

Understanding High-level Interpreting in the Cold War: Preliminary notes

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Our whole picture of Soviet Russia is falsified by words. To the British soldier the word “transport” calls up an image of a phalanx of three-ton trucks, solid, immaculate and uniform. But pronounce that word to a Russian and he will see in his mind’s eye a long procession of farm-carts hauled by thin and hairy ponies. (Crankshaw 1946: 503)

Abstract/Résumé

Ce travail sur les interprètes et l’interprétation de “haut-niveau” à l’époque de la Guerre Froide (1946-1991) est placé sous le signe de l’idéologie et des relations internationales. En effet, s’il y a une particularité qui distingue cette époque c’est bien son caractère de lutte idéologique à échelle planétaire entre le monde communiste représenté par l’ex-URSS et le monde capitaliste représenté par les Etats-Unis. Cependant, malgré les tensions de l’époque, les contacts et les réunions entre les dirigeants politiques des deux superpuissances ont été fréquents et ils ont eu lieu dans des contextes très différents : au sein des Nations Unies, lors de réunions “au sommet”, ou dans des rencontres bilatérales. Pour que cette conversation au niveau international ait pu se produire, les interprètes et les activités de médiation linguistique et culturelle se sont révélés indispensables.

Dans ce contexte très complexe, la politique menée sous la présidence de Richard Nixon (1968-1974) a été marquée par la personnalité du président lui-même et de son secrétaire d’État, Henry Kissinger. Ils ont été les responsables d’une politique étrangère entraînant des risques sur tous les plans. Sur le plan qui nous intéresse, cela s’est traduit par la méfiance par rapport à la présence des témoins lors de ses négociations, dont les professionnels de l’interprétation, notamment ceux du Département d’État. En revanche, ils ont privilégié les diplomates ayant des connaissances linguistiques, et très proches du point de vue idéologique; ou les interprètes soviétiques et chinois.

Notre travail offre une riche matière à la réflexion en ce qu’elle place la médiation linguistique et culturelle au centre des échanges politiques et des négociations diplomatiques, comme un élément idéologique et culturel propre des relations internationales.

Keywords/Mots-Clés

High-level interpreting, Cold War, Nixon administration, political and diplomatic settings, visible interpreters

I. Introduction

The term Cold War refers to the series of provocations, threats and indirect disputes between the USA and the Soviet Union the length and breadth of the planet over an extended period of the 20th century (1946-1991). The Cold War was a huge conflict of interests at global level, a dispute between the two superpowers to gain and keep spheres of influence. The weapons deployed in this planetary conflict were military, economic, political, ideological and also cultural.

In the Cold War era, the lines of communication between the two superpowers were never completely cut, but were kept open through international conversations that took place in different forums, such as privileged setting of the United Nations (Baigorri-Jalón, 2004), and also between officials of different rank, including the leaders themselves on several occasions. The interpreters who worked in these high-level meetings had excellent linguistic and cultural training, but they lacked specific training in interpreting. They had to learn their profession 'on the job'. They lacked norms or professional codes which might somehow guide their activity, and had to learn them through socialization with the users of their services. Interestingly enough, the users of interpreting services also had to learn how to work with interpreters, as Takeda (2007) has aptly explained in her research on interpreting services at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (1946-1948). On the other hand, the post World War II criminal courts are an excellent example of 'on the job' interpreting training in a multilateral context (Gaiba, 1998; Baigorri-Jalón, 1999, 2000).

An account of high-level interpreting during the Cold War requires an explanation of the different historical and geographic contexts in which world leaders and diplomats relied on the use of interpreters. Moreover, such an account must explain all the constraints (cultural, ideological and physical) that influenced the work of diplomats, politicians, and especially interpreters when they convened for negotiations in a climate marked by tension, distrust and verbal confrontation.

Our interest in studying interpreting during the Cold War is twofold. Firstly it is a largely untapped area in the history of interpreting. Secondly, the research can bring insights into interpreting in general and its development as a profession. To keep this paper short, we looked at the interpreters who acted as top-level mediators at meetings

between President Richard Nixon and senior American personalities with Soviet and Chinese political leaders. We want to find out how their background led these interpreters to work at this demanding level of responsibility. We also ask how they accomplished their work in an atmosphere of extreme tension, exhaustion and stress that characterized the meetings.

Translators and interpreters are constrained in many ways (Álvarez & Vidal, 1996, p. 6). The unique characteristics of many of these high-level encounters must have required a great deal of diplomatic discretion, patience and stamina due to the political importance of the leaders involved, the complexity of the topics, the length of the meetings, and the tension and stress generated among participants. Interpreters, with their linguistic and cultural skills, were essential cogs in this machinery since they acted as facilitators of communication between the parties. To function as interpreter at this level also included to assume additional roles such as secretary or assistant, or public relations officer particularly when the interpreter was “the only link with the host culture, being the only one to speak that language” (Gentile, 1996, p. 117).

When we study the work of the interpreters who accompanied political leaders, senior diplomats or even dictators, such as Mao Zedong, who had his own particular use of language, attention should be paid to the dynamics of interpreted events in political and diplomatic settings. These communicative situations were strongly biased from an ideological standpoint and interpreting was an essential part of the negotiations.

The paper is based on modern debates of theoretical research in Interpreting Studies (Cronin, 2002, 2006; Angelelli, 2004; Diriker, 2004; Pöchhacker, 2006) and adopts the commitment to rethink translation studies from the perspective of ideology and power (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002; Baker, 2006; Tymoczko, 2007). In other words, our commitment is to critically theorize the position of interpreters in these political and diplomatic settings, making sense of contradictory data concerning their role as highly visible mediators during the years of Nixon’s presidency. By drawing on multiple sources, our paper explores the question of how interpreting practice contributed to development of international diplomatic negotiations, which also means to consider interpreting as a main instrument of foreign policy.

