

Live Interpreting during the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Medium, the Mode, and the Model

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Abstract

Rapid advances in communication technology, coupled with a restrictive pandemic, have led to changes to how interpreters work and deliver their services. The Pandemic has forced interpreters to work off-site: from home and online. While the mode of delivery is not entirely new, the model is. The paper examines the experience of a Sydney interpreter during the Covid-19 pandemic which witnessed a severe lockdown (June 2021) with members of the Australian army patrolling certain suburbs. In response to the unusual situation, the state government of New South Wales, Australia's largest state decided to hold a daily press conference. When it was decided to make the press conference available in certain community languages, live interpreting was the mode selected. While the medium of a virtual studio was easily set up, the experience proved to be not only new but a challenge given the complexities of the situation. The paper examines the professional activity of interpreting the state premier's daily press conference; an experience that would be called upon nine months later during the Australian Federal elections in May 2022.

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1. Introduction

Interpreting is one of the oldest human activities practiced between neighbors who do not share the same language. It is interesting that the story of the Tower of Babel is often used in reference to translators whereas it is interpreters who are meant. In pre-literate times, it was interpreters who orally carried out all 'translations' required. One of the oldest references to interpreters comes from the tomb of General Hor-em-heb in Sakkara south of Giza, in modern Egypt which dates to the 14th century BC (Rave et al., 2011). Hor-em-heb, in his northern Memphite tomb, before he became a Pharaoh, has a scene depicting him speaking to a governor from a foreign land. Between him and the governor there is an image of what appears to be two interpreters facing different directions: the pharaoh and the governor. Egyptologists tell us that this is, but one person, a single interpreter, and the double figure is an Egyptian artistic tradition expressing movement. In this instance, fast movement expresses speed (Wilkinson, 1992) and could be taken to refer to the dexterity and skills of the interpreter. This historical reference serves as a reminder of the long-held appreciation of the excellent skills interpreters have. For many years, scholars, scientists, and journalists have attempted to examine the amazing brains of conference interpreters (Watts, 2014; Grosjean, 2019), their abilities (Chernov, 2004; Ahmed, 2010) and their personalities (Torikai, 2009). Interpreters perform different tasks from translators, require different facilities and deliver different services in different modes: dialogue interpreting, consecutive interpreting, sight translation and simultaneous interpreting. There is a different setting for which each mode of interpreting is most suited (Mikkleson & Jourdenais, 2015).

2. The mode of interpreting

Interpreters work with the spoken word and therefore it is fundamental that they develop excellent listening and speaking skills, over and above their linguistic skills in the source and target languages and expert knowledge of their respective cultures. Translating skills, as understood in translation studies, refer to the knowledge of processing, negotiating and expressing meaning in the target language in a manner that is linguistically correct, culturally acceptable and pragmatically appropriate (Ellis, 1997). Interpreters recognize that different settings require different modes of interpreting. For instance, in a medical interview 'dialogue interpreting' would be appropriate whereas at a press conference 'consecutive interpreting' would be best suited to the Question & Answer setting. Conferences, meetings, and speeches, more often than not, require the simultaneous mode of interpreting. This arrangement has been defined since the end of the Second World War till about the mid-eighties when 'international events' began to be televised 'live' in more than one linguistic community which necessitated interpreting (Daly, 1985). With satellite television, better technology and globalization the need for live coverage increased. In 1991, the American invasion of Iraq gave CNN the golden opportunity to become an international household name as it was broadcasting "Live from Baghdad"; an experience that remains to be examined both in print and in film (Wiener, 1991). The CNN example is worth examining in more detail as technology made it move from a regional network "commonly dubbed Chicken Noodle Network to a global news channel" (Henry, 1992, p. 10). Not only were other American channels tuning in but also all other foreign news channels were listening and interpreting what CNN was broadcasting. Interpreting for the media thus began with the need to engage and maintain a panel of interpreters who are not only available at the proverbial "drop-of-a-hat" basis but are also reliable to work on any event covered. The only interpreters deemed

suitable for this type of work were simultaneous interpreters who can provide simultaneous interpreting as the news break and stories develop (Grosjean, 2019).

