

Editorial

Francesco Straniero Sergio began to write an Introduction for this issue of *The Interpreters' Newsletter* several months ago. His intent was to prepare a thorough, exhaustive and critical review of what has been observed and described on Television Interpreting (TI), inserting specific aspects of each contribution to this issue. He was not able to pursue his objective. On the 18th July 2011 Francesco passed away leaving me and all those who loved him and appreciate his work in pain and sorrow.

I committed myself to completing this issue which Francesco and I had started together. My firm commitment would have been in vain had it not been for the effective support and collaboration of all the contributors and peer reviewers. To all these colleagues go my deeply heartfelt thanks.

After months of reflection, and thanks to the suggestion of a dear friend, I decided to publish the notes that Francesco had sketched for the Introduction without making any changes. Notwithstanding our year long collaboration, I did not dare to manipulate his writings. The rough draft of the issues dealt with will not prevent readers guessing the path that Francesco was following towards a thorough review of the literature on TI and which would have led him to expand upon the title he had chosen for his section below.

My contribution, therefore, will be limited to the presentation of the papers of this issue and to the sketch of the connections between TI and corpus-based Interpreting Studies. In carrying out this task of mine, I will draw upon suggestions that Francesco made during long and exciting conversations we devoted to the planning of this issue.

Caterina Falbo

What television can tell us about interpreting
Francesco Straniero Sergio

Television Interpreting (TI) is part of the larger field of Media Interpreting (MI) which also includes radio and newer types of electronic media and transmission such as webcasting and other forms of Remote Interpreting (O'Hagan/Ashworth 2002). A particular form of MI is Simultaneous Film Interpreting (Russo 1997, 2005), which represents an alternative to the mainstream modalities of audiovisual translation, i.e. subtitling and dubbing. Ultimately MI falls under the domain of Audiovisual or Screen Translation (Luyken 1988; Gambier 2003).

Part of TI shares what goes under Dialogue Interpreting (Mason 1999), "a group of activities seen as sharing an overall mode of interaction rather than a particular setting" (Mason 2009: 81). TI embraces different kinds of situations and participation frameworks, ranging from face-to-face communication – with the interpreter actually taking part in the TV programme as a ratified participant – to simultaneous interpreting (SI) of talkshows and media events. Early instances of TI include SI of the moon landing in 1969 (Pinhas 1972; Nishiyama 1988; Kurz 1996, 1997: 195; Straniero Sergio 2007), and the Gulf War in 1991 (Shibahara 2009), which contributed to making the interpreting profession visible to the public at large worldwide. Tsuruta (2003: 30) maintains that it is precisely during the Gulf War that the designation broadcast or media interpreter started to be distinguished from conference interpreter.

In terms of situationality and working conditions, live broadcast SI bears some resemblance with Remote Interpreting, in that the interpreter usually sits in a separate studio (though not always in a soundproof booth) and has no direct view of the speakers, but receives the visual input via a monitor. However, unlike Remote Interpreting, "interpreters would typically travel to the studio where interpretation takes place, although not always to the location of the speaking parties" (O'Hagan / Ashworth 2002: 95). TI is thus a location-dependent form of interpreting which may (and frequently does) take place in a dislocated situationality, where participants do not share the same unity of place, and sometimes, not even that of time, as is in the case of pre-recorded programmes (Falbo 2012a, 2012b). Interpreters have no access to primary speakers who more often than not are unaware that an SI of their speeches is going on somewhere else in the world. The outcome of these speech events is independent of interpreters' performances. Consequently, there is no feedback and hence no "resource enabling interpreters to adjust, remedy or fine-tune their interpretation" (Amato 2002: 271). Outside those situations where a studio audience is present, interpreters can rarely check the effect of what they say on hearers. In a real meeting, participants closely follow the interpreter who is sitting in front of them (or through headphones), so that they can reply, express agreement/disagreement, accept/reject a proposal, vote on a motion, sign an agreement, and so on. Conversely, in TI/MI there is an undifferentiated (invisible) mass with a more passive viewing.

Another constraint concerns speed and delivery. Conference interpreters – in Italy at least – are always given the text of the speeches by heads of state. Therefore, they have at the very least a few minutes to prepare. However, on TV, where politicians who count are more often seen, things are very different. Barring few exceptions (e.g. the Pope's speeches) interpreters

never have the opportunity to see the text. So they have to translate speeches either read or teleprompted at breakneck speed.