As we will see later, within the source material used there are the memoirs. Some of the important figures of this period have published their memoirs (Nixon, 1978;

Kissinger, 1979; Gromyko, 1989; Dobrynin, 1995; Holdridge, 1997), as have some of the interpreters (Walters, 1978; Berezhkov, 1994; Troyanovsky, 1997; Sukhodrev, 1999; Ji, 2008), which crossed the line marked by Thiéry (1985, 2007) concerning the code of ethics and the professional secret of interpreters. In fact, these publications seem to reflect that these Cold War interpreters were more than anonymous interpreters.

This paper is a preliminary study, an early stage of a larger investigation into the history of interpreting during the first decades of Cold War era, in which we describe the special features of the type of interpreter who worked in bilateral meetings between leaders from the countries involved in that conflict. In this paper, we begin by providing a basic background for understanding high-level interpreting in the general frame of the Cold War and, particularly, during the Nixon Administration. Next, we analyze the sources. Then we introduce the interpreters and explain certain biographical information relevant to the study. Finally, we examine some of the issues presented in this introduction, linked with the interpreter's active role (Mossop, 2007), as illustrated by a few examples of interpreted situations.

II. The historical context

In the Cold War context, not only were the USSR and the USA two military superpowers in open conflict with other, they were also two antagonistic social systems, two ideologies and two opposing ways of understanding the world. In this bipolar world, the two sides, the Communist bloc, represented by the USSR, and the capitalist bloc, represented by the USA, not only engaged in concrete war episodes using conventional military forces, confronting each other in moments of extreme tension, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 27, 1962, but also fought, above all, a silent battle, using the intelligence services and propaganda agencies of their respective governments, where the unwritten rule of Cold War diplomacy was “never concede anything” (Dobbs, 2008, p. 114).

There were also short periods of stable international relations linked to the notion of *détente*, and the period of *détente* par excellence in American foreign policy took place during the presidency of Richard Nixon (1969-1974). Despite the fact that Nixon was

one of the most anticommunist of American presidents, when he came into office in 1969, his inaugural address called for an “era of negotiation to replace an era of confrontation, and with the avowed goal of building a structure of peace” (cited in Garthoff, 2001, p. 277).

It is also important to stress the trend towards normalization of relations between the USA and China under Nixon’s presidency. In the worldwide strategic play of interests during the Cold War, both sides won. On the American side, a *triangular diplomacy* would guarantee a superior control position. The goal was “to increase American maneuverability, and to carve out a preeminent position for Washington as the ‘balancer’ at the pivot of the new triangle by maintaining better relations with each side [the URSS and the Communist China] than they did with each other” (Goh, 2005, p. 476). On the Chinese side, there were strategic reasons for an American-Chinese rapprochement, such as Communist China’s seat in the United Nations in October 1971, after more than two decades of exclusion. There were also domestic policy reasons associated to the failure of Mao’s Cultural Revolution.

One of the most successful events during this period was strategic armament control. The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty was signed between the two superpowers on August 3, 1972, and was the basis for the whole armament control process, which crystallized later in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) agreements (Clemens, 1973; Garthoff, 1977, 1978). Obviously, as most historians point out, the *détente* was never an alternative to Cold War, but it did introduce a stable structure and other less belligerent ways of conflict-solving by reinforcing diplomatic channels. In this sense, during Nixon’s term, American foreign policy was necessarily influenced by Nixon’s personality as well by his conception of international diplomacy. Richard Nixon and his national security adviser and subsequently Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, both shared the same “preoccupation with secrecy, their exaltation of presidential authority and control, their contempt for bureaucracy and Congress, and their deeply manipulative conception of politics in United States’ international relations” (Burr, 1998, p. 18).

Nixon and Kissinger broke all the rules of conventional political communication. Walker (1973, p. 189) even speaks of a ‘diplomatic revolution’. They practiced a back channel diplomacy – which doubled their staff’s workload and encouraged a feeling of

distrust between those who were ‘in the loop’ and could work and those who did not know or were not able to. Moreover, they increased confusion by delivering information through two different channels (Garthoff, 2001, p. 254). With regard to the communication through interpreters, in their encounters with Soviet and Chinese leaders, both Nixon and Kissinger employed a rather risky mediation model, when they left themselves in the hands of interpreters working for the ‘other side’. As a result, they could not value either the accuracy or precision with which their words had been transmitted. Kissinger refers in different places of his memoirs (1979, p. 1149, 1208) to this usual practice of relying on Soviet and Chinese interpreters. Some examples are:

I was frequently criticized for relying on Soviet interpreters. This was as nonsensical a charge as in the Chinese case. In fact, three members of my staff knew Russian (Sonnefeldt, Hyland, and Rodman); several on Brezhnev’s side of the table knew English (Gromyko, Dobrynin, and Aleksandrov). If Sukhodrev ever had difficulty with a word or phrase, a chorus of voices chimed in to help him (Kissinger, 1979, p. 1149).

Brezhnev insisted on seeing Nixon alone. Nixon followed his usual practice of not taking a State Department interpreter — which, now that I too was excluded, I found irksome. As was his custom, he also did not dictate an official record, though he briefed me orally (Kissinger, 1979, p. 1208).

