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Interpreting Conflict

A Comparative Framework

Edited by
Marija Todorova · Lucia Ruiz Rosendo



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Palgrave Studies in Languages at War

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Editors

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Praise for *Interpreting Conflict*

“A key compilation for interpreters and researchers interested in interpreting in conflict zones and related fields.”

—Jesús Baigorri-Jalón, *former United Nations staff interpreter and author of Languages in the Crossfire: Interpreters in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) (forthcoming)*

“This timely volume gathers an impressive body of international research on interpreting which encompasses violent conflict and the refugee and humanitarian crises that emerge in its aftermath.”

—Moirá Inghilleri, *Professor of Translation and Interpreting Studies and Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA*

“A fascinating, eye-opening collection of unique studies that set the standard for research on interpreting in military and humanitarian contexts and covers an amazing array of geographical regions, including Korea, China, Japan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, the Sahel, Italy, Spain, the US and Argentina. A must-read for scholars of translation, interpreting, intercultural communication, and a wide range of disciplines concerned with the study of conflict and its aftermaths.”

—Mona Baker, *University of Oslo, Norway*

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Part I

Introduction



1

Moving Boundaries in Interpreting in Conflict Zones

Lucía Ruiz Rosendo

Interpreting in conflict zones has recently received considerable attention in academic literature. The role of interpreters working in these contexts is blurred, in that the tasks they perform go beyond the oral transfer of linguistic features to encompass their role as translators, cultural mediators and even as original speakers in their own right. Usually they are alone in understanding the languages and cultures involved; often, they are civilians belonging to the community in conflict with no previous training in interpreting who are recruited by armed forces, humanitarian organizations or NGOs. In other cases, they are professional or non-professional volunteers, willing to help in humanitarian crisis situations and post-conflict development. In still other cases, they are trained interpreters who work for international organizations, such as the United Nations, but who face different circumstances when interpreting in the field; this stems from their positionality as interpreting experts and their

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professional affiliation, which lead them to assume a different role as mediators.

In Translation and Interpreting Studies, scholarly interest in the complex role of interpreters in conflict settings began in the twentieth century. However, the current ubiquity of interpreting, an increasing public awareness of this activity, as highlighted by Pérez González (2012), and its prominence in scientific literature (Schäffner et al. 2013) have led to an increasing interest in the methodical study of interpreting in different conflicts. Studies tend to focus on interpreting in war settings (e.g., Baigorri Jalón 2019; Baker 2010; Inghilleri 2008, 2009; Lan 2016; Footitt and Kelly 2012, 2018; Juvinall 2013; Ozawa 2008; Stahuljak 2009) and much less on the role of interpreters who work in the humanitarian field as a subcategory of post-conflict scenario (e.g., Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche 2018; Todorova 2016, 2017). Interestingly, most of the studies on the role of interpreters in war, mainly those working for the military, have been carried out by scholars who are outsiders to the activity or, in other words, who do not have direct experience as interpreters in these scenarios, with some noteworthy exceptions (Méndez 2018; Snellman 2016). Contrastingly, many of the authors of studies conducted on humanitarian interpreting are interpreters with experience of working in these settings, although these are still scarce. Given the circumstances and conditions under which interpreters in conflict and post-conflict scenarios perform their work, we believe that it is essential to encourage a more interdisciplinary discussion that analyzes the different factors that have an impact on the interpreter's role in different contexts and settings.

Against this backdrop, this volume, which is a compilation of studies that are related to the themes of two panels coordinated by the authors, the first at the 2018 IATIS (International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies) conference and the second at the 2019 EST (European Society for Translation Studies) conference, consists of contributions on military and humanitarian interpreting and is particularly interested in studies of an interdisciplinary nature. Contributions seek to foster interprofessional dialogue and are written not only by scholars but also by those directly or indirectly involved in the activity, such as military personnel, humanitarian interpreters and activists, with the ultimate

goal of examining the topic through different lenses and from different perspectives.

