

INTERPRETING PERFORMED BY PROFESSIONALS OF OTHER FIELDS: THE CASE OF SPORTS COMMENTATORS

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Abstract

Interpreting shares common ground with other disciplines, especially those that have to do with communication.

On television, reporters, commentators and presenters do sometimes interview the sports person in his or her native language and later interpret for the audience.

Using a corpus of interpreting episodes performed by sports commentators in several fields such as motor racing, we explore the quality and nature of the interpreting that is carried out by them, comparing it and contrasting it to what would be expected from a trained interpreter, in light of the fact that the former would have received limited training in this field.

The paper focuses on the work related to non professional interpreting done by Brian Harris and the research carried out by Sergio Viaggio and Francesco Straniero, amongst other authors, on television interpreting. This piece of work aims to question whether there is something to be gleaned that could contribute to the body of contrastive studies on communication and the body of knowledge on interpreting as a whole.

Key words: sports interpreting, television interpreting, media interpreting.

Introduction

Interpreting is an activity that can be practiced in multiple contexts. It is in one of these contexts that we find sports interpreters. The multiple contexts in which we interpret have sometimes served as a mean to classify the activity: Community interpreting, conference interpreting, or media interpreting are some of the examples. In an unpublished paper by Brian Harris (1995, quoted by Torres Díaz, 1998), the author presents a taxonomy which already includes a classification based on professional and non professional interpreting amongst others.

From the beginning of its practice, especially when there were no interpreting schools, up till today, interpreting was and is still performed by non professionals or by professionals of other fields that happen to know at least a pair of two languages: Franciscan friars in the

America of the XVI century (Chrobak, 2009); Servants in colonized territories (Bowen, 1995); Missionaries around the world (Bowen, 1995); Army officers (Bowen, 1995); Reporters of historical records (Payás, 2012); Guides throughout the ages, and with the boom of tourism in many countries (Harris, <http://unprofessionaltranslation.blogspot.com/Tourist>), (Kartunnen, 1994); Cleaners, in various official buildings, such as schools, town councils and hospitals, with the immigration waves of the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s in the UK and in the rest of Europe (Pöchacker, 1999); Journalists (Torres Díaz, 1998); Scholars (Bowen, 1995); Diplomats (Harris, <http://unprofessionaltranslation.blogspot.com/Hitler>); Members of sport teams (Harris, <http://unprofessionaltranslation.blogspot.com/Pelota>) and even doctors, midwives and nurses in today's Spanish hospitals (Torres Díaz, 2014). As Margareta Bowen stated, all these linguistic intermediaries either «chose the profession or were chosen by it». (Bowen, 1995, 247). For some intermediaries, even at a «high-level», interpreting was «unexpected and fortuitous». (Birse, 1967: 106; mentioned by Bowen, 1995: 268). (1)

As early as 1978 Harris was referring to these non professional interpreters that performed without having received any form of interpreting training as Natural translators and these sometimes were even children, they would be involved in interpreting activities at school between other classmates of the same origin of recent arrival and school staff or teachers or even with their parents or other relatives in multiple social services. Brian Harris describes natural translation as «The Translation made by bilinguals in everyday circumstances without special training for it». And as the author explains, these bilinguals apart from knowing an A language and a B language, which he refers to as competences, have with the acquisition of these two languages acquired a third competence, which is the ability to translate, that is why they translate and interpret without training courses.

As we have just quoted, amongst these non professionals there are many that although not having received any specific training for interpreting have received training in a discipline which shares a common ground with interpreting and this is the field of communication. Reporters, commentators and presenters that know several languages and are used to communicating information via a camera and a television screen are clear examples; they appear on television presenting and at the same time interpreting between guests in the studios and audiences. Like interpreters these journalists are above all communicators.

1. Television interpreting

Television interpreting is also known as Broadcast television interpreting and Media interpreting. When we talk about Media interpreting we are also referring to the interpreting done on radio programmes. Television interpreting either performed simultaneously or consecutively has nowadays become a common practice. We could differentiate two different types of TV interpreting.

