

The interpreter and the spectacle of confrontation

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Abstract

Televised formats such as talk shows and news interviews often include foreign guests whose participation requires the services of interpreters. Several studies have illustrated how, in media interpreting settings, interpreters are active participants in the interaction, rather than simply 'revoicing machines'. Most of these studies have concerned themselves with 'infotainment' shows, i.e. with a setting (usually) characterised by the physical presence of the interpreter, who becomes a ratified participant in the interaction. In this article, we wish instead to focus on the actions of interpreters in confrontational talk shows, i.e. media interpreting contexts characterised by the staged production of confrontation, where interpreting takes place off-camera in the simultaneous mode. Using examples from two Italian political talk shows featuring foreign guests, we show that also in this simultaneous interpreting context interpreters actively participate in conversational exchanges and are instrumental in the accomplishment of the confrontational practices which characterise such events.

Keywords

Dialogue interpreting, media interpreting, talk show interpreting, confrontainment, infotainment, conflictual interaction, simultaneous interpreting, overlapping speech, turn-taking management, conversation analysis.

Several studies (Straniero Sergio 1999, 2007, 2012; Wadensjö 2008a, 2008b) have shown that the specific context of media interpreting sets apart the role and performance of interpreters from other settings in that the interpreter mediates not only between speakers in the interaction but also with respect to the overhearing audience. Broadcast talk, in fact, “is centrally produced for overhearers” (Heritage 1985: 99), i.e. it is primarily designed for an (absent) news audience¹.

In this article, we focus on simultaneous interpreting during televised political talk shows and, more specifically, on interpreted confrontational exchanges. To our knowledge, this is the first study which investigates the dynamics of interpreting in the relatively recent format of confrontational talk shows. In order to examine the interpreters’ interactional behaviour when participants talk competitively, we first review examples of interpreting in the more traditional infotainment format. Next, we analyse some extracts taken from two interpreted confrontational political talk shows, focusing in particular on the communicative actions of simultaneous interpreters who are only heard by primary participants and viewers as disembodied voices. The data illustrate how this specific interpreting arrangement affects the interactional game that is typical of this type of talk shows.

1. Interpreters in talk shows

Interpreting may be required in different types of media settings, including talk shows, press conferences, interviews and debates. The interpreter may be located either in the same place as the person(s) interpreted or elsewhere. Thus, for instance, interpreters may translate an event taking place in a distant location, “without the primary participants needing the service or even knowing that the event is being interpreted into another language” (Sandrelli 2017: 180), a situation which has been described as simultaneous interpreting *in absentia* (Falbo 2012). This is the case, for instance, of the televised interpreting of US presidential debates broadcast on Italian television discussed in Colucci (2011) and Dal Fovo (2012). Simultaneous interpreting is also often embedded in journalistic commentary, so that, for instance, interpreted foreign news may be used during news bulletins “to fill in the idle slots between correspondents’ reports and the comments made in the studio” (Straniero Sergio 2011: 177).

In the case of interpreting *in presentia*, Straniero Sergio (2003) distinguishes between shared settings, in which interpreters interact directly on-site with primary participants, and displaced settings, in which remote interpreting takes place as interpreters are connected to the primary participants via communica-

1 Thus, in interpreted broadcast events such as talk shows and press conferences, interpreters may direct their utterances to the primary participants or to the secondary audience, and switch between different recipients, taking into consideration the possible interpretation and effects of their verbal actions on the audience (cf. Goffman 1981: 197-327; Bell 1984).

tion technologies such as videoconferencing. In shared settings, the interpreter shares a physical space with primary participants and thus appears on screen, while in displaced settings he or she is located off-camera, for instance, in an interpreting booth. In both cases, interpreting can be either consecutive or simultaneous, i.e. the interpreter may wait until the end of a speaker's turn or relay talk to the addressed party with only a brief lag behind the interpreted speaker. In some cases, a mix of consecutive and simultaneous modes may be involved. In on-site simultaneous interpreting, interpreted talk may be whispered only for the benefit of the foreign guest, or be uttered aloud. In displaced settings, the voice of the interpreter, who is literally not visible to the recipients of the interpreted speech, may be superimposed to that of the interpreted guest, whose volume is turned down, while the guest hears the interpretation into his or her language through headphones.

