

Broadcast interpreters in Japan: bringing news to and from the world

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Abstract

During the past twenty years, interpreters have been an active force in broadcasting TV news in Japan. This article looks at how this mode of interpreting has taken root in Japan and then examines the constraints, requirements and challenges for the future. It first reviews how interpreting television news from English into Japanese is performed on regular news programs. Interpreting Japanese news programs into English is also discussed in light of the remarkable events of 2011.

The two essential constraints in TV news interpreting are the short preparation time and the undefined audience. More often than not, prepared texts are not available and preparation time is extremely limited. Broadcast interpreters need to be flexible and to be equipped with not only linguistic ability but also with a broad knowledge of current affairs. They also need to be skilled at conveying the news using their voice as a tool. To convey the news accurately and intelligibly, broadcast interpreters need to constantly update not only their linguistic ability but also their background knowledge and announcer-grade speaking skills. As a result of the increased prominence broadcast interpreting as a profession has its own niche as part of news reporting in journalism.

Introduction

Broadcast interpreting has come to hold a unique position in Japan¹. In various European countries and also at the European channel ARTE, media interpreting

1 Here the term “broadcast interpreter” is used to describe those interpreters that

is regularly employed (Pochhacker 2004). Interpreting for TV is done on an ad-hoc basis mostly by conference interpreters to convey key addresses by top political figures or major events in entertainment. ARTE, where this author visited in May 2011, is the only other place where conference interpreters are employed to broadcast regular news programs. In South Korea, as described by Lee (2011) media interpreting is used for major news events and entertainment such as the Academy Awards Ceremony. In Japan there are regular TV programs that are produced with the premise of using broadcast interpreters. Some interpreters specialize in broadcast interpreting (cf. BS Hōsōtsūyaku gurūpu 1998). It is usually the case that in the interpreting of news into Japanese, such interpreters' names are shown on the TV screen so the viewers can know whose voice they are hearing.

In the last 50 years, numerous major news events occurred, leading to increased demands on interpreters to accurately convey the news. The first big event was the landing of NASA's Apollo Eleven on the moon in 1967. This was before the word "hoso tsuyaku", or broadcast interpreter in Japanese, was created. The expression "hoso tsuyaku" came into existence around 1990 when NHK (Nihon Hoso Kyokai), Japan Public Broadcasting Corporation, started its Broadcast by Satellite television on channel number seven at that time. This channel was dedicated to sports and news, and from about 1988 test operations using conference interpreters took place, and NHK began to regularly broadcast the news from the United States and Europe.

What brought increased attention to broadcast interpreters were events such as the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 in Beijing and the First Gulf War in 1991. A major incident that resulted in the employment of broadcast interpreters on a wide scale was the Japanese Embassy hostage crisis in Peru in 1996. Spanish interpreters were put on standby for four months until the matter was finally resolved by Peruvian government forces storming the embassy complex. Another big incident that employed an even larger number of broadcast interpreters was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, which led up to the Iraq war of 2003. Interpreters were on alert around the clock at NHK and also at JCTV (Japan Cable Television), which broadcast CNN news in Japan. As documented by Tsuruta (2003) heavy usage of interpreters in conveying news about the Iraq war continued for over one month on a wide scale until the declaration of the end of active combat in May 2003.

On the other hand, in the area of Japanese-to-English interpreting, a major series of events (the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami followed by a nuclear accident) happened on March 11, 2011 that warranted the use of interpreters from Japanese into English for NHK World, the NHK subsidiary for broadcasting news from Japan to the world on cable television and on the Internet. The operation was the biggest that NHK Global Media Services (G-Media) had ever experienced in dispatching broadcast interpreters. For interpreting from Japanese into English, NHK broadcasts its news programs at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. bilingually with partial use of broadcast interpreters for

predominantly interpret for TV programs. However, the word "media interpreter" as used in foreign literature will be used as well.

domestic viewers, but employing broadcast interpreters in such a massive operation which continued for 45 days was the largest in scale in the history of NHK and is of historic significance in the history of broadcast interpreting as well.

According to NHK officials, NHK-BS has now over 20 years of history in having broadcast interpreters interpret news programs from abroad on a regular basis. Dedicated news channels such as CNN and BBC World news are also broadcast with simultaneous interpreting from seven in the morning until midnight on cable television. Such is the landscape of broadcast interpreting in Japan.

In the next section, this paper will review the current situation of Japanese broadcast interpreting. Then the article will examine the constraints and requirements that are inherent in performing this task, followed by a look at how training is conducted for this profession and finally, it will conclude with the future challenges for the profession. The following was compiled with much help from NHK officials who generously answered this author’s questions and is based on the exchange of opinions with colleagues who have taken part in the broadcast interpreting of TV news.