Examined experiences of interpreters working for broadcasters go back as far as the Moon Landing as described by Japanese interpreters (Torikai, 2009) and provide insights into the context of working for the broadcast media. Interpreting for the Eurovision competition in 1986 is one of the earliest detailed experiences described (Daly, 1985). More recently, interpreters focused on specific settings such as talk shows (Sergio, 1999) and covering the Oscars in Italy (Amato & Mack, 2011). Likewise in Egypt, and despite the lagging of interpreting studies, the experience of offering live interpreting during the state visit to Cairo by the president of the Soviet presidium Nikita Khrushchev in May 1964 is an invaluable case study that remains to be examined. The interpreting mode, used during this historic visit (Dawisha, 1979), was awkward moving from sight translation to consecutive interpreting while Khrushchev was delivering his speech. Simultaneous interpreting must be used when it is technically available, appropriate, and conducive to understanding. In live broadcasting, and while the mode of simultaneous interpreting appears to be the most suitable, there are several factors and issues that need to be discussed and settled before the interpreter commences interpreting.

Some of these factors and issues are the physical set up where the interpreter is placed. Clear sound is a must and so is a clear line of vision. In broadcasting, it would be a serious shortcoming if the interpreters are translating something the audience can see, and only they imagine. The other issue is preparation: conference interpreters have a *modus operandi* that is proposed and upheld by a robust international professional body (<https://aiic.org>) and there are minimum conditions covering accepting work, sound quality, preparing and even the duration in the booth. Live interpreters, and due to the nature of (broadcasting) work need to develop their own professional code of practice and to negotiate it with their employers.

3. The medium of interpreting

In conference and live interpreting the medium is essentially the same: a microphone and a headset. However, the medium, often, is governed by the setting which is subject to external pressures and changes. In conference interpreting, where simultaneous interpreters work, the equipment and the booth is provided by a technician who is usually outsourced. The setting is usually manageable but not always comfortable unless one is working for the headquarters of an organization that has dedicated conference rooms and booths for their 'regular' interpreted meetings. Quite often, conference interpreters must accept makeshift arrangements where booths are tucked in or even stuck somewhere in the conference room with poor or no line of vision or access to screens to follow the PowerPoint presentations. This in a way is compensated for by the time given for preparations since most conferences are planned and organized well in advance.

Live interpreters work also with the same equipment: a headset and a microphone, but the settings vary with each assignment. First and foremost, the nature of broadcasting means interpreters have to be available and ready to 'cover' breaking events which place a tremendous pressure on their cognitive performance. The adrenalin rush is too high and so is the stress level and the genre of the news makes no difference: bush fires, the Olympic Games, 9/11 attacks, riots at the US Congress, floods, natural

disasters, racial protests in Minneapolis, national debates, the Queen's Farewell, the Opening of the World Cup, etc. The timing of world event varies and unfortunately when one lives in a country that is GMT +10, a lot of events will happen in the middle of the night or very early in the morning. This means makeshift arrangements will be made and interpreters need to be resilient, available, and ready: mental agility, clear voice, superior linguistic command, and composure. At times, pre-recorded interpreting would be required to accompany footage used in the news bulletin or in other shows or during the live coverage at 'certain' moments. Therefore, the ability to quickly translate and to voiceover 'selected audio segments' is often a requirement made shortly before or after working on air.

Although the medium is the same, live interpreters acknowledge the main differences with conference interpreting which determine the way they work. While conference interpreters have an audience of field experts and specialists, live interpreters work for a wide audience that include all sectors of the community (Tsuruta, 2011) – which places a certain degree of pressure on the interpreter to ensure that the message gets across to all. Furthermore, whereas conference interpreters work in teams and for a short duration of 15-20 minutes maximum, depending on the complexity of the session, live interpreters do go on for a whole hour, or longer, on their own. Equally significant, is the fact that where conferences are of shorter duration 3-5 days, live coverage of significant events could go on for days and at different times of the day. Most broadcasters contact simultaneous interpreters to work as live interpreters, and in the wake of the pandemic, interpreters are increasingly engaged as 'remote' interpreters. Live interpreters continue to face challenges that are peculiar to broadcasting contexts such as mixed-mode interpreting where the speaker is delivering a speech (interpreted simultaneously) then takes questions from the press (requiring consecutive interpreting) and when a sheet of information is given out (sight translation is required). The ever-changing context of live interpreting, and despite the same medium of interpreting shared with conference interpreting, places more pressures on the live interpreter.

