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Interpreting at the Border: «Shuttle interpreting» for the UNHCR

Interpretar en la frontera: «Interpretación puente» para el ACNUR

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Abstract: This paper will provide an overview of relevant research in the area of interpreting in conflict zones with a special focus on working with refugees. The relevant theoretical framework will be supplemented by my personal experience working as field interpreter for UNHCR in Macedonia and Kosovo in 1999/2000, and the experiences of my colleague interpreting for the refugees in Macedonia during the European refugee crisis at the Macedonia-Greece border in 2015/2016. Tackling the question of the discrepancy between the prescribed neutrality and real-life experiences of mediating and advocating for the vulnerable, the article will propose a new mode of working for interpreters in conflict that I would call «shuttle interpreting», namely independent interpreting between the communication parties.

Key words: UNHCR, emergency, shuttle interpreting, refugees, border.

Resumen: Este artículo ofrece una visión general del estado de la investigación sobre la interpretación en zonas de conflicto, con especial atención al trabajo con los refugiados. El marco teórico se basa en la propia experiencia de la autora, que trabajó como intérprete sobre el terreno para el ACNUR en Macedonia y Kosovo en 1999/2000, así

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como en las experiencias de una colega que ejerció como intérprete en Macedonia en el contexto de la crisis europea de los refugiados en la frontera greco-macedonia en el 2015/2016. Tras abordar el problema de la discrepancia existente entre la neutralidad recomendada y las experiencias cotidianas donde se ejerce la mediación y la defensa de personas en situación de vulnerabilidad, se propone una nueva forma de entender el trabajo de los intérpretes en los conflictos como «intérprete puente», abogando por interpretar de manera independiente entre los participantes en la situación comunicativa.

Palabras clave: ACNUR, emergencia, interpretación puente, refugiados, frontera.

The important role played by translators and interpreters in situations of conflict, in the events leading to such conflict, and in dealing with its aftermath, has been gaining increased interest among translation studies scholars in the last decade. However, a serious survey of the current state of research will necessarily result in concluding that there is still a lack of a clear typology and definition of the different roles played by interpreters in such situations. Furthermore, there is still a shortage of recognition of the role played by interpreters in emergency situations, as well as insufficient opportunities for appropriate training development.

This article looks at the special role of locally-employed staff working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as UN Refugee Agency, in situations of emergency response which are closely connected to war and violent conflicts. I will argue that in these particular situations interpreters are not just enablers of communication by transferring content from one language into another but are active partners in the process of mediation and advocacy for the vulnerable. Furthermore, I will point out to the meaningful connection that can be drawn between «shuttle mediation» and interpreting in situations of humanitarian crisis, advocating for the introduction of a new mode related to interpreting in conflict, namely that of *shuttle interpreting*. Shuttle interpreting can be said to occur when the interpreter works independently, transferring the messages between the communication parties who are not present in the same meeting.

This article will base its theoretical framework on the analysis of two case-studies of field interpreting, both examples of crisis situations in which UNHCR employed a large number of local field staff, primarily helping with language and local knowledge: 1) interpreting at the Macedonia-Kosovo border for refugees leaving Kosovo and taking temporary refuge in Macedonia immediately after the Kosovo crisis in 1999, and 2) interpreting during the European refugee crisis in the part that took place at the Macedonian-Greek border in 2015.

1. INTERPRETERS IN CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The role of interpreters in processing military data, facilitating communication between armies, the local population, and the media, or investigating war prisoners has recently been the focus of an increasing number of contemporary studies (Apter 2005, Baker 2010, Dragovic-Drouet 2007, Inghilleri 2005, Palmer 2007, Rafael 2007, Stahuljak 2000). In all these situations related to conflict, violence and war, interpreters go beyond their usual perceived role of communication enablers, but more often than not they become proactive partners in the process of conflict resolution and peace building. Moreover, interpreters provide humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing war zones.

In their guide for interpreting in public services and the community, Tipton and Furmanek (2016) define and elaborate different modes of interpreting and propose terminology in relation to community and public settings. However, they clearly stress that interpreting in conflict zones and disaster situations represents a separate and specific domain that has not been covered in their extensive study. Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud (2016, 29), on the other hand, identify the need for more exploration of the «categorisation of interpreters in conflict». Allen (2012) recognizes and describes the characteristics of three types of interpreters in a situation of war: military linguists, contract interpreters and humanitarian interpreters. Allen describes this third group of interpreters as the most under-recognized and researched «interpreters working on the ground with international aid and news organizations, flies almost completely under our radar» (2012).

