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INDICE

KATELL DROUET

Institut de Recherche en Sciences et Technologies du Langage, Mons

katell.drouet@student.umons.ac.be

Using Eye-tracking to Study the Reading Pattern of Subtitles and Cognitive Load in Video game Players: A Pilot Study.

Abstract

Subtitles have long been investigated in the field of audio-visual translation as a potential source of Cognitive Overload (Sweller, 1988; Sweller & Chandler, 1991). If literature tends to confirm that films with subtitles do not cause any Cognitive Overload, and could sometimes improve learning, (Baranowska, 2020), no studies have been conducted evaluating the effect and relevance of subtitles in video games. There would be much to be found on the needs of video games players, particularly with the focus of accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing audiences who need subtitles to follow the dialogues. To investigate the effect of the interaction variable, we conducted an experiment which uses eye-tracking to measure the fixation times and follow the movement of the pupil of five male subjects who were familiar with video games and have observed a significant behavioural difference between sequences with and without interaction, as subjects were all ignoring the subtitles at the bottom of the screen when active in gameplay. This preliminary study shows promising results that need confirmation by a larger study with a larger sample size and more diversity in the background of the subjects.

Keywords: *Cognitive overload, Media accessibility, Eye-tracking, Video game subtitles, Subtitling*

Introduction

If the available literature on audio-visual translation has already explored the topic of cognitive load in relation with subtitles at large, this very same theme applied to subtitles in video games remains unknown. Yet, there would be much to investigate in terms of cognition when a subject is faced with subtitles in an environment where they are intended to interact. Indeed, most of the literature, if not all, available on the relation between cognition, specifically the concept of Cognitive Overload as theorised by John Sweller in 1988 (Sweller, 1988: 276) treats the ability to read subtitles and its impact on the cognitive load of a subject within the framework of static and passive video observation. Despite our best effort, we were not able to find any article in the available literature investigating the differences that might exist between simply simultaneously watching a video and reading text and the cognitive requirements of video games.

According to Sweller (1988), the 'Cognitive Overload' theory suggests that the human brain is only capable to receive and treat so much information at once. Once received through the different sensory organs, the sensory stimuli will access the 'working memory', also called 'short term memory', whose task is to analyse and transmit this information to the 'long term memory'. A 'Cognitive Overload' happens when the number of stimuli arriving to the 'working memory', which can no longer analyse every information received, will shut down a number of stimuli prioritising quality of treatment over quantity of treatment. In a Cognitive Overload scenario, the subject will simply ignore those shut down stimuli, which will never reach long term memory (Sweller 1988: 261). In the case of subtitles, there has been several inquiries investigating the possible involvement of subtitles on Cognitive Load in videos and films, since a spectator will have to watch, listen, and read at the same time. So far, most of the literature seems to disprove the idea that subtitled films and videos add to the cognitive load in a detrimental manner, both in the case of intra and inter-

lingual subtitling. A few studies, notably Kruger, Hefer & Matthew (2013), Baranowska (2020) and Szarkowska & Gerber-Morón (2018) tend to confirm the absence of Cognitive Overload in subjects confronted with subtitled video streams, both inter and intra-lingual, and even a reduced Cognitive Load in foreign language learners (BARANOWSKA, 2020: 110). According to Szarkowska & Gerber-Morón (2018), the human eye is even capable of following a subtitling speed up to 12 characters per second (most norms advising to keep to a 15 character per second speed for improved comfort of the viewer, with Netflix norms allowing up to 20 characters per second when it comes to English subtitles for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing).

When it comes to those principles applied to the reading ability of viewers in an interactive environment as are video games, there is unfortunately no available literature investigating the effect of a new variable added to the already observed effects of subtitles on Cognitive Load.

The current trend in the video game industry is to display subtitles the same way it is usually provided in the film or television industry, at the bottom-centre of the screen. A set of guidelines based on factual data and relevant to the cognitive needs of players could help the industry a great deal to provide better inclusivity contents and meet the needs of a broader audience.

For the sake of simplicity, this research deals with the players' cognitive response to in-game subtitles with audio dialogues, as opposed to phylactery type subtitles that the player can skip and read at their own pace.

Based on Sweller's (1988) and Chandler and Sweller's (1991) Cognitive Overload Theory, and on the conclusions of the current literature on the relation between subtitles and cognitive load, we shall here evaluate the automatic behavioural response of video game players in an interactive game sequence, in order to determine if the way the industry currently displays subtitles allows the cognitive processes to follow both the action on screen and the scenario. We expect three possible outcomes to this experiment:

- Hypothesis 1: The player's gaze will be unequivocally drawn to the subtitle line and may distract the player.

- Hypothesis 2: The player's gaze will not always be drawn to the subtitles, and those will only cause minor distraction.

- Hypothesis 3: The player's gaze will not be drawn to the subtitles at all.

1. **Methodology**

1.1. Sample:

This preliminary research experiment used a sample of 5 adult male subjects aged 23 to 32 (m=26,4) who all declared having a high level of familiarity with the video game medium, and to play First Person Shooter type games less than 5 hours a week. All participants were selected from the IRSTL institute and ISIA Lab at the University of Mons, Belgium, and volunteered for the experiment. Of the participants, one was short-sighted, and another suffered from hyperesthesia, but orally declared it did not impede his ability to follow the experiment. All participants were Native French Speakers.

1.2. Material:

A 25-minute-long sequence was selected from the game *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel* published in 2014 by Gearbox Software and developed by 2K Australia. It corresponds to the introductory sequence of the game. The sequence was presented with French audio and French subtitles.

Two questionnaires were filled by the participants, the first being a familiarity questionnaire aiming to sort the participants according to their gender, age, and level of proficiency and familiarity with video games. The second is an evaluation questionnaire and aims to receive the impressions and perception of the subjects when it came to the subtitles in the sequence. This questionnaire is composed of four items, with the goal to investigate the subjects' perception of subtitles situationally in an interactive and busy environment. For each item, some space was left blank to allow the participants to give their personal impressions related to its relevant item. The first offered to rate on a 5-point Likert Scale the feeling of the subjects had of needing the subtitles to understand the dialogues and the story (1=not at all, 5=absolutely). The second required the subjects to answer a 'yes' or 'no' question whether the subtitles in the game correspond, in their opinion, to the norms usually applied by various audio-visual media. The third and last item asked the subjects to rate on a Likert scale similar to the first item whether they felt their gaze was 'drawn' to the subtitles against their will, as a means to judge whether the feeling was confirmed by the factual observations or not.

The participants were equipped with a non-invasive 'Pupil Labs' eye-tracking device composed of a pair of lens-less glasses with a series of cameras on the side and at eye level to capture the movement of the pupils of the wearer in relation to the position of the side-camera. Participants were then placed in front of either a laptop screen or a television screen where the game could be seen. The screen was outlined by a series of QR codes aiming to mark out an AoI (Area of Interest), as seen in Figure 1, for the eye-tracking software to calculate various sets of data. This setup allowed us to measure in real-time the movement of the eye of the players all along the recordings, as well as their fixation time and spots on the AoI in the form of heatmaps at a given time *T*.

Five recordings, 00:24:59 to 00:30:47 (*m*=00:26:34) in length, were obtained with this setup. However, one video-test had to be completely excluded from the corpus due to myopia correction of the subject. This correction caused a warp in the line of view of the inner camera of the device, rendering the possibility to follow the movement and fixations of the eye impossible. Out of the four remaining recordings, only one was obtained in the optimal conditions to capture and measure the fixation heatmaps (Figure1). Two others allowed for usable measurements but were slightly too imprecise, due to being captured on a smaller screen, to serve as illustrations. The last recording can serve to measure the movement of the pupils on the full length of the video, but not AoI could be determined by the software. Three of the remaining recordings were captured on a 16' laptop screen at a distance of 40cm, and the last, which will be known as 'reference recording', or *RR*, was captured on a 55' television screen at a distance of about 1.5 metre. Unfortunately, no session could be allowed for any tests due to time constraints, so the configuration and details of the experiment setup were adjusted along the way.