As will be clear from the above, for Nixon and Kissinger the communication through interpreters of the ‘other side’ was not problematic at all. It seems that they ignored the extraordinary influence and responsibility that they gave to these interpreters at the expense of the basic rules of diplomatic conversation and also of the State Department interpreters.¹ All of which points to their utilitarian conception of foreign policy. With these unusual practices, Nixon and Kissinger sought “to claim personal credit for any achievements and to blur the responsibility for failures” (Matlock, 1996, p. 4).

This is the historical context of our study. As will be shown, this paper examines various aspects of interpreting as a linguistic and cultural tool in political and diplomatic settings at a time when the profession of conference interpreter was still in the making. Looking at the activity of interpreters from this perspective, we can

¹ For a historical overview of White House interpreters see Obst (1997).

probably understand their work in a much more flexible way and answer questions such as how and when did the personal involvement of the interpreter work in the communicative interaction. Referring to the early stages of the professional development of conference interpreting, Angelelli (2004, p. 107) mentions what an anonymous AIIC interpreter respondent highlights in relation to the work of pioneer conference interpreters like Marie-France Schunke and Wadi Kaiser:

They were not burdened by those categorical messages that some of our interpreting professors had to give in order to refrain the most inventive of us to create their own stories. Messages like: 'Stay close to the original' or 'It is not your job to explain'.

The study of interpreted situations allows us to explore controversial issues such as the neutrality and impartiality of interpreters according to the different settings they work in.

III. Notes on the sources

The declassification of documents related to the Cold War along with the growing bibliography concerning this decisive and prolonged historical period of the 20th century (1946-1991) has contributed to significant historiographical advances and confirmed this era as one of the most important political periods of the previous century.

Any research on diplomacy and interpreting in the Cold War requires the use of multiple sources, such as archives, memoirs, interviews, newspapers, Internet documents, photographs, scholarly documents, etc., written or spoken in, and translated into and out of different languages, particularly English, Chinese and Russian.

The starting point for our research about high-level interpreting during the presidency of Richard Nixon was the collection of documents edited by William Burr (*The Kissinger Transcripts. The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*, 1998). This collection includes 36 memoranda of Kissinger's conversations with Zhou Enlai and Brezhnev, and also with some of their staff, in 1971-1976, when he was "at the height of his power and self-confidence" (Spence, 1999, p. 3), working as assistant to President Nixon for national security affairs (1969-1973), and subsequently as Nixon's

Secretary of State (1973-1974). We supplemented this with other sources like the *Cold War International History Project*, which is one of the major collections of on-line documents to study Cold War History. The material collected by Bernkopf (2000) about the normalization of US-China relations, which is based on oral testimonies, and the photographic records that can be found in a range of sources such as the politicians and interpreters' memoirs are also valuable resources.

Memoranda of conversations (or *memcons*, the verbatim records of the conversations between the leaders) that were classified material in the past are now accessible in electronic format. Interpreters are mentioned in the sections of these memcons where participants in the meeting are enumerated. They appear again whenever they intervene with their own voice, mainly when they wish to explain something that has not been clearly understood, with a view to preventing any misunderstandings.

Regarding the politicians and interpreters' memoirs, they are first-person accounts of the historical events they experienced, but they should be read with a certain amount of prudence, given the tendency to self-justification and the tricky nature of memory. Consequently, their accounts should be verified and contrasted with more reliable and objective records. Memoirs are what the politicians and interpreters now say that happened then. As a result, they have both the benefit of hindsight and a different mindset from the one their authors may have had forty or fifty years earlier.

The same type of biased information can be expected from the press consulted, mainly in English. Although theoretically the press was and is free in the West – and often even at odds with the leaders of their own countries – it usually reflected the evolution of ideologies and the perceptions about the Other, normally seen as the enemy in a period of 'war'.

IV. Notes on the interpreters

For the purpose of this article, we refer mainly to the interpreters who worked in the high-level meetings between the US leaders and the leaders of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, particularly those who worked as personal interpreters in exclusive meetings like Ji Chaozhu (born in 1929 in the Shanxi Province of China),

Nancy Tang (born in 1941 in Brooklyn, New York) and Viktor Sukhodrev (born in 1932 in Lithuania). The three of them are what we call ‘naturals’, as they learnt the foreign language while they were children or very young.

Ji Chaozhu was nine and a half when he arrived with his family in the States. They had fled from China because of the war with Japan. Ji says that when he went back, twelve years later, “my Chinese was so bad that I could scarcely communicate and, of course, I was unable to read even the simplest signs” (2008, p. 69). In fact, he had to use an interpreter to whisper to him in English the readings of the Chinese Communist student reading club (Ji, 2008, p. 54). In his case, reaching an adequate command of Chinese required a great intellectual effort. In Tang’s case, she learned English even before she could speak Chinese. She arrived in China in 1950 at the age of nine and she studied at the Beijing Foreign Language Institute. Viktor Sukhodrev attended British local schools at the age of six because his mother worked at the Soviet Trade Mission in London during World War II years. He returned to Moscow six years later.

We can consider them as members of what is usually called *third culture kids*, the children of expatriates who live between two languages and cultures in a natural way, because of their families’ migration processes. They returned to their original countries in time to learn their language and culture and to become acquainted with important government persons of the respective regimes. They were all serving in the translation services of the ministries of foreign affairs when they were recruited for high-level interpreting jobs, which means they had sufficiently proved their loyalty to the political regimes and its ideological principles and could be duly screened by the national secret services. Despite this, in authoritarian regimes, high-level interpreters like Ji Chaozhu was purged or ‘reeducated’ four times, the last one when he was about to retire as an interpreter and after twenty years spent as Zhou Enlai’s first interpreter. Mao’s hostility to intellectuals is well-known, “perhaps because he knew he would never really be one” (Spence 1999, p. 159). In fact, there seems to be a contradiction between the political prosecution and the necessity of having to rely on them for the purpose of the international meetings. However, ideological contradictions were not new in Mao’s regime. These contradictions, reflected in the various campaigns proclaimed by Mao, such as the Great Leap Forward or the Proletarian Cultural Revolution, were often a terrible consequence of the struggle for power at the highest levels.