Décalage (or ear-voice span) and turn-taking are not always strategies that media interpreters can decide autonomously. One of the main requirements of TI is to finish one's interpretation at the same time as the speaker's, or as close to it as possible, and at times even before the speaker (Viaggio 2001). Interpreters may even be explicitly asked to wait a few more seconds before delivering their translation to let the audience hear the voice of the original speaker (Straniero Sergio 2003).

The conference interpreter usually translates a number of speakers, one after the other, alternating with a booth-mate. Conversely, during a TV programme, when there is more than one foreign speaker (whether physically present or virtual), the norm is "one speaker one interpreter", irrespective of turn length. Moreover, interpreters are usually selected on the basis of the sex of the person/s to be interpreted for the purpose of voice-matching. This may result in an unbalanced workload between interpreters.

Discontinuity and brevity are further important factors influencing the interpreter's work. In war or disaster coverage, SI of foreign TV broadcast news is frequently used intermittently to fill in the idle slots between correspondents' reports and the comments made in the studio. Interpreters translate for a maximum of five minutes, then their voice is faded out by the newscaster who hands over to a correspondent, leads into a report or sight translates news coming from international press agencies. The interpreter's delivery might also be interspersed by the newscaster who stops it to add some narration or to rephrase the interpreter's words (Katan/Straniero Sergio 2003: 142; Darwish 2006: 57).

On television, SI often coexists with other audiovisual translation modalities (narration or free commentary, voiceover and subtitling). It is, for example, quite possible for SI during a programme to be re-edited and subtitled or voiced over by another speaker – and unbeknown to the original interpreter. Sometimes this gives rise to hybrid forms of language mediation which may entail a redefinition of (but also a conflict between) the professional roles and the corresponding norms. This happens when the newscaster/reporter (in a media event) or the host (in a talkshow) takes on the role of the interpreter or when the interpreter is assigned a quasi-journalistic role (Straniero Sergio 1999b; Chiaro 2002; Katan/Straniero Sergio 2003; Jääskeläinen 2003; Cappello 2003; Niemants 2007).

A distinctive feature of TI concerns quality criteria. In *Conference Interpreting*, voice and other related parameters such as intonation, rhythm, fluency and delivery appear to rank the least important aspects affecting quality (Collados Aís 1998). Conversely in TI, where form is preferred over content, these suprasegmental and paralinguistic elements turn out to be of overriding importance (Daly 1985; Kurz 1990; Moreau 1995; Kurz/Pöchhacker 1995; Bros-Brann 1993; Kurz/Bros-Brann 1996; Mizuno 1997; Elsagir 1998; Straniero Sergio 2003, 2007; Katan/Straniero Sergio 2003; Darwish 2006). Interpreters are expected to have good diction and a pleasant lively voice so that listening is comfortable for the audience. Moreover, on TV there seems to be less tolerance of foreign accents and other indications of non-native delivery. An exception to this rule is represented by American newscasters who, as Viaggio

(2001: 30) reports, “will not tolerate an interpreter who does not suffer from the relevant foreign accent”.

Admittedly, interpreters have to adapt to current broadcast standards set by professional speakers; and at least two generations of TV audiences have grown up with the standards offered by the voices of excellent film dubbing actors and TV voiceover professionals. It is these “product norms” (Chesterman 1997) which drive the expectations for similar voice qualities from the interpreter, “whose voice has to be flexible enough to sound like a presenter, a sports reporter or even a deejay, as well as a politician, economist, scientist as well as a whole host of celebrities” (Katan/Straniero Sergio 2003: 138). According to Viaggio (2001: 30), the media interpreter should also have “the cultural sensitivity of the community interpreter, the analytical keenness and background knowledge of the journalist and the rhetorical prowess of the seasoned communicator”.