4. The model of interpreting

In live interpreting, the objective is different from that in conference interpreting even though the mode and the medium tend to be the same. This is because what is being translated is a lot more than words: whether in the form of a speech or a text being read out. While the interpreter is a simultaneous interpreter their task is to address a public in need of translation of what is being said in addition to information, background knowledge of the broadcast event as well as interpretation of the visual before them. Naturally this largely depends on the event being broadcast, the significance of the event and the genre of the linguistic message being interpreted. As live interpreters deal with a variety of settings it would be restrictive to insist that the interpreter translates only the words being said or heard. With the existence of the visual before the audience, the interpreter would be out of place should they only interpret words heard. Their task, depending on the event, is akin to a TV commentator and not just an interpreter. This expanded role (and responsibility) is gained with experience, not just as an interpreter, but also as an interpreter in a 'specific and continuing event', for example in interpreting during an extended coverage of bush fires, the on-going coverage of a sports competition, federal elections or a regular press conference that goes on for several weeks or months such as covering the War in Ukraine.

Like conference interpreters, live interpreters are not seen and do not appear on the TV screen but unlike the former, their voice becomes so familiar to the audience and this familiarity with the voice establishes a kind of consistency and with it a type of familiarity that leads to a degree of credibility particularly in times of stress, pandemic, war, or national disaster. As events tend to go for longer time than conferences the task, skills and role of live interpreters deserve more attention and examination. Several scholars examined simultaneous interpreters' work (Downie, 2016) and skills (Jones, 2002) and focused on how interpreters develop their strategies (Torikai, 2009), decision-making process (Seleskovitch, 1978), compensation (Sleskovitch & Lederer, 1993) and risk management (Akbari, 2009). The latter is of great interest to interpreters as they face challenges in the course of their work that vary from poor sound to the loss of sound, multi-speakers at the same time and various speakers at the same session. Live coverage is a multifaceted and complex task, and though it appears like simultaneous interpreting, it is more complex for an interpreter who is trying to make sense of the entire event by focusing on the audio and the visual as well. In a sense it is akin to the subtitler who translates the audio while interpreting the visual.

It is because of the complexity in interpreting during live coverage that interpreters seek latitude to allow them to combine the audio and the visual in their model of interpreting. This latitude is always governed and guided by the network's guidelines and the experience of the managing directors. To appreciate the need for further research into this area, I will now turn my attention to two examples of live interpreting that took place in Sydney. The first is during the lockdown, necessitated by the severe spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, which took place in the form of a daily press conference. The second is during the Australian federal elections of May 2022. It took the form of a series of five national debates between the primary candidates and between senior ministers. After describing the setting of each example, I will discuss the experience highlighting the need for further research into this model of interpreting which is gaining more popularity in the broadcasting industry as the global village is getting smaller and smaller thanks to rapid advances in telecommunication technology and the tendency to favor remote interpreting over on-site interpreting as well as the impact this is having on the interpreting profession.

4.1. Example one: Interpreting the daily Covid Press Conference

In early 2021, Australia was gripped by fear, disinformation, and conflicting government directives on how best to deal with the pandemic. Masks worn in public, social distancing (later revised to) physical distancing, and hand sanitizing were among the obvious instructions, but the situation was a lot more confused and confusing when it came to working, taking public transport and travelling. All air travel came to a halt. Moving from one region to another, either for work or to visit family was gradually being restricted. A lockdown loomed large and indeed by June 2021, Sydney, Australia's largest city was in lockdown.