Research in talk show interpreting has mostly analysed interpreted events in which interpreters are present on site and are seen interacting with primary participants, both in consecutive and simultaneous mode. Most notably, Straniero Sergio (1999, 2007, 2012) and Wadensjö (2008a, 2008b) discuss aspects of participation framework, focusing on meaning negotiation, topic management and turn-taking behaviour. These studies have shown that interpreters actively participate in the management of the interaction and the development of conversational arguments, and their contribution is often relevant or may even prove crucial to the dynamics of the interaction.

Straniero Sergio (1999) highlights the dual structure of broadcast interaction, which takes place between primary participants, including the talk show host, the programme's guest(s), the interpreter(s) and the audience in the studio, but also between primary and secondary participants, that is the programme's external audience. He focuses on the role of the host as an intermediary between the various on- and off-screen parties, possibly acting out a variety of feelings and attitudes supposedly coming from members of the audience. This type of setting favours relational over propositional content, and phatic over referential communication, and the interpreter is often used as a contextual resource whose performance may be commented upon, reformulated or challenged by the host and other parties. At times, interpreters may even be cast by hosts as their assistants (Straniero Sergio 1999: 315) or be referred to by the host in the third person and thus turned into a discursive topic. Straniero Sergio (2012), for instance, provides numerous examples in which the host initiates a repair sequence through comments, rejections and corrections of the interpreter's interlingual renditions, as well as by requesting clarifications and questioning the appropriateness of the interpreter's rendition. Straniero Sergio shows that in the setting of tabloid and lifestyle talk shows, interpreters are often ratified and active participants who may be required to take on functions which differ from those typically assigned to their professional capacity, including the role of discussant and entertainer.

While Straniero Sergio's examples are all taken from entertainment-oriented conversational settings covering 'soft' rather than 'hard' news, i.e. ones in which the topics discussed are ordinary everyday events rather than current political affairs, Wadensjö (2008a, 2008b) discusses a segment from a talk show dealing

more specifically with political issues. This is a 1996 televised interview between the former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev and a BBC journalist, assisted by an interpreter, who during the talk show switches between the consecutive and simultaneous mode. The interview combines generic features of the news interview and of the talk show interview, mixing 'serious' exchanges with moments of emotional relief. Wadensjö shows that while ostensibly presented as an exchange between interviewer and interviewee, with the interpreter acting as a ratified 'non-person' (i.e. someone who can act and talk "without causing a redefinition of the ongoing event" (Wadensjö 2008a: 186), the interview is in fact a three-party conversation. This becomes apparent by looking at the type of sequences, which do not simply consist in questions and answers 'echoed' by the interpreter in another language. Rather, they are more complex sequential organisations, to whose management and coordination the interpreter contributes both through his renditions and through his non-renditions. These latter include both non-translations of the host's back-channelling and 'suggestions' for possible replies, which are then taken up by Gorbachev. Wadensjö (2008b) shows that, even though – in contrast with the examples discussed by Straniero Sergio (1999) – the interpreter does not align himself with the host and declines to participate as an interlocutor, he may still be seen as acting as a principal, i.e. "someone who believes personally in what is being said and takes the position that is implied in the remarks" (Goffman 1981: 167). Wadensjö shows that through his (non) renditions of the participants' contributions and his non-verbal behaviour, the interpreter manages turn allocation at transition-relevance places (Sacks *et al.* 1974), in a way that tacitly supports Gorbachev's communicative project rather than that of the programme's host.

In the settings described by Straniero Sergio and Wadensjö, the interpreter is usually physically present in the television studio, sitting next to the host and guests. Because of the consecutive mode, s/he is allocated a turn of talk which does not overlap with that of the interpreted primary participants, as in a remote simultaneous arrangement. Thus, it could be argued that the active role of the dialogue interpreter in the settings investigated by Straniero Sergio and Wadensjö is facilitated by the basic arrangement of the show, namely, a) the consecutive mode as a way to allocate a turn to the interpreter, and b) the physical presence of the interpreter on site, which makes her or him visible and addressable, favouring her or his agency.

