Media interpreting: a passion for being there

The work is intense, the demands great, and the schedule sometimes exacting. What keeps a media interpreter going? It’s the exhilaration of communicating breaking news stories.

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People are always asking me: “You get up at four in the morning and sometimes stay up until 2:00 am. You follow the news 24-7. Why would you want to work like that?”

I think back to the intensive days of the Florida vote recount in the 2000 US Presidential election, or of interpreting the news on the war in Iraq. Now that we are in an election year once again, I recall how it was 12 years ago. And my answer is immediate and simple: because media interpreting is a fascinating job. It’s not because I’m paid to do it, but the sheer excitement of being on the frontline of news reporting.

**Being there**

When we interpret a reporter’s story from a faraway land, we feel we are there at his or her side. We watch Mt. Etna erupting as the BBC’s Nick Robertson continues to report even as lava closes in on him. We are right there with Christiane Amanpour covering the plight of women and children in Afghanistan. We are in the CNN newsroom and with anchorman Wolf Blitzer when he’s out on the campaign trail. We experience the events as if they were unfolding before our very eyes.

We also share the emotions of people at the scene. We cry with the victims of massive earthquakes. We mingle with the crowds marching in the streets and confronting security forces as they cry out for democracy and freedom. We feel indignant at seeing a popular uprising ruthlessly crushed by force.

And we laugh with Richard Quest when he reports business news like no other anchor can with his unique humor.

Yes, we also feel that we are voices that speak to people in front of television sets, that we are conveyors of news to viewers on the other side (though we cannot see their faces, different from when we interpret at conferences). We try not to be oblivious of those people on the other side.

We are media interpreters and we take pride in conveying the news.

Yes, we felt fresh indignation when the Costa Concordia sank, when the captain abandoned ship before seeing all his passengers to safety. He just wanted to show his favorite female crewmember the island where she was born, and went dangerously close to the shore causing the accident.

Yes, we also let out a sigh of relief when just in time people are saved from danger.

We are the conveyors of the news: it is our duty to make it intelligible to our viewers. We always do
our best and give it all we’ve got to span linguistic and cultural barriers. We bring into play our own knowledge wherever necessary, we edit when we feel we should for the sake of clarity and brevity. We bring to the audience what we believe is concise and precise information by taking on the roles of newscasters, ordinary citizens, first responders, or heads of states. And we experience what it means to be in their shoes as they speak.

We take the position of the defendants in a news report from the courtroom as if we were there on the stand. We try to express the emotions their voices carry under the intense pressure of the trial.

And we live the lives of the people attending the Academy Awards Ceremony as if we were them.

Does that mean we get emotionally carried away? No, we shouldn’t allow that to happen. We have to maintain a certain restraint to be as objective as we can. But sometimes we cannot keep from crying when deeply moved. I cried when reporting CNN Heroes and witnessed how great humans can be, and how humble the truly great are.

The name of the game is that we are conveyors of the news. We experience the lives of others, become their voice, and express their emotions in their own words.

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