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Contents

Interpreting the Oscar Night on Italian TV: an interpreters' nightmare?

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Abstract

Simultaneous interpreting is recognised to be an extremely complex cognitive activity placing high demands on linguistic abilities, extra-linguistic knowledge and communication skills of those who perform it.

Specific difficulties identified in literature as the main factors contributing to the complexity of the interpreters' task include high information density, especially if combined with a high speed of talk and/or not well structured utterances, proper names, figures, culture-bound references, humorous, ironical or highly emotional passages, unfamiliar accents and pre-prepared speeches read out with no chance for the interpreter to have access to them.

Simultaneous interpreting for live media ceremonies entails even more difficulties due to the peculiar features, structure and time constraints of the broadcast event. This study discusses simultaneous interpreting of two Academy Award Ceremonies – in 2000 and 2010 – focusing on two specific difficulties: proper names and culture-bound references. The interpreters' performance is analysed using rendition categories based on the work by Wadensjö (1998). Results are discussed in the light of previous studies and Relevance Theory.

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1   Paragraphs 1, 5, 6 by G. Mack and 2, 3, 4 by A. Amato.

Introduction

The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies has changed interpreting from an activity carried out mainly in conference settings into one performed in a variety of macro-contexts including a wide range of communication frameworks. One of the areas where interpreting has been growing rapidly is the media and in particular television. Although TV interpreting only accounts for a limited share of the interpreting private market, it has a remarkable impact on the perception of interpreters and their work among large numbers of people. The major live TV programmes are generally interpreted by experienced professional interpreters and often feature highly skilled performances.

This paper analyses two editions of the Academy Awards Ceremony (AAC) broadcast in Italy and focuses on three main aspects: the complexity of the AAC format, the interpreters' working conditions and the interpreters' renditions of culture-bound items and proper names.

1.   The AAC: a complex TV "container"

The AAC – also known as the Oscar Night[2] – is probably the most famous self-celebrating ritual of the US film industry. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) was established in 1927 and has been awarding prizes for the best films produced during the previous year(s) since 1929. The first AAC to be televised was in 1953, with a reported audience of 34 million. Today the televised Oscar Night, lasting between three and over four hours, is one of the US mainstream cultural traditions. The 2011 ceremony, held in a Hollywood theatre and broadcast live by ABC, drew an average 37.9 million US viewers (Gorman 2011). The AAC is also popular in the rest of the world: it is broadcast in more than 200 countries[3] including Italy, where it is interpreted simultaneously.

The socio-cultural and economic aspects of this event have been widely investigated (e.g. Levy 2001; Epstein 2005) and go beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that many interests revolve around the AAC, which acts as a powerful showcase for the US film industry:

> The production and distribution of motion pictures and television programs is one of the nation's most valuable cultural and economic resources. The industry is a major private sector employer, supporting 2.4 million jobs, and over $140 billion in total wages in 2008 [...] The industry is one of the most highly competitive around the world – one of the few that consistently generates a positive balance of trade, in virtually every country in which it does business (MPAA 2010).

Among the various roles played by the ceremony there is an advertising function (Deuchert *et al.* 2005), aiming to catch the attention of the widest possible worldwide audience. Since the AAC's message is partly conveyed through

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2   Academy Award® and Oscar® are trademarks and service marks of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
3   AMPAS official site; available at <http://www.oscars.org/>.

language, the way the linguistic component is transferred into a foreign language is an interesting aspect to investigate.

1.1 Format

The AAC is a complex, carefully constructed TV show. One or two hosts take the audience through the show, alternating with numerous other on-stage performers and behind-stage announcers. Together with these primary speakers, there are secondary speakers in local TV studios who present the event to their respective audiences – in our case one or more Italian anchors and their guests. In Italy the AAC has been aired live with simultaneous interpreting since at least 1994 (Scalcerle 1994). Since 2005, the show has been broadcast by the satellite pay-TV network SKY, with slight changes in its format. This paper describes the format of the two editions under study.

1.2 The Oscar event – a complex situation and a complex sound track

The modes and conditions of interpreting for the Oscar Night vary according to the different types of talk associated with different speakers and interactions, both on stage and on pre-recorded videos shown during the night. The main primary speakers are hosts, presenters, winners and announcers. These speakers participate in a wide range of interactions: with other protagonists on stage, with members of the public they occasionally address remarks to, with guests intervening also via satellite links. All these interactions take place in English and are thus only partially accessible for an Italian audience. The secondary speakers are Italian presenters and guests who comment on the AAC before and after the show as well as during commercial breaks (which in recent years have coincided exactly with those in the original broadcast).

After the opening welcome by the AMPAS President, the hosts – often famous comedians – have the task of running the show, maintaining attention and entertaining the audience. Presenters usually introduce single award categories or special tributes. They read out the nominees and announce the winners. Their talk is more "informative" although at times they too use humour. Winners make acceptance speeches characterised by a strong emotional component, typically expressing their gratitude to other people and organisations. A voice-off announces presenters and lists winners' previous nominations and awards as they come on stage.

Even though it is intended to sound spontaneous, what is said on stage is rarely extemporised (cf. 2.1) as is evident from references to the teleprompter, rehearsals, and scripts. Most winners are allowed only 45 seconds for their acceptance speeches and sometimes resort to reading what can sound like "a speed-read version of the telephone book" (Levy 2003: 292). The show also includes live performances by singers and dancers and sometimes by hosts or presenters, pre-recorded clips from nominated films and interviews with show business personalities. The videos are projected on a huge screen behind the

stage, and may also contain writing e.g. the names of nominees or subtitles. In the film clips, talk is often combined with other components of the soundtrack. Finally, there are music breaks played by an orchestra in the theatre. Talk may at times overlap this wealth of sound, making what speakers are saying harder to understand.

