

Translating and Interpreting in Peacekeeping Operations: Voices from the Field

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Yet the definition of what an interpreter is, could be considered as crystal clear for professionals in Translation/Interpretation, the truth is that, in the fog of war, the definition is not clear at all, and becomes fuzzy, in a context where improvisation is commonplace. The agency of interpreter is undertaken by a wide variety of individuals ranging from military linguists to hired civilian locals, from professionally trained interpreters to limited speakers of the required language. In the military jargon 'interpreter' it is commonly used to designate any person able to establish any kind of communication between two different languages regardless his education, training, skills and level of expertise. This work explores the complex function of translators/interpreters (T/Is) in peacekeeping operations. It discusses the challenges T/Is face under a triple approach: from the legal point of view, from the ethical point of view and from the operational point of view. The legal questions it reflects are the right to security and protection, and the contracting conditions. With regard to the ethical issues it deals with the "issue of trust" and the required impartiality. Finally, from the operational side, it discusses the indispensable need of T/Is in peacekeeping operations and the need to train in the use of T/Is to any participant in this kind of operations. Data come from interviews and personal experience. One of the main conclusion is that there is still pending a huge labour related to the peacekeeper training to work with the aid of T/Is. Although there are some attempts in the good direction, their outcomes are not enough.