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IELTS as a predictor of potential proficiency for conference interpreting with English as an active language

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IELTS AS A PREDICTOR OF POTENTIAL PROFICIENCY FOR CONFERENCE INTERPRETING WITH ENGLISH AS AN ACTIVE LANGUAGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Conference Interpreting emerged as a distinct profession in the early twentieth century, arguably during the Paris Peace Conference (PPC) of 1919, after World War I (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 17). The winners of the war came to understand that multilateral diplomatic relations were a means to prevent future wars between states, and that dedicated translators and interpreters were necessary to facilitate communication between states. As French was quickly being overtaken by English as the language of international and intergovernmental diplomacy, the organizers of the PPC opted, after much debate, for both languages to be considered the event's "official" languages.

This novel aspect of the PPC would make it necessary to employ the services of multilingual public service workers and military personnel to perform the functions that would eventually be consolidated into the singular profession of Conference Interpreter. In this way, what was once considered a temporary, spontaneous occupation that was practiced by chance (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 25) became a recognized, dedicated profession.

During the 1920s, as the number of international conferences and organizations ballooned, especially in Europe, the need for interpreting services became more and more evident (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 72). It was at this time that organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) made their first forays into what would later be known as simultaneous interpreting, in order to overcome the barriers presented by consecutive interpreting when working with multiple languages (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 60). In fact, the ILO was one of the first institutions to suggest that simultaneous interpreting was a trade that could be learned–and therefore taught–in a school that faithfully simulated an interpreter's actual working conditions (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 139). The first such course was organized by the ILO and the League of Nations in 1928 (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 143).

Conference Interpreting reached a turning point during the Nuremberg trials, shortly after World War 2. The techniques employed during the trials were so sophisticated, and simultaneous interpreting technology was deployed at such a large scale, that, "we can speak of a *pre-* and *post-Nuremberg* with respect to interpreting techniques and methods" (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 211). This is due mainly to the fact that the trials themselves involved people from several different countries who spoke in different languages and were often monolingual or lacked knowledge of a truly "international" language i.e., French or English (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 241). From the perspective of the profession, and specifically the simultaneous interpreting mode, Nuremberg was a success, "1. Because it saved a tremendous amount of time compared to how long the deliberations would have taken with consecutive interpreting [...] 2. Because simultaneous made it possible to multiply the number of languages, thus overcoming the limitation that had been imposed on international organizations after World War I" (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, p. 245). It was after Nuremberg that Conference Interpreting would cease to be a marvel and would become a true profession.

The increased need for qualified professional interpreters brought about the birth of the first School for Interpreters in Geneva in 1941 (Gaiba 1998, p. 28). Over time, the number of interpreting schools grew, and as a result AIIC held a colloquium on the teaching of Conference Interpreting in 1965. Two of the colloquium's stated objectives were to standardize Conference Interpreting teaching methods, research, and experiences, on the one hand; and to, as Keiser (1965, p. 2) put it, "tear away [Conference Interpreting's] shroud of mystery."

This collaborative approach to the study of Conference Interpreting training eventually led to research on how interpreters are assessed. One area of specific interest is testing for interpreter aptitude, which, "notwithstanding their continuing uncertainties and weaknesses enable testers to give a reasonably justified assessment of the potential that candidates may have or lack" (Kalina 2015, p. 28). This is because, "experience has shown that students must meet certain prerequisites in order to successfully complete a degree in Conference Interpreting" (Chabasse 2015, p. 43). In other words, "selecting interpreting candidates wisely has become not only a practical necessity [...] but also an ethical one" (Russo 2011, p. 8).

As Conference Interpreting is a linguistic profession, language proficiency is a "commonsense prerequisite for interpreting" (Blasco Mayor 2015, p. 108). Therefore, when assessing aptitude in potential Conference Interpreters, pre-training language proficiency assessment is important. The question that arises from this conclusion is which pre-training language proficiency assessment can be considered valid, and why. Arguments can be made for and against the idea of a standardized language test as a predictor of aptitude in Conference Interpreting, as opposed to a specialized test that evaluates language proficiency specifically as it pertains to Conference Interpreting.

This thesis, then, will discuss the following research question: can a specific standardized language test, the International English Language Testing System exam, or IELTS, be used to determine if a candidate for a conference interpreting program possesses the potential aptitude to become a conference interpreter with English as an active language? To do so, in section II, Definitions and literature review, this thesis will first define and discuss the central concepts related to the research question. In section III, Analysis, it will analyze the language skills that a candidate is expected to possess if they wish to be admitted to a conference interpreter training program. Then, it will approach the research question directly by determining if these skills are evaluated by the IELTS exam and comparing that to the set of language skills that are evaluated in a Conference Interpreting admission test—in this case, the admission test employed by the Faculté de Traduction et Interprétation (FTI) of the University of Geneva—using an external, common frame of reference, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (hereinafter the CEFR scale). By comparing both the IELTS test and the FTI admission test against the CEFR scale, which is used as a benchmark, it is possible to determine whether the IELTS exam can be an accurate predictor of a person's potential aptitude for the profession of Conference Interpreting.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Aptitude

Aptitude is most thought of as a specialized form of intelligence (Robinson 2013, p. 52), and more specifically for the purposes of this text, the constellation of faculties that allow someone to learn a

language (ibid). It is, in other words, a holistic construct made up of a combination of cognitive and perceptual abilities (Doughty, Campbell, Mislevy, Bunting, Bowles & Koeth 2010 in Granena 2013, p. 105). Indeed, it is a "conglomerate of individual characteristics that interact dynamically with the situation in which learning takes place." (Kormos 2013, p. 132).

Aptitude is the second strongest predictor of a learner's capacity to learn a foreign language, after age of onset, or the age at which a learner is first exposed to a foreign language (Granena and Long 2013, p. IX). However, despite its importance, aptitude is difficult to define and measure as evidenced by the fact that the measurement of aptitude is itself a subject of research (Granena and Long 2013, p. 34). Nevertheless, individual differences in aptitude can determine whether an individual can achieve a high level of language proficiency, and someone with the required aptitude "is able to learn any foreign language to a near-native level of competence, given proper motivation, time and conducive environment" (Biedrón and Pawlak 2016, p. 156). Moreover, aptitude is a stable trait and there is no measurable difference in language aptitude across genders (Granena 2013, p. 122).

When discussing the use of language, the concept of aptitude can be subdivided into four distinct and measurable skills: "phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability and associative memory" (Wen, Biedron and Skehan 2017, p. 3-4). In his work on the concept of language aptitude, Carroll (1981, p. 105 in Kormos 2013, p. 134) defines each of these skills as follows:

Phonetic coding ability: "ability to identify distinct sounds, to form associations between those sounds and symbols representing them, and to retain these associations" i.e., the capacity to understand the sounds of a language and identify the words that they correspond to.

Grammatical sensitivity: "the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words (or other linguistic entities) in sentence structures" i.e., the capacity to understand the functions that words fulfil in a sentence.

Inductive language learning ability: "the ability to infer or induce the rules governing a set of language materials, given sample language materials that permit such inferences" i.e., the capacity to extrapolate the rules of grammar to create new sentences.

Associative memory: also known as rote learning ability, this refers to "the ability to learn associations between sounds and meanings rapidly and efficiently, and to retain these associations."

Additional, non-linguistic constructs that influence language aptitude include learning strategies, self-regulatory capacity, motivational orientation and certain personality traits, such as openness to experience, extraversion and conscientiousness (Kormos 2013). The interplay between aptitude and factors such as motivation, or even anxiety was confirmed by Li (2016, p.33), who found that aptitude "has a large overlap but is not isomorphic with intelligence."

From this, it can be inferred that language aptitude consists of three types of skills: those associated with comprehension, those associated with employing the information gained from comprehension to express new ideas, and those associated with creating opportunities to learn and utilizing them effectively.

Aptitude for languages is but one of the elements that constitute aptitude for Conference Interpreting. Adequate command of an interpreter's languages – in other words, the act of having capitalized on aptitude for language learning using formal or informal language acquisition methods – is vital, especially in the context of a language-centered course where, "[…] a learner's cognitive processes and skills develop through engagement with the communicative tasks that arise in social interaction" (Shaw 2022, p. 30). The abilities that allow an individual to acquire the necessary skills to become a Conference Interpreter also include both cognitive and personality factors (Schlesinger and Pöchhaker 2011). Chabasse (2015, p. 48) lists several non-linguistic skills that make up a candidate's aptitude for Conference Interpreting, including: determination, stamina, concentration, stress resistance, flexibility, ability to communicate, self-confidence and the ability to work in teams.

Since the early days of the profession, there has been a prevalent assumption that interpreters possess inborn qualities (Russo 2011). In interpreting studies, it has also been suggested that aptitude is noticeable "particularly in the interpreter's speech restructuring analysis and synthesis skills." (Russo & Pippa 2004; in Dastyar 2019, p. 6).