1.3. Procedure

We have defined an Area of Interest (AoI) corresponding to the area delimited by the QR codes surrounding the projection screen, in order for the software to calculate the average gaze fixation time on the duration of a defined 'event'. The very centre of the AoI corresponds to the reticle of the game, or the pointer a player uses to determine the aim of their avatar. At the bottom-centre of the AoI are the subtitles, and at the top, right-hand corner is a mini map that needs to be defined as a way to recognise some eye-movement patterns. Various sequences, called 'even', were

selected on the RR due to their relevance in the behavioural observation of the player in terms of possible reaction to the usual stimuli that a First Person Shooter (FPS) game sends toward the player; this in relation to the subtitles on screen at the same time. We have divided those sequences in two axis: the 'Sequence Type', or the action involvement of the subject, that can be either 'Cutscenes' (where the player does not have control of their avatar, and act like films or videos), or 'Gameplay Sequences' (where the player is in control of the avatar and must react in real-time to the stimuli on screen); and the 'Cognitive Investment' of the subject, either 'Active' or 'Passive' depending on whether the player must immediately react to stimuli, or if their need to react is diminished or if they lose control of their avatar. Only three of the possible combinations appear in this study, 'Cutscene-Passive', 'Gameplay Sequence-Active' and 'Gameplay-Sequence-Passive'. The 'Cutscene-Active' combination is much more unusual in the video-game medium, since it would require the player to be fully cognitively invested in what abides to a film in order to interact with it, which is only observable in some genres like visual-novels or cutscene games. However, we can still draw some preliminary conclusions by inferring from the analysis of the other three combinations.

1.4. Data Collection

The fixation times of a subject's gaze on the AoI is defined by heatmaps delimited by the QR codes surrounding the area of the screen we want to study. These heatmaps are calculated by measuring the average fixation time of the eye on pre-determined 'events' and appear as coloured purple to yellow spots. The more the colour draws towards a light yellow, the longer the fixation time, meaning that the gaze of the subject stayed for a prolonged time on this specific spot of the AoI. On the entirety of the recording presenting the optimal setup, we have defined a series of these "events" and applied an enrichment provided by the Pupil Labs website to create the heatmaps.

This same software allows us to follow in real time the movement of the pupil of a subject in the form of linked numbered points showing the order in which the eye of the observer moved on the area captured by the lateral camera. Unlike the heatmap enrichment, this feature is not limited to the AoI, but covers the entirety of the field of view of the lateral camera. We used these points not as a way to measure an average behaviour, but rather to follow in real-time the movements of the pupil at any given time *T* within the already defined events and estimate the reaction behaviour and time whenever a line of subtitles appears on screen and compare it to the data of the heatmaps.

The events were as follows, in order of appearance:

- Full Recording

- Introduction Cutscene

- First Gameplay Sequence

- Second Gameplay Sequence

- Third Gameplay Sequence

- Cutscene 2 – Full

- Cutscene 2 – Jack Alone

- Cutscene 2 – Enemies

- Title Card

- Fourth Gameplay Sequence

- Sixth Gameplay Sequence

- Gameplay Stops

- Tutorial Text

- Seventh Gameplay Sequence
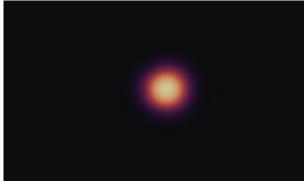
- Moving

1.5. Data Analysis

The average heatmaps of the RR shows that the average fixation of the subject was unambiguously concentrated on the centre of the AoI, or at the level of the reticule (Figure 2).

Therefore, the gaze of the subject seems to be mainly focused on the centre of the screen, as was theorised by Kurzhal et al (2017: 6559). When analysing the various 'Game Sequence' events, those that have been tagged as 'Active' at least, a similar pattern (Figure 3) can be observed. This could mean that when the player is cognitively involved in the game, ergo when they must interact with the stimuli sent their way, their attention is fully concentrated on the aiming reticule, and it would seem that they ignore the subtitles.

However, during a 'Passive' sequence, whether it is a 'Cutscene' type or 'Gameplay Sequence' type, the fixation pattern changes. During cutscenes, the fixation spectrum is much more spread on the AoI than it is in game sequences, and a clear line is visible at the bottom, where we established the subtitle line sits (Figure 4). This could mean that during a passive event, the viewer has the time they need to both listen to the audio dialogue, but also to follow the subtitles. According to Kurzhal et al (2017), it could also be possible that subtitles act as a magnet for the gaze of a viewer, as "with the tendency to read text even when the audio language is known, the viewer has to foveate the respective region at the bottom of the screen to read." (KURZHAL ET AL, 2017: 6559). A similar behaviour can be observed to a lesser extent during Gameplay Sequences with low cognitive investment, that we would in this study consider as 'Passive'.

The observation of these heatmaps allows us to outline certain behavioural patterns. During active gameplay sequences, the player seems to favour attention and reactivity to the various stimuli sent their way, and since their brain might be in Cognitive Overload, they prioritise the treatment of information immediately relevant to their goal and needs, completely outclassing subtitles, in accordance with Sweller's Cognitive Overload theory (SWELLER, 1988: 276). This effect might even be enhanced

by the ability of the player to hear the dialogue in their mother tongue, rather than having to rely on the subtitles to understand their content and follow the story. However, the evaluation forms

filled by the participants tend to confirm the overload hypothesis, since most have reported being mostly able to follow the scenario without help from the subtitles, but still felt as if they would be unable, by the end of the sequence, to relay all the details of the story given to them that far.

During Gameplay sequences, the gaze of the player is almost exclusively fixated on the centre of the AoI. However, on a few occasions, a slight variation towards the mini map at the top right-hand corner of the AoI can be observed. Which of the 'Gameplay Sequences' it concerns varies from subject to subject, but it seems to be a regularity amongst players. As a side note, it seems to show that, when playing, the perception of space is different from outside of the game. Players seem to visualise the world within the game as if they were taking the avatar's place within the environment. Therefore, to turn and see around them, they will rather turn the avatar itself within the game environment, rather than move their gaze on the surface of the screen, outside of the virtual environment. However, when it comes to elements outside of the field of view of the avatar, such as the health bar, the ammunition or, in our case, the mini map, players perceive it as outside of the game, outside of the immersion, and therefore can move their eyes on the AoI to get the in-game information they need.

The observation of the movement of the pupil on the AoI also offers some insight on the cognitive logic of the gaze. During the cutscene sequences, notably the introduction cutscene, the eye of the subjects tends to be locked on the centre of the screen, with slight variations and movements to décor elements that might have been put there by the creators to draw attention. In the introduction cutscene, the first reaction

of the gaze is to travel from building to building, exploring the AoI and the environment. As soon as characters appear on screen, the behaviour changes in every recording: players make a sudden movement towards the figures when they appear, and towards the faces when they become visible. From the face, eyes then explore the environment, until a line of subtitles appears on screen, which immediately catches the attention of the subjects, who then read the line, to finally return to exploring the AoI (Figure 5). Thanks to this observation, we now have a referential to compare the different cognitive behaviours between the game sequences we have already defined and isolated. The basic movement of the eyes during a cutscene can be summarised as follows:

- The gaze follows the faces of characters or notable background elements when no character appears on screen.

- The gaze travels down-screen to the subtitle line shortly after it appears.

- The gaze returns to faces and background elements when the subject is done reading.

The moment the player switches to an 'Active' cognitive involvement, their behaviour changes completely, as observed on the various heatmaps. During 'Gameplay Sequences,' the dotted lines remain almost exclusively on the centre of the AoI, though this feature allows to witness some very subtle and punctual movements towards other elements around the reticle. Therefore, the subject is not entirely and exclusively fixated on the reticle, but they also investigate some other possible sources of stimuli and remain alert to possible changes in their peripheral vision. Players seem to favour indirect eye-contact and peripheral vision to receive outside stimuli. However during the first and second gameplay sequences, the player will unequivocally ignore the subtitles as soon as they directly interact with the game. This can be observed in both instances of gameplay. Unlike in the cutscenes, there is no movement done towards the bottom of the screen, even when subtitles appear on the AoI. When the player is out of a combat situation, their cognitive investment appears to be focused on the observation and surveillance of décor elements, looking for points of

interest or possible perturbators (enemies or interactions). The moment the game ceases to be interactive, the behaviour previously observed during the introduction cutscene returns, and the player is more keen to reading the subtitles.

During 'Passive Gameplay Sequences,' the cognitive investment of the player is somewhere in between. The perceived absence of immediate stimuli makes it so the subject takes more time to care for other elements, including subtitles, the same way they did during the 'Passive Cutscene.' However, when still in a Gameplay Sequence, the points of interest of the player will be slightly different from the ones of the Cutscene: the movement of the gaze is less ample than in Cutscenes, and the occasional divergence from the central-area focused pattern will usually be located on the mini-map, in the top right-hand side of the AoI, rather than on any décor elements. If it does not always appear on heatmaps, the fact that this phenomenon happens repeatedly (though not long enough for the fixation to be registered by the software) shows how prevalent this behaviour is. These 'breaks' in the action of the game appear to be used by the player's brain as a way to register the environment and understand the goals of the scenario.

