

Sociopolitical Aspects of Interpreting at the International
Military Tribunal for the Far East (1946-1948)

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Summary

This study is based on the premise that interpreting is a social activity, which therefore needs to be described and analyzed with reference to the social, political and cultural context of the setting in which the interpreter operates. Sociopolitical aspects of interpreting at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) are studied by focusing on the three-tier structure of the linguists (language specialists) who were involved in the interpreting process. Based on the concepts of “trust, power and control”, the historical and political context of the IMTFE and the sociopolitical background of each linguist group are examined to explore why the tribunal devised the organization of interpreter, monitor and language arbiter. The concept of “negotiated norms” is applied to examine the tribunal’s attitude toward the interpreting procedures and the interpreters’ performance. Interjections by the linguists during testimonies of Japanese witnesses are analyzed to test the hypothesis that interpreters’ behavior is influenced by their position in the power constellation of the setting in which they operate.

Keywords

International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), interpreting, sociopolitical, power, control, negotiated norms, interpreters’ behavior, monitor, arbiter.

Research problems

The most salient feature of interpreting at the IMTFE was the hierarchical structure of the three ethnically and socially different groups of linguists who performed the three separate functions: interpreter, monitor and language arbiter. Notwithstanding this distinct feature of the interpreting arrangements, and the historical significance of the trial itself as the Japanese counterpart of the Nuremberg Trial, there has been very little research done on the interpreters who worked during the IMTFE. The first aim of this study, therefore, is to shed light on this forgotten chapter in the history of interpreting. Special focus is placed on the sociopolitical context of the IMTFE and the background

of each linguist group in order to explore why the tribunal devised the three-tier interpreting organization.

The second aim is to examine the hypothesis that interpreters' behavior is influenced by their position in the power constellation of the setting in which they are placed. Micro-linguistic analyses account for a good share of the research on courtroom interpreting. This approach, however, focuses on texts and often fails to pay attention to various factors that can affect an individual interpreter's behavior such as professional training, institutional constraints and the sociocultural background of the interpreter. This study attempts to apply a more holistic approach to describe and analyze interpreting activity. The nature of interjections by the linguists and the interactions between the court and each linguist group during the testimonies of Japanese witnesses are examined in order to test the hypothesis.

Literature review

In light of the first objective of this study, literature covering interpreting in historical events is reviewed in order to examine different approaches researchers apply to describe interpreting activities that took place in the past. The reviewed literature includes: *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial* (Gaiba 1998) and *Tokyo Saiban no Tsuyaku Kenkyu* (Watanabe 1998). Although Gaiba's account of interpreting at the Nuremberg Trial does not contain any in-depth, theory-based analysis on a particular aspect of interpreting, it does present a vast amount of information on interpreting at this historical venue. Watanabe's work is significant as the first academic inquiry into the interpreters at the IMTFE. Relying solely on the transcripts of the proceedings, however, results in an incomplete understanding of the nature of the interactions among the linguists. An attempt to explain why the IMTFE established the three-tier interpreting system in the first place is lacking as well.

For the purposes of the second aim of this study, literature dealing with interpreters' behavior in courtroom settings is reviewed. The reviewed literature includes: *The Bilingual Courtroom* (Berk-Seligson 1990/2002), *The Discourse of Court Interpreting* (Hale 2004), and several articles by Morris (1989, 1990, 1995), Shlesinger (1991) and Jansen (1995). Berk-Seligson's in-depth ethnographical study analyzes the impact of interpreter alterations and intrusions on court proceedings. It fails, however,

to consider various factors that can affect such behavior by an interpreter, including the interpreter's background and position in the institutional setting. Hale's study on the discourse of court interpreting mainly applies a micro-linguistic analysis approach, but also pays attention to interpreters' own views of their roles, their ethical concerns, working conditions and other factors. Drawing on interpreting at the Demjanjuk trial, Morris and Shlesinger refer to institutional constraints on interpreting in courtroom proceedings as a major factor for shifts in interpretation. Focusing more on interpreters than on texts, their discussions include issues concerning interpreters' latitude and moral dilemmas. Jansen's case study explores the nature of norms governing court interpreters' strategies. Its findings support the hypothesis that the situation in which court interpreters' work has a direct bearing on their interpreting strategies. As Jansen acknowledges, however, the corpus of his study is too limited to reach a conclusion on general norms.