1 The current situation of TV news interpreting

1.1 Foreign news into Japanese

The current situation of TV news interpreting can be classified according to audience, language direction and mode of interpreting. As shown in Figure 1, media interpreters are employed in conveying foreign TV news for the Japanese audience. The mode of interpreting can be strictly simultaneous with almost no preparation time or what is called “prepared interpreting”, where interpreters can view video clips of stories that they will interpret in advance².

	Prepared Interpretation	Live Simultaneous Interpretation
Over 10 hrs per day	NHK-BS World Wave	JCTV CNNj BBC World BBC World
About 30 min. per day		TBS JNN CBS Evening News Nikkei CNBC Squawk on the Street

Figure 1. Foreign News Programs interpreted into Japanese by broadcast interpreters

2 As documented for example by Ino/Kawahara (2008).

The mode of interpreting employed has much to do with how the foreign news is incorporated into the regular news program. In the case of NHK, as a public broadcasting corporation it needs to cut commercials and also be mindful that no product names be broadcast. For example, interpreters will not say “Barbie” or “Lego” but will give generic names such as dolls or toy blocks. We will say “soda” instead of “Fanta”. There are instances when a TV program deals with the launch of a new product and the product name is used throughout the show. In such cases, it could well be that this program will not be aired by NHK BS (broadcast by satellite), the satellite broadcasting channel of NHK which employs broadcast interpreters constantly in regular programming.

NHK makes use of broadcast interpreters on an ad-hoc basis on its two terrestrial channels, namely NHK-G (G stands for general - in Japanese this channel is called NHK Sogo, meaning “general”, and this is channel one) and NHK-E (E stands for Educational; in Japanese this channel is called NHK Kyouiku meaning “educational” and this has been designated channel two). For example, live simultaneous interpreting was used in a news program on NHK-G (Channel One) when the space shuttle Atlantis returned to Earth on July 21, 2011 after completing its final flight. On NHK-E (Channel Two) interpreters can be called to interpret, for example, for interview programs with guests appearing via satellite hook-up.

NHK-BS currently broadcasts news programs from 23 TV stations in 17 countries and one region using broadcast interpreters. For some countries there are more than one station. For example there are four TV stations from the United States, namely ABC, CNN, PBS and Bloomberg. There are two from Germany, namely ZDF and ARD, and two from China, CCTV and Shanghai RTS. The newest addition is New Delhi TV from India. The details are as shown in Table 1.

NHK chooses the broadcasting stations so as to have a balanced selection from around the world. However, there are none from the African continent. NHK had tried to have a TV station in South Africa at the time of the World Cup in South Africa, but was not able to find a reliable TV station that transmits TV news on a regular basis. Since NHK-BS incorporates TV news programs from overseas TV stations into its regular news programs, it is imperative that the transmissions arrive on time on a regular basis. For the TV stations listed above, most of the news programs are broadcast with the interpreters’ voice regularly on weekdays, but for Brazil’s Bdeirantes and Turkey’s TRT the broadcast is aired only on Saturdays.

Over the years there has been some change in the style of morning news programs. One thing that does remain unchanged is that the “peak hour” for interpreters is around 5 a.m. The morning news called “World Wave” from 4 a.m. to 8:49 a.m., is the main news program on NHK-BS airing various portions from news programs around the world. Hourly, at ten minutes to the next hour, a 10-minute news program called BS50 is aired. This program is designed to be different from the news programs aired on NHK-G. News programs at 7 a.m. and in the evening are the most popular news programs in Japan.

North and South America	
ABC	United States
Bloomberg	United States
CNN (Cable News Network)	United States
PBS (Public Broadcasting Service)	United States
TV Bandeirantes	Brazil
Europe	
BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)	U.K.
F2 (France Deux), France, ARD Germany, ZDF Germany, TVE (Television Espanola) Spain, RTR Russia _ Asia, KBS Korean Broadcasting System South Korea, CCTV (China Central Television) China, Shanghai TV China, ATV (Asia Television) Hong Kong, ABS-CBN Philippines, VTV (Vietnam Television)	Vietnam
CH9 (Channel 9)	Thailand
CNA (Channel News Asia)	Singapore
Al Jazeera	Qatar
TRT	Turkey
New Delhi TV	India
Australia	

Table 1. Foreign news programs broadcast on NHK-BS

BS news strives to be different from the news program on NHK-G. BS50 is a news program that summarizes in 10 minutes the latest news aired on NHK-G. It is aired at 10 minutes to the hour since the news programs on NHK-G are aired exactly on the hour. In the morning, World Wave from 4 a.m. to 4:49 a.m. shows mainly programs from Asian news stations. From 5 a.m. to 5:49 a.m. it shows mainly news from European stations. From 6 a.m. to 6:49 a.m. and from 7 a.m. to 7:49 a.m. are the two major time frames in which the main news is presented with two newscasters, one male and one female³. The two presenters explain the news from five European stations from 6 a.m. to 6:49 a.m. From 7 a.m. to 7:49 a.m. there is a section called “Sekai no Tobira” (Door to the World) in which the main topic of the day is introduced. Sometimes guests appear in this section. This section lasts for about eight minutes⁴.

