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UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

FACULTÉ DE TRADUCTION ET D'INTERPRÉTATION

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The Impact of the Political Conjuncture on Interpreters

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté de Traduction et d'Interprétation

Pour l'obtention du MA en Interprétation de Conférence

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Abstract

High-level interpreters, employed in official diplomatic discussions alongside heads of states and government, work in a highly politicized environment. The latter can influence in many ways the interpreters' lives and careers. To better understand this influence, I raise the following question: what exactly is the impact of the political conjuncture on an interpreter's life? This research identifies different types of impacts and categorizes them into recurring patterns. It provides the reader with a clear overview of the latter. I chose to study interpreter's lives in an extreme political setting: the USSR during the Cold War. It is an ideal-type background that crystallizes and exacerbates political tensions, impacting all actors involved in international relations, interpreters included. My work employs a qualitative historical approach, relying largely on primary sources: the memoirs of interpreters at the highest level, who work for or with Soviet delegations. I found that the political conjuncture does impact, both positively and negatively, the personal and professional lives of interpreters. The impact on the personal life is threefold. It affects the interpreters' physical health, their psychological and emotional state, and their personal relations and interactions with others. The impact on the professional life is felt at all three stages of a career: the beginning, middle, and end. First, the political conjuncture can affect the choice of career. Later on, it also impacts the work environment and routine, and the interpreting process itself. Finally, politics can put an end to the interpreter's career, or be the reason for quitting it voluntarily. This work is of interest to readers who aspire to an interpreting career and inquire about possible pitfalls awaiting the high-level interpreter. It is also of relevance to those curious about the history of interpreting in the Soviet Union.

Keywords: high-level interpreter, international relations, political conjuncture, state, government, ideology, nationalism, office politics, confrontation.

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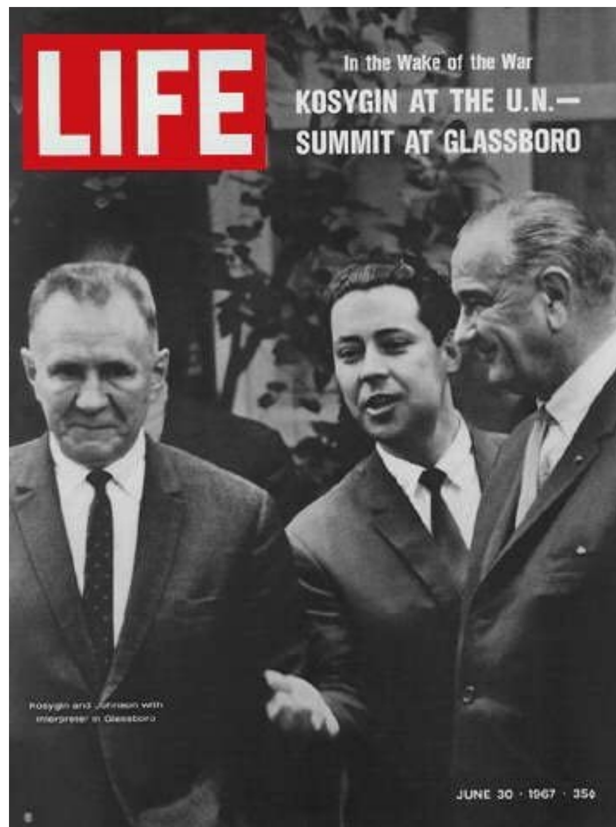
1. Introduction

In an interview to the Russian TV channel *Kultura* in 2011, Viktor Sukhodrev (1932-2014) reveals that he always wanted to become an interpreter. In his childhood, darkened by the Second World War, Sukhodrev used to watch newsreels and look at photographs in the newspapers. He saw political leaders, and between them, inconspicuous, another person: the interpreter. Very soon, young Sukhodrev realizes that this is who he wanted to be when grown up: “the man in the middle”. Several years later, he succeeded in his endeavour, joining the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and starting to appear in photographs, standing alongside the great statemen of his time. Yet he did not know at the start of his career, that he would be a legend to all young Soviet and Russian interpreters that would come after him. His career spanned over three decades and placed him alongside Soviet leaders, from Khrushchev to Gorbachev. Sukhodrev had achieved his dream, he had become “the man in the middle”.



The interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev, stands between Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin and American President Lyndon B. Johnson. Cover of LIFE magazine, June 30, 1967.

The prestige associated with proximity to powerful people, traveling, fame: all these factors seem to make high-level interpreting a dream job. Yet, there is something that the cover of LIFE magazine does not feature: the negative sides of working as a high-level interpreter. High-level interpreters are needed in an international relations context, when representatives

of two countries, two cultures, and two languages want to communicate. However, this international relations context is heavily subjected to the political relations between countries and peoples at that given moment. Even worse, the political context changes all the time, and international relations can either improve or worsen. It is constantly evolving: in international relations, there are ups and downs, conflict and alliances, confrontation and rapprochement. These fluctuations necessarily have an impact on the people working in the field of high-level politics. Heads of states and government are both the force that shapes international politics, and actors that react to unfolding political events. Their co-workers—foreign affairs secretaries, advisers, interpreters—find themselves in the midst of political events, both on the domestic and international level. Their personal and professional lives are thus heavily influenced by various changes in the political conjuncture. Therefore, it is important to take into account the political conjuncture when assessing the profession of the interpreter.

I wish to better understand the profession of high-level interpreters, especially the risks and hazards that come with the profession but are usually not talked about. This thesis strives to offer an overview of potential dangers, risks and pitfalls related to the profession, so that fellow colleagues can become aware of them. This thesis is also of relevance for those studying what type of emotional hardships professional interpreters can face. Awareness of the fact that numerous interpreters before them underwent many ordeals will be helpful to those colleagues that might be going through emotional difficulties related to their profession.

I therefore seek to answer the following research question: ***What is the impact of the political conjuncture on a high-level interpreter's life*?** To answer the research question in more detail, it is subdivided into the following two sub-questions: *What is the impact on an interpreter's personal life?* W*hat is the impact on an interpreter's professional life?*

I found that the political conjuncture does indeed heavily impact the life of interpreters. The impact is twofold: there are repercussions for both, the interpreter's personal and professional life.

I look at three aspects of the interpreter's personal life. First, their physical health and integrity; second, their psychological and emotional state; third, their personal relations with other people. I have found that all three are affected by the political conjuncture. The impact on the physical health and safety is mostly negative: sleep deprivation, straining, accidents, and other negative effects. The emotional state is also impacted, as interpreters are taken on a roller coaster of emotions that range from happiness to depression-like moods, depending on the political conjuncture they have to work in. Finally, the personal relations and acquaintances of an interpreter can be touched by the political mood of the moment as well.

I have then studied the impact of the political context on the interpreter's professional life, which I have divided in three parts: start, middle and end of the interpreting career. I have found that the professional life of a high-level interpreter is almost completely subject to political fluctuations. These can determine whether or not a person becomes an interpreter in the first place. The political conjuncture can also result in the interpreter deciding to quit, or being fired. Finally, politics also have general repercussions on an interpreter's work environment, routine, and relations with co-workers.

1.1. Structure

This thesis is structured according to the types of impact that I have identified, the two main types being the impact on the interpreter's personal life, and the impact on the interpreter's professional life. Therefore, Part 1 will focus on the way the political conjuncture affects an interpreter's personal life. This includes the analysis of the impact on the interpreters' physical safety, their emotional state and their personal relations. Part 2 will be centred on the impact of politics on interpreters' professional lives, and will look into different stages of their career. I look into the beginning of the career, the career itself, and its end, as well as how all three stages can be influenced by the political conjuncture at hand.

2. Literature review

On a meta-analysis level, Cronin (2000) provides a general account of what interpreting is. The author examines what is at stake during the interpreting process and what problems can be encountered. In particular he emphasizes that the interpreting task is not merely a translation of words from language A into language B, but the explanation of a whole cultural context. The latter is often implicit in the source language, but must be made explicit in the target language. We will see many occurrences of such interpreting being needed in later sections of the thesis about occasions where the interpreter acts as a cultural and social mediator. Moreover, Glenn and Glenn (1981) highlight that people from different cultures conduct political talks differently. Sometimes stumbling blocks occur not because of an actually irresolvable situation, but because a party considers the issue as a matter of principle, and refuses to give in. The party can, for example, be afraid of reputational damage because giving in could be perceived as weak. Glenn and Glenn highlight the Soviets' inability to accept compromise and their propensity to barter over different points on the agenda. This contrasts with the English-speaking delegations' approach, that is based on pragmatism and legal foundations. Such insights shed light on the difficulties or even failures of negotiations in, for example, American-Soviet encounters at the highest level. Those setbacks do not go unnoticed by interpreters, who then reflect on them in many memoirs and recollections.

It is important to establish a general overview of the history of simulteanous interpreting (SI) in the Soviet Union. Chernov (1999) sets the historic frame in which Soviet institutions responsible for training interpreters appeared. A majority of Soviet or Russian language specialists came from institutions subject to the influence of the Soviet ministries of Foreign Affairs or Defence. Moreover, the Soviet government had a direct influence on the development of the profession, by issuing a direct order to organize courses for training simultaneous interpreters. The author stresses that the very first Soviet interpreters that were trained specifically for the job only graduated in 1962 from the U.N. Language Training Course at the Maurice Thorez Institute of Foreign Languages. Before, interpreters were recruited in random and circumstantial way. The circumstances were of a political nature. Shveitser (1999) provides additional information, on what it was like to be an interpreter in the USSR. The author notably stresses that consecutive was the primary modality for interpreting, but that Soviet interpreters were also subject to politically-motivated freedom restrictions: they could not mingle freely with foreigners and "capitalists". Sometimes their interpretation was placed under scrutiny and was "monitored by an official from the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party" (p. 27).

Zooming in onto high-level interpreters, several scholars have already written about the work of interpreters alongside heads of states and government. Some of them were authoritarian figures, such as General Secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Baigorri Jalón (2014) provides an overview of recurring patterns in the work of an interpreter alongside dictators or generally high-level political figures. The author points out the circumstantial recruitment of interpreters. I seek to describe those circumstances through the prism of international and domestic politics. Baigorri Jalón stresses the importance of knowing the topic at hand for a good interpretation. I argue that the preparedness of the interpreter depended, among other things, on the will of the principal to create good working conditions for his interpreters, brief them and provide them with necessary documentation. The author also notes the fear and trepidation of interpreters before authoritarian figures, and the importance of trust in the principal-interpreter relations. I pick up and expand on those points by providing additional evidence from the biographies of several other interpreters. The author describes recurring patterns (fatigue and stress; additional tasks demanded of the interpreter) in the work of interpreters. I agree that those are important points and seek to explain these phenomena by political circumstances. Most importantly Baigorri Jalón (2014) stresses that an interpreter could "fall from grace for reasons that had absolutely nothing to do with his linguistic performance" and there was always a "risk of the interpreters' speedy downfall with the collapse of the regime that bred them" (p. 209). This supports my claim that political conjuncture affects the interpreters' lives. I will expand on it and describe the fall from grace of several interpreters caught in the irrational repressions machine of the state, and how the collapse of the Soviet Union brought down the career of the interpreter Palazchenko.

Rogatchevski (2019) debates the extent of the "invisibility" of high-level interpreters. In many ways interpreters are noticed only in a "negative" way: when they make a mistake and correct it; or when they are indisposed. The author highlights the fact that interpreters are more than simply interpreters. They can be considered as "co-interlocutors", who filter and moderate some of the politicians' wildest diatribes, thus affecting the discussions. This idea of reverse impact, meaning the influence of the interpretation on the political process, is very interesting and central to the conclusion and outlook of my thesis. Moreover, Milkova (2020) writes about factors that create difficulties for an interpreter: stress and pressure to deliver a "perfect" performance, fear of causing a political incident, short reaction time, and being submitted to a rigorous code of ethics (Milkova, 2020).

Interesting insights that serve to expand the research question further are found in the following works. Probirskaja's (2016) highlights the fact that interpreters in WWII were hailed as war heroes and veteran. However, a less glorious conflict for the USSR—the Afghan War—did not award interpreters the same prestige and "glamour". Salevsky's (2014) writes about

the danger of using the recollections of interpreters as sources for historic science. We are all human, and no one possesses a perfect memory. Moreover, one's opinion of various political events might (and probably will) change over time. Another interesting idea is that of Menzel (2019), as she writes about interpreters who chose to become pro-active politically and choose to engage in unofficial (known as "Track II") diplomacy. This provides a perfect illustration of the interpreters' yearning for a bigger role in diplomacy and international relations.

My thesis consolidates the findings of the aforementioned articles and builds upon it. I acknowledge all the difficulties mentioned by the aforementioned scholars. I argue that all of them are observable in biographies of high-level interpreters, and that they have a profound impact on both, an interpreter's personal and professional life.

3. Description of the corpus

The present section introduces the primary sources, meaning the memoirs, that lay at the foundation of my analysis. Many interpreters worked for the Soviet Union's leaders, enabling their communication with foreigner diplomats. All of the interpreters studied in the present thesis have Russian in their language combination. On the one hand, I study Soviet interpreters working for their own government. On the other hand, I look at foreign interpreters (working for the UK and the USA) interpreting at meetings with Soviet delegations.

Amongst Soviet interpreters with an English-Russian combination I will cite Berezhkov, Pavlov[1], Sukhodrev, Troyanovsky, Korchilov, Palazchenko, Shveitser. Among Soviet interpreters working with French-Russian: Yerofeyev and Krivoshein. Rzhevskaya worked with German-Russian and was a female military interpreter. She does not fit the definition of high-level interpreter, which I provide in the next section on the research design and methods, and which is the focus of the present work. However, her memoirs and experience still prove immensely fascinating and raise the important questions about the fate of military interpreters caught up in political conflicts. This issue is discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

Among foreign interpreters involved in talks with the USSR I study Birse, Bohlen, and Akalovsky. I was not able to find an autobiography for Akalovsky, therefore, I had to limit myself to reading his interview.

I will now present the used primary sources in a more detailed way. **Berezhkov**'s autobiographical works *History in the Making* (in English) and *Kak ya stal perevodchikom Stalina* [How I became Stalin's interpreter] describes the author's path to becoming an interpreter at the very high level and the various trials and tribulations that he endured during his service (Berezhkov, 1983; Berezhkov, 1993).

Pavlov did not compose any large memoir about his experience as Stalin's interpreter and largely abstained from publicly discussing his work and the historical events he took part in. However, in the 1990s the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) asked the interpreter to write a short autobiographical note as his recollections were deemed useful to the Ministry and its historians. Thus, Pavlov (2000) wrote *Avtobiograficheskiye zametki V.N. Pavlova - Perevodchika I. V. Stalina* [Autobiographic notes of V. N. Pavlov – The interpreter of J. Stalin] that was concealed in the MFA archives and only later published in a scientific journal.

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[1] Both Pavlov and Berezhkov did German-Russian interpreting as well, but to a lesser extent than English-Russian.

Sukhodrev's *Yazyk moj – drug moj: ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* [My tongue – my friend: from Khrushchev to Gorbachev] is replete with various anecdotes, sometimes humorous, sometimes unnerving, about the author's long career alongside three different Soviet General Secretaries: Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev (Sukhodrev, 1999). Sukhodrev had to deal with very different types of statesmen, which provides researchers with an opportunity to compare their characters and their relation to the interpreter. This is a perfect illustration of the notion of personal politics (in the sense of interpersonal relations between the interpreter and people around him) that I introduce in the thesis. In a TV interview entitled *Sukhodrev. 30 let s vozhdyami* [Sukhodrev. 30 years with Soviet leaders], Sukhodrev shares mostly anecdotes already published in his book mentioned in the previous section. He does, however, add some information that did not get into the books, about the widow of a famous Soviet artist, asking a favour of him, hoping to use his proximity to powerful people. He also shares his childhood memories of his life in the UK and the trauma of WWII with interviewer Angelina Tikhonova for an online publication (Tikhonova, 2010).

Troyanovsky's *Cherez gody i rasstoyaniya: istoriya odnoj semji* [Through years and distance: the story of a family] is a biographical work written by Troyanovsky, who was Sukhodrev's mentor, interpreter to Stalin and later Khrushchev (Troyanovsky, 1997).

Korchilov (1999) writes *Translating history*, which contains many observations about the impact of the 1980s Soviet domestic crisis on the life of an interpreter alongside Gorbachev. It is set in the same timeframe as Palazchenko's autobiography, and both interpreters reference each other. **Palazchenko**'s *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze* evokes his work alongside the Soviet Secretary General and his Foreign Minister, and the interpreter's personal reflections on the events rolling out in the world during the last years of the Soviet Union (Palazchenko, 2009). **Shveitser** (2012) writes *Glazami perevodchika: iz vospominaniy* [Through the eyes of the interpreter: recollections] in which he describes his work at high stakes events such as the Tokyo War Crimes Trial, in international organisations but also when accompanying Soviet delegations to the USA.

Krivoshein (2014) writes *Dvazhdy frantsuz Sovetskogo Soyuza* [Twice a "Frenchman" of the Soviet Union], a quite recent publication. The author's life path is sinuous: he was born in Boulogne, France, in a family of Russian emigrants. However, the family eventually decides to return to the USSR. Krivoshein's French roots allow him to work as translator and interpreter, but also conditioned him to be a quasi-foreigner with a negative opinion of Soviet domestic policies (Krivoshein, 2014). **Yerofeev**'s *Diplomat: Kniga vospominanij* (Diplomat: memoirs) describes his life and work as a French-Russian interpreter at the highest level, alongside Stalin and Molotov (Yerofeev, 2005). Interestingly, it is the only book in this selection entitled after a different profession—that of a diplomat—even though almost all Soviet

interpreters doubled as diplomatic attachés or assistants. Yerofeev recalls information, absent in his book, about the interpreter's work being misused by journalists, in an interview to the Russian *Trud* newspaper in 2000.

Finally, **Rzhevskaya** (2018) describes the trials and horrors of war and conflict in her memorable *Memoirs of a wartime interpreter* and also the struggle of being a female military interpreter.

I also included non-Soviet interpreters' autobiographies in the analysis. American interpreter **Bohlen** (1973) writes *Witness to History, 1929-1969, in which* the author accounts for more than 30 years of Soviet-American relations and depicts key players in the Cold War. **Birse** (1967) was a British interprer, who wrote *Memoirs of an interpreter* relates the author's childhood in the Russian empire and his life after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Fluent in Russian, he becomes an interpreter for Churchill and other high-ranking British political actors, and witnesses many historic negotiations and conferences, such as Teheran and Yalta.

Akalovsky, Soviet expert and interpreter in the USA, gave an interview to Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000. The text is available in the Library of Congress. In this interview he describes his childhood, education, and path to becoming an interpreter. Most importantly for this thesis, he describes his vision of Khrushchev's trip to the USA in the 1959. Akalovsky's point of view somewhat contradicts that of the Soviet "witnesses" Troyanovsky and Sukhodrev. The contrast between the two is particularly interesting for the present work.

4. Research design and methods

In order to answer the research question—What is the impact of the political conjuncture on a high-level interpreter's life?—I have decided to study the biographies of the aforementioned high-level interpreters with Russian in their language combination. This combination predisposed them to work with political representatives of the Soviet Union if they are foreigners, or to work for the USSR's government itself if they are Soviet nationals.

My method was twofold. On the one hand, I first read the findings of other scholars (see section 2. Literature review), to see the patterns that they identified in the relation between interpreters and political conjuncture. I then studied the primary sources (memoirs) so as to find data which supported these pre-identified patterns. On the other hand, in the course of studying the memoirs, I identified further relevant data, and more recurring patterns. These have been integrated into my research as well. Later on, I categorized the impacts into two large groups (impact on personal life and impact on professional life) and then sub-categories within them.

I define "high-level interpreters" as professionals who carry out interpreting tasks from one language to another, for heads of states and government, and ministerial-level representatives. I chose to focus on high-level interpreters because they are, thanks to their position, completely immersed in international relations, much more than legal, medical, community, or other interpreters.