In the case of Sukhodrev, he also belonged to the establishment of the Soviet regime and was well versed in the ideological pillars of the Soviet leadership. The alignment with the positions of the respective regimes is of particular importance if we consider that in both the Chinese and the Soviet cases, local interpreters worked into the foreign language, and therefore, were the spokespersons of the leaders and the systems they represented. It should be noted that both the Soviet and the Chinese regimes had created a new vocabulary and new speech models which interpreters had surely adopted, sometimes in a very natural way (Visson, 2007).

The excellent preparation and extraordinary abilities of these high-level interpreters are well documented not only in their own memoirs, when they wrote them, but also in the testimonies and stories of those for whom they performed. This is evident in Kissinger's mention of Sukhodrev (Kissinger, 1979, p. 1208) when he refers to the first meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev in 1972: "I was reduced to asking the splendid Soviet interpreter Viktor Sukhodrev to dictate his account to Julie Pineau, my secretary".

According to Donald Anderson, who was the control officer for Kissinger's visit to Beijing in 1974, Nancy Tang was one of the finest interpreters he had ever met (Bernkopf, 2001, p. 302). She served as Mao's principal English interpreter and she recruited Wang Hairong, Mao's grandniece, to her side. These women, who had their own political agendas, were involved with the Gang of Four, and helped Mao's wife (Jiang Qing) keep track of adversaries such as the premier Zhou Enlai and his assistants (Ji, 2008, p. 256). In a relatively recent interview, Nancy Tang spoke of her training and the influential role played by Mao and Zhou Enlai. Her words reflect in a nutshell the extralinguistic and professional skills interpreters should have:

At that time we were just interpreters, and there were many things we didn't know much about. But they encouraged us to study, not to just settle for being a basic interpreter. They encouraged us to learn more about the people we translated for, the issues they were discussing, and the background and culture of the foreign guests. I think it was through being at these discussions --- and they also made us feel we were a part of it. I think it was great these leaders treated us young people in that way. That was actually how we grew up, how we later came to understand life and our responsibilities, how we should work through life --- we learned to do as they had done. (CRIENGLISH.com, 2006).

The influence of Nancy Tang and Wang Hairong became increasingly great over the time, particularly at the end of Mao's life. Holdridge (1997, p. 151) provides an example:

Upon entering Mao's study, two female nurses standing on each side of the chairman had heaved Mao erect from his chair while the elderly gentleman babbled something that to the visitors [prime minister and assistants of a NATO country] was entirely unintelligible. The interpreters [Nancy Tang and Wang Hairong] without blinking an eye went through the formality of telling their distinguished visitors how pleased the chairman was to see him and how the visit would improve the good relations between their two peoples.

In order to understand the power that these interpreters held in this and in many others situations, we have to study their roles within the particular political events where communication through interpreters took place. Nancy Tang was the Jiang Qing's eyes and ears. Nancy Tang and Wang Hairong were the inevitable duo and they were exceeding the tasks normally expected from interpreters. On one occasion Mao referred to them as "those spies" (Holdridge, 1997, p. 151).

Ji Chaozhu was not unknown to American politicians and his "competence as an interpreter had been amply and repeatedly demonstrated during the 1971 Kissinger trips to China" (Holdridge, 1997, p. 85). Ji Chaozhu was indispensable because of his bilingualism, which allowed him to work from and into English, and because of the profound knowledge he had of American culture, which allowed him to understand the American lifestyle, their negotiating approach and even their jokes. But he was also indispensable because he had continued his studies of the Old Chinese historians and philosophers, which were highly appreciated and often quoted by Mao. That is how Ji Chaozhu saved the American delegation accompanying Nixon in his 1972 visit from an embarrassing situation when Ji accepted the request by senior staff member John Holdridge to replace their interpreter, Charles Freeman, who felt unable to interpret some quotes from Mao Zedong's poetry, inserted in Nixon's banquet speech:

...our own interpreter Chas Freeman expressed deep concern to me over his ability to do justice to translating what the president would say in his banquet speech. Translating

for President Nixon on this occasion was a formidable task. The banquet was to be given worldwide television coverage [...] We knew the president was planning to use some quotes from Mao Zedong's poetry [...] but we didn't know in advance what poem he would quote or what the correct translation would be. This in particular was troubling Freeman, since it would be virtually impossible for anyone not thoroughly familiar with Mao's poem to be able to render the English back into the original Chinese. (Holdridge, 1997, p. 85)

On February 2, 1979, *The New York Times* published an editorial entitled "The Indispensable Mr. Chi", in which it referred to the role played by Ji Chaozhu as Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's interpreter in his visit to the United States. *The New York Times* editorial refers, though, to another issue, the illogical lack of American qualified interpreters from English to Chinese. Ji Chaozhu quotes the article extensively in his memoirs (2008, p. 300-301), where mention is made to the fact that at the time of Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972 the President could speak with the Chinese leaders "only through *their* interpreters", and that seven years later "the humiliation - and perhaps damage - continues on American soil. Absurd in any language". In order to understand the feeling of linguistic inferiority revealed by *The New York Times* editorial, there are a number of considerations affecting the communication through *their* interpreters as a sign of their superiority in the negotiations and the impact of these interpreters in the American public opinion as a highly educated individuals.

