



Interpreting and translating in conflict zones challenge traditional role models and reveal the enormous potential of power and ambivalence inherent in the mediation activity. This article discusses interpreting situations in Russian prisoner of war camps of the First World War as depicted by prisoners from the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. By highlighting the social functions ascribed to and taken on by the interpreting figures, it will be shown that language mediation was not only constitutive for the implementation and running of the camp organization, but also discloses the ambivalent features which make communication under coercive conditions.

**KEY WORDS:** prisoner of war camp, First World War, interpreting, Bourdieu, power relations.

# «He became our interpreter, our spokesman, he had a leading role!»<sup>1</sup>

## Interpreting in Russian Prisoner of War Camps of World War I

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*La interpretación y la traducción en las zonas de conflicto ponen en cuestión los tradicionales modelos de rol y desvelan el poder y la ambivalencia de la actividad de la mediación. El presente artículo analiza las situaciones de interpretación en los campos de prisioneros de guerra de la Primera Guerra Mundial referidas por los prisioneros del Imperio alemán y la Monarquía austrohúngara en sus memorias. Al subrayar las funciones sociales atribuidas a y desempeñadas por los/las intérpretes, se afirma que la mediación lingüística no es sólo un factor constitutivo para la implementación y el funcionamiento de los campos de prisioneros de guerra, sino que también desvela el carácter ambivalente de la comunicación bajo condiciones hostiles.*

<sup>1</sup> Granach, 2007: 297. The quotation is drawn from a situation depicting the war conflict between Italy and the Habsburg Monarchy.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *campos de prisioneros de guerra, Primera Guerra Mundial, interpretación, Bourdieu, relaciones de poder.*

## INTRODUCTION

Interpreting in situations of war and conflict has been increasingly on the research agenda in Translation Studies, challenging persisting ideas of social roles of interpreters in more general terms. Such traditional role models, on the one hand, epitomise the «perfect» performance of language experts in the interpreting booth of big international conferences; on the other, they continue to evoke features of language mediation which refer to stereotypes such as «traduttore, traditore» — or, those who translate are traitors —, thus revealing the ambivalence of interpreting between the various groups of interest involved.

Vast migration movements and the increasing deployment of interpreters in areas of conflict have contributed to break up such fossilized ideas, resulting in a more differentiated picture of the translatorial work. This opening up has happened not least thanks to the steadily establishing research paradigm of translation sociology, which allows for questioning social categories such as (in)visibility of translators, governance of communication or impartiality of the translation and interpreting activity. In a first step, the myth of the invisible interpreter and her or his objectivity were disputed in a series of empirical studies (e.g. Valero-Garcés, 2007; Bartłomiejczyk, 2017; Zhan and Zeng, 2017). Moreover, the reflexive awareness of the physical closeness of the communication partners involved resulted in studying the spatial arrangement, and the behaviour in terms of the distance between the individuals participating in the interpreting situation as well as the body language were detected as elements which potentially govern the communication (Askew and Salama-Carr, 2011; Kinnunen, 2017). One of the consequences resulting from these insights

is that «negotiating» the communicative and social roles has become centre-stage (Wolf, 2011: 3), and translation sociological concepts including translation ethics and prestige or status have experienced an increased theoretical engagement (Martín Ruano, 2017; Prunč, 2017; Tissot, 2017).

Highly globalised conflicts such as the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the continued occupation of Palestine as well as the so-called «war on terror» in the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York of 2001 have additionally foregrounded the complexity of the translators' and interpreters' roles in the construction and representation of conflict situations. The topics dealt with in the wake of the epistemological insights gained from these broadened reflections include the discussion of cultures of military coalitions (in the context of the Second World War, Kujamäki, 2016), the nature of interrogation and torture in war (Andrew and Tobia, 2014), or the constraints laid upon interpreters in conflict zones challenging ethical behaviour (Inghilleri, 2008; Snellman, 2016).

This article will discuss the research strand of interpreters in conflict zones in the context of communication in the First World War, with a specific focus on German and Habsburg prisoners of war in Russian detention camps. While interpreting will be revealed as a construed activity which decisively helped to implementing and fostering the (structural) organization of a camp, the interpreter figures will be discussed against the background of their particular function in the camp setting. In particular, it will be highlighted that interpreting in the prisoners of war camps was not only an ambivalent activity, but also contributed to (further) shaping the antagonisms between the individuals involved.

## LANGUAGE AND INTERPRETING IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In history and presence, armies are more than often compound of multilingual troop units: Alexander the Great's vast conquering expeditions with militaries from a variety of (conquered) countries, the centuries-long Roman conquests (Wiotte-Franz, 2001), the composition of Byzantine armies, or of the Napoleonic wars (Schreiber, 2016) as well as the multinational nature of the army of Empires such as the Habsburg Monarchy (Wolf, 2015) are only a few examples. These armies witness not only the encounter of many different languages, but also varying religious confessions, various social origins, distinct military traditions and diverging ideologies. In order to mould a powerful and effective troop out of such a kind of rich conglomerate diversity, it has been necessary to invest painstaking labour of integration.