Although it does not involve interpreting directly in war situations, interpreting for the UNHCR does occur as a result of a war, and involves a serious crisis situation. Created in 1950, the UNHCR has the mandate «to ensure the international protection of uprooted people worldwide»[1] which comes as a result of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. As much as «87 per cent of [UNHCR's] staff are based in the field, assisting the most vulnerable victims of displacement»[2]. Thus, assuring that accurate information is shared with refugees and that they can clearly convey their stories and needs in a language they understand is of paramount importance for UNHCR.

Most of the research on the interpreters' work with refugees has so far involved the asylum procedure in receiving countries. Pöllabauer (2004) analyses the work of interpreters in asylum procedure in Austria, Inghilleri (2005) looks at the «interpreting habitus» of interpreters within the asylum system in the United Kingdom, whereas Maryns (2006) studies the oral performance of asylum speakers and how their stories get transformed in the Belgium asylum procedure. Mulayim and Lai (2010, 48) present the case for interpreters of «rare and emerging languages» in public services in Australia, which «accepted the second highest number of refugees out of all the countries in the world» and the obstacles in training refugees to perform interpreting for their communities due to the lack of sufficient staff in these languages. Most recently, Tipton and Furmanek (2016) put special attention on «the role of the interpreter in an Asylum and Immigration Tribunal appeal hearing in the United Kingdom» (2016, 76).

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[1] http://www.unhcr.org/legal-protection.html

[2] http://www.unhcr.org/where-we-work.html

However, little research has been done on the work of locally employed interpreters by the UNHCR in emergency situations. In an emergency response, often occurring due to a devastating conflict or war, UNHCR «can launch an emergency operation within 72 hours»[3] of trained volunteers listed on the «Emergency Response Team (ERT) rosters for any impending humanitarian crisis». In order for the volunteers to effectively communicate with the refugees and the host country, UNHCR needs to quickly and effectively employ interpreters. While the volunteers have been trained to work in an emergency situation, the locally-employed interpreters often have only a basic knowledge of one of the languages in which they interpret and little or no experience as interpreters before the conflict occurred in their region:

> Interpreters are often recruited because they «know» both the local language/dialect and English, the language of international relief operations, and not because they have been trained as translators or interpreters. It is safe to say that hardly any have undergone training in interpreting, as the results of the first phase of our project confirm. Thus, they lack both essential professional skills to perform adequately as interpreters, as well as the necessary professional ethics to support crisis management and humanitarian efforts in a stressful environment. (Moser-Mercer and Bali 2008, online).

For instance, before the 1990s conflict in the former Yugoslavia there were no translation agencies or schools in the country that provided specialized training for interpreters, so the first place where translators and interpreters could be found during the Yugoslav wars were translation associations whose members had majored in a foreign language (Dragovic-Drouet 2007, 29). Yet, these people had variable levels of experience, while their interpreting skills were unknown since some of them only knew the foreign language. After the hiring of all available translators with experience, the employers' search then had to expand to include English language teachers, who theoretically knew the foreign language but whose translation and interpreting skills were limited or nonexistent. Even with their involvement, the real need was still not met, as the language capabilities of the interpreters were often inadequate, and the interpreting skills had to be acquired during quick and improvised training after they began work. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina local interpreters were employed by UNPROFOR, however many of them were never trained to be interpreters, but had other professions, «such as the doctor who worked as an interpreter for the British general Michael Rose… and a remarkable number were engineering students and/or the children of engineers» (Baker 2010, 158). But even linguists who are employed and trained by foreign organizations may often have a limited knowledge of the other language, not to mention specific interpreting skills and experience.

