



Book Review

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*Interpreting conflict: A comparative
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Interpreting conflict: A comparative framework, an edited volume with fourteen chapters, addresses the theoretical and practical perspectives of military and humanitarian interpreting from different geographical, social, political, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, leading to further scholarly inquiry into the issue in question and calling for concerted efforts by researchers, trainers and public institutions. It is a collection of essays that endeavours to establish a new dialogue between interpreting, conflict, and post-war humanitarian studies. For readers interested in interpreting and interpreters in war settings, this original, insightful and informative book is a must-read.

The first section starts with the article “Dual citizen interpreters: Consequences of assigned loyalties in the aftermath of war” by Kayoko Takeda, focusing on the experiences of *Nisei* (literally ‘second-generation’ but in this context individuals born in the United States or Canada to Japanese immigrant parents) linguists within wartime Japanese organizations and the consequences these individuals faced in the aftermath of the war. Kayoko Takeda goes back to the reasons of *Nisei* living in Japan first, and then coherently examines what those *Nisei* linguists do in the Japanese military, government and state news agency in a compelling and well-argued way. Apart from the complicated roles presented evidently, particularly important are the ethical aftermath and consequences, treason and war crime accusations, confronted by these heritage language speakers for their abusive behavior toward prisoners of war and local civilians, including their participation in torture as interpreters though some may dodge condemnation from both countries by working for the occupation forces.

The role of linguists of the same period is further elaborated in Tian Luo and Ruiqi Zhu’s chapter entitled “To be or not to be loyal: Loyalty of military interpreters serving the Japanese army in the Second Sino-Japanese War”. Analysing the content of 80 narratives from historical archives and autobiographies of interpreters serving Japanese military during the war casts new light on fervent, feigned, shifted and divided loyalty. I had assumed that the contributing factors of their loyalty choice were economic and ethnic, but the authors show how ideology, position in the power structure and prospects of war and so on led these interpreters to subject themselves to Japanese

military, particularly as they intertwine with ethics. By clarifying the definition of “loyalty” in military context, the authors argue that interpreters should ensure their loyalty is morally righteous and humanely plausible instead of revelling in blind loyalty by aligning themselves with the wrong side.

The main issues covered in “Interpreting the Korean Conflict (1945-1953)” authored by Hyongrae Kim are the role of the interpreter and the shape the interpreting *habitus* assumed during the entirety of the Korean War, including the preparatory, engagement, and conclusionary phases of the conflict (p. 79). The acute shortage of qualified and professional linguistic mediators severely limited the US military’s ability to fully assert its dominant authority throughout the entirety of the Korean War process. This not only hindered the effective flow of information but also exposed the US military to the risk of manipulation during interpreting processes for personal or political gains, thereby undermining their authority throughout the war. The author delineates why the interpreters acted as a scapegoat during the occupation, why they became struggle focus during the engagement phase and why self-preservation rather than accurate information delivery was their top priority in interlingual communication in armistice talks. Kim’s conclusion invites us to “reconsider traditional notions of the identity and functionality of the interpreter”.

In Chapter 5, relying on a series of in-depth narrative interviews with five locally recruited interpreters from Afghanistan and ten Spanish military personnel in the Afghan conflict, María Gómez-Amich examines how conflict zones challenge the conventional role of interpreters as neutral and unseen communication promoters. All these military interviewees agreed that interpreters in conflict zones should prioritize military needs when translating, but they held different views on the interpreters’ job responsibilities, translation methods and strategies, as well as their loyalty and credibility. To a certain extent, the importance and clout of local interpreters are testified in those narrative interviews.

By using Baker’s (2006) frame analysis, Yolanda Moreno Bello explores the strategies preferred by interpreters and their autonomy while negotiating different conflict ideologies in Chapter 6. This empirical analysis is based on a corpus of interviews with 12 local interpreters and five military interpreters who worked in the conflicts in Lebanon. Moreno Bello also points that “new lines that open up negotiating possibilities of other elements could be useful in regard to empowering the interpreter to negotiate equally among all participants” (p. 132).

An insight into the personal experience of interpreting in Senegal, a multi-cultural country with seven official languages, is provided by Verónica Méndez Sánchez in Chapter 7: “The Spanish ‘military interpreter’: A practical application in international operations arising from armed conflicts”. She carefully demonstrates the correlation between interpreting and armed forces and the contributory factors while working in this setting. Based on her own positive and professional experience, she proposes that the training and regulation of military interpreters should be improved, given the irreplaceable role played by interpreters.

Literature (war novels) also sheds light on the important role interpreters, as a rare resource, play in conflict areas. Focusing on Lorenzo Silva and Luis Miguel Francisco’s *Y al final, la guerra* and Álvaro Colomer’s *Aunque caminen por el valle de la muerte*, Lucía Ruiz Rosendo explores how interpreters are deemed crucial in modern counterinsurgency operations through the lens of the military personnel’s narration about the portrayal of language intermediaries in the Iraq War by employing Baker’s narrative theory. The interpreters’ feelings,

experiences and concerns, especially the need for post-war protection, are also aired out in the two texts.