In what follows, we first provide a short description of how the dynamics of confrontational political shows differ from those of the infotainment type and then look at the actions of the interpreter in this context. The data we analyse suggest that, though working off-camera in simultaneous mode and in a displaced setting, the interpreter plays a relevant role in the management of the interaction and in determining the development and possibly the outcome of the conflict among participants.

2. Televised talk shows: from infotainment to confrontainment

On Italian television, like elsewhere, there are several talk shows in which hosts facilitate a debate on political and social issues between politicians, journalists and representatives of civil society. According to Scannell (1991), political talk shows are a kind of panel interview aimed at delivering news as well as entertainment to an overhearing public. However, Hutchby (2006: 65-80) maintains that contemporary political talk shows are increasingly based on creating the “spectacle of confrontation”, i.e. what has been referred to as confrontainment (see e.g. Lorenzo-Dus 2009) rather than infotainment. This is so because the main interaction modality in this type of setting is conflict. Thus, while the structure of the confrontational talk show may be similar to that of the infotainment talk show, it “also has much in common with a game show [in which] guest participants are introduced as if contestants” (Hutchby 2006: 67), and are involved in the production of confrontation as a public spectacle (*Ibid.*: 71).

In principle, nothing would prevent interviews or panel discussions from taking place in the form of orderly and peaceful conversations, as is the case of infotainment talk shows. Yet, in the confrontainment format, “what might be a boring succession of talking heads” becomes “a lively sparring match between thoroughly committed adversaries” (Clayman/Heritage 2002a: 300). The prevailing tendency of these types of talk show is to turn into acrimonious disputes: participants give free rein to their disagreements and often come to stage intense conflicts. Talk show guests turn into and behave like opponents, rather than simply like people with different ideas or political ideology. They resort to interactional modalities which are typically conflictual, such as competing for turn space and control, exchanging quick quips and retorts, sarcastic laughs, point-blank questions, producing adjacent pairs such as accusations and defences, pointing out incongruities and discrepancies in the other participants’ arguments rather than let it pass, and so on. Hosts usually allow this to happen without intervening, or even fuel confrontation between guests or take an active part in them (Clayman 2002).

Clearly, conflict does not arise automatically, as a consequence of the guests having divergent political opinions and views, but is the result of specific interactional activities and moves. In other words, the manner in which guests are selected to represent divergent interests and ideologies only partly explains the conflictual nature of most contemporary political talk shows. One of the practices which have the effect of encouraging the expression of conflict is the tendency of guests to interact directly, without the mediation of the host (Clayman/Heritage 2002a: 300). On more traditional infotainment talk shows, “disputants can only legitimately speak in response to the mediator’s questions. Therefore, there is a systematic bias against the possibility of direct address between the disputants and this results in an attenuated form of argument” (Hutchby 2006: 77). By contrast, in confrontational talk shows, guests, now turned into disputants, routinely address their disagreements to one another rather than waiting for the mediation of the host, thus generating overlapping talk. Turn-taking competition is, in fact, one of the most apparent aspects of confrontational talk show

dynamics. Rather than talking one at a time and duly waiting for other guests to complete their turn, guests and hosts try to take the floor away from each other, talking over someone else's turn. One way to keep one's turn and resist someone else's foray is to keep talking, thus occasioning overlaps. Persistent and competitive overlap is indeed what characterises many contemporary televised talk shows. The "densely interactive exchange laced through the simultaneous talk" (Schegloff 1988: 231) can "easily get lost in the hubbub accessible to on lookers and audiences" (*Ibid.*), but participants seem unconcerned that their overlapping talk may impair hearing or understanding. This is because aborting one's turn and relinquishing the conversational floor to another guest can be detrimental to one's communication project, and yielding the floor a speaker would run the risk of appearing weak with respect to the action and initiative of the opponent. Interruptions, overlapping talk and forays into each other's turn mark the transition from the "one-at-a-time" to the "free-for-all" arrangement that characterises a confrontainment setting. In the following section, we examine the role of the interpreter in such conversational encounters.

3. Interpreters in confrontainment

To illustrate the dynamics of televised interpreted conflictual interaction, we offer some examples taken from two Italian political talk shows. The first of these is a panel discussion including several Italian guests, the host, and a foreign guest. The second is an interview to a foreign guest by two Italian hosts (though we will look only at parts of an exchange between the guest and one host).