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[3] http://www.unhcr.org/emergencies.html

According to the UNHCR guidelines for interpreters, they are expected to «maintain impartiality and neutrality» (UNHCR 2009, 25). As I have written elsewhere (Todorova 2016) neutrality is a behavior historically expected by both mediators and interpreters who work in a situation of conflict as a method to attain the trust of the involved parties. However, this trait has recently been problematized and scholars have argued that not only is neutrality impossible, but its opposite may actually be more effective to conflict resolution. The same case for reassessment of neutrality can be made for conflict interpreters as well, the perception of which is now changing from mere language instruments to human agents inhabiting a complex network of social positions and performing a more proactive role in conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance. Interpreters are also involved in creating and maintaining a relationship of trust in the conflict setting. In order to create this relationship of trust, interpreters have to position themselves in relation to both the international organizations and the parties involved in the conflict, which entangles them in a more complex set of relations. The role occupied by interpreters in conflict and related humanitarian situations is only complicated further by the fact that they are not outsiders to the conflict, but from the onset they are positioned well inside the conflict situation and one (or more) of the parties to that conflict.

Writing about the difference between «theoretical» violence i.e. violence as an epistemological issue, on one hand, vis-a-vis «empirical» violence i.e. the deployment of forces against the population, on the other, Stahuljak (2000) argues that translators are in an impossible situation: they are required to convey or communicate a meaning without loss and without interpretation – in brief, to remain «neutral». However, what the translation process reveals is that no one can be neutral when it comes to language: meaning and interpreting are intertwined, language is never «neutral». Dragovic-Drouet stresses that interpreters working for NGOs «were often faced with situations which made it difficult for them to maintain impartiality» (2007, 36), especially when they identified with the community that was affected by the war. In fact, many contemporary scholars in translation and interpreting studies go firmly against the «in-between» metaphor in terms of the positioning of translators and interpreters. According to Tymoczko, the «in-between» metaphor emerges from the narrow Western views of translation and therefore «is not a good model for those who seek an ethical geopolitical change» (2003, 199). Translators have ideologies and loyalty, and this is connected with certain cultural spaces, and not with the «in-between». And finally, the «in-between» discourse clouds the need for a practical collective engagement as an assumption for social change. Agreeing with Tymoczko, Baker (2006) criticizes the «in-between» metaphor to support the idea of a neutral space, a no-man's land between cultures that would allow translators to transcend cultures and politics.

In discussing the training needs for language actors working in conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian settings, Moser-Mercer et al. draw «on experience with training field interpreters working for humanitarian organizations» (2014, 143) including UNHCR. The Center for Interpreting in Conflict Zones (InZone) has developed a training mode using new technologies to provide training for interpreters working in humanitarian crises. UNHCR has also developed a self-study module (2009) for interpreters in a refugee context. However, there is still a significant lack of research in the area of interpreting in emergency humanitarian situations.

In this article I acknowledge the work of UNHCR field interpreters by presenting the life-stories of two interpreters working for the UNHCR during particular crisis situations due to a large influx of refugees at the border of Macedonia. Further, drawing on conflict resolution strategies and modes, I will try to describe the role of interpreters in these particular situations.

2. PRESENTATION OF CASE-STUDIES

The analysis in the article is based on the experience as told by the involved language brokers. Although telling a life story is such a great part of our human nature, we are often unaware of its meaning. People everywhere tell stories about a part of their lives to friends and strangers. Stories can confirm, valorize, and support our experience in social frameworks, and clarify our relationships with those around us. Stories help us understand the differences, but also our similarities and relationships with others. The use of life narratives in serious academic studies is thought to have started in psychology with the psychoanalytical interpretations of Sigmund Freud's individual cases in 1910 and 1911. Gordon Allport (1942) used personal documents to study the personal development of individuals, focusing on primary documents, including narratives, while at the same time bearing in mind the problems of trustworthiness and validity of the interpretations made from those documents. The method reached its maturity in Erik Erikson's studies on Martin Luther King (1958) and Gandhi (1969). Erikson (1975) also uses life stories to research the way historical moments influenced people's lives. It can be said that the life story interview has evolved from oral histories, life stories and other ethnographic and field approaches. It is a qualitative research method to gather information about the subjective essence of the part of the individual's life that is transferable through the disciplines.

Trying to amend the situation of interpreters who «even on those occasions when their presence is mentioned, interpreters working in conflict zones are rarely referred to by name or singled out for detailed description or comment» (Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud 2016, 2), I have conducted several interviews with interpreters working at UNHCR Macedonia during the humanitarian crises in 1999 and 2015, and I will here present two stories, including my own story as interpreter for the UNHCR Macedonia and Pristina.

