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Media conference interpreting

Caterina Falbo

Introduction

Media interpreting caters for the needs of interlingual communication in a globalised and increasingly interconnected world. It encompasses film, radio and television interpreting as well as interpreting for webcast programmes. Film interpreting is nowadays very rare (Russo 1997, 2005) owing to the preference for other forms of audio-visual translation such as dubbing or subtitling. Presumably, radio interpreting had been used well before the advent of television (Pöchhacker 2018), but it has so far been under-researched (Castillo 2015a), as has interpreting of webstreamed events. A closer look at research on media interpreting corroborates the impression that the terms ‘media interpreting’ and ‘television interpreting’ are, often implicitly, almost used as synonyms. This may be due to the fact that television interpreting seems to be more common than other forms of media interpreting and is clearly the most widely researched field within mass media interpreting. In this chapter, the term ‘media interpreting’ is used for two reasons: on the one hand, it is in line with the prevalent trend in the literature (see, for instance, Dal Fovo 2015); on the other, it takes account of the fact that many worldwide broadcast events are broadcast simultaneously on television channels and internet platforms as well as on radio stations (Castillo 2015b), and mostly by the same broadcast network.

Against this backdrop, and drawing upon the relevant literature, this chapter will first cover the evolution of media interpreting and media interpreting research, and then focus on the characteristics of broadcast interpreter-mediated events/programmes and the challenges interpreters face. In particular, attention will be paid to the working conditions, the constraints, and the quality requirements and norms characterising interpreters’ performances. A subsection will be devoted to sign language interpreting in the media.

Media interpreting research: how it began

There is no doubt that mass media viewers today are well accustomed to listening to interpreters’ voices; they first entered television studios for the US presidential debate in 1968 and for the moon landing in 1969 (Kurz 1997; Kurz & Bros-Brann 1996; Nishiyama 1988). Television interpreting has since become an everyday feature of television channels such as...
Germany’s ARTE (Andres & Fünfer 2011), of news broadcasting in Japan (Shibahara 2009; Tsuruta 2011), Turkey (Arzik Erzurumlu 2019), and on Arabic satellite television (Darwish 2006). Television has been—and perhaps still is—the most immediate and sometimes the only medium through which most people come into contact with interpreting and interpreters (Jääkeläinen 2003; Jiménez Serrano 2011; Kurz & Bros-Brann 1996; Pöchhacker 2011; Viaggio 2001).

The increasingly frequent appearance of interpreters (or the sound of their voices) in mass media, thanks partly to the proliferation of public and private television channels, has received the attention of scholars since the mid-1980s at least (e.g. Daly 1985; Nishiyama 1988). This constant interest has led to a large number of publications describing the main features and challenges of television interpreting, and dwelling mainly on the differences between television interpreting and conference interpreting (e.g. Darwish 2006; Kurz 1986, 1991; Mack 2001; Viaggio 2001). With the creation of television interpreting corpora—such as CorIT (Corpus di Interpretazione Televisiva [Corpus of Television Interpreting]) (Straniero Sergio & Falbo 2012) and STICor (Spanish Television Interpreting Corpus) (Jiménez Serrano 2011)—scholars have begun to reflect on television interpreting as a whole with a view to identifying the specific features of the different communicative situations characterising the television setting. Recent research work (i.e. Castillo 2015b), offering a wider perspective, shows the close relationships between different mass media (television channels, internet platforms, radio) run by the same broadcasting institution, and highlights the different phases of media interpreting practice.

**Media interpreting: situational and organisational characteristics**

International broadcast media events, news and breaking news broadcasting, talk shows and sports coverage are typical media broadcasts in which interpreters are needed in order to allow the audience of a national broadcasting network to follow what is said by foreign-language speakers on screen and make the most of what they are watching. All these interpreter-mediated broadcasts share the overarching goal of holding the viewers’ attention and preventing them from switching to another channel. The goal is achieved by satisfying their need to be informed or entertained and by supporting their comfortable “couch viewing” (Straniero Sergio 2003: 168). The interpreter is not immune to this basic and intrinsic condition of media communication and, as a consequence, he or she is subject to the rules of entertainment, as will be detailed below. Within such rules, there are two principles generally adopted by broadcasters to make interpretation more accessible to viewers, i.e. voice matching and the ‘one-speaker-one-interpreter’ principle. According to the former, women must be interpreted by women and men by men, i.e. a woman’s voice is matched by a woman’s voice and a man’s by a man’s. According to the latter, one interpreter must be assigned to each participant to reproduce the variety of voices characterising the primary interaction. Moreover, the public nature of broadcast events and programmes results in the total and unlimited exposure of interpreters and their work to the plaudits or withering criticism of viewers and commentators alike (Darwish 2006: 57; Katan & Straniero Sergio 2003: 139; Kurz & Bros-Brann 1996: 211; Pöchhacker 2011: 23–24; Straniero Sergio 2007).