2. **Discussion**

Referring to Sweller's Cognitive Overload Theory, when a video game player is active in the interaction of the game, then their brain is indeed in a state of Cognitive Overload. Due to their engagement in the game, and in order to respond instantly to the various stimuli on screen (including audio-clues and dialogue), players will usually forego the reading of subtitles. Therefore, intra-lingual subtitles are completely ignored by the cognitive functions, as it is superfluous for a hearing French-speaking audience. This allows us to answer the hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: 'The player's gaze will be unequivocally drawn to the subtitle line and may distract the player.' During Gameplay Sequences, the attention of the player is fully focused on reacting to visual and auditory stimuli and remains fixed on the very centre of the AoI, within the reticule. The player also appears to favour moving the avatar within the game environment rather than moving their eyes and attention on the screen (with small exceptions for out-of-game information, such as map and interface) to visually explore the game environment. Since the map and interface cannot move, they are considered by the brain as 'in front' of the game.

- Hypothesis 2: 'The player's gaze will not always be drawn to the subtitles, and those will only cause minor distraction.' According to the eye-tracking results obtained here, the player's gaze is not necessarily drawn to the subtitle line at the bottom of the screen, particularly in gameplay. The 'distraction' effect of the subtitles is also mitigated, as none of the subjects have reported any perceived sensation of looking at the subtitles when they were playing. Therefore, the subtitles do not seem to constitute any distraction whatsoever during gameplay phases, and go as far as to be ignored, unlike in cutscene of 'passive' sequences, where they act as a magnet to the gaze, as the cognitive load lowers.

- Hypothesis 3: 'The player's gaze will not be drawn to the subtitles at all.' This hypothesis seems to be the best matching with the experiment's results. Though it must be nuanced that if the player's gaze is indeed not drawn to the subtitles during gameplay, it is still the case for cutscenes and 'passive' gameplay. Since the subject's brain is mainly focused on reacting to stimuli, the positioning of subtitles at the bottom centre of the screen does not seem to suit the actual needs of the player. Since the player's gaze is almost exclusively focused on the centre of the AoI, it might be relevant for the industry to rethink their linguistic and accessibility features to match the cognitive needs of the public more efficiently.

The cognitive behaviours of video game players can be summarised by sorting them on two axes: Gameplay Sequence Type and Cognitive Investment (Table 1). If the behaviour is comparatively similar between the three categories Cutscene-Active, Cutscene-Passive (allegedly) and Gameplay-Passive, a stark shift in the behaviour of the player in the category Gameplay-Active can be observed. Since the goal of any given video game, and what makes them so different from films or series, is to offer an interactive experience, then it would seem logical to consider this last aspect as a priority over the others, particularly if the video game intends to cater to a deaf audience (who need the subtitles to follow the dialogue). Besides, even when considering a broader spectrum of players, the current position of subtitles at the bottom centre of the screen does not suit the actual behaviour of players, who mostly remain focused on the centre of the screen. A solution similar to that investigated by Kurzhal et al (2017), which consists in placing the subtitles close to the face of the speaker, may offer interesting perspectives to be formally investigated.

Cognitive Investment / Gameplay Sequence Type	Active	Passive
Cutscene	Subtitles are followed and player's attention goes from exploration of the background to other notable elements (character faces and/or background elements)	Subtitles are followed and player's attention goes from exploration of the background to other notable elements (character faces and/or background elements)
Gameplay	Gaze is fixated on the centre of the AoI and ignores the subtitles.	Subtitles are followed and player's attention goes from exploration of the background to other notable elements (character faces and/or background elements), and on interface information.

Table 1: Summary Table of the Observations made during tests, depending on the required Cognitive Investment and Gameplay Sequence.

When it comes to research limits, the size of the sample is far from ideal to yield any generalising results due to time and material constraint. With only five participants, among which two had to be cast aside from the data, it is impossible to apply results to the majority of the population. From follow up discussions between the subjects and the researcher, another limitation has emerged: the knowledge of the topic might have influenced their actual behaviour, and that they might have paid more attention to the subtitles than they normally would in a casual setting.

Since the entirety of the participants have declared being familiar with video games, a control group composed of people with little to no experience with the medium could be envisaged, as a way to see whether familiarity is a relevant variable in the ability to follow subtitles in an interactive environment. A paradigm using an EEG device can also be envisaged, as a way to visualise cerebral activity in the situation investigated in this research, alongside the already used eye-tracking and possibly pupillometry as recommended by Kruger (2013). This equipment can provide valuable

data on potential Cognitive Overload in video-game players as it would allow for comparison of various data sets with specific focuses.

3. **Conclusion**

Unlike what has been investigated in audio-visual research until now, it seems that video-game subtitles do cause cognitive overload in users. The results of this experiment show that players seem to ignore subtitles once they become active in the game to focus more on the stimuli sent their way. A major behavioural difference could be observed thanks to the contrast in gaze fixation between four investment categories, depending on the 'Sequence Type' and the 'Cognitive Investment', as seen in Table 1: Active Cutscene Sequence, Passive Cutscene Sequence, Active Gameplay Sequence and Passive Gameplay Sequence. Cinematic sequences, which can be compared to films, have confirmed the observations of the available literature on subtitles and cognitive load. However, the observation of gameplay sequences where the player needs to be active yielded results showing a completely different behaviour, as the player's gaze stops moving around the screen and focuses solely on the centre of the AoI, with only very small variations towards interface elements. Across all investigated recordings, the subtitles were ignored during gameplay sequences.

If the observation of a wider range of players and a larger sample could yield more precise results and a better average behaviour of players, this research shows that there is indeed a specificity to the way video-game players react to subtitles. The way the industry currently offers subtitling is not relevant to the actual needs of the audience, at least when it comes to subtitles used to translate or offer a non-audio version of the in-game dialogues. Thanks to questionnaires filled by the participants, none of the subjects have felt a need to use the subtitles to understand the story, despite some difficulties to render the full picture by the end of the experiment. Still, observations did confirm that, to the average video-game player, subtitles do not constitute an obstacle to the player's involvement in the game, as they are simply ignored. However, it does bring up the question of the relevance for hearing audience of the bottom-centre display currently in use by the industry. The industry may then rethink the way they provide accessibility content to better match the specificities of the medium to better the accessibility of video games for a wider range of players and include the deaf and hard-of-hearings.

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ELEONORA BERNARDI

Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna – Department of Interpreting and Translation - info.eleonorabernardi@gmail.com

The forgotten faith of locally recruited conflict zone interpreters. a case study of interpreters in the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia in the 1990s.

Abstract

Although present on the battlefield since Roman times, interpreters and translators working in conflict zones have rarely been considered by scholars and practitioners, at least until the death toll among interpreters in Iraq and Afghanistan staggered in the years 2000s. This situation prompted a reflection on this "less glamorous" form of interpreting along with their roles, practice and dangerous position. Scholars, professional organisations and veterans' associations have since been fighting for interpreters' protection, social security and relocation in the short-term, but little attention has been paid to interpreters' position in the long term, to understand how and whether their perception and status change when cannonballs have long stopped firing. To answer this question, this paper considers the experience of locally recruited interpreters who worked for peacekeeping and military missions to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia in the 1990s. After presenting the context of their deployment, we will discuss the status former conflict zone interpreters have in nowadays Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the possible reasons behind it, to point out useful lessons that can predict interpreters' positioning in post-war countries as well as improve their long-term management in the future.

Keywords: *Interpreters, Translators, Conflict zones*

Introduction

Traditionally conceived as the failure of dialogue and diplomacy, wars have emerged, in the last twenty years, as contact zones (Ruzich, 2021: 75), where language exchanges are essential. Despite their importance, the role of civilian and military language agents, be they translators, interpreters, multilingual officers, or language assistants, has only started to be considered in translation and war studies in the 2000s (Kelly et al., 2019; Summerfield, 2014;) when local interpreters in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s became "the largest group of civilian victims of the conflict" (Kahane, 2007; Kellet, 1999). The last twenty years have seen a surge in academic output on the topic approached from different angles including the humanitarian (Bartolini, 2010; Delgado Luchner-Kherbiche, 2018; Fitchett, 2014), military (Cappelli, 2011; Footitt-Kelly, 2013; Snellman, 2014), theoretical (M. Baker, 2005, 2006, 2010; Footitt-Kelly, 2014), or pedagogical one (Albaaka, 2020; Todorova- Ruiz Rosendo, 2022) and efforts have been parallelly made to trace back the role and presence of interpreters in wars over the centuries (Baigorri-Jalón, 2011, 2019; Gómez Amich, 2018; Moreno Bello, 2014; Persaud, 2016; Ruiz Rosendo-Persaud, 2016; Takeda 2016; Todorova, 2016; Wolf 2019). While professional organisations, institutions (Council of Europe, 2010; European Parliament, 2018) and veterans' associations have campaigned for interpreters' rights – namely protection, social security and relocation – little attention has been paid to the status enjoyed by former war zone interpreters in post-war societies on the long term.