2.1. *Interpreting at the Macedonian-Kosovo border in 1999*

One of the latest conflicts related to the break-up of ex-Yugoslavia was the conflict in Kosovo in 1999. Ethnic tensions have always been an issue throughout Kosovo's history, which is so deeply intertwined with the troubled history of the whole Balkans. A region at the border between Albania and Serbia, mainly populated with ethnic Albanian population, at different periods it belonged to different political entities, including Albania, the Ottoman Empire and Serbia. After the Balkan Wars it become part of Serbia, and later became part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the Second World War, within the Republic of Serbia, but with significant autonomy. The situation significantly deteriorated after the Yugoslav constitution was changed to reduce the independence of the two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina, part of the Republic of Serbia) in 1989. After 1990 Kosovo Albanians started a non-violent resistance as a result of this situation. During the war in Bosnia and Croatia, the problems in Kosovo were to some extent forgotten, but after the Dayton Accord at the end of 1995 and beginning of 1996 the conflict began to turn more violent, since Albanians in Kosovo expected some international settlement for the Kosovo issue that did not happen. The first acts of violence against Serbs and Serbian security forces by Albanians started in March 1998 when open violent conflict replaced the peaceful struggle of ethnic Albanians for their independence and right of secession from Yugoslavia. The violent conflict was for the most part fought between the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Serbian security forces. It captured the attention of the world media and triggered hectic diplomatic activity, international outrage about human rights violations, and relief efforts of nongovernmental organizations in Kosovo. Yet despite this, the conflict escalated.

In an attempt to put an end to the conflict, NATO launched an air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in March 1999. As a result, a large influx of refugees from Kosovo started to enter Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia. However, the largest numbers of refugees were using the Blace border crossing between Macedonia and Kosovo. Refuges entering Macedonia included ethnic Albanians, and later Roma and Ashkali[4] population, taking temporary refuge in Macedonia, or seeking asylum in other «third» countries. The languages involved in this emergency situation were Albanian, Serbian and Macedonian, as well as (mainly) English as the language of the international organizations.

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[4] Albanian speaking Roma minority population established in 1999 in order to distinguish this group from the mainly Serbian speaking Roma population in Kosovo.

During the Kosovo conflict and the ensuing refugee crisis in Macedonia, I started working as a Field Clerk in the team of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I was interpreting for the refugees at the Macedonia-Kosovo border, but also in various refugee camps throughout Macedonia. This was a truly life-changing experience for me. Assisting the international personnel who were trying to help the Albanian refugees from Kosovo to Macedonia, I was working against the «publicly perceived» national interests of Macedonia and the Macedonian people, to whom I «belonged» in terms of my ethnicity.

Unlike most of my colleagues working in the same position as field clerks with no specific translation education and experience, I was a graduate in English Language and Literature with a specialization in translation. However, my degree was mainly designed to prepare me for written translation, predominantly literary translation. Luckily, in my previous professional experience prior to joining UNHCR, I had the opportunity to face many of the dilemmas of field interpreters, including the overarching dilemma of what is a «socially acceptable» behavior of an interpreter, in my capacity as interpreter working for several international organizations including the Skopje offices of the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The most significant experience of my work as part of the UNHCR team happened at the Blace border crossing, on the border between Macedonia and Kosovo. The Blace team consisted of four members: an international Protection Officer, two interpreters, and a driver. The interpreting team consisted of an ethnic Albanian and an ethnic Macedonian (myself), both Macedonian nationals. The Albanian interpreter mainly worked on interviewing refugees, whereas my own duties mainly involved interpreting the communication between the UNHCR Protection Officer and the Macedonian border police authorities.

During the highest intensity of refugee influx from Kosovo into Macedonia, the Macedonian police would sometimes close the border for a certain amount of time, sometimes up to a couple of days. This activity led to a great number of people being caught in the no-man's land without any support from the UNHCR or any other organization. One of the tasks of the UNHCR protection staff at the Blace border crossing was to make sure that the vulnerable population, women, children and elderly, were provided with the necessary support and care. After several attempts to negotiate flow of refugees and allowed numbers to enter the country, the UNHCR Officer and the police commander reached a standstill and no one was prepared to withdraw. After an exchange of hostilities, the possibilities for face-to-face meetings became difficult. As a locally engaged, ethnic Macedonian interpreter, I was sent to continue the interrupted negotiations with the border police officials. I performed individual meetings with UNHCR international staff, on one hand, and Macedonian border police officials, on the other hand.