Problems of integration appeared particularly virulent in the context of colonial soldiers. Regarding the First World War, more than half a million soldiers from various colonies participated in the war, including 500,000 from French, and about 150,000 from British colonies. Most of them were recruited by force, and the colonial authorities were repeatedly confronted with collective, armed resistance. Once incorporated in the Army, a big part of the colonial soldiers especially from Africa found themselves soon in traumatic situations: many French officers were convinced that due to the Africans' assumed under-developed nerve system [sic], they were particularly apt for being deployed as «shock troops» in attacks at the front; as a consequence, calculations say that the risk of being killed in the combat was 2,5 times higher for West African infantrymen than for their French comrades (Koller,

2014:16). Many soldiers struggled with language problems, as in most cases the colonial soldiers' mother tongue was another than English or French. Additionally, language acquisition was highly ambivalent, as the colony and its officers understood language learning as a «civilizing mission». Conversely, good language skills were paired with easier access to knowledge and information, thus representing a potential danger for colonial power (Fogarty, 2016).

As a matter of fact, in the Great War communication, as in any other transnational war, was of paramount importance, including languages at the front, interpretation and translation. The mediation activity *qua* interpreting and translating in the First World War until recently has been a quite under-researched field. The series *Palgrave Studies in Languages at War* at Palgrave Macmillan deals in detail with the question of language in terms of communication with the home front; propaganda and language manipulation; the representation of the war in letters and diaries; or the documentation of language change (Declercq and Walker, 2016; Walker and Declercq, 2016), yet, without an explicit focus on interpreting or translation. Other publications look at specific issues such as the French interpreters in the British-French Allied Coalition (Heimburger, 2012a) or at the depiction of interpreters on WW I's postcards and private pictures (Heimburger, 2014; Kelly, 2014; Wolf, 2014). Peter Cowley (2016) examines three autobiographical and fictionalized accounts of World War I, written by French interpreters, as representations of the role of the interpreter in more general terms.

Military interpreters in the First World War were often soldiers or officers, with civilians recruited from the local population at a later stage of the war (Kraus, 2009: 790). Both kinds of interpreters handled communication among

the troops on one side, and, in case of territorial occupations, with the local authorities, on the other. They were also involved in interrogations of prisoners and renegades, either by conducting the interrogation or by interpreting it. Others drew up dossiers on the prisoners or analysed translated documents captured in the wake of a combat. Those working behind the front lines provided for the acquisition of food for the troops and the allocation of medical service; others were involved in censoring the mail of prisoners of war, in doing propaganda work or in training interpreters for deployment at the front (see, e.g. Wolf, 2014; van den Noortgate, 2016).

One of the major settings of interpreting during the First World War were prisoners of war camps. During (and after) the war, an estimated six to eight million men were held in camps as prisoners of war — yet historians have only recently begun to examine this captivity experience seriously (see Jones, 2011). The research on prisoners of war in detention camps during the First World War touches on various dimensions, including military questions, issues around foreign policy and nationality, and economic aspects in terms of the deployment of POWs as forced labour (Oltmer, 2006: 9); yet, questions pertaining to issues of language mediation are very scarce. This is all the more surprising as POW camps entailed an exceptional degree of contact with people from other nationalities, including the civilian population and the military.

In view of the multiple forms of interpreting practices, Franziska Heimburger (2012a) elaborated a typology of the interpreting activity in the First World War, distinguishing between the two categories «go-between» and «gatekeeper». Once the «go-between» is understood as «a person who acts as agent or intermediary for two people or groups in a transaction or

dealing» (Collins Online, 2018), the manifold tasks which potentially can be ascribed to this activity are being unfolded. Interpreters are «go-betweens» by virtue of their activity, or, as Heimburger says, «go-betweens are individuals who create and/or maintain connections between culturally and, practically always, linguistically distant social entities». Furthermore, go-betweens are unique because they know both sides, and, consequently, find themselves «in a situation of ill-defined status between two larger entities» (Heimburger, 2012a: 23). The second metaphor, «gatekeeper», is stronger linked to a theoretical framework (Heimburger mainly refers it to Kurt Lewin's conceptual reflections on gatekeeping in the publishing process and the literature based on Lewin; ib.: 27), and especially to Cecilia Wadensjö who describes gatekeepers as «intermediaries between lay people and institutions» (Wadensjö, 1998: 67), particularly foregrounding their control function.<sup>1</sup> In my analysis, I will correlate the type of translation or interpreting with these metaphors.

