Opening the Black Box: Oral Histories of How Soldiers and Civilians Learned to Translate and Interpret During Peace Support Operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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This paper uses 51 oral history interviews with former military personnel, language trainers and locally-recruited interpreters to explore how soldiers and civilians were educated into becoming translators and interpreters who worked in support of the multi-national military force that first deployed into Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. The peace operations took various forms as the nature of the Bosnia-Herzegovina mission changed but had a constant need for language support, which it met by combining a small number of soldiers trained in the local language(s) and a much larger number of local people with formal or informal education in English. The paper shows how different groups of people on whom the need for translation and interpreting had an impact (military linguists; military non-linguists; professional translators and interpreters; local interpreters who began work without professional training in interpreting) formed norms about the role of translators/interpreters through their education. Though each milieu led to a different translating and/or interpreting subjectivity, all language intermediaries recognised their work as a contingent and difficult activity while non-linguists were less able to conceive of language learning and translation/interpreting as more than a "black box" activity of finding equivalence. Using these findings as an illustration, the paper argues for the greater use of oral history in researching adult education and training on the grounds that an interview-based biographical approach provides insights into the long-term impact of learning.

The first commander of British troops deployed on a peace support mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bob Stewart, wrote in his memoir that one of his first preparations for setting up his new battalion headquarters had been "to get MOD [Ministry of Defence] backing to take on a considerable number of native-speaking interpreters, probably with a mix of Serb, Croat and Muslim backgrounds."[2] After a

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[2] Bob Stewart, *Broken Lives: A Personal View of the Bosnian Conflict* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 37.

briefing by the Canadian commander of another United Nations battalion based at Daruvar in Croatia, Stewart decided to recruit at least 15 locally-employed interpreters for the British battalion, which would open its own base in November 1992. By the end of the year, British forces in former Yugoslavia had access to one military interpreter with a degree in Serbo-Croat who had been serving with a UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) field ambulance in Croatia, three other Serbo-Croat/Serbian speakers who were identified in the British Army and deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) in late 1992, and approximately a dozen "military colloquial speakers," the first tranche of soldiers and officers who had volunteered for a crash course in "Serbo-Croat" and an individual six-month tour of duty in BiH.[3] This marked the beginning of fifteen years of British military involvement in BiH during UN and NATO-led peace support missions, and fifteen years of meeting the heavy demand for translation and interpreting that operations in a linguistic area like the former Yugoslavia required.

Where most foreigners working overseas do not speak the language(s) of their destination, written and oral communication relies on "language intermediaries" – people who are able to act as translators (by mediating between languages in writing) and/or interpreters (by mediating between languages orally). The language intermediaries who assisted military operations in BiH and other deployments such as Iraq and Afghanistan fell into several groups. They represented varying professional backgrounds in which competences were acquired through different kinds of education, training and learning. Some were professional soldiers with language skills and others were civilians: a few of these civilians were professional translators and/or interpreters but many others had only a formal or informal language education, not role-specific training. As this paper will demonstrate, the individuals coming out of each of these milieus had learned to conceive of the role of language intermediary in different ways – or had acquired, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, a different "habitus" or naturalised set of behaviours and beliefs.[4]

The paper is based on oral history interviews with 51 people who had contact with languages and peace operations in BiH: British and Danish soldiers (linguists and non-linguists), civilian language trainers, and locally-employed "interpreters" who worked for elements of the multinational military force. At an early point in these interviews, each speaker was usually asked to talk about their experiences of language education from childhood onwards, situating themselves as a learner (and

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[3] Although Croatia had declared independence in 1991 and declared Croatian to be a separate language from Serbian, British military trainers and learners still referred to one "Serbo-Croat" language in the early 1990s. The paper therefore uses this term when presenting the perceptions of this group of interviewees.

[4] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

sometimes a teacher) as they did so. The biographical and broadly chronological approach of the interviews also asked speakers in detail about learning later in life which was directly relevant to the role(s) they had performed in BiH, e.g. studying "Serbo-Croat" for the first time or learning interpreting skills. Interviews were transcribed and coded in Qualitative Data Analysis software for themes relevant to the study as a whole such as language learning experiences; role perception and performance for language intermediaries; ideas about the translation process (to name some of the most frequently recurring codes). Two empirical research questions emerge from this interviewing technique: a) how was the role of language intermediary conceived, and b) how were potential language intermediaries educated into conceptualising and filling that role? Answering these questions simultaneously helps to answer a further, methodological question: c) how does oral history contribute to the study of education and learning?

Foreigners in unfamiliar language environments need language intermediaries because translation and interpreting require human judgement. Both interpreting and translation involve recognising meanings in the original text (the "source language") and presenting those meanings in order to be comprehensible in another language (the "target language"). Non-linguists often understand translation as a "black box"-style process in which every unit of meaning in one language has an equivalent meaning in another, so that the translator or indeed the language learner needs only to match the equivalents and then rearrange the units of meaning into a grammatical sentence. This idea still underlies simple machine translation and is reflected in the device of the phrase book, which provides many non-linguists' only exposure to an unfamiliar touristic language ("What's the Greek for X?"). British soldiers deploying to countries where English was not an official language were issued with a similar device, the language card.

Translatability is usually, if not always, more problematic. Against the universalist idea that language has two layers and a single "deep structure" of meaning that can be represented through many different structures on the surface level (i.e. different languages), many translation scholars argue that because "individual languages embody and therefore impose different conceptualizations of the world" there can never be fully adequate translations.[5] A simple example of incomplete translatability would be to ask a speaker of Croatian the English word for "*sigurnost*," which can be translated as either "security" or "safety."[6] Somewhat more complex would be to ask our language intermediary the Croatian word for "security." The dictionary translation, of course, is "sigurnost." Yet, to fully

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[5] Theo Hermans, "Translatability," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. Mona Baker (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 301.
[6] The same double meaning affects the words *bezbjednost* in Bosnian/Montenegrin and *bezbednost* in Serbian, the three other languages that have materialised in the place of "Serbo-Croat" since 1991.

understand the sociolinguistics of contemporary Croatia, one might further explain that "sigurnost" became the sole equivalent for "security" during the prescriptivist/nationalist reform of the Croatian language after 1990, when the president who won Croatia's first multi-party elections began separating Croatia from the socialist Yugoslav state. Until then, the Croatian "sigurnost" had co-existed with the Serbian "bezbednost" in public Yugoslav life, which recognised the so-called western and eastern variants of Serbo-Croat (today's Croatian and Serbian languages) as equally valid. The Yugoslav secret police (the Department for State Security) had been named *Uprava državne sigurnosti* in Croatian, *Uprava državne bezbednosti* in Serbian, but known even in Croatia by its Serbian acronym UDBA. A Croatian speaker even today might recognise "bezbednost" even though s/he did not use it or consider it part of contemporary Croatian. With certain other words – "what's the Croatian for 'airport'?" – the intermediary would have to explain instead that governmental Croatian had instituted the neologism *zračna luka* after 1990 but that many people who identified themselves as Croatian-speakers still actively use the old Serbo-Croat/Bosnian/Serbian word *aerodrom*. These examples illustrate how much space for agency can exist in even the briefest translation and hint at the decisions that any person working between languages in the former Yugoslavia would routinely have had to make. BiH, with its three ethno-national movements making claims over language, indeed represented an even more complex linguistic landscape.[7]

       This paper aims to contribute to the oral history of adult education/lifelong learning and to military oral history. Military oral history is a field populated by museums (such as the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive in London and the Canadian War Museum), military forces themselves,[8] and scholars who use oral history to study topics such as veterans and memory.[9] Literature on oral history and education often focuses on the transformative potential of oral history gathering as a teaching method or on using oral history to reflect on radical or therapeutic pedagogy, where it may overlap with reminiscence-based therapy.[10] However, fewer projects seem to have invited learners to reflect on the impact of learning they had voluntarily undertaken after finishing their initial educational trajectories at school or university.

