

Re-thinking the role of the interpreter in conflict-related scenarios

Lucía Ruiz Rosendo, University of Geneva

Marija Todorova, University American College Skopje

Interpreting in conflict zones and related scenarios has recently received considerable attention in academic literature. The role of these interpreters is blurred, in that the tasks performed go beyond the oral transfer of linguistic features to encompass their role as translators, cultural gatekeepers and even as original speakers in their own right. Usually they are alone in understanding the languages and cultures involved, and are often locally-recruited civilians who belong to the community in conflict with no previous training in interpreting and who may have developed a certain ideology. In other cases, they are volunteers, professional or non-professional, willing to help in humanitarian crisis situations. In still other cases, they are trained interpreters who work for international organisations but who face different circumstances when interpreting in the field which lead them to assume a different role as mediators.

Despite an increasing interest and research already conducted (Inghilleri 2005; Baker 2010; Moser-Mercer 2014), more research has to be carried out to develop further certain key concepts — ethics, neutrality, positionality and identity — that have an impact on the interpreter's positionality in conflict-related scenarios. Consequently, more discussion is needed regarding the categories of interpreters working in each stage of different conflict situations, and the position they adopt; the actors who the interpreters interact with in each different 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, and 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.

Against this backdrop, this panel invites contributions on the following topics and is particularly interested in submissions of an interdisciplinary nature fostering interprofessional dialogue. The panel aims at developing further the discussion on these topics:

- What is the role of interpreters in conflict-related scenarios?
- What is the positionality of these interpreters? To what extent does the conflict itself and the interpreter's own experiences have an impact on the interpreters' positionality?
- What are the ethical, psychological and security implications of working as an interpreter in armed conflicts and related humanitarian scenarios?
- What are the relations of power created between the interpreters and the other stakeholders?
- How does the interpreters' ideology affect their work?
- How do interpreters' emotions affect their work?
- Can we speak of the "interpreter's neutrality" in these scenarios?
- How can these interpreters be trained?

Given the circumstances and conditions under which interpreters in conflict zones and related scenarios perform their work, more interdisciplinary discussion is needed in order to analyse the different factors that have an impact on the concept of neutrality. We encourage those authors who have carried out research projects on this topic to submit their proposals to this panel.

References

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