## MEMOIR ACCOUNTS AS SOURCES

Interpreting as a socially constructed activity can be detected in the vast majority of autobiographical accounts of First World War fighters, no matter which languages or cultures are involved.<sup>2</sup> The corpus under investigation consists of accounts in German language written by soldiers and officers from the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy who fought in

<sup>1</sup> With reference to gatekeepers in medical interpreting, see e.g. Davidson, 2009; Pöllabauer, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> So far, memoir accounts of soldiers and officers of the First World War have been paid little attention in Translation/Interpreting Studies. One of the few pertinent works are Heimburger, 2012a, 2012b or Cowley, 2016, and especially Moniz, 2017.

the First World War. Memoir accounts as sources for investigating the question of language mediation in its widest sense call for a more detailed discussion of the genres involved. Mostly linked to questions of authenticity and representativeness, the medium chosen for research is of paramount importance (Stanzel, 1993: 14). Possibilities of genre in the war context include autobiography, memoir, diary, letter, poem, novel, drama; for the present analysis, the first two categories are most pertinent. Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as «[a] retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality» (Lejeune, 1982: 193). According to Lejeune, a work must implicitly or explicitly state itself to be an autobiography in order to be included within the genre. Other scholars, like Stuart Bates, for instance, rather believe that a series of narrative accounts, though not intended to be an autobiography per se, can be categorized as such because they contain «a self-revealed personality, after thorough reconsideration» (Bates, 1937: 5). Despite incongruities on definitions, there are some features common to the majority of autobiographical works. These include the grammatical perspective of the work, the identity of the self, and self-reflection and introspection (Berryman, 1999: 71). Memoirs, on the other hand, may only tell the story of a finite span of time within the individual's life, and will usually focus more on his or her memories, feelings or experiences (Todorova, 2014: 222). The statements made in a memoir mostly claim to be factual. In the context of the present analysis, in most cases it is difficult to distinguish between the two genres. In any case all accounts were written on the basis of the (ex-)soldiers' own personal experiences in POW camps in Russia. Moreover,

about half of the texts under study, even though they can be ascribed to one of the two genres, were not written by authors who performed themselves the interpreting or translating activity, but rather described it as performed by other inmates.

An analysis of war autobiographies or memoirs could be done on the basis of a series of questions, such as: Do they reflect the immediate experience of the narrator? Or are there aspects which block off such kind of representation? Walter Benjamin is convinced that immediate experience does not exist at all:

Wasn't it obvious at the end of the War that people came back silenced from the field? Not richer — poorer in mediate experience. What ten years later poured into the flood of war books was anything but experience passed from mouth to mouth. (Benjamin, 1977: 439, qtd. in Rogge, 2016: II)<sup>3</sup>

Thus Benjamin claims that immediate experience can be conveyed only in oral form; in written form it is no longer immediate. This brings us to the central question: Can war experiences be described at all? This question is unavoidably linked to the problem of violence, the main feature of warfare. Is violence representable? By asking this question, we become aware that war is construed as a violent borderline experience which eludes the conventions of representation in societies which are fundamentally understood as being governed by civilian people, not military. The experience of violence discerns the war from life before and

<sup>3</sup> Hatte man nicht bei Kriegsende bemerkt, daß die Leute verstummt aus dem Felde heim kamen? Nicht reicher — ärmer an mittelbarer Erfahrung. Was sich dann zehn Jahre später in der Flut der Kriegsbücher ergossen hat, war alles andere als Erfahrung gewesen, die von Mund zu Mund geht. (All translations are mine, MW)

after, and discerns the veteran from the civilian (Clauss, 2016: 31). This, in turn, evokes the next question: Which is the role of the moment when the war account was written? Here a distinction must be made between oral and written accounts. Admittedly, oral accounts are also processed experience, but written accounts offer a form of experience based on particular reflection and particular linguistic design. In this context, it seems relevant whether the autobiographies or memoirs were drawn up already during the war or under the impression of combat operations, or sometime after the war. The time distance is therefore a central element in the representation of war events and war experiences. Of the texts explored, about 80 percent were written in a span of 1 to 15 years after the war.

### THE REPRESENTATION OF THE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING FIGURE IN MEMOIR ACCOUNTS

The focus of this study is on interpreting and translating of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Russian prisoner of war camps. The analysis draws on Franziska Heimburger's distinction of the two metaphors «go-between» and «gatekeeper» as well as on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (1992) and is based on the exploration of about 100 autobiographical reports and memoirs of soldiers and officers from the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy who fought in the First World War and published their accounts between 1917 and 1988.<sup>4</sup> About 85 percent of all explored texts include passages which refer to language or interpreting/translating situations. The selec-

<sup>4</sup> For a sample of bibliographies on German and Habsburg POW in Russia see Nachtigal, 2003, Wurzer, 2005 or Leidinger and Moritz, 2008.

tion criteria for the inclusion of passages in the present paper refer to the representability of a large variety of interpreting situations within the realm of the two metaphors.