Although the three interpreters mainly referred to here were brought up during their early years in the country of their 'foreign' language, not all returned at the same age to their country of origin. Nancy Tang was born in the US and first went to China at the age of ten. Sukhodrev was barely an adolescent when he returned to the Soviet Union. Ji returned to China after having been at Harvard for a couple of years, at the age of 22. The way they acquired language knowledge is very important because it provides information about essential components of the interpreting profession. According to Taft (1981, p. 65) a distinction has to be made between:

...those mediating persons who acquire their multiculturalism simultaneously in their childhood and those who acquire it after the foundation for the first has been laid in

their initial enculturation. The differences between these two situations are of considerable importance to the competence with which the person is likely to be able to handle the second culture.

Ji emphasizes throughout his memoirs the importance of his American natural accent as compared with that of other higher ranking officials in the Ministry. His relatively poor Chinese for a good part of his early career seemed to be less important for him – or for his authorities. This attests to the importance that Chinese (or Soviet) leaders attached to good quality (even idiomatic) English when dealing with their counterparts. Perhaps they thought that, by choosing the more ‘natural’ interpreters of that language, their impact on the other party would be greater, even if that meant that the interpreters had to work into the – theoretically – “foreign” language. The quality of English was not trivial in such high-profile events and some of the meetings were carefully staged precisely with the purpose of making a good impression. Thus, we find comments such as Apple’s on Sukhodrev’s “flawless English” when Brezhnev visited Nixon in 1973 (*The New York Times*, June 19, 1973) as a great accomplishment. In this sense, the ‘how’ seems to be as important, if not more so, than the ‘what’. Sukhodrev had been chosen by Nixon on his previous visit to Moscow in 1972 to translate the words of his address broadcast on Soviet television. This prompted the following remarkable comment from William Safire, a language specialist:

...(An interesting footnote: during Nixon’s 1959 speech, an American capably interpreted for Vice President Nixon; this year he chose Viktor Sukhodrev, the top Soviet interpreter, to handle the agreed-upon simultaneous interpretation. Soviet viewers who saw Nixon heard Sukhodrev, the best in the business at the top of his form – not drily translating, but dramatically driving home Nixon’s mood and message. Obviously, no one told him *not* to do his professional best.) (William Safire. The Moscow Summit, *The New York Times*, July 2, 1972)

It seems interesting to note here the contrast made by Safire between “dry” and “well performed translation” (interpretation), as well as the fact that no one (from the Soviet side) had instructed him to lower the quality of his work just because he was working for the ‘enemy’. In any case, we should not lose sight of the fact that most users based

their interpretation quality assessment only on how the speech sounded in the target language they understood, for the simple reason that they did not know the source language.

Ideology, understood as a set of fundamental concepts, beliefs and value systems which are shared by a large group of individuals (Hatim & Mason 1997, p. 144), is an extremely important issue during Ji's life. In this case, ideology includes recognition of his 'Chineseness', identified by Communist Party credentials, which took him a long time to obtain. Stability in his political thought seems to have been his major preoccupation although that meant tremendous sacrifices. For example, his family life was almost nonexistent for many years and he was a victim of the vagaries of successive ideological regimes within the regime throughout his life. In this sense, his professional, political and even physical survival is an example of resistance. Ji has "lived to tell the tale", so he fits the subtitle of Karttunen's book (1994) "interpreters, guides, survivors". In his struggle he worked mainly for Premier Zhou, who trusted him personally, but also for Mao, who never paid attention to him as an interpreter or as a person. This tension and stress caused serious problems for the interpreters working under totalitarian regimes.

Similarly another factor essential to understanding the complex nature of the translation of ideology was the deep feeling of enmity between international leaders or between negotiators which expressed itself in the use of verbal violence and even racist comments directed at others (Fernández Sánchez, 2010). The verbal violence affected the team of translators and interpreters as reported by Ji (2008, p. 107) when referring to his participation as note-taker in the Panmunjom negotiations after the Korean War:

We needed to expand our vocabulary of insults. Our crew of language experts sat down with an American dictionary to see if we could unearth some fresh inflammatory words. Both sides were constantly accusing each other of lying about something — a stray bomb, a troop incursion, pressuring POWS to defect. Our side had used liar and lying so many times that the words had lost their punch.

The national history of China during Ji's life is full of the use of vituperative language against the evolving internal enemies:

The most colourful form of these [class] discussions probably has been the vituperative language of the Cultural Revolution, in which one is hard-pressed to specify the relationship to the means of production of such class enemies as “ghosts and monsters,” or “little reptiles” and “chameleons.” (Kraus, 1977, p. 66)

Ji’s career went from note-taker to interpreter to diplomat, and that seems to be a normal professional itinerary. This should not be limited to totalitarian regimes. There were a number of verbatim reporters in the United Nations who ended up in interpreting and, later, held high administration posts in the international civil service. Perhaps what makes cases of Ji and others regime-specific is that becoming a diplomat required an impeccable background of faithfulness to the authorities and their ideas. Their position was not neutral, but clearly aligned with their party, which in this case was also their Party. This does not mean that they worked in a manner that would misrepresent either of the counterparts. On the contrary, accuracy was the best way to send the message that each party wished to convey to the other. Moreover, interpreters who worked for their authorities’ government as part of their team were previously briefed about the political aims to be achieved. Sometimes they also had the texts of their delegation’s speeches that were to be interpreted for the foreign party. Everybody wanted to make sure that the contents of the messages were clearly understood by the other party, and they spared no effort to achieve it.