From 8 a.m. to 8:49 a.m. there is basically a mixture of European, Asian and US news. In what is called the “News Hour” from 12 noon, the same contents from 8 a.m. to 8:49 a.m. is repeated. In the afternoon, from 3 p.m. World Wave Asia goes on air, followed by Tokyo Market Information. From 4 p.m. there is World Wave, including the PBS News Hour and ABC Nightline. From 5 p.m. a program called “Hot @ Asia” is broadcast. There are newscasters who appear with what is called the “caster lead” that lasts between 40 to 50 seconds to explain the news.

3 This is in the summer. In the winter, it is aired one hour later, from 7 a.m. to 7:49 a.m. and from 8 a.m. to 8:49 a.m.

4 Right after the US elections of 2008 this author had a chance to appear on this section with a senior colleague: we were asked by the two newscasters what we broadcast interpreters thought about the presidential race that culminated in the Democratic candidate Barack Obama eventually taking the Presidency.

Thus, of the 24 hours of the broadcast by satellite by NHK-BS, eight hours are devoted to airing news. There are two notable features about the news broadcast using interpreters on NHK-BS. One is that the news programs from overseas are not used in their entirety but are “cut” based on the editorial decisions of the day. For example, from 6 a.m. to 6:49 a.m. news from mainly European TV stations is broadcast. There are two interpreters working for each of the TV stations. The interpreters assigned to each program view the transmitted programs on the digital server and write down the main news items. The NHK-BS editors collect those lists and select the main news items of the day to be transmitted. Which news from which TV station will be selected will depend on what takes place that day. The “cut” pieces of the news program are all aired with what is called prepared interpreting. The broadcast interpreters who come as early as 2 a.m. to prepare for the World Wave have between one to two hours to prepare for such a flow of work. The exception is “ABC World News” from ABC in the United States. This program is shown with only 10 minutes’ preparation time to show the TV program with Japanese voice-over with a 10-minute delay as it is aired in the United States. For the two American talk show style TV programs shown in the afternoon, the PBS News Hour and ABC Nightline, there is more preparation time available so it is possible to assign different interpreters for host and guests.

Another notable feature is that NHK-BS makes it clear that it is NHK-BS that is airing those news programs from abroad. The decision as to what to show on its airwaves is made by the NHK-BS. In the past it used to be the case that longer blocks of news broadcast from each of the TV stations were used. Since this is a news program, speed and accuracy is the key. However, these two elements are in competition. When there is a contradiction in what is transmitted in the foreign TV news and NHK news, NHK must make a decision as to broadcast the news or not. NHK would especially like to show how Japan is viewed in the overseas news. But it is sometimes the case involving news concerning conflict and natural disasters that the figures concerning the victims or damage can be at variance. In such cases with considerable pressure of time and resources, NHK must take a difficult decision whether to air that foreign news or not. A case in point that happened in relation to the natural disaster that struck Japan recently was that a foreign television news organization reported that Japan intended to import much-needed temporary housing. As it so happened, that information was found to be untrue after it was aired. Even if NHK-BS is not the originator of the news, what is aired on NHK-BS is viewed as aired by NHK.

If there is more time to prepare, the preferred method is to show foreign news clips with subtitles after checking for the accuracy of the report. This is the way it is usually handled on NHK-G, other than for live media events, such as the US President’s Inaugural Address. From the second showing, it is usually the case that subtitles will be chosen. The decision is always taken based on time and cost effectiveness.

The broadcast interpreters are always conscious of the fact that they are working for NHK as interpreters. For example, an interpreter working to interpret France 2 news would want to convey the spirit of the French newscaster, but the viewers are a Japanese audience viewing NHK-BS. The role expected of the interpreter is to convey to the Japanese TV viewers in an intelligible way the latest news

conveyed in France. Here two things are also asked of broadcast interpreters. One is to consider human rights and refrain from showing minors with handcuffs or dead bodies lying in a field and to address criminals without honorifics. It is customary in Japanese media to refer to a crime suspect with the Japanese word “yogisha”, meaning “suspect”, after the suspect’s name. After the suspect is indicted then the Japanese word “hikoku” meaning “plaintiff” would be added after the name.