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[7] See Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and its Disintegration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ronelle Alexander, *Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian: A Grammar with Sociolinguistic Commentary* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

[8] See the proceedings of the first Military Oral History conference held at the University of Victoria in 2008, which contains several contributions from military colleges, accessed August 4, 2011, http://library.uvic.ca/site/spcoll/military/conference_2008.html.

[9] On veterans and memory, see particularly Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[10] Joanna Bornat, "Reminiscence and Oral History: Parallel Universes or Shared Endeavour?" *Ageing and Society* 21, no. 2 (2001): 219-41.

In terms of oral history and education, the education researcher Tara Fenwick has used oral history to study the impact made by critical workplace educators who applied a radical Freirian approach to their delivery of English language classes at a garment factory in Alberta, where they encouraged participatory action and helped language learners find ways to raise grievances with management.[11] Meanwhile, the educational historians Philip Gardner and Peter Cunningham chose to ground their study of the British teaching profession in oral history interviewing in order to extend the history of education beyond policy- and institution-based perspectives, into "a new focus on the ways in which schoolteachers themselves understood and negotiated their professional lives in the past."[12] Cunningham considers that this allowed them to tap a "huge repository of accumulated memory, experience and wisdom" that existed in every school although education policy sought to eradicate past teaching practices.[13] The methodology enabled them to trace moments of change in a bottom-up history of education such as the translation of developmental psychology into primary teaching practice and the effect of the mass evacuation of children and schools during the Second World War.

For oral narratives by learners who did not necessarily situate themselves within a critical or radical project, one may also turn to a strand of applied linguistics that uses language learners' narratives to understand motivations and strategies in second language acquisition. Current thinking in applied linguistics views language learning as "a social practice that engages the identities of learners in complex and sometimes contradictory ways" and learner narratives can help explain those contradictions.[14] Many decisions to learn new languages as an adult can be seen as forming part of "a struggle […] to participate in the symbologically mediated lifeworld of another culture."[15] These might be strategic choices in order to achieve an occupational requirement, such as Canadian immigrants studying English in order to enter the healthcare sector in a study that identified a dearth in research into

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[11] Tara Fenwick, "Tightrope Walkers and Solidarity Sisters: Critical Workplace Educators in the Garment Industry," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 26, no. 3 (2007): 315-28.

[12] Philip Gardner and Peter Cunningham, "Oral History and Teachers' Professional Practice: A Wartime Turning Point?" *Cambridge Journal of Education* 27, no. 3 (1997): 331-42, 331.

[13] Peter Cunningham, "The Uses of History, the Uses of Memory," *Education 3–13* 28, no. 3 (2000): 70-73, 71.

[14] Bonny Norton, "Non-Participation, Imagined Communities and the Language Classroom," in *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research*, ed. Michael P. Breen (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001): 159-71, 167.

[15] Aneta Pavlenko and James P. Lantolf, "Second Language Learning as Participation and (Re)Construction of Selves," in *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*, ed. James P. Lantolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 155-77, 155.

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English-language education for the workplace.[16] Alternatively, they might be more diffuse efforts to identify with "a socially and historically constituted field of interpretation", such as the French classes taken by British language learners who invoke and develop imaginaries of France in order to self-consciously become Francophiles.[17] In either case, the biographical approach makes clear that language learning represents, as Norton would expect, an opportunity to imagine new subjectivities.[18] This effect exists in all education and training but is particularly powerful with language because language learning entails gaining access to, and building knowledge about, social worlds that are quite literally foreign. To learn another language is to accept constant encounters with otherness from a particular position in an cross-cultural power relationship; to learn to translate or interpret between languages is additionally to accept a set of responsibilities which may vary with the wider context of a person's translation/interpreting education.

Military Perspectives on Translation

Militaries depend on translation and interpreting whenever they are ordered to project power into or gather knowledge in a milieu where their troops' native language(s) is/are not widely in use. In the contemporary world, this may be deployment for warfighting, for humanitarian relief, or for any of the intermediate types of operations (peacebuilding, military observation, sanctions enforcement) that take place under the auspices of international organisations or ad hoc coalitions; in the Cold War, military language needs concentrated on gathering intelligence from human and electronic sources, conducting defence diplomacy, and ensuring sufficient language capacity to interrogate the other bloc's captured prisoners in the event of war. The Second World War, the epitome of a total war between states, involved the use of several thousand linguists in uniform on the part of each major combatant, as interpreters for many forms of military activity, liaison officers, interrogators, investigators, and gatherers of intelligence. The users of translated information may be distanced from the production of translation in both a practical and a conceptual way. Practically, users may not have been present when the

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[16] Patricia A. Duff, Ping Wong, and Margaret Early, "Learning Language for Work and Life: The Linguistic Socialization of Immigrant Canadians Seeking Careers in Healthcare," *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 57, no. 1 (2000): 9-57.

[17] Simon Coffey, "Stories of Frenchness: Becoming a Francophile," *Language and Intercultural Communication* 10, no. 2 (2010): 119-36.

[18] A Mexican mechanic in California, for instance, narrated his language learning as a bridge towards obtaining a computer skills certificate with which he could return to Mexico embodying technical rather than physical masculinity: Julia Menard-Warwick, "'The Thing About Work:' Gendered Narratives of a Transnational, Trilingual Mexicano," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 9, no. 3 (2006): 359-73.

translation was made.[19] Conceptually, they are likely to be distanced from translation because they have not themselves had to perform it or make the many choices about meaning that the work requires.

As a peacekeeping and later peace enforcement operation, the multinational military deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina required written translations but also a vast amount of oral interpersonal communication: negotiating passages through checkpoints, holding military liaison meetings, carrying out civil affairs visits, performing weapons inspections, talking to officials and members of the public in the local language(s), and so on. The peacekeeping theorist Robert Rubinstein observes that "a great deal of a mission's work involves human interaction", and this certainly held true for BiH and likewise for the similarly-framed mission in Kosovo after 1999.[20] Quite unlike the assembly-line paradigm of translation for intelligence – but resembling the language needs of the Allied administration of Western Europe after the liberation in 1944-45 – non-linguist members of the multinational coalition were therefore in close proximity to the unfamiliar local language throughout their mission. A soldier who was holding a conversation through an interpreter (i.e. the "user" of an interpreter) was physically present at the moment of translation, observing but likely unable to understand the interpreter at work.