2. Interpreting the AAC: behind the scenes

Given the peculiarities of TV simultaneous interpreting, the number of professionals who regularly work in this area in Italy is quite small (Straniero Sergio 2007). Only in a few cases do TV channels have interpreters on their permanent staff. Usually interpreters are recruited by agencies on a daily basis on the free-lance market, as is the case for the AAC. We had the chance to interview a female interpreter who has interpreted all the AACs since 1998[4]. The main issues covered were interpreters' preparation, requirements, guidelines and instructions expressed by the production company and/or the broadcaster, along with peculiar technical and logistical aspects, which all heavily affect the interpreters' working conditions and organisation.

2.1 Preparing for the Oscar Night

Our interviewee told us that at least a month before the ceremony, she starts following all the news about nominations and nominees, and about US entertainment in general. Above all she tries to see as many of the nominated films as possible since these are the ones most frequently referred to during the ceremony.

Two days before the Sunday evening on which the AAC takes place, the interpreters receive a preliminary draft of the script, nicknamed the Bible, which is provided by the US production company. Usually this script contains indications of the order in which presenters will appear and where pre-recorded material and commercial breaks are planned. Most of the presenters' lines are still substituted by the acronym TBD – to be disclosed. The final version of the Bible, which normally contains all the presenters' names and lines (but not those of the hosts), is generally made available a few hours before the start of the ceremony, when there is very little time left for the interpreters to prepare their lines in advance, so much of the talk has to be rendered impromptu. As voice matching is required, the interpreters do at least know which hosts and presenters they are going to interpret. Our interviewee said she usually only manages to prepare the first half of the final script before she starts interpreting, and that she goes on reading and preparing while her colleague is translating the male speakers. Furthermore, only in the first part of the night is there a fair chance that the Bible will be followed closely. If the show runs late, any line may be replaced with a

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4   Our thanks go to Elena Scaramuzza for her invaluable contribution.

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more concise version, possibly read from the teleprompter at a very fast rate, turning the Oscar Night into an interpreters' nightmare.

2.2 Production requirements and their impact on working conditions and organisation

According to our interviewee, the recruiting agency applies two main criteria to select the interpreters for the AAC: past professional experience and voice matching. The agency has always respected the interpreter's view that a perfect harmony between the two members of the team is essential, and consulted her in the case of substitutions.

The TV producers have only a few explicit requirements. The first is that, for legal reasons, commercials should never be translated. The second is strict voice matching, even if it leads to an unbalanced workload between the female and male interpreter (cf. Table 1) and greater fatigue. The third requirement is that regardless of the quality of the international broadcast (which the Italian channel obviously cannot influence), there must be no apparent or extensive discontinuity in interpreting. It is agreed, however, that poorly audible voice-offs or film clips need not be translated (cf. 1.2).

Certain technical aspects involved in interpreting this TV event make it very different from conference settings. The two interpreters sit in a booth surrounded by numerous TV screens, showing the images broadcast by ABC, the images aired by the channel they work for and programmes that are being broadcast by other networks. When the live images from the US and Italy are the same, the interpreters know they are on air. There is a countdown at the beginning and end of commercials to help them start and stop interpreting at the right time. Interpreters have headsets and consoles as in conference interpreting, but no direct control over their microphones, which are both permanently on. In order to switch them off, both interpreters' mute buttons must be pressed simultaneously. In practice, the mute mode is only used when a call light on the control panel goes on to signal that the programme director needs to talk to the interpreters. This means that by default every word spoken and every noise made in the booth will go on air, making it impossible for the interpreters to talk to each other and rendering any form of cooperation or prompting very difficult. Even leafing through the Bible or scribbling notes has led to complaints from the production company.

Otherwise, producers do not seem particularly sensitive to interpreting issues. It is up to the interpreters to identify potential problems in advance and ask for a briefing with the producers for instance in the case of a speaker who suddenly starts singing. In all cases not discussed with the producers interpreters must choose what to do and make on-the-spot decisions. As the interpreters cannot talk to each other in the booth, our interviewee stressed the need to get along well, adding "We maintain eye contact all the time like TV commentators do. It's a very similar job".

While not expressly mentioned by our interviewee, the mismatch between images and sound deriving from the time-lag needed to listen before interpreting

is considered a negative factor on TV. During the Oscar Night there are often fast exchanges between a male and a female host/presenter, where décalage is even more crucial. With both microphones always on, there is the additional problem of avoiding overlapping talk. Yet, in our data this aspect appeared to be well managed by the interpreters and was not studied further.

Another key aspect of interpreting the AAC is the need to deal with many more inputs than in conference settings (Figure 1).

AUDIO INPUT	EARPHONES	US broadcast	*music* *sound effects* *oversound speakers* *official speakers* *occasional speakers (no mike)*
		Italian broadcast	*Italian commentators*
	BOOTH	interpreter colleague (on air)	
VISUAL INPUT	MONITORS	US broadcast	*non-vocal aspects of speakers* *written info on screen* *subtitles* *video clips*
		Italian broadcast	
		other broadcasts	
	BOOTH	"Bible"	
		colleague interpreter (*non-vocal*)	

Figure 1. The interpreter's input during the AAC

Overall, the AAC is an enormously challenging task for the interpreters. Typically it involves:
· extremely little time to prepare relevant documents;
· several hours night work;
· uncontrolled sound quality (often with interference and not clearly audible speech);
· lack of control over the microphones;
· limited possibilities for interaction in the booth;
· an unbalanced workload between the two interpreters;
· a variety of speech types;
· many different speakers, of different nationalities, with different accents;
· many read-out texts;
· high speech rates;
· many culture-bound elements and proper names;
· many quips and jokes.