The presence of a multitude of nationalities led many authors to detailed descriptions of this coexistence under various perspectives.<sup>5</sup> They often apply a stereotypical outlook to illustrate the national diversity present in the camps. In his book *Da geht ein Mensch* (2007) Alexander Granach<sup>6</sup> presents an example of this tendency. Its satirical undertone hints to the playful coexistence of the manifold nationalities on the one hand, and to the notorious nationalist conflicts resulting from it, on the other:

The life of these eighteen thousand Austrian soldiers of all nationalities was gradually shaped by a certain style. The virtual masters among us were the Bosnians. They were tall, beautiful men who wore red fezes and talked fluently Italian. They were followed by the Dalmatians who were always in a good mood, drank wine and who also talked fluently Italian. The Czechs segregated themselves, they wore their Sokol<sup>7</sup> —badges and openly talked about the break from Austria and about

<sup>5</sup> For details on the structure and organization of camp societies see Cartellieri, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Granach (1890–1945) was born Jessaja Gronach in Austrian Galicia to Jewish parents. After serving in the Habsburg Army during WW I, he entered films in 1922 and rose to theatrical prominence at the Volksbühne in Berlin. When Hitler came to power, he fled first to the Soviet Union, then to the USA. He died in 1945 in New York.

<sup>7</sup> The Sokol movement (Sokol in Czech means falcon) is an all-age gymnastics organization founded in Prague in 1862. Through lectures, discussions, and group outings provided physical, moral, and intellectual training for the nation. The movement quickly spread across all the regions populated by Slavic cultures, especially in the Habsburg Empire, and played an important part in the development of Czech nationalism. During WW I, many Sokol members were active in persuading the Czechs to defect from the Austro-Hungarian army to the Russian side.

national liberation. [...] Then there were the South Slavs: Slovenes, Serbs, Croatians. They scolded the Monarchy and called the old Emperor an idiot. (Granach, 2007: 304-305)<sup>8</sup>

In the context of Habsburg soldiers, the Empire's «many-languaged soul» (Wolf, 2015) is reflected in the naturalness of many of its members to understand a variety of languages. Ricco Pizzini in his account *Durch! März bis Dezember 1917. Ein Erleben im Weltkrieg* describes a scene, in which the author, while being captured, tries to employ his experiences rooted in the Monarchy's multilinguality:

The Russians were very agitated and kept shouting at me. As far as I could understand with my scarce knowledge of army-Slavic — the k.u.k. Esperanto which is a mixture of all idioms of the people united in the old army — they were all outraged by the air attacks against their infantry, which apparently have caused them many casualties. (Pizzini, 1934: 61)<sup>9</sup>

The example shows that language knowledge was essential, from the moment of capture to the setup and implementation of a prisoners'

<sup>8</sup> Das Leben dieser achtzehntausend österreichischen Soldaten aller Nationalitäten bekam einen eigenen Stil. Die eigentlichen Herren unter uns waren die Bosnier. Das waren große, schöne Männer. Sie trugen rote Feze und sprachen fließend italienisch. Gleich nach ihnen kamen die Dalmatiner, die immer guter Laune waren, Wein tranken und auch fließend italienisch sprachen. Die Tschechen hatten sich schon ganz abgesondert und trugen ihre Sokol-Abzeichen und sprachen offen vom Abfall von Österreich und von nationaler Befreiung. [...]. Dann waren da die Südslawen: Slowenen, Serben, Kroaten. Sie sprachen und schimpften auf die Monarchie und nannten den alten Kaiser einen Trottel.

<sup>9</sup> Die Russen waren sehr erregt und schrien fortwährend auf mich ein. Soviel ich mit meinen geringen Kenntnissen des Armee-slawischen verstand, des k.u.k. Esperanto, das eine Mischung aller Idiome der in den alten Armeen vereinigten Völker darstellte, waren sie alle sehr empört über die Fliegerangriffe gegen ihre Infanterie am Nachmittag, die sie scheinbar große Opfer gekostet hatten.

society in the camp. Many inmates embraced the opportunity to learn Russian or other languages during their captivity; others deepened their language skills (Leidinger and Moritz, 2008). In view of the naturalness of mastering a variety of languages as a soldier coming from the Habsburg Monarchy, it is not surprising that an author's proficient interpreting activity is depicted as something neutral, in the following case perhaps with a touch of complacency, not least in view of the particularly high number of languages the author masters. The example is drawn from Arnošt Kolman's autobiography *Die verirrte Generation. So hätten wir nicht leben sollen* (1979).<sup>10</sup>