The other consideration is to alert the news desk in case material other than that from the original TV station is used in the program to avoid expensive royalty claims that might arise if broadcast. This may well happen in case of sports programs where there can be exclusive broadcast rights signed with specific TV stations.

Such a way of handling the TV news “in pieces”, so to speak, might not be welcomed by language learners who want to watch foreign news in the original foreign language. Also, viewers might like to know the top news headlines from a certain country. A recently introduced section on World Wave called “Headline pick-up” conveys the choice of the day made by the newscasters with a focus on one of the foreign TV stations’ headlines (for example one of the European stations) and broadcasts it with Japanese subtitles (here voiceover is not used and viewers watch the original). Usually, on NHK-BS the main voice is in Japanese (the voice of the broadcast interpreter) and the sub voice is the original foreign language.

In the case of NHK, the broadcast interpreters are basically registered with a subsidiary of NHK namely NHK Global Media Services. Most of the broadcast interpreters who are currently working have been with NHK for over 10 years.

1.1.2 CNN and BBC

Cable networks that broadcast content provided by CNN or BBC World might have different points of emphasis from NHK, and seem to place more importance on mainly transmitting news content “in real time” using live simultaneous interpreting and not prepared interpreting as we saw in the previous section. The general rule concerning the human rights and royalty issues also holds for those networks specialized in news. However, what is different is the interpreting type. Whereas NHK employs mainly “prepared interpreting”, the two news channels mainly use “simultaneous interpreting”. JCTV (Japan Cable Television) airs CNNj, which is a mixture of CNN International, CNN domestic and CNN financial. BBC World is aired by BBC World Japan. On both of those channels, interpreters basically work in pairs to interpret half an hour each for three hours. That would mean around 12 interpreters would be needed for one day to cover 18 hours of broadcasting with interpreters.

Japanese is on the main audio track for those two cable news channels as well. Japan is unique in the sense that those specialized news channels make a special marketing effort to provide the news in Japanese to penetrate the market. Here again, the main concern is time and cost effectiveness. It is quicker to show news with simultaneous interpreters and more cost effective, as there is not the necessity to provide remuneration for the interpreters’ preparation time.

JCTV's interpreting service is provided through three interpreter agencies by their registered interpreters. Since the broadcast is on cable TV, the number of viewers is not as large as for NHK or other terrestrial TV networks, but it is said that CNN is watched and followed by the media, and thus we often see such accreditation in newspapers as "as reported by CNN". In the case of JCTV, it can be said that the well-known name of CNN in live news reporting is its biggest asset. In the case of BBC World, the interpreters are either registered directly or work through one interpreter agency.

One notable difference between Japan and the rest of the world is whether the persons appearing in TV programs will be matched by respective genders when interpreted into Japanese by broadcast interpreters. According to Bros-Brann (1997), during the live coverage of the US presidential election "there was interpretation on all the major French TV channels, meaning that interpreters with the right voice, the right accent and the right sex were in great demand. Let's not forget that TV anchormen and journalists insist on having male voices for male speakers, as this goes back to a notion that interpretation and dubbing are similar beasts".

Japanese television stations tend to prefer a different voice for each guest but do not insist on gender-based assignment in media interpreting except for a few exceptions. For example, on ABC Nightline aired on NHK, whenever it is possible, a male interpreter is instructed to translate the main anchor when the anchor is male. When Ted Koppel was the anchor, there was a period when a specific male interpreter was assigned on a weekly basis to be the Japanese voice of Koppel, but that was later stopped. Currently, there are four interpreters assigned to this talk show, but they are all female. At CNN, for a brief period in 2002, a specific interpreter was assigned as the voice for Paula Zhan who was the anchor for "American Morning". However, this was stopped after a month and a half due to the start of the Iraq war.

1.2 Japanese news into English

1.2.1 NHK

Under normal circumstances, the two major news programs shown on NHK-G, namely "News Seven" and "News Watch Nine", are broadcast bilingually for those residing in Japan who need to see news in English. There are basically three steps in getting the NHK news ready to be transmitted in English. The first step is to involve "writers" who are in most cases bilingual Japanese to translate the NHK news into English. The second step is to involve "rewriters", mostly English natives who rewrite the translation to make it more natural. The third step is that of the "readers" reading the English news script. The part of the script that cannot be prepared, for example breaking news or natural disasters, would be covered by simultaneous interpreters. In normal circumstances, there are seven writers, two rewriters and two simultaneous interpreters to do this job. It should be noted that as a public broadcaster, NHK is required by its charter to provide coverage of natural disasters. It has an extraordinary network in place to cover crises in any part of Japan. NHK holds emergency broadcast drills every night at midnight to

prepare for those eventualities, so as to ensure that the cut from regular broadcasting is made swiftly for that coverage.