This notion has been challenged over the years; nevertheless, how a trainer can determine whether a candidate is fit to become an interpreter is still a topic of discussion. Moser-Mercer (1985) suggests that such a determination can only be made after observing a student over a period. This contrasts with ideas expressed in the 1965 Paris *Colloque sur l'enseignement de l'interprétation*, during which Keiser (1965) asserted that it would be a waste of time and effort to allow someone without the necessary "gifts" to undergo interpreter training:

> *"Mais il serait anormal de permettre à des candidats dépourvus de dons de se lancer dans des études d'interprétation alors qu'il serait patent qu'ils ne deviendront jamais interprètes, ou qu'ils ne le deviendront qu'après quinze ans d'études, ce qui entraînerait une disproportion des efforts injustifiée."* (p.311)

This idea implies that a person needs to possess certain innate traits if they wish to become a conference interpreter, and that compensating for the lack of these traits through training is simply not worth the effort. This is an idea that has been challenged on several occasions, most famously by Jennifer Mackintosh in *Interpreters are Made, not Born*: "The growth in the number of schools and international gatherings devoted to interpreter training suggests that indeed, interpreters are no longer born, but made." (Mackintosh 1999, p. 67) The very existence of Conference Interpreting training courses seemingly supports this idea.

In any case, debates on interpreter aptitude touch on an ethical component inherent to Conference Interpreter training: the evaluation of aptitude as a predictor of future skill level, and therefore as a way of regulating access to interpreter training (Russo 2011). The debate of whether aptitude can determine whether an individual should even begin training to become an interpreter is, in essence, the "nature vs. nurture" debate as applied to the profession of Conference Interpreting. Aptitude

tests, which seek to determine whether a candidate possesses aptitude for Conference Interpreting, are, therefore, merely predictive in nature (Dastyar 2019) as they by themselves are unable to determine, accurately and without error, how an interpreter trainee will progress through a program of study and into the profession.

In conclusion, for the purposes of this thesis, "aptitude" will be defined as the aggregate latent skills that a person must develop if they wish to become a conference interpreter–including, but not limited to, language proficiency–as well as the ability to capitalize on those skills to acquire or develop the skills required by the profession. "Potential aptitude", then, is the possibility that a person might possess aptitude for conference interpreting. An admission test into a conference interpreting training would, therefore, consider potential aptitude when evaluating candidates for admission into said program.

B. Assessment

Assessment can be defined as "the systematic multi-step process of developing and documenting a clear picture of individual and institutional effectiveness through the use of a wide variety of methods" (Dastyar 2019, p. 14). In simpler terms, assessment refers to the process employed to quantify a student's (in this case, a student of Conference Interpreting) achievements before, during or after completing a training program for Conference Interpreters. This thesis will focus on assessment that is used prior to the beginning of a Conference Interpreter training course, as the focus is on certain types of assessment as predictors of potential aptitude; any other types of assessment that take place during or after undergoing a Conference Interpreter training program are therefore not relevant.

There is no internationally enforced, universally accepted framework for determining whether a person possesses the skills necessary to become an interpreter. And yet, assessment is an integral component of interpreter education (Pöchhacker 2015). In fact, Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2008, p. 30) go so far as to call it a "necessary evil." There is a consensus as to the fact that

interpreter training courses are necessary and need to assess whether a given person is in possession of the skills necessary to become an interpreter, which include the skill of interpreting itself, of which language skills are a subset. There is also consensus that assessment tests administered prior to interpreter training should be able to predict a potential interpreter's performance after a certain period of study (Liu and Zhang 2022). However, due to the lack of specific, actionable assessment criteria, it is up to each institution to determine how this assessment is carried out.

Assessment in the field of Conference Interpreting is a subjective process due to the unavailability of objective tests (Dastyar, 2019), itself a consequence of how difficult it is to identify objective criteria in the first place. Current assessment models function by knowing what qualities may predict successful performance in interpreting (Moser-Mercer 1994; in Dastyar, 2019), and testing for them. These qualities can either be *hard skills*, which can be tested empirically; or *soft skills*, which cannot.

> *"Memory capacity, for example, can be tested through a recall exercise or through standardized tests, such as the Wechsler memory scale; knowledge of L1 and other languages can be tested through an inter- view or a standard language test [...] Other features now deemed equally important as these hard skills are what are known as soft skills, as they constitute more elusive personal traits and skills that are not amenable to straightforward standard testing procedures." (Russo 2022, p. 307).*

Another element that makes it difficult to evaluate aptitude is the fact that students are prone to assessing their own language proficiency skills, and that this self-assessment clashes with that of an instructor's: "students' self-appraisal of their own skills in many cases differs from the instructor's assessment, and that students may not recognize their language insufficiencies" (Shaw, Grbic, and Franklin 2004, p. 70).

Han (2018, p. 16) points out that, "the most common and time-honored approach to assessing interpretation is arguably based on what Goulden (1992) calls the *atomistic method*: assessors focus on points of content in an interpretation and/or its (para)linguistic features (including such items as

omissions, substitutions, errors, pauses, false starts and repetitions)." However, this approach is not considered to be wholly adequate due to its "reductionism, unreplicability and inherent impracticality" (Han 2018, p. 61), and for this reason Hamidi and Pöchhaker (2007) highlight that currently the most widely-used method of assessing interpreting skills involves the use of an *analytic scale* which judges the different *components* of an interpretation separately and then assigns a total score. This is, incidentally, the assessment methodology employed at the University of Geneva's *Faculté de Traduction et Interprétation*.

Keiser (1978, in Dastyar, 2019) builds on the notion of the *analytic scale* by mentioning that these essential *components* of interpreter aptitude testing using an analytic scale include (but are not limited to) 1) knowledge (perfect mastery of the active language(s)); fully adequate understanding of the passive language(s); solid general background (formal training equivalent professional experience); and 2) personal qualities and attributes (e.g. the capacity to adapt immediately to subject matter, speakers, audience, and conference situations; and the ability to concentrate).

The first component, "fully adequate understanding" of the interpreter's passive languages, ties into the framework of A/B/C languages employed by international interpreters' groups such as AIIC, which will be discussed in the following section. The term "language skills", then, can be defined as the specific skills that show whether a person possesses a fully adequate understanding of their passive languages.

The EMCI Consortium, a consortium of European universities in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Interpretation of the European Commission and the Directorate-General for Logistics and Interpretation for Conferences of the European Parliament (EMCI 2023), recommends that Conference Interpreter training programs organize their admissions tests as follows:

- the oral reproduction of short and structured speeches (2-3 minutes) from the candidates C and B languages into A and, where appropriate, A into B
- a general knowledge test
- an interview with the candidate.

- sight translation

- a brief oral presentation by the candidate on a subject chosen by the panel

- written tests, etc.

This indicates that the EMCI Consortium (which includes interpreting programs such as the one offered by the Faculté de Traduction et Interprétation at the University of Geneva) considers that, prior to beginning a training program in Conference Interpreting, a candidate is expected to possess certain skills or forms of language knowledge; furthermore, it is expected that Conference Interpreter training programs will test for these skills to filter out those candidates who do not possess these skills. Additionally, as these tests involve comprehension in a candidate's passive language(s) and both comprehension and production in a candidate's active language(s), they are de facto language proficiency tests that test two languages simultaneously.

Moser-Mercer (1985) underlines the necessity for a comprehensive analysis of a complex activity such as simultaneous interpreting and points to the desirability of observing a student over an extended period before issuing a judgment on interpreting (Moser-Mercer 1985). Furthermore, there is a need to revise assessment methodologies, as "while subjective evaluation is elemental to a skills-based interpreter education program, the students highlighted the importance of developing methodologies that are as criterion-based as possible." (Shaw, Grbic, and Franklin 2004, p. 92)

C. Language skills in Conference Interpreting

The term 'language skills' is often taken to be synonymous with the term 'proficiency'[1] .

The United States Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) has established a rating scale to classify skill in interpreting[2]. While language skills are a major component of this rating scale, not much detail is given as to what those language skills are, as other, non-linguistic factors are also

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[1] See Alahmadi and Foltz (2020) where the terms are used interchangeably.

[2] https://www.govtilr.org/Skills/interpretationSLDsapproved.htm

included in the rating scale. It is possible, however, to conclude that listening comprehension, written comprehension, and speaking proficiency are considered essential skills for interpreters.

In their book *Language Assessment in Practice*, Bachman and Palmer (2012) provide a breakdown of the different types of "language knowledge," and the skills that are associated with that knowledge. They divide this knowledge into two categories: Organizational Knowledge (which includes knowledge of grammar and vocabulary i.e., how the language works) and Pragmatic Knowledge (knowledge of how the language is used to communicate ideas as well as the cultural elements that are often associated with the language).

Skaaden and Wadesjö (2014, p. 20) refer to this very list and add that, "language proficiency is a highly complex phenomenon, resting on several organizational and pragmatic skills. The ability to interpret thus involves the mastery of *grammatical*, *textual*, *pragmatic* and *functional* knowledge in combination with other interactional skills [emphasis added]." An initial outline of language skills/proficiency can, then, be built on these four general skills: grammatical skills, textual skills, functional skills and sociolinguistic skills. And such an outline, or evaluation, of language skills can utilize existing standardized language testing tools.