The state government of New South Wales, Australia's largest state, decided to embark on a public campaign to communicate with the public through a daily press conference. In the conference, the Premier would appear accompanied by some senior members of her government who are involved in the state's response to the Pandemic. The conference followed a pattern where the Premier would start the conference and report on the situation as regards the spread of the pandemic and the latest measures

taken. This would be followed by her Chief Medical Officer responsible for the plan to counter the pandemic. Following these two persons other government personnel such as the police minister representing law and order would speak on how the government intends to enforce the government's plan and directives. After all government officials had spoken, the press would have about ten to fifteen minutes to ask questions. The press conference took place in the foyer of the government building where the Premier has her office. This contrasts with a similar press conference held in the State of Victoria, where the Premier held his conference in a public park next to his building. Though the background was green and lush, the street noise, and unfriendly birds, made the task of the live interpreter unnecessarily more difficult. In July 2021, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia's largest multicultural broadcaster (radio and television) decided not only to broadcast the Daily Press Conference but also to offer live interpreting for the whole duration in a small number of highly relevant community languages. It was decided to offer the live interpreting in Arabic, Assyrian, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Vietnamese (Kwan, 2022).

SBS Radio and Television, established in 1978, has played a significant part in the Australian community both for new migrants and for the predominantly European community since its inception: broadcasting programs from 'home' for the newly arrived migrants and offering a taste of the several cultural backgrounds that are increasingly making up the Australian multicultural community. Like any large city, Sydney is a vast metropolis with regions known for certain demographics. During the lockdown, the regions of high incidents of reported infections with Covid were identified with high demographic density and concentration of Arabic, Assyrian, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Vietnamese communities. Furthermore, they also have a younger demographic profile which meant the workforce of construction workers, laborers, technicians, and those working in the service industry reside in those socio-economic regions. Movement by these workers was seen as a risk the state government needed to be able to manage. SBS Radio contacted interpreters and explained the project and requested that interpreters be available and ready to 'go live' within 48 hours. On the 23rd of July 2021, at 11 o'clock in the morning, SBS Radio launched one of its remarkable services to multicultural Australia the extent of which has not been seen or attempted previously. Arabic was the first language to go live, on the first day of launching the live interpreted coverage followed by the other three languages a day or two apart. During the lockdown, SBS Radio delivered a special microphone and a headset to the interpreter's residence by a special courier wearing protective clothing. Access to the medium was given to the interpreter via a web site that allowed the input/output to be tested and controlled remotely. All interpreters are qualified and experienced 'simultaneous interpreters' and despite their experience they were not comfortable with the short notice. Prior to July 2021, everyone was already working from home, has already discovered, and used various platforms for virtual meetings whether Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Adobe Connect, Google Meet etc., has interpreted over the phone for at least eighteen months and carried out numerous hours of virtual court hearings via video-conferencing. The Covid-19 pandemic had changed the way most interpreters work in Australia and had made remote interpreting the more popular, if not favored modus operandi of interpreting for a variety of reasons, but the Coronavirus was not the sole reason for the shift.

For all intents and purposes, the daily press conference by the NSW Premier was an exercise in public relations with clear objectives: a face-to-face meeting with the community, daily, for just an hour, to brief the community on the latest developments in a fast-changing situation and with an opportunity,

for the press, to ask a few questions. SBS Radio realized that this arrangement needed to be conveyed in some of the community languages most affected. The one-hour daily press conference, having gone for almost ten weeks tended to develop a clear pattern. Notwithstanding some changes that largely depended on the developing situation, the pattern can be analyzed in Table 1.

Table 1. The main components of the one-hour daily press conference

Part	Duration	Speaker	Topic	Notes: Language & Information
1	15 mins	The Premier	Reporting	Directives. Concepts. Numbers. Terms.
2	10 mins	Health Advisor	Medical Info	Technical: Terms, Names, Numbers
3	10 mins	Police Chief	Legal matters	Concept, terms
4	10 mins	Prof. Expert	Prof. issues	Changeable. New info. Names & Terms
5	15 mins	The Press	Q & A	Off camera. Over talk. Poor sound. Noise

Within a few days of the press conference the above pattern became clear which gave the interpreter an idea of what to expect. This is vitally important for live interpreters as it aids them to scaffold their output and to take better control of risk management (Seleskovitch, 1978).