This paper analyses the current position of interpreters recruited during the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, whose contribution seems to have been "erased" from post-war discourse and representation. We will try here to analyse the reason(s) behind this situation by

considering four possible variables, namely, interpreters' "involvement" in peacekeeping/military missions, interpreters' position in wartime society, traditional representations of interpreters, and nationality and language, although more factors could be at play here. The findings are part of a wider PhD project, carried out between 2019 and 2021, investigating the role, position, and practice of interpreters during the war in the former-Yugoslavia.

Methods

The research project from which data used for this papers stem used archive material (official archival documents, newspapers articles, trials reports, videos and audio files) and semi-structured interviews with former military personnel (15 respondents) and interpreters (12 respondents). Interviews were held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and despite the cons of online qualitative interviewing - like troubles in establishing a relationship, lack of disclosure and paralinguistic clues (C. BAKER, 2012C) - the online tool gave us the chance to access interviewees from far-away countries and did not seem to affect disclosure, even of highly emotional issues. While being aware of the methodological limitations of interviews, especially if carried out several years after the events investigated took place (C. BAKER, 2019: 160), we believe that, although affected by the passing of time and by the interviewees' conscious and/or subconscious narratives, interviews provided a valuable tool to gain information about individual, collective and cultural experiences and that time distance allowed interviewees to talk freely about it without the limitations and influences of the narratives that were dominant at the time (C. BAKER, 2019). Moreover, since military matters are usually covered by confidentiality and war archives are often classified for 30 or 50 years after a war has ended or until its protagonists are alive (FOOTITT, 2019), interviews are sometimes the only way for scholars in this field to gather relevant data and access information.

Background

When the conflict broke out in the Former-Yugoslavia, the international community adopted an inconsistent and patchy approach to recognition and resolution of the conflict, although trying to provide humanitarian and cease-fire support (GOW, 1997). Two missions were deployed to the area: the European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM), established in Slovenia in September 1991 to be later extended to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR)[1], active in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina until 1995, when it was replaced, after the Dayton Agreement, by NATO-led IFOR (1995-1996) and SFOR (1996-2004), and later by EU EUFOR (2004), which is still active today. In a matter of months, a huge number of troops, NGOs, humanitarian and international organisations, and foreign journalists flooded Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, soon realising that they would not be able to function without the help of language intermediaries (DRAGOVIC-DROUET, 2007). The former-Yugoslavian interpreting market was already up to international standards (BERNARDI, 2023) but limited in size and heteronomous recruitment proved immediately difficult (CRONIN, 2002: 393): thousands of interpreters had therefore to be recruited among teachers, doctors, engineers and students (BAKER, C. 2010A: 165), sometimes only equipped with a grasp of English and no prior interpreting experience (DRAGOVIC-DROUET, 2007). Recruitment practices varied greatly and no training was provided at employment until a centralised language unit was introduced by SFOR in 2000 (ASKEW, 2011). ECMM interpreters were all volunteers and started to be paid only when Germany took over the EC presidency in 1994, while the UN hired and paid interpreters as "language assistants", although working conditions varied, despite the existence of a somewhat centralised recruitment system (BERNARDI, 2023).

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[1] The UN also continued to be present after 1995 with UNMIBH, UNTAES, UNIPTF, UNPSG and investigators of the ICTY.

Nevertheless, locally recruited interpreters did not have social security, healthcare or pension schemes, and the provision of protection equipment generally depended on their commander's common sense (Ivi: 316). Interpreters operated on the front line, with the increased risk, as local citizens, of being arrested by the warring parties (Spahić-Šagolj, no date), killed or injured (C. Baker, 2010a; Footitt - Kelly, 2013: 185). They performed a variety of tasks and had no clear job description: they mediated among local and international commanders and assisted UN agencies in their encounters with the local population, gathered victims' accounts, organised safe passage at checkpoints, assisted observers in accidents evaluation and medical evacuation, they were present at body count and passenger exchange, coordinated aid and sometimes performed community interpreting tasks (Thomas, 1995, 1997).

1. Status of interpreters in post-Yugoslavian societies: "public erasure"

Despite the widespread use of locally recruited interpreters in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, in almost 30 years, research on their role and position has only been carried out – to the author's knowledge – by foreign scholars, or local scholars living abroad, such as British scholar Catherine Baker (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2014), former EC interpreter Zrinka Stahuljak (1999, 2007, 2009) and Serbian professor Mila Dragović-Drouet (2007).

What emerges, especially from Baker's research, also confirmed by the data this paper is based on, is that former interpreters are generally absent today from popular and traditional representation of the conflict and have been denied any type of recognition of their work both from their country and their former employers (C. Baker, 2014: 99).

From an institutional point of view, although the discussion on veterans' management and role have taken centre stage in the two countries in the last twenty years, both in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina interpreters have never been considered for veteran status (*branitelj/branilac*) – which goes with public recognition and financial support – despite the risks undertaken and their permanence on the front line (Baker C., 2010b; bernardi, 2023; footitt - Kelly, 2013), nor will ever have any chance to it, judging from a general reading of the Croatian and Bosnian laws on veteran status and subsequent amendments (Republika Bosne i Hercegovine, 2004; Republika Hrvatska, 2017).

From a more cultural and sociological point of view, interpreters were never given any public recognition of any sort, except for some 30 Croatian interpreters who received the Croatian Homeland War Memorial medal in 2002 (Predsjednik Republike Hrvatske, 2002). Even here, it should be noted that their names appear on the list of recipients without specific mention of their role – unlike all the other categories of medal recipients – and one can figure out they were interpreters only by knowing them personally, with no mention of the awarding ceremony or the medals found by the author in any newspaper of the time.

This lack of recognition was raised by several of the Croatian ECMM interpreters interviewed: "Many of my colleagues have like a wound that we are forgotten" (Interpreter 02, 2020), a feeling reinforced by the fact that, according to Interpreter 2, they were all unpaid volunteers until 1994; "these people I worked with really worked for the noblest motives, they did their best, they went into dangerous situations, they were students who could party and instead of going to clubs they went on the field, working day and night, really people did their best emotionally, physically and intellectually and they didn't expect a reward then, none of us expected a reward then, but we do have a sort of bitter feeling in the mouth like that was nothing" (Ibid.).

Finally, interpreters, unlike veterans and refugees, are equally absent from popular representations of the conflict and from post-Yugoslavian fiction, cinema or political debate (Baker, C., 2014: 93) except for the recent movie *Quo Vadis Aida* by Jasmila Žbanić (2021), where the main character is a local female UN interpreter very freely inspired by the experience of Hasan Nuhanović, a UN interpreter in Srebrenica.

Conflict zone interpreters in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia have not just fallen into oblivion though, but they seem to have acquired, in post-Yugoslavian societies, a negative reputation. The few times they are mentioned, they are usually negatively connotated, *voire* reviled and criticised. For example, during the war, the Croatian Education Minister of the time publicly defined the patriotism of Croatian interpreters as "questionable" (STAHULJAK, 2009: 409) and interpreting scholar Dragović-Drouet (DRAGOVIC-DROUET, 2007) heavily criticised the professionality of ECMM interpreters, putting forward an example of mistranslation broadcast by RTL-TV1 in the autumn of 1993, although this is historically and scientifically unverifiable as the author failed to provide a specific timeframe for verification, and the source of the example is a complot theory book (COLLON, 1998). Another example of mistranslation was provided in 2018 by a Croatian magazine (DNEVNO.HR, 2018), which published undisclosed footage claiming to prove that local UN interpreters had "*fige u džepu*" (Croatian for "ulterior motives"), that guided their translation behaviour[2].

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, interpreters seem to enjoy a similarly bad reputation, as emerges from the reading of internet comments under an article by RTV of Bosnia-Herzegovina (RTV BN, 2016), on the attempt of some 700 former BiH NATO and EUFOR employees to have their employer contributions paid (MULIĆ-SOFTIĆ, 2017). Comments are quite explicit (e.g. "They worked for years for enormous sums of money") or even angry (e.g. "Most of them worked in the interest of NATO and SFOR like spies, I wouldn't pay them a penny") (IBID.).

Such a bad perception can also be found throughout the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) trial procedures, where interpreters often took the brunt of criticism and their witnessing, especially of interpreters from the Republic of Serbian Krajina, was routinely discredited by defence lawyers claiming that "all interpreters working for the United Nations were in fact providing the Serbian side with intelligence" (ELIAS-BURSAĆ, 2015: 235).

2. Reasons for interpreters' erasure and bad reputation

The interviews held with interpreters and military officers, as well as the documents analysed confirm what the available literature has posited, i.e., interpreters and their contribution to their countries' independence have been erased from post-war societies. To understand why, the specific historical, political and sociological context in which interpreters operated was analysed, along with dominant perceptions about interpreters and translators in the general public and the armed forces. Four possible variables for interpreters' current status were put forward, namely interpreters' "involvement" in peacekeeping/military missions, interpreters' position in wartime society, traditional representations of interpreters, and nationality and language.