I define the "political conjuncture" as the global sum of events in international relations, domestic politics, and personal politics. International relations are the sum of political events directly related to the way in which two or more nations interact with each other in the field of political, economic, or cultural relationships. Domestic politics are political events directly related to all issues and activity within a state's borders. In the present thesis, I focus on the USSR between the end of WWII and 1991. Finally, personal politics are the sum of the interpreter's personal relations and interactions with other people, including co-workers, principal and personal acquaintances. These relations can take the shape of office politics such as rivalry and intrigues.

The expression "personal life" encompasses a variety of meanings. It allows me to structure this part accordingly and further nuance the aforementioned question by raising several sub-questions:

- What is the impact of the political conjuncture on the interpreter's personal safety and physical health?

- How are one's private emotions and psychological state affected?
- What are possible consequences for the interpreter's personal relations with other people?

The timeframe considered in this thesis ranges from World War II to 1991, the end of the Cold War. I focused on the Soviet Union because the country played a major role in the international arena at that time, due to its immense military power, its nuclear force, and its ideological confrontation with the Western bloc. Therefore, the context of the Cold War crystallizes political passions. The ups and downs of world politics are felt more acutely than ever before, and ever since. The USSR and the USA, two giant powers, oppose each other, and the threat of nuclear war is ever-present. Such a political conjuncture is an ideal-typical conjuncture to study the effects of politics on various actors in international relations. The tenseness in international relations alternates with periods of rapprochement such as the period that followed Stalin's death and Khrushchev's coming to power. Then, new tensions arise, such as when the Cuban Missiles Crisis unfolds. Brezhnev's is a period of stagnation both domestically and in Soviet-American relations, while Gorbachev launches a new era of reforms and democratization that will eventually end in domestic crisis and the end of the USSR.

There is a general lack of research into Soviet interpreters. Many of their autobiographies are not translated into English and therefore remain unknown to non-Russian speakers. Analysing the most interesting recollections and memories of Soviet interpreters and publishing them in the present thesis is another motivation for my work.

All the translations of original Russian sources provided in this thesis are my own, unless specified otherwise.

5. Findings

5.1. Impact on personal life

5.1.1. Physical health and safety

5.1.1.1. Occupational hazard

War

During the time period studied—the WWII and the Cold War—hazard was, first and foremost, the danger brought about by war and active combat operations. The interpreters in Moscow were in danger because of their work in the *Nomenklatura*[2], in a context where the enemy army was approaching the Soviet capital. Thus, in October 1941, at the beginning of WWII, Pavlov (2000) is evacuated out of Moscow to Kuybyshev (today's Samara) in the south of the USSR, with the rest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) workers and officials. The dangers linked to war and the Nazi army approaching Moscow are very real and instill great fear.

Authoritarianism

The authoritarian leaders that the interpreters work for are another hazard that comes to mind when thinking of the considered timeframe. It was not considered safe to work for people, that were perceived as arbitrarily using and abusing their immense political power. Pavlov was employed alongside Stalin[3] and Molotov.[4] He had reasons to feel nervous, even though, according to Birse (1967), he never displayed any alarm and always kept his composure. In the preface to Pavlov's (2000) autobiographical notes, a joke that Stalin allegedly made is mentioned:

> [Сталин] на одном из приемов в узком кругу заявил: "Светлая голова у товарища Павлова. Много знает. Не пора ли ей в Сибирь?". Владимир Николаевич [Павлов] рассмеялся тогда вместе со всеми, но можно предположить, что потом ему было совсем не смешно.

---

[2] In former communist countries, the *Nomenklatura* was the group of officials that held positions of the highest authority.

[3] Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in office from 1922 to 1952.

[4] Vyacheslav Molotov (1890-1986) was a Russian politician and diplomat. Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (i.e., head of the Soviet government) from 1930 to 1941 and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1939 to 1949, and from 1953 to 1956.

> During a reception with his inner circle, [Stalin] said: "Comrade Pavlov is a bright man. He knows a lot. Isn't it time for him to go to Siberia?" Vladimir Nikolaevich [Pavlov] laughed along with everyone, but it can be assumed that afterwards he did not feel amused at all. (p. 95)

Korchilov (1999) recalls another story that is a perfect illustration of these dangers perceived by anyone in the proximity of authoritarian leaders. It is an anecdote made up by Nixon,[5] a story about Prime Minister Churchill[6] and General Secretary Stalin, who once spent a whole night together, drinking and talking. The anecdote is about the conversation that allegedly took place afterwards between the two statesmen:

> The way Nixon told it, Prime Minister Churchill sat up all night drinking with Stalin at the Yalta Conference and said to him the next morning, "I hope I didn't say anything indiscreet last night." "Don't worry," Stalin supposedly replied, "I had the interpreter shot." One hopes it was only a story. (p. 20)

The anecdote seems indeed to be no more than a story. Moreover, in all the memoirs studied for the present thesis, no mention is made of any Soviet interpreter being shot for the sake of confidentiality, or for anything else, like a more or less serious interpreting (or other) mistake. On the contrary, Berezhkov (1993) recalls making a severe blunder during the WWII, when he could have endangered Soviet operations by dictating an important note out loud to the stenographer. There was a suspicion that the office could be bugged, thus speaking out loud would have allowed spies to listen in. His superior, Molotov, interrupted Berezhkov before he could do any damage, scolded him, but no sentence whatsoever ensued and the interpreter continued to carry on. The interpreter remembers wondering:

> [Я] недоумеваю, почему он оставил этот инцидент без последствий. Ведь при тогдашней всеобщей подозрительности он мог предположить, что я специально хотел громкой диктовкой передать кому-то столь секретную информацию. Но он, видимо, отнес это на счет моей неопытности.
>
> [I] wonder why he left this incident without consequences. Indeed, with the then general suspicion, he could assume that I specifically wanted to convey such secret information to someone by loud dictation. But he apparently attributed it to my inexperience. (p. 168)

Stalin too was tolerant of the mistakes Berezhkov made. For example, after important talks, Berezhkov had to write telegrams to be sent to Soviet embassies abroad. He based the text on the notes he took during talks, and then created a digest of the important points. However,

---

[5] Richard Nixon (1913-1994) was president of the United States from 1969 to 1974 and a member of the Republican Party.

[6] Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965) was a British statesman, and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945, during the Second World War, and from 1951 to 1955.

sometimes he would include unimportant information. Stalin would scold him, and correct the mistakes himself by dictating a new text to Berezhkov. Besides reprimands and orders to pay more attention, no sanctions would take place. However, it remained an unpleasant experience for the interpreter. Berezhkov (1993) writes: "всякий раз, когда случалось такое, долго оставался неприятный осадок" [whenever this happened, I was left with an unpleasant feeling that remained for a long time] (p. 221).

These few episodes of tolerance and acceptability do not mean, however, that Nixon's anecdote is not representative of the unease and tension that interpreters must have felt while working alongside such awe-inspiring figures as the Soviet leaders of the first half of the 20th century. Even though the actual physical threats to interpreters were few, the *perceived* danger remained and had a strong impact on them.

Real, tangible political changes will be necessary to make interpreters feel like they are safe, and not under the constant threat of political repressions. Such changes occur, for instance, with Khrushchev coming to power. The new General Secretary seeks to improve relations with the West, but also puts a halt to repressions at home. This period is commonly called the *Thaw*, or *Détente*, in international relations. Sukhodrev (1999) enters the MFA "уже после исторического поворота в биографии нашей страны" [after the historic turn in the biography of our country] (p. 29). Here, he refers to Khrushchev's denunciation of the cult of personality of Stalin in a speech before the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956. Therefore, Sukhodrev lives and works in a very different political conjuncture and never expresses fear for his life or safety. One generation later, Palazchenko (2009) and Korchilov (1999), who work with the democracy-oriented Gorbachev, feel even more comfortable and at ease.

Straining one's voice

The interpreter's main work tool is, of course, his or her voice. Overstraining and lack of rest can have a strong negative impact on the voice cords. Because of such straining, interpreters might lose their voice and remain mute for a short while. Palazchenko (2009) recalls one such time when he lost his voice after a particularly intense two-day mission in India, accompanying Shevardnadze[7]. He writes that: "I interpreted so much in a little more than two days that at the end of the visit I lost my voice. When Shevardnadze asked me something on the plane home, I said I would write him a note" (p. 60).

[7] Eduard Shevardnadze (1928-2014), Soviet and Georgian politician and diplomat. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991, during the Gorbachev era. Shevardnadze was involved in the making of numerous and ground-breaking decisions in Soviet foreign policy including the reunification of Germany.

Accidents

Work-related injuries are not inexistent, even for a profession that presupposes mostly staying indoors. Yerofeyev recalls a time when he slipped on the freshly waxed floors of Kremlin's corridors. This happened because the interpreter was running to attend an extremely urgent and completely unplanned meeting at the very high-level. Yerofeyev (2005) writes: "[Я] помчался по длинному узкому коридору. На мое несчастье, на повороте я растянулся на только что натертом, скользком, как лед, паркете и до крови разбил себе кисть правой руки." [I rushed along a long narrow corridor. To my misfortune, at the turn, I stretched out on a parquet that had just been waxed. It was as slippery as ice. I hit my right hand so hard it started bleeding] (p. 192). The pressure to rush to the meeting, caused by the fear that the high-level dignitaries would have to wait for the interpreter, are the direct causes of Yerofeyev's accident.

Politically-motivated attacks

Sukhodrev (1999) recalls a politically motived assault on Kosygin[8] when they were in Canada. The delegation was walking towards their hotel, when someone punched Sukhodrev in the shoulder and tried to grab Kosygin. The attacker was shouting "Free Hungary!", probably in reaction to the Soviet policy in Central and Eastern Europe. Bodyguards intervened and the incident lasted no more than a few seconds. However, although the Premier was targeted and not the interpreter, the latter still found himself in the middle of a fistfight, as his duty was to accompany Kosygin.

In the 1980s, Gorbachev's reforms come about and aspire to put a definitive end to authoritarianism. However, many conservatives are upset with the General Secretary's reforms and attempts at a rapprochement with the USA. This triggers a severe domestic crisis, which eventually will lead to the Union's collapse. These events trigger in Gorbachev's interpreter and avid supporter Palazchenko (2009) the fear that the *coup d'état* against the General Secretary will end up in his forced removal from power, or even physical repression of Gorbachev and his co-workers. Palazchenko's mother, who lived through the "Stalin years", is convinced that 1930s-like purges would take place and that the 'old times were returning' " (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 311). The interpreter himself does not exclude the hypothesis that "sooner or later there would [be] a crackdown against 'internal enemies,' including those associated closely with Gorbachev" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 310). Moreover, he recalls an advice given by a friend during that period: "I think you should, ask the Americans for some

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[8] Alexei Kosygin (1904-1980), Premier of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1980.

kind of protection", and notes that "there was a lot of fear in Moscow during those days" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 364).

5.1.1.2. Absence of work-life balance

Long working hours

The amout of sleep and rest that a person gets also deeply affects their physical health. Unfortunately for many high-level interpreters during political conflicts and early afterwar years, the working hours are very long. This does not only affect Soviet interpreters. Indeed, Birse (1967) writes: "Hours of work are often long and tiring" (p. 106). Bohlen (1973) too, when acting as an interpreter, remembers that "the work was exhausting. […] Most days, I did not finish until long past midnight" (p. 127).

Politicians are constantly "on the job" and so are their interpreters, no matter how long talks last. Moreover, informal talks between high-levelleadersstill need to be interpreted even after the official part of the discussions are over. Therefore, the interpreters must stay and work as long as the politicians want to talk to each other. This is well illustrated by one occurrence of Churchill and Stalin's private talks. They started officially in the evening but only end late at night, after Stalin asks Churchill to stay for dinner and drinks. For the interpreters Pavlov and Birse, the informal part of the discussions was still part of their work day. Pavlov (2000) recalls: "Беседа Сталина с Черчиллем длилась долго и закончилась в 2 часа ночи. На каждого из переводчиков пришлось по 3 1/2 часа перевода. Это было довольно утомительно." [Stalin's conversation with Churchill lasted a long time and ended at 2 am. Each of the interpreters had 3,5 hours of working. It was pretty tiresome] (p. 110).

Berezhkov (1983) remembers similarly exhausting working conditions: "our working day usually lasted for 14-16 hours with a short break from eight till ten in the evening" (p. 253). Later, after the war years, the working hours do not improve much, as the interpreter writes that "work began for us at ten in the morning and ended late at night" (p. 306). This is not only explained by the war—be it in a hot or cold war.

Another reason for such straining office hours are the work habits of the political leaders. Troyanovsky (1997) writes: "Это соответствовало режиму работы Сталина […]. Он привык работать по ночам: вставал поздно и ложился часа в четыре ночи, а иногда и позже" [This corresponded to the Stalin's work routine. He was used to working at night: he got up late and went to bed at about four in the morning, sometimes even later] (p. 135). Stalin's habit of staying up late forced his head of government Molotov to stay in the office as long as he was up. This in turn kept interpreters up until finally "Molotov went home" (Berezhkov, 1983, p. 306). According to Troyanovsky, these habits of the leader had an impact

on all the highest levels of the government and the MFA, as such a work routine descended down the chain of command to a certain level of the *nomenklatura*.

Such an unorthodox working routine did not only have short-term consequences such as lack of sleep, but also long-lasting effects. Berezhkov (1993) gets into the habit of working such hours, and he finds it difficult to shake off this habit Even after his interpreting career has ended, he stays in his office at the TASS news agency after everybody else has gone home.

24/7 availability

At least one interpreter must always be present in the office. This is explained by war times and the resulting tense political situation. Someone must be ready and available in case of emergency, since every minute and every hour counts during war times. Thus, Berezhkov (1983) remembers that during the dinner break, one interpreter goes to eat, the other remains in the office, and later they alternate: “either Pavlov or I, by turns, remained in our office, since something unforeseen might always come up” (p. 306).

Interpreters could also expect to be woken up in the middle of the night by a call from superiors. Berezhkov (1983) recalls being dragged out of bed by a phone call from Mikoyan[9] one night, and being asked to present himself to Molotov, on the spot: “I was called at about three o'clock in the morning […] by Mikoyan himself. I went to his office where he told me I had to report immediately to the Secretariat of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars” (p. 49). Yerofeyev (2005) was also summoned to the Kremlin in the middle of the night for an unscheduled meeting, which lead to the above-mentioned accident.

The 24/7 availability requirement remains in the post-war period. Even in the context of a cold war, crises are frequent and must be reacted to swiftly. Palazchenko (2009) notes that even his official vacation, away with his family, was not a valid argument not to answer the superior’s call:

> I was on annual leave in late July, spending it with my family […], when I got a call from the office of then Deputy Foreign Minister […]. He was sending a car to take me to the Foreign Ministry to help him with something urgent and sensitive. (p. 143)

Rising political tensions in the world were usually reflected by extra work and stress, but also, practically speaking, less sleep. Palazchenko recalls a crisis in USA-USSR relations that happened because an espionage scandal erupted. During that time, the interpreter did not have a healthy resting schedule: “I did not have much sleep those days. The record of every conversation had to be made immediately, to be cabled to Moscow. […] On some days I came

[9] Anastas Mikoyan (1895-1978), high-level Soviet official, Minister of Foreign Trade at the time Berezhkov meets him for the first time.

back to my hotel in the small hours of the morning and slept for a few hours before rushing back to the Soviet U.N. mission" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 54).

Food

Banquets are usually dreaded by interpreters, not only because they represent poor working conditions, but also because the interpreters often have to go hungry through the entire night. Birse (1967), sitting at the dining table and contemplating plates of meats, fish and caviars, recalls: "Eden began another speech, and I knew that I was doomed to go hungry in the midst of all that plenty" (p. 145).

Sometimes, though, interpreters are lucky. Sukhodrev (1999) recalls a banquet in India, when he was accompanying a Soviet delegation. The event took place in a hotel, and the owner was kind to set up a separate dining room for the interpreters. After asking permission, the interpreters were allowed to leave to eat. Once again, they took turns, one interpreter always remaining behind to work.

5.1.2. Psychological and emotional impact

5.1.2.1. Positive emotions

Principal's reassuring attitude

On the one hand, principals can inspire strong emotions, such as awe and fear, in their subordinates. On the other hand, they can make an effort to put the interpreters at ease. The political leader and superior has the power to reverse the mood of the talks and inspire positive emotions in his fellow co-workers.

Birse (1967) recalls how the good mood of Stalin changed the entire ambiance of the talks with Churchill for the better, probably lifting up some of the interpreter's stress in the process as well: "Stalin's face had lighted up and he had permitted himself an occasional smile, though not as yet the broad grin and leg-pulling which were to come later, and which marked a complete change of mood" (p. 101). Birse (1967) also mentions several times that Churchill had the power to inspire him and motivate him to work more and better simply by showing some concern for the interpreter's well-being: "Frequently, […] [Churchill] would ask how I was doing. I wonder if he realized how encouraging it was to be asked in the middle of a talk: 'Are you feeling tired, Birsey?' I may have felt tired, but he made me forget it" (p. 224).

Berezhkov recalls a similar conversation that reflects a certain degree of concern on Stalin's side about the well-being of his interpreter after a long flight. The leader asked, as cited by Berezhkov (1983): "You're not too tired after your journey? Are you ready to interpret? The conversation will he important". To this the interpreter answers: "Yes, I'm ready, Comrade Stalin. I rested well on the over night stop in Baku. I feel fine" (p. 254).

Troyanovsky feels a great deal of stress before his first mission of interpreting for Stalin. The latter first inquires about the health of his usual interpreter (Pavlov is indisposed, which is the reason why Troyanovsky has to step in) and then makes a light joke to appear less intimidating. Troyanovsky (1997) writes that:

> Сталин улыбнулся и сказал фразу прямо-таки из Фенимора Купера: «Тогда передайте привет моему бледнолицему брату [Павлову] от вождя краснокожих». Эти слова я воспринял как желание меня успокоить. И надо сказать, в этом он, безусловно, преуспел, я сразу почувствовал себя непринужденно”
>
> Stalin smiled and said a phrase straight out of a Fenimore Cooper novel: "Then say hello to my pale-faced brother [Pavlov] from the leader of the Redskins”. I took these words as aimed at reassuring me. I must say he succeeded. I felt at ease at once (p. 148).

Enjoying the work

Awareness for the high-level interpreter’s position makes many of the representatives of the profession very grateful for their fate. Sukhodrev shares how much he valued his work for the possibility to see the world and to meet famous and remarkable people. He remembers that “работая, переводчик имеет огромное счастье увидеть разнообразие мира, культур, людей” [thanks to his work the interpreter has the incredible luck to see the diversity of the world, its cultures and people] (Tikhonova, 2010).

Despite the stress mentioned in the previous sections, a certain thrill of participating in high-level political talks and meeting people that one would normally not meet also has its place. For instance, Birse (1967) writes:

> I told myself, it would be thrilling to meet these two men [Churchill and Stalin] if only for a few minutes–something to write home about, the censorship permitting. It would also be an achievement to get inside the Kremlin, for no one except diplomats on business or attending exceptional functions was permitted to enter. (p. 98)

Depending on the dignitary that one gets to interpret for, the process can be enjoyable. Thus, Birse (1967) recalls the pleasure of interpreting for Bevin,[10] who had a strong character and stood up for his position: “[Bevin] proved to be a great fighter, and at the same time one of our best Foreign Secretaries. I enjoyed interpreting what he said, which sounded like a punch straight from the shoulder” (p. 211). Stalin was enjoyable to interpret as well, and Birse recalls: “I liked his slow, simple manner of expressing himself” (p. 212). Certain topics are also more

[10] Ernest Bevin (1881-1951) was a British statesman, trade union leader, and Labour politician. He served as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1945-1951.

pleasant and easier than others. For instance, Birse recalls: “Whenever military, economic, or financial questions were being discussed, I felt sure of myself.” (p. 112).