Interpreting and particularly in the simultaneous mode, is not and should not be about guessing what the speaker is about to say but rather translate what they say. In the absence of briefing, the nemesis of all bad interpreting, any background information on facts, details, issues, terms, name and numbers is always welcome and greatly appreciated as it frees the interpreter from overloading their short-term memory and enables them to focus on clarity, meaning and style. While the above table sums up the five major parts of the daily press conference rather neatly, it must be remembered that within each part there are sub issues and dilemmas that cropped up during the press conference: some are thematic; others are technical while others are professional. Interpreted press conferences take place every day and in a very broad spectrum of fields from foreign affairs to film festivals and in football, the post-match press conference is a fine example of the mechanics and pressures of live interpreting. Although some scholars have examined the intricate nature of interpreting at press conferences, the field is too large to be covered in one case study (Gamal, 2014). In Arabic interpreting studies, press conferences remain under-represented despite the abundance of professional examples and case studies that could enhance our understanding of the practice of interpreting at this complex, multifaceted and challenging setting.

I now turn to another professional example of live interpreting taken from the Australian political system and carried out for the Special Broadcasting Service. This time it was covered live on national television during the May 2022 Federal elections. A discussion of both examples will follow.

4.2. Example two: Interpreting National Debates

In April 2022, the government announced the date for the federal elections to be held on Saturday 21 May 2022. There is a legal obligation of the government in office to announce the date which is usually 33 days prior to the polling day (Marsh, 2022). The political hype prior to the elections begins with advertising in the print, audiovisual and online media outlets and culminates in a televised debate between the leaders of the two political parties in the country.

SBS Television, in Sydney, decided to offer live interpreting for the national debate. This time, the multicultural broadcaster gave the interpreter a three-day notice but with one major change from the Covid daily press conference broadcast nine months earlier. This was a briefing by the management as to the Broadcaster's guidelines on interpreting a national debate. National debates are not a common scene in the Australian political landscape despite increasing interest in following the American presidential tradition. In fact, it was only the second ever political debate and was the first to be interpreted live. The fact that SBS Radio and Television embarked on offering live interpreting, during unusual and stressful times in the country, is largely seen as a service of accessibility at a level not seen or attempted previously. For almost half a century, Australia's multicultural broadcasting service (www.sbs.com) has been making languages and cultures available to a wide sector of the community, roughly estimated to be a quarter of the population who were born overseas. This quarter of the population is larger than just 25% by virtue of mixed marriages, second generation and other Australians, from native, European, or other migrant backgrounds. Here a distinction is made between broadcasting the national debate on its channels (radio, television and online) therefore making it 'available' and going an extra step of interpreting it into several languages (Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese) thus making it 'accessible'.

In the last federal election, and indeed in all past elections, there was only one debate where the two leaders would face a moderator, usually an experienced and well-known announcer to answer a series of questions prepared by the broadcaster. Each candidate is given a short period of time usually 2-3 minutes to answer. In theory, it is not unlike an interview with two persons who are listening attentively to the interviewer and answering relevantly, objectively, and politely. In reality though, the occasion has been turned into a television drama high on style and low on substance. In this regard, the Australian political debate reflects the American presidential debate as seen, live on television, during America's last election between Biden and Trump (Nobel, 2022).

This background was shared and discussed in the briefing and with it the expected role of the interpreter. While the role of the interpreter, in any setting or context, is to translate the message accurately and correctly as is practically possible, the genre of interpreting televised political debates has an extra dimension that the broadcaster believed was significant to share with all interpreters. This was latitude and *editorializing* the message. It is not additions or omissions that worried the broadcaster but coloring the words! For the voice of the interpreter must remain neutral to the message translated even the 'tone of voice'. As it happened, two interpreters were engaged for each language with the decision to have mixed gender in each team. The mixed gender was a professional decision in order to enhance the reception of the service. To maintain impartiality, interpreters took turns when working on the national debates: and there were five of them prior to the Election Day. The political debate,

between the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader, was a series of three rounds, moderated by three different well-known and therefore familiar announcers in addition to two other ‘ministerial debates’ focusing on the economy and defense. The elections came in the wake of two difficult years where the pandemic had wreaked havoc with almost everything from nursing homes to schools and from shopping to working, rising tension in the Pacific and a series of natural disasters that befell Australia from bushfires to floods which brought, naturally, the government’s policies into question. In other words, the interpreter selected for this professional assignment would have to be familiar with the political system, the economic situation, and the government responses to major challenges from natural disasters to the pandemic to diplomatic relations in the Pacific.