After the NATO air campaign and the withdrawal of the Serbian army from Kosovo, UNHCR started a large-scale repatriation to Kosovo of the Albanian refugees temporarily sheltered in Macedonia. At this point, I was offered a position as a Field Interpreter in the UNHCR Pristina office, to assist in communication with the Serbian internally displaced population. The Serbian population still living within the city of Pristina, consisting primarily of elderly people, sick or disabled, was isolated and with restricted movement due to fears for their security. During almost my year-long work in Pristina, I visited individuals and small communities of Serbian, Goran and Roma population, making sure they received the appropriate living supplies and medical attention. Although employed as a local interpreter expected to work alongside an international officer, I performed this task individually, with the support of a local driver with knowledge of the local area. After a day spent in the field I would prepare written reports about the situation identified and the mitigation activities conducted.

2.2. *Interpreting at the Macedonian-Greek border in 2015*

After the conflict in 2001, UNHCR significantly reduced its presence in Macedonia. However, the recent European refugee crisis, due largely to the war in Syria and Iraq, as well as conflicts in Afghanistan, has again triggered the need for more intensified protection and aid for the refugees. Refugees from these countries were crossing the Mediterranean Sea looking for safety in Europe, first arriving in Greece or Italy, and continuing their journey through Western Balkans and Eastern Europe towards other European Union (EU) member states in Western and Northern Europe, mainly Germany and Sweden (UNHCR 2015). In the case-study presented in this paper, the refugees were mainly crossing the Greek-Macedonian border, and crossing Macedonia heading to Serbia, on the way to EU.

Hana Habahbeh[5] has been working for UNHCR since the beginning of the crisis, first as an Assistant Interpreter, and later as Field Assistant and as Field Monitor with special attention to protection, using English, Macedonian and Arabic. She is one of the three UNHCR interpreters employed to work during the emergency response to the European refugee crises in Macedonia. Born and raised in Macedonia, Hana learned Arabic from her Palestinian father, and uses Arabic at home as her second mother tongue. Having been using it to communicate with family and friends, she never imagined having a career in translation or interpreting since the Arabic language is rarely used in Macedonia. So she chose to work in the area of law instead.

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[5] Personal interview on December 12th 2016.

With the outbreak of the European refugee crisis, which significantly affected Macedonia as a transit country, UNHCR increased and strengthened its presence in Macedonia again. Interpreters from Arabic who were able to provide this service were in short supply and UNHCR tapped insider sources to get to interested people with the relevant skills to perform the job, contacting Embassies, Universities and other organizations. Hana was invited for an interview, where she was tested for her skills to use spoken Arabic, and after two days she was invited to join UNHCR.

During the early stages of the emergency response there was no training provided for her to perform her interpreting duties, and she was bound to learn from her own daily experience. Later on there were two training sessions conducted by UNHCR international staff from Geneva and Budapest. The training incorporated topics related to interpreting methods and techniques, including the use of body language. Additional training was also provided by UNICEF. However, Hana found that the UNHCR «rule book» offered the best guidance as it provided advice on «how to behave and that you are not the one who will determine who lies and who tells the truth».

Languages that were still lacking interpreters were Farsi and Urdu in particular, as there were far less speakers who could interpret these languages. One or two were eventually found; however, refugees also used English as a relay language.

The two vulnerable groups that Hana experienced in this situation were the Yazidis[6] and the members of the LGBT population. Both these groups could speak Arabic but had special protection needs and, therefore, accommodation and transportation was provided in separate groups. Hana stated that she «never made any distinction between different people» and maintained that «there should be no preference or loyalty» to any side.

One of the most rewarding and most problematic instances of interpreting that Hana described during her two years' employment at the UNHCR in Macedonia happened at the Greek-Macedonian border, at Gevgelija. The border was temporarily closed for a day or two when the authorities started sorting refugees at the border based on their origins, in order to give priority to people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. During a day of closed borders there were about 5,000 people impatiently waiting to enter Macedonia. UNHCR staff was ordered to stay away from the border-crossing zone due to security reasons. The Macedonian border police was trying to establish order, but since they had no interpreters available the communication with the refugees was difficult. Hana decided to act on her own and provided support to the border police. It took her two hours of «shouting and persuasion» to make everyone line up and create some order.