Moreover, there is sometimes a certain degree of *camaraderie* between interpreters, one helping the other out, and colleagues acting as a reassuring presence. This was the case for Birse (1967), who remembers his colleague Pavlov with fondness: “We worked as a pair almost uninterruptedly for three years. [Pavlov’s] presence gave me confidence, and I hope I inspired the same feeling” (p. 113).

If the political views of the interpreter and his chief align, it might also spark enjoyment for the interpreter to speak for his principal. Thus, American interpreter Bohlen (1973) remembers a very sharp conversation that Truman had with Molotov after the end of the WWII, and writes: “How I enjoyed translating Truman’s sentences! They were probably the first sharp words uttered during the war by an American President to a high Soviet official” (p. 213). It seems that Bohlen supported those sharp words of his principal completely and rejoiced at being the vehicle for conveying such a message.

A feeling of joy can be triggered by the appreciation expressed by a single individual (the principal of the interpreter most often). Birse (1967) remembers how being appreciated and praised for good work seemed to give him wings and inspire to carry on:

> As we were preparing to leave, Churchill turned to me and said: 'I am very pleased with you. In future I will want you always to interpret for me.' Any fatigue I was feeling seemed to disappear in a flash, and I felt ready to continue for another seven hours if necessary. Looking back, those words were worth more to me than any praise I may since have earned, and quite as much as any formal honours conferred upon me. (p. 104)

Sukhodrev (1999) recalls how happy it makes him to receive a couple words of appreciation for his work. Appreciation is especially valuable if it comes unexpectedly. It could come from people like actor Gary Cooper in Hollywood, or even from Shelepin,[11] a rather gloomy figure in Soviet politics, since he used to be head of the KGB.

Being part of history

Furthermore, many interpreters described their intense pleasure at being included in historic events relevant for the world’s future. It is a source of great positive emotions and seems to trump the stress and exhaustion of working under such exceptional conditions. Birse (1967) writes: “the lack of sleep was compensated by the excitement of the work. It certainly never

[11] Alexander Shelepin (1918-1994) long-time member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, First Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the KGB at different stages of his career.

lacked interest." (p. 157). Berezhkov (1983) remembers how the realization of him being a cog in the wheel of history, dawned on him one night in Teheran. In 1943, he was there interpreting during a conference which would be decisive for the fate of the world.

> It was only then that I fully sensed the importance of everything that I had witnessed. […] Here, in the Iranian capital, far from the frontlines, something was taking place of vital importance for the future course of the war and for victory. I suddenly realised that the process of creating history was happening before my very eyes, in concentrated form, as it were. (Berezhkov, 1983, p. 272)

Receiving awards

Several of the interpreters working during the war years and early Cold War were rewarded with honours given out by the State. Sometimes they were decorated even by foreign countries that recognized their work. Troyanovsky (1997), among other workers of the MFA, received the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, an honour awarded by the Soviet State for great deeds and services to the country and society. Churchill, who was always pleased with Birse's work, recommended the interpreter for the CBE[12] (Birse, 1967). Moreover, Birse's work is recognized by the Soviet side too, and the British interpreter receives the Order of the Red Banner of Labour from Kalinin's hands. Birse, born in St. Petersburg, is even recognized as a person who has his place in the USSR:

> President [Kalinin] addressed me as 'Comrade' and said it was rare for a foreigner to receive a Soviet decoration, but he was particularly happy that the award had been given to a man from Great Britain and to one who, so he had been told, had been born in Russia and was therefore a son of both countries. (Birse, 1967, p. 188)

Pavlov (2000) too, in his autobiographical notes, details the awards that he has received. One of them is an Order of the British Empire. It is unclear, however, which are of his awards for interpreting services *per se*, as Pavlov also acted as a diplomat.

5.1.2.2. Negative emotions

Negative emotions related to high-level politics

Isolation

International politics can be characterized by clashes of ideologies and world views. These confrontations severely impacted, for instance, the work atmosphere of Birse and his colleagues. Birse remembers that, back in the war years, the isolation of the British mission

[12] Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, one of the five classes of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire British order of chivalry.

from Soviet civilians and the unwillingness of Soviet military to cooperate in any substantive manner with the foreign diplomats. This was the result of a political and ideological mistrust on the part of the Soviets towards any kind of foreigners. The British were especially mistrusted, probably of the pre-war failure to sign an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Birse (1967) speaks of “**depression** and **frustration**” (p. 68) affecting the British officers and diplomats, as they are forced to remain **idle** and experience **boredom**. He also recalls one specialist “whose nerves broke down after months of **inactivity**” (p. 68).

Stress and pressure

High-level politics are matters of war and peace, life and death for millions of civilians and military personnel in the world. Sometimes, relations between allies and enemies depend on the correct interpretation of that one person standing between the leaders of two great (and deadly) nations. Such pressure does not go unnoticed by the interpreters on whose shoulders such a responsibility rests. As he heads off to interpret for Churchill and Stalin’s private talks Birse (1967) recalls the thoughts racing through his mind: “I realized that the talk would probably concern problems of the highest importance” (p. 97). Further, the interpreter writes: “The hours I had spent […] in anticipation of the meeting had created a feeling of **nervousness** and of doubt whether I should be able to cope with my duties adequately, in the presence of such an assembly” (p. 154). Pavlov (2000) mentions that he was working in “[атмосфера] большого нервного напряжения, присущего столь ответственным переговорам на высшем уровне” [an atmosphere of great **nervous tension**, intrinsic to such high-stakes negotiations at the highest level] (p. 110). Berezhkov (1983) recalls the intense stress of working at the Teheran Conference: “I finished work very late that first evening in Teheran. […] I did not feel capable of falling asleep because the **nervous tension** which had built up during the day had still not eased” (p. 272). Also at Teheran, Bohlen (1973) reminisces: “I was understandably nervous at the prospect of interpreting for the President at such important diplomatic negotiations. The Moscow Conference had been good practice, but this meeting was at the highest level” (p. 136.)

Fear of war

The ups and downs of world politics during the Cold War also contribute to a feeling of **unease** and **stress** in a world on which the nuclear bomb could be unleashed at any time, due to disturbances in the Soviet-American relations. Thus, the Cuban Missile Crisis is a moment of high stress for everybody, as Shveitser (2012) describes it: “Конечно, все эти дни нас не покидало ощущение тревоги за своих близких и за себя. Но вида об этом мы не по-давали и старались не выдавать своего волнения” [Of course, during this entire time we

felt anxiety for our loved ones and for ourselves. But we didn't let it show, and tried to conceal our nervousness] (p. 99).

Disappointment and frustration

Disappointment is another negative emotion that can be felt by interpreter. It is often due to a certain political situation of non-communication. For instance, Birse (1967) writes of his **disappointment** when a meeting between British and Soviet military chiefs reveals itself to be just as fruitless as other interactions between the two countries that he has witnessed before: "I was disappointed. It had been my first opportunity to interpret for top-level chiefs and the meeting had proved, in my opinion, as futile as those to which I was accustomed at the 'Otdel'. The only difference lay in the personalities" (p. 97). This feeling gradually worsens and transforms into **self-doubt** as the interpreter worries that he might be the one responsible for the little (or none at all) progress made in the talks:

> In a discussion which is getting nowhere and is likely to end in a stalemate, the position of the interpreter is unenviable. Every such talk left a feeling of disappointment and misgiving as to my own part in the proceedings. Had my translation perhaps been unsatisfactory? (p. 114)

A delicate political topic can determine the unwillingness to compromise, cooperate and communicate. Birse (1967) recalls that some "meetings with Molotov were **disheartening** and **unproductive**" (p. 199). The sensitivity of the topic (Soviets being accused of kidnapping Polish officers and citizens) makes Molotov particularly suspicious and more easily irritated by his interpreter Pavlov, Birse's counterpart. The two interpreters were scolded for comparing notes, which was never a problem before:

> It had been my practice and Pavlov's […] to compare notes […]. No objection had ever been raised by Molotov. At the end of one meeting about the vanished Poles, I asked Pavlov to check my version of a certain sentence; he was about to do so, when Molotov forbade him. (p. 200)

Palazchenko (2009) expresses **frustration**, when talks seem to have reached a stalemate and irritation is mounting between politicians Gorbachev and Shultz:

> […] I felt on both sides of the table a mounting irritation at having fallen into some kind of trap. It was one those moment when the interpreter almost wants to shout, "Stop! There's got to be a better way to do it. Why not take a break, come back in an hour, and see if there's a chance to come to terms." (p. 73)

Negative emotions provoked by political leaders

Awe of high-ranking officials

Meeting for the first time the head of a country is a rather intimidating experience for most people, even more so when the leader has practically unlimited political power and is said to

be responsible for the making or wrecking of countless lives; as it was the case with Stalin. Birse (1967) recalls his strong emotions bordering on panic-like feelings that took hold of him before he had to interpret for two remarkable leaders, Churchill and Stalin, for the first time:

> The prospect of meeting two of the world's leaders at such short notice […] agitated me to a degree. But there was little time for reflection, and I resigned myself to the inevitable. […] During the drive I had tried to reason with myself. I determined to try to forget who these two men were, and to act as if I were interpreting for two ordinary individuals. (p. 97)

Yerofeyev (2005) recalls the strong, almost hypnotic effect that Stalin had on his entourage, and even employs esoteric concepts to describe the Soviet leader. Yerofeyev (2005) writes that the leader "обладал сильным биополем" [had a strong energy field] (p. 170). He probably means that a strong energy irradiated from Stalin and was felt by other people. He recalls that: "я неоднократно замечал на себе, что даже сидя спиной к двери и не слыша его шагов, я словно кожей чувствовал, когда Сталин входил в кабинет" [I noticed several times that, even sitting with my back to the door and not hearing his steps, I felt it in my skin when Stalin entered the office] (Yerofeyev, 2005, p. 170).

Troyanovsky (1997) writes about the stress he felt before interpreting for Stalin the very first time, and highlights that the stress is due to the figure of the leader and not a lack of confidence in his interpreting skills: "Сказать, что я не волновался перед началом беседы, означало бы кривить душой. Волновался не из-за сомнений в своих переводческих силах. Дело было в том, что я должен был переводить Сталину" [I'd be lying if I said that I was not worried before the start of the conversation. I was not worried because of doubts about my interpreting abilities. The problem was that I had to interpret for Stalin] (p. 147). However, after this first meeting Troyanovsky quickly gets over his first feeling of fear, and even remarks that, unlike many other people, he did not found Stalin to be very impressive or hypnotic. It would seem that the awe effect did not affect everybody.

Berezhkov describes somewhat incoherent feelings towards Stalin. On the one hand, Berezhkov (1983) writes: "I had already acted several times as interpreter for Stalin, but each time I was to see him I became seized with agitation" (p. 252). The awe that he feels in front of Stalin even borders on the absurd, as shown in the following passage where Berezhkov contemplates the possibility to run back to his room or hide behind a curtain in order to avoid meeting Stalin in the hallway:

> Нередко бывало, что, выходя из секретариата наркома […] я видел, как из-за противоположного угла показывался знакомый охранник [Сталина]. И каждый раз это приводило меня в смятение. Нет, то не был страх. Я был убежден, что мне лично ничем не грозит такая встреча. Но появлялось непреодолимое подсознательное желание спрятаться. Через несколько секунд должен появиться Сталин. Мысль лихорадочно

работала: как поступить? Вернуться обратно в секретариат или быстро добежать до своей комнаты и укрыться за дверью? Может, спрятаться за одной из гардин, прикрывавших высокие окна, смотрящие во внутренний дворик?

> Often, when exiting the Secretariat of the People's Commissariat […] I would see [Stalin's] bodyguard appear from the opposite side of the corridor. Every time it threw me into confusion. No, it was not fear. I was convinced that such a meeting would not be a threat to me personally. Still, I had an irresistible, subconscious desire to hide. In a few seconds, Stalin would appear. My thoughts raced feverishly: what should I do? Go back to the secretariat or quickly run to my room and hide behind the door? Maybe hide behind one of the curtains that covered the tall windows overlooking the courtyard? (p. 215)[13]

On the other hand, Berezhkov (1993) claims he has had no fear working with Stalin and being close to him. He thought that he has been 'inoculated' against such fear because of something that has happened to his father. The later was repressed, and put in jail. However, he was released after the investigation found him to be innocent. After his father's return, young Berezhkov acquires a deep conviction that repressions would never touch or hurt someone who is truly innocent. This conviction, according to him, allowed him to walk into Stalin's office without fear later on:

> Казалось чудом, что отца выпустили, причем без всяких отягощающих его дальнейшую жизнь последствий. […] Этот невероятный случай имел для меня определенные последствия. Он позволил уверовать, что если человек действительно невиновен, то его либо не тронут, либо, даже арестовав, в конце концов обязательно выпустят. Быть может, это и позволило мне потом, спустя многие годы, без страха входить в кабинет Сталина, сидеть рядом с ним, не ощущая опасности.
>
> It seemed like a miracle that my father was released, and without any consequences that would affect his future life. […] This incredible event had consequences for me. It led me to believe that if a person is really innocent, then they will either never get in trouble, or, even after being arrested, they will be released in the end. Perhaps this idea allowed me, many years later, to enter Stalin's office without fear, and to sit next to him without feeling any danger. (pp. 156-157)

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[13] One might wonder, when reading Yerofeyev's (2005) memoirs, whether Berezhkov did not actually give in to his fear and hid behind a curtain while Stalin was walking by: "Как-то вечером незнакомый голос по вертушке [...] попытался грубо отчитать меня за то, что я будто бы спрятался за занавеску, когда по коридору проходил товарищ Сталин и не поприветствовал его. Пришлось объясняться с одним из начальников охраны." [One evening an unfamiliar voice on the phone […] tried to rudely reprimand me for allegedly hiding behind a curtain when Comrade Stalin walked along the corridor and not greeting him. I had to defend myself with in front of one of the security chiefs.] (p. 155).

Doubting the interpreter's competence

The pressure and stress felt by the interpreter can be reinforced by doubt on the part of the superiors. Korchilov (1999) remembers an unpleasant episode with Brezhnev[14] and Gromyko.[15] The latter understood English and was listening to the original English speech. Gromyko then interrupted Korchilov in the middle of his interpretation to ask whether the interpreter is sure of the translation of a particular word. In doing so, Gromyko also undermines the interpreter in Brezhnev's eyes, who does not understand English, and who starts to doubt whether the interpreter is up to the task.

> Gromyko, the foreign minister, who spoke good English […], interrupted me in the middle of the sentence to ask if I was sure, it was the right word to use. [Brezhnev] looked at me sideways, then at Gromyko, clearly unsure about my reliability as an interpreter, and finally asked Gromyko bluntly and loudly if he was being "got across" correctly. (p. 22)

Gromyko eventually reassures the General Secretary and admits that Korchilov is doing a good job.

Molotov was a rather difficult person to interpret for, and at first feels mistrust towards his young interpreter. Troyanovsky (1997) remembers that Molotov summoned him before important talks, and "стал расспрашивать, достаточно ли уверенно я себя чувствую, хорошо ли я разбираюсь в тех вопросах, которые стоят на повестке дня конференции, и т. д." [asked me if I was confident enough, if I had a good understanding of the issues on the agenda, etc.] (p. 139). After the talks, Molotov asks those who were present "как звучал мой перевод, все ли соответствовало сказанному им" [how my interpretation sounded, whether everything matched what he said] (p. 139). After he is reassured that everything went well, Molotov does not doubt the interpreter again.

Shame and embarrassment

More mundane, but still unpleasant situations can sometimes take place. Berezhkov remembers an awkward situation in which he happened to buy a suit almost identical to that of Molotov. Berezhkov (1993) writes: "Я сразу ощутил неловкость и неуместность такого совпадения. Молотов тоже взглянул на меня весьма неодобрительно" [I immediately felt the awkwardness and inappropriateness of such a coincidence. Molotov, too, looked at me very disapprovingly.] (p. 236). Molotov mentions that to foreign guest they will look as if they

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[14] Leonid Brezhnev (1906-1982), Soviet politician, General Secretary of the USSR between 1964 and 1982.

[15] Andrei Gromyko (1909-1989), Soviet Belarusian politician and diplomat during the Cold War. Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1957–1985, under Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko.

are wearing uniforms, and Berezhkov goes to change his suit as soon as possible and never wears it again. Molotov does not either (Berezhkov, 1993).

When Molotov suddenly scolds Birse and Pavlov for exchanging notes even though it was their usual practice for years prior to that, Pavlov seems quite ashamed of his principal. Birse (1967) recalls the "embarrassed look Pavlov gave me" (p. 200) which gives the researcher an idea of the interpreter's private feelings in that moment.

Sukhodrev (1999) remembers feeling shame and embarrassment at Khrushchev's behaviour. The leader visited Hollywood, where a projection of the movie *Can-Can* was organized for him. When later journalists asked him about the movie, Khrushchev burst into an angry tirade and denounced the Can-Can dance as something inappropriate. Sukhodrev (1999) remembers his feelings at that moment:

> Выпад Хрущева вызвал […] у меня чувство горечи. Ведь в Голливуде его принимали хорошо. Ему радовались, его оценили… И вдруг – обидный выпад против тех, кто так старался ради него. Тем более огорчительный, что именно эти его слова были тут же растиражированы газетами.
>
> Khrushchev's angry burst caused [...] a feeling of bitterness in me. After all, in Hollywood he was well received. People were happy to see him and appreciated him... And suddenly came this an offensive attack against those who tried so hard to please him. All the more upsetting was the fact that these bitter words were the ones immediately picked up and spread by the press. (p. 73)

Negative emotions linked to interpreting tasks

Loneliness

Interestingly, two interpreters use very similar words to describe their feelings when working under such pressure. Birse (1967) writes about "a **sinking feeling** and a sense of **loneliness**. [The interpreter] is alone in the midst of an ocean of words. He just interprets." (p. 110). More than 30 years later, Korchilov (1999) writes:

> Well, nothing really happens beyond an occasional **sinking feeling** in the pit of the stomach and a sense of... **loneliness**. The sinking feeling comes when the interpreter senses that the meaning of his principal's utterances is beginning to elude him or when the latter interrupts his train of thought to wonder if he is being "got across" correctly. (p. 22)

Lack of work experience and young age

Another factor to take into account for understanding the stress felt by some interpreters is their young age and lack of experience. Indeed, since the Soviet MFA had to recruit in an *ad hoc* manner interpreter from different backgrounds and often without work experience, the new recruits had a hard time adjusting.

Pavlov was struggling at first because of his great inexperience. He made mistakes in reports about his first meetings. This led to Molotov scolding the young interpreter. Such unpleasant moments would leave a deep negative impression. Pavlov (2000) writes that “я очень переживал свою неудачу и объяснял ее себе необычностью обстановки и незнанием вопроса. Сказывалось также незнание мной дипломатической терминологии и отсутствие жизненного опыта. Ведь мне едва исполнилось 24 года” [my failure upset me very much and I explained it to myself by the unusual situation in which I was, and by my ignorance of the matters at hand. Other factors were my ignorance of diplomatic terminology and lack of life experience. After all, I was only 24 years old] (p. 98).

Yerofeyev (2005) is a very young man when he becomes Molotov’s assistant. He is struggling at the beginning and lives with the “чувства, что [его] не сегодня-завтра с работы выгонят, и если этого не сделали, то только потому, что не находят пока замены” [constant feeling that [he] can lose his job any day, and that the only reason that it has not happened is that they did not find him a replacement yet] (Yerofeyev, 2005, p. 114).

Confrontation with death

Sukhodrev (1999) as Kosygin’s interpreter, accompanies the Soviet official to Indira Gandhi’s funeral and has to witness that macabre event. He writes that her face (Indians did not preserve the body before cremation) was already touched by decay. This event leaves a very strong negative impression on Sukhodrev, as he writes: “я испытывал сильное потрясение” [I was very much upset] (p. 181).

Ups and downs

After the high of working at thrilling conferences, that will leave a trace in history, comes the **down,** meaning the return to rather dull and grey realities of behind-the-scenes politics. Therefore, the interpreter is subject to a genuine **emotional roller-coaster.** Birse (1967) writes: “The succeeding months for me in Moscow were dull and unexciting compared with the stirring days in Teheran, but an interpreter's work is not confined to gala days” (p. 163).