Operational military interpreting usually takes the form of liaison interpreting – face-to-face interpreting unassisted by technology – rather than the sophisticated conference interpreting setup used in international assemblies. Soldiers who may speak through interpreters are trained to speak in the first person as if addressing the foreign interlocutor directly. The interpreter speaks in the first person to the interlocutor as if in the soldier's voice. The interpreter should then relay the other part of the conversation back to the soldier, without any speaker using reported speech ("tell him/her that…" or "s/he says that…").[21] From 1992 onwards, the British military organised pre-deployment field exercises for units deploying to BiH, where troops would role-play common scenarios drawn from other units' recent experiences "in theatre," that is, at the deployment destination.[22] Simulations of using interpreters were worked into the training so that troops already would have had the experience of speaking their native language, hearing a conversation between two speakers of another incomprehensible language and then hearing that translated

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[19] Such was the case, for example, at Bletchley Park (the British decryption centre during the Second World War), where linguists received the raw decrypted texts of German intercepts and sent the translated messages on to non-linguist analysts in a process reminiscent of an assembly line: Hilary Footitt, "Another Missing Dimension? Foreign Languages in World War II Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 3 (2010): 271-89, 282.

[20] Robert A. Rubinstein, *Peacekeeping Under Fire: Culture and Intervention* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2008), 77.

[21] The distancing effect of reported speech is discussed further below.

[22] The same has been done for units about to deploy to Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

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back. The field exercises aimed to present soldiers with the alienating effect of being a monolingual participant in an interpreted conversation and needing to trust a language intermediary. To create this effect, the people playing the interpreter and the local interlocutor did not actually need to be carrying out a faithful translation: these exercises were not training for interpreters. The "local language" speakers could be having their own satirical conversation or sometimes could even be speaking a different language altogether:

> ["Jovana,"[23] a locally-employed interpreter for British forces who took part in pre-deployment exercises in the UK:] It's like a local thing, that we would have a chat between us interpreters without them [soldiers] knowing what's going on. "So what's the next scenario?" "Oh, God, yeah, I hate that scenario." And the soldier thinks that you're crying because you're in pain. And even some things the local person says, then you translate, but you're dying out of laughter, because it's something from your history, or […] [she gives an English equivalent of their in-jokes] like "What is your name?," and there is a guy standing there, local, with a big nose, and he is, "Oh, my name is Rod Stewart." […] So in our language we used all these things, "I'm bli-i-ind, I can't see anything," "So what's your [name] grandpa?" "Filip Višnjić," which was like from history. And you just laugh, and then soldiers [say] "Whatever did he say?" What is funny about [it], what did he say?" Like, "No no no, his name is such and such," but you just – it's a history thing – and can't even explain it – it's just so funny.[24]

> ["Louise," a British military language educator who went on a crash course in "Serbo-Croat:"] Tom [another British officer] was from a country in southern Africa. I can't remember which one it was, but he spoke Afrikaans. […] And he spoke something anyway that none of us understood, and that was the whole point. We were out on the two weeks' operational training, military training, on Salisbury Plain. And [the training leader] briefed Tom and set him up, with another soldier that spoke Afrikaans, fantastic coincidence. And set up for us all to witness. And he set up so that Tom played the interpreter, because he'd got English and Afrikaans, the soldier just played the Afrikaans-speaking person and pretended not to speak anything else, and one of

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[23] All speakers' names given here are pseudonyms.
[24] Interview, November 2009.

> us had to play the third party. And set up the interpreting scenario and
> demonstrated how to do it properly. Brilliant.[25]

The narrator of the second extract belonged to a small group of British officers in whom the Army's language training expertise resided: the linguists of the Royal Army Educational Corps, reorganised into the Education and Training Services branch of the new Adjutant-General's Corps in 1992.[26] RAEC officers with languages degrees formed the backbone of British uniformed military language support for BiH in the first few years. Their proven track record in language learning made them particularly suitable for colloquial speaker training, alongside intelligence operators in the Royal Corps of Signals and a mix of volunteers from other units. In theatre, they could act as ad hoc trainers to improve the skills of local interpreters and were already experienced in this type of role. RAEC members who contributed interviews to this collection included the officer with a degree in French and German who supplied the extract above; the British Army's first military interpreter to serve in Croatia and BiH, whose degree was in Russian and Serbo-Croat; and an experienced instructor of Russian and Chinese who had "converted" to Serbo-Croat to serve as a colloquial speaker then returned to the Defence School of Languages (DSL) at Beaconsfield as head of Russian Language Wing. RAEC Russianists had often also worked as Russian/English interpreters during arms control talks and inspections in the 1980s. On one of these visits, the Russian/Serbo-Croat graduate had observed US military interpreters embodying a principle of invisibility that he would attempt to pass on to the interpreters he trained:

> At Molesworth [US air base in UK], the Americans used to call the
> interpreters "lips." "Hey, lips," you know, and the lips would come
> over and do the interpreting and they were supposed to be invisible.
> They were simply a pair of lips, and that is the basic principle, that
> you stand behind the colonel, the Queen, John Major, you know,
> Margaret Thatcher, whoever it might have been coming out to see us.

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[25] Interview, February 2009.

[26] In the history of language teaching, United States military language instruction during the SecondWorld War is significant as a forerunner of the "audiolingual" method, popular in the mid-twentieth century. This was based on students' repetition of grammar drills and also had the name "the Army Method:" A. P. R. Howatt, *A History of English Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 266-67; Cheryl Brown Mitchell and Kari Ellingson Vidal, "Weighing the Ways of the Flow: Twentieth Century Language Instruction," *Modern Language Journal* 85, no. 1 (2001), 26-38, 29. This, however, represents an earlier phase in language teaching history. When the present author's RAEC interviewees discussed teaching methodology, they identified with the communicate method rather than audiolingualism.

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> The Queen never came out (laughs). And just adopt a low profile, and
> simply do the interpretation[.][27]

This man, who had devised the British Army's first language cards for "Serbo-Croat," set up its first team of local interpreters in BiH, and initiated the Serbo-Croat training programme at the Defence School of Languages (DSL), corresponded to both these profiles: he had studied a joint degree Russian and Serbo-Croat at the University of Nottingham and had interpreted between English and Russian during military liaison missions in the late 1980s. However, with this exception, the soldiers with the strongest skills in the local language were not those with the strongest background as language educators. The other British soldiers with significant Serbo-Croat knowledge happened to be men with a Serbian parent who had joined infantry or artillery units, including a captain in the elite Parachute Regiment who complained in his memoir that he did not have the memorisation skills an interpreter needed and therefore felt bored.[28] These heritage speakers were highly valued and quickly exhausted: the Army had access to three heritage speakers in the early 1990s and one more in the early 2000s. Other military language intermediaries (often known as "military interpreters" but officially "military colloquial speakers") had to learn Serbo-Croat from scratch through courses of up to three months at the Defence School of Languages, which trainers revised based on feedback from course graduates' users and supervisors in the field. A full account of the development of Serbo-Croat language training at DSL has been given by Michael Kelly.[29] The present paper concentrates in part on how learners on these crash courses acquired a subjectivity as language intermediaries and reconciled this with their subjectivity as soldiers.