2.1 Interpreters' involvement in peacekeeping/military missions

One of the main variables behind interpreters' erasure and bad reputation may be their "involvement" with international military/peacekeeping missions as these were harshly criticised for having failed to stop the war and the suffering of the local population, coming to represent the failure of the international community to provide a consistent and effective response to the conflict (GOW, 1997). UNPROFOR's non-reaction, or slow reaction time (MATJAž, N.D.) was considered by Croats and Bosnian Muslims as a *de facto* approval of Serb aggression (PIRJEVEC, 2014: 160) to the point that it was called SERBOFOR in Sarajevo (IBID.). On the other hand, Bosnian Serbs described attacks on their positions in 1994 and 1995 as a "persecution", an approach further reinforced in

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[2] The said footage and other excerpts of interpreter-mediated interactions were analysed using Conversation Analysis (CA) and, although several interpreting and translation mistakes were reported, unneutral renditions seem to be due more to a lack of language control and interpreting skills rather than to political considerations.

public sentiment after the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999 (Iᴃɪᴅ.). ECMM was also accused of treason by Croats, for serving the interests of the European Union that was suspected of favouring the Serbs (Kᴀʜᴀɴᴇ, 2007) and turning pink zones into Serb-held territory (Kʀsᴛɪᴄᴇᴠɪᴄ, 1998). Locals ironically nicknamed ECMM observers *sladoredari* (Croatian for "ice-cream men") (Mɪšᴋᴜʟɪɴ, 2010; Mᴀʟᴀʀɪć, 2016), who "only go out when it's sunny and there is no fighting" (Mɪšᴋᴜʟɪɴ, 2010).

Interpreters working for these missions were probably seen as an extension of their failures, without distinguishing between the individual's work for an association and the association itself. A proof of that is that all interpreters interviewed stated that they enjoyed initial support from their fellow nationals, who had hoped international presence could stop the war, but that they slowly became the target of local contempt as the situation deteriorated and the missions proved useless, *voire* detrimental. Given interpreters' visible presence within the mission, whispering in the commanders' ears, local citizens might have also expected them to influence the course of events, to advocate for their suffering, so that when the situation failed to change, the blame fell harder on the interpreters. Although no extreme violence episodes like those in Afghanistan and Iraq were recorded, interpreters recount having been outcasted by their own community and treated suspiciously: "[people were] like you're not really one of us anymore, you are working for them so we can't really tell you everything, you know, we have to be careful with you when we hang out with you" (Iɴᴛᴇʀᴘʀᴇᴛᴇʀ 05, 2020).

2.2 Interpreters' position in wartime society

Another variable that could explain the contempt and anger at interpreters, even today, might be the fact that interpreters had, despite the risks and lack of protection, at least in the eyes of their fellow citizens, a power position envied by many. The salary paid by international organisations was two or three times higher than that of any professional in wartime or post-war Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina: interpreters working for UNPROFOR were paid between 500 and 900 euros at the highest pay grades (C. Bᴀᴋᴇʀ, 2011: 27; Bᴇʀɴᴀʀᴅɪ, 2023), with salaries increasing with the arrival of SFOR in the late 1990s (C. Bᴀᴋᴇʀ, 2011). In a country where unemployment plummeted, to use the words of a former SFOR interpreter in Bosnia-Herzegovina, "interpreters earned the salary of three surgeons, two majors and four heads of the local district" (Gᴀᴛᴀʟᴏ, 2004: 35). This is probably why interpreters were accused of not caring about the war situation or the suffering of their countrymen and women, as long as they made money (Iɴᴛᴇʀᴘʀᴇᴛᴇʀ 02, 2020).

When reminded that some interpreters did not earn a salary for months and that EC interpreters, for example, were unpaid volunteers until 1994, critics underline that interpreters were nevertheless in an advantaged economic position: they could be paid in hard currency, like food or cigarettes, had access to food products and essential goods that were impossible to find or too expensive on the black market thanks to their daily connection with foreign officers (Nᴜʜᴀɴᴏᴠɪć ᴇᴛ ᴀʟ., 2019; Sᴜʟᴊᴀɢíᴄ ᴇᴛ ᴀʟ., 2010) and they were entitled to a meal a day in the military canteen. Such a position and connections allowed some interpreters to engage in black-market activities, commonly referred to as *ratno profiterstvo* (Croatian for "war profiteering"). Although none of the interviewed interpreters put themselves on record as profiteering from the war in that sense (C. Bᴀᴋᴇʀ, 2012ᴀ: 865), and no accounts were found by the author, the chance to potentially engage in parallel activities, probably equalled interpreters, in the eyes of their fellow citizens, to war profiteers and black-market criminals.

A further argument behind interpreters' bad reputation could be that local authorities sometimes tried to interfere with the missions' employment policies, especially between 1992 and 1995, as "foreign military bases represented competing sources of income for local residents that could harm [their] ability to exert patronage and influence" (Iᴠɪ: 859). Interference could range from pushing "their own relatives" (Iᴃɪᴅ.) into interpreting positions to having interpreters split their

salaries with them under threat of conscription or imprisonment (Ibid.), thus contributing to portraying interpreters as recipients of age-old nepotism practices of privileged war and political elites.

A further factor to consider in this respect is one that has gender-related implications: interpreters' wages were uncommon enough in a war-raged country, let alone if earned by women, who represented most of the interpreting workforce. Although in Yugoslavia women had enjoyed some rights not yet granted in the West (like divorce or abortion), the country was still a male-dominant and sometimes rural society: when women interpreters became the bread-winners of their families and sometimes extended families gender and age relations within the family were reversed (C. Baker, 2010b: 162), as their economic position gave women unprecedented decision-making power over their fathers, fathers-in-law, brothers and husbands and possibly undermined their traditional dominant role. Considering age-old prejudices towards working women, it can be easily inferred how these young women working with military men – who sometimes they ended up marrying or having affairs with – were easily placed on the negative side of the "saint-whore" complex, as testified by four out of the seven female interpreters interviewed. Interestingly, such a perception could also be extended to men, for different but somehow similar reasons: in the toxic masculinity approach promoted by nationalist parties on all sides before and during the war, male interpreters often attracted general scorn on gender grounds because they did not actively contribute to the war effort by taking up arms and fighting on the front lines, and for hiding as "cowards" in UN offices (Baker, 2012a: 859; Bernardi, 2023).

2.3 Traditional representations of interpreters

Another reason for interpreters' bad reputation is more connected to traditional representations of language intermediaries and can be found in the Italian motto, *traduttore traditore*, which epitomises ancient-old mistrust towards interpreters and "the idea that a translator can never remain entirely faithful to a source text or speech" (C. Baker, 2010b: 166). Interpreters' representation has always alternated between faithfulness and unreliableness, sympathy and hatred, but this duality takes, in conflict zones, more dangerous connotations with interpreters accused of being either "native spies" by foreign employers or "treacherous collaborators" by their local community. Their difficult role is perfectly described by an interpreter who worked for SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina: "Some people would try to put us down telling us that "who do you work for? Are you working for us or you're working for them?" (Interpreter 05, 2020).

In war and post-war Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, interpreters seem to have, therefore, fallen on the negative side of this "victim-villain dimension" (M. Baker, 2012), characterised by unreliableness and duplicitousness which can also be found in other conflicts in history, the most recent examples being Afghanistan and Iraq (M. Baker, 2010; Boulet, 2003; Glionna - Khalil, 2005; Inghilleri, 2010; Palmer - Fontan, 2007; Takeda, 2009: 59). This distorted perception is linked to the theoretical assumption that interpreters should be neutral and invisible conduits of information–also promoted, at least until the 1990s, by conference interpreting scholars and professionals (Lambert, 2018: 269) – where interpreters' agency, that is action or intervention within the interpreting act, can be perceived by end-users as treachery or the result of shady allegiances (M. Baker, 2010).