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3. A closer look at the interpreted version of the AAC

For the purpose of this study we used video recordings of the US and Italian broadcasts of the Oscar Night from 2000[5] and 2010. This made it possible to compare not only two different interpretations of the same event, but also to try and identify changes in the ceremony itself that could potentially impact on interpreters. The recordings were transcribed[6] using conventions based on those developed for conversation analysis (Sacks *et al.* 1974)[7]. The two transcripts for each AAC were then aligned turn-by-turn in parallel columns. The main characteristics of the two transcribed datasets are summarised in Table 1.

	AAC 2000 (about 46% of the show*)	AAC 2010
Words (English) Words (Italian)	7,758 6,160	11,975 11,222
Speakers	52 (M 35, F 17)	103 (M 63, F 40)
Multi-speaker sequences	52 (M 38, F 9, Mixed 5)	105 (M 47, F 43, Mixed 15)
voice matching* (*calculated on the English transcription)	M 75%, F 25% (approx.)	M 55%, F 45% (approx.)

Table 1. Main characteristics of the datasets

We then focused our analysis on two particular aspects of interpreting: the way interpreters handled culture-bound items and proper names. Both types of expressions are peculiar features of the AAC discourse, as well as being known as major problem triggers in simultaneous interpreting. To analyse their occurrence in the AAC discourse and the interpreters' choices, these elements were identified and classified by typology while their renditions were grouped into categories based on Wadensjö's classification (1998: 106-108), to which another category – divergent rendition – was added. This was necessary because some renditions

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5   Unfortunately, the Italian 2000 edition was available for only about half the ceremony.
6   Part of the material had been already transcribed by Zanarini (2003); transcriptions of acceptance speeches were also checked against the texts available online in the AMPAS database (http://aaspeechesdb.oscars.org/).
7   Transcription conventions used in the examples:
    [ ] simultaneous or overlapping talk;
    ? question intonation (rising tone);
    = latched to previous;
    e: or e::: lengthened vowel sound;
    (.) short pause (less than one second);
    (1) longer pause (in seconds);
    / abandoned utterance;
    BOLDFACE emphasis or loudness;
    °   ° quietly or as an aside;
    xxx inaudible.

were found not to fit in the other categories. Non-renditions[8] were also found, but did not affect the categories discussed here:

a) close renditions make explicit the same elements of the item (a culture-bound reference or proper name) as those made explicit by the speaker;

b) reduced renditions only make explicit some of the elements of an item made explicit by the speaker;

c) zero renditions leave an item made explicit by the speaker implicit or completely unexpressed;

d) expanded renditions make explicit elements which the speaker left implicit;

e) divergent renditions contain elements that differ from what the speaker actually said.

In our analysis, these categories were not applied to utterances or turns of talk, but to expressions containing culture-bound references and names. It is therefore possible to have several instances of the same or different types of renditions in the same stretch of the interpreted version.

At times the use of these categories was problematic, as in example 1.

Example 1 - Zero rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2010]	Rendition	Back translation
live from the Kodak Theatre Hollywood and Highland it's the eighty [second annual Academy Awards [((applause))	[((the public applauds)) [ed ecco a voi la settantaduesima edizione degli Academy Awards	*here is the seventy-second edition of the Academy Awards*

This excerpt comes from the beginning of the 2010 show when a voice-off announces the beginning of the Oscar Night. The reference to the Kodak Theatre – where the AAC has taken place since 2002 and which is certainly known to the interpreters – was not rendered. All the names were omitted by the interpreter, who produced an announcement that is typical of Italian TV presenters "ed ecco a voi". In linguistic terms and in terms of explicit information, this was counted as a zero rendition of a cultural reference. In pragmatic terms, however, the Italian expression does exactly what the original does: it announces the beginning of the show. Furthermore, the audience can see the theatre and this information is embedded in the audiovisual message and thus implicitly conveyed. For the purpose of this study we classified as zero or reduced renditions all those cases in which an explicit reference or part of it was omitted by the interpreter, even if the message and the intention of the speaker were clear.

8 "A 'non-rendition' is a 'text' which is analysable as an interpreter's initiative or response which does not correspond (as translation) to a prior 'original' utterance" (Wadensjö 1998: 108).

4. Culture-bound references and their rendering

There is no general agreement in the literature about a definition of "culture-bound". Some authors claim that cultural items mainly refer to extralinguistic fields (names of places, flora, fauna, social institutions) while others argue that they include intralinguistic and pragmatic phenomena (idioms, proverbs, puns). Nor is there a common terminology:

> These 'problem triggers', in Gile's (1995) terminology, are 'culture-specific items' in the source text, variously referred to also as 'realia', 'cultural references', 'cultural markers', 'culture-bound references' or 'culture bumps' (Leppihalme 1996) – and notoriously hard to define (Pöchhacker 2007: 129).

There is however a general consensus that they are potentially problematic for interpreters to render. Strategies may vary from "functional (i.e. target-cultural) adequacy" (Pöchhacker 2007: 129) to providing additional information to the listeners in order to make the cultural item understandable or omitting items that the interpreter presumes the audience knows (Kurz 1993).

Here we treat cultural references as those references made to the current affairs, history, geography, customs and traditions of a country. For our analysis of the AAC we distinguished between references to US culture, references to the cultures of other countries, and references to the world of entertainment (cf. Table 2).

	2000 (about 46% of the show)	2010
Culture-bound elements - Total	85	97
References to US culture	22 (26%)	4 (4%)
References to the culture of other countries	17 (20%)	16 (17%)
References to the world of entertainment	46 (54%)	77 (79%)

Table 2. Culture-bound elements in the datasets

4.1 References to US culture

Since the AAC is a US popular tradition, we expected to find large numbers of references to US culture, and indeed 22 out of a total of 85 culture-bound elements in the 2000 edition concern US culture (26%). However in 2010, only 4 out of 97 (4%) did. This could be a sign that the show has changed to adjust to a global audience who may not understand references made to US culture.