Educating the "Military Colloquial Speaker"

Military colloquial speakers understood that they were not as skilled in the local language as the locally-hired interpreters they worked alongside: this understanding was based on a construction of Serbo-Croat as a difficult and obscure language for Anglophones to learn plus a belief that native speakers of a language possessed innate authenticity. Their advantage, and the reason why the British military was prepared to detach them from their own units and train them in a language they might never use again, was that by virtue of being soldiers they were already trained, trusted, and socialised to perform activities that local interpreters could not do.

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[27] Interview, September 2009.

[28] Milos Stankovic, *Trusted Mole: A Soldier's Journey into Bosnia's Heart of Darkness* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 238-39.

[29] Michael Kelly, "Issues in Institutional Language Policy: Lessons Learned from Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *European Journal of Language Policy* 3, no. 1 (2011): 61-80.

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Military linguists would be used at discussions which were considered too sensitive for local citizens, for classified intelligence-related tasks, or in situations where the officer in charge believed it would be too dangerous to take a civilian, although during the wartime period local interpreters still crossed front lines, came under fire, and became the targets of snipers. "Fred," who had been in charge of the Russian Language Wing at DSL for three years in the mid-1990s, identified this as the key distinction between the language intermediaries available to a "user" of interpreters in theatre:

> [I]t did to some extent condition the way people worked with them. If they took one of the uniformed military colloquial speakers or something, or a military person who had a language knowledge, then frankly they could… not only ask them to do more or less anything that they felt needed doing, they also had an extra soldier, who did not need looking after if things got difficult, and you had an armed person who could look after himself or herself. And that of course is also a consideration, which using a young female Bosnian interpreter, or even a young male Bosnian interpreter, for that matter, you can't do. You know, that's someone else to look after.[30]

Military colloquial speakers were aware of their limitations and recognised that after less than three months of language training, supplemented by practice in the role of field interpreter, they were not capable of producing a perfect result. "Fred" himself considered that even two years learning military Chinese had not made him a genuine interpreter:

> [W]ith a few notable exceptions, most of us would have had real trouble functioning fully as interpreters in any situation, which of course is what an interpreter has to be able to do. And similarly, I think, also in translation. I think, though we could have coped reasonably well with the military technical vocabulary, because that is where we focused on, actually the wider use of the language would have needed extra training.[31]

In "Fred's" view, the ability to function fully "in any situation" was a prerequisite for genuine interpreter status and one that military language trainees did not possess

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[30] Interview, July 2009. The constructions of civilian and military in this framework are developed in Catherine Baker, "'It's Not Their Job to Soldier': Distinguishing Civilian and Military in Soldiers' and Interpreters' Accounts of Peacekeeping in 1990s Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 137-50.

[31] Interview, July 2009.

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even if they had passed a more advanced exam giving them the so-called "interpreter" grade.

Under pressure to train colloquial speakers in as short a time as possible and for the least possible cost, Army educators deliberately trained their students to be competent in particular fields of vocabulary at the expense of an all-round language education which would have taken much longer to complete. Learners therefore studied military vocabulary using primary source material such as Bosnian/Croatian press reports of events in the war. Yet the military "in theatre" did not exist in a vacuum and had frequent interaction with civilian life, in settings which could be ceremonial, formal or mundane. In her oral history, "Louise" narrated a number of "hugely embarrassing" moments as evidence that military colloquial speakers had not been ready for this wider range of tasks. They included one occasion where, using the workaround that "interpreters translate meanings not words," she had committed the gaffe of placing wartime Split in former Yugoslavia not Croatia, and another occasion where she had been unable to understand a high-ranking Croatian politician who was mumbling with his hand over his mouth. On the second occasion she had been able to ask a local interpreter for help:

> I couldn't understand a word he was saying. And I looked in horror at the Brigadier, and then thank gosh, behind me was Darija, who was the local interpreter […] Darija had been sent by the outgoing G5 [civil–military cooperation] person, she was about to get on a plane home, I went "I need some help with this meeting, can you tag along?" And she just appeared out of nowhere, sat there, of course she was beautiful, wooed the men, did the interpreting, and again it just proved, we're not ready as interpreters, we're not really interpreters, in five months you just cannot get to that standard, some people could – I was a pretty good linguist, but Slavonic was, you know, that was tough.[32]

Another colloquial speaker who served in BiH in 1999 (and spoke English with a strong Birmingham or "Brummie" accent) had adopted the workaround of asking local people to "speak like a child" so that they would slow down and he would be able to understand them:

> ["Steve:"] [I]nitially, I found it difficult. Because I didn't know what to expect, and you get used to the tone of voice from your instructors, at Beaconsfield, and they probably purposefully spoke softly, and slowly, so we could digest what they said. But once we got into

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[32] Interview, February 2009.

theatre, into Bosnia, it was like people were on speed, you know, how fast they were speaking. And I would say "polako, polako," you know, "slow it down a bit." […] You know, I weren't perfect, I mean, I was speaking Serbo-Brummie, you know, Serbian with a Brummie twang to it. So they probably had as much problem understanding me, initially, as I did understanding them. But [I] certainly improved by the end of it. So, yeah.

Q: Where did you get that idea from, about saying speak like a child?

A: Because I didn't know what else to do. And I was thinking – and I remember speaking to a kid. And he was just on my level, this little fellow, and I thought, "Right, I'm going to have that." And as soon as I'd go to a village, "Er, govoriš, er, er, govorim, er, djece," "speak childish," or whatever it was. Can't remember now. But it worked. You know. It breaks the ice, as well, because they start laughing at you. You speak like a child. I know (laughs). I know. Yes. And it would break the ice, and it was good. Yeah, it was good.[33]

Translation was a struggle to be met with professionalism and good humour to compensate for a skills gap which had its origins in institutional limits on resources: a triumph over adversity which British soldiers construct as the specifically British aspect of their soldiering.[34]

Another set of soldiers had not been deployed as language intermediaries but were able to use their language skills in attempts to build rapport with local people or to monitor the quality and trustworthiness of interpreters. These "serendipitous monitors" believed themselves to be few in number given the infamous British/Anglophone disregard for learning other languages; they had either learned the local language(s) privately because they believed it would make them more effective in their role or they had acquired enough Russian in another role that they felt they had some basic understanding of Serbo-Croat. The two Slavonic languages were similar enough that several NATO militaries fast-tracked Russian-speakers through conversion courses in order to produce military linguists for BiH. One battalion commanding officer serving in 1993 had learned Russian in the 1980s:

Russian was very useful, of course, because when I later moved to Yugoslavia, although I can't in any sense speak or write Serbo-Croat,

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[33] Interview, July 2009.
[34] See Stephen Grey, "Cracking On in Helmand." *Prospect Magazine* 162, August 27, 2009, accessed August 5, 2011, http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/08/cracking-on-in-helmand.

there was enough commonality between the two languages for me to be able to work out what was being said to me, before the interpreter interpreted it, and for me to be clear on whether or not the interpreter was translating what I was trying to say or was using his or her own interpretation or just literally cutting things out, which sometimes they had a tendency for doing, particularly if they thought one was being political, or boring, they would shorten it, and then you'd have to grab them by the scruff of the neck and say "No, that's not what I said." […] And so I was not always, I think, popular with some of them, in that I had a pretty fair idea if they had mashed up what I was saying, which enabled one to clarify the situation.[35]

A Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers officer who had voluntarily learned Serbian before deploying to BiH would also use his monitoring ability to reproduce the power/trust relationship between the military employer and a local civilian employee:

> [I]f you were facing someone down, like the local mayor or something, if I said something that he [a particular interpreter] thought the mayor might object to, he would start his interpretation with "kaže da…" you know, which is "he says that." Because no interpreter should ever do that. They should always interpret word for word. And I had a little pact with – I remember, any interpreter that did that to me, I would say in Serbian, so that the other person understood, I would say "Don't say 'kaže da,' you interpret word for word, OK?"[36]

"Serendipitous monitors" in non-linguist roles were militarily valuable but very rare, given the scarcity of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian speakers in the UK.

The officers-in-charge of military colloquial speakers and local interpreters were often not linguists who would appreciate the ambiguities and stressfulness of translation/interpreting at first hand. Military linguists might themselves be put in charge of local interpreter teams ("cells") and be viewed as the source of expertise on interpreting skills education. This worked well where the linguist had an Army educator's background and could hold impromptu classes to improve local interpreters' English-language or interpreting skills. The disadvantage of this lack of field support for military language intermediaries was that their own supervisors often had unrealistic, black-box-based expectations of what a person with three

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[35] Interview, May 2009.
[36] Interview, November 2009.

months' study of the local language would be able to achieve. "Fred" had witnessed the result as a colloquial speaker himself and subsequently as a head of department at DSL:

> But then people were taken from that course and thrown into Bosnia, and people said "Ah, we've got the linguists here." Sometimes they would even say "We've got the interpreters here." And sometimes people were asked to do, well, I think very often people were asked to do things which were way beyond their level. And I think that that then meant that people who had the military colloquial speakers working with them sometimes were disappointed with the level of language ability that the individuals displayed. And though they may have been quite happy to sit and talk in very short pieces of language, to use a great deal of circumlocution, and there was a little bit of imagination [to] get meaning across, then that was very different from what sometimes people expected of them. They expected them to be able to say anything (laughs) and understand anything, and it wasn't like that. […]
>
> It was a complete misunderstanding of what these people were capable of doing. And I think that is so common. Particularly with people who themselves do not speak any foreign language at all, because I think they feel that someone who's had three… if you had three months' training as a car mechanic, you'd probably do a reasonably serviceable job, you can go out and you can service a car. And so the feeling is, well, you've had three months' training in a foreign language, you should be able to (laughs) go out and do these jobs I want you to do, and you can't.[37]

"Use of interpreters" training, administered by DSL, was introduced to the pre-deployment training package as an attempt to rectify this. It was hoped that this would enable non-linguists in the field to a) think back to what interpreters had and had not been able to do during simulated interpreting situations and b) speak in a way that made interpreters' work easier. In practice, it was not long and reflexive enough to break down the black-box concept of translation or communicate how long it would take to become fluent in a new language.

Military language education still created a baseline pool of British soldiers with local language competence and on occasion this could have longer-lasting effects for individual learners. The following observation shows how the

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[37] Interview, July 2009.

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biographical nature of oral history can be valuable to educational research. One former colloquial speaker, "Steve," introduced himself as a disengaged childhood learner who had left compulsory education as soon as possible and joined the Army as a teenager:

> I left school at fifteen and a half, and went on to the YTS [Youth Training Scheme], which was the norm then. There was no work, and to keep the dole figures down, slave labour, really. No-one really learnt a trade, and no-one benefited from it really, apart from the government, to keep the dole queues down. As soon as I was eighteen, I joined the Army.[38]

He had taken the DSL course at age 31 and narrated it as the first time learning had appealed to him:

> I think on a course of twelve… I think eight passed. Eight passed. But I had to work hard to pass it, because I didn't find it easy. I mean, I've got no education really […] I've got a CSE in woodwork and that's about it.[39] So I had to work hard. I mean, I've got the mental capacity to do it. I didn't realise I had. It's just surprising what you can achieve when you put, when you go hard at it. So I was quite pleased with my result.[40]

This learning experience had emboldened him to study a trade in preparation for making a civilian career outside the Army; it had also encouraged him to use German for everyday purposes in the town where his unit was based. Interestingly, a civilian language instructor who had taught Serbo-Croat at Colchester in the early 1990s had witnessed learners who had been disengaged at school going through a similar transformation:

> I remember it so vividly, there were two guys who […] even the pronunciation of their English was very – you could say that they are not educated at all. And after three months they managed to pass the colloquial exam. And when we were saying goodbye to each other they said, "We would never forget you, because we discovered something in ourselves, that we can learn." Probably they were, I

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[38] Interview, July 2009.

[39] CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education): a 1960s–80s vocational qualification usually taken by pupils at the UK's "secondary modern" schools which prepared children for trades rather than university entry.

[40] Interview, July 2009.

remember one of them was telling us that he… whenever he went to school, he would go into the woods, instead of going to school (laughs), and he knew everything about nature, the woods, the animals and things, but he just was escaping school. So he could read and write (laughs) and that was the only [thing]. And he said, "I would never know that I could learn something if I didn't come to learn Serbo-Croat." So that was very nice, I think that was one of the best compliments a teacher can get, really, from a student. Yeah.[41]

On one level, this can be explained by Army educators' commitment to making learning approachable and purposeful to enlisted troops who have often chosen the military as an alternative to further education. On a theoretical level, it can also be explained by the linguist Bonny Norton's concept of "investment:" learners have "a socially and historically constructed relationship […] to the target language" and therefore "[a]n investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity, which changes across time and space."[42] Prospective military colloquial speakers approached the challenge of learning Serbo-Croat and interpreting skills from a secure social identity as soldier, which they had acquired and re-confirmed through repeatedly taking on the challenge of difficult training as they adjusted to different deployments. The potential result ("I've got the mental capacity to do it") could have a transformative effect and encourage the learning of further languages or skills. The sociologists Rachel Woodward and Karl Jenkings argue on the basis of photo-elicitation interviews with current and former British soldiers that military subjectivities consist of "individual military identities" which are based not in *being* a soldier so much as *doing* particular activities: "What soldiers distinctively do is execute acts using skills and competencies in which they have been trained."[43] This contrasts with the subjectivity of a civilian linguist where what the working self distinctively does is master language.