When we the viewers see the interpreters performing liaison interpretations of interviews in studios or outside studios, in the majority of cases live, as well as consecutive interpretations of short or long speeches presented by important figures or by politicians where we see an interpreter doing the interpretation after the speech (2).

Or when we the viewers, hear but do not see the interpreter. In these cases, and when the interpreting is simultaneous to the speech act, viewers prefer to hear the same gender of the person interpreted, so in most cases when a lady has to be interpreted a female interpreter would be called in, this procedure would not be used in other contexts. Interpreting without the visibility of the interpreter can also be done in the consecutive and liaison mode, in these cases when the interpretation is being presented the cameramen will continue to focus on the interviewee.

We could also mention another type of TV interpreting: live subtitling, a hybrid of translation and interpreting, widely used nowadays by many television broadcasters, based on the simultaneous interpretation of a television programme to a stenographer who at the same time types the interpretation into a computer which appears simultaneously on our TV screen in the form of captions on a blank screen, giving the illusion of subtitles (Harris, 1994).

Media interpreting is not as recent as we may think. In 1934, André Kaminker, an interpreter of the League of Nations, interpreted Hitler's speech at the Nuremberg party convention live for French Radio (Mayer, 1993: 11). Austrian national broadcasting corporation (ORF) began using interpreters for the coverage of major events, such as the opening conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency in 1957, the U.S. election night of 1968 and the Apollo space mission to the moon in 1969 (Mayer, 1993: 11).

Television interpreting is very different from community and conference interpreting. As Mayer states (1993: 11): «In radio and TV broadcasts, communication is in one direction only, and the viewer or listener cannot indicate verbally or otherwise that that information has not been understood».

Although for some, television interpreting is considered conference interpreting (Baker, 1988), the process, as well as the difficulties and constraints are very different. Working in studios interpreters don't tend to sit in booths but in a different studio receiving the input via a monitor. The television interpreter speaks to unspecific audiences that are very big in numbers, even via satellite, their voices can be recorded and perhaps relayed in newspaper articles and even compared with the original (Kurz, 1995:194). As Pöchhacker states: «The level of output quality expected in media interpreting is even considerably higher» (1995: 207). Television interpreters also need to be familiar with the setting; they need to understand how television functions and how programme producers and sound engineers interact to obtain the end product. They also need to be familiar with the way a speech or an interview works.

All these interpreting jobs can either be performed by a professional interpreter or by a non professional; some of them are television presenters or sports commentators that know a pair of two languages.

Television interpreting has been studied in depth since the nineties in Europe. Austria and Italy are the countries where more publications on this field can be found, followed by Germany and Spain, especially in the last years. It is important to notice the works of Mayer (1993) and Kurz (1995; 1996) and Pöchhacker (1995) in Austria, and those of Viaggio (2001) and Straniero (2003) in Italy; Dörte & Fünher (2011) in Germany; and Molina Vallecillo (2002), Jiménez Serrano (2011) and Torres Díaz (2012) in Spain (3).

In their articles Kurz and Viaggio talk about the impact that the audiences have on the interpreter and about the qualities required for a good television interpreter. It is interesting to note that Viaggio refers to the «keenness and background of the journalist» (Viaggio, 2001, 30) as one of the desired qualities of the media interpreter. Straniero creates a corpus of professional interpreting performances taken from Formula One in Italian and English that stress the mistakes produced in some of the interpretations broadcasted live. Pöchlhammer talks about quality requirements as media interpreters not only having to meet conference interpreting standards but also and above all broadcasting standards. Dörte and Fünher devote their work to the interpreting practiced in the channel ARTE; Molina Vallecillo writes about the need of the establishment of norms to safeguard media interpreters as well as the required mention of the credits at the end of the programmes, not always respected in many television channels; Jiménez Serrano talks about the stress that interpreters working on television encounter and the difficult backstage conditions that sometimes have to face; Torres Díaz talks about the urgent need to create courses that capture the needs of and specialize on media interpreting.