A commonly accepted scale of language proficiency is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which was created by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2023). The CEFR identifies six levels of language proficiency: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. Level A1, the lowest level, corresponds to "the lowest level of generative language use" and C2 corresponds to a high level of proficiency characterized by, "a broad range of language, which allows fluent, spontaneous communication," and, "precision, appropriateness and ease with the language" (Council of Europe 2009, p. 122).

The EMCI Consortium states on their website (EMCI 2023) that to be eligible for admission to a Conference Interpreter training program, a candidate must, inter alia:

- *"Have an excellent command of their mother tongue (A language) over a wide range of topics and registers;*

- *have an in-depth knowledge of their working languages (B and C)"*

These requirements refer directly to the A/B/C Language classification system employed by interpreters, which will be discussed in a later section of this text.

Likewise, on their website, AIIC provides a list of relevant *hard skills* and *soft skills* (both linguistic and non-linguistic skills) that they consider are necessary for a Conference Interpreter to have. They are:

- *"a polished command of their own native language over a range of registers and domains*

- *a complete mastery of their non-native languages*

- *a familiarity with the cultures in the countries where their working languages*

  are spoken

- *a commitment to helping others communicate*

- *an interest in and understanding of current affairs, plus an insatiable curiosity*

- *world experience away from home and school and a broad general education*

- *good training (and usually at least an undergraduate university degree)*

- *the ability to concentrate and focus as a discussion unfolds*

- *a pleasant speaking voice*

- *a friendly, collegial attitude*

- *calm nerves, tact, judgment and a sense of humor*

- *a willingness to adhere to rules of conduct (e.g., confidentiality)"* (AIIC Training and

  Professional Development 2016)

This list includes several skills that are seemingly unrelated to language skills. Despite considering them necessary, AIIC's best practice guidelines for Conference Interpreting training programs does not mention these skills specifically; they merely mention that "[a Conference Interpreter training course] must include instruction in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting," and that such a course must, "include a theory component and a course which addresses with professional practice and ethics." (AIIC 2023). This implies that there are traits that Interpreter Training schools may not necessarily be testing for even though they are considered a valuable part of a Conference Interpreter's repertoire of skills.

Nevertheless, as language proficiency is vital to the profession Conference Interpreting, there is a need for reliable assessment of language proficiency. As Green (2021, p. 13) states, "in proficiency assessments the issue is whether or not the person being assessed has sufficient language ability to satisfy certain needs."

D. IELTS

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is widely accepted as a reliable means of assessing whether candidates are ready to study or train in the medium of English (Charge and Taylor 1997). More specifically, it is a test that determines readiness to undertake a degree in an English-speaking university (Dooey and Oliver 2002). IELTS is recognized by higher education institutions throughout the world as a measure of competence to study in the medium of English (De Witt 2003). Therefore, if English is considered a *lingua franca*, in the sense that it is considered a common mode of international communication that crosses language barriers (Albl-Mikasa 2022), can IELTS be used as an example of a testing tool that evaluates the language skills outlined in the previous section of this thesis? In other words, can IELTS be used to test the English language abilities required for admission to a conference interpreting program?

The listening and speaking tests are the same for all candidates but the reading and writing sections of the IELTS are available in two different modules, academic and general training (De Witt 2003). For the purposes of this thesis, which seeks to evaluate the IELTS as a tool in an academic environment, only the Academic IELTS test will be considered.

The following exercises make up the different components of IELTS (all information taken from IELTS 2022):

Listening

Test takers are tasked with listening to four recordings of native English speakers, and then answer a series of questions. The questions themselves can be multiple choice, matching, plan/map/diagram labelling, form/note/table/flow-chart/summary completion, and sentence completion. This section asks test takers to listen to recordings of different types in different contexts (casual conversations, social situations, academic monologues, etc.) and extract information from what they hear.

"In its broadest sense, conference interpreting can be defined as the rendering of speeches delivered in one language into another" (Diriker 2015, p. 78). As the primary task of a conference interpreter involves working with speeches, the IELTS Listening test is, at first glance, the most relevant of all IELTS tests when assessing proficiency with the English language as a passive language. Not all the content of the recordings themselves is necessarily relevant to the profession, but at the very least, listening comprehension is a fundamental upon which aptitude for conference interpreting can be assessed.

Reading

The reading module presents test takers with 40 questions, which test for different skills, such as "reading for gist, reading for main ideas, reading for detail, skimming, understanding logical argument and recognizing writers' opinions, attitudes and purpose." (IELTS 2022) The questions themselves are based on three texts taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers, and are complex enough that they are considered appropriate for people entering university courses.

Written texts are a twofold source of information for conference interpreters: existing written material (websites, books, etc.) provide information when preparing for a conference, and written speeches are used during simultaneous interpreting with text, which consists of "rendering orally into another language a written text that, typically, the interpreter has not read before" (Bartłomiejczyk and Stachowiak-Szymczak 2022, p. 28). Therefore, the Reading test is second only to the Listening test when it comes to providing information on a person's potential aptitude for conference interpreting. Furthermore, as the test uses diverse written texts on a variety of topics, there is a possibility that the content of these texts will resemble the types of written materials that conference interpreters use in the profession e.g., while researching a conference.

Writing

The writing module is divided into two tasks. The first task is to describe a graph or table using their own words i.e., translating visual information into written text. The second task is to "respond to a point of view, argument, or problem." (IELTS 2022) Both tasks have a minimum word count (150 words for task 1; 250 for task 2), and test takers are expected to write full, complete and grammatically correct sentences (bullet points or sentence fragments are not allowed). The Writing module has a time limit of 60 minutes.

Of the four tests that comprise the IELTS, the Writing test is the least relevant when assessing a person's potential aptitude for conference interpreting. It is not a skill that is used while interpreting, nor is it as necessary as Reading or Listening, at least not in the way that the IELTS exam assesses it.

Speaking

This module is subdivided into three parts that assess the test taker's use of spoken English. The test taker is seated in a room with an examiner, the person who administers the test. In Part 1, the examiner asks the test taker questions about their personal life and a wide range of familiar topics. In Part 2, test takers receive a card with a specific topic, and are then tasked with talking about the topic and answering a few follow-up questions. Finally, in Part 3 the test taker must answer even more questions and further develop the topic introduced in Part 2. The entire Speaking module is recorded and lasts approximately 15 minutes.

"The conceptual linkage between language and tongue [...] points to ORALITY as a crucial aspect of interpreting" (Pöchhaker 2015, p. 198). Thus, the IELTS Speaking test is immediately relevant when assessing potential aptitude for conference interpreting with English as an active language.

To generate an IELTS score, students are assigned scores in speaking, reading, writing and listening on a scale of 0–9 with a whole or half score allocated for each. An overall score is determined by calculating the mean from the four sub-scores rounded to the nearest whole or half band score (Schoepp 2018).

Interpreting is predominantly an oral profession. Therefore, at first glance it might be pertinent to only consider the Listening and Speaking components when discussing IELTS in relation to this thesis. However, given that simultaneous interpreting with text is an increasingly important part of Conference Interpreting, especially in international organizations, the capacity to read and comprehend texts quickly is a skill that should not be neglected.

The British Council, one of the entities responsible for organizing and administering IELTS, stresses that the test is designed for non-native speakers of the language. This is because its primary purpose is to assess English proficiency in people who wish to work, live or study in an English-speaking country (www.ielts.org).

IELTS has a proven track record of serving as one of the most important standardized tests for determining a person's English language proficiency, as, "it provides a test-user and NNES (non-Native English-speaking) test-taker with simplified, easy-to-understand, criterion- referenced, and time-bound evidence of that person's English proficiency." (Pearson 2019, p. 3). This means that examinees – who are assumed not to be native English speakers – are evaluated by how their proficiency in English measures up to native speakers of the language. It can be inferred, then, that the IELTS exam cannot, by design, determine if a given examinee's proficiency in English is like that of a native speaker. The ramifications of this conclusion will be discussed in part III of this thesis (Analysis).

Another relevant criticism of the IELTS exam is the fact that, like most other standardized language assessment tests, it heavily favors written content. Skaaden and Wadesnjö (2014, p. 21) state that:

> "Given that interpreters first and foremost need to understand and produce
> talk, oral proficiencies seem to be the most important and are therefore
> the skills that primarily require testing for the profession of interpreting.
> Nevertheless, and partly for practical reasons, many language proficiency

tests used to screen interpreters include written parts. In fact, some of

them exclusively test written language skills."

As a result, "performance on such a test reveals limited information about the candidate's ability" (Skaaden and Wadesnjö 2014, p.22) as a written assessment does not reveal enough information about a candidate's oral language skills.