Pain

Strong emotional **pain** at being excluded from the interpreting profession is also mentioned in the studied memoirs. Berezhkov, who was removed from the MFA, is upset because he is **missing out** on major political and historical events. He thus expresses a certain degree of **entitlement**, thinking that he was meant to be at Yalta. He also misses being an important member of the delegation, being relied upon and playing an important role in the proceedings. Berezhkov (1993) suffers from what he perceived to be **unfair** treatment, and is even **offended** by what happened to him:

> Особенно тяжело я переживал, читая сообщения с Ялтинской конференции. Казалось, еще вчера все ее участники были рядом со мной. Вместе с ними я должен был отправиться в Крым, войти в Ливадийский дворец, переводить беседы Сталина с Рузвельтом и Черчиллем. За четыре года я привык, что всегда был в таких случаях нужен. Было до слез обидно, даже оскорбительно.
>
> I was especially **hurt** when reading news about the Yalta conference. It seemed that only yesterday all the participants were right **next to me**. I was **supposed to go** to Crimea with them, enter the Livadia Palace, interpret Stalin's conversations with Roosevelt[16] and Churchill. For four years **I was needed** in such situations, I got used to it. It was so **unfair** that I could **cry**, it was even **offensive**. (p. 374)

Berezhkov then goes on to reflect on the fate of the interpreter, indispensable but at the same time tragically replaceable. Awareness of that is a very strong negative emotion, that perhaps eludes interpreters while they are in service, and only becomes noticeable when they are removed from or quit the stage. The feeling of injustice is linked to not being recognized as a person, a human being, but only as the function that the interpreter is fulfilling.

> Что такое переводчик? Без него участники переговоров словно глухонемые. Он нужен, необходим, незаменим. Но вот я вижу, что нужен он только как профессионал, специалист, но вовсе не как личность. Человек исчезает, но профессионал остается.
>
> What is an interpreter? Without him, the negotiators are deaf and dumb. He is needed, essential, irreplaceable. But now I see that he is needed only as a professional, a specialist, but not at all as a person. The person disappears, but the professional remains. (p. 374)

5.1.3. Personal politics

5.1.3.1. Close personal relations

Family life

International level political meetings often involve a lot of work to prepare the talks, but also extensive travelling and staying abroad during the length of the talks. Troyanovsky (1997) takes his family along for most of his new positions abroad. However, sometimes, personal relationships are deeply and negatively affected by such circumstances, and marriages can even fail. Thus, Palazchenko (2009) writes that after moving to New York to work as an interpreter for the United Nations, he “went through all the problems and joys of building a family in a foreign environment. It was not easy, and the marriage eventually ended in divorce” (p. 7).

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[16] Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), American statesman, president of the United States from 1901 to 1909.

Friends can turn away

Domestic politics, especially in times of crisis, can divide society. This polarization can drive people of different political beliefs apart. During the last years of the USSR's existence, tensions arose between conservative and democratic forces in the Soviet government, but also inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Palazchenko, Gorbachev's interpreter who shared his views on the necessity to democratize the USSR, feels the antipathy of the conservatives, irritated by Gorbachev's reforms and his strive to reform the country. Palazchenko (2009) writes: "I felt some of that resentment myself. My telephone was not ringing as much as in better times, and some people began to avoid me" (p. 244).

Berezhkov remembers that when he is caught in the NKVD investigation about his parents who left with Germans, his friends turn away, probably out of fear that they could be somehow guilty by association. Berezhkov writes that (1993) "недавних сослуживцев и многочисленных «приятелей» как ветром сдуло" [people who only recently were my comrades-in-arms and numerous "buddies" disappeared in the blink of an eye] (p. 357).

5.1.3.2. Prejudice and mistrust

Nationalism

Prejudice and mistrust can be felt on different levels. If we speak of the international level, then the mistrust against a representative of a certain country could be considered a demonstration of nationalism. In Russia, for a long time, foreigners were regarded with a degree of apprehension, which often led to their physical and geographical isolation. Thus, entire districts in cities were dedicated to foreigners and to their "containment". Birse, for example, recalls the history of Nemetskaya Sloboda[17], a neighbourhood in Moscow populated by German speaking foreigners that existed in the 16-17th centuries. Birse (1967) draws an interesting parallel between the Nemetskaya Sloboda of old and the isolation of the British mission in Moscow in the 1940s:

> The British Military Mission […] was situated in a narrow street, off one of the main thoroughfares, near the 'Red Gates' […]. This quarter of Moscow lies at no great distance from what in the distant past had been the 'Nemetskaya Sloboda', which I mentioned earlier. A mile or two further north and we should have been within the area of the isolated settlement of the original merchant adventurers. We did not know it at the time, but we were to be as isolated and enclosed as our predecessors and for very much the same reasons. (p. 58)

[17] German Quarter.

Thus, members of the British Mission—including Birse—are isolated from any informal contact with Soviet citizens. Casual mingling with the Soviets is also strongly discouraged. *Burobin*, a special state organization, caters to the needs of foreigners so that they do not need to hire help amongst Soviet citizens. Birse is also acutely aware of being watched by the Soviet police every time he leaves the embassy to wander around (Birse, 1967).

Another type of mistrust occurs more plainly. During Stalin's talks with Ribbentrop (about highly sensitive issues, one can imagine) the interpretation is provided not by Pavlov (the usual interpreter) but by an interpreter from the German embassy in Moscow whose name is Hilger. Nevertheless, Stalin asks Pavlov to be present during these talks, so that he can monitor the interpretation and check whether Hilger is providing an accurate translation. Pavlov (2000) writes:

> Переводчиком в переговорах Сталина с Риббентропом был Хильгер. Сталин поручил мне только следить за точностью перевода на немецкий язык того, что он будет говорить. Кроме того, я должен был сверить русский и немецкий тексты договора и протокола с русским текстом этих документов, что было мною сделано.
>
> Hilger was the translator in Stalin's negotiations with Ribbentrop. Stalin instructed me only to monitor the accuracy of the translation into German of what he would say. In addition, I had to check the Russian and German texts of the treaty and protocol with the Russian text of these documents, which I did. (p. 98)

Ideology

The Soviets' mistrust of foreigners is not solely based on nationalism. The reason is also an ideological one, as the archenemy of Soviet communism is capitalism. Thus, as Birse (1967) puts it, "anyone from the west was a potential enemy of the regime" (p. 59). The British are perceived not only as strangers, but also as agents of capitalism and must be watched. This is largely confirmed by historic sources, but also by the perception of the interpreters, whose biographies are here studied. For instance, Yerofeyev (2005) writes that "все, что исходило от США, Англии и прочих империалистов, встречало априори настороженный прием. […] В основном такая реакция объяснялась классовым подходом, идеологическими соображениями" [everything that came from the United States, England and other imperialist states was *a priori* met with apprehension. […] Such reactions were mainly explained by the class wars approach and ideological considerations] (p. 125).

Interestingly, Sukhodrev (1999) recalls even General Secretary Khrushchev being nervous about having to mingle with capitalists during a luncheon. This interesting episode happened during Khrushchev's trip to the USA in 1959. A luncheon was organized in the Waldorf Astoria hotel, in New York, and heads of large corporations, banks and investment

funds were invited. The General Secretary turned to Sukhodrev and told him: “Виктор, ты представляешь себе, в каком обществе мы сегодня находимся? Ведь приедем домой, а нас Шверник из партии погонит. Это же сплошные капиталисты! Акулы!” [Victor, do you understand what kind of company we are in today? When we’ll come home, Shvernik[18] will throw us out of the Party! These are all capitalists! Sharks!] (Sukhodrev, 1999, p. 66).

There is not only a need to isolate foreigners from Soviet citizens, but also to protect the latter from the nefarious influence of capitalists. Shveitser (1999) recalls that at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, Soviet supervisors “feared that long exposure to an alien ideological atmosphere” (p. 26) would negatively affect the Soviet interpreters. The supervisors insisted on isolating the interpreters from their Western colleagues. Thus the Soviets’ “ideological purity was saved” (Shveitser, 1999, p. 26). Moreover, Shveitser compares the dormitory in which he was staying to a military casern under surveillance. There was a very stern guard who wrote down one’s name if one came back late, or alone. Soviet specialists were not allowed to go out alone (Shveitser, 2012).

It is important to note that ideological mistrust went both ways. Yerofeyev (2005) remembers the warm welcome he was given by Scottish people during the WWII, when the USSR was fighting on the Eastern Front. The young man was *en route* to Sweden to take up his new job. After many peregrinations though war-torn Europe Yerofeyev finds himself in Scotland, where a Soviet person was a rather rare sight. He’s welcomed as the representative of a heroic nation and a hero himself, and everybody is friendly and welcoming.

Very soon after the war, the attitude towards the Soviets will shift dramatically. Shveitser (2012) recalls the changed attitude of Americans towards Soviets during the Tokyo trials. It affected the interpreter as well, as he could feel the change in the mood. At first, everybody was friendly. Both Americans and Soviets remembered that they were allies in a terrible war and were happy to talk to each other. It did not last long. Shveitser (2012) writes that “ситуация изменилась. Отношения между Советским Союзом и западными союзниками резко обострились. Прозвучала знаменитая речь У. Черчилля в Фултоне, где впервые было произнесено словосочетание «Железный занавес». […] В отношении американцев к русским стала сквозить подозрительность, а порой и открытая враждебность” [the situation changed. Tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western allies escalated sharply. Churchill delivered his famous Fulton speech, in which the phrase

[18] Nikolai Shvernik (1888-1970), Chairman of the Party Control Committee, supreme disciplinary body of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

"Iron Curtain" was uttered for the first time. […] Suspicion and sometimes open hostility began to show in the attitude of the Americans towards the Russians] (p. 26).

These political fluctuations continued throughout the course of the 20th century, tainted by the Cold War, together with the ups and downs of Soviet-American relations. For Soviet interpreters working in the 1960s and 1970s those fluctuations are quite tangible, and affect the way people look at them. For instance, in 1960, when Shveitser accompanies Soviet officials on their tour through the USA, the mood is somewhat friendly and light-hearted (most of the time). Very soon, though, the mood shifts again. In 1962 the Cuban Missiles Crisis blows up, and the tension is quite tangible (Shveitser, 2012).

Mistrust based on ideology sometimes also shows in Soviet people's attitude towards Russian emigrants and their descendants, who settled in foreign countries. Shveitser (2012) recalls accompanying a delegation of Soviet officials to the USA. Polyanski, a member of the delegation, refused the services of American interpreter Akalovsky. Thus, Shveitser has to do all the work alone, instead of being regularly replaced by his American colleague. Polyanski's prejudice against Akalovsky was based on the fact that he is the descendant of White Russian emigrants.[19] The delegate was convinced that Akalovsky would misinterpret him on purpose. Shveitser (2012) writes:

> Полянский первое время настаивал на том, чтобы я один переводил все время. Американскому переводчику Александру Акаловскому, профессионалу высокого класса, Полянский не доверял, опасаясь, как бы этот потомок русских белоэмигрантов не стал его умышленно искажать.
>
> Polyansky at first insisted that I should interpret all the time. Polyansky did not trust the American interpreter Alexander Akalovsky, a highly skilled professional, and feared that this descendant of Russian White emigrants would deliberately misinterpret his words. (p. 46)

Krivoshein, after his White Russian family repatriates back to the Soviet Union, feels the mistrust and disapproval of other Soviet citizens. The former White Russian, forced to work for his ideological enemy, the Communist State, is looked down upon. Krivoshein (2014) writes in rather crudes expressions: "Все мы стали политическими проститутками. […] Нас иначе как продажных и не воспринимали и обращались с нами с брезгливой учтивостью" [We all became political prostitutes. […] The others perceived us as corrupt and treated us with disgusted courtesy] (p. 104). Krivoshein (2014) remembers that Soviets often referred to the

[19] "White Russians" is a term that refers to former Russian aristocracy and bourgeoisie that fled the country before the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

former aristocrats and bourgeois as *nedobitki*, meaning people who survived the revolution and the downfall of the upper class and aristocracy.

Sukhodrev (1999) too is well aware of how Soviets perceived Russian emigrants. He writes that "в те времена официальное отношение к таким людям у нас в стране было резко отрицательным. Они считались врагами, перебежчиками и так далее" [In those days, the official attitude towards such people in our country was strongly negative. They were considered enemies, deserters, and so on] (p. 212). However, many interpreters in countries other than the USSR and who worked from Russian into English were Russian emigrants. They would, sometimes be among those who accompanied Soviet delegations that came to the USA (such as the already mentioned Akalovsky) or to Canada. Sukhodrev had sympathy for them. He suggests to Kosygin that the Premier proposes a toast to acknowledge their work. Kosygin agrees and lift his glass to those interpreters, saying:

> Я знаю, что многие из вас – выходцы или потомки выходцев из России. И хочу выразить вам искреннюю благодарность, пожелать вам и вашим родственникам всего наилучшего, а также выразить уверенность в том, что, откуда бы вы ни прибыли, сейчас все вы – хорошие канадцы.
>
> I know that many of you are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Russia. And I want to express my sincere gratitude to you, wish you and your relatives all the best, and express my confidence that, no matter where you come from, you are now all good Canadians. (p. 212)

As Sukhodrev remembers, the interpreters were deeply touched by such an attention from the Prime Minister, after being looked down upon by many Soviet people (officials and not only) for most of their lives.

Mistrust **ad personam**

A basic assumption of an interpreter's work and position is that he or she is considered to be absolutely neutral. On rare occasions circumstances are such that the interpreter 'breaks the fourth wall' and speaks of himself after being prompted by a politician. The other side's politicians become nervous, especially given the tense political context and expectations of having spies and traitors everywhere. When Churchill is absent a moment, Stalin and Molotov ask the interpreter personal questions out of curiosity. Birse (1967) writes that they wanted to know "where I had learnt Russian, how many years I had spent in Russia, what my family had been doing in St. Petersburg, the name of my school and so on". The interpreter then had to explain himself to his principal and "reassured [Churchill] that I was only answering questions about my past" (Birse, 1967, p. 104).

An interpreter with whom politicians have not worked for a long time does not enjoy the same trust as one that they have worked for years. Bohlen (1973) recalls that he grew

close to Roosevelt and was much more involved in the affairs of preparing international conferences. However, the relationship is different with Truman and Bohlen is not part of more "intimate conversations between Truman and Byrne" (Bohlen, 1973, p. 228). This is due to a lack of trust. Trust simply had not yet had time to establish itself: "It seemed inevitable that I should not enjoy the confidence of people whom I had just met to the same degree as I did of those I had worked with longer" (Bohlen, 1973, p. 228).

A person's marital status too can be a criterion on the basis of which a person is judged to be reliable or not. For instance, the USSR was against sending unmarried men abroad on missions, as they were considered "not quite reliable in the eyes of 'the system'" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 6). It is for this reason that Palazchenko does not get to go to the U.N. in New York after passing his final interpreting exams, unlike some of his fellow comrades. He stays in the USSR and spends some time teaching and interpreting.

Mistrust of a whole interpreting modality

In one occurrence, mistrust was even direct against a whole slice of the interpreting profession, the simultaneous interpreters. Shveitser (2012) points out the mistrust towards a new way of doing interpreting: the simultaneous modality, which is not yet trusted enough to be fully accepted in the Tokyo trials:

> Устные переводчики […] переводили синхронно только готовые письменные тексты (обвинительного заключения, приговора, письменных показаний). Все остальное (допрос свидетелей, прения сторон) переводилось последовательно […]. В этом, по-видимому, сказывалось известное недоверие к находившемуся еще в младенческом возрасте синхронному переводу.
>
> Interpreters […] worked in the simultaneously modality only when they had pre-written texts (indictment, verdict, written testimonies). Everything else (interrogations of witnesses, debates) was interpreted in the consecutive modality […]. This, apparently, reflected a certain distrust of simultaneous interpretation, which was still in its infancy. (p. 19)

The trials are a high stakes event. Organizers wish to avoid mistakes as much as possible, including interpretating mistakes, which literally become a matter of life and death. For this, organizers take precautions. They prefer to use a modality that has been tested and approved for years, i.e., consecutive. This modality seems to be less "risky" and thus more trustworthy. When confronted with the necessity of SI (probably for saving time), organizers provide interpreters with as many written documents as possible so that the latter can prepare.

5.1.4. Conclusion

In this part, I have analysed various types of impact that the political conjuncture can have on an interpreter's personal life.

First, I have studied the dangers that could come upon the physical person of the interpreter. International conflicts and wars, are the first and most obvious type of danger that emerges in the selected time period. Domestic repressions, such as imprisonment and various mistreatments, were common place in authoritarian USSR. It is true that in my pool of studied interpreters not one suffered such a terrible fate (at least for being an interpreter or making an interpreting mistake). However, it does not mean that they did not *perceive* it as a possible grave danger to themselves. Interpreters were also not shielded from accidents, despite their white-collar working environment. Voice straining, sleep deprivation, hunger and discomfort associated with it, occurred regularly as the result of long working hours.

Second, I have found that the impact on the interpreter's mental state ranges from positive feelings, such as elation and happiness, to different kinds of negative emotions, mostly stress. These emotions can be triggered by the international context: excitement for being part of history and stress because of high responsivity laid on one's shoulders. The interpreter's principal could also be the trigger of various reactions, positive if the work of the language specialist is acknowledged, negative is the principal is an awe-inspiring and intimidating figure. The work of the interpreter itself could be either enjoyable or terribly difficult and frustrating.

Third, I have analysed how an interpreter's personal relations can be affected by the political context. Friends and acquaintances who did not share the interpreter's view could turn their back on them in times of political tensions. Marriages could break up because of long working hours and incessant traveling. People also reacted to interpreters differently based on their political views. Thus, interpreters could be discriminated against because of their nationality, ideology, or more personal criteria. The whole modality of simultaneous interpreting was mistrusted at the beginning because it was a technological novelty and had not yet been tested and proved to be reliable yet.

5.2. Impact on professional life

The present part seeks to answer the following question: **what is the impact of the political conjuncture on the professional life of a high-level interpreter?** I have decided to sub-divide the concept of professional life into natural parts that follow the course of one's career. Therefore, we can nuance the main question and ask the following three sub-questions:

- How does the political conjuncture impact interpreters career choices?
- How does it influence their everyday work at the very high-level?
- What role do politics play in one's decision to quit the interpreting career?

5.2.1. Becoming an interpreter

In the time period studied, an interpreting career is more often than not an *ad hoc career*, that one ends up pursuing by force of circumstances. The latter can be, for example, a tense international context or a domestic lack of personnel and language specialists. However, we know of examples of specialists that consciously made the choice to become interpreters.

5.2.1.1. Start of career

By personal choice

Sukhodrev (1999) is the son of two Soviet intelligence officers, even though he does not know about it when he is a child. As a young boy, Sukhodrev was fascinated by "the person in the middle" (i.e., the interpreter) that he could see in documentary reports about high-level discussions such as the Yalta or Teheran conferences. The interpreter in the films would sit, inconspicuous, between two great leaders and help them communicate. From childhood already Sukhodrev knew who that person was and he knew that one day he would grow up to become like them. His upbringing in England—made possible by the intelligence career of his parents—gave him the rare opportunity to learn English naturally, as a second mother tongue, and not in school or university.

Much later, Korchilov writes about interpreting being his dream, too, albeit for different reasons. For him, interpreting was more than a career, it was a means to an end: to "travel and see the world" (Korchilov, 1999, p. 25). His preference for simultaneous interpreting was also determined by his impression of SI being "more challenging, more exciting, more promising" (p. 25) than translation. Because of an opening at the U.N., he was sent to New York even before finishing his 10-month U.N.-sponsored interpreting courses. Korchilov did not have the luxury to grow up with a foreign language and had to acquire them through time and effort, as he puts it: "I toiled my way through all the intricacies and hidden traps of English and Spanish" (p. 25).