Year	Number of References	Zero Renditions	Divergent Renditions	Reduced Renditions	Close Renditions	Expanded Renditions
2000	22	6	2	3	10	1
2010	4	1	0	1	2	0

Table 3. References to US culture and their renditions

In the 2000 AAC the six zero renditions include three geographical references: the acronym for Los Angeles (L.A. - in a string of three geographical references together with New York and London), the World Trade Centre, and Bell (a little town close to L.A.). This town is mentioned twice by the host Billy Crystal when joking about the theft of some Oscar statues[9], saying that Bell is where one of them was found. The first time Bell is mentioned the interpreter omits it, while the second time he renders the name correctly, though no explanation is given to the Italian audience about its meaning (a place close to Hollywood where it would be difficult to hide anything). Another two zero renditions are also names. The first is Planned Parenthood, a civil society organisation mentioned in an acceptance speech in a stretch full of names, the second is a Jewish-American name contained in a joke that the interpreter failed to convey in Italian. The sixth case of a zero rendition is more than just a multiple name deletion as shown in example 2[10].

Example 2 – Zero rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
you know I was just thinking between Andrzej Wajda Chow Yun Fat and Selma Hayek John Rocker must be going nuts (.) ((laughter)) please welcome someone else who is going to upset him (.)	qualcun altro rimarà sconvolto	*someone else is going to be upset*

In example 2 the interpreter omits the whole first part of the host's turn, where Billy Crystal mentions a series of foreign celebrities and then refers to John Rocker – a baseball player who had made racist comments in a notorious interview that year – saying that he must be going crazy to see so many non-US people being celebrated. This is an extremely culture-bound reference, impossible to understand unless one knows who Rocker is and what he stands for, exactly as in the case of Bell. Without an explanation, even repeating the name correctly would not have conveyed the meaning to an Italian audience; here too the interpreter omitted the reference, presumably because he did not know who Rocker was or thought the reference would be inaccessible for an Italian audience without an explanation.

Example 3 is another baseball reference. Crystal has just told the audience that he can read people's minds and pretends to know what Meryl Streep is thinking about – a change to the traditional rules of baseball. The interpreter provides a divergent rendition.

9   In 2000 fifty-five Oscar statues were stolen a few days before the ceremony; most were subsequently found in a trash bin.
10   The names of nominees are not included in this category and are discussed in paragraph 5.

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Example 3 – Divergent rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
oh yeah ohh ((laughter (2)) the designated hitter rule is ruining baseball ((laughter (3))	mhm (.) l'autore designato che fa ha realizzato una base al baseball ah	*mhm (.) the designated author who does has made base in baseball ah*

The reference to baseball is there, but the rendition does not convey the idea that Streep is against this change to the rules (let alone why the public finds this funny).

Another reference to baseball is made at the beginning of the show. Here Crystal tells Jack Nicholson to interrupt him whenever he wants as he considers Nicholson as great a figure as Babe Ruth. Here the interpreter produces a reduced rendition, which conveys Crystal's regard for Nicholson, but omits the name of the celebrated baseball player:

Example 4 – Reduced rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
ok feel free to talk to me at any time big daddy ((laughs (4)) it's just me and you ((laughs (1)) Jack you know you are Babe Ruth to me	sì va bene prenditi pure la libertà di interrompermi quando vuoi (.) solo tu e io (.) Jack sai cosa sei per me	*(.) yes all right feel free do interrupt me when you want (.) just you and I (.) Jack you know what you are for me*

Close renditions represent the largest category. These include seven geographical references, two references to President Clinton and a joke about the missing Oscar statues that the interpreter rendered effectively. Example 5 shows a successful close rendition of a reference to US current affairs:

Example 5 – Close rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
you know that is the strangest thing that has happened to the suburbs since the Clins decided to move to Westchester you know	sapete. (.) qualcosa di strano è successo: (.) alla periferia da quando appunto Clinton si è trasferito a Westchester	*you know (.) something strange happened: (.) in the suburbs since Clinton moved to Westchester*

These lines follow the presentation of a clip from "American Beauty" in which the protagonist is a depressed middle-aged man who becomes infatuated with a friend of his daughter's. Crystal's reference to the Clintons' purchase of a house in Westchester clearly alludes to the Lewinsky scandal. The interpreter conveys both the reference to Clinton and to the suburb.

The 2010 edition of the AAC contains only four references to US culture. The only case of zero rendition was discussed in example 1 above. The two close renditions are geographical – Chicago and Omaha. The one reduced rendition is in a list of security forces thanked by Kathryn Bigelow in her acceptance speech, which is shortened by the interpreter.

The cultural references in the 2000 edition were definitely more challenging and caused more problems for the interpreters, with a greater proportion of zero

or divergent renditions. References to US culture are often to humorous effect, and a detailed investigation of humour in the AAC and the challenges it presents for interpreters would give a more complete picture of the interpreting problems (cf. Antonini 2010).

4.2 References to other cultures

In both editions of the AAC, references to non-US cultures were mainly geographical names. Table 4 shows the number of references and rendition types.

Year	Number of References	Zero Renditions	Divergent Renditions	Reduced Renditions	Close Renditions	Expanded Renditions
2000	17	7	0	1	9	0
2010	16	1	1	0	14	0

Table 4. References to other cultures and their renditions

In the 2000 AAC, 10 out of 17 references were names of cities and countries, and two were specific references to a theatre and an area in London. Six related to Spanish religious traditions and one to the recent history of Poland. While the latter was well rendered, the Spanish references, and in particular a list of saints pronounced with a heavy accent by director Pedro Almodovar, caused more problems, as shown in example 6.