These basic and shared characteristics of interpreter-mediated broadcasts are intertwined with other aspects which have an impact on the interlingual communication process and product, such as the interpreters’ location, the working conditions characterising the broadcast setting and the role interpreters are expected to play. The interplay between these factors leads to different configurations and hybridisations which will be illustrated below with regard to
international media events, foreign news and breaking news broadcasting, broadcast interviews within national broadcast programmes, and sign language interpreting.

**International media events**

Media events (Dayan & Katz 1992), such as debates between candidates in a presidential election campaign (Dal Fovo 2013; Kurz 1993; Kurz & Bros-Brann 1996; Pöchhacker 2011), judicial proceedings (Amato 2002), award ceremonies (Amato & Mack 2011) and film festivals (Merlini 2017) are broadcast worldwide and “[f]rom a technical point of view, these types of broadcast involve multilateral connections between different media institutions” (Castillo 2015b: 282) in different countries. This means that each national media network willing to broadcast them has to provide some sort of language transfer—mainly, but not exclusively, from English—in order to allow its audience to access what is being said on screen. In Europe the most frequent mode is simultaneous interpreting provided by in-house and/or freelance interpreters depending on the languages needed and their number. The foreign broadcast media event is often included by the national broadcaster in a regular programme, such as, for example, the daily newscast or an informative talk show which generally involves, besides the anchor, the presence of journalists and other guests in the television studio (Falbo 2009, 2012: 164–165). Castillo (2015b: 283) provides a detailed example of this arrangement. The author describes how Canal 24 Horas, a public Spanish broadcast institution, covered the joint press conference by the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The producer decided to broadcast this scheduled press conference live within the daily news programme. From time to time, the simultaneous interpretation was covered “with intermittent comments by the news host” (Castillo 2015b: 283), who had the task of conducting the news programme and helping the audience make sense of what they were watching. A similar framework applies to sports press conferences, as described by Straniero Sergio (2003) and Castillo (2015b).

Significantly in media event broadcasting, interpreters are not engaged to allow communication between the primary speakers: the American presidential candidates or the press conference participants do not need an interpreter to understand each other. Interpreters are needed by the audience—ordinary viewers as well as politicians, commentators and other professional figures within the vast field of the information sector—of the various national broadcast networks. Therefore, in this type of situation, interpreters do not play any role in the interaction between the primary speakers (see “documentary interpreting” in Viezzi 2013: 384) and interpret remotely (see Seeber & Fox, Chapter 35, in this volume) from the studio of the national broadcast network. As Falbo (2012: 163–164) notes, the interpreter performs “simultaneous interpreting in absentia”, where the words ‘in absentia’ refer to the ‘absence’ of the interpreter who does not participate in the primary interaction. The fact that the speakers who are interpreted simultaneously do not need interpreting to understand each other has a significant impact on the interpreter’s work. One of the most challenging features is the fact that the interpreter cannot rely on the turn-taking pace typically characterising interlocutors whose mutual understanding depends on the interpreter’s turn. In presidential debates, for example, turn-taking is very rapid and overlaps are frequent. Analyses of the corresponding interpreted speech have shown that a number of debaters’ turns are not translated and the overlap rate is lower than in the original, the interpreter’s speech thus conveying a ‘different’ interaction compared to that co-constructed on screen by the primary speakers (Dal Fovo 2011). Furthermore, the set-up of the interpretation service has an impact on the interaction format. If the ‘one-speaker-one-interpreter’ principle is not adopted, the words uttered by an interpreter
interpreting two interlocutors debating on screen may result in a kind of monologue-like speech ("monologisation effect", see Straniero Sergio 2007: 13, my translation). Conversely, a monologue-like interaction (e.g. the State of the Union address by the President of the United States) interpreted by two interpreters giving voice to the same speaker could bring about a ‘discontinuity’ effect. Differences have also been detected in interpreters’ prosody compared to that of the primary speakers. High-speed speech, overlaps and speakers’ style hinder the production of smooth, enjoyable interpreted speech; anxiety and sometimes a breathless tone of voice emerge, as well as shifts in rise/fall intonation (Alexieva 2001: 121).