Palazchenko's (2009) expresses an early interested in translating and chooses to go to the Institute of Foreign Language. He does not explicitly speak of a desire to necessarily become an interpreter, even though it seems that he started working as one even before completing his interpreting courses (it is unclear in which context, though). He is then **invited** to attempt the entrance exams to the U.N. courses (and succeeds.) I argue that this illustrates a will of the Soviet authorities to encourage specialists in pursuing an interpreting career, because the demand for the profession is high.

Shveitser (Shveitser, 2012) seems to have had an interest in languages since childhood. His choice of university was made consciously: he went to the Military School of Foreign Languages to seek a career related to the use of foreign tongues.

On the eve of WWII, Birse (1967), who is too old to be drafted as a soldier, **voluntarily** registers himself at the War Office in the Officers' Reserve. Therefore, Birse's motivation was to be involved in war operations and to serve his country in the fight against fascism. Even though he does not aim at being an interpreter per se, he does highlight his language qualifications, which will eventually lead him to become an interpreter (Birse, 1967).

Ad hoc recruitment

Chernov (1999) stresses that among the very first interpreters "none of them had actually been trained as simultaneous interpreters, they all became conference interpreters by trial and error" (p. 42). This claim is supported by evidence from several biographies included in the present thesis. The reasons for such a random process are highlighted below.

Lack of Russian language specialists in the West

The first explanation is of a practical nature: there were simply too few people in Europe or the USA that spoke foreign languages with sufficient proficiency, especially Russian. Thus, Russian emigrants, sometimes former members of the aristocracy, who learned Western languages (French, English, or others) to perfection often become interpreters. As an example, I can cite Constantin Andronikof, mentioned by Krivoshein (p. 167), a former aristocrat and White Russian, who served as interpreter to a number of French Presidents including Charles de Gaulle. Other examples include the interpreters Akalovsky and Krivoshein themselves.

War time demand for interpreters

Russian emigrants are not the only ones to master the Russian language though. The war context also raises understandable trust issues as to the loyalty of the personnel. Therefore,

Birse, an Englishman born and raised in St. Petersburg, proves to be invaluable. War makes the demand for such interpreting specialist a pressing one:

> As far as England was concerned the need for Russian-speaking interpreters, and in fact for any one with a knowledge of some of the lesser known languages, arose almost overnight, and the gap was hard to fill. (Birse, 1967, p. 107)

Birse lives through WWI and is recruited again as a language specialist when WWII unfolds. He finds himself in the British diplomatic mission in Moscow. Circumstances—the embassy interpreter being indisposed—force him to become one, even though he does not have much experience in the field. Birse (1967) writes that

> the Embassy interpreter was ill and I was to replace him at Churchill's talk with Stalin that night. I protested that I had had no experience of political talks, and that I should certainly be below the standard required, but [the ambassador, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr,] insisted. I understood that it was an order. (p. 97)

Birse’s interpreting career is almost completely subjected to the political spur of the moment, as whenever the need arises, Birse is recalled to serve as an interpreter. Indeed, after WWII is over, he goes back to the UK to work as a banker and teach at Cambridge. However, he is recalled by former co-workers to interpret for Eden in the Berlin Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1954. Birse (1967) cannot refuse “a man for whom I had the highest regard and who had always been generous in recognizing my efforts” (p. 225). Birse (1967) is once again interrupted in his “civilian” life, when offered to interpret during the highly politicized spy “case of the Petrovs in Australia, in which [Birse] was destined to play a not inconsiderable part” (p. 228).

The American interpreter Bohlen is first and foremost a diplomat, and his Russian skill is somewhat inferior to that of Birse, who grew up in pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg. However, Bohlen (1973) is still called upon to act as an interpreter when circumstances demand it, as the “British interpreter would not be able to do the work for both his and our delegation” (p. 127). Bohlen (1973) worries that “it had been more than two years since I had spoken Russian regularly and I had not boned up on the language” (p. 127). However, the talks go well and Bohlen is chosen to interpret for Roosevelt in Teheran. The interpreter at this point mentions “the enormous role that luck can play in the career of an individual” (Bohlen, 1973, p. 132), thus illustrating the random character of the interpreting career in such contexts.

Political purges and lack of specialists

Another explanation for recruitment of interpreters among people from all walks of life is the lack of language specialists in Soviet institutions. Several interpreters attribute this to the 1930s political purges, after which many organizations lost quite a percentage of their staff:

> Молотов немедленно приступил к чистке аппарата от старых и, на его взгляд, недостаточно лояльных работников. […] Старый НКИД был полностью разгромлен, его персонал разогнан, причем многие из руководящих сотрудников подверглись репрессиям.
>
> Molotov immediately set about cleaning the apparatus of old and, in his opinion, insufficiently loyal workers. […] The old MFA was completely destroyed, its personnel were dispersed, and many senior employees were repressed. (Yerofeyev, 2005, pp. 19-20)

Berezhkov (1993) too, wonders why he—a young man with little experience and a technical engineering education—would be chosen to assist a high-level official such as Mikoyan. He comes to the same conclusion as Yerofeyev:

> Видимо, [Микояну] был крайне необходим переводчик, обладавший хотя бы скудным опытом работы в Германии. Этому требованию я более или менее отвечал. Главное же было в том, что Народный комиссариат внешней торговли, как и другие советские учреждения, подвергся сталинской «чистке» и был фактически опустошен. Срочно понадобились новые работники, и в этих условиях требования оказались невысокие.
>
> Apparently, he desperately needed an interpreter with even a meager experience of working in Germany. I more or less met this requirement. The main reason was that the Ministry of Foreign Trade, like other Soviet institutions, was subjected to the Stalinist "purges" and was *de facto* decimated. New workers were needed urgently, and in such conditions minimal requirements turned out to be low. (p. 157)

Berezhkov (1983) learned foreign languages under the impulse of his parents, who assumed “that whatever [he] should do in [his] life a knowledge of foreign languages would always be useful” (p. 45). They turned out to be quite right. Ironically, Berezhkov (1993) owes his knowledge of German to the legacy of German colonies in Kiev, similar to those in Moscow described by Birse in the previous chapter:

> По соседству, оказались кварталы, с давних времен населенные киевлянами немецкого происхождения. [Здесь] находилась школа-семилетка, где все предметы преподавали на немецком, а русский и украинский считались как бы иностранными языками.
>
> In the neighborhood there were districts a long time inhabited by Kievans of German origin. [There] was a seven-year school, where all subjects were taught in German, while Russian and Ukrainian were considered foreign languages. (p. 119)

His engineering degree and knowledge of German make Berezhkov a member of a commission sent to Germany to inspect and purchase equipment. Tevosyan[20], a high-ranking

[20] Ivan Tevosyan (1902-1958), Soviet politician, Shipbuilding Minister of USSR in 1939-1940.

official, was present. He had his own interpreter, a woman who was doing well until the conversation went into technical details, at which point she was lost. Berezhkov volunteered to help and his knowledge of engineering helped him to provide an accurate and smooth interpretation (Berezhkov, 1983). Tevosyan recommends Berezhkov to Mikoyan, Minister of Foreign Trade, who recommends him to Molotov. The latter asks him to work for him as an interpreter during talks with Germans (Berezhkov, 1983). When the soon-to-be interpreter confides that he does not have a specialised training for such a mission, Molotov replies: "That doesn't matter. […] We've all had to learn different things" (p. 43). Thus begins Berezhkov's diplomatic and interpreting career.

Pavlov (2000) too had a technical background. He had just obtained his engineering diploma, when, in 1939 he was called to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and put though language exams. He succeeded and was told that he was to become assistant to Molotov. He tried to get out of it, and claimed that he wanted to pursue a scientific career, but Molotov appealed to his sense of Party discipline and solidarity. Pavlov (2000):

> Мои возражения и в частности довод о том, что я хотел бы остаться на научной работе, где я надеюсь принести больше пользы государству, были отвергнуты Молотовым ссылкой на партийную дисциплину.
>
> My objections, and in particular the argument that I wished to do scientific work, where I hoped to be of more use to the State, were rejected by Molotov who refered to Party discipline. (p. 97)

Troyanovsky, son of the first Soviet ambassador to the USA, goes to an American school in Washington, and learns English there. Ironically, Troyanovsky remarks (1997) that education in the USA helped his future diplomatic career, as the teacher always asked him his opinion when the topic of the USSR came up. He then had to explain the Soviet position on various matter of international politics. Troyanovsky thus has always been immersed in an international relations context. In September 1941, after Germany's attack on the USSR, a commission selects soldiers who speak German or English. Troyanovsky is among the selected ones and he is sent to attend classes in the Military School of Foreign Languages. He ends up in the Soviet *informburo*[21], as editor and translator; then he is recruited by the MFA, and sent to London. He is promoted several times and becomes entrenched in diplomatic work, even though it was never his first choice of career. Troyanovsky (1997) writes that "непроизвольно, без какого-либо желания с моей стороны (я имел иные планы на жизнь), началась моя дипломатическая карьера" [involuntarily, without any such desire on

[21] A leading Soviet news agency that was operating in the 1940s-1960s.

my part (I had other plans for life), my diplomatic career began] (p. 104). Then he participates in the organization of the Nuremberg trials, before finally becoming assistant to Vyshinsky[22], then Molotov.

Yerofeyev's is a case for both the previous 'personal choice' section and the present 'ad hoc recruitment' section. On the one hand, Yerofeyev (2005) writes that he did not know what he wanted to do after school. However, when he was 19 years old, he was summoned to the St. Petersburg *obkom*[23], where he was shown a picture of Pavlov, standing between Molotov and Ribbentrop and was asked whether he knew who that was. Yerofeyev's answer was affirmative (*perevodchik*[24]) and the following question was whether he wanted to become one. The young man answered 'yes' without even thinking about it. He was then sent to special courses organized by the Central Committee of the Party. Yerofeyev then starts working in the news agency TASS, then the Soviet embassy in Stockholm until one day he is urgently called back to Moscow, because Molotov urgently needs a French-speaking interpreter. Unfortunately for Yerofeyev, the trip takes a very long time and he misses the occasion to interpret for Molotov at a meeting with Charles de Gaulle. The magic of *ad hoc* recruitment works again, and Molotov's assistant and secretary, who happens to speak French quite decently, has to fill in.

Even though it was Sukhodrev (1999), dream to become an interpreter, he makes it into the Soviet MFA by chance. Troyanovsky, who was already working as an interpreter for a long time at the MFA, was looking for somebody to replace him. He happens to hear of Sukhodrev and invites him for an interview, after which the young man is hired by the MFA.

5.2.1.2. Language combination

Sukhodrev, Korchilov, Palazchenko, Berezhkov, and Pavlov all had more than English in their combination. But their career is (mostly) about the Russian-English language combination, which is the consequence of a specific international political conjuncture.

For instance, both Berezhkov and Yerofeyev, driven by idealism, wanted to learn Spanish to join the International Brigades fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Berezhkov (1983) writes that he studied Spanish "because there was a war going on in Spain and all my friends dreamed of joining the International Brigade" (p. 45). However, afterwards Spanish will not play an important role in his career, but English and German will.

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[22] Andrey Vyshinsky (1883-1954), Soviet politician, jurist and diplomat. Served as a Soviet state prosecutor in the Nuremberg trials. Deputy Foreign Minister in 1940-1949.

[23] Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

[24] Interpreter.

By the time Yerofeyev (2005) is sent to language courses, the Spanish Civil War is already coming to an end, and Yerofeyev, disappointed, ends up studying French. He writes:

> С грустью и завистью смотрел я на гордо прохаживающихся по коридорам университета, с новенькими орденами на груди, переводчиков, уже вернувшихся из Испании, куда их посылали нелегально.
>
> I looked with sadness and envy at the interpreters proudly strolling through the corridors of the university, with their new orders on their chests, who had already returned from Spain, where they had been sent illegally. (p. 14)

It is worth noting that the choice of the language studied was not the student's one to make. Learners were assigned to language groups, depending on the MFA's needs for this or that number of specialists in this or that language.

The preponderance of the English-Russian combination is explained by the predominance of Soviet-American and Soviet-British relations in world politics during the course of the WWII, while France was under occupation, and negotiations with Germany were suspended or reduced. After the war, it was the Soviet-American relations that shaped the world. The political hyper focus on these relations during that period is thus reflected in the abandonment by some interpreters of their third and fourth languages. The limited need of the Soviet MFA for French-speaking interpreters is confirmed by Yerofeyev (2005) when he reflects on the fate of French within the Soviet MFA:

> Постоянного переводчика с французским языком у Сталина не было, да, собственно, он и не требовался в годы войны и в послевоенный период, когда беседы Сталина велись главным образом с англо-американскими деятелями […]. С франкоговорящими собеседниками у него встречи случались редко. […] Меня привлекли к переводам бесед Сталина значительно позже, в ноябре 1947 года.
>
> Stalin did not have a permanent interpreter in French, and, in fact, one was not needed during the war and in the post-war period, when Stalin's conversations were conducted mainly with Anglo-American leaders [...]. He rarely met with French-speaking officials [...]. I was brought in to translate Stalin's French conversations much later, in November 1947. (p. 165)

5.2.1.3. Education and schools

In the 1930s and 1940s, Soviet officials understoond the severe lack of trained interpreters and translators in the country. The Soviet Union should not be isolated from international politics in the same way as after the Revolution of 1917. Political events unravel fast, the number of international meetings that Soviet leaders must attend explodes. They now require high quality translations and interpreting. The MFA, purged of many workers, has to be refilled with new blood. Thus, Yerofeyev (2005) writes:

> Этого не могли не заметить Сталин и Молотов, которые, впрочем, сами только начали выходить на широкую международную арену и нуждались в помощи профессионалов. В связи с этим в 1939 году было решено создать курсы переводчиков при ЦК ВКП(б), а затем и Высшую дипломатическую школу (ВДШ).
>
> Stalin and Molotov could not fail to notice this, even though they were just beginning to enter the international arena and thus needed the help of specialists. For this reason in 1939, they decided to create courses for interpreters under the supervision of the Central Committee of the Party, and then the Higher Diplomatic School. (p. 21)

According to Yerofeyev (2005), the new interpreting school focuses on three languages: German, English and French. It is not surprising. Germany, France, the UK, and later the USA played central roles in the on-going conflict on the European continent, and later in the resolution of the war's consequences.

After the war, the countries' aspiration for sustainable peace leads to the creation of the U.N. and dozens of other international organizations and agencies, all of which require, of course, highly trained translators and interpreters to function correctly. Additional institutions in the USSR are created to prepare specialists in translation and simultaneous interpreting, so as to satisfy the demand for interpreters and translators, linked to deepening political ties and dialogue between countries, notably through the U.N., as a platform of dialogue and peaceful conflict settlement. Yerofeyev (2005) expresses the same opinion when he writes that: "мне лично за всю мою дипломатическую жизнь не приходилось участвовать в таком количестве международных совещаний и конференций […] как в период 'холодной войны'" [I personally have never attended so many international meetings and conferences in my entire diplomatic life [...] as I did during the Cold War] (p. 209).

As we have seen, depending on the urgency of the need for interpreters, not every specialist had a diplomatic and military background. However, sometimes for aspiring interpreters, attending diplomatic training was a mandatory requirement. Korchilov, after studying languages, worked as an interpreter and rotated between several fixed-term missions at the MFA and the U.N. However, Korchilov (1999) writes: "in 1985, when my fixed-term appointment expired, I was recalled to Moscow again to rejoin the government diplomatic service. But not before I was put through a course at the MFA Diplomatic Academy to master the subtleties of the art of diplomacy" (p. 26). Thus, we see that the MFA was interested in heightening the qualifications of their interpreters and sent them to perfect their knowledge of international relations.

5.2.2. Being an interpreter

5.2.2.1. Perks of working as interpreter

Financial comfort

A first, rather very down-to-earth benefit was of a material nature. The general financial situation of the high-level interpreters was better than that of an average Soviet citizen (Berezhkov, 1993). High-level Soviet interpreters were also given the possibility to travel abroad, unlike the rest of the Soviet population. Therefore, they had the opportunity to buy many products and luxury items that were unavailable in the Soviet Union at the time (Berezhkov, 1993; Sukhodrev, 1999). Even, Yerofeyev, still a student at the translation courses, recalls the comfortable life conditions that the students enjoyed: "были созданы и хорошие бытовые условия: уютное общежитие, столовая с вкусной пищей, просторное помещение для проведения разных мероприятий" [good living conditions were created: a cozy dormitory, a dining room with tasty food, a spacious hall for various events] (Yerofeyev, 2005, p. 21).

Krivoshein (2012) remembers being very well paid, both in the USSR and later in France, because the profession of simultaneous interpreter was in very high demand at that time and thus very well compensated. Moreover, the competition was very low, especially for the French-Russian language combination. Krivoshein (2012) mentions that "тогда в Москве с французским языком качественных ремесленников было менее десяти" [back then in Moscow there were less than ten highly skilled interpreters working with French] (p. 215). This high demand implied good monetary compensation for Krivoshein.

However, the monetary advantages were not always steady. Shveitser (2012) (who belongs to a generation that came after Berezhkov, Pavlov and Birse) is critical of the pay interpreters get in the 1960s. Yet, he admits that later on the salaries became better, when the demand for the profession rose. Palazchenko (2009) writes of decent earnings for an interpreter in the 1970s: "I also started to work as a simultaneous interpreter, which at the time was regarded as something enormously difficult and almost mysterious. It also paid good money" (p. 5). We thus see a correlation between demand for the profession and material compensation of the specialists.

Freelancing

Krivoshein (2014) is an exception in the studied pool of interpreters as he was not officially attached to a Ministry or to the Government, and worked as a freelance. He praises the freelance aspect of the work. Indeed, not being part of an intistituion meant that he did not have to participate in various rituals that were characteristic of the "трудовой коллектив"

[work collective], such as Party meetings, and more or less mandatory donations to various socialist associations and unions (p. 52).[25]

Privileged position

In domestic politics, high-level interpreters enjoyed a position of proximity to power, or as Palazchenko (2009) puts it, to an "inner circle" (p. 14). Belonging to it was prestigious, but also meant more work, and a requirement to be more flexible and available all the time. This privileged position also allowed to have many informal, casual conversations with the country's leaders. Thus, Korchilov (1999) throughout his memoirs recalls his numerous casual chats with Gorbachev, but also his wife Raisa, such as when they discovered that they were "*zemlyaki*, that is to say, fellow countrymen from the same part of Russia" (p. 288). Bohlen (1973) remarks that acting not only as an adviser, but also as an interpreter, made it possible for him to become close to Hull:[26] "As an interpreter, I became much closer to Secretary Hull than I ordinarily would have. I had scarcely known him before" (p. 127).

Proximity to and good relations with people in power allowed for asking some favours asked here and there. Marina Vladi, a friend of Sukhodrev, asks him to ask a favour of the General Secretary, so as she could keep some real estate that her late husband[27] was given by the State and that was, for some reason, under threat. Sukhodrev helps her out (interview with Viktor Sukhodrev, 2010).

Proximity to power and attempts at obtaining favors do not always succeed. Krivoshein (2012), as a convict and former camp prisoner, has a passport that ties him down to a specific living location: a provincial town in which he cannot use his professional skills. In order to work as an interpreter, Krivoshein must illegally go to Moscow. During one mission, the interpreter impresses Gorkin[28] with a very skilled and accurate legal translation when a delegation of French law practitioners comes to Moscow. Krivoshein asks Gorkin for a favor: he wants to be allowed to remain in Moscow on a legal basis. Gorkin obviously has sympathy for him and promises to try and help him, but unfortunately for Krivoshein, he fails.

Traveling and discovering the world

On the international level, a very important privilege that most interpreters cite is, of course, the possibility to travel around the world and discovers different cultures. Meeting and chatting

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[25] Such as the Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy. It was a paramilitary sport organization in the Soviet Union.

[26] Cordell Hull (1871-1955), United States Secretary of State in 1933-1944.

[27] Vladimir Vysotsky (1938-1980) was a famous and well-loved Soviet singer and poet.