Training and Civilian Modes of Translating for the Military

In the linguistic profession, advanced knowledge of one or more languages in their sociocultural context and a parallel skill set in translation and/or interpreting are what constitutes a person's working identity. Within the subfield of interpreting, the most highly skilled and prestigious mode of working is conference interpreting, where the language intermediary interprets into the target language at the same time

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[41] Interview, April 2009.

[42] Bonny Norton, "Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English," *TESOL Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1997): 409-29, 411.

[43] Rachel Woodward and Karl Jenkings, "Military Identities in the Situated Accounts of British Military Personnel," *Sociology* 45, no. 2 (2011): 252-68, 260.

as the speaker is presenting in their source language ("simultaneous interpreting"), assisted by audio technology and a soundproof interpreting booth. Conference interpreters have their own professional association, the International Association of Conference Interpreters/Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC). AIIC was founded in 1953, binds interpreters to a code of professional ethics, and sets out standards for conference interpreters' working conditions: e.g. each interpreting booth at a conference should have at least two interpreters to relieve each other and no interpreter should work for more than two 2–3 hour sessions a day.[44] The trainers of professional interpreters insist that, in the words of the senior conference interpreter Danica Seleskovich, "the teaching of languages cannot be reconciled with the teaching of interpreting."[45] In professional interpreting, language skills are only a starting-point necessary but insufficient to acquire the expert identity of interpreter. The identity of a conference interpreter foregrounds interpreting skills for their own sake rather than the use of language as an instrument that contributes to the success of a military mission.

However, very few interpreters who worked for multinational military forces in BiH had ever had this degree of training. The former Yugoslavia's experienced professional interpreters were quickly recruited for high-level work with international organisations and often moved abroad, for example, to join the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague.[46] Younger languages graduates who were planning to work as professional interpreters found headquarters-level work with UN agencies or NGOs when the conflict began and this also often led to work abroad. Professional linguists who chose to stay in the former Yugoslavia did so for family reasons or personal solidarity. For example, a literary translator from Sarajevo resolved to stay in her city during the war and so became an interpreter for foreign journalists and then a media analyst who translated local newspapers at the UN headquarters. However, a surprising number of the foreign military force's locally-employed interpreters were not even languages graduates: from narratives by 31 interviewees (28 of whom had worked as interpreters in BiH) who had been educated in the former Yugoslav and/or Bosnian systems, only 19 included periods at university. The others had typically attended an academic-track high school (*gimnazija*) but seen their education disrupted by war and the need to earn money for their families. Not every university student had been

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[44] "AIIC Professional Standards," AIIC, 2000, accessed August 3, 2011, http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article122.htm.

[45] Danica Seleskovich, "Teaching Conference Interpreting," in *Translator and Interpreter Training and Foreign Language Pedagogy*, ed. Peter W. Krawutschke (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008 [1989]): 65-88, 65.

[46] Mila Dragović-Drouet, "The Practice of Translating and Interpreting During the Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia," in *Translating and Interpreting Conflict*, ed. Myriam Salama-Carr (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 29-40.

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able to complete a degree and some who were students when war broke out in 1992 had switched to different subjects after the war. Only 10 of the 31 had studied languages at university, 7 had studied for other professions (the most popular subject being engineering), and 2 did not mention their subject of study. As a site of language learning, university was far less important in interpreters' accounts than high school or private tuition.[47] The typical local interpreter therefore had had a general language education but not the socialisation that was supposed to go towards producing a professional interpreter.

This did not mean that interpreters without formal training were incapable of acquiring the necessary subjectivity. An initiative at the Sarajevo headquarters of SFOR (the NATO-led peacebuilding force) from 2000 onwards aimed to centralise all the headquarters' interpreters into one Language Services Bureau (LSB) under the leadership of two professional civilian linguists who were native speakers of English and would be able to train the interpreters/translators in advanced techniques. Forty-eight locally-employed linguists sat the LSB tests in September 2000 and eight did not have their contracts renewed because they had not reached a minimum standard. The others were reassigned to posts in the new bureau based on their test results and benefited from professional development including revision of their translations, contacts with other NATO language services, and the opportunity for the most able to train in simultaneous interpreting. One HQ SFOR interpreter who had been working for the foreign military since 1993 was appointed chief of the LSB in the late 2000s, and another person who had become an interpreter in 1997 with no formal training whatsoever, having specialised in electronics at school, taken private English classes with a parent, served in the military during the war and then found a job as a glazier, was able to become interpreter to the commander of EUFOR, the EU-led force which had replaced SFOR in 2004. However, HQ SFOR was an exception in its commitment to skills training, and even that commitment only came at a late stage of the foreign presence in BiH. In general, opportunities for Bosnian linguistic staff to be educated into a subjectivity of *thinking about* how they translated and interpreted were very limited, leaving them to construct a subjectivity as they went along.

Field interpreters who worked on foreign military bases as the only language intermediaries were part of an environment populated mostly by non-linguists. If the

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[47] Private tuition in English played a role in several language learning biographies because pupils in the former Yugoslavia, whose compulsory language education usually started at 10 or 11 years old, were not able to choose which language they would start learning at school. Professional families who believed that English competence was an essential part of their social stratum's cosmopolitan cultural capital would often pay for private English classes if their child had been allocated to German or Russian. One interpreter, from Tuzla (a city that was surrounded by Bosnian Serb forces during the war), had taken three months of private lessons at a language school in 1993 in order to improve her employability for interpreting jobs.

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base were British, it would also be an environment populated mostly by speakers of only one language, unless the unit happened to be Welsh or Gurkha/Nepalese. Their sources of advice in coming to terms with the distinctive practical and ethical problems of conflict and post-conflict interpreting would be their shiftmates in the interpreting pool and perhaps their military supervisor if that person were a linguist.[48] Non-linguist military supervisors were unlikely to recognise the physical and mental strain of interpreting and certainly did not appreciate the professional standards for rest and staffing laid down for conference interpreters. Only the HQ SFOR LSB interpreters were educated into thinking of themselves as professional linguists (after many years of work), and the experience was eye-opening:

> ["Zorica," LSB interpreter:] I personally was not thinking about this job being my future career, because even at that time it was decided at the end of every year, whether the mission would be (laughs) continued or not, or terminated. However, it was maybe the first time that we thought or were shown [how] to think of our job from a professional point of view. I did a lot of reading, especially off the internet, about interpreting and translating, of course, but it was not official, it had not been done by my bosses, by anyone from the organisation, it was on my own. And so it was the first professional linguistic approach that we had.[49]

Left to themselves, non-professionally-trained interpreters' answer to the implicit question "what is the role of the language intermediary?" was to see the figure of the interpreter as a human with agency.