The innovative nature of this book comes not only from its comparative framework of the military and the humanitarian but also from an analysis of a range of case studies based on different settings, periods and actors and through which the research questions are addressed. While recognizing that some aspects are common to both frameworks, the purpose of this book is to compare relevant notions of interpreting in conflict-related scenarios such as the specific positionality of the interpreter in these different contexts; the ethical, psychological, emotional and security implications of their work in different scenarios; the specific training needed to work for the military and for humanitarian settings and whether or to what extent this training has to be adapted to the demands; and the relations of power created between the different stakeholders. The rationale is that the term “interpreting in conflict zones,” as it has been coined in the literature, is too broad, encompassing any setting in which the interpreter works and that is located in a zone that is in conflict, usually an armed conflict. It is our belief that more attention must be given to the particularities of each context. In this volume a distinction is made between the military and the humanitarian environments as two contexts representing conflict and post-conflict scenarios, along the lines of Tesseur and Footitt’s (2019) examination of the role of language mediators in conflict and post-conflict contexts, and the authors’ purpose of increasing our understanding of what constitutes the “profession” of interpreting by the analysis of diverse contexts and scenarios. Therefore, the chapters included in this volume draw on data stemming from different studies that investigate the role(s) of interpreters in diverse military and humanitarian scenarios in different regions (Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America) through the consultation of myriad sources (archival materials, secondary sources, autobiographies, war novels and personal experiences) and the use of different qualitative methods, mainly experiential interviews with the main parties involved (military personnel, humanitarian agents, military interpreters, locally recruited interpreters and UN staff interpreters).

In the first part of the volume, a total of seven chapters focus on the role of the interpreter in military scenarios. The first chapter deals with

the role of Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans and Canadians) in the Asia-Pacific War (1931–1945) and the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–1952). *Kayoko Takeda's* “Dual Citizen Interpreters: Consequences of Assigned Loyalties in the Aftermath of War” analyzes the role of Nisei as linguists recruited to engage in different language-related tasks by the Japanese military, government and state news agency. Drawing on archival materials and secondary sources, the chapter examines the backgrounds and wartime activities of these Nisei linguists and their treatment by Allied powers in the post-war occupation era. The chapter brings to the fore aspects that are relevant today and allows us to understand the scope of language issues in armed conflicts, such as the complex issues faced by dual citizens of warring states, the liability of being a heritage speaker in war, and the ethical and legal implications of interpreting in criminal acts.

The next chapter belongs to this same period but addresses the role of linguists from a different perspective. *Tian Luo and Ruiqi Zhu's* “To Be or Not to Be Loyal: Loyalty of Military Interpreters Serving the Japanese Army in the Second Sino-Japanese War” explores the states of interpreters' loyalty in this conflict by focusing on interpreters who served the Japanese army during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931–1945). The authors analyze 80 narratives from historical archives and autobiographies of interpreters and come to the conclusion that interpreters demonstrated four distinct states of loyalty: fervent, feigned, shifted and divided loyalty. These were shaped by different interrelated factors such as ethnic identity and nationality, the chance of survival in the war, linguistic competence, economic reward, position in the power structure, temporary social status, ideology and prospects of war. The chapter offers a complex examination of loyalty and its ethical implications in military contexts.

After these two chapters, the focus of this volume remains in the first half of the twentieth century, but shifts to a different conflict, focusing on the three stages of the Korean War, that is, the preparatory phase, the US/USSR military occupation of Korea (1945–1948); the engagement phase, the confrontation between the militaries of North and South Korea and their respective allies (1950–1953); and the conclusionary phase, the Korean Armistice Negotiations (1951–1953). *Hyongrae Kim's* “Interpreting the Korean Conflict (1945–1953)” examines the shifts in

the interpreter's positionality during the aforementioned phases, drawing on Bourdieu's field theory and Inghilleri's (2005) analysis of the existence of a zone of uncertainty in which the interpreter's work takes place. The chapter concludes that these different positionalities, the different tasks the interpreter carries out, the existence of diverse needs, and power structures and the norms dictating the interpreter's work in different periods and locations show that there is a need to reconsider traditional notions of the interpreter's identity and functionality.

Moving to the second half of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century, a total of four chapters deal with conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. *María Gómez Amich's* "Local Interpreters Versus Military Personnel: Perceptions and Expectations Regarding the Local Interpreter's Role and Agency Within the Afghan Conflict" examines the role of the interpreter in the context of military operations conducted by internationally deployed armies that required interaction with Afghan security forces and civilians. Drawing on narrative interviews with Spanish troops deployed in Afghanistan and Afghan interpreters, the chapter examines relevant issues of trust, allegiance, identity, ideology and interdependency that challenge the traditional view of the interpreter as a neutral linguistic mediator.

Subsequently, *Yolanda Moreno Bello's* "Negotiating Ideologies in Conflict Zones: The Case of the Interpreter in Lebanon" draws on interviews with interpreters who worked in the conflicts in Lebanon between 1975 and 2006 and applies Baker's (2006) frame analysis to examine how interpreters negotiate ideologies found in discourse. The author comes to the conclusion that the interpreter plays an essential role in negotiating conflict ideologies, although they show different levels of autonomy in doing so.