[28] Alexander Gorkin (1897-1988), Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union in 1957-1972.

with foreign heads of state, or various celebrities is an added benefit. For example, Korchilov (1999) has the chance to meet President Reagan and to ask him about his acting career.

> I told [Reagan] I was a movie buff and that as an interpreter I had always been curious to know why he was referred to as the Gipper with a capital G and who or what "a gipper" was. [..] He told me, with relish and feeling, like the real raconteur that he was, the story of the origin of the phrase. (p. 351)

Sukhodrev*,* in an interview, shares how much he valued his work for the possibility to see the world, and meet famous and remarkable people. At the time the interview is recorded, Sukhodrev is 78 years old. He insists on the importance of the good memories that his work provided him with, and that they are a great comfort now that he is retired:

> Работая, переводчик имеет огромное счастье увидеть разнообразие мира, культур, людей. […] Благодаря профессии я дважды был осчастливлен находиться в обществе [Фрэнка Синатры], даже общаться. О чем? Не важно. Светская болтовня. Но с кем?! Вот что особенно дорого в данном случае. Таких дорогих и хранимых в памяти встреч очень много.
>
> In his work the interpreter has the incredible luck to see the diversity of the world, its cultures and people. [...] thanks to my profession I had the chance, twice, to be in [Frank Sinatra's] company, even to talk to him. What did we talk about? It does not matter. Idle mundane chat. But with such a person! This is what is so valuable. And I have a lot of precious memories about such acquaintances, memories that are greatly important to me. (Tikhonova, 2010)

Shveitser (2012) stresses the discoveries to be made thanks to the profession: "Ведь переводческое ремесло – это не только поиск нужного слова, не только решение сложных языковых и культурологических проблем. Это еще и люди, страны, события и встречи, память о которых навсегда остается с тобой" [Interpreting is not solely about the search for the right word, for the solution to complex language and culturological problems. It is about people, countries, events, acquaintances, the memories of which will always be with you] (p. 13).

Traveling around did not only give access to material goods, but also to information and press articles which were available in the West, but were heavily censored in the USSR. Shveitser (2012) points out an interesting paradox. After the Cuban Missiles Crisis—a moment of terrible tension for everyone in the West—when his delegation goes back to Moscow, he expects wives and children of the delegates to rush to the airport and cry with relief at their return. It turned out that the Soviet press toned down the gravity of the Caribbean crisis quite a bit, and that the abysmal anxiety that was widespread in the West never affected the Soviet population.

5.2.2.2. The interpreting process

I argue that the political conjuncture has an impact on the interpreting process itself. Firstly, the circumstances that lead to *ad hoc* recruitment put inexperienced interpreters in a difficult position. They have to spend a lot of time studying and compensating for insufficient knowledge of social, political and diplomatic science.

Lifelong learning

Berezhkov, who became an interpreter 'by accident', feels the need to study more to be up to the task. He writes that his new occupation at high-level governmental talks "requires an extremely broad general knowledge", and that he has to study and read a lot so as to "fill in the gaps that were inevitable in someone who had graduated from an engineering institute" (p. 50). Moreover, he often consulted his colleagues who had diplomatic experience: "we would talk about all sorts of interesting, and as far as I was concerned, instructive things relating either to history or current affairs" (Berezhkov, 1983, p. 50). As Berezhkov (1983) puts it: "interpreting at diplomatic negotiations demands special professional skills and tremendous concentration. One has to keep extending one's knowledge and constantly increase one's vocabulary" (p. 253).

Pavlov, too, never missed an occasion to work on his English, despite very long working days. Berezhkov (1983) remembers that he "was always struck by the diligence and persistence of V. N. Pavlov", as "[he] never missed one moment to brush up his English" (p. 253). The two men team up to improve their skills with great dedication:

> We listened to BBC broadcasts in order to broaden our knowledge of English idiomatic expressions and political terminology, and Pavlov supplied us with a Webster's, in two weighty volumes, which we perused in our spare moments to build our vocabularies. […] We also listened to German radio broadcasts. (p. 305)

Sincere communication

I argue that if there is a genuine political will to communicate during the discussions, then the interpreter's task is made easier. Such an exercise in sincere communication relies, among other things, on the politicians' awareness of the difficulties of interpreting, and their willingness to reduce those hurdles.

Willingness to communicate

Sincere communication is described as an easy and pleasant situation for the interpreter to do his work. Palazchenko writes about sincere communication between Gorbachev and Bush that made the task of the interpreter comfortable. Palazchenko (2009) describes it as "a personal mutual commitment to work together in spite of possible complications and

obstacles” and adds that he “had a good time interpreting it” (p. 80). We see that both statesmen **seek understanding** and desire a fruitful discussion.

Clear expression and low speed

Generally speaking, heads of states and government seemed to have consideration for their interpreters. International discussions at the highest level are usually high staked debates. When politicians understand that and want to reach an agreement, they **speak clearly** and at a **reasonable pace**. This makes the task of the interpreter easier. Birse (1967) recalls that such an attitude was generally characteristic of most negotiations that he took part in, and that “no one spoke at a breakneck speed” (p. 107). On the contrary, the speed at which most people spoke at “round-table conferences and important private talks was, if anything, on the slow side” (Birse, 1967, p. 107).

For instance, Birse (1967) writes that “Churchill spoke slowly and clearly, and I found no difficulty either in writing my notes or in putting them across in Russian” (p. 100). Stalin had a strong Georgian accent. However, he was thoughtful of the interpreters and their daunting task. His manner of speaking compensated for his accent. Birse (1967) mentions that the leader’s “slow, simple manner of expressing himself […] entailed no effort for his interpreter to follow his train of thought” (p. 212), despite his Georgian accent, to which the British interpreter eventually got used to. Bohlen (1973) remembers that Stalin “seemed to me to be considerate of his interpreter” (p. 142) and was “pausing considerately so that the interpreter could translate” (p. 145). Troyanovsky (1997) supports those affirmations and writes that “Сталина было нетрудно переводить. […] по-русски он выражал мысли правильно и точно, используя богатый набор слов. Он говорил короткими фразами, а периоды между паузами не были длинными” [Interpreting for Stalin was easy. […] He formulated his thoughts in Russian correctly and precisely, using a rich vocabulary. He spoke in short sentences, and pauses came frequently] (p. 149).

Molotov had a speech disorder. Yerofeyev (2005) writes that “когда Молотов волновался, торопился или сердился, то усиливался дефект его речи” [when Molotov was agitated, in a hurry or angry, his speech disorder worsened] (p. 125). However, this flaw is only mentioned by one interpreter, Yerofeyev himself. Perhaps this shows that it was not a big problem and did not prevent understanding. Yerofeyev (2005) generally comments that Molotov’s speeches were clear and concise, without digressions. It could be explained by professionalism and perhaps the will to compensate for the speech defect. Generally

speaking, Molotov paid a lot of attention to the interpretation and was conscious of its importance.[29]

Bohlen (1973) speaks to President Roosevelt before a conference and asks him to speak slowly with regular breaks. The interpreter writes that “Roosevelt understood, and I must say he was an excellent speaker to interpret for, breaking up his statements into short lengths and in a variety of ways showing consideration for my travails” (p. 136). The President’s American accent was at first dreaded by the Soviet interpreter Berezhkov (1983), who remembers thinking:

> Would I be able to understand what Roosevelt said straight away, and then be able to convey it immediately to Stalin in Russian? After all many Americans have a very peculiar pronunciation and some litter their speech with figurative and even slang expressions, making it difficult to grasp immediately the sense of what has been said. (p. 255)

However, thanks to Roosevelt’s consideration everything goes well, and Berezhkov (1983) writes then that “Roosevelt spoke lucidly, distinctly, drawing out his words somewhat, using short phrases and making frequent pauses. He had obviously had a great deal of experience of speaking through an interpreter” (p. 255).

Bohlen (1973) remarks that understanding the discussions’ high stakes made politicians **abstain from complicated and metaphoric language** (most of the time). He writes that “all three leaders were usually impressed with the danger of misunderstanding and too conscious of their enormous power to play games with language” (p. 147).

Briefing the interpreter

Politicians can help interpreters produce a good and accurate interpretation. They can make them familiar with the topic at hand, and **provide them with all the necessary documents**. Birse (1967) writes that being briefed beforehand resulted in “luckier days […] because the agenda presented no difficulties from the interpreter's point of view” (p. 96). More importantly, many high-level interpreting revolved around international talks, that were going according to

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[29] Once Molotov’s professional rigor led to a somewhat comic situation. He asked Troyanovsky to make a special effort in conveying the message. The interpreter recalls:

> Однажды, когда на совещании министров иностранных дел обсуждался вопрос о репарациях с Германии, [Молотов] заявил: «Мы не просим, мы требуем репараций». И, нагнувшись ко мне, шепнул: «Скажите эту фразу как можно более увесисто». Я так усердно выполнил это указание, что некоторые даже вздрогнули.
>
> Once, a meeting of foreign ministers was discussing the question of reparations from Germany. [Molotov] said: “We are not asking, we are demanding reparations”. And, bending over to me, he whispered: “Tell them this in the most intimidating manner.” I followed this instruction so diligently that some participants even flinched. (Troyanovsky, 1997, pp. 138-139)

a previously made scenario and were thus predictable. Political "round-table conferences, statements and speeches were usually prepared in advance" (p. 112). Therefore, the interpreter at the highest level was, most of the time, prepared.

Unfortunately, not everybody is aware of the difficulties of the interpreting task. It does happen that politician use slang, humour and speak too fast. Then the communication via an interpreter becomes much more strenuous, if not impossible.

Non-communication

I argue that not taking into account the interpreter's difficulties reflects a certain **neglect** on the part of politicians for the general quality of the talks. The result is a tedious, often unintelligible interpretation. I argue there can be two reasons for this. The first is an involuntarily, but still harmful, unawareness of the difficulties of interpreting.

Involuntarily non-communication

The American side does not understand that **spontaneously** asking the British interpreter (Birse) to work for them, comes with great difficulties for the interpreter. Not only does he not know the political agenda of the Americans, but he is also generally unfamiliar with the speaker and his manner of expressing himself. Birse (1967) writes:

> Cordell Hull, who spoke in a low voice with a southern American accent with which I was unfamiliar, sat at some distance from me, as I have said. It was with the greatest difficulty that I could catch what he said, and I had either to ask him to repeat his sentences or to guess the drift. I had had no insight into his brief, and I was unused to his way of thinking. (p. 142)

Muddled and illogical train of thought is an additional difficulty for the interpreter. Birse (1967) recalls that "the chief's inability to express himself simply without wandering into irrelevancies, side-issues, and repetition" (p. 109) was making his task much more difficult.

Yerofeyev recalls that Zhdanov[30] promises him to pay attention and not to **speak too fast**. He even says to the interpreter: "не стесняйтесь подать мне знак, скажем, рукой, и я постараюсь умерить свой пыл" [do not be shy and send me a signal, wave at me for example, and I will try to speak slower] (Yerofeyev, 2005, p. 186). Zhdanov forgets about his promise "через пару минут после начала выступления он припустил с такой скоростью, что я с трудом успевал за ним, и никакие знаки рукой и другие подаваемые мною сигналы не могли его притормозить" [after a couple of minutes, he was speaking so fast

[30] Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948), Soviet Communist Party leader, former academic of theology, and cultural ideologist, sometimes described as the "propagandist-in-chief" of the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1948.

that I could hardly keep up, and no waving my hand at him or other signals could slow him down] (Yerofeyev, 2005, p. 187).

Polyanski has no idea how tiring it is to interpret, and is irritated when Shveitser gives up (after a 12-hour marathon of interpreting, as he calls it), and is replaced by his American counterpart Akalovsky. Shveitser (2012) explains it by Polyanski's lack of experience with interpreters: "в то время Полянский еще не имел никакого опыта работы с переводчиком. Это была по существу его первая ответственная поездка на Запад" [at the time Polyanski had **no experience of speaking through an interpreter**. It was in fact his first important trip to the West] (p. 47).

Use of slang

Slang is usually a problem for interpreting. Khrushchev was famous for using familiar (sometimes bordering on vulgarity) expressions that were always hard to interpret (Shveitser, 2012). That fact alone is irresponsible with regards to the quality of the speeches and discussions that he has to participate in. Even worse, the General Secretary had been assigning his own meaning to certain terms, which differed from the definition found in the dictionary (Sukhodrev, 1999). On different occasions, he used the expression *kuzkina mat'* (literally translated it means "mother of Kuzma", which makes no sense to non-Russian speakers). Russian dictionaries define the expression as a "blunt threat". However, Sukhodrev (1999) affirms that, much later, Khrushchev told him that "это значит показать то, чего они никогда не видели" [it means to show someone something that they have never seen before] (p. 200).

Therefore, it seems that Khrushchev never meant to threaten Nixon in the Kitchen Debate, and that he only meant that the USSR would catch up with the US in its development. Sukhodrev (1999) expresses regrets that "[Хрущев только мне одному, а не широкой публике растолковал то особое, личное, а не словарное значение любимой фразы" [Kruschev explained that special, personal, not-from-the-dictionary meaning of his favorite expression to me alone, and never to the general public] (p.201). Thus, the interpreter is the only one to know the true meaning of the General Secretary's words. The politician himself remains oblivious to the fact that he is **not understood** in the first place, and that he has only himself to blame for that.

Voluntary non-communication

Sometimes however, politicians are unwilling to communicate on purpose. They use different kinds of artifices to stall the talks (Glenn & Glenn, 1981). In practice, for the interpreters, it meant insipid, boring but also **unintelligible conversations** that were hard to interpret.

Bohlen (1973) provides a perfect illustration for such a situation, that occurred in talks between Soviets and Americans. He writes:

> [Hull] made a statement to Molotov that made no sense. I told Hull afterwards, courteously, I trust, that I was afraid I had not been able to get over to Molotov the meaning of the sentence. The Secretary looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and said, "It was meant to be as clear as mud." (p. 129)

We clearly see that a statement that is meant to confuse the political opponent, instead of transmitting a genuine message, also confuses the interpreter and makes his or her work difficult if not impossible.

Birse (1967) writes about debates on the future of Poland at the end of WWII, which is a highly sensitive political issue for all parties present, but the Soviet side especially, as Poland was to be included in the socialist sphere of influence. The Soviets seem to stall the talks and one way to do that is to express their position in a difficult way so as to lose the other participants:

> While interpreting this maze of ideas, I felt that at times the thread of the discussion escaped me and it was difficult to unravel the exact meaning of what was being said. If it was hard for the interpreters to follow the talks, what must it have been for the far more responsible participants. (p. 207)

Birse (1967) goes as far as to provide the reader with "a specimen of an imaginary discussion which ends in a stalemate" (p. 115) on purpose. The example spans several pages (pp. 115-118) and illustrates the dialogue of the deaf and the mute, in his example incarnated by a British and a Soviet delegate. More importantly, Birse points out that interpreters who strive to find meaning in such talks (where there is no meaning at all, on purpose) are overstepping their boundaries. The overzealousness of the interpreter could result in the successful conveying of a message; but it would go against the wishes of the politicians:

> Both interpreters might have been able to prevent a deadlock, had either of them dared to take the risk and initiative, but a block may in fact have been wished by both parties, which shows how dangerous the assumption of initiative could have been. (Birse, 1967, p. 115)

Disregard for both the interpreter and the listeners is also a case of non-communication. Troyanovsky (1997) recalls how Vyshinsky, at a reception which took place during the Nuremberg trials, uttered a toast. It was a very provocative toast, even shocking for representatives of Western democratic states, based on the separation of powers, independent judicial systems and the founding principle of presumption of innocence. Vyshinsky said (as cited by Troyanovsky): "Предлагаю тост за то, чтобы все подсудимые были осуждены и повешены" [I propose a toast that all the defendants be convicted and

hanged] (p. 122). He immediately drinks to that, without waiting for the interpreter's translation that would allow others present to understand the meaning of the toast. This shows clearly that Vyshinsky considers his statement as peremptory, and disregards the opinion of his Western colleagues. Troyanovsky (1997) writes that: "когда же я перевел этот далекий от норм юриспруденции тост, англо-американские судьи и их заместители, если пользоваться нынешним сленгом, буквально «отпали» [when I translated this toast far removed from jurisprudential norms, the Anglo-American judges and their deputies literally "fell off their chairs", to use today's slang] (p. 122).

Confidentiality issues

Confidentiality for interpreters at the highest-level is mandatory and even crucial in a tense political context. Bohlen (1973) stresses that information "leaks in the midst of the war could have provided invaluable military secrets to the enemy" (p. 132). The requirement to keep silent about what one knows and be diligent with documents is thus a full part of the interpreter's work.

Berezhkov had a room that he shared with Pavlov in the Kremlin. Molotov would sometimes walk in and scold Berezhkov for leaving important documents laying around and for not locking up the safe. Negligence towards politically sensitive documents and endangering of confidentiality in the context of the Cold War was reprimanded (Berezhkov, 1993).

When an interpreter breaches confidentiality, officials get very upset and refuse to work with that specialist again. Bohlen (1973) describes an episode when a professor, randomly recruited to be an interpreter, is unaware of the necessity to keep silent and tells his friends about his experience:

> In 1942, when Molotov, […] came to the United States, Roosevelt had used Samuel Cross, a Harvard professor of Russian, as an interpreter. Professor Cross apparently did an excellent job, but shortly after his return to Cambridge, […] he was entertaining dinner parties with stories of what Molotov had said to the President and what the President had said to Molotov. (p. 132).

American officials then refused to work with the professor ever again. The American President stresses the need for interpreters who are integrated into the State structure and bound by a confidentiality agreement. Roosevelt, as cited by Bohlen (1973), tells his subordinates "to find some interpreters **in government service** who would be under discipline and could be relied on not to run around blabbing about" (pp. 132-133).

However, confidentiality seems to be a flexible concept in some cases. Bohlen (1973) is asked to testify before the Senate and is questioned about the Yalta conference. Back then, Bohlen acted as an interpreter, a status which theoretically would allow him to decline

answering questions on the basis of confidentiality. However, he was also considered as an *adviser*. Bohlen decides that he can testify in that quality. He writes: "I had been more than an interpreter; I had been an adviser aware of the issues at the conference and could not act like a village idiot when questioned" (Bohlen, 1973, p. 314).

Finally, interpreting politically sensitive matters determines working into the B language. For instance, at the Teheran Conference, Bohlen and Birse work into Russian, while Pavlov works into English. Bohlen (1973) explains that such a system was adopted out of the "belief that the speaker's own interpreter would have a better understanding of what his man said than would the translator for the leader who was listening" (p. 137). Moreover, "if the listener's interpreter had done the translating, he might have been accused of distorting statements" (Bohlen, 1973, p. 137).

5.2.2.3. Other professional tasks

I have previously defined "the interpreter" as a specialist who is in charge of interpreting high-level governmental talks from one language to another. However, many of the studied interpreters counted as full-fledged employees of governments and ministries. This meant that they had to carry out a number of non-interpreting tasks in between interpreting missions.

Non-interpreting tasks

High-level interpreters on the ministerial and governmental level, be it on the Soviet side or not, were first and foremost diplomats and officials, meaning more than 'simply' interpreters. Politics was deeply intertwined with their interpreting duties, and added a layer of extra work.

Administrative and secretarial tasks

Firstly, interpreters also acted as translators and secretaries. They took notes of discussions with foreign officials, wrote them down and telegraphed them to Soviet embassies abroad (Troyanovsky, 1997; Berezhkov, 1983; Yerofeyev, 2005). They translated messages into Russian that were then send to their principals from foreign officials (Berezhkov, 1983; Pavlov, 2000). They supervised and edited translations of various documents, among which "speeches, statements, texts of agreement; and protocol events, and even the menu for the dinner" (Korchilov, 1999, p. 145).

Secondly, interpreters had to monitor foreign media and press. Berezhkov (1983) wrote "reports on American affairs" (p. 306). Akalovsky in his interview mentions surveying the Soviet press and wrote reports on what he deemed of interest. Birse (1967) mentions similar "prosaic duties […] such as newspaper articles to be digested and summarized" (p. 163).