Example 6 - Zero rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
I also want to thank my sisters Maria Jesus and Antonia for the amount of candles that they lit to their favourite saints during the last months (.) you know (.) culture different (.) thanks to the virgin of Guadalupe the virgin of la Cabeza de Miraculos the Sacred heart of Mary Saint Judas Tadeo (xxx) and el Jesus de Medinaceli	vorrei anche ringraziare mia sorella Maria Jesus Antonia (.) per la fidu:cia riposta nei suoi santi preferiti in questi ultimi mesi a Guadalupe (.) sta elencando tutti i santi protettori	*I would also like to thank my sister Maria Jesus Antonia (.) for the trust placed in her favourite saints in the last few months in Guadalupe (.) he is listing all the patron saints*

In the excerpt above the interpreter produced five zero renditions, but by switching to reporting mode was able to inform the audience that the speaker was enumerating saints[11].

In the 2010 edition, close renditions included 12 names of countries and two of cities. The only case of a zero rendition relates to apartheid in South Africa.

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11   On the use of reporting as a coping strategy during live TV programmes, cf. Amato (2002).

Example 7 – Zero rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2010]	Rendition	Back translation
this year (...) inspired by events in South Africa during the era of apartheid this (.) is District Nine	ispirato da ah eventi in Sudafrica District Nine	*inspired by ah events in South Africa District Nine*

This excerpt comes from the introduction to "District Nine", nominated as best film. Here the interpreter renders the presenter's geographical reference but not the political one, producing the general expression "*events*" as in the original but leaving out "the era of apartheid".

There is one divergent rendition, clearly deriving from a misunderstanding when a winner speaks about his "team in Jordan" and the interpreter renders it with a name (cf. 5.4).

Overall, references to other cultures are well handled by the interpreters. Although the proportion of zero renditions in 2000 may seem high, these included five names of Spanish saints and two locations in London with which an Italian audience is unlikely to be familiar, and the main intention of the speakers was in any case conveyed. While the performance of the interpreters in the 2010 edition seems more accurate and complete, the latter had mainly to deal with the names of cities and countries – there were no lists of Spanish saints in 2010!

4.3 References to the world of entertainment

References to the world of entertainment include specific references to the nominated films and references to awards, celebrities or films not among the nominees that year. All other proper names are not included in this category, but will be discussed in paragraph 5.

The variety of references is huge. It may include past films, characters, lines or scenes from nominated films, references to past and present celebrities, or names of previous winners in any of the AAC categories. Even previous award winners for "technical" categories, such as mixing and editing, can be referred to, and it is simply a "mission impossible" for interpreters to know them all. Each type of reference implies a different kind of difficulty and deserves a detailed analysis. For these reasons, although all references were counted and grouped according to rendition categories, examples will focus on references to nominated films only, which interpreters can easily read about and even see before the show, as our interviewee stressed.

Year	Number of References	Zero Renditions	Divergent Renditions	Reduced Renditions	Close Renditions	Expanded Renditions
2000	46	15	6	1	24	0
2010	77	8	2	4	62	1

Table 5. References to the world of entertainment and their renditions

This group of cultural references is by far the largest in both years (54% and 79% respectively), confirming the self-referential nature of the AAC and its function of promoting the film industry. In the 2000 data there were 46 references to the world of entertainment. The most represented category is close renditions, followed by zero renditions and divergent renditions. Close renditions include six titles of past films, 11 references to celebrities, five references to nominated films and two references to the Thalberg Award. Zero renditions include five titles of past films, six references to celebrities and four references to nominated films. Divergent renditions include four references to nominated films and two references to celebrities. There is one reduced rendition of a reference to a past film. References to nominated films, which we imagined would have posed a lesser challenge than the others, were in fact a source of difficulty for the interpreters: of the 13 references to nominated films, only five were accurately rendered in 2000.

Example 8 – Zero rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
a movie with action suspense and an intelligent provocative message (.) take the blue pill and stay where you are (.) or take the red pill and see just how deep the rabbit hole goes we had a great team	con azione suspense e messaggi provocativi in un unico film continua così (.) abbiamo avuto un grande team	*with action suspense and provocative messages in a single film keep doing this (.) we had a great team*

In example 8, the speaker quotes a line by one of the supporting characters in "The Matrix" offering the leading character the possibility to see that he lives in a virtual world under the absolute power of computers: he can either take a blue pill and remain in the virtual world or take the red pill and "see how deep the rabbit hole goes" – clearly alluding to Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland"[12]. Even if the interpreter had had the script in front of him, it would have been impossible to render the implications of this line without having seen the film or at least preparing the script in advance. The reference was not conveyed and the expression "stay where you are" rendered with "continua così" ("*keep doing this*"). The same line was quoted later by another winner, and in that case the interpreter produced a divergent rendition.

References to another nominated film, "American Beauty", caused similar problems. Apparently the interpreter did not recognise the names of the two families in the film:

Example 9 – Divergent rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
oh my god (.) feels like family night with the Burnhams and the Fittses	oh mio dio (.) è una notte movimentata:	*oh my god (.) it is an eventful night*

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12   The dubbed Italian version is:"Pillola azzurra fine della storia. Pillola rossa e resti nel paese delle meraviglie e vedrai quanto è profonda la tana del bianconiglio".

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By omitting these names, the interpreter deleted the reference to the film and the expression used, "movimentata" ("*eventful*"), conveys a different meaning from the original. The same two names were also mentioned by another winner in his acceptance speech and once again they were omitted by the interpreter.

Another reference to the same movie was made by the screenplay writer during his acceptance speech, who referred to the situation that inspired the plastic bag scene (a cult scene for movie buffs). This was an uninterpretable reference if one had not seen or read about this scene: since it was at the end of a sequence of thanks, the interpreter omitted it and produced a general expression of gratitude instead.

The 2000 AAC also contained two references to "Sixth Sense", one of which was literally rendered and its meaning effectively conveyed, while the other was omitted.