Visibility and popularity

Television, in general, and talkshows in particular (Straniero Sergio 1999a, 2007; Katan/Straniero Sergio 2001) feature a greater visibility and involvement of the interpreter as compared to other institutional contexts. Being literally in the spotlight, interpreters are expected not just to have the relevant cross cultural communication skills but also exhibit good showmanship. The interpreter is often the object of explicit scrutiny and teasing. Her/his presence (both in the consecutive and the simultaneous modes) is a contextual resource for introducing new topics and vignettes, with ad-libbed sketches often playing on elements of farce, all of which exploit the fact that the interpreted event is ‘live’. Moreover, given the fact that viewers are watching for enjoyment, the interpreter’s performance is often part of the show. Off-stage, the interpreter is exposed to criticism by the mass viewing public. These include not only the (literally) millions of accredited armchair viewers, but also a small number of unaccredited eavesdroppers, colleagues and the other professional interpreters who are likely to assess the quality of the interpreter’s performance.

Indeed, a TV interpreter’s professionalism may well be also judged by the national press, the next day. Thus, for example, in a scathing article published in a respected Italian daily newspaper, *La Stampa*, the day after the funeral of Lady Diana, the author ungraciously demolished the SI of the Earl of Spencer’s eulogy. The performance, according to the author, resembled that of “heavy breathing on a chatline”. On another occasion, another Italian TV critic, reproached the interpreter for having translated President Bush’s expression “I am a liberal” with “Sono un liberale”, rather than leaving the word in English. Other comments may concern the violation of the voice-matching principle (see above) as in the case of the three-hour long SI of Clinton’s Deposition before the Grand Jury in 1998, when the former American President was translated by three women. On the other hand, critics and journalists may also express positive appreciation about interpreters. An emblematic case is that of Olga Fernando (Italy’s most popular Tv interpreter). To quote from the press (*Il Corriere della sera*, *Giornale di Sicilia*): “Ms Fernando has a good word for everybody”, she displays “delicacy”, “profound sensitivity”, “sympathy”, “emotion”, and “does not limit herself to a cold translation”. (Paolo Nosedà, a famous TV interpreter in the 2000s decade)

Since TI gives great visibility and accountability to interpreters, it contributes in shaping not only the public image of interpreters, but, most importantly, the underlying norms (Chesterman 1993; Toury 1995) governing their profession. Indeed, newspaper articles are

“extra-textual sources” (Toury 1995) or “documentary sources” (Dufrou 2007), providing a meta-discursive representation of the interpreter which “does not embody just a neutral description of intrinsic features, but presents a selected and hierarchised set of norms” (Diriker 2004: 25). These norms convert the general values or ideas, shared by a community, into performance instructions which specify what is prescribed and forbidden, as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension (Toury 1995: 55).

Television Interpreting: a multifaceted activity Caterina Falbo

The contributions to this issue on TI can be divided into two groups. The former focuses on analysis of interpreter performance on TV, while the latter deals with working conditions, quality, user expectations, the interpreters’ role(s), visibility and comparison between transfer modes.

Eugenia Dal Fovo gives an account of MA students’ contributions on TI discussed at both the University of Trieste and the University of Bologna at Forlì. MA theses are undoubtedly a valuable instrument to allow research to progress and to identify further developments. Reviewing aspects and methodological approaches applied in MA theses give the author the opportunity of highlighting results and problematic elements. The contribution of MA theses is also one of the aspects dealt with in Franz Pöchhacker’s paper which offers a picture of TI in Austria and outlines the great potential of TI corpora, an issue which will be discussed briefly below. Amalia Amato and Gabriele Mack point out two of the main difficulties interpreters have to face in simultaneous interpreting in television settings such as the Academy Award Ceremony, i.e. proper names and culture-bound references, whose rendition is analysed by applying the categories identified by Cecilia Wadensjö. Modalisation as a device for emphasising or mitigating political discourse is the focus of the paper by Chiara Colucci who analyses simultaneous interpretations of five US presidential debates broadcast by Italian television channels. The fifth paper which concludes the first group of contributions is that of Clara Pignataro. The author investigates how a professional interpreter manages two specific elements of speech production, i.e. prosody and discourse markers, when interpreting Formula One press conference interviews on television.