When I felt better, I should be brought back to the camp, but the doctor wouldn't let me go. He needed an interpreter for the prisoners [...]. I had to interpret to Russian and from Russian, and not only in all eleven languages of the Austro-Hungarian people, but also into and from Turkish. Among the prisoners there were many Turks. [...] German and the Slavic languages were no problem, I got along with Hungarian and Romanian, because after one and a half years of captivity I had acquired a small vocabulary. (Kolman, 1979:74)<sup>11</sup>

In this description, the author presents him-

<sup>10</sup> Arnošt Kolman was born in Prague in 1892 to a Jewish family. After the Russian Revolution he worked as a party functionary in the Red Army. In 1976 he defected to Sweden where he died in 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Als sich mein Zustand gebessert hatte, sollte ich wieder ins Lager zurück, aber der Oberarzt ließ mich nicht. Er brauchte einen Dolmetscher für die Gefangenen [...]. Ich mußte ins Russische und aus dem Russischen dolmetschen, und das nicht nur in allen elf Sprachen der österreichisch-ungarischen Völker, sondern auch in und aus dem Türkischen. Unter den Gefangenen gab es viele Türken. [...] Mit Deutsch und den slawischen Sprachen hatte ich keine Schwierigkeiten, mit Ungarisch und Rumänisch kam ich irgendwie zurecht, denn nach einer halb Jahren Gefangenschaft hatte ich mir einen kleinen Wortschatz erworben.

self as a par-excellence mediation figure, for whom his comprehensive language knowledge seems to be part of his every-day social practice. Simultaneously he makes the reader understand that his mediation activity was associated with prestige which allowed him to be equipped with some symbolic capital.

### *The interpreter/translator as go-between*

As Heimburger (2012a: 23) emphasizes, go-betweens focus on the entities they link and act as negotiators. In such situations, loyalty, as a category deeply endowed by questions related to the sociology of translation (Prunč, 2012: 341), becomes particularly relevant. However, this idea of loyalty seems far apart from the concept of loyalty as elaborated in Translation Studies which in the course of a translation process ideally integrates a loyal attitude towards the author/speaker, the commissioner of the translation and the addressee (Nord, 1989). At a later stage of the scholarly discussion the translator as a forth agent is included in the concept (Prunč, 2012: 342). In the context of military interpreting loyalty appears mostly reduced to a moral category situated primarily on one side of the agent groups involved in the interpreting process. In Franz Wlad's account *Meine Flucht durchs mongolische Sandmeer* (1918) loyalty gains particular momentum:

I had to work as an interpreter in many occasions, which helped me to refine my language skills in Russian. There were about 300 wounded Austrians and Hungarians most of whom didn't speak any Slavic language. In such a way I had the opportunity to keep in touch with our good comrades and support their wishes. (Wlad, 1918: 38)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Schon hier mußte ich vielfach als Dolmetscher dienen, wodurch ich mich in der russischen Sprache ver-

In these lines the author manifests his sense of allegiance to this wounded comrades, but at the same time he explicitly mentions that this interpreting activity also serves him to deepen his Russian speaking skills. Thus, by shaping his social position in the camp, he also gets the chance to embrace the opportunity to increase his cultural capital.

Similarly, cultural capital surfaces in interpreting scenes featuring the social category of negotiation, as shown in the following passage drawn from *Hilfsplatz D7 vermißt. Erlebnisse eines kriegsgefangenen Arztes* by Gustav Cartellieri. The author attempts to claim his rights as a doctor in the Russian camp of Ashgabad (today located in Turkmenistan) with the help of an interpreter:

At the central office a severe negotiation takes place during which I adopt all the words I know in Russian. [...] The next day, in my talk with the commandant, there is also an interpreter. I make him translate that, in case I travel to Kará-Kallá, as a doctor I would be entitled get a train ticket. [...] After a while, I become tired of all the questions, and, without giving the interpreter a chance to speak, I answer the question in Russian whether I would be willing to do my service directly with «da, da» — yes. [...] The commandant becomes suspicious and calls for a second interpreter. After that everything is fine. (Cartellieri, 1942:77)<sup>13</sup>

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vollkommen. Es waren gegen dreihundert verwundete Österreicher und Ungarn dort, die meist keine slawische Sprache beherrschten. So hatte ich viel Gelegenheit, mit unserer braven Mannschaft in Verbindung zu bleiben und ihre Wünsche zu unterstützen.