These criticisms notwithstanding, IELTS is still an important tool for gauging a person's proficiency in the English language, as "language proficiency is a critical factor in academic success and the IELTS is a useful predictor of a student's ability to cope with academic English (Ciccarelli 2001, p. 3, in Feast 2002, p. 71). Thus, a higher score in the IELTS exam could provide the organizers of a conference interpreting program admission test with a useful indicator of proficiency in English, which can then be utilized to gauge potential aptitude for conference interpreting.

E. The CEFR scale

The CEFR scale is used extensively around the world and employs a six-point scale, from A1 (the lowest) to C2 (the highest) to gauge an individual's proficiency in any given language (Council of Europe 2022).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a comprehensive, standardized framework used to gauge the proficiency level of individuals in any given language. It was developed by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division in English and French in 2001 (Nagai et al 2020) to provide a standardized tool for measuring and discussing language proficiency levels in Europe (Nagai 2020). It is based on six levels, which range from A1 (the lowest) to C2 (the highest). Each level is defined by a set of language competences that are divided into four categories: reading, writing, listening, and speaking; in this sense, CEFR is an action-oriented approach to language i.e. it focuses on what can do with a language, and not merely what they know about it (Nagai et al. 2020).

CEFR is a standardized and comprehensive tool for assessing language proficiency, i.e., it enables comparisons to be made across different systems of qualifications (Nagai et al. 2020), and provides points of comparison. Furthermore, the CEFR scale is applicable to all languages and all age groups, making it a versatile tool for language learning and teaching. As a result of these characteristics, the CEFR scale is widely recognized and accepted by language schools, universities, and employers. Crucially, however, the CEFR scale is not intended to assess the proficiency level of interpreters, as "the language competence of professional interpreters and translators is usually considerably above CEFR Level C2" (Council of Europe 2020, p. 107)

The CEFR scale is not considered universal. The design of IELTS, for example, was not informed by the CEFR scale specifically, although it does establish links between its assessment scores and its corresponding CEFR level (Green 2017). However, since numerous tests have been related to CEFR (Green 2017), the case can be made that different testing systems can be compared or contrasted by mapping them to their equivalents in the CEFR scale (Hidri 2020). Indeed, "the practice of aligning language assessments to the CEFR through standard setting procedures is now commonplace (Brunfaut and Harding 2020, p. 216).

The Council of Europe provides an updated version of the CEFR scale, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Language, Teaching, Assessment (Companion Volume)*, which breaks down the CEFR scale into a series of sub-skills that are employed when using language. These illustrative descriptors (as the sub-skills are called in the manual) are divided into categories: Reception, which includes oral and written comprehension; Production, which includes production of speech and written texts; Interaction, which refers to any skills that involve interpersonal interactions; Mediation, which involves conveying the meaning of oral speech or written texts from one modality to another, such as providing oral summaries of written texts; Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence, or the ability to draw on knowledge of different languages and cultures to participate in a variety of social situations; and general language competence. The illustrated descriptors are also rated using the A1-C2 scale and provide specific examples of language proficiency in different areas. The descriptors, being illustrative in nature, are reference tools and,

"not intended to be used as assessment instruments, though they can be used as tools for the development of such instruments" (Council of Europe 2020, p. 41). They can, therefore, be utilized as a common point of reference against which both the IELTS exam and the FTI admission tests can be compared.

F. A/B/C languages and Active/Passive Languages

Interpreters use certain labels to describe the languages that they work with and how they use them. The most common and widely used labels are "A language", "B language" and "C language", which denote the relationship between an interpreter and the languages that they use. Setton and Dawrant (2016, p. 49) state: "The classification of interpreters' working languages on this basis has been one of the cornerstones in the professionalization of conference interpreting."

AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (2022), gives the following definitions for these same terms:

"A language: The 'A' language is the interpreter's mother tongue (or its strict equivalent) into which they work from all their other working languages in both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation.
B language: A 'B' language is a language in which the interpreter is perfectly fluent, but which is not a mother tongue.
C language: A 'C' language is one which the interpreter understands perfectly but into which they do not work. They will interpret from this (these) language(s) into their active languages. It is therefore a passive language for the interpreter." (AIIC, 2022)

As AIIC was and remains the main interlocutor of the Conference Interpreting profession in the world (Boéri 2015), their definitions of A/B/C languages are widely accepted.

Likewise, ASTM International (formerly the American Society for Testing and Materials) provides its own guide to Conference Interpreter working languages. The ASTM Standard Guide to Language Interpretation Services (ASTM 2016) provides the following definitions for the same terms:

"A: A language in which the speaker has educated native proficiency in speaking and listening.

B: A language in which the interpreter has full functional proficiency in speaking and listening.

C: A language in which the interpreter has full functional listening proficiency." (ATSM 2016)

The EMCI Consortium also provides their own definitions for A/B/C/ Languages (EMCI 2023). To them, an A language is, "the interpreter's native language (or another language strictly equivalent to a native language), into which the interpreter works from all her or his other languages in both modes of interpretation, simultaneous and consecutive." A B language, meanwhile, is, "a language other than the interpreter's native language, of which she or he has perfect command and into which they work from one or more of their languages." Finally, a C language is any language, "of which the interpreter has a complete understanding and from which s/he works."

Loiseau and Delgado Luchner (2021) provide a brief overview of what these terms mean, as follows:

"[...] an 'A', the language of which the interpreter has the highest command, is used as an active or target language from all other languages in her combination; a 'C' is a language used passively (i.e. as a source language) in the interpreter's A language; and a 'B' can be used as a source language (into A) and a target language, only from the interpreter's 'A' language." (p. 468)

Setton and Dawrant (2016) provide an itemized description of what having an A language means for a potential interpreter. According to this description, the potential interpreter's A language in which the potential interpreter:

- *"is most at ease, expressing him/herself naturally, clearly and well without undue effort and in a standard accent[3];*

- *has a convincing educated command at university honours level, both written and oral;*

- *can read complex texts aloud fluently, confidently and intelligently;*

- *can use the language correctly in a range of registers (formal, colloquial, humorous, ironic, etc.);*

- *has a large vocabulary and good command of idiom, usage, colloquialisms and cultural references;*

- *exhibits high verbal fluency and flexibility, and can easily generate synonyms, paraphrase, and express things in different ways for impact, or for different settings and audiences; can expand or compress expression;*

- *can 'read between the lines,' and anticipate how sentences are going to end and where the argument is going;*

- *is familiar with discourse and style conventions in different genres;*

- *[...] '[is] able to understand fully all forms and styles of speech intelligible to the well-educated native listener, including a number of regional and illiterate dialects, highly colloquial speech and conversations and discourse distorted by marked interference from other noise[...]' (ILR scale of listening proficiency, 'Listening 5')*

- *is sensitive to nuances, tone and fine shades of meaning;*

- *can understand literary language, allusions and even somewhat archaic language."* (p. 62)

Less detailed definitions are provided for B and C languages. A C language is defined as one for which the potential interpreter can "understand any speaker in a conference without too much effort. [This would correspond to] a IELTS Listening score of 8-9." (Setton and Dawrant 2016, p. 63). A B language, conversely, is one where the potential interpreter can, "speak convincingly and effectively [...] giving sophisticated speeches [...] [The interpreter will need to] marshal devices of argument, rhetoric, persuasion, hedging [...] empathy, humour [and] cross-cultural dynamics." (Setton and Dawrant

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[3] In this thesis, "standard accent" means an American, British or Australian accent, as stated by Pearson (2019, p. 3), who argues that the IELTS exam, "emphasize[s] the linguistic norms of inner-circle Englishes, particularly those of the United Kingdom, United States and Australia" (p. 4).

2016, p. 64). As with C languages, Setton and Dawrant (2016, p. 64) suggest that a B language could match an IELTS speaking level of 8-9.

It can be inferred from these definitions that every interpreter is expected to have one A language, at least one C language and, potentially, a B language. An interpreter's language combination can differ according to their individual circumstances, however: they may possess several C languages or lack a B language altogether.

An interpreter may be considered to have two main/A/active languages if they can comfortably express themselves in either one of those languages; and, in cases where the interpreter has a third working language, if they can interpret from that language into either one of the two main languages. However, "this is relatively rare" (Pöchhacker 2015, p. 63).

Loiseau and Delgado Luchner (2021, p. 468) specify that the A/B/C language classification scheme is based on largely intuitive criteria: "Practising interpreters seem to have acquired an implicit understanding of what 'makes an A an A, a B a B and a C a C'."

As a result, there appears to be a lack of actionable criteria that can be employed to determine a potential interpreter's A, B and C languages. In fact, often this classification is employed in comparative terms (Loiseau and Delgado Luchner 2021), such that an interpreter's B or C languages are labelled this way mainly in relation to their A language, and vice versa. This is concerning as "language proficiency levels must be specified more closely for testing purposes, especially for admission where language is still evaluated more or less separately from other aspects of performance" (Setton and Dawrant 2026, p. 51). Nevertheless, it is recognized that interpreting into an A language is vital because when using their A language, interpreters "would be distinguished by their ability to naturally pick the words that strike the most and produce the most evocative images and structures" (Solari 2018 p. 15). This automatically ensures that, "the interpretation will be complete and the whole content conveyed" (Seleskovitch and Lederer 1995, p. 114).