**Foreign news and breaking news broadcasting**

The situational conditions and the organisational aspects concerning media event interpreting partially apply to news broadcasting and news reports. In some countries, such as Japan, Turkey, and on Arabic satellite networks, live interpreting of foreign news programmes—in particular from CNN and BBC—is aired on a regular daily basis (Arzik Erzurumlu 2019; Darwish 2006; Shibahara 2009; Tsuruta 2011). Coverage of news from all over the world is subject to different organisation patterns, according to the preferences of the broadcast network or editors. Simultaneous interpreting of live news coverage alternates with “prepared interpreting” (Tsuruta 2011: 162): interpreters “view the transmitted programs on the digital server and write down the main news items”; the broadcast “editors collect those lists and select the main news items of the day to be transmitted”. The same process may apply to interviews with a foreign guest. The guest’s turns are translated and edited and then read by a professional speaker, so that they overlap with the original turns while making the beginning and the end of the interviewee’s speech audible. This choice aims at giving the audience the impression they are listening to the original live interview. This way of preparing and editing a speech in the target language can be carried out by interpreters as well as journalists (Arzik Erzurumlu 2019; Castillo 2015b: 285) and accounts for a hybridisation of roles which will be dealt with below.

Breaking news coverage, instead, may disrupt the scheduled agenda as was the case of the US President’s declaration starting the Gulf War in 1990, and freelance interpreters with the required languages may be called in at very short notice, as happened in 2011 with the tsunami which devastated the Fukushima nuclear power station in Japan (Castillo 2015b: 284).

**Broadcast interviews**

A completely different communicative situation is represented by those national programmes hosting live interviews with international newsworthy figures. Whether in the frame of a news broadcast or a talk show, they fall under the category of what Castillo (2015b: 288) calls “broadcast talk”, the short form for “broadcast talk-in-interaction” (Castillo 2015a). In contrast with what characterises media event broadcasts and live coverage of foreign news programmes or breaking news, in live interviews the interpreter’s output is essential for the on-screen primary speakers, who can understand each other thanks to the interpreter’s relaying activity (Wadensjö 1998). Basically, the interpreter interprets remotely: the interpreter is located in a separate room and follows what is going on through a screen. He or she performs a “simultaneous interpretation in praesentia” (Falbo 2012: 163–164), as—unlike simultaneous interpreting in absentia—his or her participation in the unfolding interaction is pivotal for both on-screen communication and the audience’s access to what the foreign guest is saying. In order to make interpreting as smooth as possible, in the Italian talk show *Che tempo che fa* [What the
weather is like], two interpreters are engaged for a foreign guest’s interview: one interpreter interprets the guest’s turns for the audience, whereas the other interprets the host’s questions and comments for the guest. Of course, the voice of the interpreter interpreting for the guest is not audible to the audience, who is not aware of his or her presence in the backstage. This set-up was suggested by Paolo Maria Noseda, the talk show’s interpreter, in order to reduce to a minimum or even remove both the time lag which characterises participants’ turn-taking during remote interpreting and the intrinsic décalage of simultaneous interpreting (Paolo Maria Noseda, pers. comm.). The adoption of this solution is a clear example of the team work which may characterise the organisation of a mass media interpreting service (Castillo 2015b). The emergency measures and travel limitations adopted worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic (2020–2021) have had an impact on the organisation of broadcast programmes, including, for example, popular talk shows such as Che tempo che fa. The presence of newsworthy figures in the television studio was the distinctive element of the talk show. The pandemic has not stopped the broadcast schedule but has drastically changed the interview set-up: the foreign guest appears on a screen and interacts with the host via a video link. Apparently, this set-up has no repercussions on the interpreters’ work, except for one aspect. Generally, the newsworthy foreign guest was required to come to the television studio approximately two hours before the beginning of the talk show—a precious time span allowing the interpreter to meet the guest, show him or her the studio and explain the interpreting procedure. This preliminary contact enabled the interpreter to establish a good rapport with the guest and secure his or her collaboration. The Covid-19 restrictions have made all this impossible. The only preliminary contact between the interpreter and the interviewee is limited to the sound check phase, and is too short and distant to establish a truly sympathetic atmosphere (Paolo Maria Noseda, pers. comm.) or give a briefing on the talk’s themes.