<sup>13</sup> Im Stationskommando gibt es dann eine schwere Verhandlung, bei der ich alle meine russischen Vokabeln spielen lasse. [...]. Bei meinem Gespräch mit dem Kommandanten am nächsten Tag ist auch ein Dolmetscher anwesend. Den lasse ich nun übersetzen, daß ich, falls ich nach Kará-Kallá fahren würde, als Arzt Anspruch auf ein Zugticket hätte. [...] Ich antworte einmal bei dieser

In this quotation, the author invents his own role in the interpreting scene: While negotiating to obtain his rights, he makes recourse to his modest language skills in Russian by even ruling out the camp's interpreter. Although not depicted in more detail, this interpreter presents some of the main characteristics of a go-between: he acts in a transaction as intermediary, obviously without any intention to intervene in the conversation, and, more importantly, is shown in a «relation between [his] strikingly improvised activit[y] and the robust institutions [he] help[s] to produce» (Schaffer et al., 2009: xi, qtd. in Heimburger, 2012a: 24). Moreover, the interpreter is confronted with mistrust both from the side of the author and the commandant. He tries to adopt his scarce language knowledge, thus investing cultural capital to some extent. Also, the scene reveals the ambivalence of the interpreting activity, which is dissipated only after negotiating the situation between the agents involved. Thereby social capital is being released which enables the negotiating process in the first place.

Likewise, the entanglement of cultural and social capital is deployed in a scene of the auto-biographical account *Die verirrte Generation. So hätten wir nicht leben sollen* (1979) of the already mentioned Arnošt Kolman. The author interprets several passages of a Russian newspaper for his comrades and is subsequently accused to be a spy by the Russian guards in the camp:

«Get up!» We jumped up and stood to attention. «Give me the German newspaper! Where did you get it from, you spy?»

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Hin- und Herfragerei, ohne den Dolmetsch erst zu Wort kommen zu lassen, direkt auf die russische Frage, ob ich Dienst machen will mit: «Da, da.» — Ja [...] Nun schöpf der Kommandant Verdacht und läßt noch einen zweiten Dolmetsch holen, und dann geht alles in Ordnung.

I explained that there were no German newspapers, and that I had read out from the *Russkoje Slovo* and translated some passages into German. (Kolman, 1979:76)<sup>14</sup>



As a go-between, Kolman certainly has knowledge of both sides involved in the situation and tries to avert the camp guards' suspicion while protecting himself and his co-inmates from potential punishment. Newspapers and books were equally sought-after in the prisoner of war camps. They can be considered a *topos* in the vast majority of memoir accounts and mostly disclose the social relationships employed in order to obtain and exploit this material with much skill. Newspapers are also in the centre of the report of Elsa Brändström (1888–1948), a Swedish philanthropist, known as the «Angel of Siberia» who introduced basic medical treatment especially for the German and Austrian POWs. The following example drawn from Brändström's narrative *Unter Kriegsgefangenen in Russland und Sibirien 1914–1920* (1922) illustrates the close connection between the go-between figure and the importance of social relationships in the camps:

Later the prisoners succeeded in smuggling Russian newspapers into the camp, with or without the commandant's permission. [They] were translated by a polyglot prisoner and were carried across the barracks like courier mail. In some camps the prisoners themselves edited daily, weekly and monthly journals which — often in a humorous and satirical way — dealt with daily facts and were also provided with excellent drawings. (Brändström, 1922:99)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> «Aufstehen!» Wir sprangen natürlich alle auf und standen in Habt-acht-Stellung. «Gib die deutsche Zeitung her! Woher hast du sie, du Spion?» Ich erklärte, daß wir keine deutsche Zeitung hätten, daß ich nur aus *Russkoje Slovo* vorgelesen und ins Deutsche übersetzt hätte.

<sup>15</sup> Später gelang es den Gefangenen, russische Zeitun-

The social bonding among the German and Habsburg prisoners is fostered through common knowledge drawn from Russian newspapers; thus, the non-institutionalized activity of the (anonymous) translator mediates between the strongly institutionalized camp system and various groups of prisoners otherwise ignorant of what was going on outside their captivity. At the same time, the scene foregrounds, at least to a certain extent, the power relations between the two entities. Brändström's narrative also illustrates the intricacy of the social capital, which, in connection with the cultural capital, is closely linked to translatorial competence, helping to establish and maintain a certain social life inside the camp.

### *The interpreter/translator as gatekeeper*

In the memoir narratives under investigation, the category of gatekeeper shows quite different features. Generally, as Heimburger stresses, gatekeepers are necessarily individuals with very detailed insight into the functioning and characteristics of the two sides they negotiate with. What sets them apart, however, is that they use this knowledge in order to decide which information is transmitted and which not. Thus, the crucial aspect of gatekeeping is the feature of control (Heimburger, 2012a: 29) which, quite understandably, is always associated with power. The German writer Edwin Erich Dwinger<sup>16</sup>

gen mit oder ohne Erlaubnis der Kommandanten in die Lager zu bringen. [Sie] wurden von einem sprachkundigen Gefangenen übersetzt und gingen wie Kurierpost von Baracke zu Baracke. In einigen Lagern gaben die Gefangenen selbst Tages-, Wochen- und Monatsschriften heraus, die die Tagessereignisse mit Humor und Satire behandelten und oft mit vorzüglichen Zeichnungen versehen waren.