More general labels can be applied to the languages that an interpreter works with. For example, Lucía Ruíz-Rosendo and Marie Dur employ the terms "active language" and "passive language", which allow for a discussion of the interplay between language skills and language assessment while avoiding loaded terminology. In their analysis of the United Nations Language Competitive Examination (2017, p. 37), they mention that interpreters are expected to have "perfect command" of their *active language* and "excellent comprehension" of their *passive languages*.

Jones (2002, p. 8) also uses the term "passive" language: "a language out of which an interpreter is capable of interpreting"; and "active" language: "one into which they are capable of interpreting" (Jones 2002, p. 8). In addition, Jones (2002, p. 9) suggests that an interpreter may have a *mother tongue* i.e., an A language in which the interpreter has, "the ability to express themselves fluently, grammatically and precisely, with accurate and extensive vocabulary, such that they can reflect finer shades of meaning on a broad range of topics." However, this term is used without any implications regarding the interpreter's origins.

Likewise, the Outreach Program of the United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (UNDGACM) uses the term "main language" to refer to an interpreter's active language(s)[4]. Specifically, the term "main language" refers to the language of an individual's higher education. As stated by UNDGACM, an interpreter must be proficient enough in their "main language" that, at the very least, they can successfully complete undergraduate studies in that language i.e., that their language skills are not an obstacle or impediment.

Davies (2003, p. 17) offers another term, that of the "dominant language", which is employed in a similar fashion to the term "active language".

As IELTS is a test of English as a foreign language that assumes that the examinee is not a native English speaker, it cannot be used to determine whether the examinee has English as an A language. It can be used, however, to evaluate the examinee's potential use of English as an active language i.e., one that they can interpret into English from their A language, at least. Other tests or methods

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[4] https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/language-careers

would be necessary to evaluate a candidate's potential use of English as an A language, some of which are mentioned in a later section (section III.D: What other methods could be used to determine whether someone has the requisite proficiency?)

Given the discrepancies surrounding the exact definition of A/B/C languages, this thesis will limit itself to discussing active/passive languages. A "passive language" is any language that an interpreter works from, and an "active language" is a language that an interpreter works from or into, either because it is their native language/language of upbringing or because they can interpret into it from their native language. This definition is useful given that the IELTS exam is not designed to determine if an examinee is a native speaker of English. Thus, the distinction between an A language and an active language is not relevant for the purposes of this thesis.

G. Bilingualism

Conference Interpreters, like other professionals, rely on a specific set of skills that allow them to exercise their profession. The first and most important skill, the one that is essential for a Conference Interpreter's work, is a high level of proficiency in at least two languages. Indeed, (Skaaden p. 36; in Dastyar 2019) points out that, "a high level of bilingual proficiency is part of an interpreter's core competence." But what does it mean to have bilingual proficiency? It is insufficient to merely discuss the interplay between bilingualism and Conference Interpreting without arriving at a definition of the term that is adequate for the purposes of that discussion.

One of the most widespread definitions of the term "bilingualism" was given by Bloomfield (1933, p. 56), who states that "bilingualism is the native-like control of two languages." However, Grosjean (1997, p. 164) argues that this definition is exceedingly narrow and excludes the "vast majority of people who use two or more languages regularly but who do not have native-like fluency in each." He goes on to suggest an alternative meaning for bilingualism: the use of "two (or more) languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives." This is an adequate definition in a general sense, but it is also broad enough that approximately 70% of the world's population is potentially bilingual, as "over 70%

of the world's population speak more than one language." (Trask, 1999 in Halsted 2013, p. 688). Edwards (2013, p. 12) explains that the different definitions of bilingualism, "reflect widely divergent responses to the question of *degree*" i.e., the level of proficiency that a person must possess to be considered bilingual.

Liddicoat (1991) catalogs a number of different types of bilingualism, depending on how the bilingual's individual languages are used, when and how they were acquired, and how they affect the individual's everyday life. In the same vein, Grosjean (2008, p. 14) argues that a bilingual individual should be seen as an integrated whole who "uses the two languages—separately or together—for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people." In other words, bilingualism should be defined not in terms of proficiency, but in terms of use (Grosjean and Byers-Heinlein 2018). In this sense, one common issue that many bilinguals encounter is the phenomenon known as *code-switching,* also known as language interference or language interaction, which occurs when there is the "intermixing of languages over the course of a conversation or within a sentence" (Gross, López, Girardin and Almeida 2022). This happens with both "native" bilinguals and people who have acquired a second language through study, and "there seems little reason in principle to draw a clear line between them" (Gardner-Chloros 2009, p. 17). The motivations and mechanisms behind code-switching are too numerous to mention here, but it would be safe to assume that the avoidance of (unintentional or deliberate) code-switching is a necessary skill for conference interpreters.

For the purposes of this thesis, bilingualism can be defined as having a high level of proficiency in two languages i.e., possessing a native or nearly native level of proficiency in two languages such that it is possible to use them while experiencing little to no interference or code-switching. The question, then, is: what does it mean to have a native-like level of proficiency? In other words, how can a "native speaker" of a language be defined?

H. Native Speaker

Defining whether a person is a native speaker of a language can be difficult, especially in the context of Conference Interpreting, as there is significant overlap between the idea of a "native language" and the terms "A language", "B language" or "active language". Paradis (2007, p. 3) describes the concept of "native language" as follows: "the native language (i.e. the grammar, what can be described by linguists in terms of rules: phonology, morphology, syntax and the lexicon) is acquired incidentally (i.e. by paying attention to something other than what is being internalized as linguistic competence) is stored implicitly (i.e. remains opaque to introspection), and is used automatically (i.e. comprehension and production are not consciously controlled)." In other words, a native speaker of a language distinguishes between correct and incorrect uses of their native language but cannot necessarily articulate how or why that is. This does not entail that a person needs to have acquired a language naturally during childhood; "the conceptual borders between native and foreign language acquisition have become increasingly blurred over the last century" (Loiseau and Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 471)

Baese-Berk, (2018) in her work on psycholinguistics, distinguishes between native and non-native speech by focusing on deviations between what another native speaker of a language expects to hear and what they hear: "These deviations result in mismatches between the signal and the listener's long-term linguistic representations, making the unfamiliar speech more difficult to process." Put simply, based on this idea of "deviations", it can be extrapolated that an interpreter who is a native speaker of a language is one whose speech is effortlessly intelligible by another native speaker of the same language. This entails the absence of factors that make comprehension more difficult and is consistent with a definition of the term "foreign accent" given by McAllister (2000, p. 51): "It refers to the inability of non-native language users to produce the target language with the phonetic accuracy required by native listeners for acceptance as native speech."

III. Analysis

A. Objective and Methodology

The research question, as stated at the beginning of this thesis, is the following: can the IELTS exam be used to determine if a candidate for a conference interpreting program possesses the potential aptitude to become a conference interpreter with English as an active language?

To address the research question, a comparative analysis will be conducted between the language skills evaluated by the IELTS exam and the admission test used by FTI to evaluate prospective students who wish to enroll in its MA in Conference Interpreting program. The assessment will be carried out by aligning both exams with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Since not all CEFR's illustrative descriptors are applicable to Conference Interpreting, only the relevant ones will be considered and presented in tabular form.

The aim is to examine the illustrative descriptors that are pertinent to Conference Interpreting and determine if both IELTS and the FTI admission test assess those specific skills. Subsequently, the descriptors that are evaluated in both tests will be categorized into two groups: those that are applicable to prospective interpreters with English as an active language, and those that are exclusively relevant when employing English as a passive language. However, the skills associated with the use of English as an active language will be given more importance, as "C-language proficiency can be viewed as a subset of B-language proficiency, and B of A" (Loiseau and Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 478) i.e., someone with English as an active language will necessarily possess the minimum level of proficiency required for the use of English as a passive language.

1. ***What level of language proficiency is required before entrance to a Conference Interpreting university course? How is this proficiency defined?***

The primary difficulty in answering this question lies in the fact that every institution, and indeed, every organization that employs interpreters, provides its own answers. IELTS provides its own method of evaluating language proficiency, but their 9-point scale can seem arbitrary without an external frame of reference.

One possible starting point is what is stated on FTI's webpage on admissions, which states that candidates must demonstrate a "high level of language proficiency" (Faculté de Traduction et Interprétation, Université de Genève, 2023). This information can then be compared with IELTS' own evaluation criteria and cross-referenced with CEFR, which is a third, external framework that enables comparisons across different systems of qualifications.

