

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN TRANSLATING
AND INTERPRETING

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MEDIATING EMERGENCIES AND CONFLICTS

FRONTLINE TRANSLATING
AND INTERPRETING

**EDITED BY
FEDERICO M. FEDERICI**



Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting

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This series examines the crucial role that translation and interpreting in their myriad forms play at all levels of communication in today's world, from the local to the global. Whilst this role is being increasingly recognised in some quarters (for example, through European Union legislation), in others it remains controversial for economic, political and social reasons. The rapidly changing landscape of translation and interpreting practice is accompanied by equally challenging developments in their academic study, often in an interdisciplinary framework and increasingly reflecting commonalities between what were once considered to be separate disciplines. The books in this series address specific issues in both translation and interpreting with the aim not only of charting but also of shaping the discipline with respect to contemporary practice and research. Margaret Rogers is Professor Emerita at the University of Surrey http://www.surrey.ac.uk/englishandlanguages/staff_list/complete_staff_list/margaret_rogers/index.htm

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Federico M. Federici
Editor

Mediating Emergencies and Conflicts

Frontline Translating and Interpreting

palgrave
macmillan

Editor

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London, United Kingdom

Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting

ISBN 978-1-137-55350-8

ISBN 978-1-137-55351-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55351-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016937722

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

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Acknowledgements

Mediating emergencies was a project initially conceived in conversations with colleagues in 2012 when some MA students asked the question on how military interpreters receive their training and whether or not they all need to be in the army. The notion of emergencies soon prevailed over that of translation in conflict, as in discussions with colleagues such as Bingham Zheng, Sergey Tyulenev, and also Dario Tessicini, the interest in both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the issue constantly grew, especially because of the dearth of in-depth research projects focusing on this dimension of linguistic mediations. As such, the volume was thought as an attempt to raise some more questions that the excellent contributors will certainly try to answer but also in the hope to generate interest in researchers-to-be, as solid, grounded, and committed research is needed in this area rich of intellectual and moral incentives.

By collecting materials, I cannot but thank the contributors who eagerly submitted drafts of their work which humbled me for the privilege in learning so much from their work and also for their constructive responses to the feedback they received. Their respective contributions represent differences and diversity in approaches, perspectives, and methodologies; one constant interrelation is the consideration that we urgently need to conduct more research of interdisciplinary nature in this area.

The generosity of friends and colleagues and fellow researchers never ceases to surprise me: they entered into a dialogue with the ideas as well as

the papers, with the theme and its difficulties, with the minutiae and the volume as a whole. My gratitude for their patience in reading pages of my introduction and papers in the volume wholeheartedly goes to Theresa Federici. Theresa extensively commented on my ideas and the introduction with the intellectual honesty, the enthusing interest, and passion for form and well-argued discussion papers that distinguish her. With her, Samuel Strong, Jacob Blakesley, Denise Filmer, Christophe Declercq, and Ahmed Mustafa too engaged with the contributions in this volume.

I am particularly grateful to the anonymous readers that Palgrave appointed to review my initial proposal. I thank them for their comments and their punctual criticisms to the proposal were extremely helpful in depleting the project of redundant and weak ideas and allowed me to focus my editing on ensuring that the volume's unity in difference would become more evident for the readers. I thank the Series Editor Margaret Rogers for her insightful comments, observations, and criticism to initial drafts of the chapters; her helpful and perceptive eye assisted me in ensuring this edited volume would reflect the values of the series. Elizabeth Forrest and Chloe Fitzsimmons at Palgrave Macmillan deserve my gratitude for the attention and enthusiasm with which they supported this project in its longer than expected gestation.

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1

Introduction: A State of Emergency for Crisis Communication

Federico M. Federici

In an interconnected and globalized world, it is difficult to distinguish the end of one emergency from the beginning of the next, so much so that Mihata postulated in the late 1990s that the world now lives in a state of emergency (Mihata 1997). Even though not all regions and populations are necessarily simultaneously affected by an emergency, it is not absurd to theorize the existence of a permanent *sense of a state of emergency* in the ways in which the world is *represented* in the twenty-first century—especially given the growth of the 24/7 news channels and of the rolling news cycle in the late 1980s (Silvia 2001; Zelizer and Allan 2010: 86). In fact, complexity theorists and sociologists have long *perceived* a state of permanent emergency in modern societies (Luhmann 1990; Bauman and Bordoni 2014). It would however be absurd to consider that a world forced into globalized economies, whose interconnections mean that any event generates ripples in instantaneous chain reactions (Kaufmann

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2013), would and could then completely discard any form of awareness of global events. This very interconnectedness feeds the need for instantaneous news reports on world emergencies, and the conflicts which often generate new ones, that is plausibly one of the key features of a world that has been brought communicatively and culturally closer. It is also an emotive closeness for many. Susan Sontag (2003: 16) observes that ‘being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience’. The fact that such calamities and their ensuing emergencies take place in other countries, other cultures, and to speakers of other languages is often underestimated. Yet, this twenty-first-century phenomenon of accentuated global awareness and, at times, of far-reaching humanitarian solidarity is not by any means an entirely new phenomenon—news agencies that boomed in the late nineteenth century also clamoured for knowledge (Bielsa 2007: 135–137) with the same sense of urgency. The scale of the phenomenon has changed, however, and is indicative of the features of interconnectedness that characterize our modernity. And as interconnected as the current world is, it has been noted that the world often remains as culturally distant as it has always been (Cronin 2006).