(Remote) simultaneous interpreting is currently by far the most commonly used interpreting mode (see Bartłomiejczyk & Stachowiak-Szymczak, Chapter 2, this volume), but consecutive interpreting was the rule in talk show broadcasts in the 1980s and 1990s in Italy (Katan & Straniero Sergio 2001: 213). At that time, talk show interpreting received the attention of scholars, who began to analyse it through the dialogue interpreting lens (Straniero Sergio 1999). When consecutive is used, the interpreter sits next to the guest and combines consecutive with whispered interpreting. Generally, whispered interpreting is used for the host’s turns (to the benefit of the guest), whereas the guest’s turns are interpreted consecutively and in voice-over for the host, the audience in the television studio, and the television viewers. The broadcast setting influences the way consecutive interpreting is delivered. As a general rule, note-taking is not envisaged in television talk shows. Extended turns are usually split into shorter utterances thanks to the prompt intervention of the interpreter kindly and smoothly interrupting the speaker; sometimes it is the speaker her/himself who stops to allow the interpreter to provide his or her interpretation. This way of managing interpreters’ turn-taking is not exclusive to television talk show interpreting. However, what is specific to media situationality is the reason why interpreters choose or are required to split turns. Longer turns in an unknown language could bore or even annoy the audience and make the show less captivating (Straniero Sergio 2007). The prevalent entertainment goal has a marked impact on the role interpreters are expected to play on screen as will be discussed below.

**Sign language interpreting on television**

In recent decades, sign language interpreting (see Turner, Grbić, Stone, Tester & de Wit, Chapter 38, in this volume) has gained increasing ground in television productions and is
today “a major source of information and entertainment for d/Deaf people around the world” (Xiao & Li 2013: 100). One specific feature of sign language interpreting compared to broadcast interpreting as described so far is that it is basically provided within domestic broadcast programmes such as newscasts, with the aim of overcoming the barriers hindering the Deaf community’s access to information and entertainment services. Various studies have shed light on the characteristics of sign language interpreting on television, often stressing the inadequate conditions under which it is provided and their effect on the end result (e.g., Kellett Bidoli 2009a; 2009b; Kellett Bidoli & Sala 2011; Kurz & Mikulasek 2004). To mention just one study, Xiao and Li (2013) used a questionnaire to assess Chinese signing tele-user satisfaction and pointed to a number of basic shortcomings which jeopardised the very usability of sign language interpreting. Data showed a low comprehension level, mainly due to the use of a transposition of oral Chinese, that is to say, signed Chinese, rather than the sign language actually used by the Deaf viewers. Similar studies have been carried out by other authors in other countries (e.g., Steiner 1998; Wehrmeyer 2015).

According to McKee (2014), television is the ideal medium to provide information and instructions to the Deaf community in the event of natural disasters. However, non-existent or inadequate briefings to the interpreters and the emergency conditions under which they have to operate unavoidably hamper their performance and compromise communication with their addressees—namely the Deaf.

News broadcasts aside, categories of programmes which include a sign language interpreting service are few and far between. One which does, is the drama genre on British television, which has been steadily developing thanks to a series of legal regulations establishing that “five per cent of digital, terrestrial, cable and satellite output must be accessible to Deaf viewers through sign language presentation or in-vision interpreting” (McDonald 2012: 189). Drama sign language interpreting is associated with specific features and challenges concerning the position of the interpreter’s image on the screen and interpreting strategies. The interpreter’s image is visible in a fixed mid-shot in the lower right-hand corner of the screen, and partly covers the scenes of the unfolding drama. But what is more disturbing is that viewers are compelled to alternate between the drama images and the interpreter. The interpreter thus becomes “an additional semiotic element within the television drama’s existing system, yet at the same time violating the image ..., forcing the audience to work harder to engage with the programme” (McDonald 2012: 190). When it comes to interpreting strategies, during the preparation phase, interpreters have to pay special attention to how they reproduce the features of the narrative world in its physical and spatial relationships. In this challenging polysemiotic context, sign language interpreters need to be specifically trained to be able to achieve their goal—allowing Deaf viewers to access and enjoy what they are watching to the full.