The second set of contributions starts with the paper by Dörte Andres and Sarah Fünfer who turn their attention to a comparison between interpreting for public television in Germany and for the European cultural channel ARTE, which relies on its own language service. This focus on working conditions also characterises Óscar Jiménez Serrano’s paper. The author suggests “backstage conditions” as a suitable expression to refer to interpreter working conditions on television: a new concept, borrowed from theatre, highlighting “all the elements constraining the interpreter’s work, which mostly belong to the world behind the TV camera”. All these elements have an undeniable influence on TI quality and interpreters’ exposure and visibility. The same train of thought is retrievable in Chikako Tsuruta’s contribution, revealing the Japanese framework of news TI. Flexibility,

linguistic ability and a broad knowledge of current affairs appear to be the essential precondition of broadcast interpreters. Interpreting on television is not always the interpreter's home ground. More often than not, journalists act as an interpreter (cf. *mediazione antagonista*, Straniero Sergio 2007) and interpreters are called upon to suspend their interpreting activity and replace it with updating the audience about the recent developments of an event. This is what Natacha Niemants analyses in her paper focusing on individual types of speech production through a comparison between interpreters acting as interpreters and interpreters acting as journalists in the framework of an Italian morning programme, *Unomattina*, during the Iraq war. In contrast to Niemants' approach, Straniero Sergio goes beyond different speech activities by a single speech producer to depict the coexistence of simultaneous interpreting with other language transfer modes. Broadcasting institutions use voice-over, subtitling and free commentary/narration as a synchronic or diachronic alternative to simultaneous interpreting. Cynthia Jane Kellett and Rita Sala conclude the second part of this issue. Their paper centers on the translation of conflict from speech to Italian Sign Language in news bulletins on Italian television. This last contribution extends to interpreting as a service provided to a social group and constitutes a strong link between television, television interpreting and interpreting as a human right.

From this briefly drafted overview it clearly appears that there are many different threads which can sew together the many aspects dealt with in each contribution. The interplay between television setting constraints – quality standards, broadcast interpreters' prerequisites and interpreters' exposure and visibility – is the background against which analyses of specific aspects of interpreters' performances are carried out. As far as exposure and visibility are concerned, it is worth highlighting that, as Franz Pöchhacker and Óscar Jiménez Serrano put it, TI is the only opportunity for millions of people to get familiar with interpreting. It is easy to imagine the consequent construction of a (television) interpreting/interpreter stereotype.

Thanks to Dörte Andres and Sarah Fünfer's paper, as well as to the contributions by Franz Pöchhacker, Óscar Jiménez Serrano and Chikako Tsuruta, it is possible to trace a picture of TI in Germany, Austria, Spain and Japan respectively, while Eugenia Dal Fovo, Amalia Amato, Gabriele Mack, Chiara Colucci, Clara Pignataro, Francesco Straniero Sergio, Cynthia Jane Kellett and Rita Sala provide an image of Italian TI.

The attention paid to real data is common to all contributions concerning the analyses of interpreted speeches. In particular Eugenia Dal Fovo, Chiara Colucci and Francesco Straniero Sergio draw their data from CorIT (Italian Television Interpreting Corpus), while Óscar Jiménez Serrano plans to create STICor, a Spanish Television Interpreting Corpus. TI and corpus-based Interpreting Studies find in these two corpora – be they already existing or only imagined – their junction point. This very issue is discussed in a recently published volume by Straniero Sergio/Falbo (2012a). The search for classification criteria for CorIT items requires the identification of discrete categories based on specific characteristics of the items making up the corpus (Falbo 2012a, 2012b). Among all the categories, those regarding simultaneous interpreting seem to fit particular

aspects of TI highlighted by several contributors. The distinction between *simultaneous interpreting in presentia* (SIP) and *simultaneous interpreting in absentia* (SIA) proves to be essential: in the former case simultaneous interpreting is performed by an interpreter sharing the *hic et nunc* of the unfolding programme and who is necessary in order for primary interlocutors to mutually understand each other; in the latter case simultaneous interpreting is carried out by an interpreter who is simply ‘useless’ for the primary interlocutors but essential for the television audience and professionals introducing and commenting on the foreign broadcast. In this case interpreters do not share the communicative situation co-constructed by the primary interlocutors; very often, at least in Italy, they share the *hic*, except for recorded programmes which are broadcast later on. Ultimately, SIA is the result of the combination of particular context traits with the simultaneous mode and, on the basis of the television settings described in several contributions, seems to be a recurring interpreting mode in Germany, Austria, Spain and Japan.

This is not the place for rehearsing all the reasons which give strength to a corpus-based approach (cf. Setton 2011) nor the methodological issues deriving from such an approach (Straniero Sergio/Falbo 2012b). Suffice it to say that studying TI through corpora is a further step towards new interrogation paradigms, new methodological challenges and, hopefully, more ecologically comparable results.

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