This last topic, the military and defense issues was, as can be expected, a complex context for any interpreter let alone during a national political debate on the eve of federal elections. Political debates are not a new genre or setting for interpreters and it has indeed been examined and reflected upon by the media and academia alike (Wang 2012, Elias 2022). The practice of interpreting political speeches is observed in countries with strong media sectors like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, France, Canada, and the United States. This experience is significant for it sheds light on a genre of interpreting that is vastly different from that encountered in simultaneous (mainly conference) interpreting due to the setting, which is characterized by tension, interruptions, unfinished sentences, rhetoric, clichés, digression, loss of sound, poor acoustics and a discourse that is sometimes difficult to anticipate. For the three leaders’ debates, in May 2022, the pattern followed a Q & A style with 2-3 minutes to answer the question posed by the moderator and a chance to sum up their position at the end in a few minutes. While each leader did their best to be cooperative it was a challenge for the interpreter. The seemingly simple arrangement of a single question and “short answer” turned out to be far from simple. For all intents and purposes, the five debates had the following pattern, with minor changes caused primarily by one of the debaters violating the agreement on turn taking, duration and cooperation.

Table 2. The pattern of the five election debates between the leaders and top ministers

No	The Debate	Duration	Issues & Characteristics
1st	Leaders	One hour	Both leaders show respect, the PM shows more flair facing the camera, more fluent with political and economic rhetoric.
2nd	Leaders	One hour	As both leaders become more confident, they trade accusations with lots of facts and figures, speak fast with lots of clichés.
3rd	Leaders	One hour	Both are aggressive, speak fast, interrupt each other. The debate almost derailed as it descended to a slinging match.
1st	Ministerial	One hour	The defense ministers are camera shy. Stuck to their guns, low on content high on numbers, repetitions and interruptions.
1st	Ministerial	One hour	The treasurers are averse to the media. Lots of figures and numbers. High on statistics and low on impact.

The moderator introduced his or her question with a short reference to an incident then asked the question. Though composed and unemotional, the question was long and came after an introduction which could easily be challenging to the interpreter. The answer, however, proved to be problematic. Though each leader was told to answer in 2-3 minutes, they tried to cram as much information as they could in the short time requested of them. The language was sarcastic at times, peppered with figures and statistics at fast speed. Neither leader did adhere to the 2-3-minute rule and worst of all they interrupted each other and threw comments in medias res. As former economists, both leaders are fluent not only in statistics but also in terminology and not used to being told to be brief! They tried to win each round of the national televised debate and with time both became more aggressive towards each other, but predominantly polite. It is interesting to observe that while both leaders are charismatic one was more linguistically fluent, a natural speaker. Over-talking was a technique they used perhaps to add spice to their show like Muhammad Ali used to throw verbal punches at his boxing opponents in the pre-fight press conference (Murphy, 2022). The two ministerial debates, on the other hand, were between ministers who clearly were not used to facing the media. The defense minister and the treasurer are two very significant posts in the Australian government however neither minister was adept at speaking in public. No matter what expertise a minister has, being camera shy is a serious handicap at a press conference and strategies must be developed to compensate for this shortcoming. Thus, raising the voice, repeating certain words, interruptions, use of euphemisms or uncommon idiomatic expressions are among the strategies employed. Unlike the treasurers' debate where each minister tried to drown the other in numbers and financial terminology; the more camera shy defense ministers resorted to long-winded sentences, repetitions, body language, sarcasm and *alta voce*.

5. Discussion

Although the concept of live interpreting is not new, the term has several variations such as remote, distant, virtual, phone, video and online interpreting. The multiplicity of terms though sharing the same medium (of headphone and a microphone) refer to a variety of interpreting modes (dialogue, sight translation, consecutive, voice over, summary). However, the term live interpreting is widely used within the broadcasting context which reflects the major activity of "live coverage". Australian media outlets, during both the Covid-19 daily press conference and the Federal Elections used the terms "Live interpreting" and "live interpreters" on several occasions (Elias, 2022; Kwan, 2022).