**Media interpreting: challenges, quality and norms**

What has been described so far gives an account of the organisation and provision of an interpretation service designed to satisfy the demands of the mass media setting as determined by the conditions imposed by the setting itself. The challenging character of media interpreting has been highlighted by a number of scholars. Jiménez Serrano (2011: 117) quotes some evocative definitions of its nature, including those by Viaggio (2001) “translation doubly constrained”, Kurz (2003) “a high-wire act”, and Mack (2001: 130) “extremely risky and stressful”. Jiménez Serrano (2011: 117) complains about the problems faced by television interpreters never having been described and analysed in a homogeneous and consistent way. Starting from contributions by authors such as Cheng-shu (2002), Kurz (1990, 1997, 2002),
Kurz and Pöchhacker (1995), Mack (2001, 2002) and Viaggio (2001), he basically identifies two sets of problems which he refers to as “backstage conditions”. The adoption of this term, “borrowed from the world of theatre”, aims to address “a wide concept that covers all the elements constraining the interpreter’s work, which mostly belong to the world behind the TV camera”, i.e. “everything else on the other side that is unknown to the viewer but has a tremendous influence on the quality of the final output” (Jiménez Serrano 2011: 120). The first set of problems encompasses all those factors giving the interpreter the opportunity to enjoy some (albeit limited) “room to [sic] man œuvrément”, provided that he or she can rely on robust experience and professionalism. They include the need to work with a reduced décalage, owing to broadcast time pressure (the interpreter is required to finish his or her speech not too long after the end of the original speech); the lack of time to prepare for an assignment (above all in emergency coverage or breaking news); the need to work at unusual times during the day or night if the broadcast event takes place in different time zones (see also Tsuruta 2011); the need to be flexible in dealing with various topics, formats and structures; the need to be able to cope with different accents and speech styles without the time to get used to them; the need to respond to pressure from viewers’, participants’ and employers’ needs and expectations. The second set of factors affecting the interpreter cannot be mitigated by the interpreter’s expertise and professionalism. They include poor sound and/or image quality; poor quality of the interpreting equipment for which unaware organisers and technicians not used to working with interpreters may be responsible (for example, non-soundproof booths may be used); no direct contact with primary speakers (or, it may be added, their collaborators); working in a separate room and interpreting remotely. Some of these factors are compounded in communicative situations where the interpreter, not needed by the people on screen but essential for the audience of the national channel airing the foreign broadcast, is required to perform a simultaneous interpretation in absentia.

Further factors are added by Pöchhacker (2007) who highlights the cultural features of political discourse interpreted simultaneously on television, and any other peculiarities characterising speeches given by politicians or diplomats. Pöchhacker (2011: 23) specifies that they are high-status originals whose content and wording, particularly in the political and diplomatic realm, are carefully chosen and crafted. … such speeches are likely to be delivered from a script to which TV interpreters in distant locations may not have access.

Indeed, when high-level political figures meet (a typical occurrence in conference interpreting), “interpreters are always given the texts of the speeches … and therefore have at the very least a few minutes to prepare”. This is not the case for television (e.g. Darwish 2006: 69; Munday 2018: 185), and interpreters end up “in a situation of ‘unfair competition’ (Pearl 1999)” (Straniero Sergio 2003: 170).

The conditions described above may have a considerable impact on the quality of the interpreter’s output (see Pradas Macías & Zwischenberger, Chapter 19, in this volume), so much so that “quality” in practical terms becomes a relative concept which highlights “the dichotomy between ideal quality and translation practice” (Straniero Sergio 2003: 169), the “tension between what is translationally desirable and what is feasible under the circumstances” (Pöchhacker 2007: 129). This also applies from a methodological point of view because any analysis entailing “the elimination of the situational context—in which the interpreted event takes place—creates a gap between ideal (academic) quality and situated (real-world) quality” (Straniero Sergio 2003: 135). What is required is a description of the strategies (see Riccardi,
Chapter 27, in this volume) adopted by the interpreter in a specific situation in an attempt to construct a target-language speech which makes sense to the viewers. Some studies have shown that interpreters pay special attention to re-establishing topic coherence in question/answer pairs (Dal Fovo 2013, 2017; Straniero Sergio 2003: 143) by resorting to omissions, generalisations and other emergency strategies. The quality criterion thus becomes “the level of professional performance that is feasible under a given set of conditions” (Pöchhacker 2011: 24). Although viewers are often unaware of the actual backstage conditions in which television interpreters work, they seem to know exactly what is important. Research by Kurz and Pöchhacker (1995) on quality criteria in conference interpreting and television interpreting demonstrated the importance that users in both sectors attach to sense consistency and logical cohesion, but also highlights that for television viewers, voice, accent and fluency are equally important (see also Pöchhacker 1997). It also appears that the logic of entertainment comes into play in typical institutional situations when they are moved to a television setting. This is the result of a study by Dal Fovo (2018) who compared and contrasted the performances of EU interpreters interpreting non-English-speaking candidates taking the floor during the third debate for the EU Commission presidency (15 May 2014) and the performances of interpreters interpreting the same debate for the Italian television channel Rainews24, the structural difference between the two lying in the fact that EU interpreters were performing a simultaneous interpretation in praesentia as opposed to the simultaneous interpretation in absentia performed by the television interpreters.