Setton and Dawrant (2016) cite a common framework of the skills and aptitudes that potential Conference Interpreters must possess to different degrees before undertaking training in the profession. This framework, the "LKSP" framework (Language, Knowledge, Skills and Professionalism), lists certain skills in all four domains that could, potentially, be considered subsets of language proficiency. Besides language proficiency, which is defined here as, "a solid and thorough understanding of [the interpreter's] working languages, and excellent active command of their target languages." (Setton and Dawrant 2016, p. 42), the following related skills are also listed (Setton and Dawrant 2016):

- "Socio-cultural knowledge of the communities that use [the interpreter's] working languages"
- "Speaking skills: an interpreter must at the very least be audible, clear and coherent; and at best, articulate, confident and convincing"
- "Intercultural communication and mediation skills: awareness of the different cultural perspectives among participants to an encounter, alertness to misunderstandings that may result, and the ability to avoid or discreetly resolve instances of miscommunication" (, p. 42-43)

As for active languages, a language in an interpreter's language combination can be considered an active language if the interpreter can express themselves in their A language (or languages) without experiencing interference from the others (Giles 2009).

FTI's admission exam for its Master's program in Conference Interpreting consists of two eliminatory stages (FTI 2023): a written stage and an oral stage. During the written portion of the exam,

candidates are asked to provide written summaries in their active language(s) of oral speeches given in each of their passive language(s). During the oral portion of the exam, candidates are asked to produce oral summaries in their active language(s) of speeches given in their passive language(s). They are also required to give oral translations or paraphrase a text written in each of their passive language(s). At the jury's discretion, candidates may also be requested to read aloud texts in their active language(s) or answer questions on general culture, particularly on the history and current events of the countries corresponding to the candidate's language combination.

2. How do these requirements change depending on whether a language is active/ passive?

Requirements for passive language competency differ from those for active language competency because Conference Interpreters are expected to interpret into their active languages, and not their passive languages. Consequently, in addition to understanding, an interpreter must also be able to produce idiomatic, grammatically correct speech in their active language(s).

Loiseau and Delgado Luchner (2021, p. 474) suggest that a certain criterion can be employed to evaluate an interpreter's language proficiency and classify that proficiency using the A/B/C model. Here, an interpreter's C language is one where, at minimum, the interpreter (or potential interpreter) has a high degree of comprehension and knowledge of the language's vocabulary, idioms and cultural references (their skill in speaking the language is not considered, as interpreters don't usually interpret into their C language). For a B language, besides showing a high degree of comprehension, the interpreter must speak in a way that is grammatically correct while employing a broad vocabulary. Finally, when using their A, or main, language, an interpreter must do all these things while also speaking in a way that is idiomatic and precise while employing proper stylistic devices and showing a high degree of cultural awareness e.g., employing the proper register. Their speech must also be free, or nearly free, of grammatical and syntactical errors.

3. Can IELTS provide information about whether someone has the requisite proficiency? Can it provide a way to distinguish between active and passive languages?

IELTS is, by its very nature, a language test for "non-native" speakers; consequently, it cannot be used to determine if a candidate has English as an A language. However, the exam's evaluation criteria can allow for an evaluation of a candidate's use of English as an active language i.e., one into which they can interpret from their native language, or from their passive language(s) if English is their native language.

To shed some light on this issue, a comparison will be carried out between the IELTS grading scale and its descriptions, and the evaluation criteria employed by FTI, and then compare both to another standardized rating scale. Commonalities can be identified because of a comparison using this additional rating scale.

This task is made significantly easier by the fact that, when discussing the use of an active language, only the highest CEFR grade, C2, is relevant for interpreters (Loiseau and Delgado Luchner 2021). In fact, the authors of the CEFR scale go so far as to posit that interpreters who use a particular language (as an active language, in this case) operate at a level that is *above* the C2 grade (Council of Europe 2020, p. 35).

The CEFR scale for spoken language assessment describes a speaker with a C2 level in each language to possess the following traits (Council of Europe 2023):

"*Range*: Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.

Accuracy: Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even **while attention is otherwise engaged**[5] (e.g., in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions). [emphasis added]

Fluency: Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

Interaction: Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turn taking, referencing, allusion making etc.

Coherence: Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organizational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices."

a. Language skills evaluated by the IELTS exam

Someone who obtains the highest IELTS band score for its Speaking test, 9, is described as follows[6]:

"Fluency and Coherence:

- speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content related rather than to find words or grammar
- speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features
- develops topics fully and appropriately

Lexical Resource:

- uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics
- uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately

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[5] For example, while performing any of the other tasks expected of a Conference Interpreter.

[6] The other relevant IELTS test score, the Listening test, is not covered as it is merely a numerical score based on the number of correct answers in that test.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy:

- uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately

- produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech

Pronunciation:

- uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety

- sustains flexible use of features throughout

- is effortless to understand" (IELTS, 2002)

Finally, there are the criteria employed by the University of Geneva's *Faculté d'Interprétation et Traduction*. Loiseau and Delgado Luchner (2021, p. 473) identified 10 categories of skills for Conference Interpreters and students of Conference Interpreting alike:

- "Vocabulary, terminology and precision

- Grammar and syntax

- Idiomaticity/naturalness, collocations and idioms

- Style, richness and flexibility

- Register

- Cultural awareness, cultural references and metaphors

- Interferences

- Simplicity, clarity and economy

- Fluency

- Accent and pronunciation"

b. *General overview of skills that are evaluated by IELTS and apply to CI as per CEFR*

The wording employed in the CEFR rating scales already demonstrates that there is significant overlap between the different rating scales. The commonalities are as follows:

1. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Both IELTS (2019, p. 21) and CEFR (2023) refer to *Range* as a defining trait of a high-level speaker of a language: the "full range of structures" mentioned in the *Grammatical Range and Accuracy* portion of the IELTS Speaking test band scores corresponds to the phrase "different linguistic forms" found in the CEFR scale. The Loiseau-Delgado criteria mentioned idiomaticity, collocations and idioms, which also make an appearance in the CEFR scale. Range, in other words, is a measure of the different ways in which ideas can be presented.

2. Fluency and Coherence

IELTS considers both concepts to belong to the same category, whereas CEFR lists them separately. In both cases, fluency and coherence refer to the ability to create, organize and connect ideas to communicate them, independently of grammatical structures and without the need to backtrack or self-correct.

3. Grammar

Both IELTS and CEFR highlight the importance of producing speech that is grammatically correct, although CEFR (2023) refers to this trait as "consistent grammatical control". This trait is also present in the Loiseau-Delgado scale, where it is simply described as "grammar and syntax" (Loiseau and Delgado Luchner 2021, p. 473).

4. Natural Language, accent and pronunciation

CEFR (2023) lists under *Interaction* the ability to employ language with "ease and skill". This is consistent with the terms "naturally and accurately" in the IELTS band score descriptors. The fact that high-level language use is "effortless to understand" indicates that the ease with which an interlocutor can understand the speech that they are hearing is directly affected by the ease with which their counterpart can express themselves.

5. Cultural knowledge

Both IELTS and the Loiseau-Ducher criteria (2021) mention cultural knowledge as an indicator of language proficiency. CEFR (2020) does not, but it does mention the ability to pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues, and the ability to contribute to a group communication exercise without it feeling forced. Knowledge of verbal/non-verbal cues could be linked to the cultural knowledge necessary to understand them.

c. CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Reception Activities

Below is a series of tables showing the CEFR illustrative descriptors, their relevance to the profession of conference interpreting for both active and passive languages, and whether they are assessed by the IELTS exam and/or by the FTI admission test. The illustrative descriptors are listed in the leftmost column, and each one will be identified as a "Relevant Interpreter Skill" for an active and/or a passive language. The remaining two columns will indicate whether those skills are evaluated by IELTS and/or by the FTI admission test.

The Companion Volume (2020) divides the list into categories, and the tables will follow this same grouping:

- Communicative Language Activities and Strategies: The largest category. It comprises Reception (including Oral Comprehension, Audiovisual Comprehension, Reading Comprehension), Production (including Oral and Written Production), Interaction (including Oral Interaction, Written Interaction and Online Interaction) and Mediation (including Strategies to Explain Concepts and Simplify Text).

- Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence: The category that "promotes the need for learners as "social agents" to draw on all their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences to fully participate in social and educational contexts, achieving mutual understanding, gaining access to knowledge and in turn, further developing their linguistic and cultural repertoire" (CEFR 2020, p. 123).

- Communicative Language Competencies: The category that integrates language proficiency with "applied psychology and sociopolitical approaches" (CEFR 2020, p. 129).