In our 2010 data, close renditions are definitely the most represented category. These include 18 references to nominated films, 14 titles of past films, 12 names of characters from unnominated films, 12 references to celebrities, three award names (Grammy, Emmy, Governors Award) and three references to technicalities of the film industry (one studio and two acronyms). Zero renditions include the name of a singer, three names of bands, two titles of past films, one reference to a family who helped Sandra Bullock prepare for her role in "The Blind Side" (the only reference to a nominated film not rendered), and one character of a past film. The two divergent renditions involve a punch line referring to the title of a movie and a negative sentence that was rendered as an affirmative one. There is just one expanded rendition where the interpreter adds the family name to the first name of a character (cf. 5.5). The two following examples show close renditions of references to nominated films.

Example 10 – Close rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2010]	Rendition	Back translation
I want to thank the Academy (.) for not considering Na'vi a foreign language (.) first of all (.)	voglio (.) ringraziare l'academy per non aver considerato il Na'vi un:a lingua straniera innanzitutto (.)	*I want (.) to thank the academy for not considering Na'vi a foreign language first of all*

This is the first line of the acceptance speech by the winner for best foreign language film, Juan José Campanella, who starts by thanking the Academy for not considering Na'vi – the language spoken by the people of Pandora in "Avatar" – a foreign language (because otherwise Avatar could have won the award). This is both a reference to a nominee and a joke, and their successful rendering would have been impossible if the interpreter had not seen or read about the movie before the show. The two hosts also referred to the religious habits of the Na'vi people and these references were also accurately rendered in the Italian version.

Another reference is to the pointed ears of Dr. Spock, a character in "Star Trek". The presenter, Ben Stiller, has gone on stage dressed and made up as a Na'vi, but says he should have been wearing Spock ears instead since "Avatar" did not get a nomination for best makeup, while "Star Trek" did. This reference is accurately rendered by the interpreter.

Example 11 – Close rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2010]	Rendition	Back translation
I should just have worn my Spock ears because Star Trek was actually nominated and I own two pairs from the original series	avrei dovuto mettere le orecchie di Spock perché Star Trek ce l'ha la nomination e io avevo due (.) paia di orecchie della serie originale	*I should have worn Spock's ears because Star Trek has a nomination and I had two (.) pairs of ears from the original series*

Overall references to nominated films were more accurately rendered in the 2010 edition than in 2000. Our data suggest that a thorough preparation on nominated films is essential to successfully render references to them.

5.   Proper names in the AAC

Though the difficulty of names in translation is often mentioned in literature[13], there are few specific studies on names in interpreting[14]. Even the definition itself of proper names is far from being a trivial question[15]. Recent works highlight that proper names are "social, ethnic, affective, cultural and pragmatic indicators" (Salmon Kovarski 2002: 83), and rules for their use – standard or idiosyncratic – are considered one of the most difficult aspects to master in a foreign language. Names are recognised to be "important elements of discourse structure which contribute to the overall communicative purposes of talk" (Meyer 2008: 110) and can carry implicitly a wealth of additional information immediately available to a native speaker, but mostly obscure for foreigners – e.g. ethnic origin, social class, speaker attitude or the relationship between different people. Names can play any kind of functions, from communicative to vocative, expressive, deictic and ideological[16]. This is particularly true of the AAC, where owing to the self-celebrative nature of the event, proper names are extremely frequent. Another peculiarity of the AAC is the high degree of message redundancy: names of people, films and characters are repeated almost obsessively, along with references to the awards and the body bestowing them.

We adopted a very broad definition of proper names, as identifying a specific individual among a category or a species (Serianni *et al.* 1988: 87). They can be constituted by a variable number of elements, ranging from a single letter to a whole phrase. In our data we identified 1700 such items (689 in 2000, 1011 in 2010), containing between one and twelve elements. These names were divided into six functionally determined classes: anthroponyms (i.e. real people or fictional characters), places, companies/institutions/organisations, awards, film titles, and a miscellaneous ragbag category. The interpreters' renditions of names were classified according to the categories described in paragraph 3.

13   For a more extensive discussion, cf. e.g. Ballard (2001), Viezzi (2004).
14   E.g. Gile (1984), Hanaoka (2002), Medici (2007), Meyer (2008), Meacci (2009).
15   E.g. Allerton (1996), Grass *et al.* (2006).
16   After Superanskaja 1973 (in Russian), quoted in Salmon Kovarski (2002: 86).

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Proper names often go together with qualifying elements that give additional information about the individual they denote. Under certain circumstances these qualifying elements can be at least as informative as the names themselves, especially for listeners with a different cultural background. Such qualifiers, classified as nouns, adjectives, pronouns, numerals and titles, will be discussed here only in relation to reduced renditions, the sum of elements per name being given in brackets (cf. Table 6).

		2000 (data referring to about 46% of the show)	2010
ratio words in names/ total words		18% (English version) 19% (Italian version)	16% (English version) 15% (Italian version)
total proper names		689	1011
DETAILS OF THE ENGLISH VERSION:	EXAMPLE		
anthroponyms	Paul N. J. Ottosson (4); dame Judy Dench (3);	437 (63.4%)	633 (62.6%)
film titles	Sleepy Hollow (2); The Most Dangerous Man in America - Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers (12)	122 (17.7%)	210 (20.8%)
awards	Academy Award (2); Oscar (1)	50 (7.3%)	66 (6.5%)
toponyms	Hollywood (1); Santa Monica (2)	30 (4.4%)	34 (3.4%)
companies and institutions	Warner Brothers (2)	33 (4.8%)	49 (4.8%)
miscellaneous - songs, literary works, buildings, brands etc.	Music in My Heart (4), the World Trade Center (3), Toyota (1)	17 (2.5%)	19 (1.9%)

Table 6. Proper names in the datasets

A crucial aspect when analysing proper names in interpreting contexts is pronunciation - both by primary speakers and by interpreters. In the AAC a broad variety of pronunciations can be found, not to mention various degrees of accuracy in articulation as English is the native language of most, but not all the speakers. There are also frequent overlaps with music and sound effects. Names, especially non-English anthroponyms, may be pronounced differently by different speakers and their familiarity to a heterogeneous audience may vary widely. Interpreters often 'adapt' their pronunciation of names to their listeners' ears. Phonetic precision was therefore not considered in this study. The English transcription uses conventional orthography for identifiable names, while names pronounced by the interpreters (as well as those of unidentified people in the original) were transcribed using what was deemed to be the most likely spelling

given the pronunciation actually used. Table 7 shows the number of proper names and their rendering.