2. Sports interpreting: televised interviews at motor races in Spain

Nowadays sports interpreting is mostly performed by professionals, especially at high level, like at the Olympics or at other important international games such as the winter games, like the Sochi ones celebrated in 2014 or Formula One events.

The majority of sports associations and translation agencies that provide interpreters for the sport sector agreed to emphasize that the knowledge of the field of work and terminology are very important for the interpreter.

In 2007 the vice president of one of the associations for translators in China, Li Yashu, expressed the following comments regarding interpreters for the Olympics in an interview to *China Youth Daily* (4): «Without understanding sports terminology, interpreters will be unable to properly express what the athletes and officials are saying. Courses are needed to prepare translators and interpreters for the demands of the Olympics».

On December 2013, in a radio interview, Mr. Clark, from Languages Services, the only language services that provides professional interpreters for football in the U.K., stated the following advice to football interpreters: «You have to know your football inside out». (5).

In Sport interpreting interpreters will be working in the different modes: consecutive, liaison and simultaneous. They can interpret at press conferences, in sport clinics, at the pitch or in the race itself, they can either be placed next to the sports person or interpret from a television studio. Much of the sport interpreting that we can actually observe as viewers takes place in front of a television camera, in some countries this activity is sometimes performed by sports commentators or television presenters or even by ex riders or ex players that know languages and have experience as communicators.

With the creation of private television channels in Spain during the 90's, the international sports events that were televised increased. From the year 2000 up till today the good role of certain Spanish sports persons, such as Fernando Alonso in Formula One, and the victories of

Rafael Nadal in the Davis Cup, and the good number of runners of Spanish origin and their victories in Moto GP (6), rose the general national public interest and this resulted in an increase in the number of sports programmes shown on Spanish television. Therefore the number of media interpretations to which we as viewers had access to, rose too.

Unlike in the Formula One where the interpretation is now performed by interpreters, generally working from a television studio, in MotoGP the interpreters working for Spanish television are the presenters or the sports commentators themselves. These interpreters and presenters work from the pitch itself.

The interpretations for motor races in Spanish television are performed by television presenters, sports commentators or ex riders. They are people which know very well the field in which they are working. The interpretations of MotoGP have in the recent years been performed by Melissa Jiménez; Ruben Xaus, interprets and presents for Superbike. Melissa is very fluent in Italian, and Ruben Xaus has excellent English, he himself is an ex pilot of Superbike and MotoGP. The interpretations of both presenters are always done in the consecutive mode, without notes. And although some professional interpreters have criticized their performances and described them as sometimes positive but others disastrous (Jiménez Serrano, 2011), they are definitely worth contemplating.

3. The corpus: recordings of interpretations in MotoGP and Superbike events. Assessment and comparisons.

In order to study the interpretations performed by presenters of motor races on Spanish television, we compiled a corpus based on the following televised programs of MotoGP and Superbike:

- Motogp 2013: Qatar (17 April); Austin (21 April); Jeréz (5th of May).
- Motogp 2014: Qatar (23 March); Austin (13 April); Jeréz (4th of May).
- Superbike 2014: Aragón (13 April); Donington (25th of May).

The examination of the recorded extracts of these events where interpreting took place showed the following information:

Television presenters worked in the consecutive mode, without taking any notes, on the pitch itself with background noise from the audiences, engines and technical staff. The interactions went from one minute to five minutes long and they were in Italian and English. Italian was always used with native speakers; English was used with natives and non natives. Most of the interactions took place after the race and they had the following characteristics:

Additions: Presenters tend to add the end: «Pero está satisfecho», referring to the mood of the pilot. This ending seems to be the most popular «pet sentence» to finish off interactions.

Summary: They make it short and leave out details, they concentrate on the gist.