Spaces of Agency in the Training of Language Intermediaries

The interpreter-as-mediator was not just someone who used their deep understanding of two languages and their translation/interpreting skills to convey meaning in the most skilful way possible, but someone who was able to influence interpersonal relationships for the sake of a wider cause, such as achieving peace in Bosnia: post-war reconstruction; promoting understanding between peoples; repairing foreigners' misperceptions of a group the interpreter identified with (e.g. Serbs); repairing neighbours' misperceptions of the foreign force. "Sinan," who began working for British forces in the Goražde enclave in 1994, exemplified the maximum-agency approach to interpreting:

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[48] British forces in central Bosnia in the early 1990s had tasked their linguists with supervising local interpreter teams, but as the number of bases grew the supervisors would not always be linguists.
[49] Interview, October 2009.

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> I think there is a human side to interpreting. When I say that you have
> to pass on certain feelings to another side. Not only to be a
> mechanical machine […] You also have to listen to the tone of a voice
> of a person who wants to tell you that idea. So you have to pass that
> on to another person. […] [T]here were many sad situations, and I
> attended these interviews, when people were telling about their
> experiences, terrifying experiences during the war. They were crying
> in these interviews. And I had to interpret these things. So you just
> have to put yourself up in this position, to try to adjust your tone of
> voice to the feeling of a person who's trying to send a message to
> another person who's listening in a different language, in order for
> that person to understand. […] So interpreters are not only translating
> machines, they are also, or they should be, really humans. Because
> humans are the ones who talk to each other. And, no matter what, you
> still have to involve yourself, in conversation. Even if you –
> sometimes you're trying your best not to – but still. You get involved,
> I mean involved in the emotional side, involved.[50]

Locally-hired field interpreters thus developed their own ethical codes without reference to any broader professional identity they could have been socialised into through education. The norms of the linguistic profession generally did not reach them and the "professionalism" many of them valued instead resembled the practical military professionalism of their employers. At the same time, they were unable to take on the norms of military professionalism entirely because of their status as civilians, untrained bodies, and non-citizens of the employing force, despite the second-hand stories of local interpreters who had identified with UK soldiers so much that they had tried to join the British Army.

Another study of interpreters at HQ SFOR has shown that without professional training interpreters could still develop senses of professional ethics, especially when it came to reconciling conflicting narratives about language and ethnic identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their ontological narratives about whether or not Serbo-Croat was still one language might differ from the post-war public narrative of one language per ethnic group, but they still acknowledged the SFOR policy of translating English documents into all three languages as a question of courtesy and respect.[51] In interpreting, untrained locals filled the space of agency

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[50] Interview, October 2009.
[51] Louise Askew, "Ethics and Ethnicity: What Professional Ethics Mean to Locally-Hired Translators and Interpreters Working for the NATO Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina" (unpublished manuscript, University of Nottingham).

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with a number of improvised interpreting strategies. If interpreters wished to distance themselves from the foreign force and win the trust of a local listener who was sceptical about the intervention, they might use reported speech ("s/he says that s/he has authorisation for the convoy" not "I have authorisation for the convoy"). This went against the standard for interpreter training and in the eyes of one British "serendipitous monitor" represented a sign of a poor-quality interpreter. On occasion interpreters would also view themselves as able to "soften" a situation through qualities they embodied or through their interpreting style:

> ["Lejla," who interpreted for Canadian troops during the war:] [T]heir opinion was that in such circumstances they were glad that I was not a man, a male interpreter, because they said that I was able to, let's say, soften the situation. You know, to simply lower the tensions. Because of… my approach, my demeanour, I don't know. And it helped. Because sometimes there were really some tense situations, when you have people who are angry at the gate… and they thought that it's better to have a female approach them than a man in uniform. […] And when I went out with the commander and his 2IC [second-in-command] to talk to them to negotiate our safe passage through [a checkpoint]… it was better that I was a female, because if I was a male interpreter they would have asked questions whether – you know, am I really an interpreter, was I fighting on one side or another, and that's what I was referring to. If you understand my point.[52]

In this situation the interpreter's perception of her role tallied with the soldiers'. An interpreter's direct intervention in the text, in contrast, represented a clash of role perceptions. "Sinan," who had done this in some conversations, nonetheless did not view it as distancing himself from the military speaker. Rather, by sacrificing a direct translation of language at a given moment he believed that he had been able to assist soldiers achieve a wider goal, successfully holding a meeting:

> But I would be softening these things, in order to make these people continue talking to each other, so that was my… contribution to maintaining the peace. Trying to make peace between these two people talking bad against each other. And I could understand both sides. But, however, I wouldn't translate all the rude comments and words, I would try to soften it up, in order for conversation to go on. […] But, don't get me wrong, people could understand. Although they couldn't understand the words, they could understand the facial

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[52] Interview, October 2009.

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expressions. You can't hide the hate on a face. You cannot hide that there is a sentence of twenty words and you are just saying how are you. Of course, I couldn't fool anyone. They could see, the British could see that there was something going on. But I would be just dropping these things, in order for the communication to continue. That was the main thing. […]

Q: And so that made the meetings go better?

A: Yeah. Definitely. (laughs) Believe me, if I was translating all of these things, it would be a disaster. They would probably shoot at each other and then shoot me.[53]

Nearly all local interpreters resisted the concept of the language intermediary as a tool or an item of technology. In more than one military milieu, soldiers were known to have identified interpreters with items of equipment to such an extent that the interpreters felt dehumanised. This construction was reproduced structurally in the sense that interpreters and other local employees were the responsibility of the logistics chain of command and that interpreters were sometimes conceived of in the same frame as inanimate assets. A 2007 training manual for the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support lists interpreters in the "special assets" category after fighting vehicles, air assets and working dogs.[54] The dehumanisation of the soldier–interpreter relationship had a discernible negative impact on workplace relations and made experienced interpreters more likely to leave the job or the team:

["Lejla," on HQ UNPROFOR:] I wouldn't say that a lot of attention was paid to interpreters. At a certain point they simply called us yellow cards. You know, they would say bring the yellow card along, we are going for a meeting. And of course it reflected on the way things were organised.

Q: Where did this name "yellow card" come from?

A: Because international members of UNPROFOR, they had blue ID cards, and we, the locals, we had yellow ID cards. So that's why we became (laughs) the yellow cards. Or a mouthpiece, or… […] When

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[53] Interview, October 2009.

[54] NORDCAPS, *NORDCAPS PSO Tactical Manual 2007*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (Finland: Kaarinan Tasopaino, 2007), accessed August 3, 2011, http://www.nordcaps.org/tactical_manual/volume2.pdf.