Year	Proper names	Zero Renditions	Divergent Renditions	Reduced Renditions	Close Renditions	Expanded Renditions
2000	689	146 21.2 %	11 1.6 %	38 5.5 %	488 70.8 %	6 0.9 %
2010	1011	104 10.3 %	8 0.8 %	34 3.4 %	852 84.3 %	13 1.3%

Table 7. Renditions of names

5.1 Close renditions

This is the most frequent category in both years, confirming that also in this context interpreters respect the basic norm of faithful and complete interpreting. Close renditions with very approximate pronunciation were less than 10%. Relatively low percentages (51% to 71%) of close renditions were found for interviewee, voice-off and winner talk; the highest proportion (over 90%) occurred in the speech of presenters, highlighting once again the crucial role of reference documents (cf. 2.1). Only in a very few cases were close renditions associated with an incorrect interpretation of the qualifier referring to the name[17].

5.2 Zero renditions

This category ranks second in terms of number of occurrences (cf. Table 7). In both years zero renditions occurred primarily in winners' acceptance speeches, followed by voice-off and host turns. Again a purely statistical analysis of rendition categories can be misleading since zero renditions do not always entail a loss of information. They can also be the consequence of strategic decisions not to render certain text types. In the case of voice-off announcements of celebrities coming on stage, if the interpreter remains silent, the audience can just hear the original sound track, which includes the celebrity's name, and the information is not completely lost. In other cases, too, the interpreter's silence during a speech allows the audience to hear names that are not rendered. Interpreters can also exploit redundancy, using deictic devices by which an item recurrently explicit in one language can be left implicit in the other. Indeed, at least a quarter of the 2010 zero renditions of names involved redundant elements in the original[18], and another quarter (in both years) involved names in voice-off announcements.

17 See example 1 with the very first segment of the 2010 event, where the name "Academy Awards" is closely rendered, but the numeral "eighty-second" becomes "la settantaduesima edizione" ("*the seventy-second edition*").
18 E.g. in the 2000 opening sequence, host Billy Crystal had a 'private' conversation with Jack Nicholson, who was seated in the front row. Crystal said 'Jack' four times, the interpreter only two times.

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In some cases zero renditions can alter the meaning of the original utterance, as when Sandra Bullock expressed her admiration for Gabourey Sidibe and Carey Mulligan in her acceptance speech, which in the Italian version omitted the latter:

Example 12 - Zero rendition[19]

Original Speech [AAC 2010]	Rendition	Back translation
Gabby I love you so much (.) you are exquisite you are beyond words to me (.) Carey your grace and your elegance and your beauty and your talent make me sick	Gabourey ti voglio un gran bene (.) sei squisita sei straordinaria la tua grazia la tua eleganza la tua bellezza il tuo talento mi mi fanno star male	*Gabourey I love you very much (.)you are exquisite you are extraordinary your grace your elegance your beauty your talent make me sick*

One particular use of zero renditions was observed where it was precisely the interpreter's silence that preserved the effect intended by the speaker, as when Penelope Cruz announced the best foreign language film by simply crying out "Pedro". In 2010, the winner for cinematography, Mauro Fiore, said a few words in Italian, which the interpreter left untranslated. Such cases show that the interpreters are very much aware that they are working in a multichannel context where their voices are only one of the many elements contributing to successful communication.

Occurrences in the remaining four rendition categories are relatively marginal, amounting in total to less than 10% in both years.

5.3 Reduced renditions

Reduced renditions accounted for 5.5% and 3.4% (i.e. 38 and 34) of all renditions in 2000 and 2010 respectively. They are of particular interest insofar as they allow us to see which elements interpreters choose to maintain and which to omit, though they do not tell us why this happened.

Reduced renditions occurred mainly in anthroponyms, followed by film titles (mostly foreign film titles announced in two languages in the original, but only in one language by the interpreters). With anthroponyms associated to qualifiers (34 and 20 occurrences), the types of reduction applied show a clear pattern: overall in 50% of cases qualifiers were preferred to personal names or surnames (e.g. "il mio manager" for "my manager Tony Smith"), while in only two instances was the opposite found. The other reductions mostly concern parts of multiple-element personal names or titles.

19 This excerpt contains an expanded rendition as well since "Gabby" was rendered with "Gabourey". Arguably this translation also lacks the idea of a feeling of friendship between the two women – perhaps in favour of a greater intelligibility of a rather uncommon first name.

5.4 Divergent renditions

Divergent renditions convey a different meaning from the original - in other words distort information - and are therefore particularly sensitive. They are rare in our data, with 11 items (1.6%) in 2000 and 8 (0.8%) in 2010. Generalisation is obviously difficult, but some trends can be detected. In most cases they concern anthroponyms and occur in acceptance speeches. In some cases there is an incorrect reference as in the case of "Rob and Patrick" and "Dan and Bruce" becoming just one person called "Robert Patrick" and "Danny Bruce" and "the American friends of Poland" becoming "gli amici americani polacchi" (*the Polish American friends*). In other cases these renditions generate a change of name category, e.g. when "my team in Jordan" becomes "Tim Jordan" or "my friends at Disney" becomes "il mio amico Dizzie" (*my friend Dizzie*).

