time performance, conducted under constant scrutiny by audiences, speakers, and clients, places interpreters under immense psychological pressure. Stress is not only an emotional response but also a cognitive burden that can negatively affect memory, attention, and decision-making.

Literature Review

Research into stress and interpreting has developed alongside studies in cognitive psychology and applied linguistics. Early scholars such as Seleskovitch (1978) and Gile (1995) emphasized the immense cognitive load required for interpreting, noting that stress exacerbates the limitations of working memory and attentional control. Gile's Effort Model identifies listening, memory, and production as separate but interdependent tasks, which must be balanced under time pressure. Stress disrupts this balance, often leading to omissions and reduced fluency.



Psychological theories provide further insight. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress highlights the role of cognitive appraisal: stress arises when demands exceed perceived coping resources. Applied to interpreting, this suggests that interpreters who perceive themselves as well-prepared experience less debilitating stress. Moreover, Gross's (1998) model of emotion regulation distinguishes between antecedent-focused strategies (such as reappraisal before a stressful task) and response-focused strategies (such as suppressing visible anxiety). Interpreters who employ adaptive regulation, particularly reappraisal, tend to perform more effectively.

Empirical studies confirm the impact of stress on interpreter performance. Moser-Mercer (2000) found that high stress levels increase errors, especially during complex or fast-paced speeches. Kurz (2001) reported that interpreters under pressure may resort to simplification or omission strategies. However, studies by Riccardi (2005) and Timarová & Salaets (2011) suggest that professional interpreters develop coping mechanisms through experience, including anticipation strategies, selective attention, and stress inoculation techniques.


Training research emphasizes the role of deliberate stress management practice. Kalina (2000) and Liu (2008) argue that interpreter training should include psychological skills training (PST), integrating relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and stress simulation tasks. Recent contributions by Seeber (2013) use neurocognitive tools to measure stress responses in interpreters, providing evidence that resilience training reduces cognitive overload.

Overall, the literature highlights that stress is an unavoidable component of simultaneous interpreting but can be mitigated through preparation, regulation strategies, and targeted training. Emotional regulation is not only a psychological necessity but also a professional competence that enhances accuracy, fluency, and long-term career sustainability.

The discussion of stress management in simultaneous interpreting reveals a dual challenge: interpreters must cope with immediate physiological stress responses while simultaneously regulating their emotions to maintain professional composure. Stress triggers include fast delivery, dense content, unfamiliar terminology, and high-stakes contexts such as political or legal conferences. While moderate stress can sometimes enhance alertness, chronic or excessive stress undermines performance.

Practical strategies play a central role in managing these challenges. Preparation is one of the most effective methods; interpreters who study terminology, subject matter, and speaker style in advance reduce uncertainty, thereby lowering stress levels. Anticipation strategies also support stress management, as interpreters who can predict speaker direction experience less cognitive overload.

Mindfulness and breathing techniques are increasingly recognized as valuable tools. Studies in cognitive psychology show that mindfulness reduces anxiety and improves attentional control, while controlled breathing regulates physiological responses such as heart rate. Interpreters who practice these techniques report improved focus and reduced nervousness during live assignments.



Training programs should therefore include stress simulation exercises, allowing trainees to practice under high-pressure conditions. Shadowing at increased speeds, interpreting with background noise, or role-playing in front of large audiences can build resilience. Moreover, peer support and mentoring provide interpreters with emotional reinforcement, reducing feelings of isolation and performance anxiety.

Ultimately, effective stress management and emotional regulation are not optional but central to interpreter competence. Interpreters who integrate cognitive strategies with psychological coping methods are better equipped to maintain accuracy, fluency, and resilience in demanding contexts.

Conclusion

Practical strategies—including preparation, anticipation, mindfulness, and controlled breathing—help interpreters regulate emotions and maintain focus. Training programs must integrate psychological skills training alongside linguistic practice, preparing interpreters to cope with real-world challenges.

Simultaneous interpreting is inherently stressful, combining cognitive complexity with performance pressure. Stress management and emotional regulation are therefore indispensable components of interpreter competence.

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