Maya Hess's chapter focuses on two Arabic linguists, Ahmad I. Al Halabi and Mohamed Yousry, who provided translation and interpretation services at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp and in a U.S. federal prison respectively. The two Arabic linguists suffered greatly under the so-called 'justice' trials after 9/11, due to their occupations and the unfair assumptions made against them based on their religion and culture. The archival evidence and ethnographic research reveal that they were victims of the government's distrust, which originated from Islamophobia and the Translator-Traitor Mentality (TTM).

Both Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 focus on interpreters in the Middle East. According to Manuel Barea Muñoz, the author of Chapter 10, "Psychological aspects of interpreting violence: A narrative from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict", interpreters' emotional and psychological health are well worth focusing on. The paradigmatic narrative in this chapter demonstrates the working conditions and psychological impacts of interpreting in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which may help readers to understand how challenging and complex the working conditions are and why interpreters need psychological training and ongoing therapy sessions.

In comparison with Chapter 10, Cherine Haidar Ahmad offers a different perspective in Chapter 11, "United Nations interpreters in the Arab Spring". The positionality of United Nations interpreters may shift between external and internal when they work in their own countries, especially when they interpret violent events or atrocities that occurred in their own countries and they sympathize with the witnesses. Luckily, they enjoy certain immunities when on duty as international staff, which could be regarded as a reward for their neutrality and impartiality. The psychological preparation in pre-employment training is also noted to ensure interpreters' high standard of ethics and strong sense of responsibility and anti-pressure ability, similarly suggested in the previous chapter.

The importance and quality of language and mediation practices in Italy are examined by Maura Radicioni in Chapter 12. It is emphasized that in humanitarian settings involving dyadic and triadic encounters, interpreters' mediation plays a crucial role in enabling participants from different linguistic backgrounds to understand each other effectively. The cultural mediators employed by the Italian medical NGO Emergency ONG Onlus (Emergency) mediate between migrants and asylum seekers on the one hand and the organization's medical staff and public service authorities on the other, showcasing their role as intermediaries between different cultures and ultimately as providers of humanitarian assistance in this challenging humanitarian environment.

Estela Martín-Ruel's qualitative study entitled "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" demonstrates the whole process of getting interpreting services in Andalusia for refugees and asylum seekers. It is observed that interpreters are often prohibited from taking notes or accessing detailed task information to protect the confidentiality of beneficiaries and employing entities. In addition, the lack of adequate qualifications among many interpreters poses challenges for refugees and asylum seekers, as it results in their inability to meet the standards expected by various entities across multiple dimensions.

Marija Todorova's chapter entitled "Interpreting for refugees in Hong Kong" focuses on the role of interpreters in refugee crises, particularly the

Vietnamese boat people crisis and the current refugee claim process in Hong Kong. The author acknowledges the crucial role of interpreters in refugee assistance, particularly highlighting their effectiveness despite lacking formal training. Many of these interpreters, often recruited from refugee communities or possessing firsthand knowledge of displacement (e.g., educated Vietnamese refugees in camps or current interpreters with cultural expertise), demonstrated not only linguistic competence but also empathy derived from shared experiences, enabling them to mediate sensitively between refugees and authorities. Their dual identity as both language brokers and individuals with refugee-like backgrounds is recognized as a key factor in building trust and facilitating communication during crises. Consequently, the author proposes that some controversial issues such as neutrality, objectivity, and trust undergo a re-evaluation and require renegotiation in this case.

Drawing on their personal experience as simultaneous in-booth interpreters in 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, Lorena Guadalupe Baudo and Gabriela Fernanda Lorenzo's contribution explores mediating conflicts and their involvement in transferring values, feelings, and meanings between languages and cultures. The authors also discuss the linguistic and emotional challenges faced by professional interpreters and propose strategies to successfully navigate such difficulties.

Before concluding, I would like to mention one final point, although it does not affect in any way the outstanding merits of the book. While the first seven chapters of the book deal chronologically with the role of interpreters in military settings, the second part explores interpreting in humanitarian contexts in different regions, outlining the role of interpreters in different contexts around the world. The book would be more logical and consistent if the two parts were standardized (and if the second part were also presented in terms of a timeline).

To recapitulate, I would like to highly recommend this book to students, practitioners and researchers because it offers a penetrating insight into the role of interpreting in conflict situations by examining a wide range of case studies. It is a good starting point for anyone who is interested in this field. This edited volume may be a stimulus for further inter-disciplinary research collaborations involving scholars from different fields so as to address the complexities of communication and mediation in conflict contexts.