However, what happened on March 11 2011, the day the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred was something that was “beyond imagination”, or “soutei-gai” in Japanese, to quote a frequently-used phrase used by government officials. For the first time since its inception in 1926, NHK used all the channels it had to broadcast the triple disaster, for the full 24 hours of the day. That did not happen at the time of the Great Hanshin Earthquake 16 years earlier, nor was it done on such a large scale. Just a few minutes after 3:20 p.m. on March 11, there was an urgent call placed to G-Media from the program “Newslines” aired every hour on NHK World, an international service operated by the International Planning and Broadcasting Department of NHK. The request was made in order to transmit internationally Japanese news in English and they needed to have three simultaneous interpreters ready as soon as possible. Public transport was stopped due to the earthquake that also hit the Tokyo area. The simultaneous interpreters who lived in the relative vicinity of NHK were summoned, and three interpreters went into the simultaneous interpreting booths at a little past 4:30 of that day.

The magnitude of the disaster came to be well known on NHK-G. However, since news scripts were not available in English, the reporting by NHK-G was directly transmitted in English via live simultaneous interpreting for a few days after the triple disaster.

Four days later on March 15, it was decided that “Ohayou Nippon” (Good Morning Japan) the news program that is broadcast at 7 a.m. and the news at 12:00 noon should also be bilingual. NHK World also wanted to broadcast the news around the clock through simultaneous interpreting.

The number of simultaneous interpreters for “News 7” and “News Watch 9” were increased from two to three. Two simultaneous interpreters were called to interpret for “Ohayou Nippon” and the mid-noon news. For NHK World, Every day, 11 simultaneous interpreters were needed. The usual 12 interpreters who regularly worked in those shifts were not enough to fill all the slots. Conference interpreters who are registered with NHK G-Media were called upon to fill the need. Almost all the international conferences in the month of March 2011 were cancelled, so it was possible to have twenty interpreters who came to help.

The media in other parts of the world used footage and sound from NHK World to broadcast the disaster. This served as an added incentive to the broadcast interpreters. Among the interpreters who came to help, some were well-equipped with knowledge on nuclear reactors from their past experience. They teamed up to prepare a glossary of nuclear terminology. This helped greatly to prepare the interpreters for the news conferences by the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Such urgent simultaneous interpreting shifts continued until April 24, 2011. This was the largest operation in the 68-year history of NHK. All available channels were used for the reporting of the disaster. From March 11, 2011, the day of the disaster, 382 people worked for the 45 days that required simultaneous interpreting for NHK-G and the NHK World. NHK G-Media was able to provide

the necessary service thanks to the work of 20 simultaneous interpreters, 50 English news writers and 50 native staff readers and rewriters.

1.2.2 Private TV stations

Currently, NHK remains the only provider of bilingual news programs for those residing in Japan. Until the end of 2009, a TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) news program called “News no Mori” was broadcast from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. bilingually. This program was broadcast for 26 years. It was staffed with seven writers, two simultaneous interpreters and two readers registered with an agency to provide TBS with the language service. On any given day, out of those registered members, four writers, one simultaneous interpreter and one reader worked. Some writers would also work as simultaneous interpreters doing both tasks.

The other private TV stations also had bilingual news programs in the 1980s but with the worsening of the economy all but TBS had ceased to provide this costly service; TBS was the one that remained until the very end. It seems unlikely, in the light of the large difference in staffing and resources compared with the NHK, that there will be any private TV station that would go back to airing their news programs bilingually.

There have been special provisions made in the past. For example, during the 2002 Soccer World Cup held jointly with South Korea, Fuji Television decided to air its late evening news program, “News Japan” with two simultaneous interpreters. This continued for two months during the period the soccer games were held.

In the 1980s, the other two major private television stations, NTV (Nippon Television) and TV Asahi, the television station that is the parent company of JCTV that airs CNNj, also aired bilingual news programs but they were discontinued. This is thought to have been based on decisions by management that the resources of their news departments could be better used elsewhere. Other attempts by private television stations to revive or initiate bilingual broadcasts cannot be ruled out in view of increased attention worldwide on Japanese media in light of the March 11, 2011 triple disaster.