In both shows, the words of the participants were interpreted into and out of Italian. However, in contrast with the settings discussed by Straniero Sergio and Wadensjö, in the remote simultaneous interpreting arrangement of the case studies we analyse, the interpreters did not share a physical space with the primary participants and did not appear on screen. Rather than ratified participants in the conversation, they may thus appear to be featured in the show only as off-camera voices lent to the foreign guests, who on their part hear the interpreted speech of the other participants through their headphones. This organisation may be seen as being conducive to a minimisation of the role of the interpreter.

The recordings of the broadcast shows used as data were analysed as available to the general viewer, i.e. we did not have access to a separate recording of the interpreters' performance. Thus, only the translations into Italian for the hosts, guests, and external viewers were accessible, while the translations out of Italian for the foreign guests were not. Because of this, it is also not clear whether one or more interpreters were employed in the TV shows examined. However, it appears that in the first case study (Excerpts 1 and 2), one interpreter was translating into Italian and another out of Italian, while in the second case study (Excerpts 3, 4 and 5) the same interpreter was working into both directions.

Clearly, having access also to the turns of the Italian discussants translated for the 'foreign' guest could allow different interpretations of the data, since their exact wording, omissions, prosody, etc. influenced the development of the ex-

change just as much as the translation of the guest's words into Italian. However, while the data we discuss are too fragmentary and partial to allow any generalisation, we believe they will suffice for an exploratory analysis of the dynamics involved in this type of show.

3.1. Case study 1

The first case study is from a panel interview show called “Dimartedì” (lit. “On-Tuesdays”), hosted by Giovanni Floris on the private national network La7. The episode under analysis, broadcast on 30 October 2018, included, among other guests, the British Eurosceptic politician and future leader of the Brexit Party Nigel Farage.

In the first excerpt, while Farage is talking and the simultaneous interpreter is translating leaving a long *décalage*, another guest in the studio cuts in.

Excerpt 1. F (Nigel Farage), I (interpreter), G (other guest)

- 1 F: have a [look ()]
- 2 I: [che l'unione europea è forte [ma guardi un attimo
[that the European union is strong but wait a second
- 3 F: [article seven has been
- 4 F: [invoked in Poland (.) Hungary
- 5 I: [l'articolo sette è stato evocato
[article seven has been evoked
- 6 F: and (just) [invoked in Romania ()]
- 7 I: [contro:: (.) la Polonia l'Ungheria e forse la Romania
[against:: (.) Poland Hungary and maybe Romania
- 8 F: [([)]
- 9 G: [le chiedo scusa
[I beg your pardon
- 10 I: [(1.2)
- 11 G: [io non ho detto che è forte ho detto che voi per paradosso
[I didn't say that it is strong I said that you paradoxically
- 12 G: (0.1) rischiate di rafforzarla (0.1) rischiate nella vostra ottica
(0.1) risk to reinforce it (0.1) you risk from your perspective

The interpreter is faced with two options. He can either stop speaking and let the other guest have the floor, or keep translating. In either case, there will be significant consequences. As it happens, in this instance, as soon as the other speaker begins to interrupt (line 9), the interpreter stops translating (line 10) even though Farage keeps talking (line 8). In the context of the talk show, this amounts to Farage being suddenly silenced, even though his voice can be heard

in the background. Eventually Farage pauses, possibly because he hears the other speaker's (translated) contribution through the headphones he is wearing. Thus, it could be argued that by discontinuing the translation, the interpreter puts Farage at a disadvantage, since he is not allowed to conclude and have the other participants hear his argument.

This behaviour does not seem to have been dictated by any particular policy of the show nor problems of auditive overload, since only a few minutes later the interpreter makes the opposite choice and keeps translating the foreign guest even as the host chimes in (Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2. F (Nigel Farage), H (Giovanni Floris), I (interpreter), A (audience).