V. Specific interpreted situations

As the interpreters state in their memoirs, they were valued as linguistic experts and cultural consultants in a large variety of political settings. One of the leitmotifs in the history of interpreting is the question of the interpreter’s control and personal involvement (Anderson, 1976). By analyzing a few examples of specific interpreted situations, we wish to explore this question on the basis of the three voices identified by Mossop (2007). We believe this perspective will provide a useful conceptual tool to study interpreting as intervention by the individual interpreter. According to Mossop, we can distinguish three voices in a translator’s work that represent three available

choices and demonstrate his active role. These three possible voice-types are: the neutralizing voice, the ventriloquizing voice and the distancing voice. Applied this voice metaphor to our study, the neutralizing voice is in use when the interpreter is speaking in his own behalf, i.e. when he requests clarification. The ventriloquizing voice is the voice the interpreter uses when he intends to imitate the speaker's style, i.e. when he is reproducing technical terminology. The distancing voice is limited to language assistance, i.e. when the interpreter is reproducing literally some words of the original discourse. The interpreter chooses one of the three voices more or less consciously according to the constraints of the communicative situation. Here are some examples.

The examples are taken from the memorandum of conversation of the meeting between Henry Kissinger and the Vice-President of the Military Committee and the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China – among other participants – on February 23, 1972, interpreted by Ji Chaozhu². They illustrate various instances in which the interpreter speaks with his own voice to seek clarification from Dr. Kissinger (example 1); to make Dr. Kissinger question the accuracy of his data (example 2) by asking him for precise data; and to prompt the intervention of an expert to help clarify technical concepts (example 3). These examples show that the conversations between the US and the Chinese leaders went beyond purely political topics to enter sometimes sensitive military issues. On these occasions exceptional care was required to guarantee the accuracy of the information. That is why the interpreter requests continuous clarification. By doing so, he participates actively in the meeting by interrupting the original speaker and by making him be more specific about the concepts he is using.

Regarding the interpreter's choices, we will see that the voice used by Ji was his own, half-way between the neutralizing and the distancing, not the ventriloquizing.

(Example 1)

Dr. Kissinger: (...) Now, for the reconnaissance aircraft, but some of them could be used for dual purposes, most of them.

Interpreter (Chi): Most?

² <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-4.pdf>

Dr. Kissinger: Some, we could get the figures on how many bombers could be converted for reconnaissance purposes. (...) (p. 7)

(Example 2)

Dr. Kissinger: (...) ... The forces I am giving you are within 300 miles of the Chinese border.

Interpreter (Chi): Nautical miles?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes

Interpreter (Chi): Speed is MACH 2?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. (...) Now, turning to surface-to-air missiles within 300 miles of your border, in the Far East air defense district...

Interpreter (Chi): The distance is all in nautical miles?

Dr. Kissinger: I suppose, but what is the difference?

Interpreter (Chi): A little bigger than a mile.

Dr. Kissinger: I am not absolutely sure, but it doesn't make any difference for air defense. (...) (p. 10)

(Example 3)

(...) Dr. Kissinger: (...) I will give you a few other items and then we will let it go. About naval forces, the Pacific fleet has 155 medium bombers; 16 ballistic missile submarines; which have a total of 113 missiles; and 23 cruise missile units which have altogether 150 launchers.

Interpreter (Chi): Surface aircraft?

Dr. Kissinger: No, launchers.

Interpreter (Chi): But surface?

Dr. Kissinger: No, these are all on submarines.

Interpreter (Chi): What do you mean by 23 cruise...

Cmdr. Howe: Guided by radar rather than a ballistic missile. (p. 11)

The next example is taken from the memorandum of conversation of 27 February 1972, between Kissinger and Ch'iao Kuan-hua, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, with Chang Wen-chin, Director of Western Europe, North American, and Australasian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others. Chi Chao-chu [Ji Chaozhu] acts as interpreter³. The meeting takes place on Sunday February 27, 1972 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:55 p.m., at

³ The two spelling versions of the Chinese name respect the original transliterations from Chinese, which have changed during the period covered in this study.

the Guest House (Hotel) in Shanghai. The participants are in the process of drafting a communiqué and both sides have been making linguistic amendments to the text. The Chinese Vice-Minister then proposes reading the draft sentence by sentence in order to ensure that they all accept the language used.

VM Ch'iao: Now I will suggest that I would read out the Chinese, sentence by sentence and ...

Interpreter: The Vice-Minister suggests this procedure. He reads out a sentence of Chinese; I read it in English; and you check it.

Dr. Kissinger: All right. The only thing I request is a copy of it in Chinese –we have an interpreter here – before we make it absolutely official.

VM Ch'iao: Only when there is no question we will go on to the next sentence. (*Memorandum of Conversation*, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only. Declassified PA/HO, Department of State. E.O. 12958, as amended, Date: 6-30-05, p. 2)

To appreciate the complexity of the communicative situation as well as the interpreting problems involved, we make a number of considerations. First, the enormous care taken by both sides over the final version of the communiqué which has to be drafted in a manner that is useful to the interests of both Chinese and the American public opinion. Secondly, the fact that the interpreter translates, but he also coordinates, mediates and redefines the role of the primary speakers (Fogazzaro & Gavioli, 2004, p. 179). The interpreter intervenes before the Vice-Minister has finished the sentence, thus introducing words that the principal has not said. This means that he is participating as an intervening agent in the meeting and it proves that he has the trust of his principal to speak with his own voice. Thirdly, the paragraph illustrates one of the modalities of the work carried out by interpreters, that is, sight translation.