I. **Table 1: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Overall Oral Comprehension, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Overall Oral Comprehension	Active/Passive	X	X
Understanding Conversation Between Other People	Active/Passive		
Understanding as a Member of a Live Audience	Active/Passive		
Understanding Announcements and Instructions	Active/Passive	X	X
Understanding Audio (or Signed) Media and Recordings	Active/Passive	X	
Watching TV, Film and Video			

II. **Table 2: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Reading Comprehension, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Overall Reading Comprehension	Active/Passive	X	X
Reading Correspondence			
Reading for Orientation			
Reading for Information and Argument	Active/Passive	X	X
Reading Instructions			
Reading as a Leisure Activity			
Identifying Cues and Inferring (Spoken, Signed and Written)	Active/Passive	X	X

The CEFR scale companion volume lists a number of illustrative descriptors that are associated with reception activities, or activities associated with language comprehension. The descriptors that correspond to the skills needed by a Conference Interpreter are listed below, alongside the CEFR

scale levels that apply to the practice of interpreting[7], as well as an explanation of whether or not the IELTS exam tests for the skills themselves:

- Overall Oral Comprehension: This skill is assessed in both the IELTS Speaking and Listening tests. Both tests task test takers with listening to and understanding a wide variety of spoken language material and demonstrating their understanding by answering questions based on what they understood. The Speaking test also requires that test takers understand and answer questions as part of an interactive dialogue with an examiner. Oral comprehension is vital to Conference Interpreting, as the primary activity of an interpreter involves understanding spoken language.

- Understanding as a member of a live audience: This skill is not assessed explicitly in the IELTS exam.

- Overall Reading Comprehension: This skill is assessed in the IELTS Reading test. Test takers are required to read and understand a variety of academic and non-academic texts and prove their understanding by answering questions. This skill is particularly important when preparing for conferences and working in interpreting modes such as simultaneous with text.

- Reading for Information and Argument: This skill is also assessed in the Reading test. Test takers are asked to extract factual and argumentative information from a text. As with Overall Reading Comprehension, this skill is crucial when preparing for conferences, researching, and generally working with written texts.

- Identifying Cues and Inferring (spoken, signed and written): This skill is not assessed explicitly in the IELTS exam, but it is useful when sitting the test, as inferring the meaning of spoken or written material is necessary to fully understand it.

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[7] A full description of these descriptors and the relevant CEFR scale levels are appended to the end of this text.

d. CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Production Activities

I. **Table 3: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Oral Production, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Overall Oral Production	Active	X	X
Sustained Monologue: Describing Experience			
Sustained Monologue: Giving Information	Active	X	X
Sustained Monologue: Putting a Case			
Public Announcements			
Addressing Audiences	Active	X	X
Overall Written Production			
Creative Writing			
Reports and Essays			

II. **Table 4: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Production Strategies, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Planning	Active	X	X
Compensating	Active	X	X
Monitoring and Repair	Active	X	X

The necessary descriptors that correspond to the language production skills needed by a Conference Interpreter while using their active language are listed below, alongside the CEFR scale levels that apply to the practice of interpreting. All the relevant skills are assessed in the IELTS Speaking test.

- Overall Oral Production: The IELTS speaking test assesses a test taker's capacity to express themselves clearly, fluently and coherently. A very high level of oral production in the English language is expected of interpreters who have English as an active language.

- Sustained Monologue: Giving Information: Here, test takers are asked to prepare and deliver organized and effective monologues on a given topic, or to answer a specific question or prompt. In Conference Interpreting, this skill is useful indirectly, as interpreters with English as an active language must take the meaning of spoken speech in a non-English language and render it in English and do so in a way that is both efficient and organized.

- Addressing Audiences: This skill is assessed partially in the IELTS Speaking test. Test takers are required to speak to an examiner, who effectively functions as an audience of one person.

- Compensating, Monitoring and Repair: Interpreters with English as an active language must be able to correct any mistakes in grammar or vocabulary while speaking (or ideally prevent them from occurring), and they must also be able to overcome gaps in knowledge using compensation strategies (paraphrasing, synonyms, equivalent expressions, etc.)

e. ***CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Interaction Activities and Strategies***

I. **Table 5: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Oral Interaction, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Overall Oral Interaction	Active/Passive	X	X
Understanding an Interlocutor	Active/Passive	X	X
Conversation			
Informal Discussion (with Friends)			
Formal Discussion (Meetings)	Active/Passive		X
Goal-Oriented Co-operation			
Obtaining Goods and Services			
Information Exchange	Active/Passive	X	X
Interviewing and Being Interviewed			
Using Telecommunications			

II. **Table 6: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Written Interaction, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Overall Written Interaction			
Correspondence			
Notes, Messages and Forms			
Online Conversation and Discussion			
Goal-Oriented Online Transactions and Collaboration			
Turntaking			
Co-Operating			
Asking for Clarification	Active/Passive	X	X

The necessary descriptors that correspond to the interaction skills needed by a Conference Interpreter are listed below, alongside the CEFR scale levels that apply to the practice of interpreting. As was the case with the Production illustrative descriptors, all of the relevant interaction skills are assessed in the IELTS Speaking test. However, unlike Production skills, Interaction skills refer to a person's (or in this case, an interpreter's) ability to converse with, and obtain information from, an interlocutor. For Conference Interpreters with English as an active language, Interaction skills are immensely beneficial because they help with ensuring that the language they employ is contextually appropriate, efficient and idiomatic. They are also tangentially useful if the interpreter must interact with the delegate directly, although "it is rare that interpreters prepare or work together with the speakers or delegates" (Pöchhacker 2015, p. 72-73).

- Overall Oral Interaction: The IELTS Speaking test assesses a test taker's ability to maintain a conversation with an interlocutor (specifically, the examiner) and express ideas.

- Formal Discussion (meetings): The IELTS Speaking test does not specifically call on test takers to engage in formal discussions. However, during the Speaking test, a test taker may be called upon to use formal speech for the purposes of presenting an argument as part of a prepared monologue.

- Information Exchange: This skill is assessed indirectly in the IELTS Speaking test, as test takers must exchange information with the examiner to successfully complete the test.

- Asking for clarification: This skill is also assessed, but only to the extent that sometimes a test taker may want to ask their interlocutor, the examiner, for additional information, or for confirmation, in an appropriate manner. This skill is of particular use in the consecutive mode, as interpreters sometimes must ask for clarification, regardless of whether they are interpreting into (active) or from (passive) English.

f. ***CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Mediation Activities and Strategies***

I. **Table 7: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Overall Mediation Activities, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Overall Mediation	Active	X	X
Relaying Specific Information	Active	X	X
Explaining Data	Active	X	X
Processing Text	Active/Passive	X	X
Translating a Written Text	Active/Passive		X
Note-Taking (Lectures, Seminars, Meetings, etc.)			
Expressing a Personal Response to Creative Texts (Including Literature)			
Analysis and Criticism of Creative Texts (Including Literature)			
Facilitating Collaborative Interaction with Peers			
Collaborating to Construct Meaning			
Managing Interaction			
Encouraging Conceptual Talk			
Facilitating Pluricultural Space			
Acting as an Intermediary in Informal Situations (with Friends and Colleagues)	Active		
Facilitating Communication in Delicate Situations and Disagreements	Active		

II. **Table 8: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Mediation Strategies, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Linking to Previous Knowledge			
Adapting Language	Active		X
Breaking Down Complicated Information	Active		X
Amplifying a Dense Text	Active		X
Streamlining a Text	Active		X

- Relaying specific information (text): This skill is assessed in the IELTS Reading test. Test takers are asked to read and understand written texts, and then convey the information contained therein.

- Explaining data: This skill is, likewise, assessed in the IELTS Reading test, as test takers must analyze tables and graphs, and then explain the information they convey.

- Processing text: Examinees are tasked with reading and understanding written texts in the Reading test. This skill is particularly relevant in simultaneous with text, as it involves explaining the meaning of an English-language text in another language, which for an interpreter would be useful when interpreting from English into their active language(s).

- Translating written text: This illustrative descriptor describes an exercise that is very similar to sight translation. The IELTS exam is conducted solely in English, so the ability to translate a text into another language is not assessed; however, since comprehension of a written text is a prerequisite to being able to translate it, it can be inferred that the IELTS Reading test assesses this skill indirectly.

- Acting as an Intermediary in Informal Situations/Facilitating Communication in Delicate Situations and Disagreements: both illustrative descriptors involve acting as an intermediary between interlocutors who may or may not speak the same language. IELTS does not explicitly assess these skills.