There are a few grammatical errors: we only found them on the Italian productions of Melissa, the use of *anche* is wrong, in Italian it is not used at the end of a sentence, and there were also

false friends: *Felicitazioni* instead of *Complementi* is used to congratulate the Italian pilots. *Felicitazioni* does not exist; it is a false friend with Spanish. The Italian pilots are so used to hear it that answer without hesitations.

The order: the productions are not presented in the right order or as produced by the interviewed pilots; the order given by the presenter is somehow arbitrary.

The third person: The presenters tend to enunciate their productions beginning with «dice que», when the norm amongst professional interpreters is of speaking in the first person (Harris, 1990).

Interpreting or commentating? : Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether the presenter has finished the exercise. Interpretations are linked with other extra information about the race.

Not all the information is interpreted: The questions posed to the interviewees don't tend to be translated to the audience. This happens more in the Italian interactions of Melissa Jiménez than in the English interactions of Xaus.

In 2003 Straniero wrote a piece of research based on the quality of interpreting. The author compiled a very vast corpus of Formula One interpretations shown on Italian TV and performed by professional interpreters in English and Italian. With the assessment of the recordings, Straniero reached some conclusions:

The interpreters had made the following mistakes: Dilation of names, redundant repetitions, and dilation of the number of laps. They showed difficulties to understand certain accents. They also added neutral finishes (7). Professional interpreters also felt uncomfortable with the settings in which they were asked to work; background noise was an added problem.

Although our study, based on non professional interpreters, was not as vast as the one that Straniero presented on professional interpreters, we were firstly tempted and later keen to compare the samples. Unlike the professional interpreters, our non professional interpreters did not miss on the number of laps, or on the names of the pilots, even without note taking, and did not encounter any problems with the different accents or with the background noise. There were no repetitions. The professional interpreters included neutral finishes while the non professionals added happier endings. The non professional interpreters were part of the show, their interpretations were part of the show; the professional interpreters always seem external. The excellent knowledge of the field and the good communication skills of the non professional interpreters made them to stand out against the professionals studied by Straniero.

4. Journalists, interpreters and a test for both

The results obtained from our study made us question whether the good results of these non professional interpreters that were mainly immersed in a journalistic career were just a case apart or a common one.

It is interesting to notice that in the 1940's and 50's when there were not interpreting schools, or just a couple of them, most of the interpreters recruited for conference interpreting

missions were newspaper reporters (Torres Díaz, 1998: 13). These professionals knew languages and were good communicators.

With the purpose of finding out more we checked several journalism training courses in Spain and realized that students that wanted to become television presenters were trained on exercises that would focus on the improvement of language presentation and memory, and although the study of a foreign language was not longer offered in the degrees of the Spanish Universities, the students were strongly recommended to learn at least one foreign language.

A lecturer of journalism at Málaga University explained to us what the memory exercise consisted on:

Students have 15 minutes to read a piece of news, about a page long in length. Later on and without taken any notes and without the piece of news, the students are asked to present in front of a camera a recreation of what they have read. Students are asked not to use fillers. The exercise is performed in Spanish, three hours a week and throughout the semester of the third year (personal communication, Juan Francisco Gutierrez, Málaga University).

Could these students do an interpreting exercise?

Keen to find out about it, in May 2014 we organized an interpreting exercise for 5 students of journalism and 5 students of interpreting at Málaga University which were in the last semester of the third year, all of them girls. The students were recorded in booths. The semester was already coming to an end. All the students selected had a level of English of C3, and they were all informed five days before about the topic of the interpretation. They were going to listen to a presentation in English for about three minutes and they were allowed to take notes. It was not an original recording, it was an adaptation based on a real case. The topic: motor races

The recording presented:

- «I am very disappointed with today's result, eh ... especially because I got a great start and the feeling with my bike in the race was the best I've had all weekend, ehh.. I was getting ahead, I think I passed five riders in four laps and was soon up into the ninth when my brakes started to fail, it is a pity because I did want to get closer to the front. I slowed down to try and see if they would work again, but they didn't, it was clear that I had no brake lever working. It's a pity, because I was happy and comfortable on the bike in the early stages of the race and was sure I could have got a good result in the group today, eh... but unfortunately at the end of lap five I had to return to the pit. Ehh... As for my hand, well once the race got going it was no problem. I thought it was going to be more difficult to race with my hand than it was because I still had some pain yesterday. I was sure Jerez was one of the toughest circuits to come back to and ride after my crash. But, It is a great track and the crowd are great as well, I was very very excited about getting back on the bike but We were this morning worried about the track because of the rain that had fallen overnight did not allow the track to dry out completely, but in the end this was in fact no problem at all, so that's the way it is really».

The assessment of the recorded interpretations showed the following:

On the one hand interpreting students had given more importance to content than to style. Their interpretations were full of details but the rendition was boring, slow, and longer than the original and with fillers.

On the other hand Journalism students had given more importance to style and rendition. They were few details, but the gist was there. The presentations were very dynamic, short, without fillers and very clear.

We presented the recordings to an external assessor that without knowing which students were the ones studying interpreting came to the same conclusions: The students of journalism had obtained better results.

Conclusion

The results obtained lead us to think that interpreting trainers should look at journalism studies to improve interpreting courses and interpreters performances for Media Interpretations. There is definitely something to be gained by the fusion of multidisciplinary training practices.

Our tested non professional interpreters and their performances reminded us of the Natural translators of Harris (1978):

«In Natural translation, transmission of information is the prime aim and criterion of success: Linguistic Expression is relatively unimportant so long as it does not interfere with information».

As Pöchhacker stated in 1995:

«TV professionals who employ and work with (simultaneous) interpreters in their programs give a distinctly higher rating to pleasant voice, native accent, fluency of delivery and correct grammatical usage but attached significantly less importance to the criterion of completeness” (1995: 206) ».

Bühler’s 1986 quality criteria reminded always to our interpreting students does not get completed with the interpretations of television presenters since there is not always consistency with the original message or correct grammatical usage of the language. Nevertheless it was, and it works for as Brian Harris says: «It serves the purpose». (Personal communication, May 2014).

Notes

- (1) Throughout the history of interpreting we have also seen how renowned interpreters became, through their proficiency in languages, interaction and communication, professionals of other fields. We have the case of Ernest Satow, first interpreter, later ambassador (Harris, 1992; Bowen, 1995). We find the case of Paul Mantoux interesting, he was first a scholar, later a military, then he became an interpreter and later on he occupied other very prestigious positions (Bowen, 1995). And there are

other cases: Andrew Dickson White, Vernon Walters and Charles Bohlen who also became U.S ambassadors.

- (2) Recorded television interviews that are accessible via internet and that had been interpreted by a presenter when shown live on television, tend to become later on subtitled on internet, meanwhile the part of the consecutive interpretation is therefore omitted.
- (3) Research is of course not only limited to Europe, there are interesting studies on television interpreting from other countries such as Japan by Sen Nishiyama (1988). The author was the interpreter for the Apollo missions to the moon for the NHK (the nationwide public broadcasting network in Japan). He interpreted the first missions via a booth that was not visible to the audiences and later on in front of a television camera in the studio.
- (4) Digital Journal: ChinaDaily.com.cn, *Linguists must talk language of sport* (08.08.2007). Disponible en: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-08/08/content_5449160.htm>
- (5) Clark's Language Services: <http://www.footballinterpreter.com>.
- (6) There were seven Spanish pilots in Moto GP in the races that took place in 2014: Marc Márquez, Dani Pedrosa, Jorge Lorenzo, Álvaro Bautista, Héctor Barberá, Pol Espargaró, Aleix Espargaró. Marc Márquez and Dani Pedrosa were winners several times. In Superbike another Spanish pilot stood up, Toni Elías.
- (7) The adding of neutral sentences or the repetition of ideas or sentences are strategies practiced and taught in some interpreting training courses.

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