2. Major constraints and requirements

The difficulties of media interpreting are well documented. For example, Bros-Brann (1997) says: “Interpreting live for television requires special skills, namely even greater rapidity than for normal conference interpretation as well as constraints for delivery (pleasant lively voice, regular rhythm, good diction)”. Interpreters’ capacity to take on the journalistic role has been investigated for some years in the literature. Moreover, Straniero Sergio (2003) stresses the similarities between journalism and interpreting, two “gate keeping activities” that are increasingly often condensed in a single professional role.

Broadcast interpreters are in fact functioning as part of TV journalism. As such, the two most difficult aspects are that 1) they are addressing a mass audience and

not specialists, as in conference interpreting, and 2) the interpreting has to be in synch with the images shown on the screen. The mass audience expects to watch news in an easy-to-understand manner. They expect to see news with conversion into meters and Celsius, rather than in miles and Fahrenheit. Such conversion is usually done with the help of the production staff. The work of broadcast interpreters also requires teamwork so as to keep the translation coherent. Glossaries are prepared in cooperation with colleagues together with the production staff. In the case of major events, there have been ad-hoc training sessions held by TV stations to deal with specialist language pertaining to those events. When such special attention is required, the word lists are posted on the interpreters' booths. Also there is a need to keep an eye on how the terms are handled by the particular TV stations that broadcast the news. For example, if working for NHK, the interpreters need to be aware of how NHK reports the same news. But just relying on the information given to them is not enough. The interpreters also are expected to individually keep track of the current terms to stay abreast of the news. And most importantly, they need to be aware of cultural literacy, as pointed out by Mizuno (1997).

The three key requirements necessary to become a broadcast interpreter can be summarized as follows: language ability, including that of their mother tongue, background knowledge of international news, and presentation skills. Language ability would mean that they should be able to have multiple ways of translating a word and that they are capable of paraphrasing to transmit what the foreign news is trying to convey to the audience with a rich vocabulary of their own. Background knowledge means that they keep track of current affairs, in other words have a keen interest in what is happening in world affairs. Broadcast interpreters need to fully understand the news they are conveying to make themselves intelligible. In some cases the interpreters need to be mindful of the difference in news reporting style between the original broadcaster and the television station that their interpreting is aired on.

This is also true elsewhere in the world, as echoed in an interview with an AIIC interpreter who works for ARTE, a French-German television channel based in Strasbourg, France. To the question on the essential qualities to be a good media interpreter, the person being interviewed replied: "Being extra quick on the ball helps tremendously. If you're doing news interpreting, you must definitely be a news junkie. A good voice whatever happens is essential. Then, you must learn to adjust your delivery and style so that you can be in synch with the speaker, whatever happens. It's much more important on television than in a regular conference setting⁵."

For broadcast interpreters working in Japan, the bar is set even higher since, unlike at ARTE, where interpreters only interpret for the newscaster part (usually about 20 minutes out of a 30-minute news program), Japanese interpreters also interpret the news package. Moreover, again, as opposed to the situation at ARTE, broadcast interpreters are dealing with newscasters sitting far away in other parts of the world and not in the studio nearby. Although it is true that for the work at

5 From an interview with Vincent Buck, an AIIC interpreter who works for ARTE, conducted on May 9, 2011 using SKYPE by the author in English.

NHK the assigned news clip might be of only a few minutes in duration, there is a far greater variety in the content than at ARTE. Interpreting the voice of a single person is a much different task from interpreting for the news package that includes voices of several different persons. However, it should be pointed out that veteran broadcast interpreters in Japan more or less feel as though they know the newscasters or the dignitaries they are interpreting for, since they often act as “the voice” for these people for a considerable length of time.

The difficulty involved with broadcast interpreting comes on multiple levels. As analyzed by Gile (2009) in an Effort Model of simultaneous interpreting, there are three core Efforts, namely the Listening and Analysis Effort, the Short-term memory Effort and the Speech production Effort plus a Coordination Effort. The first step is the listening: a broadcast interpreter must be familiar with colloquial expressions and idioms, and also be able to spot a mistake by detecting something that “does not sound correct”. Often news packages are edited to condense much information in a short amount of available air time which further adds to the burden on broadcast interpreters.

As Lee (2011) notes, we should consider the viewer’s attitude when thinking about broadcast interpreting. Most viewers are unaware of the constraints of simultaneous language transfer and thus are not prepared for active and cooperative listening. To such viewers, interpreters need to convey information in an intelligible and viewer-friendly manner. Broadcast interpreters add, omit, adapt and edit information so as to fit into the constrained time and to make the information easy for the viewers to understand. Broadcast interpreters consult, whenever possible, with the news editors of the television station in order to be in line with the administrative policies of that station. As broadcast interpreters working in Japan we constantly feel the need to add information to the news topics that are not familiar to the Japanese and to explain about proper nouns, specifically the names of people, places and events not known to general viewers in Japan. However at the same time we would like to retain attractive expressions in the original language as much as possible. This is always an ongoing challenge.