Research in interpreting has nevertheless shown, in the last twenty years, that communication is a co-constructed activity, and that the interpreter contributes to the interaction as a full-fledged participant, especially in community interpreting (Wadensjö, 1998), while neutrality has become a much more nuanced and complex concept, to be considered not like a fixed, immutable assumption (Ballardini, 2019), but "en situation", that is according to the specific context where it takes place (Hale, 2007; 2008; Inghilleri, 2012; Kalina, 2015; Rudvin, 2002). This is all the more true in

conflict zones, where the neutrality often evoked by the military and the general public is even more problematic, as no human being acts in a purely neutral way in a war, not even local interpreters who participate with ontological and personal narratives of their own (KAHANE, 2007) in the narratives that create the intellectual and moral environment of the conflict (M. BAKER, 2012). The inability of interpreters "to find neutral or linguistically neutral spaces" (KAHANE, 2007: 4) is then further complicated by a lack of specific international status for interpreters in conflict zones: they are not part of the foreign military troops, but they work for one of the parties in the conflict and come dangerously close to the "continuous combat function" as defined by art. 51.3 of the First Additional Protocol and art.13.3 of the Second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention of 1949 for combatants (UNITED NATIONS, 1949). Being neither one nor the other, interpreters find themselves in a legal no man's land (BARTOLINI, 2010), with unclear rights and protection, but especially no specific neutral status as the one granted to doctors and journalists. As a consequence, these conflicting expectations in both the military and the general public between interpreters' neutrality and their local embeddedness contribute to creating a climate of mistrust and the automatic expectation of betrayal and duplicitousness of interpreters, which has defined the general attitude towards interpreters in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia in the 1990s.

2.4 Nationality and language

A final aspect that complicated interpreters' position and probably contributed to their bad reputation is the interplay between their national or ethnic belonging and their professional role, especially in a conflict where ethnicity was central or made to appear as such. People were forced to pick sides, to choose their *narod* (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian for "nation") – a concept similar to the German *volk* –, binding together those sharing a common history, tradition and culture. Such a univocal conception of nationality, given by a set of factors the individual cannot influence, probably affected interpreters not just as citizens embedded in the conflict, but also in their role as language mediators. Military officers interviewed in the framework of this research project reported that international forces paid attention to interpreters' ethnicity because deploying interpreters from the "wrong" nationality would result in their imprisonment or in refusal to engage in negotiations by the warring parties (BERNARDI, 2023): in Sarajevo, Serb interpreters usually worked on one side of the confrontation line, while Bosnian-Muslim and Croat interpreters worked on the other (THOMAS, 1995). Only a few worked on both sides of the line and when they did, they remember having been forced to lie about their names and surnames not to betray their national origin (C. BAKER, 2012B; TODOROVA, 2016: 233). As a consequence, the interpreters' ethnicity was often associated with their perception as professionals and used to justify cases of mistranslation, as we have seen in the examples provided in section 1.

It should also not be forgotten that any inter-language operation was also complicated by the role languages acquired to express national identity: if Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian previously functioned as regional variants of the same language, the struggle for linguistic uniqueness and recognition in the 1990s was as fierce as the one on the battlefield. Besmir Fihadić, in his work on linguistic justice at the ICTY, provides the example of a man killed in a Serb detention camp for having used the Bosnian word for "enjoy your meal", "*bujrum*", instead of the allegedly Serbian one (FIDAHIC, 2018: 78-79). When the war broke out, nationalist language policies and prescriptions were implemented to encourage citizens to express their national belonging through language. As a consequence, even in the briefest translation, interpreters were forced to routinely take, not just inter-language, but also intra-language decisions (BERNARDI, 2023), as we can see in the excerpt below, taken from a mediated encounter between a US official and an interpreter speaking to Serbian refugees in the Croatian Krajine (UNTV ARCHIVES, 1995):

*Kao što je Gospodin Roberts rekao sada je ovo pitanje, sada je čitava ova stvar krenula na mnogo više nivoe, političke nivoe a mi ćemo i dalje kao i prije ovaj **osigur… obezbeđivati** vam zaštitu i podršku* [As Mr. Roberts said, now this issue, now this whole thing has gone to much higher levels, political levels and we will continue as before to **guarantee… to guarantee** to you protection and support - my translation]

Here, the interpreter, speaking to Croatian Serbs, self-corrects in mid-sentence the Croatian word *osigurati* and replaces it with the Serbian one *obezbedivati*, although both would have been understandable. This kind of forced intra-language translation could probably have exposed them to increased "ethnic" criticism for any language choice they willingly or unwillingly made.

It should also be added that interpreters, for the simple fact of mastering one or more foreign languages, are usually the result of different language and nationality backgrounds, experiences abroad, or the simple desire to learn about other people's cultures and customs. As such, they emerge in the interviews as people who generally found it even harder to pick sides in a clearcut way and appear to be aware that the situation was more complex than the "us vs. them" narrative that dominated the conflict. After all, it is the interpreter's job itself to *prevoditi* (Croatian for "to carry through") that is to carry the message across, from one language and one culture to another, to walk the thin line between the here and there and interpreters must be both here and there to do it. It is easy to understand how this "other otherness" is even more problematic in a polarised society and how the juxtaposition of several "loyalties" or "belongings" put interpreters in an even more uncomfortable position.

Conclusions

This brief contribution in no way aims at defending interpreters *a priori*, but at underlying how, in post-war situations, interpreters continue to face problems because of their work for many years after the war has ended. Conflict zone interpreters in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s have been reviled or at least erased from public discourse and recognition for several reasons, ranging from the reputation of their employer to their ethnicity and language issues. It should be said, though, that with few exceptions (Spahić-Šagolj, no date; Nuhanović et al., 2019; Suljagic et al., 2010), interpreters themselves failed to reflect on their experience as a professional category, probably because interpreting was a "temporary evil", a painful experience to leave behind, and not a professional choice. Even those who pursued careers as conference interpreters never came up with a special definition for that social/working group and identified with market dynamics while professional associations have mostly been "concerned with defending professional quality and rates against amateur competition, which may also include former employees of international organizations" (C. Baker, 2014: 8).

We believe that this case study, investigating the position and status of conflict zone interpreters in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina after the war, might provide a reference for the fate that awaits other interpreters in more recent conflicts as it alerts both interpreters and their employers upon the risk of stigmatisation for interpreters as a category when the war is over, even if this does not turn into outright violence and retribution like in Afghanistan right now. Moreover, we wanted to bring to the attention of the general public the difficult position interpreters find themselves in, caught among the different expectations of the warring parties, their employers, and their own community.

As several scholars have already underlined, international forces making use of locally recruited interpreters in war zones should include post-war interpreters' management in their plans, primarily for what concerns their safety, with relocation offered to those risking their lives, but they should also consider the less-violent forms of exclusion and discrimination befalling interpreters

remaining in their own countries that sometimes continue over many years. Finally, if the need to train locally recruited conflict zone interpreters has been identified as fundamental (PERSAUD, 2016; TODOROVA- RUIZ ROSENDO, 2022), this should include strategies and measures to support interpreters in the aftermath of the war, as well as guidance, professional methodology and decision-making training, to help interpreters mitigate errors and improve their general perception.

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CHIARA INNOCENTI

Scuola Superiore per Mediatori Linguistici di Pisa - m0022@ssmlpisa.it

The Extended Mind Theory as Explanation of Mass Manipulation of the Korean War

Abstract

Why are humans so susceptible to media manipulation? This research has a prime interest in answering this query, to finally understand the real nature of this long-standing issue. The Extended Mind theory, first conceived in the Nineties by Clark and Chalmers, serves here as the theory that convincingly explains the swift information dissemination now ruling the world (CLARK – CHALMERS 1998). Investigating the scheme of a wildfire-like rampant thought, first conjectured by the extended mind theory developers, is geared to unveil the psychological mechanisms which, nowadays, commanding heights leverage to shape public opinions.

The impact of a biased thought deliberately grafted into society has been analyzed historically: thanks to a thorough analysis and comparison of publications released by the most authoritative news outlets of the leading countries of the Cold War (US and Russia), suspicious upside-down narratives about the Korean War (1950-1953) will be disclosed. Ultimately, the Korean War will loom as an easy subject that Governments used to exploit, given the impossibility of the public witnessing long-distance events.

This comparative analysis aims to pinpoint the differences between Soviet and American reports and show that the common thread between these theoretically opposing representations is the aggressive communicative patterns used, which makes the realities perceived by the Americans and Soviets highly mediatized. The awareness about brain functioning in today's globalized world which stems from a full comprehension of the extended mind theory is eventually meant to provide humans with a better critical eye, transforming the influence each person exerts on surroundings into the sole reliable truth worth accepting.

Keywords: *Manipulation, Extended Mind Theory, Influence, Cold War, Korean War.*

Introduction

While civilization responds to today's needs by applying technological progress to every domain, a much more primary dilemma remains unsolved: what is the actual nature of human beings? In the 16th century, René Descartes dispelled any doubt through the image of a universe as a combination of two discrete substances. According to Descartes, each element on this planet, possesses two components: the *res cogitans* – or the spiritual substance, meaning the mind – and the *res extensa,* or the physical world, meaning the body (DAMASIO 1995). In clarifying the composition of individuals, Descartes also depicts the human mind as autonomous from the body, since the spiritual substance and the physical world are different in functions and features, which makes them never interact by nature. Can this assumption be considered completely exhaustive, if contextualized in modern societies? When the individual mind is analyzed in a more realistic social context of several people living together, it becomes evident that it features a natural proneness to stretch and connect with surrounding environments (CLARK – CHALMERS 1998). This paper intends to use what Clark and Chalmers called the Extended Mind Theory, to explain the continuous exchange of information among people and ultimately comprehend the functioning of mass manipulation. To this end, the Korean War is chosen as a case study. Its occurrences – retraced through the pages of the most authoritative newspapers of the US and Soviet Union (respectively, The New York Times and Izvestija) – allow shedding light on the easy success of those manipulative messages somehow distorted by American and Soviet institutions.