5.5 Expanded renditions

Expanded renditions, where the interpreter makes something explicit or adds information with respect to the original, account for only about 1% of the total. This may appear in contradiction to the need to give foreign listeners access to implicit information available to native speakers (cf. 4 and 5), but it is hardly surprising given the time pressure under which interpreters generally work. Expansions of names may repeat information previously conveyed as shown in example 13.

Example 13 – Expanded rendition

Original Speech [AAC 2000]	Rendition	Back translation
if you had your choice and you could get the Thalberg Award or the White House (.) I think I'd stick with this	(.) hm se si potesse scegliere tra il premio Thalberg e non so (.) la Casa Bianca (.) eh credo che rimarrei attaccato piuttosto al premio Thalberg (.) lascerei perdere la Casa bianca devo dire eh (.)	*hm if you could choose between the Thalberg Award and I do not know (.) the White House (.) eh I think I'd rather stick to the Thalberg Award (.)I'd forget about the White House I must say*

Expansions can also occur when the interpreter adds information which was not made explicit by the speaker as when "did you know the moustache Brad Pitt wore in "Inglorious Basterds" is the same one Salma Hayek wore in Frida?" is rendered with "lo sapevi che i: baffi di Brad Pitt in Bastardi Senza Gloria sono gli stessi di Salma Hayek in Frida (.) Frida Kahlo". Or when a presenter makes a pun with the words of the movie "The Blind Side", and the interpreter adds a more literal translation to explain its meaning in English: "si chiama The Blind Side come dire l'angolo morto" (*It's called The Blind Side, that's to say the dead angle*).

6. Discussion of results

Relevance Theory (RT; cf. Sperber/Wilson 1995/1986) has been applied to various aspects of simultaneous interpreting, but not to interpreters' choices on how to render culture-bound terms or names. The RT approach is based on an inferential model of communication, according to which a speaker provides evidence of his/her intention to convey a certain meaning to the listener. The latter infers this meaning by presuming optimal relevance in what is communicated and applying the principle of economy, i.e. stopping the interpretation process when a satisfactory explanation has been reached.

The interpreter, who is both a hearer and a speaker, has a double task: achieving a satisfactory idea of what the speaker wants to communicate and conveying to his/her listeners sufficient elements to guide their understanding in the same direction. While doing this, the interpreter is subject to multiple constraints, such as clients' wishes, speaker characteristics, (presumed) audience requirements and technical and process-specific aspects – above all background knowledge, cognitive processing capacity and time limits. In our case the leading maxim for the interpreters seems to be that of rendering the elements explicited by the speaker as precisely and completely as possible, close renditions being by far the most numerous category both for culture-bound elements and for names. It is striking to note how rarely the interpreters take advantage of the huge amount of redundant elements they could delete or of deictic devices which could shorten their output without information loss. In relevance theoretical terms this might mean that the patent redundancy of many expressions is considered by interpreters to be part of the speakers' intention, and the aim to give accurate and complete renditions prevails over the possibility of conveying the same message using fewer words, which would make the task of both the interpreters and listeners far easier[20].

Zero and reduced renditions appear as only second and third choices – arguably imposed by process constraints, e.g. insufficient time to reproduce the incoming speech completely. In the case of names, the zero renditions causing information loss occurred mainly in acceptance speeches, which contain a high concentration of problem triggers (cf. 2.2). In the case of reduced renditions, there seems to be a hierarchy of elements guiding the interpreter's choice of how to compress the message, but this aspect needs to be further investigated on a more extended database. Extended renditions entailing the explicitation of implicit meaning, on the other hand, are quite marginal. Even considering the time constraints, this is surprising, especially in relation to culture-bound references, since many aspects of implicit meaning that are perfectly understandable to an American audience remain obscure to Italians without an explanation. It would be interesting to study this aspect further, comparing extended renditions in different settings.

There is a high variability in rendition types associated with speaker categories: for names, winners seem the most difficult to translate – with 100% and 75%

20 For instance, the possibility of allowing the audience to infer information from the context by rendering the expression "Academy Award winner" without the specification "Academy Award" was rarely found in our data.

divergent renditions in 2000 and 2010 respectively. Names in presenters' speeches (which are included in the final version of the script provided to the interpreters) were rendered much more accurately. This is a strong case for giving the interpreters all available documentation as they showed that they use it efficiently.

Discussing the main results of our study on the basis of interpreting literature, some interesting observations emerge. Our datasets confirm some of the conclusions on the rendering of names reached by Gile (1984: 84) on a much smaller sample[21]:

> [...] il semblerait que dans leur choix, les interprètes cherchent essentiellement à:
> - Restituer dans la mesure du possible l'intégralité de l'information véhiculée par chaque segment de discours, y compris les noms propres.
> - Limiter au maximum le risque de perte d'une information voisine par une concentration excessive sur l'information en cours de restitution.
> - Economiser leurs efforts.

With appropriate documentation available, Gile (1984 : 84) observed that:

> [...] le taux de restitution des noms propres [...] se rapproche de 100% si le sujet dispose de documents qui les contiennent; rappelons que sans les documents, il est dans l'ensemble nettement inférieur à 50%.

Another point worth noting is variability between interpreters, suggesting that there are personal preferences or even specific profiles. This feature, put forward by Straniero Sergio (2007) and confirmed by Meyer (2008), was also found in our data. Renderings of names by the female interpreter in 2000 and 2010 were very similar in terms of categories: close renditions amount to 87.2% and 90.4% respectively, zero renditions to 7.6% and 7%, while reduced renditions were 2.5% in both years. A greater variability was found in rendition categories for the two male interpreters, with 68.1% of close renditions in 2000 and 85.5% in 2010; 21.9% of zero renditions in 2000 and 8.7% in 2010; and 6.7% reduced renditions in 2000 and 4.2% in 2010. These and other aspects deserve further investigation. There is undoubtedly a great deal more that can be learnt from the interpreters of the Oscar Night, for whom, at least on the basis of our analysis, this experience does not seem to be a nightmare after all.

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