Reflections on quality are inevitably associated with the concept of norms (see Pradas Macías & Zwischenberger, Chapter 19, in this volume). Studies of television interpreting have clearly shown that norms governing conference interpreting do not apply to the television setting for two main reasons, related, respectively, to working conditions (see above), and to priorities and guidelines established by broadcasters to which interpreters are subjected (Tsuruta 2011: 106). An example of the former is given by the reflections offered by Straniero Sergio (2003: 139) in his analysis of a corpus of Formula One press conferences with simultaneous interpreting in absentia. What the interpreter says often does not correspond exactly to what the interviewee has stated—it is rather the result of deductions made by the interpreter on the basis of the dynamics and result of the race and his knowledge of the sport (see also Pignataro 2011). Far from being dictated by any disregard for adherence to the original utterances, such interpreting performances are the result of imperfect perception—due to the working conditions (delay in establishing the satellite link, background noise, overlapping talk, etc.)—of what the speakers say. While in a conference interpreting setting the interpreter may (to some extent) request the speaker to slow down or may report audio problems, on television he or she must simply and solely respond to the impositions of the television medium, in particular the duty to provide a version which is comprehensible to the viewers. The result is that “emergency strategies, i.e. strategies which usually are considered ‘last resort’ … in this type of SI … become the norm” (Straniero Sergio 2003: 140).

As regards the priorities the interpreter has to respect, Katan and Straniero Sergio (2001: 220) analyse interpreter output in talk shows and observe that the interpreter “is acutely aware of the audience’s likely perception” and, to produce a version which a foreign guest says which is accessible to viewers, opts for “managing rather than translating meaning”. In other words, it seems that the interpreter reacts to the particular features of the television setting by adapting what is said to the supposed expectations and receptive capacity of the audience, in all probability following the broadcasters’ instructions. For example, this happened before the broadcast of Bill Clinton’s testimony before the Grand Jury in 1998. The interpreters were instructed by the news editor of the Italian RAI 2 TV channel to abstain from translating “indecent or
embarrassing details of the affair” and “to limit themselves to saying the following words: ‘the President is giving personal details about his affair with Monica Lewinski’” (Katan & Straniero Sergio 2003: 140–141). In short, as suggested by Straniero Sergio (2003: 172), “the norm is that media interpreters are judged not for interpreting a speech correctly but convincingly well”.

**Hybridisation of role and product**

As has been seen, the media setting compels the interpreter to adapt to the logic of entertainment and behave in ways that undermine some of the time-honoured cornerstones of interpreting ethics, such as the principle of the transfer of meaning in a logic of content accuracy. In talk shows above all, the interpreter is caught up in a process in which interpreting is part of the unfolding spectacle, and is a spectacle in its own right (Straniero Sergio 2007: 132–186), with the ‘show’ component prevailing over the ‘talk’ component—“the entertainment function prevails over the information function” (Katan & Straniero Sergio 2001: 214). As a consequence, the interpreter is markedly involved at a professional and personal level. In particular, consecutive interpretation entails the presence of the interpreter alongside the foreign guest, and this on-screen physical presence obviously makes the interpreter highly visible and exposed to the whims and wishes of the host and guests (Straniero Sergio 2012). Katan and Straniero Sergio (2001: 232) use the term “multivariate mediator” to capture the essence of a talk show interpreter who—in Italy at least—is required to “display a certain acting ability to ‘get into the part’ played by the guest or, at least, to manage the situation”, for example, by reacting appropriately to the host asking him or her the same (intimate) question asked to the guest and/or other participants (see also Wadensjö 2008).