Toward the Extended Mind Theory

Clark and Chalmers questioned Cartesian dualistic metaphysics advocating the existence of an *extended mind* (CLARK – CHALMERS 1998). For them, the mind is not to be perceived as a separate element from the surroundings, as isolated in its functioning; but as a detail, understandable just, if, framed in a much more complex scenario, namely the universe. The world was for the first time seen as a cryptic system in which interdependence reigns, where the functioning of a single part is correlated and more often reliant on the functioning of others. In such a context, the physical world activates and facilitates the human mind in every action (*active externalism*), whereas the mind is a stream of thoughts that continuously reaches beyond the boundaries of the body, merging with the environment and stimulating it (CLARK 2011).

To support this thesis, Clark and Chalmers give the example of Inga and Otto (CLARK – CHARLMERS 1998): two regular teenagers differing in their intellect. Inga is equipped with a natural congenital memory whereas Otto suffers from Alzheimer's disease and relies on a notebook to fix information that otherwise would get lost. Clark and Chalmers focus their attention particularly on the mnemonic processes of Inga and Otto, in case they are asked to reach the Museum of Modern Art on 53rd Street in New York City. Clark and Chalmers posit that, in retrieving the address of MoMA, Inga and Otto, would both demonstrate the effectiveness of their *memory*. Otto's notebook – a material object – serves him just the same way a natural object – memory – serves Inga. This proves that memory can be extended to the outside of the body.

The Extended Mind in Society

Similarly, Hutchins describes a mind functioning in tandem with the environment (HUTCHINS 1995). This time, the scenario relates to the crew of a Navy ship that, during navigation, has to deal with many complications. According to Hutching, the *being together* with other people solves all problems the crew faces, because togetherness infers spreading across more people what normally weighs on the shoulders of one person. This optimizes an incredible amount of time accomplishing a given cognitive process. Consequently, the mental effort required by each member is lower because the stream of thoughts reaching beyond the body gives rise to joint reasoning.

Gallagher made further progress in defining the mind, supporting that, the stream of thoughts in a civilized community does not move solely from one individual to their entourage, but also from the clutch of minds gathered in those organizations operating to regulate society (GALLAGHER 2013). What Gallagher calls *mental institutions* are in fact in power to massively influence the mental states of single individuals with premeditated values and ideas as in the example of Alexis (*ibidem*). Alexis is a judge who must issue a sentence to end a case. Because of this, three different scenarios are possible: (1) Alexis bases her decision on evidence provided by witnesses during the trial; (2) Alexis bases her decision on evidence provided by witnesses during the trial and experts reports; (3) Alexis bases her decision on evidence provided by witnesses during the trial, experts reports, and a pre-set scheme of rules.

According to Gallagher, Alexis makes the same cognitive process in the three scenarios but in the first one, her cognitive effort doubles, because she lacks the pre-set scheme of rules and experts' reports. As a consequence, she has to rely on more subjective reasoning, while in the second and third scenarios, her mental effort is lower because she can rely on the mental efforts distributed across more individuals. Gallagher also posits that the first scenario gives a lot of support to Alexis' cognitive process, because what is perceived as "subjective reasoning" depends on the knowledge Alexis acquired through her academic career, namely the body of laws and practices that humanity has produced across centuries.

All in all, Alexis is subject to the influence of the outer world, to which she also contributes. In this context, not only is Alexis vulnerable to surrounding contingency, but she is also an active player

who can change the course of events. Every participant in the trial affects and is immediately affected by others' people behavior. The slightest variation in people's attitudes – as verbal (words), non-verbal (facial expressions, postures, body movements, gestures, eye contact), and para-verbal (pitch, tone, pace) – will have considerable repercussions for the surroundings. A different judge's ruling, a different witness testimony, and a sole difference in experts' consideration will bring to a different sentence or scenario.

Extended Mind Pattern as Reason for Manipulation

Clark, Chalmers, Hutchins, and Gallagher and the extended mind theory in general demolish the Cartesian dualistic perception of the universe and conclude that the mind is an autonomous element, a game of influences and interdependence among humans. But are these influences comparable to manipulative attempts? According to Gallagher, not only do mental organizations influence individuals, but they also can determine their mental states, which is precious to catch the dual facet of manipulation. To explain this concept, Gallagher gives the example of a charitable organization (GALLAGHER 2013). If, for instance, a charitable organization was mounting a campaign for the personal sake of money, there would be no reluctance to acknowledge this initiative as manipulative. Considering now the opposite case a charitable organization was about to launch a fund-raising campaign to aid a country at war, everyone would refrain from leveling such charges. To rebut the widespread belief that manipulation always hides the conscious utilitarian aims of manipulators, it is essential to cover the analogies between the strategies the aforementioned organization would employ in both cases. If the organization was interested in robbing people of their fortunes like in the first scenario, or in allocating money to save civilians in the bombing like in the second, there would be no difference in its campaign strategy. In both cases, they would appeal to logical fallacies to convince people of the soundness of the initiative. For example, it would target human emotional vulnerabilities by limiting the advert to the experience of people on the battlefield. Advertising the campaign by making the images as much moving as possible, e.g. by spotlighting the suffering of a person at risk, would be undoubtedly more effective than showing general statistics about death tolls. In other words, the organization would opt for photos triggering a chain of emotional reactions in the recipients, in power to nurture people's desire to donate. Believe it or not, transcending the real aim beyond these disguised-as-benevolent campaigns, the mental state of recipients would be altered in both cases, and people swayed to do something that, in other circumstances, would not do.

In light of these considerations, not only does the extended mind theory offer a renowned model of the universe, but also, a reconsideration of humanity. Exerting influence yet remaining vulnerable, humans demonstrate to be, for the first time in history, double players: manipulators and easy prey to external manipulation. Every detail of their demeanor – mental states, emotions, behaviors, actions, and everything that defines them *in their being* – proves to be a reaction to external elements that are unlikely to be dominated. Individuals, though naturally endowed with rationale, lose control over destiny, and are forced to accept unpredictability.

The Korean Case Context According to History

Thus far, a definition of the extended mind has been presented, which outweighs Descartes's dualistic vision of the universe in terms of exhaustiveness. In fact, this interpretation of the mind as expanding and becoming an integral part of the universe becomes explicative of a continuous information flow moving from the individual to the surroundings, which ends up exerting instrumental force in defining the mindsets of people. Apart from the "modest" force released by the synergy of two people, the extended mind theory serves the purpose to analyze a more overwhelming and unrestrainable force, deriving from societal ruling organizations' messages.

Now, it is crucial to provide tangible cases of mass manipulation tapping into the crucial role that distorted ideas played in fanning hatred of countries for the opposite Bloc during the Cold War. To illustrate mass manipulation at work, the major US and Soviet publications covering the Korean War in the time span between 1950-1954 were analyzed. In this period, the United States and the Soviet Union succeeded in creating administrations ruled under their influence (LUCIANI 2011). While the North – the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – emulated a full-fledged Marxist-Leninist regime, the South – the Republic of Korea – duplicated the American Capitalist reality. In this complex scenario, on June 25th, 1950, the Communist North stormed South across the 38th parallel, initiating a "civil" armed conflict (*ibidem*). Comparing the reports on this topic of the most authoritative US and Soviet news outlets (i.e., The New York Times and Izvestija), the Korean conflict will emerge as an outstanding case of disinformation, presenting an offensive language, and several unfathomable mysteries.

The Korean War according to US and Soviet Newspapers

Carrying out a comparative analysis between The New York Times and Izvestija publications on the major events of the Korean War, the first discrepancy that emerges is in the time the press announced the start of the war. On June 25th, 1950, The New York Times acquainted its people with what was happening on the peninsula with a report (War is Declared by North Koreans: Fighting on Borders). Following the declaration of war, the American reporter also specified the coordinates, fractions, times, and specific movements of the troops on the battlefield. Izvestija waited until June 27th, 1950. On June 25th, an article deemed it wise to emphasize the benevolence of the Soviets, vehemently expressing opposition to all forms of violence, including wars (Ves' Sovetskij narod goriačo odobrjaet Zajavlenie Verchovnogo Soveta URSS: naš narod za mir). Without mentioning the Korean War, the article hinted at an abstract conflict that had recently started looming. The instigator was the United States which, under the protection of Democracy, was in reality causing unemployment with Capitalism. After that, the article juxtaposed the communist society with the fervent belief in equality and the "bossing imperialist predators" with their revolting pursuit of wealth (*ibidem*). The American system was depicted as a brutal one, hinging on financially benefitting from the unemployment and misfortunes of the underprivileged social classes. The sources were multiple Soviet hardworking sailors traveling abroad. Americans were ultimately defined as "podžigatel' vojyy" (instigators of war), which openly presaged the outbreak of the war (*ibidem*).