- 1 F: let's start [involvement
 2 A: [xxxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 3 H: [allora
 [ok then
 4 A: [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 5 I: [cominciamo [ad aprire la mente
 [let's start [opening our minds
 6 H: [ci sono due piani
 [there are two levels
 7 F: [()
 8 H: [ascolti farage [perché:
 [listen farage [why:
 9 A: [XXXXXXX [XXXXXXXxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
 10 I: [a:: un'Europa in cui commerciamo insieme
 [to:: a Europe in which we do business together
 11 I: cooperiamo insieme siamo amici insieme
 we cooperate [together we are friends together
 12 F: [but not run by a bunch of old men
 13 I: ma non siamo gestiti [da un gruppo di vecchi
 but we are not run [by a group of old men
 14 F: [(.) based in Brussels and not so far ()

Taking advantage of a burst of applause (lines 2, 4, and 9), which typically signals the completion of a turn, the host attempts to cut in three times (lines 3, 6, and 8). However, his attempts at interrupting Farage and take the floor, possibly for reasons tied to the economy and management of the show, are not successful, since the interpreter does not stop the simultaneous translation (lines 5, 10, and 11). Thus, Farage keeps his turn (lines 12 and 14) and manages to bring his argument to a proper ending.

These two examples illustrate how the interpreter acts not only to relay linguistic meaning, but he also has an influence on interactional dynamics. Without the presence of an interpreter, it would be up to participants to “decide to yield to competing talk or not” (Schegloff 1988: 237). Here, instead, to maintain his turn and resist the interruptions of other participants the foreign guest needs the interpreter to continue interpreting, he cannot accomplish that by himself. We can define the relationship between interpreter and guest not simply as a case of turn-sharing, but as a case of co-construction of a single turn by two actors. More specifically, different actors collaborate in the very construction of the turn, each adding a piece to it (Sacks 1992a: 142-149, 320-327, 574-654; 1992b: 56-59; Llewellyn 2005). To paraphrase Charles Goodwin (2013: 15), we could say that these examples show that “[h]uman beings inhabit each other’s actions”. The primary participant leverages the necessary cooperation of the interpreter to accomplish some basic aspects of interaction, such as keeping the floor. This happens not only because the interpreter is needed to translate the propositional content of the guest in the language of the other participants, but also because the management of the turn-taking system is primarily entrusted to the interpreter. Keeping or relinquishing a turn crucially depends on his or her actions.

Does the interpreter make conscious choices to translate or not to translate? In many cases it may be impossible to say whether a non-translation was intentional, or it was just a remedial strategy due to cognitive and auditive overload. Certainly, during overlapping or fast exchanges an interpreter, consciously or unconsciously, selects which turns to render. While this does not necessarily entail s/he is taking sides, it does mean that such a (non) selection may actively contribute to one speaker winning over the other, and that this action has consequences on the development of talk and agency of the interpreter.

3.2. Case study 2

The second case study is from a show called “8 e mezzo” (lit. “Half past 8”), also broadcast by La7. The episode examined was aired in 2007 and features an interview by the two journalists co-hosting the show at the time, Giuliano Ferrara and Ritanna Armeni, with Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss Muslim academic, philosopher and writer.

Confrontation is characterised not only by turn-taking competition, but also by quick exchanges between participants, who challenge each other in a sort of verbal duel of provocations. Under these circumstances, it is the most successful quipster, the one who manages to inconvenience the opponent, who gets the upper hand, and prosody, pace and tone of voice play a decisive function.

Tariq Ramadan is famed for his ability in confrontational settings such as those that arise during TV interviews and, of course, talk shows. He has featured as a guest in several popular European TV programmes, including in the UK and France, where he confronted several intellectuals, journalists and politicians. His participation has always been characterised by heated discussions with the other guests and the hosts. In the show we examine, the interaction between Ramadan and one of the hosts, Giuliano Ferrara, a journalist well known for his adversari-

al style and little inclination towards professional neutrality, rapidly degenerates into a confrontation. This is clearly shown by the fact that the respective roles of interviewer and interviewee are disrupted. In Excerpt 3, it is Ramadan, the interviewee, who asks questions to the host/interviewer, as the two speakers leave behind their institutional roles and take on those of opponents and antagonists in a dispute. Ramadan's questions are basically provocations, possibly meant to trigger a confrontation. The sarcastic tone in which his utterances are voiced is key to understand the sense of such an anomalous action. The interpreter is thus also led to emulate Ramadan's tone and pace in her rendition, in order to convey the sarcasm.

In Excerpt 3, Ferrara has just voiced his suspicion that Ramadan's acceptance of democratic values may not be genuine. In order to justify his view, the host submits that Ramadan has written a preface to a book authored by sheik al-Qaradawi, who is renowned for his fundamentalist stance and support for al-Qaeda.