The next step is to find an appropriate expression in the target language. This mainly pertains to the Speech production Effort. In one instance, the expression “a low hanging fruit” was interpreted literally, rather than with the meaning “to exhaust the easy options”. Translating proper nouns, particularly the names of countries and cities can be quite tricky due to the convention in Japan to follow the original language pronunciation as well as using the katakana syllabary to render non-Japanese names and terms into Japanese. For example, Ivory Coast must be pronounced “Côte d’Ivoire”, and Florence must be “Firenze” in keeping with their original-language pronunciation. Another example, with the influx of immigrants from the African continent, the Schengen Agreement was much in the news. It warrants an explanation for viewers that this is a treaty that enables an immigrant who sets foot on the European continent to travel freely within Europe without being stopped at the border. An Amber alert, much quoted in the US news, in cases of child abduction, might require an explanation, i.e. that it is a child abduction alert bulletin. All this is made further challenging since news covers a wide range of topics.

Titles of dignitaries can be complex at times, because for instance the word “queen” can be interpreted into either “Jyoou” (meaning the monarch as in the case of Queen Elizabeth II) or “Ouhi” in the case of a spouse of the King. “Prince” can be either “Koutaishi” (meaning the Crowned Prince or the heir to the throne, for example Prince Charles) or “Ouji” (meaning prince in general, for instance Prince William). There was an instance of Hilary Clinton, the Secretary of State, interpreted as “gaisho” meaning foreign minister in Japanese, but one should be mindful to follow the journalistic convention in the Japanese language. It should be noted that NHK has a number of publications from its research team at the NHK Broadcasting Culture Institute, that serve as a guide on Japanese language usage. The publications range from word usage, pronunciations of foreign proper nouns including names and places, to weather information. Those are periodically updated. To be a skilled interpreter with solid background knowledge and to stay on top of current affairs, one constantly needs to be aware of what is happening globally. A seasoned interpreter enacts automated cognitive operations to a certain extent, but with the ever-changing world one cannot stop if one wishes to continue to be an active practitioner. These rules and terms are one area that one can become accustomed to with training and experience. As Gile (2009) notes, gradual automation of cognitive operations is important in interpreting skills acquisition. There are automatic and non-automatic operations in the interpreting process, and non-automatic operations may become automatic after enough repetition. When the processing capacity available for a particular task is insufficient, performance deteriorates, but with sufficient practice through trial and correction, more automation can be attained to lessen the burden and free up more processing capacity. That should be the major benefit from training.

But the requirement that should be particularly stressed for broadcast interpreters is their speaking skills. As Kurz (1990: 169) has noted, media interpreters must have a smooth delivery:

The media interpreter must endeavour to make his style and delivery particularly smooth, clear and to the point. The reason is that the audience at home is used to television newsreaders and commentators with very good voices, well-trained in the fluent delivery of a text, and does not understand or appreciate the very different demands made of the interpreter.

Mack (2001: 128) points out the quality necessary for media interpreters as following: “Their voice quality should be as good as that of professional announcers, and hesitations, pauses or peculiar inflections are banned”.

This is reflected in the words of a fellow AIIC interpreter:

As a newscast interpreter, you really need to perform in a way that will not drive the audience away. I remember a colleague’s phrase whereby interpreters should be heard, not seen. I would say that good media interpreting is where interpreters do not sound too much like interpreters.

This colleague also explained: “Your voice is pretty much all you have. ARTE organizes superb voice coaching seminars for its regular interpreters”⁶. At NHK

6 This is also quoted from the same interview with Vincent Buck.

also, most of the veteran interpreters working for over 10 years have attended training provided by NHK announcers.

One thing that should be mentioned is that the hard work by broadcast interpreters is gaining public recognition. Since in Japan it is regularly the case that the media interpreters' names are shown on the screen, some have come to gain media attention. These interpreters are frequently interviewed by language magazines and newspapers. There are also cases of interpreters asked to write for a major newspaper and also making television appearances on programs for learning English, due to their heightened visibility on TV. Becoming a famous interpreter is often a goal for language learners.