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[6] A religious and ethnic minority group fleeing Sinjar Mountain.

During this event, and many other events, Hana performed her work independently, not accompanied by any member of the UNHCR international staff. Hana and her colleagues also worked as interpreters for other UNHCR partner organizations, both international and national, as well as with the police. She felt that she could be proactive. UNHCR has a system of weekly meetings when she could present her opinion and suggested ideas based on her experience in the field. One such suggestion which was accepted and implemented was to create WhatsApp groups for better communication.

After the borders with Greece and Serbia were closed for refugees on 7 March 2006, the number of refugees in Macedonia was significantly reduced. Today there are about 1,500 people left in the two transit centers in Tabanovce and Vinojug, mainly families with small children or people with low resources. The refugees have no permits for free movement. The Macedonian state is either looking at asylum applications or is returning refugees in the first safe country, in this case Greece, for readmission.

3. SHUTTLE INTERPRETING

Based on the two previously presented case-studies, it can be said that the work of UNHCR officers in emergency response at the border clearly resembles the work of a mediator. Emergency interpreters position themselves between the refugees and asylum seekers, on the one hand, and the Government border management authorities and police, on the other. In both cases described above the role of the UNHCR was to secure an uninterrupted flow of refugees across the border and provide them with the necessary humanitarian and legal protection, especially when the authorities decided to close the border temporarily.

My attempt here is not to draw connections between the work of the interpreters and mediators in terms of their objectives, and I have elsewhere pointed to the similarities in the work of mediators and interpreters in conflict resolution (Todorova 2016). However, in this article I would like to point out that some connections can be drawn between «shuttle mediation» and interpreting during a humanitarian crisis. Apart from providing interpretation during meetings, most of the activities performed by interpreters involve «establishing a sense of trust and providing encouragement to the parties involved to reach an acceptable solution» (Todorova 2016, 238). I will go one step further and advocate for the addition of another kind of interpreting – namely that of the *shuttle interpreting*, a term based on the study of mediation and diplomacy processes.

The process of «shuttle mediation» takes place when the mediated parties cannot be present in the same room at a mediation meeting for various reasons, including sometimes due to feelings of intimidation or other high emotions (Boulle et al. 2008, 245). In this case the mediation will take place either 1) simultaneously, if the parties are present in separate rooms but close to one another and at the same time; or

2) the mediator visits the parties separately at different times. In both situations it is the mediator who passes the message from one party to the other and makes sure they reach an agreement. As seen from the case-studies described above, interpreters in an emergency situation may find themselves interpreting without the simultaneous presence of both parties in the same place and at the same time. The interpreter meets separately with the both parties in the communication process and makes sure communication is established.

Not unlike shuttle mediation, *shuttle interpreting* should be used only when mediators or the parties to the dispute do not feel confident about their physical safety or when there are other insurmountable reasons why it is not possible for the parties to meet or they fear of losing face. The interpreter then needs to meet with both parties separately and convey the message to the other party. This situation can be identified in both case-studies. My own main duties as a UNHCR locally employed staff was to perform «shuttle interpreting» at the Macedonia-Kosovo border between UNHCR on one side and the Macedonian border police and army on the other. Additionally, in Pristina I continued to conduct «shuttle interpreting» between the UNHCR international staff and the internally displaced and minority population in the city. The situation in 2015 was slightly different, with the UNHCR interpreter performing shuttle interpreting between the border police and the refugees at the border crossing, as well as for UNHCR officials and the refugees located in the transit centers.

Just like in the shuttle mediation process, it has to be acknowledged that *shuttle interpreting* has its drawbacks and limitations. First, most or all of the non-literal and non-verbal meanings will be lost as there is no access to cues such as posture, facial expression and tone of voice. Moreover, participants will lose the ability to respond immediately to proposals/statements and to witness immediate responses. Since information is passed by a third party (in this case the interpreter), there is a greater risk of miscommunication and misinterpretation. One of the techniques the UNHCR interpreter has developed in order to avoid misunderstanding is «repeating the message or question several times until being completely sure the other side understands completely» (Habahbeh 2016).