Excerpt 3. R (Tariq Ramadan), H (Giuliano Ferrara), I (interpreter)

- 1 H: è lei che ha scritto la prefazione al libro dello sceicco al-Qaradawi
 2 non io per cui un po' di diffidenza ce l'ho eheheheheh
it was you who wrote the preface to sheik al-Qaradawi's book
not me therefore I am indeed a bit suspicious ehehehehe
- 3 R: mais vous [avez même pas lu la préface
but you [haven't even read the preface
- 4 I: [ma lei l'ha neanche letta [la prefazione:
 [but you haven't even read [the preface
- 5 R: [même pas lu la preface
 [not even read the preface
- 6 R: (0.1) avez vous [lu la préface ?=
 (0.1) have you [read the preface?=
 7 I: [lei l'ha [letta la prefazione?=
 [have you [read the preface=
 8 H: [=no non l'ho [letta=
 [=no I haven't [read it=
 9 R: [alors vous [ne savez
 [then you [don't know
- 10 R: pas de quoi on parle
what we are talking about
- 11 I: [=ah e allora?
 [=well then
- 12 I: (0.1) allora lei non sa di cosa [sta parlando
 (0.1) then you don't know what [you are talking about

The journalist emphasises his critical comment with a laugh (line 3). Ramadan does not stand idly by, and provocatively asks him whether he has read the preface. The question is not simply a request for information, since Ferrara had previously explicitly stated during the interview that he had not read the preface, something that Ramadan recalls in line 4, repeats (line 5), and then reformulates as a question in order to inconvenience the host (line 6). The interpreter omits the translation of Ramadan's repetition (lines 5), but tries to convey Ramadan's provocative action by mimicking and stressing his prosody (line 7)². Ferrara replies to Ramadan's direct question (line 9) by acknowledging he has not read the preface, in overlap with the interpreter who interjects (line 11) by picking up on the first word of Ramadan's conclusive remark (line 10), with an ascending intonation pattern. Then, she translates Ramadan's sarcastic remark (line 12), beginning with a repetition from her previous intervention. It should be noted that the Italian translation is more face-threatening than the French utterance, since Ramadan's inclusive impersonal pronoun "de quoi *on* parle" (line 10) has been rendered with a more direct form of address (line 12).

In the heat of the confrontation, the interpreter at one point (line 11) seems to engage directly with Ramadan's adversary, merging in her turn a translation of what the guest has begun to say with a timely reply to the host's previous answer. Together with the sarcastic intonation and the change of pronoun in the interpreter's subsequent rendition of Ramadan's turn in line 12, however, this behaviour is not to be interpreted as affiliative. The interpreter is not siding with Ramadan, but rather she seems to be trying to translate the pragmatic meaning of the action performed by the guest. A flat translation, devoid of the prosody used to convey the sarcasm and sharp tone of Ramadan's question, would have not been very effective. The primary participants are actually quarrelling, and this is what the interpreter is attempting to convey through the prosodic features of her translation. This excerpt shows that interpreting in the context of the conflictual dynamics typical of political talk shows requires the display of involvement in the conversation.

The host takes a hit, but he does not give up and tries to counter the attack. Confrontation is characterised by an acceleration of the delivery pace, and tighter turn-taking (Schegloff 1988; Hutchby 2006). Furthermore, in order to confront each other, opponents in a televised verbal fight need to deliver "their objections with greater immediacy and directness" (Clayman/Heritage 2002a: 314). The pace of the exchange becomes progressively more frantic, making it difficult for the interpreter to participate.

2 The prosodic dimension of confrontational interactions would deserve further analysis. However, since this article focuses on turn-management, the analysis of prosodic features is not carried out for reasons of space.

Excerpt 4. R (Tariq Ramadan), H (Giuliano Ferrara), I (interpreter)

- 13 H: [non l'ho letta ma ne conosco abbondanti citazioni testuali=
[I haven't read it but I know abundant literal quotations from it=
- 14 R: =de quoi? d' quoi?=
=of what? of what?=
15 H: =de la préface=
=of the preface
- 16 R: de ce que j'ai écrit?=
of what I wrote?=
17 H: =c'è qualcuno [che l'ha letta per me
=there's someone [who read it for me
- 18 I: [di quello che ho scritto io?
[of what I have written myself?