<sup>16</sup> Dwinger was a German leading novelist. He served as a Cavalry officer in WW I and was captured by the Russians in 1915. Due to the fame he gained under the Nazi regime, he is considered a «prototype of nationalistic and fascist writer» (Böttcher, 1993: 156).

(1898–1981), in his much translated autobiographical account *Die Armee hinter Stacheldraht. Das Sibirische Tagebuch* (1929), depicts the dramatic sanitary situation in the wake of a typhus epidemic in the Siberian camp:

Dr Bockhorn [...] said, «well, now tell him please: We need an empty room as an isolation lazaret. [...]. We ask him for the last time. Then... then...». «What does the man say? The shrew mouse [nick name for the camp commander] falls upon slyly. «That the exasperation of the survivors can carry matters to extreme», I translate. [...] «You want to threaten me?» he shrieks. «Only inform!» I say coldly. (Dwinger, 1939: 113)<sup>17</sup>

The author-interpreter seems to have quite detailed knowledge of the subject matter he is called to negotiate on. His language competence allows for a margin of manoeuvre he and the doctor can operate in so that they can articulate the claims the doctor and some more people in the camp make in order to improve the disastrous health situation. The dialogue is endowed with powerful tensions, accentuated by the commander's aggressive behaviour. Negotiation as a key element of both the interpreting activity in POW camps and the gatekeeper pattern is the triggering moment in this scene; yet, not least due to the interpreting mode, it shifts into a forceful conflict-laden situation.

Especially in military action, power and control are quite closely connected. Control can take different shapes, including a manipulative and ambivalent variant. All these elements can

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Bockhorn [...] sagt «gut, nun sagen Sie ihm bitte: Wir brauchen einen leeren Raum als Isolierlazaret. [...] Wir bitten zum letztenmal. Dann aber... dann aber...». «Was sagt der Mann jetzt gerade?» fällt die Spitzmaus lauernd ein. «Daß die Erbitterung der Überlebenden zum äußersten führen kann!» übersetze ich. [...] «Ihr wollt mir drohen?» kreischt er. «Nur unterrichten!» sage ich kalt.

be detected in the following example. Herbert Volck (1894–1944)<sup>18</sup> in his *Die Wölfe. 33000 Kilometer Kriegsabenteuer in Asien* (1936) describes the controlling feature of an interpreter in the camp:

The tall dragoon is a general drudge: interpreter, supplier of food, commander of the [inner] guards. The Russians have respect for his length and his giant hands. [...]

The tall dragoon, our interpreter, accompanies the «woinski natschlnik» [military superior] to the staircase, then he comes back and assumes a mystery look. He keeps silent for a couple of minutes and grins to himself. This is how he acts when he has some news to tell us, and he can allow himself to do so, only that in most cases they do not prove true. We burst with tension [...]. (Volck, 1936: 48–49)<sup>19</sup>

The ambivalence inherent in this situation is obvious: the interpreter deals in an underhanded manner which results in a total control of the scene. He seems entitled to do so due to his detailed knowledge of both sides between which he mediates — the camp inmates and the Russian officer —, on the basis of his language skills, on the one hand, and on his multiple roles in the camp which enable him to be familiar with much of what is going on in

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Volck was a writer and journalist from Dorpat (today in Estonia). He is said to have had close contacts with Hermann Göring. In 1943 Volck was arrested due to his critical stance towards the conduct of war and was deported to Buchenwald where he was murdered in 1944.

<sup>19</sup> Der lange Dragoner ist Mädchen für alles: Dolmetsch, besorgt Verpflegung, kommandiert die Wache. Die Russen haben Respekt vor seiner Länge, seinen riesigen Händen. [...] Der lange Dragoner, der unser Dolmetscher ist, begleitet den «woinski natschalnik» bis zur Treppe, dann kommt er wieder und macht ein geheimnisvolles Gesicht. Einige Minuten schweigt er und grinst vor sich hin. So macht er es immer, wenn er Neuigkeiten hat, und kann sich's leisten, wirklich; er hat immer als erster die Neuigkeiten, nur stimmen sie meistens nicht. Wir platzen vor Spannung [...].

his surroundings, on the other. The interpreter masterly controls the situation, also on the basis of his cultural capital which is involved through his language proficiency. Thus, the interpreting activity helps him to become centre stage, and, additionally, his appearance obviously allows him to be the holder of some portion of symbolic capital within both groups involved.