Another drawback of «shuttle mediation» is considered to be the fact that it «creates the potential danger of an abuse of mediator power deriving from his or her position as the sole conduit of information between the parties» (Boulle et al. 2008, 246). Similarly, Pöllabauer reveals that in asylum hearings in Austria interpreters are «granted a much wider scope of influence than is generally assumed» and they «take the lead and elicit information they regard as necessary for […] establishing favorable communicative relations» (2004, 154). In the case of *shuttle interpreting*, the interpreter's influence and power become even more pronounced.

Shuttle interpreting may also result in the parties believing that the interpreter may act as their advocate. Interpreters have been often faced with the dilemma of loyalty and neutrality. Hana has maintained during our conversation that «she cannot take sides» (Habahbeh 2016). However, she has also reported having a proactive role in the process of providing refugees with the necessary assistance. Hana says that she «feels responsible for the people she is interpreting for since there may be terrifying consequences if you do not interpret properly, especially in medical situations» (Habahbeh 2016). As I have noted elsewhere, although interpreters believed they should indeed remain invisible yet, at the same time, most reported having a proactive role in taking action, working independently and suggesting remedial activities. This position «would indicate that while they may be intuitively aware of their agency in the process, the dominant education narrative still works to cancel that out» (Todorova 2016, 238).

Interpreters involved in shuttle interpreting could learn from the suggestions given to shuttle mediators in order to perform their tasks better. A mediator involved in shuttle mediation needs to pay special attention to clarifying and summarizing exactly what is being said and report this accurately to the other party. It is important for the mediator to establish what exactly the parties wish to be passed on and what they wish to remain confidential (Boulle and Nesic 2001). In this situation it is also important to keep notes of what is being said. Working in an emergency situation, at the border crossing, may prevent the untrained interpreter from remembering to keep notes of all their discussions. However, this significantly changes in the aftermath of the emergency situation, once the response becomes more organized. While working in the UNHCR Pristina office, interpreters were asked to draft reports at the end of each field visit to keep track of the situation and of the needs of minorities in Pristina region. Furthermore, the local UNHCR staff visiting the refugees in the two temporary transit centers in Tabanovce and Vinojug drafted daily reports which they shared with all UNHCR international staff, and even with the main Geneva office.

4. CONCLUSION

This article confirms that not only the «working requirements, conditions and description of interpreting during war are not yet well defined» (Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud 2016, 28), but the working conditions related to humanitarian crises related to war has not been defined and categorized. This lack of categorization and attention by academics has resulted in stagnation and no real progress in the position of these interpreters in the course of history. Interpreting for refugees, in an emergency situation, like the ones described above, is closely related to a situation of war, and thus can be classified in the same domain.

The two case studies explained in detail above show that the role of interpreters and their position within UNHCR emergency deployments has changed very little over fifteen years. Although employed primarily for their linguistic skills, UNHCR local field staff working in a situation of emergency often adopt a role similar to that of a mediator, working independently, without immediate guidance by the primary parties involved in the communication process, undertaking tasks beyond the scope of the work of a language broker.

Most of the interpreters, with some exceptions, involved in an emergency UNHCR deployment are not professionals. Although training in interpretation is obviously important for interpreters during conflict situations, other types of training are also equally (or even to a greater extent) necessary when working in emergency situations.

However, «despite the position the interpreter has played in conflict scenarios, no provision has been made for training interpreters specifically to work in those settings, with few exceptions» (Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud 2016, 28). This fact is often overlooked by interpreters themselves and by the organizations recruiting them. As one of the interpreters noted, «no training can prepare you for what is happening in the field» and «90% one learns from experience and adapting to the given situation and from advice provided by more experienced staff» (Habahbeh 2016). Training in mediation would be highly useful for interpreters, as it would empower them to contribute more fully to the process of working independently, as well as to utilize their agency during the *shuttle interpreting* process in a more conscious and purposeful way, with the ultimate aim of doing their utmost to help both communication parties to reach their goal.

Finally, field interpreters working in conflict and humanitarian settings «have a lot to teach the rest of us. How to stay safe when interpreting in unsure settings, how to handle vicarious trauma, and how to stay focused and effective under extreme circumstances are just a few of the challenges they face and overcome on a daily basis» (Allen 2012). If we listen to their stories we may be able to learn a lot about how they perform their day-to-day duties and use this in providing them with the best possible support and training.

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