An operational definition of emergencies is used here, as it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a comprehensive definition and of ‘crisis communication’ (a superordinate term to discuss all forms of communication in extreme conditions, be they conflicts, disasters, emergencies, or crisis, a broader concept I borrow from O’Brien’s contribution in this volume). The observations in this chapter rather intend to remind readers of the many questions we should be asking about the relationship between international response and intercultural communication, or lack thereof. In attempting to understand connected yet culturally remote events, we are continuously in need of mediation; here, the term is intended in its linguistic and cultural sense, whereby native speakers and educated experts of the affected culture allow others to enter the threshold of a different speaking community—the notion of language and culture mediators considered here includes and goes beyond the professional profiles of translators and interpreters. It intends to encourage readers of this volume to expand on these questions from original methodological, as much as ethical perspectives, and on the related multidisciplinary settings

that should be used to investigate the complexity of emergency management by including considerations on language barriers. One of the manifestations of the feeling of interconnectedness is in the immediacy of world reactions to emergencies. There are immediate response and rescue teams that arrive in areas of natural disasters, and there are other forms of responses to conflict, which are by their very existence more convoluted in nature and type.

The observations that follow aim to discuss the urgent need to establish a concerted and multidisciplinary debate on the role of intercultural communication in international multilingual missions that respond to emergencies across the world, with reference also to examples of conflict-related emergencies and their representation in translation in the media. Hence, it is subdivided into sections as follows: I offer a set of reflections that review the lacunae in the literature on translation and interpreting in the gap between common notions of resilience, preparedness, planning for crisis response, and the absence of considerations about intercultural communication in crisis and emergencies even within translation research. I then outline the concept behind this collection, prior to introducing the thread that weaves together the chapters from very different voices and angles, which come together in this volume.

Translation and Interpreting Research Related to Emergencies and Crisis Communication

Translator and interpreter trainers have responded with ad-hoc solutions over the last three to four decades (or arguably since the Nuremberg trials) to the unprecedented need for linguistic mediation. In legal emergencies involving interpreting of trials, the notion of response to finding large numbers of skilled legal interpreters in a short amount of time has begun to be scrutinized (see Braun and Taylor 2012; Hertog and van Gucht 2008). Other forms of crisis communication and uses of translation and interpreting in emergencies need to attract more research to investigate the many open issues. Professional initiatives have grown in the last ten years with significant projects taking shapes (as in the project ‘Words of Relief’ by Translators Without Borders (TwB), discussed by O’Brien in

this volume). The web page of Words of Relief articulates the scenario in which emergency responses operate in the twenty-first century:

Words of Relief is a translation crisis relief network intended to improve communications when the crisis-response aid workers and affected populations do not speak the same language. It is a tool to be used prior to a crisis (when there is a warning of impending crisis), during the first 72 hours, and then in the three months following the initial crisis.

Some core issues with crisis communication are central to this perspective: there is a need to be ready; there are instruments to become readier; there are ways of supporting responses to crises in multilingual environments. There is growing awareness in the humanitarian response about the role of communication. One humanitarian organization, the Communicating with Disaster-Affected Community Network,¹ notes that ‘Communicating with disaster affected communities is a growing field of humanitarian response that helps to meet the information and communication needs of people affected by crisis’ (CDAC 2014). Communicating to and with communities affected by emergencies, and among humanitarian entities during emergencies, is growing in prominence. In the strategic framework of the TwB initiative (which was supported among others by O’Brien and discussed in this volume), a clear indication is provided of the proportions that the multilingual scenarios immediately assume.

The network focuses on three key components:

- Translating key crisis and disaster messages into 15 world languages before crises occur (the pilot will focus on Swahili and Somali);
- Building a spider network of diaspora who can translate from one of the 15 world languages into regional languages and who are trained to assist right away; and
- Creating a crowdsourced, online (and mobile) application that connects the translation team with aid workers and data aggregators who need immediate help.

¹ ‘The CDAC Network aims to ensure that communities affected by, and prone to, crisis are better able to withstand and recover from humanitarian emergencies, and are actively engaged in decisions about the relief and recovery efforts in their country’, see <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/>.

The most important elements beyond the significant solidarity and empathy implied in this humanitarian approach correspond to the many studies on ‘emergency planning’ and ‘crisis management’—these terms are differently defined in many disciplines, but the core elements are the temporal dimensions that include preparedness to respond. Any response is a complex combination of new ideas to deal with unprecedented issues and the application of defined mechanisms or procedures of reaction that guarantee a prompt response. In relation to planning, preparedness, training, resilience, and crisis management as they are considered among international and national bodies, the issue of intercultural communication seems to remain as the notable absentee. Networks of practitioners and researchers from multiple backgrounds have to date not succeeded in addressing this lacuna—the link between research endeavours and the broader picture of disaster management and emergency studies has not yet established a connection with those involved in intercultural communication. In order to address it, we need to question what we should study, why, and how.