IFOR came, actually, we were approached by one officer, who said, "I want you as a team just to move, come work for IFOR." And… we were not satisfied with how things were done in UNPROFOR when it comes to civilian employees, and we all as a team decided simply to go and work for IFOR. And I have to say that the relation was much better. We were never again called yellow cards or mouthpieces.[55]

A similar account came from a British base in the late 1990s:

["Jovana," who had moved to the UK:] [L]iving here, and going back, I just realised, OK, this is not the way you should be treating people. How come that you are so protected, how come that you take care of yourself, and you're just treating locals like kind of disposable tools? Like, "don't forget that" – that was our favourite briefing for soldiers when they were going on a patrol. Don't forget your kit. I don't know, helmets, body armour. Don't forget your satellite box, the orange box of the satellite phone. Don't forget your interpreter. And we were like, "As if I am a tool, sorry, excuse me?" (laughs) I'm human, you know, kind of thing. So that was it.[56]

A different form of dehumanisation, overdependence on technology for translation, was met with scepticism by linguists. Most language work in Bosnian peace operations involved non-routine situations, improvised materials, such as their own glossaries, low-technology modes of interpreting, and high pressure. Even the language trainers, who were working in the UK rather than BiH, had to improvise teaching materials in order to teach the language(s) quickly and for military purposes. Interpreters respected the interpreting booth as the most advanced form of oral language mediation although most of the time it was irrelevant to their own work. They were not trained in simultaneous interpretation and the sites they visited were not that type of facility. Word processing software made document production easier, but dedicated translation software proved more troublesome.

Language intermediaries in BiH were not competing with the hand-held translation devices that the US military would later test for use on patrol in Iraq and Afghanistan, although these devices had their origins in defence research inspired by US experiences in BiH.[57] While in BiH, the US military had also field-tested a document recognition and translation system called Forward Area Language

[55] Interview, October 2009.
[56] Interview, November 2009.
[57] Steve Silberman, "Talking to Strangers," *Wired* 8, no. 5 (2000), accessed August 3, 2011, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.05/translation_pr.html.

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Converter (FALCON) which could scan local-language documents and translate them into English. Users reported that FALCON's many errors when it scanned real-world documents "rendered 'the current system…less than desirable for the intended function.'"[58] This problem recurred a few years later at the Language Services Branch of HQ SFOR when NATO tried to introduce the translation memory software, "Trados". Professional translators commonly use Trados to ensure consistent terminology across a series of texts and improve productivity. The translation theorist Brian Mossop fears that translation memory software may lead to "a phenomenon we might call collage translation" where pieces of a translation are retrieved from a memory and edited rather than being composed from scratch.[59] In an operational headquarters like HQ SFOR, it had a much more practical drawback. Like FALCON, Trados struggled with documents that were stapled, poorly printed, on thin paper, or written in Cyrillic. During her interview, the chief of the LSB at the time explained why they had decided to stop using it:

> [T]here were so many technical problems, and also the whole sort of – you know, with using this kind of translation software, it does change the way in which you do translate, and basically despite the training we had, nobody ever really took it on board, and I don't blame them, because it was… it was too much like hard work. You know, by the time you'd scanned a document, fiddled about with it and so on you could have translated the damn thing. […] [I]n every language service I've ever worked in, you always have too much work. And you're working against the clock. And so if you're working against the clock, you're not going to be able to spend time fiddling around with your Trados translation tools, which are meant to help you, but you still have to devote a lot of time to actually learning it, and fiddling about and sort of figuring out how you put it all together.[60]

Translators wanted to fulfil their responsibilities to customers and the ethic of quality, not to assist a computer to do imperfect work. Interpreters, meanwhile, performed instantaneous and ephemeral language mediation and did not have a technological replacement.

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[58] M. C. Holland, C. Schlesiger, and C. Tate, "Evaluating Embedded Machine Translation in Military Field Exercises," *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 1934 (2000): 239-47, 242.

[59] Brian Mossop, "Has Computerization Changed Translation?" *Meta: journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal* 51, no. 4 (2006): 787-805, 790.

[60] Interview, February 2009.

Conclusion

Every language intermediary and language trainer in these set of interviews recognised translation and interpreting as a contingent, human endeavour requiring skill. The nature of that skill and how a translator/interpreter was expected to have learned it, however, varied depending on the social fields that the speaker had been embedded in. The milieu of military linguists valued efficiency in translation, accepted that linguist-soldiers would often have to work with the bare minimum of resources ("cracking on"), resigned itself to cost and time constraints on the length of education, viewed practical scenario-based methods as an essential element of language teaching alongside classroom grammar teaching and conversation classes, and educated language intermediaries to seek workarounds for gaps in their knowledge. The milieu of professional linguists expected students to spend years learning in much greater depth the language and translation/interpreting skills that military trainers covered in a few months. Total linguistic fluency, years of practice and stringent accreditation procedures were necessary to produce a genuine "interpreter." The self-taught linguists whom foreign troops employed in the field took on a subjectivity that was much more active, sometimes even activist. While they had the potential to be successfully trained in the norms of the linguistic profession, most elements of the foreign force did not allocate the necessary time or money to make this possible.

In the broader military context of British peace operations in BiH, languages were far less visible than in the accounts studied here. The Imperial War Museum Sound Archive's holdings on BiH – mainly interviews with British soldiers – contain only passing references to the local language(s) or to interpreters and no interviews with soldiers who used other languages themselves. However, since more than half of the author's interviewees agreed to contribute their recordings to the Sound Archive, future users will find languages and interpreting represented much more strongly in the collection. Military memoirs acknowledge the importance of language intermediaries but apart from the memoir by the Anglo-Serbian captain who worked as a military interpreter, they leave the individuals as social actors in the background.[61] Non-linguists abstractly recognised linguists as an important resource but did not understand how linguists were produced or how they actually did their work. After BiH and Kosovo, the British military did train more front-line personnel on short language courses to be "secondary linguists" – soldiers in non-linguist roles who knew some local language – in Iraq and Afghanistan. Taking a "long" (eighteen-month) language course to study a language in depth, however, was still

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[61] Catherine Baker, "The Care and Feeding of Linguists: The Working Environment of Interpreters, Translators, and Linguists During Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *War and Society* 29, no. 2 (2010): 154-175, 156.

perceived as detrimental to a military career outside the small milieu of military language trainers and career "primary linguists."

This illustration of the value of oral history in understanding translation/interpreting education supports Peter Cunningham's argument that life history interviewing gives the researcher access to accounts of professional practice that have been considered too ephemeral or outdated to record. In the specific case of language support for the military, some interviewees were authorised to speak orally about their former work whereas written documents from the period remained classified and inaccessible. The wider relevance is that contextualising interviewees' accounts of a particular place and time, late 1990s Bosnia-Herzegovina, within a biographical narrative of themselves as learners provides insights into the learner and teacher as social actors. Prompted by informed questioning, speakers chose to narrate the values and identities they brought into their formal and informal education. However, speakers produce their narratives in the present. Their accounts of past learning are necessarily informed by where that learning led in later stages of their life stories: how congruent their educational trajectories were with the working lives they strove for or fell into; what public conventions have become available for them to situate the skills they learned, and the ways they used those skills. More research projects, and more longitudinal interview-based studies, are needed to fully theorise the relationship between education, the application of learning, and time.