In addition, the following works are referred to as sources for the theoretical framework: Pym (2006), Pöchhacker (2005) and Shlesinger (1999, 2001) to discuss sociocultural approach as the overall theoretical framework of this study; Anderson (1976), Hermans (2000), Pym (1998) and Cronin (2002) among others to arrive at the concept of "trust, power and control"; and Toury (1995) and Shlesinger (1999) to explore the concept of "negotiated norms".

Hypothesis

Interpreters' behavior is influenced by their position in the power constellation of the setting in which they operate.

Interpreting does not occur in a vacuum. It serves a certain function in fulfilling the goal of a given setting. In order to understand the interpreter's behavior, consideration should be given to the overall institutional purpose of the setting and to how the interpreter is used to satisfy the purpose. The hypothesis of this study is that interpreters' awareness of their standing in the social, political and cultural context of the setting affects their behavior, choices and strategies in interpreting.

Research methodology

The research methodology of the first part of this study fits into the category of historical and archival research (Williams and Chesterman 2002: 65-67), which is based on the examination and analysis of historical records and other archival information. This study draws on a wide variety of materials: the transcripts of the IMTFE court proceedings in both Japanese and English, relevant court and government documents, interviews with several people who were involved in the Japanese war crimes trials, some motion pictures recorded by the U.S. military during the IMTFE, a documentary film on the trial and literature about Japanese Americans and war-time and post-war Japan. Since the memories of those interviewed concerning events that happened 60 years ago may not always be clear, any new information obtained in the interviews was corroborated by another source, such as government documents or an interview with another person.

The second part of this study fits into the category of case studies (*ibid.*). It is a case study on the interpreted testimonies of Japanese witnesses to test the hypothesis that links interpreters' behavior to their hierarchical position in the setting in which they operate. The focus is placed on the nature of the interjections by the linguists and the interactions between the court, the interpreter, the monitor and the language arbiter. Although an attempt is made to seek patterns in the linguists' behavior, this will not be approached in a strictly quantitative way, as it is not feasible with the materials available to conduct a type of research which would involve measuring and counting to obtain statistics. The audio of the motion pictures recorded during the trial indicates that the transcripts are accurate but not complete, as they did not include interjections whispered to the interpreters by the monitors. Since an audio of the entire testimony of a given witness is not available, it is not possible to get a complete tally of the total number of interjections that are missing in the transcripts, either.

Instead, this study attempts to describe the quality of the linguists' behavior, drawing on their sociopolitical background and hierarchical positions in the IMTFE. It is an interpretive examination of the materials by the author as a practicing interpreter and researcher. Therefore, this study does not attempt to reach a conclusion on the universality of interpreters' behavior in the courtroom setting. Rather, it intends to introduce one way of describing and analyzing interpreters' behavior and to seek any findings which may support its hypothesis.

Research materials

The first part of this study draws on the above-mentioned historical and archival materials. They were mostly obtained from the U.S. National Archives, the Japanese National Diet Library, the Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the National Archives of Japan, the Japanese American Veterans Association, the MacArthur Memorial Library and Archives, and the Archives at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

It also relies on interviews with people who actually were involved in interpreting at the IMTFE. They include: a one-on-one interview and email communications with Takashi Oka, who is the only known surviving interpreter; the transcript of an interview with Masakazu Shimada, another interpreter, conducted in 2000 by Kondo and Watanabe; and a 1980 taped interview of Lardner Moore, one of the language arbiters, conducted by his son George Moore. In addition, interviews were conducted with people who were involved in the U.S. Military Intelligence Service Language School, the Yamashita trial in Manila and other “Class B/C” war crimes trials.

The examination of the interpreted testimonies of Japanese witnesses draws on the transcripts in both English and Japanese and the audio track of the motion pictures filmed during the trial.

Expected results

1. The “who, what, where, when, why and how” of interpreting at the IMTFE will be presented.
2. Why the IMTFE established a three-tier structure for the interpreting process will be explained.
3. An analysis of interpreters’ behavior will be presented in sociocultural terms.

Expected benefits

1. Contributing new information to the history of interpreting.
2. Broadening the scope of research which applies sociocultural approaches.

Transfer of results

The findings of this study are to be shared at conferences internationally, in articles and books - hopefully, in both English and Japanese.

Work schedule

July–August 2006: Additional interviews with IMTFE participants in Japan and the United States; and viewing of all the motion pictures of the IMTFE proceedings available at the U.S. National Archives.

September 2006–June 2007: Expand the minor dissertation, especially the “literature review” and “theoretical framework” chapters; and develop an in-depth, well-defined analysis of the linguists’ behavior with a larger corpus than that of the pilot study conducted in the minor dissertation, which examined the interpreted testimony of Hideki Tojo.

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