In other situations the interpreter may be asked to play a journalist’s role (Kurz & Bros-Brann 1996; Niemants 2011; Straniero Sergio 2003), which is, of course, not a typical interpreter’s role; and Arzik Erzurumlu (2019) accurately describes the practice of “interediting”, i.e. how interpreters acting as editors in news broadcast programmes end up interiorising institutional policies such as those governing lexical choices.

In infotainment programmes it is not unusual for interpreters in a studio booth to be asked to provide a summary of what they are watching on foreign television channels. One such case was an Italian breakfast news programme during the invasion of Iraq in 2001, in which interpreters acted as journalists, telling the viewers and presenters what CNN and Al Jazeera were showing at the time (Niemants 2011). Other studies have analysed instances where interpreters were rejected by a programme host who performed the functions of presenter, journalist and interpreter rolled into one, often with results hardly acceptable compared to interpreting standards (Chiaro 2002; Jääskeläinen 2003). Straniero Sergio (2007: 257–299) has provided ample illustration of how a host may force an interpreter to haggle over a translation to the point of undermining his or her role of linguistic expert by reformulating or correcting a segment of translation, thus providing an “antagonistic mediation” (my translation). In the face of the flexibility required of media interpreters, some scholars have begun to talk of a specific professional profile and a need for special training courses (e.g. Castillo 2019; Dal Fovo 2016; Dal Fovo & Falbo 2017; Kurz 1990; Kurz & Bros-Brann 1996; Mack 2002; Viaggio 2001).

The hybridisation characterising the role of the interpreter also affects transfer modes. Besides, “prepared interpreting” (Tsuruta 2011: 162), the simultaneous interpretation performed by the interpreter undergoes a sort of editing process and is revoiced by a speaker or used for the production of subtitles (Shibahara 2009: 145; Straniero Sergio 2011: 184). In other words, simultaneous interpretation “may (and frequently does) represent a kind of provisional text
(produced on the spot) and the next transfer mode(s) is a revised version of it, cleansed of all the ... interpreter’s disfluencies” (Straniero Sergio 2011: 186). Nowadays, this seems to apply to webstreamed interpreters’ output which becomes a fully accessible source for the production of different text types by virtually anyone. The interpreter’s speech is then just a raw product that may be processed and manipulated by media programmers and/or newscasters.

Conclusion

Media interpreting is a particular communicative setting in which the process and product of interpretation are influenced by the situational factors that typify it and the requirements of broadcasters and programmers. Its working conditions and the primacy of entertainment criteria require a reformulation of quality expectations and customary norms, with a consequent revision of the role of the interpreter who ends up being necessarily involved in the logic of spectacularisation. As one of the most prominent scholars of television interpreting, Straniero Sergio (2007: 530), wrote, “‘n’ever as on television has translation meant above all representation, ritual, involvement and ... even notoriety” (my translation), for good or ill.

Notes

1 Castillo (2015a: 1-2) maintains that “[t]he prevalence of broadcast of interpreter-mediated events on radio in comparison to TV is not reflected in research literature”.
2 Caimotto (2019: 44) argues that “a growing complexity” characterises “media communication as a consequence of the ongoing technological convergence and the blurring of lines between formerly distinct media”.
3 Straniero Sergio (2003: 168, note 120) offers a rather exhaustive list of the main media events which marked the twentieth century:
   More recent examples of media events are mentioned by Castillo (2015b).
4 Some media events such as press conferences or award ceremonies may have an interpreting service of their own. When they are broadcast in other countries, media interpreting takes the form of a kind of displaced relay interpreting which may correspond to Darwish's (2006: 70) “relay telecast simultaneous interpreting”.
5 Basically, for longer assignments at least two interpreters are engaged. For details on dialogue-like/monologue-like interactions, readers are referred to Falbo (2012).
6 The term used by AIIC in this respect is “proximal interpreting”, available at: (https://aiic.ch/it/press/remote-interpreting-ws1/).
7 The meaning of ‘d/Deaf’ is: “d=people suffering from hearing loss/Deaf= people culturally Deaf”.
8 For a critical presentation of the studies on the viewers’ reception, see Pöchhacker (2018).

Further reading

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Kellett Bidoli, Cynthia J. 2009b. Multisemiotic transfer of cinematic America identity to deaf Italians.