The aspirations of this volume reflect to a small extent these bigger multidisciplinary questions. The book concept emerged from the observation that most sciences and many modelling techniques especially in advanced computing have been used in the last three decades to contribute to the management of coordinated responses in disasters and emergencies. These models are often focused on unpredictable agents (people); however, in their programming, they ignore or downplay the distance that languages and cultures make in crisis management. Among translation and interpreting specialists, that interest is now emerging. However, whereas research in interpreting and translation in conflict (be they war or post-war conflicts) and in ideological settings of opposition has been steadily growing for over a decade, very few studies exist on the matter of translation and interpreting in emergencies. The agency of translators and interpreters, from the political and ideological, to the ethical perspectives in conflict settings has been successfully and richly explored from several angles. All these angles are relevant in the discussion of conflict-related emergencies (see Apter 2001; Baker 2006, 2010; Dragovic-Drouet 2007; Footitt and Kelly 2012a, b; Footitt and Tobia 2013; Inghilleri 2008, 2009; Inghilleri and Harding 2010; Harding 2011; Kelly and Baker

2013; Palmer 2007; Rafael 2007, 2009; Stahuljak 2000, 2009; Takeda 2008). Studies have so far included personal accounts of interpreters in war zones (see Goldfarb 2005; Hari 2008) and at least one account from a peace and relief mission negotiator (Edwards 2002). The most extensive studies explicitly focused on the use of translation in crises emerging after the 2010 Haiti Earthquake (see Hester et al. 2010; Lewis 2010; Lewis et al. 2011; Sutherlin 2013; Morrow et al. 2011; Munro 2013) and following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (Cadwell 2014; Kaigo 2012; Mizuno 2012; Naito 2012).

In the last five years, new studies on the relevance of computer-aided solutions for translation in humanitarian contexts have emerged (in particular Hester et al. 2010; Lewis 2010; Lewis et al. 2011). Possibly the greatest exception refers to the 10-year activities of the InZone research team. Ground-breaking work focusing on education and training challenges when supporting populations living through the aftermath of emergencies has been conducted by the InZone research group, which is based at the University of Geneva in Switzerland under the directorship of Barbara Moser Mercer. However, compared to other areas, in terms of studies entirely focused on translating, interpreting, and forms of cultural mediation in emergencies, there appears to be a dearth of research. Paradoxically, the lack of research seems to be almost in inverse proportion to the increase in operations and activities in which interpreters and translators take the lead (as in the example of the project ‘Words of Relief’ led by TwB), see Translators Without Borders 2015 and the growing awareness of communication as a core obstacle to effective humanitarian operations among the main actors. A few papers have paved the way towards intensifying the shift of focus onto translating and interpreting in emergencies (see Moser-Mercer et al. 2014). There is an urgency to conduct research on the vast array of issues related to any discussion on emergencies and crises of a humanitarian nature—these do not exclude conflicts or their aftermath, but ought to extend to issues of preparedness and planning for those many disasters that affect specific regions for reasons of geomorphology (e.g. those subject to earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and so on). The role of language mediation in a wide range of emergencies, the challenges of coordinating rescue teams, and the challenges of supporting any logistical aspects of international responses to calamities come with many com-

plex questions to answer, which deserve urgent and immediate attention from a wider community of researchers in translation and interpreting. Indeed, professionally and ethically, these operational scenarios are what Maier calls 'limit situations' (2007: 264), a definition she offered in relation to translators in conflict situations. Further ethical issues derive from the use (or training) of non-professional linguists in crises. In this sense, two chapters of this book (Gaunt and Skorokhod) also discuss the issue of representation and prejudice towards interpreters embedded in the discourse of their former military commanders. Such long-established depictions of language professionals undeniably continue to hamper any potential inclusion of linguists in the operational planning, in preparedness activities, and in the review of responses to emergencies that would in turn also support changes to training modes, increase the frequency of training, and diminish the use of ad-hoc solutions (such as those detailed in Kelly and Baker 2013).

The Absence of Language and Culture Mediators in Emergency Planning

In social sciences, study areas such as emergency planning and preparedness represent important areas in which strategic and tactical decisions can be discussed at a higher level and with attention to analysing data collected on previous responses to crises (be they natural disasters or man-made humanitarian emergencies). This higher-level scrutiny leads to enhancements in many aspects of planning and response; it includes complex computer-assisted modelling and has benefitted concerted multiagent responses to disasters. In other words, studies of real natural and social phenomena connected with emergencies, and the responses they prompt, have generated an essential area of objective and quantitative evaluation and reflection, which in turn has led to improvements to responses in the field. Practitioners' reports underline that the issue of communication (among relief operators, affected communities, and all the parties involved) affects the significance and diminish the reach of humanitarian activities. Yet the discourse on 'language barriers' (an overused term, adopted here for expediency) and the issues of intercultural communication in emergencies stands out