A frequent case of gatekeeping by military interpreters during the First World War relates to intervening in the friction between the two parties participating in a scene. In many cases, the interpreter interferes in the tone of what is said in order to tune down the unpleasant atmosphere which might be unfavourable for the existence of the co-inmates in the camp. The author of the following and last example shows such a scene. Gustav Krist (1894–1937?) was an Austrian adventurer, carpet-dealer and writer. In November 1914 he was severely wounded and captured by the Russians at the San river defensive line on the Eastern front. Krist wrote his memoirs *Pascholl Plenny! /Vorwärts Gefangener!* (1936) on the basis of his war diaries. The following scene follows the arrival of a group of war prisoners at the camp:

After the newcomers had waited for about an hour, Starschi Kusmin appeared, [...] also called «the swine», perhaps the biggest scoundrel who ever had a soldier uniform on his body. He gave a speech to Gurk's [the author's] transport group, which subsequently was translated by a banned Volga German soldier in a considerably milder tone. (Krist, 1936: 248)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Nachdem die Neuankömmlinge so über eine Stunde gewartet hatten, erschien der Starschi Kusmin, [...] auch kurz das «Schwein» genannt, wohl der größte Halunken, der je eine Soldatenuniform am Körper hatte, und hielt an Gurks Transport eine Ansprache, die nachher von einem wolgadeutschen verbannten Soldaten, stark gemildert, übersetzt wurde.

In this passage, gatekeeping is performed on a rhetorical level, a most recurrent feature in the adoption of this metaphor. The interpreter clearly opts in favour of his co-inmates, although apparently he still does not know most of them personally. The Starschi's «welcome speech» probably followed the usual, mostly violent discourse of insult and threat which was mitigated by the interpreter. The new prisoners might have understood from the tone of the original message that the interpreter had tuned down the Russian officer's aggressive and insulting language. Gatekeeping can thus be an important means to elucidate the space between the individuals involved and the context they operate in.

## CONCLUSION

The activity of interpreters — both official and ad-hoc — in prisoners of war camps play a constitutive role in the establishment of the camp organization and is, not surprisingly, mostly shaped by distinct power relations. The analysis had a focus on the interpreting activity in Russian POW camps which, to my knowledge, so far have not been studied under a translation or interpreting perspective. Despite this spatial focus and the limited number of examples analysed within the realm of a research paper, it can be cautiously asserted that interpreting in detention camps in the First World War was an intricate activity embracing a series of different fields of action. The interpreter figure appeared as a socially constructed individual who struggles for a space of movement in order to understand — and mediate between — the different worlds both inside and outside the camp. Moreover, many soldiers deployed as interpreters performed tasks which went far beyond their area of responsibility as

language mediator; the multiple social roles mostly resulted from the strong concentration of the interpreter's social capital.<sup>21</sup>

The discussion of the features characteristic for interpreters as «go-betweens» and «gatekeepers» helped to foreground the complexity of the interpreting activity as a social practice in a semi-institutionalized environment. The interpreters were, by virtue of their activity, mediators operating day and night. Mediating *qua* interpreting in many cases was linked to questions of loyalty. The social category of loyalty in the context of interpreting is often linked with high expectations, as only few soldiers disposed of proficient language skills and many comrades hoped to be supported by the interpreters in a series of situations, as has been shown. At the same time, however, interpreters appeared suspect precisely due to their language skills which allowed them to control the situation in a stronger way than some of the inmates would expect. The ambivalence resulting from such situations could go as far as alleged espionage. Nevertheless it has also been shown that a great deal of the interpreters enjoyed a certain prestige, which, especially in connection with question of status, resulted in a high symbolic capital.

The adoption of the two metaphorical figures of the «go-between» and the «gatekeeper» has also revealed that one of the main characteristics of the first group is negotiation, especially between culturally remote social entities, both claiming to get to better know the other side, and pushing one's own position further by

<sup>21</sup> Beyond the examples included in this paper, the corpus includes various interpreters with multiple tasks: they helped wounded soldiers, consulted the civil population on the advancement of various military units or on the position of enemy troops. In many cases interpreters were liaison officers and as such served in the military administration, delivering messages between the belligerent units.

contributing to the gradual institutionalization of the interpreting role. On the other hand, a «gatekeeper» was usually equipped with good knowledge of the various parties involved, which often allowed him to have a certain control on the social setup in the camp. This, in turn, could contribute to foregrounding the relative power his activity was endowed with and to show in more detail in which way the interpreter himself helped to construct a more or less clearly defined position in the camp hierarchy. Subsequent explorations of the interpreting practices — especially under a translation sociological perspective — in the First World War could yield valuable insights into the social constructedness of the interpreting figure and the potential of manipulation inherent in any translation activity in coercive situations within POW camps or, more generally, in a war setup.

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