The fact that Ji Chaozhu is translating in both directions brings us to another reflection related to the voice of the interpreter, particularly that defined by Mossop (2007, p. 20) as the neutralizing voice in the sense that it reflects the translator's linguistic biography. We should not forget that Ji is working from English to Chinese and vice versa and that he is doing this consecutively, that is, immediately after each speaker has delivered his part of the speech. In other instances, such as in meetings where Mao was present, there was a double transfer (a relay): from Mao's dialect to

Mandarin and from Mandarin to English. It was done thanks to the presence of two interpreters, Tang Wensheng (Nancy Tang) and Wang Hairon. In the case of the US-Soviet exchanges we know that the Soviet interpreter worked into his “foreign” language. We mention this because we should not lose sight of the fact that although bilingualism is probably a banality, equilingualism is an extremely rare ability and that the linguistic biography of each individual interpreter has an impact on the lexical, grammatical and syntactic structures he or she produces when crafting the speech in the target language. Thus, the end result of the interpreting activity is not due simply to the possible self-censorship imposed by the ideological constraints, but also to the linguistic resources available in the interpreter’s brain at the moment of the interpreting exercise, that is, immediately after the speaker has finished his segment of speech.

The complexity of the process can be illustrated by the famous phrase “We will bury you”, supposedly pronounced by Khrushchev through his simultaneous interpreter and ideologically manipulated *ad nauseam* by the other side in the Cold War confrontation. Stephen Pearl used this example to discuss the differences between simultaneous interpreting and translation:

The endless medieval disputations about “my vas pokhoronim” also seem to lose sight of the fact that on the notorious occasion[s] when it was uttered, the interpreter’s English version was the product of simultaneous interpretation and not of pondered translation. The implication is that the interpreter should have said something different or “better”. “We will bury you” is not at all a bad rendering of the original. The unwary interpreter who strays too far from the literal in the course of heated debate is in something of a “lose-lose badly” situation. If he or she says “bury” for “pokhoronim”, Monday morning translators may tell him/her loftily that it should have been “outlive” or “survive”. If he/she says “outlive” or “survive” and another participant in the meeting then reacts to the Soviet/Russian delegate’s remark, the original Russian speaker may hear through the reverse, English to Russian, interpretation that he is understood to have said “perezhit,” or “vyzhit,” when in fact he said “pokhoronit” and he will then, not entirely unreasonably, pillory the unfortunate interpreter for “not knowing how to translate a simple Russian word like ‘pokhoronit’”. The complexities are endless.⁴

⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20050307190332/http://article.gmane.org/gmane.culture.studies.liter>

The time factor here, beside a number of constraints attached to a “highly sensitive context” (Baker, 1997, p. 111), is one additional key element to understanding the labyrinth in which the interpreter finds himself when called upon to disentangle the intricacies of a speech and to make correct lexical choices from his personal repository.

We have chosen a last example to illustrate the complexity of the interpreters work. This is a text taken from Sukhodrev’s memoirs (1999, p. 308-309) in which he refers to the visit paid by Brezhnev to Nixon approximately one year after Nixon’s visit to Moscow. Nixon is the host and offers his guests (in this case, Brezhnev and the interpreter, Sukhodrev) a drink of vodka:

The door opened and a Filipino waiter, whose services were used by Nixon, walked in. He brought a steamy bottle of *Stolichnaya* and poured vodka in everyone’s glass. Nixon did not fail to remark that he had this bottle brought especially for his guest. Brezhnev raised his glass, made a short toast and drank it at one gulp, Russian-style. At first, Nixon took a small sip, American-style, but observing the way Brezhnev had drunk it, followed his example. After the dishes were changed, the Filipino appeared again, this time with a bottle of dry wine. He poured it and left. Brezhnev looked at the wine, then turned to me and asked if I could ask Nixon to have the waiter come back with the bottle of *Stolichnaya*. Nixon for his part turned to me: “*Viktor, there’s a button over there by the door. Would you press it for me?*” I did press it and the waiter returned instantly with a quizzical look on his face. Nixon asked him to bring back the vodka. The Filipino brought “our” opened bottle, filled our glasses and was about to take it away again. At this point Brezhnev said to him, in Russian, something like “*leave it on the table and we’ll figure out what to do with it.*” I quickly translated this before the waiter had the time to disappear through the door. In short, by the time the dinner ended, we had polished away this bottle of *Stolichnaya*.⁵

The text can be read as a simple anecdote, which is what it is. But there are other possible readings. First of all, it should be noted that Sukhodrev is revealing details of the dinner that in all likelihood did not reach the public when it took place, an argument that Thiéry (1985) would surely use in favour of his objection to interpreters writing their memoirs. We cannot guess the impact the anecdote could have had on the

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⁵ Translated from Russian by Igor Korchilov, in personal communication with the authors.

American people, had they known about the substance abuse – by any standards –, at their President’s table, but we know of other examples of the importance that non-verbal issues may have, as Jönsson (1990, p. 46) puts it:

...On one occasion during Khrushchev’s 1959 goodwill visit to the United States, the Soviet premier, in order to symbolize friendship between the two countries, clasped his hands above his head in a traditional Russian gesture of friendship. Many Americans misunderstood the message, thinking he was imitating a boxer who had just knocked out his opponent.