In "The Spanish 'Military Interpreter': A Practical Application in International Operations Arising from Armed Conflicts," *Verónica Méndez Sánchez* draws on her insightful knowledge and experience as both a soldier and a language mediator in international missions to explore the main factors shaping the military interpreter's status when working in sensitive zones such as the Africa's Sahel region. She analyzes different factors inherent in the work of military interpreters, including workload, thematic fields, responsibility, military discipline and

multifunctionality of the position and highlights the specific characteristics of this category of interpreter as a connoisseur of the military profession and of the different topics and jargon dealt with in the armed forces. The author posits that interpreting is an indispensable activity as it is an instrument of conflict prevention and mitigation.

Moving to the Iraq war, “Narrative Representations of the Interpreter in Wartime,” by *Lucía Ruiz Rosendo*, applies narrative analyses to two war novels about the Battle of Najaf. Both narratives focus on the experiences of the Spanish soldiers serving in Iraq, but the author analyzes the two novels in terms of how they depict the role of the military interpreter. One of the issues that both novels tend to agree on is that interpreters in war zones and scenarios are usually locally recruited interpreters who are paradoxically considered to be an ambivalent resource. This arises because they are indispensable for communication but, at the same time, belong to the community in conflict and, therefore, arouse the mistrust of the military. The chapter also highlights the interpreter’s identity as a central theme and the problematic issue of the lack of protection for interpreters who have served for Western armed forces in the Middle East.

The last chapter in this section, “After the Towers Fell: The Fate of Two Arabic Linguists” by *Maya Hess*, the founder and CEO of RedT, focuses on the paramount notion of trust through the socio-psychological lens on the US prosecutions of Ahmad Al Halabi and Mohamed Yousry, two translators/interpreters who were tried in a military and federal court, respectively. It analyzes court documents, trial records and observations in the trials of two Arabic language translators/interpreters in US military and federal courts to conclude that as a result of the 9/11 attacks, the treatment of Arab American interpreters in high-risk settings is shrouded in a distrust and stereotyping largely rooted in Islamophobia and the profession-specific Translator-Traitor Mentality (TTM).

The second part of the volume includes six chapters which look at interpreting in a humanitarian setting arising as a direct consequence of war and conflicts, most often resulting in displacement of civilians. These chapters constitute an overview of the reality of the role of interpreters in different contexts around the world, from Spain and Italy to the Middle East and South America.

In “Psychological Aspects of Interpreting Violence: A Narrative from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Manuel Barea Muñoz* draws on semi-structured interviews with 11 interpreters working at international organizations within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to create a paradigmatic narrative which reveals the interpreter’s complex positionality as an actor embedded in the conflict. The author points out that the interpreter’s role goes beyond the traditional notion of being an impartial and neutral conduit to adopt a more active stance. The author highlights the emotional reactions of the interpreters and their response to psychological conditions that may subsequently linger due to repeated exposure.

Remaining in the same region, the next chapter focuses on the positionality of interpreters employed by the United Nations Office at Geneva to work in the field during events associated with the “Arab Spring.” *Cherine Haidar’s* “United Nations Interpreters in the Arab Spring” compares the interviews with two professional UN interpreters, and similar to the findings presented in the previous chapter, she comes to the conclusion that interpreters who work in their own country are under significantly emotional stress, which may be understood not only as the natural outcome of interpreting accounts of harsh events but also as the result of a deliberate effort the interpreter makes to abide by an internalized code of conduct. Interestingly, the positionality of UN interpreters is different to that of other categories of interpreters in that, due to their status as international staff, they enjoy certain immunities when on duty. This provides them with some degree of protection and makes it less likely that they will fall victim to abusive power relations in the triangle of United Nations users, third party users and interpreters.

Moving on to a different region, *Maura Radicioni*, in “Interpreter-Mediated Encounters in Complex Humanitarian Settings: Language and Cultural Mediation at Emergency ONG Onlus,” focuses on the role of interpreters who work for NGOs in complex humanitarian settings, such as the refugee crisis in Italy. Radicioni takes an ethnographic approach to look at the role of cultural mediators at an Italian NGO that provides medical assistance to civilian victims of war, migrants and asylum seekers. The very name of the cultural mediators defines their role as cultural brokers above their language mediation tasks. The author states that in healthcare interpreter-mediated encounters, cultural differences are

better overcome when mediation is carried out by a language professional who shares a cultural background with the beneficiary. She concludes with the powerful remark that language mediation is a form of humanitarian aid, promoting peace, solidarity and respect for human rights.