3. Training

NHK International Training Institute, which is a part of NHK G-Media, started operating classes in 1992, with the aim to train broadcast interpreters. Even before that the Institute held internal training for NHK staff. From 1991 there was a preparatory office set up within the news department with the understanding that international news requires an international training center. It now has 15 classes geared toward training media interpreters and translators in Japanese to English, for a total of 300 students. The majority of classes are held after office hours on weekdays and on Saturdays, with the most classes on Saturdays. There is a wide variety among those who come to attend the classes, in a wide range of ages and professions, including people that already work as interpreters. However, for the beginners' classes it is not always the case that every one seeks to become a broadcast interpreter. There are those who come to study here because of the uniqueness of the teaching materials, all of which involve actual news. Such students have a desire to learn English using live news material. Another factor that helps trainees, is becoming familiar with the style of news programs. To learn the construct of news programs helps the interpreters in their anticipation efforts.

The three requirements to become a broadcast interpreter as outlined in the previous section, namely language ability, background knowledge, and presentation skills are all addressed in the above training. And as also explained in the previous section, training is conducted to gain benefit through attempts to make non-automatic operations automatic by much repetition. Familiarizing the trainees with the background knowledge and the conventions in TV journalism is also a major asset to be gained.

The first generation of practicing broadcast interpreters, who started working from around the time of the First Gulf War, served as the first generation of trainers. Those who train the aspiring broadcast interpreters are always practicing interpreters, and these in turn become the next generation of trainers. In the early days after its inception, there was an evaluation committee within the International Training Institute that served to evaluate those who were trained at the Institute. Basically, for English, the broadcast interpreters that newly join are all graduates of this Institute. This also serves as a strong motivation for those who come to study at this Institute.

One thing that is worthy of attention is that this Institute started special classes focusing on pronunciation from the fall of 2011: one centering on Japanese to be taught by a former announcer of NHK and another on English pronunciation to be taught by a practicing broadcast and conference interpreter who is also a specialist in phonetics.

Several interpreting schools such as Inter School, Communicators and Simul Academy offer special courses catering to would-be broadcast interpreters. Just to add a remark about the trainers, there many instances of trainers at NHK G-Media and other interpreting schools going on to become university professors.

To join the team of simultaneous interpreters on CNN or BBC World, one needs to pass an “audition.” Most of the newcomers tend to study at these interpreting schools to obtain the skills specific to broadcast interpreting. It should be noted also that the classes at those interpreting schools serve in fact as virtual auditions for the instructors to recommend the prospective broadcast interpreters to the interpreting agencies, which in turn dispatch the interpreters to television stations.

One last point that should be mentioned here is that for broadcast interpreters for languages other than English, there is no fixed training institution or formal program. However, it should be noted that all the broadcast interpreters can profit from voice training or pronunciation classes in Japanese. If there is one thing that can be done to improve the performance of broadcast interpreters in a relatively short amount of time, it is training in speaking skills and delivery.

4. Future Challenges

By way of summary, we can reflect on the following points. Broadcast interpreting is part of journalism and it is here to stay. The biggest challenge is that broadcast interpreters are required to keep to the conventions of TV journalism and especially be aware of the human rights issue. Broadcast interpreters need to be skilled in not only linguistic capabilities but also need to keep track of current affairs and be good speakers in addressing the mass audience. For interpreters to and from English, there are training institutions in place, but for other languages training on the job is still the predominant way of acquiring skills necessary for broadcast interpreters. Since this is a job that requires writing skills similar to that of journalists and speaking skills similar to that of newscasters, broadcast interpreters are required to constantly improve their language abilities, update their knowledge of current affairs, and be good, intelligible speakers.

What is most important is that broadcast interpreters acknowledge themselves as conveyors of news, that they make sure they fully understand the news transmitted through the medium of their voices, and in so doing can find the optimum ways to express to the audience at large the news from the world and news from Japan. It is indeed the first time in history that interpreters are employed on a large scale to address ordinary citizens and not simply address specialists who attend international conferences. Broadcast interpreters can take pride in their work, secure in the knowledge that they are the first in Japan to convey the news from abroad through the interpreting of foreign news programs.

They can also find meaning in the fact that they are a reliable voice to transmit valuable information that can be crucial in the lives of those who do not understand Japanese. A big future challenge is to increase the flow of information from Japan to the world through broadcast interpreting. This is an effort that will require endeavors from the television stations: but just as the current broadcasting of foreign news in Japan has become possible with a pool of dedicated interpreters, having a sufficient number of broadcast interpreters would add impetus to the television stations to enlarge this function.

The challenges for broadcast interpreters continue to be significant, and this will continue as long as broadcast interpreters stay on the job. But as of the summer of 2011, there is no shortage of people who are willing to take this job, and after already 20 years in existence, this profession is well established and charged with an important mission; that of conveying the current situation of the world to Japan and of conveying the Japanese situation to the world.

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