As opposed to the participants in the previous case study, the primary participants here understand each other's language, and engage in a dyadic exchange. The pace is, in fact, so fast that the interpreter is sidelined, or lets herself be sidelined by remaining silent. In line 13 Ferrara responds to Ramadan's previous summary statement (lines 9 and 10 of Excerpt 2) starting his turn in overlap with the interpreter's rendition in line 12. In line 14, Ramadan does not wait for the interpreter (who the hosts and the audience do not hear) to translate, and raises his voice repeating a request for clarification, to which the host replies in French rather than rely upon the interpreter (line 15). Ramadan fires back with another question (line 16), and at this point the host switches back to Italian (line 17), though again without waiting for the interpreter, who only at this point manages to provide a translation of Ramadan's previous utterance (line 18), competing in overlap with the host's continuation of his previous argument. While as a result of the omitted renditions the overhearing audience is excluded from some verbal details of the exchange, they are probably able to follow and appreciate the determination of the antagonists. In this context, a translation of the embedded exchange, even if delivered with a short *décalage*, would slow down the interactional pace and prevent the opponents from addressing each other directly. Instead, the conflict escalates: the primary participants ignore the default format of "turn-type preallocation" (Atkinson/Drew 1979), which would require the interpreter to provide a translation of each turn, and engage in direct confrontation. The example in Excerpt 5 again shows the interpreter struggling and falling behind during one such escalation.

- Excerpt 5. R (Tariq Ramadan), H (Giuliano Ferrara), I (interpreter)
- 19 R: [() une de ces citations ((raises index finger))
[() *one of these quotations*]
- 20 H: [per esempio [Paul Berman e altri [l'hanno letta=
[for example [Paul Berman and others [have read it=
- 21 I: [mi mi dia una di queste citazioni
[give give me one of these quotations]
- 22 R [eh? ((bends towards the host))
- 23 H: Paul Berman e [altri l'hanno letta ((grimaces))
Paul Berman and [others have read it
- 24 R: [Paul Berman [les citations qu'ils font=
[Paul Berman [the quotations they made=
- 25 I: [no
[no
- 26 R: =ne sont pas [prises de la préface
=are not [taken from the preface
- 27 I: [queste citazioni non sono le citazioni esatte
[these quotations are not the exact quotations

In this exchange the pace is so hectic that the interpreter is always one step behind the contenders. The translation of Ramadan's words in line 19 is delivered (in line 21) after Ferrara has already started his (already overlapping) reply. Ramadan's interjection in line 22 ("eh?") is uttered as the guest bends towards the host, as if trying to listen more intently to what Ferrara is saying, rather than being addressed to the interpreter translating from Italian into French in the headphones. As opposed to the example in Excerpt 2, where the foreign guest entrusted the interpreter with the management of turn-taking, here the opponents can – to some extent – communicate directly without the need for an interpreter, who is there mainly to translate the staged confrontation for the audience. In line 23, the host repeats his previous utterance as a reply to Ramadan's request for clarification in line 22, rather than in response to the interpreted speech. Ramadan does not wait for a translation of the antagonist's reply, but contradicts the host picking up the name "Paul Berman" and disputing the authoritativeness of the host's reply. The interpreter is sidelined by the fast pace of confrontation between the two opponents but manages to interject a "no" (line 25) in overlap with Ramadan's reply (lines 24 and 26), which is, in fact, a rejection of the credibility of Ferrara's repeated appeal to authoritativeness in line 23, apparently designed as a direct response in a dyadic exchange. Finally, in her rendition of Ramadan's utterance (line 27) the interpreter lets the reference to Paul Berman slide, and repeats the words from her previous turn (line 21) "queste citazioni".

Confrontation in TV shows puts simultaneous interpreters in a very challenging situation, since they have to face the conflicting demands of relaying prop-

ositional content and a confrontational attitude. In this case, the immediacy and directness required by the escalation of adversarialness (Clayman/Heritage 2002b) tends to prevent the interposition of the interpreter's turn between those of the primary participants. However, as the interpreter struggles to keep the pace of the exchange, she manages to convey the pragmatic meaning that is functional to Ramadan's confrontational strategy, and at the same time contribute as a principal to stage the conflict for the audience.