Live interpreting in the contexts described above clearly differs from other models of interpreting and particularly simultaneous interpreting commonly used in conferences and meetings. In this model of closed quarters, the interpreter is spared the media/social pressure of interpreting during an emergency, national crisis, or an international event. While conference interpreters do face animated sessions and meetings, these only go for a few minutes and are far in between given the more professional and academic-like nature of the meetings. In simultaneous interpreting the audience are largely experts in the field and the terminology is already defined, shared, and understood. Furthermore, most conferences and their literature are agreed upon in advance. This is rarely the case in "live" interpreting. There is, therefore, a need to pay closer attention to this model of interpreting as the above Australian examples have shown. A definition of live interpreting is perhaps the first point of departure. Live interpreting is the model of interpreting within the broadcasting industry that is usually in response to an emerging event the end of which is unpredictable. The unpredictability here refers to

how the developing story will unfold which makes it difficult for the interpreter to research. The media outlet may suddenly decide to include live interpreting for as long as it deems necessary. The interpreter in this model of live interpreting needs to be available and ready. This requires a higher degree of flexibility and the expertise to conduct research and preparation in a short period of time, usually 48 hours or less.

The experience of live interpreting in the daily updates through a press conference was discussed with the SBS management through a debriefing phone call after each press conference. This professional arrangement was both insightful and fruitful as the experience gained would be utilized a few months later. Although no fresh material such as latest figures, names, police orders or medical advice was passed from the Broadcaster to the interpreter, the broadcaster's professional care proved helpful for the interpreter and boosted their resilience. The one-hour press conference, and not withstanding its five parts, was a grueling exercise by professional standards. Each part presented its own challenges as the press conference itself went through times of stress: the official medical advice was questioned, the government decision to call a lockdown came under fire for being too late, the decision to call the army to patrol streets in suburbs with migrants from Iraq and Vietnam was too delicate and finally as the Premier herself came under fire from a particular member of the press who was directing questions in regards to an investigation into her political/personal affairs.

In an ideal world, a live interpreter would appreciate knowing what the live coverage is about and with adequate time to prepare. Working for the broadcasting media is a rewarding experience, both financially and professionally, however, it would be ideal if the speakers (the government) appreciate that the press conference is being interpreted. It was delightful to hear the Premier acknowledging the fact that the press conference is being interpreted but that did not convince the participants to speak either clearly or at normal speed. Some started speaking with their masks on, while others turned their face away from the microphone, spoke off camera and on several occasions, they spoke on top of another speaker. The worst culprits were members of the press. As soon as the premier invited questions from the press (the last part of the press conference) they behaved like children: screaming, speaking at the same time, off camera and off the microphone. It was painful to interpret an answer to a question that was not captured. In the few occasions when a question was heard clearly, it was far from being lucid: long-winded with multiple concepts and spoken fast because there was always another question. Despite requests (and later complaints) to the broadcasting management, nothing could have been done to tame the press.

The repeated experience over ten weeks created a kind of familiarity for all parties involved: the premier, her team members, the press, the interpreter as well as the Arabic-speaking audience who were following the interpreted press conference on television, the radio and on Facebook. This familiarity worked for all parties particularly the interpreters. Learning and gaining momentum as the media story unfolds is the hallmark of resilience and experience. However, the business decision to change interpreters, in mid-stream, resulted in a marked shift in the fluency of the narrative, the consistency of the terminology and phraseology, and ultimately the credibility of the press conference. It must be remembered that the goal of the press conference was first to convince Sydneysiders, particularly the residents of certain LGAs (local government areas) where the infection numbers were high, to accept and adhere to the lockdown. Second, the press conference aimed to convince all

residents to take the vaccine (regardless of its brand name). As the Premier said “once the vaccination reaches 80% it would be possible to ease the lockdown” so it was a race for the credibility of the press conference (Crowe & Curtis, 2022).