- Adapting Language/Breaking Down Complicated Information/Amplifying a Dense Text/ Streamlining a Text: These illustrative descriptors refer to the ability to paraphrase, reformulate, and explain texts. As with the previous descriptors, IELTS does not explicitly assess these skills.

g. *CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Mediation Activities and Strategies*

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I. **Table 9: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
Building on Pluricultural Repertoire	Active/Passive		X
Plurilingual Comprehension	Active/Passive		X
Building on Plurilingual Repertoire	Active/Passive		X

None of the illustrative descriptors in this chapter of the CEFR Companion Volume are assessed explicitly in the IELTS exam, as the focus of the test is assessing English language proficiency. However, the IELTS may assess this skill indirectly through the inclusion of cultural references that may be unfamiliar to examinees from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds unless they possess a minimum level of competence with the English language.

h. *CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Communicative Language Competences*

I. **Table 10: CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Communicative Language Competences, relevancy to Conference Interpreting, and applicability to the IELTS exam and the FTI admission test**

CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales	Relevant Interpreter Skill	Assessed by IELTS	Assessed by FTI
General Linguistic Range	Active	X	X
Vocabulary Range	Active	X	X
Grammatical Accuracy	Active	X	X
Vocabulary Control	Active	X	X
Phonological Control	Active	X	X
Orthographic Control			
Sociolinguistic Appropriateness	Active	X	X
Flexibility	Active	X	X
Turntaking			
Thematic Development			
Coherence and Cohesion			
Propositional Precision	Active	X	X
Fluency	Active	X	X

These illustrative descriptors refer to the ability of a person to utilize numerous types of linguistic elements; it is safe to conclude, therefore, that they are assessed both by the IELTS exam as a whole and by FTI's admission tests. They are also particularly relevant to interpreters who utilize English as an active language, apart from Orthographic control, which is not needed during interpreting. This does not mean, however, that they are not useful for interpreters with English as a passive language as well, as a better command of the language allows for more comprehension while interpreting.

i. *CEFR illustrative descriptors and applicability to the IELTS, CI and the FTI admission test: Sociolinguistic Competences*

These illustrative descriptors refer to the "social dimension of language use [...] that are not dealt with elsewhere: linguistic markers of social relations; politeness conventions; register differences;

and dialect and accent." (Council of Europe 2020, p. 136). The illustrative descriptors that apply to the IELTS exam are the following:

- Sociolinguistic appropriateness: this refers to the correct use and recognition of levels of politeness, social cues and register. This is only partially evaluated in the IELTS exams, as examinees are not

- specifically tasked with employing different registers or forms of politeness in either the Writing or Speaking tests; however, certain forms of expression (including politeness) are expected.

- Flexibility: this illustrative descriptor is concerned with the ability to adapt language to different situations, and to reformulate thoughts in different ways. It is one of the primary tools in an interpreter's toolkit. However, as with Sociolinguistic appropriateness, it is not specifically assessed in the IELTS exam; it is merely a useful skill to possess when taking the Writing or Speaking exams. Therefore, this illustrative descriptor is only indirectly assessed.

- Propositional Precision: This illustrative descriptor concerns the ability to express ideas precisely. At high levels, this skill allows for the expression of various, nuanced ideas with different levels of emphasis. Once again, this skill is only assessed indirectly in the IELTS Speaking and Writing tests. It is, nonetheless, a vital tool for interpreters to possess.

- Fluency: The last illustrative descriptor is also a holistic aggregate of the previous sociolinguistic competences. As such, it is assessed directly in the IELTS Speaking test.

4. *What other methods could be used to determine whether someone has the requisite proficiency?*

Pöchhaker (2015) developed the SynClose test to assess aptitude for interpreting. Examinees listen to a recording of a text where numerous sections have been removed and replaced by gaps; when prompted, they must then fill these gaps by saying as many synonyms as they can for the word or words that they believe can be used to fill them. The rationale behind the SynClose test is twofold: Firstly, it calls on test takers to understand both the language and the meaning of the text, as "before meaning can be re-expressed, it must of course be understood" (Pöchhaker 2011, p. 112). Secondly,

it asks examinees to demonstrate the capacity to call on a wide gamut of linguistic resources, even while under duress.

Chabasse's Cognitive Shadowing Test tasks examinees with listening to a series of pre-recorded questions, and to answer each one while simultaneously listening to the next. The test assesses the "ability to listen, speak and think at the same time without actually requiring any previous experience in [simultaneous interpreting]" (Chabasse and Kader 2014, p. 27).

Finally, Timarová developed a personalized cloze test, which "consisted of listening to a short text and shadowing it in L2, substituting the original story with personal details" (Russo 2022, p. 314). Of the three tests mentioned in this thesis, this is the only one that requires the use of more than one language.

Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2008) state that most conference interpreting training programs employ similar tests to determine a candidate's aptitude for conference interpreting. These tests include short consecutive interpreting tests, general knowledge questions, and sight translation exercises. They highlight that this occurs chiefly because they "strongly resemble actual interpreting and its most significant components" (2008, p. 39). They also draw attention to the fact that admission tests implicitly evaluate soft skills (as discussed in section II.B, *Assessment*): "[soft skills] such as personality, motivation and teachability already play an implicit rather than explicit role in admission testing [...] schools want to know what the candidate is like, even if they do not score them explicitly on this." (Timarová and Ungoed Thomas 2008, p. 42).

5. *What other skills do interpreters need, and can these be dissociated from language proficiency?*

EMCI Conference Interpreter training programs employ admission tests that share commonalities with standardized foreign language tests such as IELTS. They both contain both written and oral components and test for language proficiency. The main difference between an admission test administered by a Conference Interpreter training program and a standardized language test is that,

in the case of admission tests, language proficiency is only one of the many skills that are evaluated. IELTS does not test a candidate's capacity to speak or write in anything other than English, for example.

Interpreters are expected to possess an array of cultural knowledge, both in general and specifically related to their main language(s). These skills include knowledge of cultural factors, non-verbal communication and historical perspectives. These subjective skills are, by their nature, difficult to quantify. Furthermore, a high level of cultural/general knowledge is contingent on language proficiency, to the point that the limit between the two is sometimes fuzzy.

Because these subjective skills are difficult to quantify, evaluators rely on intuition or instinctual knowledge to assess whether a potential interpreter possesses said skills. Often, this involves determining whether a person's speech possesses what Iwabuchi (2002, p. 257) refers to as, "cultural odor", stereotypical elements that are associated with a particular culture.

Then there is the matter of a potential interpreter's "A" and "B" languages. Here, too, there is a large degree of relativity, as "there is no evidence regarding the correlation between the official 'A' or 'B' tag on an interpreter's official professional status and [their] mastery of the relevant languages." (Gile 2005, p. 18).

Regardless, there is a need to ensure that admission tests for Conference Interpreting programs reflect aptitude for conference interpreting rather than language skills as such (Chabasse and Kader 2014). Language skills and cultural knowledge are important in interpreting, but there are other skills that are equally important, such as stress management. Jiménez Ivars et al. (2014, p. 167) mention that a distinction must be made between, "cognitive variables (pertaining to learning styles), affective variables (related to motivation, attitudes and language anxiety) and personality variables (as illustrated by extraversion or ego permeability)."

III. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

The objective of this thesis is to help ascertain whether a person's results in the IELTS exam can be used to determine if that person possesses the potential aptitude to become a conference interpreter with English as an active language. An analysis of the types of skills assessed by the IELTS exam, and a comparison with the types of skills assessed by the FTI Master's program in Conference Interpreting, using the CEFR scale, shows that this is partially the case.

The IELTS exam can be used to gauge a person's proficiency with the English language, and a higher score can indicate that a person has a high level of proficiency or is perhaps bilingual. Bilingualism with the English language is a strong indicator of the level of proficiency required to work as a conference interpreter with English as an active language, and many of the skills assessed by the IELTS exam are transferable to the profession; this further bolsters the IELTS exam's position as an indicator of aptitude for conference interpreting. However, the IELTS exam is not an interpreting exam, but rather a test of language proficiency, and as such it does not assess interpreting skills directly. Furthermore, as the test is administered in English and only assesses English proficiency, it merely assesses whether an examinee is proficient with the English language, and not whether they possess the plurilingual skills required to be a conference interpreter.

For these reasons, the IELTS exam can be seen as an indicator of a person's potential aptitude for conference interpreting, but it cannot be taken as the only indicator. Rather, the IELTS exam can be used as one of the many tools employed by conference interpreting trainers to determine a candidate's potential aptitude. Higher results on the IELTS may indicate that the candidate has the potential aptitude necessary to work as a conference interpreter with English as an active language, but this cannot be ascertained unless other evaluations are carried out prior to the beginning of a candidate's journey to becoming a conference interpreter. Other evaluation methods, such as the ones designed by Pöchhaker and Chabasse (2014), can be used alongside the IELTS exam to evaluate a candidate's proficiency.

One potential future avenue of research would involve taking the IELTS test scores of candidates admitted to a given conference interpreting training program with English as an active language and comparing them with their end-of-training results. This would allow for an analysis of the predictive capabilities of the IELTS exam i.e., whether the potential aptitude suggested by a higher IELTS score translates to actual aptitude once training is underway. Such an analysis would perhaps control for as many external variables as possible by looking only at candidates with similar (or identical) language combinations. Ideally, such a research project would take place over several years and involve detailed records to allow for the collection of reliable data.

Further research projects would also pair IELTS scores with different types of admission tests. Here, too, the goal would be to determine which types of admission tests are better at determining a candidate's potential aptitude for conference interpreting with English as an active language. Potentially, this would enable conference interpreter trainers to design admission tests that are better at evaluating potential aptitude for conference interpreting and determining if a given candidate does indeed have the required proficiency to have English in their combination as an active language.

In any case, the end goal of any research project in this field is to produce more accurate, and thus more useful, admission tests. Reduced ambiguity in admission tests will lead to training programs that can better consider the abilities of candidates. This, in turn, will produce interpreters that are more capable of capitalizing on their skills.

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