4. Discussion

Televised political talk shows often owe their success to the heated debates taking place between participants. Such disputes are fuelled not so much by the presentation of opposed arguments and views, but by interactional actions through which disagreement turns into conflict. Confrontation is exhibited through stiff turn-taking competition, as participants attempt to get the upper hand on their rivals, and through increasingly faster crosstalk, as participants attempt to leave their opponents without a valid response. Participants prevail or make the best impression when they manage to gain the floor, to not let themselves be overtaken by their opponents, or to confound them. In these situations, interpreters are often put in a strained position. As they are driven into the fray, their task becomes not so much that of coordinating interaction, for example by making the participants resume the orderly flow of interaction as they wait for turn completion, but rather that of assisting the interpreted guests in their turn-keeping strategies. In the arrangement of simultaneous interpreting the interpreter does not appear on screen, and his or her off-screen voice replaces that of the guest, whose voice is heard only in the background. While it would be tempting to think that this strategy could minimise their participation, interpreters are far from being cancelled from the show. The two case studies show that, willingly and knowingly or not, they take on an active role and emerge as full-fledged participants exactly because of the conflictual nature of this type of political talk shows, which are not simply a parade of guests who in turn express their opinion, but rather staged dialectical confrontations.

Some aspects of the interpreter's performance during talk shows may be specified by the producers of the television programme. For instance, among the aspects possibly envisaged by the producers of "lifestyle" talk shows, there may be a preference for a long *décalage*, at least at the beginning of the guest's turn, to allow the audience to listen to the foreign guest's own voice and expressiveness (Straniero Sergio 2013: 3631), which feed into the illusion of spontaneity of talk shows. In the confrontational format interpreters seem to face competing demands. On the one hand, their contribution to the show is essential, as they make it possible for the audience to follow the opposing arguments and the development of conversational conflict. On the other hand, by interposing their interpreted speech between that of the primary participants, they risk interfering with the immediacy which characterises confrontational exchanges. In the course of the exchange participants become opponents engaged in a verbal combat, whose key ingredients include fast-paced crosstalk and directness of address. When competing for a turn, participants

must decide whether to relinquish the floor and “whether to abandon an utterance in order to respond or not, whether to return to what they were saying or stay with the new tack” (Schegloff 1988: 237). In interpreted televised conflictual talk shows, some of these decisions have to be taken by the interpreter. Thus, the interpreter plays a crucial role as regards retaining the turn of the guest when faced with an attack from other participants, and more in general a foreign guest may be completely dependent on the interpreter each time a turn-taking competition arises.

When a confrontation involves expressive resources such as sarcasm, irony and forms of provocation, conflictual actions may be conveyed by prosodic patterns over and above the linguistic expression of disagreement. In the midst of the most hectic parts of a talk show, interpreters can be sidelined – or let themselves be sidelined – by the primary participants. However, such backing out or weighing in are neither a mere absence nor a disruptive and uncalled for intrusion, but rather, part of the dynamics that make it possible for disagreement to escalate into conflict (Maynard/Clayman 1991).

5. Conclusion

This exploratory analysis shows that in simultaneous broadcast interpreting of conflictual talk, interpreters are functional to the interactional framework of the show and the goals of deliberately seeking and staging verbal conflict for the sake of gaining audience. Interpreters have to struggle with the dilemma of divided loyalty not only between national host and foreign guest, but also between the discussants and the general public for whom the conflict is staged. While in shared consecutive settings the active role of interpreters is favoured by their on-site presence, the physical and organisational arrangement of remote simultaneous settings seems designed to minimise the role of interpreters. However, the examples considered here illustrate that simultaneous interpreters play a central and active role also in the accomplishment of the interactional practices which characterise confrontational talk shows, and that their verbal actions (or inactions) are consequential for the development of the confrontation.

Transcription conventions

[start of overlapping talk

? questioning intonation (usually with rising tone)

XXXx applause

:: sound elongation

(.) micro-pause of less than 1 second

(1.0) silence expressed in seconds

(()) non-verbal feature

eheheheheh laughter

() inaudible words

= latching : one sound follows the previous one with no intervening silence

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