Thirdly, interpreters acted as logistics support. Birse (1967) recalls "appointments to be arranged for the Ambassador and other Embassy officials" (p. 163). While Korchilov (1999)

was involved in the "the not-so-exciting work of helping the security forces communicate" in the context of a Soviet delegation to the USA, although guarded by Soviet security, the latter still had to communicate with American hotel security and personnel (p. 47).

Diplomacy

High-level interpreters were often also trained diplomats, with a knowledge of foreign languages and cultures. Consulting them proved valuable for those who could not speak foreign languages and "feel" the mood and impression of foreigners. Thus, Churchill inquired about his interpreter's opinion on Russia, the Soviet Union and its people. Birse (1967) writes:

> During lunch [Churchill] touched on the following questions: What did I make of Russia today? Were the Russians better off now or under the old regime […]? What did I think of the visit of the Supreme Soviet Delegation? Were the Russians building an atom bomb plant? (p. 222)

Troyanovsky accompanied a British delegation to Stalin's *dacha*[31]. After the delegation had left, Stalin wanted to know the opinion of the interpreter on the members of that delegation. Troyanovsky (1997) writes that "после встречи с англичанами он поинтересовался моим мнением об ее участниках, спросил, кто из них, на мой взгляд, является наиболее перспективным политиком" [After the meeting with the British, he asked my opinion of the participants, asking which of them I thought were the most promising politicians] (p. 160).

Diplomatic insight and knowledge are also asked of Bohlen (1973), who was an adviser on Soviet policy. Palazchenko (2009) recalls that his opinion was solicited after Shevardnadze's one-on-one meeting with Reagan (with only interpreters being present), when the Minister went back to report on the talks to Gorbachev.

Intercultural mediation

Interpreter are not only translators, they convey an understanding of the context, culture and societal norms. Cronin (2000) writes that "interpreters are valuable not only because of what they do but because of who they are. They are generally part of the host community and as such are conduits for privileged 'inside' information on the society and culture" (p. 72).

This privileged information is valuable for politicians, especially in a tense international context, such as WWII or the Cold War. Politicians are aware that the smallest blunders could be overblown to diplomatic scandals and hurt their reputation. Thus, they want to avoid such incidents and sometimes turn to the interpreter to help them, considering him or her an ally. The range of such situations varies from the mundane to the almost dramatic.

[31] Countryside residence.

Birse's memoirs include a passage about Stalin's participating in an official dinner at the British embassy. He asks Birse for mundane advice, such as whether it would be appropriate to drink to the health of the waiter and inquires which cutlery to use. Birse recalls (1967) that "Stalin […] turned to me and said: "This is a fine collection of cutlery! It is a problem which to use. You will have to tell me, and also when I can begin to eat. I am unused to your customs" (p. 160). Similarly, cultural "advice" can be unprompted, but still welcome. Thus, Birse (1967) advises Churchill against trying some of Stalin's special recipe vodka (probably having had some experience with it during his life in Russia).

Korchilov (1999) felt the need, at a banquet, to help break the ice between Americans and Soviets. He helps Secretary of State George Shultz and introduces him to representatives of the Soviet cultural scene, invited to the party:

> Obraztsova curtsied and said nothing; Ulyanov and Zalygin exchanged handshakes with [Shultz] and also said nothing. They seemed awed, not knowing what to say to the U.S. secretary of state, who had singled them out among all the guests for special attention. It was up to me now to take the initiative and make the introductions. (p. 115)

Shveitser (2012) describes a similar situation that occurred with his colleague. As the latter recalls, during a dinner party, one of the Soviet delegates is quite uneasy, while being faced with an American lady who is quite talkative. The delegate keeps answering in one-syllable words. Embarrassed, his interpreter makes him a suggestion about what could be a more polite and "involved" answer, to what the delegate says: "You tell her that" (p. 57).

Sometimes interpreters act as touristic guides. Korchilov (1999) recalls walking around in London with Yakovlev[32] and explaining to him what different monuments are:

> As we passed Cleopatra's Needle, [Yakovlev] wondered what it was. I explained. He asked me if I had ever worked in Britain. I said no, never, but I had been to London twice, I had read books about it, and I happened to like the city very much. (p. 201)

In his interview, Akalovsky remembers Nixon's visit to Moscow, during which the president got into a somewhat unsavoury situation. When purchasing a souvenir, Nixon gave the vendor a banknote and told him to keep the change. The vendor was offended and said he did not take bribes. The Soviet press got hold of the story and exaggerated it, saying Nixon attempted to pay off Soviet citizens and buy their souls, in the words of Akalovsky. After this episode the American president asked the interpreter to stay with him everywhere he went from that moment on.

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[32] Alexander Yakovlev (1923-2005), Soviet and Russian politician and historian, Head of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1986.

Sukhodrev (1999) acts as a “gastronomic” cultural mediator in France when Gromyko and him are invited to a high-class Parisian restaurant. The Prime Minister asks, in a whisper, the interpreter to remember what wine they were served, as he enjoyed it very much. The waiter brings Sukhodrev the etiquette from the bottle. When Gromyko asks whether it is appropriate and would not be perceived negatively, the interpreter reassures him: “Не только удобно, но и принято во всех хороших ресторанах. Помимо всего прочего, такая просьба характеризует вас как человека, разбирающегося в винах” [Not only it is appropriate, but also the usual way in all good restaurants. Moreover, such a request characterizes you as a person who understands good wine] (Sukhodrev, 1999, p. 336).

5.2.2.4. Instrumentalization of the interpreter or interpretation

Sometimes the interpreters are asked to do tasks that do not only not fit into their job description, but are straight up of an informal nature.

Favour for a colleague or superior

On the interpersonal level, it can be a superior asking the interpreter for an informal and out-of-job-description task. Berezhkov (1983) recalls that he was sent “on a somewhat unusual mission” (p. 307) delivering to the American Embassy in Moscow a present destined to President Roosevelt.

Sukhodrev’s (1999) memoirs are replete with small anecdotes about such informal situations and favours asked of the interpreter and his colleagues. For example, he used to buy hats and ties abroad for Soviet officials, because decent quality accessories were nowhere to be found in the USSR. Another time he brought from India a box with exotic insects as a present for Khrushchev’s son (entomology was his hobby.)

Troyanovsky is asked to accompany Svetlana, the daughter of Molotov, on a tour of Paris, while her father is there because of a conference. He takes her to a restaurant, a theatre and on walks, all while being chaperoned by Molotov’s “экономка и один охранник” [housekeeper and one of the guards]. Despite Molotov paying for the restaurant bill, Troyanovsky (1997) recalls that “никакого удовольствия от этого вечера я не получил, во-первых, потому, что на мне лежал определенный груз ответственности, а во-вторых, потому, что Светлана не была увлекательной компаньонкой” [I did not enjoy the evening, firstly because of the responsibility resting on my shoulders, and secondly because Svetlana was not an engaging companion] (p. 136).

Confrontation of different factions

On the level of domestic politics, however, several interesting situations have arisen during the domestic crisis of the late 1980s. Here interpreting was used as a tool to undermine

negotiations. Indeed, Korchilov (1999) recalls an episode that he thinks was an attempt to sabotage Gorbachev by scheduling an unexperienced interpreter for important talks with Americans. The next day, Korchilov remembers reading “in some of the major newspapers that Gorbachev's performance at this meeting was ‘rambling, incoherent, muddled, and disjointed’” (p. 244). However, the blame is not to be laid on the interpreter himself, but on the people who decided that he’d be interpreting. Korchilov (1999) speculates that:

> The Soviet official in Moscow who was responsible for interpretation assignments at this summit—[…] who did not even try to conceal his dislike for Gorbachev and his reforms—should have known better than to assign an unseasoned interpreter to do such an important job. I came away from the meeting convinced that it had been done negligently, if not deliberately–to undercut Gorbachev's image. (p. 244)

Both Palazchenko and Korchilov take this act of sabotage via poor interpretation very seriously. The next day, both interpreters work in tandem and replace the unfortunate inexperienced colleague. Palazchenko and Korchilov both support Gorbachev’s views and reforms, they want to put their skills to his service, and seek to ensure that the General Secretary is understood by his interlocutors. Korchilov (1999) writes: “We didn't want a repetition of what happened the day before on account of poor interpretation. The meeting was far too important to allow the Soviet leader's remarks to be botched” (p. 254).

Unofficial communication channel

On the level of international politics, the interpreter can also be asked to become an unofficial communications channel, in situation when information has to be passed on “off the record” or when official channel fails.

Berezhkov recalls an event before the Great Patriotic War,[33] while the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Germany was still in effect. During a reception in the house of an American diplomat, Berezhkov meets a German major. The latter is not there by chance, he uses Berezhkov to try to pass on a message about German military units that have been transferred to the Soviet borders. The interpreter was astonished by this “officer of the Hitler Wehrmacht passing information on to a Soviet diplomat, which, if true, would undoubtedly be classified as top secret” (Berezhkov, 1983, pp. 58-59).

A similar event seems to have happened to Pavlov: he and Dekanozov[34] were approached by the German ambassador to Moscow. The latter was trying to hint at the scope

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[33] Term used in Russia and other former republics of the Soviet Union to describe the part of WWII in which the USSR was directly involved. It started on 22 June 1941 and lasted to 9 May 1945.

[34] At the time, Soviet ambassador to Berlin.

of the threat facing the USSR (meaning the *Barbarossa operation*) and advised them to seek rapprochement with Hitler (Pavlov, 2000). Choosing to approach Pavlov and Dekanozov was a reasonable decision, since the two men had the trust of both Molotov and Stalin, and thus the "выбор Шуленбургом этих советских дипломатов для столь серьезного разговора был не случаен. Он знал, что [Павлов и Деканозов] пользовались доверием И.В. Сталина и В.М. Молотова" [Schulenburg choose to have such a serious conversation with these Soviet diplomats for a reason. He knew that [Pavlov and Dekanozov] had the confidence of Stalin and Molotov] (Pavlov, 2000, p. 96).

Palazchenko too recalls a time when he was asked to basically act as an unofficial "channel". A Soviet delegation to Afghanistan was supposed to meet with Benazir Bhutto, however the meeting fell through, as they were interrupted by Yakub Khan, her political opponent from the opposition.

> […] Bhutto's private talk with Shevardnadze turned out to be short. A few minutes later […] we were joined by Yakub Khan and two or three other officials. Bhutto smiled apologetically. She seemed to be encircled by people who, though not openly hostile, owed her no allegiance. The discussion did not add anything to what we had gone through before, and the overall feeling was eerie and frustrating. (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 116)

After this, Shevardnadze makes an unorthodox attempt to communicate with Bhutto: he asks Palazchenko to go and talk secretly to her assistant. However, "he too seemed isolated and not quite free in what he was saying" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 116).

Sukhodrev (1999) during a reception at the White House, was approached by a member of personnel who whispered to him: "Было бы неплохо, если бы господин Микоян уходил в числе последних или даже самым последним" [It would be nice if Mr. Mikoyan were among the last to leave, or even the last] (p. 125). It turned out that Levi Eshkol, Prime Minister of Israel, was present and wanted a private word with the interpreter's principal. Another time, the KGB, confused by Khrushchev hectic promises and chattering with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, contacts Sukhodrev to understand what is it exactly that the Soviet leader promised her. Semichastny,[35] the gloomy Chairman of Soviet secret services, phones Sukhodrev himself and asks him what is going on. Sukhodrev answers: "Хрущев обещал подарить Жаклин Кеннеди щенка" [Khrushchev promised to give Jacqueline Kennedy a puppy] (p. 121).[36]

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[35] Vladimir Semichastny, Chairman of the KGB from November 1961 to May 1967.

[36] During a reception, Jacqueline Kennedy and Khrushchev discuss Belka and Strelka, the dogs that the USSR sent to space as part of its space program. Both came back safely. Khrushchev mentions that one dog even had babies, after what he promises Jacqueline to give her one of those puppies.

Journalists

Korchilov recalls how journalists exploited an awkward translation for the sake of creating some buzz. An American friend and colleague of Korchilov's (the name is not specified) was accompanying Jimmy Carter on his visit to Poland in 1977. Korchilov (1999) writes:

> [Carter] told the welcoming crowd in Warsaw that he had come "to learn your opinions and understand your desires for the future." The next day the press alleged that his American interpreter had conveyed the final phrase into Polish as "your lusts for future." (The interpreter, whom I later met, denied any such mistranslation. He claimed Carter's visit simply did not arouse much interest, and so the press invented the story.) (p. 19)

Yerofeyev recalls that the press ascribed to the interpreter words that he had not pronounced. In 1947, Yerofeyev was interpreting Stalin's meeting with Thorez,[37] head of the French communist party. During the talks, Stalin said that if the Allies had waited longer to open a second front, the Soviet army could have gone all the way to France. Stalin paused and then added that the army could go all the way to Paris. However, in 1990s when the press got hold of this conversation, the journalist wrote that "во время беседы переводчик Ерофеев дополнил Сталина этим самым "...И до Парижа" [during the discussion the interpreter Yerofeev completed Stalin's sentence by adding "…and to Paris"]. This episode shows how little awareness journalists have of the interpreter profession, of what the interpreter can and cannot do. This limited knowledge does not prevent the press from publishing articles, with the aim of entertaining or amusing their audience at the expense of the interpreter, as in this case.

Propaganda

The interpreter (or his interpretation) can sometimes serve as a political tool against their will, for instance, for propaganda purposes. Akalovsky recalls such an episode in his interview. During the famous *Kitchen debate* with Khrushchev, the Soviet interpreter had difficulties translating some of Khrushchev's slang and obscure proverbs. However, according to Akalovsky, the Soviet press could not admit that the Soviet interpreter was struggling. They wrote that it was the American interpreter, meaning Akalovksy himself, who committed a blunder. Later, Akalovsky confronted a member of the Soviet delegation about it, to which the answer was that the Soviet have freedom of the press, too (Kennedy, 2000).

Yerofeyev (2005) thinks Stalin's display of care is nothing more than an act. He writes: "Сталин любил на людях и особенно перед иностранцами демонстрировать

[37] Maurice Thorez (1900-1964), French politician and leader of the French Communist Party (PCF) in 1930-1964.

«патерналистское» отношение ко всяким «мелким сошкам», вроде переводчиков и других «винтиков» его аппарата" [in public and especially in front of foreigners, Stalin liked displaying a "paternalistic" attitude towards "small people" like interpreters and other "cogs" in the party apparatus] (p. 192). Thus, Yerofeyev considers himself instrumentalized by Stalin for propaganda purposes. Two situations are particularly descriptive. After a 'French movie night' in the Kremlin—Yerofeyev was interpreting it for officials gathered for the party—Stalin offers the interpreter a glass of champagne. Yerofeyev first politely declines, to which Stalin answers that Molotov (the interpreter's direct superior) allows it and that the interpreter deserves it anyway. Yerofeyev (2005) then writes that this entire scene was for show and that "таким образом, демонстрация проявления внимания вождя к «маленькому человеку» состоялась" [thus, the demonstration of the leader's care for the "ordinary citizen" took place] (p. 195).

Yerofeyev (2005) explains another episode in a similar way, an event that took place directly after the interpreter hurt his hand after slipping on the waxed floors. The interpreter finally makes it to Stalin's office for the unscheduled talks. Stalin noticed the interpreter's hand and summons a medical team to check on Yerofeyev's hand. All of this happens in front of the mystified foreign delegation. Yerofeyev argues that this, too, was an ostentatious demonstration of care for Stalin's subordinates, rather than genuine concern for the interpreter's health.

Making a political point

Troyanovsky recalls a less serious and more comic example of his interpretation being instrumentalized by Vyshinsky. The Deputy foreign minister was invited to New York and made a speech. He denounced US Kremlinologists that "готовы обвинять Советский Союз в чем попало. Говорят даже, что мы «тоталитаристы»" [are eager to accuse the USSR of all sorts of things. They even say that we are [sic] "totalitarianists"] (Troyanovksy, 1997, p. 125). The last word makes Troyanovsky stumble, as the interpreter is struggling to pronounce it. Vyshinsky, seeing his interpreter struggle, then "выхватил из моих рук микрофон и под аплодисменты публики заявил: «Видите, мы даже выговорить это слово не можем, а утверждают, будто мы тоталитаристы» [snatched the microphone from my hands and under the applause of the audience said: "You see, they say we are totalitarians, even though we can't even pronounce the word"] (Troyanovksy, 1997, p. 125).

During the international Paris Conference in 1946, Yerofeyev (2005) is rudely interrupted in the midst of a consecutive interpretation by a loud cry: 'you translated it wrong!' and loses the thread. This, we can imagine, probably had a rather negative impression of the competence of the Soviet interpreter and generally their delegation on everybody present in

the conference hall. The motivations of the person shouting—a delegate of the Ukrainian SSR, represented in the U.N. separately from the USSR—are unclear, however Molotov is furious and scolds him for being "представителем страны – самостоятельного члена ООН, вмешивается во внутренние дела делегации СССР" [the representative of an autonomous U.N. member state who interferes in the internal affairs of the USSR delegation" (p. 135).

Interestingly, sometimes one interpreter instrumentalizes the other. Bohlen (1973) remembers that Pavlov wanted to omit a sentence that Stalin uttered into his moustache and that was not meant for the audience's ears. However, Bohlen, who speaks Russian, forced Pavlov to interpreted that last sentence too:

> Hopkins[38] asked whether the Soviet Union was prepared to honor the Yalta agreement on entering the Far Eastern war. Stalin replied testily, "The Soviet Union always honors its word." Then he lowered his voice and added, "except in case of extreme necessity." Pavlov was just about to omit the last phrase in his interpretation when I said to him in English, "I believe there is a little more, Pavlov," and he hurriedly mumbled Stalin's qualification. (p. 219)

5.2.2.5. Work relations

The interpreter and the principal

Most interpreter-principal interactions and relations are superficial as there is no time to develop any close bond, however there are some notable exceptions.

Informal relation

Troyanovsky once stays at Stalin's dacha for a while. It is important to note that the interpreter's father, Aleksandr Troyanovsky, was a revolutionary, military officer and later Soviet diplomat, and he knew both Stalin and Lenin.[39] In 1913 (before the interpreter's birth) the Troyanovsky family lived in Vienna, and Stalin stayed with them for some time, while writing one of his works on Marxism (Troyanovsky, 1997). Therefore, while it would be incorrect to speak of proximity between young Troyanovsky, the interpreter, and the leader of the Soviet Union, there is still an undeniable informal connection between the two men. While Troyanovsky junior stays at the dacha, his conversations with the leader are mostly informal and focused on Stalin's stay with the family in 1913. Still, Troyanovsky later wonders why Stalin invited him in the first place, whether it was the warm memories of his friendship for his father, or perhaps a display of kindness and generosity. However, Troyanovsky makes an

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[38] Harry Hopkins (1890-1946) was Secretary of Commerce, and President Roosevelt's closest advisor on foreign policy during World War II.

[39] Vladimir Ulyanov (1870-1924), better known by his alias Lenin, was a Russian revolutionary and politician. He served as the first head of government of Soviet Russia from 1917 to 1924 and of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1924.

interesting remark that Stalin could have been interested in learning more about the interpreter, as he was a bilingual himself and had respect for the work of translators and interpreters:

> Не исключаю и того, что Сталин, будучи человеком двуязычным, высоко ценил значение квалифицированного перевода, и ему было небезынтересно разобраться, что представлял собой этот юноша, от которого зависело, насколько убедительно его, Сталина, высказывания будут звучать по-английски. Не случайно, позднее по его инициативе была награждена орденами небольшая группа переводчиков, в их числе и я. Передавали, что Сталин сказал тогда, что труд переводчиков тяжелый и важный.
>
> I do not rule out that Stalin, as a bilingual man, could appreciate a highly skilled translation, and that he was interested in discovering more about me, a young man on whom depended the credibility in English of Stalin's words. It is no coincidence that a small group of interpreters, including myself, were later decorated at his initiative. It was reported that Stalin said at the time that the work of interpreters was hard and important. (Troyanovsky, 1997, pp. 162-163)

In the case of Sukhodrev, who had an exceptionally long interpreting career at the highest level, the interpreter had the time to create an amical bond with his principal. In his recollection, Sukhodrev writes (1999) about the couple times that he got invited to Khrushchev's dacha after the General Secretary retired (or was removed) from his position. Sukhodrev has the occasion to see the exuberant former Soviet leader in an informal even candid context, as Khrushchev takes the interpreter for a walk to show him his vegetable garden. Later on, Sukhodrev is invited to spend the 1965 New Year's Eve celebration with Khrushchev and his family.