The second discrepancy is in the casus belli. According to the New York Times, the war sparked off because of dangerous special operations that the Northern leader Kim Il Sung, called the "Soviet Puppet", had organized along the dividing line of the country (War is Declared by North Koreans: Fighting on Borders). The Northern Korean attack was with all evidence "an aggressive action that could not have been carried out without Soviet direction" (*ibidem*). The Soviet Union was training the North Korean forces; and the dodgy fighter aircraft overflying the South of the peninsula, noticeably Russian for their look, were a clear proof of that. On the contrary, America had to be sublimated for constructing all those enviably effective textile manufacturing and processing plants that, at that time, succeeded in reviving the plummeting economy of South Korea (*ibidem*). Izvestija presented the conflict in a totally different manner, reporting on the Northern Korean leader's press release of 26th June 1950 (Obraščenie Kim Ir Sena k narodu Korei). According to Kim Il Sung, on 25th June, the army of "the puppet government" guided by the Southern Korean leader – Syngman Rhee – initiated the attack on the territory north of the 38th parallel, which ultimately forced the Democratic People's Republic to "launch a decisive counteroffensive" (*ibidem*). Syngman Rhee had always been against the peaceful reunification of the country. More than this, he was liable for being an unforgivable "predatel'" (traitor) who, just in the shameful bid to recreate a socio-economic framework modeled on American Imperialism, had even come to terms with whom for long years had enslaved Koreans, the Japanese (*ibidem*).

The third discrepancy is in the picture that the press draws of the Southern Korean people receiving the troops from the North. According to what is told to Americans, the Southern capital – Seoul – was ready to appeal to the United Nations for help (Washington holds Russia to account: State Department Eyes 'Serious Matter' in Korea – Seoul Set to Appeal to U.N). There was a perception of a discouraged people, which was annulled by Northern invaders, and that, for this, was on the verge of gathering around American protective forces (*ibidem*). While the Administration affirmed that Russia was the "motivating power" behind the North Korean Government, the first secretary of the Korean Embassy specified that the attack was not a sheer "local incident", but more likely "the next step of Soviet Russia to dominate" other countries like Japan and, in general, the Far East (*ibidem*). According to the press, Russia was also striving to boycott the UN Security Council, in the meantime calling for peace talks and immediate ceasefire (US Blames Russia: Korean Cities Invaded by Communists). Dissimilarly, Izvestija described the achievements and conquests of the northern army as liberating (Naselenije južnoj Korei privetstvuet voinov Narodnoj armii). The people inhabiting the South who, for a long-time endured repression by the authorities, were now celebrating the Communist "voinov-ocvoboditelej" (soldiers-liberators) with thrilling cries, large bouquets, and flags representing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (*ibidem*). Truman's Declaration issued on June 27th, to call on the US navies to assist South Korea, sounded false and wicked in the eyes of the Soviets (Zajavlenie Trumena). Despite the evident enthusiasm that Koreans were showing for the Northern soldiers' arrival, the United States was depicted as wanting to aid the opposing faction, even at the cost of collapsing its economy (Padenie kursov akzij na n'iu-jorkskoj birže).

Ultimately, the fourth remarkable discrepancy is in the truthfulness of biological warfare. On March 14th, 1952, the Soviets charged the United States with committing monstrous crimes (Sovetskij narod gnevno protestuet protif čudoviščnik zlodejanij amerikanskich aggressorov). The imperialist invaders or the "ljudoed" (cannibals) – to exterminate all dissident populations – were supposedly fighting by deploying the most ruthless of all weapons (*ibidem*). The US Government, "prikryvajas flagom Organizatsii Ob'edinjonnych Nazzij" (hiding behind the flag of the United Nations), was spreading serious illnesses by dropping from fighters hazardously infectious mosquitoes (Vstupitel'noe slovo akademika B. D. Grekova). Plague, cholera, and typhus bacteria were wiping up the whole of South Korean civilians (*ibidem*). In the meantime, the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson was shamelessly arraigning the accusation, but the evidence of American incivility lays in the fact that the politician – despite rebutting the libel against his people – always abstained from proclaiming the inadmissibility of bacteriological weapons (*ibidem*). On the contrary, The New York Times responds to the accusation with an article (British Reds End Parley: Lay Bacteriological Warfare to U.S in Korean War) clarifying that disregarding continual denials on the part of the US, the Communist party congress kept stubbornly making its own way. According to The New York Times, on April 14th, 1952, the "British Reds" even adopted a Resolution urging the Government to end the deployment of such horrifying weapons, and this, purely in the bid to fan across the nation what thereafter Americans called the "germ war hoax" (The Germ War Hoax).
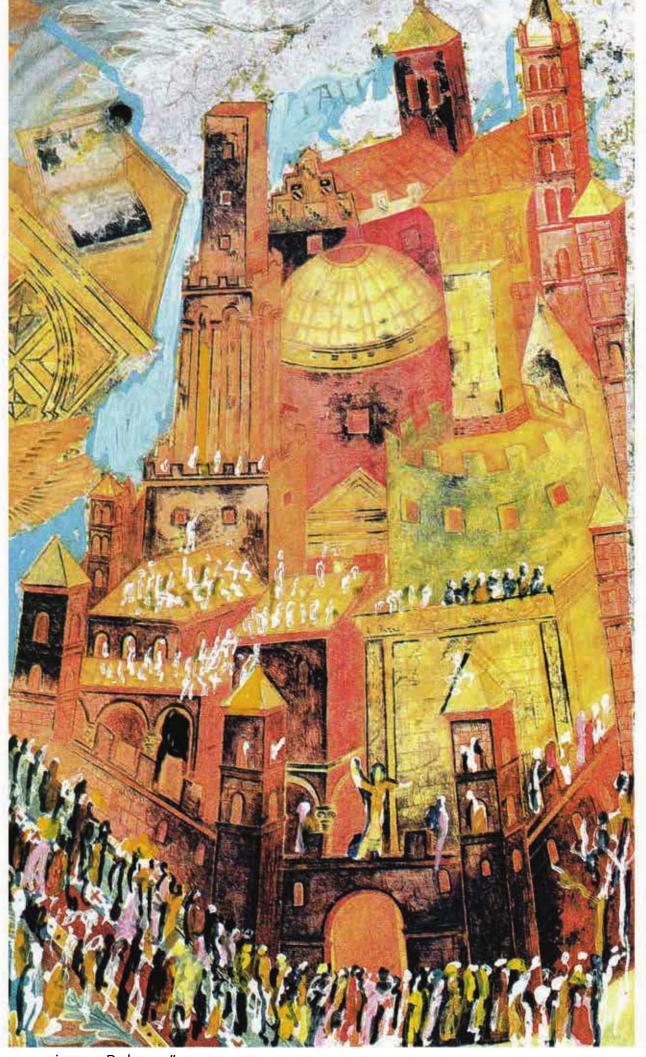
Conclusions

From this analysis, emerges that, during the Korean War, a dangerous *language of war*, to be imputed to the US and Soviet governments, pervaded the press. Omitting and distorting reality was a daily occurrence because the events needed to be adjusted to mainstream prejudices. It all materialized in different narrative devices. First, in the two newspapers, there were different choices about the beginning date of the war, the identity of the instigators, initiators, and victims, and finally, a diverse stand on the biological warfare allegedly implemented by the US throughout the following years. Second, there were discriminatory political adjectives with a high occurrence in all texts herein analyzed, i.e the "Red Soviets", the "Communists", the "Imperialists", and the

"Capitalists", inserted most probably to fuel hatred and remind the audience of the ideological characteristics of its enemy.

During this period, the Soviet Union and the US experienced bitter rivalry and hence, the authorities featured a precise political interest in instilling patriotic zeal into common people. For this, journals, radio, television, and newspapers idealized their nation at the expense of the opponents beyond the Iron Curtain, to heighten public awareness about the deplorability of the antithetical ideology. In such a historical framework, not only did Gallagher's mental institutions dictate laws, but also premeditatedly determined the thoughts that wedged into the minds of people, which ultimately succeeded in molding the conscience of entire nations. This research intends to demonstrate that, elucidating and comprehending the easy play of manipulation of the Extended Mind Theory, can also provide the readers with a larger and more reliable interpretation of historical events.

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