In the five segments of the national debates at the leader and ministerial levels it was almost the same pattern of live interpreting but with one major difference: speaking at the speed of light. The debate is structured around the format of a moderator introducing a concept then asking a question. At times the same question was put to both debaters and at other times the moderator would ask each debater a specific question. All debaters were requested to adhere to the rule of 2-3 minutes to answer, a simple rule to follow at this professional level; however, that was rarely the case as other factors weighed in. Debaters spoke faster to include more in their allowed time. Unfortunately, for the interpreter, this speed is a lot faster than the normal and comfortable speed of 120 words per minute. As the questions got more complex, tougher, or unexpected the debaters resorted to techniques that varied from shouting, over speaking and interrupting to laughing or simple noise making and hostile body language.

In the political debates, two interpreters were working together in what would normally be a pleasant, albeit intense, setting due mainly to the context. It was difficult, at times, to make sense of the message in the source language and consequently the target language reflected the noise. The televised national debates required the interpreter to work onsite at the television station which though capable was not necessarily accommodating of the interpreter’s professional requirements. Live interpreting, as experience shows, is a lot more than just good equipment. Professional interpreters though resilient also need the support of the broadcasting service to perform better as live interpreters in the context described above. This means the appreciation that interpreters need notice to prepare and get to know the event program to mentally summon up the required sociolinguistic frames of reference. The incident of Al-Arabiya Network interpreter erroneously translating King Charles III announcement as “It gives me pleasure to announce the death of my beloved mother Queen Elizabeth II” made the headlines (<https://multilingual.com/al-arabiya-interpreting-mistake>). This is a huge mistake at this high level of live interpreting and in these tense circumstances. Professional interpreters can sympathize with the interpreter as they know what could have happened. In this incident, the interpreter was called upon to be available and ready for an evolving news story, with little or no time to mentally prepare. The king’s speech is not difficult, and King Charles is known for his clear enunciation and good speaking speed, however, the interpreter was overwhelmed by the occasion and failed to summon up the appropriate sociolinguistic frames of reference for the occasion. Speaking in Modern Standard Arabic; a register that is higher than the usual vernacular, and at this formal occasion, the interpreter needed that little precious time to prepare mentally.

6. Concluding remarks

As the world continues to get smaller and smaller due to rapid advancements in telecommunication technology, the media’s insatiable thirst for live coverage will increase and with it the need for live interpreters. In this paper, the focus has been on the work of interpreters in the broadcasting industry and an attempt has been made to describe the context in which they work. It is insightful to examine the history of live interpreting and its close association with the broadcasting environment. The

numerous terms that can and do describe this type of work need not underestimate the need to establish a definition for a single term for the live interpreter. The field of live interpreting, in the wake of almost three years of working from home and online, is likely to favor a remote basis of work which is fortunately supported by capable and improving technology.

There are several issues which were not examined in this paper such as the task of the interpreter in live coverage since the context particularly when compared to the context of the simultaneous interpreter is vastly different. Also, the significant issue of what information needs to be made available to the interpreter working in the context of a live coverage. Equally significant is the complex issue of audience who are heterogeneous in contrast to the homogenous audience in conferences where everyone (even the press covering the conference) are specialists in the field or very familiar with the topic. This is an area that needs further examination as it affects the performance of the broadcasting interpreter. As live interpreters work on multi-platforms (on air and online), and their work is accessed by the public, it gets reviewed and evaluated by the audience and, instantaneously. In this respect, live interpreters share the challenge subtitlers face: being quickly (and often unfairly) criticized by viewers who have very little understanding of the challenges resulting from the medium, the mode and the model of linguistic transfer.

The main issues of live interpreting, as a distinct form of interpretation, is the recognition that live interpreting requires a special training, a manual of good practice and a robust research agenda. There are also other pertinent professional issues that need to be negotiated with the media sector itself that cover technology, ergonomics, rules of engagement, remuneration, briefing and debriefing fatigue as well as professional development. Given that live interpreting is used almost exclusively within the broadcasting context, it would be insightful and indeed a sound investment to see the broadcasting industry develop a training package for live interpreters to work in some of the major professional contexts. As stories tend to break and develop instantly, hoping for an interpreter who is available and ready, at the drop of a hat, is not always a good strategy.

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