

Ruize Rosendo, Lucia and Persaud, Clementina (eds) 2016. *Interpreting in conflict zones throughout history* Special issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 15.

Interpreting in conflicts is an important and developing area of interpreting history. It offers valuable information about the role of interpreters in international geopolitics and situates interpreting in contexts where concepts such as interpreters' neutrality and loyalty are frequently contested. Lucía Ruiz Rosendo's very useful introduction to this special issue gives an overview of interpreting history from Ancient Egypt to the 21st century and highlights the indispensable role of interpreters throughout history. As she points out, the fourteen articles presented in this special issue convincingly show that training has seldom been provided for war interpreters, either in the past or currently, and even the role of interpreter is not clearly defined (28).

Another prominent feature of this special issue is its emphasis on individual interpreters' voices. Instead of presenting an undifferentiated official version of interpreting history, many contributors choose to focus on the experiences of individual interpreters, especially their perception of their own interpreting work and identity as interpreters. For example, María Gómez Amich and Pekka Kujamäki draw upon interpreters' autobiographies to examine the experiences of a British female interpreter and a Finnish female interpreter who worked in British MI6 and the German Army, respectively, in World War Two, investigating their stories of how civilians with foreign language skills were identified, recruited as interpreters and gradually integrated into their military units. These personal accounts might be biased and limited for many reasons (e.g. time, location and audience), but they reveal the temporary nature of interpreting in conflict as well the life of interpreters as human beings (Kujamäki 118-119).

This emphasis on interpreters' human side is found in many papers in this issue, for example, Malgorzata Tryuk's study of interpreters in Nazi concentration camps, Pin-ling Chang's analysis of a Chinese interpreter's collusion with Koxinga and Dutch authorities during the Sino-Dutch War (1661-1662), and Annarita Taronna's examination of language mediators working with newly arrived migrants in Southern Italy. Their studies show that in extreme conditions such as wars, interpreting is no longer strictly bounded by professional ethical rules such as neutrality, but can be a means to save the life of others or even the interpreter him or herself (Tryuk 138-139), or build "effective cross-border solidarity networks in real time" (Taronna 297).

As Chang (65-66) points out, notions of trust and loyalty in interpreting are also not necessarily determined by interpreters' nationality or ethnicity, and interpreters' neutrality cannot gain all parties' trust. Instead, it is biased interpreters who tend to be trusted more by one side and might be able to contribute more to the effective resolution of the conflict (Todorova 237,

Snellman 266). Binhua Wang and Minhui Xu's case study of interpreting in the Korean Armistice Negotiations also shows that, interpreting in the Negotiations was not expected to be neutral or impartial, but considered as part of power struggle, and the interpreter was considered "a member of his own camp serving its national interest and political agenda" (193).

This discrepancy between reality and professional codes of ethics is underlined and contested by other papers in this issue. For example, through analysing the role of three French interpreters who worked as liaison officers of the British Expeditionary Force in World War I, Peter James Cowley (85) argues that the notion of neutrality is "entirely at odds with" military interpreters' "subordination to their military superiors." His argument resonates with Snellman's view that military interpreters tend to see themselves as part of the army and identify with the professional ethos of soldiers (274). Comparing with military interpreters, civilian interpreters might have more autonomy in their career. However, they also face significant pressure in keeping their neutrality in their interpreting work, especially those who serve the enemy. With case studies of Afghanistan interpreters working with international coalition forces during the period of 2001-2015 and Chinese interpreters in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945), Mihaela Tălpaş and Ping Li, Chuanmao Tian and Zhonglian Huang explore the risks and challenges that both civilian and military interpreters encounter in these conflicts due to their nationality, political ideology and social, cultural backgrounds. Their arguments echo recent research on interpreters' identity crises in wartime (e.g. Baker 2006, Inghilleri 2008, Salama-Carr 2007) and highlight the varied definitions of interpreter ethics in different contexts.

Due to the limitation of space, it is impossible to cover all the interesting case studies in this issue. These papers might not be systematic enough to present an overview of the history of interpreting in terms of time or space and some discussions might overgeneralise the situation for interpreters in a long-lasting war. However, the rich information unearthed by contributors on this topic highlights the agency of interpreters in various contexts of conflict and constitutes an important contribution to the study of interpreting history.

References

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