We could also say that Sukhodrev’s text demonstrates the dominance of Russian customs even when the Soviets are the guests, not the hosts, although this could also be interpreted as a lack of courtesy on the part of Brezhnev because he imposes his (heavy) drinking habit on his host as part of Soviet negotiating style. The scene shows the relationship of apparent comradeship, perhaps attributable to Soviet ways, between Brezhnev and his interpreter, when the former tries to obtain the latter’s complicity to get the bottle of vodka back from the waiter. We have explored elsewhere (Baigorri-Jalón, 2000, p. 211-267) the conditions that totalitarian leaders expected from interpreters, among which total dependability and trust were of paramount importance. Curiously enough, Nixon calls the interpreter “Viktor”, which gives an idea of the close relationship established between the principals and their interpreters. But there is also a point which we could identify as ‘professional risk’ of the interpreter, who is forced to drink a considerable amount of vodka while he is working. Alcohol may have an effect on the interpreter’s cognitive skills necessary for his immediate performance apart from a prolonged effect – if the exception became the rule – on the interpreter’s health.

To turn to another aspect of the difficult and stressful work of these high-level interpreters, we pay attention now to the fact that they had to perform tasks that were beyond the usual interpreting functions. We will mention briefly three examples from Ji’s memoirs. He occasionally interpreted “Western movies while they were playing on-screen for Mao’s wife” (Ji, 2008, p. 261). In September 1956 he was assigned to guide and interpret for the premier of Nepal’s bodyguard and his personal servants (Ji, 2008, p. 147). And he played the role of “bodyguard” himself in 1961 while the Chinese delegation attended to the Conference of Geneva and they learned that there might be an

another attempt to assassinate Premier Zhou. In his words (Ji, 2008, p. 205): “We young men –secretaries, translators, and interpreters – were organized into a security force and took turns patrolling the grounds of the premier’s villa every night, armed with a loaded handgun”.

We can say that these interpreters were seen as clerical assistants. Their working conditions were intolerable and they undertook a large variety of language tasks, most of them very complex and arduous. The external conditions that weighed on the interpreters were accompanied by internal conditions linked to support for and loyalty towards their clients.

VI. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is important to recognize that high-level interpreting during the Cold War is intimately related to wider settings in international politics. In fact, we have adopted the view that in the general context of the high-level meetings during this historical period, these interpreted communicative events should also be considered as social and political events. A simple overview of photographic records of those years shows interpreters sharing the stage with political leaders, thus becoming participants in the political events. The number of graphic illustrations portraying interpreters playing their role between famous leaders is a typical feature of interpreter memoirs. Certainly, they were very aware of their visible role as well as their excellent reputation, and the publication of their memoirs is a telling example. As has been pointed out by scholars who have studied the consequences of use and abuse of power that translation and interpreting can give rise to, we have to consider the contested nature of the interpreters’ role in these political contexts who “often find themselves simultaneously caught in both camps, representing both the institutions in power and those seeking empowerment” (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002, p. xix).

As a first approach to the subject, this article has sought to identify a profile for high-level interpreters during the Cold War. One of the conclusions reached is the relation between diplomacy and interpreting in modern and not so modern history (Harris, 1993; Korchilov, 1997; Roland, 1999; Palazhchenkom, 1997; Balliu, 2005; Baigorri &

Fernández, 2008). These interpreters' profiles have in common with their counterparts in other settings the usual linguistic and cultural ingredients, as well as the secrecy of their work, which was an obsession during the Cold War, but they also have other characteristics that were not necessarily shared by their colleagues working in conference interpreting settings, including at the international organisations. One such characteristic was their association with the political regime (or Party line) of their principals – the only loyalty guarantee those leaders would accept in the screening process. Association with the political regime and loyalty to their leaders meant that they felt part of the delegation (they were regularly briefed before the meetings) and that they approached negotiations with the aims and ideas previously established by their political leaders. That does not mean, as Baker pointed out (1997, p. 114-115), that they were free of stress associated with “the tension and acrimony that often pervade” those encounters, stress that also derives from the fact that the interpreter can be monitored by participants and sometimes by a wider audience.

Those factors, undoubtedly, affect the interpreters' performance, but we should not infer that they would betray the contents of the utterances they interpreted. If anything – as we have seen above – they were faithful to the original with a vengeance, since that was the best way to serve their leaders' interests. Their involvement in the political agendas of their leaders and the fear of dissent – supposing they held opposing views – in totalitarian regimes made them overlook working conditions that would have been unacceptable for other colleagues working in other settings and under other circumstances.

Their preparation required constant training, as was also the case for their 'Western' counterparts, but for them it was not easy in the stifling cultural environment where they lived, under personal and professional stress and often poorly fed. These working conditions included limitless working hours (even to the detriment of the quality of their work and of their own health), the performance of tasks that went beyond interpreting, and the absence of reasonable compensations in cash or kind. When we read Ji's memoirs, we can see the ordeals he endured throughout his life, including the fact that he was not rewarded as he deserved. In this context, it seems inevitable to make comparisons between the situation of these interpreters and that of their coeval conference interpreters in international organisations, but the fact remains that by

applying Western standards to a Chinese, or more broadly, to a communist context, we lose sight of the marked difference of worldviews, as Hsu pointed out (1977, p. 205) concerning the paradox that “we only see China and the Chinese through the colored glasses of individualism”.

The professional standards of conference interpreting were being defined according to the rules established by Western pioneers of AIIC, but the examples we have shown here prove that there were very different lines of development of the profession and that we should conclude that there is not a single model that can be applicable to all situations. In this sense, the profile of the very visible interpreter that we have studied in this article seems to have an intrinsic relationship with international diplomatic negotiations in general and with an utilitarian conception of foreign policy in particular. If flexibility and adaptability have been key features of the interpreters throughout history, perhaps we should also apply a flexible approach when trying to define a yardstick for their profile and conclude that it all depends on a set of conditions that are – like historical events – unique and unrepeatable.

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