From the south of Italy to the south of Spain, in “Andalusia, the Principal Gateway to Europe for Migrants and Refugees Arriving by Sea: Access to the Right to Interpreting Services in Agencies Receiving Asylum Seekers,” *Estela Martín Ruel* presents the results of an investigation on the right to access to interpreting services provided at five Spanish organizations in charge of receiving asylum seekers in Andalusia. The author comes to the conclusion that the role required of interpreters by the different entities varies greatly in terms of the higher or lower levels of visibility and intervention, and that most of the existing challenges stem from a lack of training and professionalism and are associated with a lack of understanding of the interpreter’s role and professional ethics.

The next chapter, “Interpreting for Refugees in Hong Kong” by *Marija Todorova*, moves the discussion to a different continent, presenting a comparative study of the humanitarian crises following the violent conflict in Vietnam and the current situation with interpreters for refugees in Hong Kong. Drawing on oral histories of interpreting during the Indochina refugee crisis and interviews with contemporary interpreters who have worked as interpreters for refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong, the study identifies common issues arising in interpreting for refugees across temporal and spatial boundaries that stem from the complexity of the communicative situations and the usual recruitment of non-professional ad-hoc interpreters, such as emotional stress, trust-related issues and training needs. The author concludes with the insightful remark that, in these environments, the issues of neutrality, objectivity and trust all gain new meanings which must be renegotiated.

The last chapter continues the discussion related to the refugee crisis but, focusing on South America, diverts from the previous chapters to provide a different perspective on humanitarian interpreting. Entitled “Latin American Interpreters Working in a Safe Country: Specific Training and Emotional Implications,” this chapter by *Lorena Guadalupe Baudo* and *Gabriela Fernanda Lorenzo*, although not directly connected to a crisis situation, lays out the experiences and decisions of interpreters

working at an international conference organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of the Argentine Republic in which refugees, migrants and other actors participated. The authors analyze the role of the interpreter as a modeling agent, their human dimension and their activism in mediating in these conflicts and becoming involved in the values, feelings and meanings that should be transferred from one language/culture to another. The authors explore the linguistic and emotional challenges faced by the professional interpreter in preparing for such an event, as well as strategies that can be used to successfully deal with such difficulties.

Interpreting Conflict: A Comparative Framework aims to go beyond the traditional notion of interpreting in conflict to a more nuanced and precise notion that takes account of the specific context in which interpreters work and that allows us to adopt a more granular approach to the study of linguistic mediation in these contexts, using detailed empirical evidence and bringing together the thoughts of scholars, activists and practitioners. The contributions in this volume, taken as a whole, strengthen the idea that interpreting is a situated practice and that, as such, it depends on the context and setting in which it is practiced. Although all interpreting is interpreting, the particularities of the context, setting and organization/institution have a clear impact on the interpreters' positionality and on the decisions taken by them.

Despite an evident increasing interest in these issues and a body of existing research, more research has yet to be carried out to elucidate certain key concepts—ethics, neutrality, positionality, professionalism and identity—that are of paramount importance in this field. Consequently, more discussion is needed regarding the categories of interpreters working at each stage of different conflicts and the position they adopt; the actors with whom the interpreters interact in each situation; how the former perceive and define the role of the latter, and the power relations that develop between them; the specific tasks carried out by interpreters in each stage and communicative situation; the underlying factors that influence their decisions, how these decisions are related to considerations of ethics and, in particular, neutrality; and the existence of common patterns in the role of interpreters across geopolitically and geographically different regions.

With this volume we aim to make three key contributions. Firstly, the volume will offer further evidence of the situated nature of interpreting and the role of interpreters through a meaningful comparison of different conflict and post-conflict contexts in different regions. Secondly, it aims to deepen our understanding of the different factors shaping the interpreter's positionality and status. Finally, the volume will contribute to current debates about the complexity of training interpreters in these contexts.

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Part II

Interpreting for the Military



2

Dual Citizen Interpreters: Consequences of Assigned Loyalties in the Aftermath of War

Kayoko Takeda

1 Introduction

During the Asia-Pacific War (1931–1945)¹ and the Allied occupation of Japan (1945–1952), there were *Nisei* (literally ‘second-generation’ but in this context individuals born in the United States or Canada to Japanese immigrant parents) who used their language skills to serve various military and government organizations, performing tasks such as translating captured documents, interrogating prisoners of war (POWs), monitoring enemy communications and teaching Japanese to intelligence officers. Collectively, they are called *Nisei* linguists here, following the precedent

¹ The Asia-Pacific War refers to the wars Japan engaged in, covering the period from the Mukden Incident (1931) through the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the Pacific War (1941–1945).

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