Palazchenko (2009) has a close relation with Gorbachev, which first stemmed from the interpreter's political support of the General Secretary's democratic ideals. Over the courses of the years their relationship and trust between them develop. When Palazchenko quits being an interpreter, he keeps close personal contact with Gorbachev, and eventually joins the former General Secretary to work for him again, this time as a consultant in the Gorbachev foundation (Palazchenko, 2009).

Taking frustration out on the interpreter

Gromyko is hurt after being removed from big game politics by Gorbachev, but still kept around as President of the USSR (nominal title without any power). His pain is illustrated by an episode in which Gromyko takes his frustration out on the interpreter: "Gromyko accused me of being an 'aggressor' because I wedged myself between him and Brezhnev as the principal, for I had to be within hearing and thus be better able to catch his slurred remarks in a sea of words" (Korchilov, 1999, commentary under 2nd photograph. Photograph inlay between pp. 224-225).

Another episode has Gromyko welcoming the Reagans at the airport and then going home, instead of participating in discussions. He takes his frustration out on the interpreter again. Gromyko's wife, confident in her English skills (which turned out to be quite poor), asked Korchilov not to interpret her unintelligible welcome speech. As a result, the Reagans were bewildered, whereas Korchilov was reprimanded:

> Gromyko turned to me at one point and stunned me by asking me bluntly who I was. 'Vi nash ili ikh?' (Are you ours or theirs?) he demanded. And this after I had been interpreting for him for so many years, sometimes as often as several times a month, to say nothing of our last meeting in the Kremlin barely two weeks before!" (Korchilov, 1999, p. 152).

Democratisation

Korchilov feels very acutely this change in leadership from Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Indeed, the change is enormous, more than just change of leader. Gorbachev comes to power with dreams of reforming the USSR, introducing transparency and lifting censorship (at least somewhat) with his glasnost' policy and snippets of economic freedom, allowing some small private businesses to pop up here and there. Korchilov feels the change too, when riding with his prinicipal on the ministerial limousine. He writes: "as I began to pull down the jump seat, the minister [Shevardnadze] invited me to sit next to him. This democratic gesture that spoke volumes about the man did not surprise me. Whenever opportunity permitted, he would invite me to share the backseat". This impressed the interpreter so much, that he mentions several times being invited to seat next to the principal (Korchilov, 1999, pp. 32, 194, 215, 297). For Korchilov (1999), this is attitude is linked to a new mindset of the leaders: "Clearly, the new powerful troika, Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, and Yakovlev, had a different mind-set and treated their subordinates accordingly" (p. 61).

A similar situation is described in the context of talks. Gorbachev asks the interpreter to sit next to him at the negotiations table. It surprises Korchilov (1999), who writes that "[Gorbachev] asked me if I minded sitting next to him, rather than at the head of the table, as had been customary for interpreters until then. I was pleasantly astonished at this change took a seat to his left" (p. 32).

Palazchenko (2009) also mentions this highly appreciated democratization, in the context of interpreting at official dinners:

> As a rule, the interpreter is seated behind the host and must contend with the waiters (accidents can result from awkward movements of waiters, interpreters, or guests). You are not eating, it is often noisy, and you almost have to shout so you can be heard at the other end of the table. Later, when he was host at dinners, Gorbachev would ask that a place be reserved for me at the table, and I felt a lot better, whether I had the time to eat or no. (p. 43)

Even Troyanovsky (1997), who lived and worked earlier than them, noticed that tendency for 'democratization' and writes that *ты*[40] [ty] was "introduced under Brezhnev and especially under Gorbachev" (p. 148). Previous Soviet leaders only addressed their subordinates using *вы*[41] [vy], which is much more formal and puts a certain distance between people.

Office politics

Competition

Palazchenko is brutally honest about the rivalry that can form between interpreters. The profession, like any other, comprises individuals with different personalities, some of whom do not refrain from idle gossip and intrigues motivated by getting better assignments and better payment. Palazchenko (2009) writes that "competition among interpreters can sometimes be fierce and that, as in other professions, there are a lot of loose and often unfair talk, many inflated reputations, and a great deal that is focused on solely money" (p. 40).

Office competition be vying for participation in the most exciting political events. Palazchenko recalls that, before the first Reagan-Gorbachev summit, his MFA colleagues were competing for the chance to be involved in it. He writes that "there was quite a competition for that in Moscow in the months preceding the summit" (p. 40). Palazchenko himself was in New York at this time, and thus avoided being caught up in the office rivalry. He remembers that he was glad to escape that competition and "anything unpleasant always associated with such things is concerned. I have never liked office politics and have always tried to stay away from it" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 40).

Curiosity

Office colleagues can also be curious as about the events occurring within the organization (resignations, promotions, and so on). The interpreters, who enjoy a privileged position due to their proximity to the leaders, can be perceived as a potential source of information on the 'inner circle'. Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Shevardnadze have a falling out and the latter decides to resign. Palazchenko is close to both men and becomes, for his colleagues, a potential source of information into what is going on. He recalls:

> In a way, as a person who was close to both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev, I was in the eye of that storm. […] I felt the eyes of many people on me as I stood in line in the eighteenth-floor cafeteria. A colleague from the Middle East desk asked me in an indirect way whether I thought

[40] Equivalent of *thou* in English and *tu* in French.

[41] Equivalent of *you* in English and *vous* (polite) in French.

> Shevardnadze would allow Gorbachev to persuade him to change his mind. (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 238)

Intrigues

Office politics can include difficult relations between superiors who do not see eye to eye. This animosity between higher ranking officials can be translated into rejection of their respective subordinates. Yerofeyev (2005) recalls the difficulty of working with Vyshinski, who has a strong dislike of Molotov (the feeling seems to be mutual) and therefore a dislike of Molotov's assistants too:

> К нам, помощникам Молотова, Вышинский относился с неприязнью, хотя внешне и старался этого не демонстрировать. Особенно плохо он относился ко мне. Дело в том, что Молотов часто, не желая звонить ему сам, вызывал меня и поручал передать Вышинскому свои устные или письменные замечания по какому-нибудь представленному им документу, носившие порой весьма нелестный характер.
>
> Vyshinsky treated us, Molotov's assistants, with hostility, although he tried to conceal it. He treated me particularly badly. The problem was that Molotov sometimes did not want to talk to him directly. Instead, he summoned me and instructed me to pass on to him his oral or written remarks on a document previously presented by Vyshinsky, remarks which were sometimes of a very unflattering nature. (p. 149)

Vyshinsky's dislike of the interpreter was not limited to his confrontation with Molotov. Vyshinsky could not forgive Yerofeyev for beating him at chess. It was a grudge that, according to the interpreter, the man carried through years. Yerofeyev (2005) writes that "однажды А. Я. Вышинский, в бытность заместителем министра иностранных дел, страшно обиделся на меня за то, что я […] выиграл подряд несколько партий. Как он ни старался, но переиграть меня не мог" [once, Vyshinsky, back then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, got terribly offended that I [...] won several games in a row. No matter how hard he tried, he could not outplay me] (p. 116).

This grudge will cost Yerofeyev dearly later on. Vyshinsky becomes Minister and abuses his power to prevent the interpreter and his family from getting individual housing and moving out of their *kommunalka,*[42] even though they were put forth by the MFA housing commission. Yerofeyev has to indulge in office politics himself, and complain to Molotov (head of government and superior of Vyshinski). He writes that "чтобы преодолеть такую оппозицию министра я, выбрав удобный момент, обратился к Молотову с просьбой поддержать мое заявление. Он поморщился и неохотно начертал: «Тов. Вышинскому.

[42] Communal housing, when several families share one apartment. A family usually occupied one room and facilities had to be shared.

Прошу по возможности удовлетворить». Вопрос был решен положительно" [In order to overcome the Minister's opposition, I seized an opportune moment and asked Molotov to support my housing claim. He grumbled and reluctantly scribbled a demand: "To Comrade Vyshinsky. I ask that the demand be granted if possible." Thus, the problem was solved] (Yerofeyev, 2005, pp. 117).

Working atmosphere

Different interpreters working in different time periods and therefore different international and domestic political conjunctures write about different working atmospheres.

The dystopian atmosphere of the Stalin era, with its purges and hunt for spies and other "enemies of the people" was unsettling and frightening. The interpreters acutely felt the gloominess of the times. Berezhkov, for example, was convinced that Stalin played mind games with him and his colleague Pavlov. Usually, Berezhkov was summoned to interpret during meetings with American representatives, while Pavlov handled British delegations. However, Berezhkov (1993) writes that "бывало и так, что в течение нескольких недель приглашали только одного из нас, независимо от того, с кем происходила беседа. Каждому из нас в таких случаях было не по себе, каждый нервничал и терялся в догадках: чем не угодил «хозяину», что вызвало его неудовольствие" [there were times when only one of us would be summoned during several weeks, regardless of the delegation involved in the talks. The other one felt uncomfortable on such occasions, was nervous and lost in speculation: what had he done to upset the "master", what had caused his disapproval] (p. 219). Eventually everything went back to normal, and the interpreters never dare inquiring what caused the trouble in the first place. Berezhkov (1993) speculates that "это была такая маленькая игра чтобы держать нас в напряжении и в состоянии «здоровой конкуренции»" [it was a small game to keep us in suspense and in a state of "healthy competition"] (p. 220). Be that as it may, but the working atmosphere in that period was indeed a dreary one.

The cult of personality made it impossible to critique or simply make fun of Soviet leaders. Yerofeyev recalls that his colleague, with whom he was sharing an office, got into trouble because of a postcard that he got in France, as a gift from an artist. It depicted "портрет Сталина, выполненный одним французским художником в стиле, далеком от социалистического реализма" [a portrait of Stalin, made by a French artist, in a style far removed from socialist realism[43]] (Yerofeyev, 2005, p. 155). Despite Molotov attempts at

[43] Socialist realism was a style of idealized realistic art, depicting communist values (such as the emancipation of the proletariat) and usually showing an idealized USSR.

protecting him, the colleague "удален, понижен в дипломатическом ранге и отправлен на невысокий пост в МИД" [was removed from the government, demoted to a lower diplomatic rank and sent to a low position in the Foreign Ministry] (Yerofeyev , 2005, p. 155).

Decades later, the situation at work and in the country in general is radically different after Khrushchev debunked Stalin's cult of personality, and Gorbachev launches reforms aspiring to the democratisation of the USSR. Korchilov (1999) remembers that "with the advent of Gorbachev's glasnost"[44] (p. 39) people could joke about their leader without being afraid. Interpreters for Gorbachev have invented their own jokes about particularities of Gorbachev's speech. The Secretary General was putting the stress on the wrong syllable in some words. Interpreters joked that they should put the stress on the wrong syllables in English as well, in order to provide an accurate interpretation and "convey this peculiarity of Gorbachev's speech and its flavor" (Korchilov, 2009, p. 39). The author is aware that making such jokes is "something we could never ever have contemplated doing in the old, pre-Gorbachev days" (Korchilov, 2009, p. 39).

Korchilov's generation of interpreters could make many other comments that would have been unimaginable in Stalin, Khrushchev, or Brezhnev times. Korchilov (1999) mentions a conversation he had with Denis Thatcher, spouse of Margaret Thatcher, during a reception. The two men discuss American and French electoral systems and the necessity to limit the numbers of presidential terms a politician can have. Then Denis Thatcher asks Korchilov about the Soviet system:

> "And what about Mr. Gorbachev? What is his term of office?" I explained that as general secretary he was to serve five years nominally, if not for life, if one was to be guided by the previous Soviet practice, but it could be changed by the impending Congress of People's Deputies, which would be convened in a couple of months. (Korchilov, 2009, p. 211)

It is hard to imagine such a conversation taking place in pre-Gorbachev times, and even more so discussing such topics with representatives of **foreign** countries.

However, Korchilov feels comfortable enough even to risk getting into arguments with his superiors, questioning Soviet policies, while the Cold War is still going on. The interpreter asks Akhromeyev[45] questions that are provocative on purpose because he wants "to test the

[44] Term that in the mid-1980s was popularised by Gorbachev as a political slogan for increased government transparency in the USSR.

[45] Sergey Akhromeyev (1923-1991), military man and Marshal of the Soviet Union (highest military rank) in 1983-1991.

limits of glasnost, to see how someone in [Akhromeyev's] position would react" (Korchilov, 1999, p. 316).

Palazchenko could also freely express his opinions on the work of his colleagues. After a visit to Delhi, Palazchenko (2009) criticises the attitude of Soviet representatives towards locals: "I wrote that some of our people in Delhi seemed rather arrogant toward the Indians and regarded their work there as a kind of exile. I did not know what could be done about that, but I felt I had to share that impression" (p. 60). Minister Shevardnadze accepted the note and even showed it to Gorbachev, who said it was "food for thought" (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 60).

Other domestic institutions

Sharing interpreters

Yerofeyev recalls that Molotov was always upset when 'his' interpreter was requested to work for somebody else. Indeed, the hierarchical structure inside any government is rigid and Yerofeyev (2005), as part of that structure and subordinate of Molotov, says about himself that "человек я не вольный" [I am not a free man], (p. 186). He means that he's tied to his position and cannot come and go as he pleases, he needs permission from his superior, Molotov. When Zhdanov's assistant asks Yerofeyev to interpret during his superior's conversation with a French representative, Yerofeyev answers that he first needs to ask Molotov, as the latter "весьма болезненно относился к тому, что его помощников иногда приглашали как переводчиков к кому-либо, кроме, разумеется, Сталина" [was quite sensitive about his assistants being sometimes invited to interpret for somebody else, expect Stalin, of course] (p. 181). Molotov allows Yerofeyev to go, and Zhdanov, satisfied with the interpreter's performance, asks for another favour: that Yerofeyev goes with him to Bucharest for a Cominform[46] conference. In order to get Molotov's approval, Zhdanov has to phone him himself:

> Жданов тут же позвонил [Молотову] по вертушке. Тот, видно, начал упираться, поскольку Жданов заметил ему: «Ну что ты, Вячеслав, неужели неделю не проживешь без него, что ли?», – и Молотов, в конечном счете, уступил.
>
> Zhdanov immediately phoned [Molotov]. He must have started to protest, for Zhdanov remarked to him, "Come on, Vyacheslav, can't you live a week without him?", and Molotov eventually surrendered. (p. 186)

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[46] The Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, commonly known as *Cominform*, was the official central organization of the International Communist Movement from 1947 to 1956, and unofficial successor to the Comintern.

Secret police

The NKDV[47] carried out secret police operations and played a central role in political repressions. As an autonomous Ministry it had the power to look for enemies of the people and potential spies even amongst the closest collaborators of Molotov and Stalin. Therefore, there was a friction and sometimes even confrontation between the government and the NKVD. Several times Molotov tried to shield his co-workers from the overzealousness of NKVD chief Beria,[48], but was not always successful.

The previous section mentioned Yerofeyev's colleague being repressed because of a postcard with a caricature of Stalin on it. Yerofeyev (2005) mentions that the postcard was found by a "уборщица" [cleaning lady] who is "несомненно, агент КГБ" [an agent of the KGB, without any doubt], and that "моему товарищу крепко досталось, даже несмотря на известную защиту со стороны Молотова" [my colleague got into big trouble, even despite Molotov's well-known protection] (p. 155). Yerofeyev also writes that many of Molotov's assistant were the subject of anonymous denunciation. Their provenance was uncertain and their reliability even less so. However, they meant trouble for the people mentioned in them.

Yerofeyev (2005) too becomes the victim of such an anonymous letter, which claimed that the interpreter's "дед якобы был крупным землевладельцем и имел большую мельницу" [grandfather was allegedly a major landowner and possessed a large mill] (p. 156). Yerofeyev is interrogated, and dismisses this claim as slander:

> Я заявил тем, кто меня допрашивал, что соответствующие органы могли бы на месте, где у них наверняка есть люди из их системы, сами проверить это подметное письмо, а не требовать от меня каких-либо объяснений. На этот раз от меня отстали, но письмо, я уверен, в мое личное дело подшили.
>
> I told those who questioned me that corresponding authorities onsite, their system was bound to have agents in the province, could have verified the information themselves, instead of demanding any explanations from myself. They left me alone, but I am sure the anonymous letter was added to my personal file. (pp. 156-157)

Government vs Conservatives

In the previous chapter I have analysed how the intra-USSR crisis of the late 1980s and beginning of 1990s, between conservatives and pro-democratic reformists, affected the

[47] People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

[48] Lavrentiy Beria (1899-1953), Georgian and Soviet politician, and head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) under Joseph Stalin.

private lives of some of the discussed interpreters. Let us now take a look at the impact on their professional lives.

The tension between conservatives and pro-democratic reformists is felt throughout the last chapters of both Palazchenko's and Korchilov's memoirs (Palazchenko, 2009; Korchilov, 1999). They both recall several episodes that illustrate the confrontational relation between Gorbachev's government on the one side, and the conservatives and *siloviki* (armed forces) on the other. Both interpreters mention talks with Americans during which Marshal Akhromeyev is present. The man's presence makes everybody tense, as he is part of a different team: the military. Palazchenko (2009) writes that "[Gorbachev] wanted [Akhromeyev] to be present as someone who was trusted by the military and the conservatives and could confirm that nothing "improper" happened during those private discussions–no capitulation, no sellout] (p. 193).

Korchilov, Palazchenko's colleague, is also present during those talks and is reassigned to take notes instead of doing the interpreting. This is done because "neither [Shevardnadze] nor Gorbachev trusted their official notetaker for the Soviet side, Akhromeyev" (Korchilov, 1999, p. 278). In this awkward situation the interpreter is clearly deemed to be more trustworthy. The confrontation between Gorbachev's team and the military is especially clear when Shevardnadze hints that "the marshal [Akhromeyev] was prone to skew things for his own purposes and anyway, he was always reluctant to share his notes with the Foreign Ministry, and when he did, they were never complete" (Korchilov, 1999, p. 278).

Palazchenko, as a close collaborator and supporter of Gorbachev, finds himself in another situation that illustrates the "Gorbachev versus siloviki" confrontation. Palazchenko has lunch with a man who is a potential KGB agent (perhaps he was even approached by the man; it is unclear). The man starts asking Palazchenko questions about his principal. Palazchenko (2009) writes:

> I was lunching in the Kremlin cafeteria with a member of the president's staff whom I suspected of being a KGB man. "Is it true that Gorbachev said during the summit in Moscow that we want to be dependent on the United States?" he asked me. […] What could I answer? Should I have said that taking anyone's words out of context was wrong? (p. 293)

The goal of the man is clearly to uncover some incriminating evidence against Gorbachev, by approaching the interpreter, a person who has the General Secretary's trust, and possibly exploiting him.

Foreign colleagues

Press

I have mentioned several times that interpreters were approached by curious colleagues and possible secret services members for information about their principals. Journalists, searching for information and hoping for a scoop, did the same. For example, Birse is approached by a British correspondent in Moscow, who wants to know whether Churchill has arrived for talks with the Soviets yet. The interpreter pretends not to know anything (Birse, 1967).

Many decades later, journalists are just as inquisitive. Palazchenko (2009) recalls that journalists, lacking other sources of information, questioning him about ongoing negotiations between Helmut Kohl and Gorbachev. He writes that “the reporters asked me my prediction. I told them I had no answer” (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 202).

Protocol workers

Protocol workers sometimes have no awareness for how interpreting works, and what is possible and impossible for an interpreter to do. At a conference at the *Verkhovnaya Rada*[49], Shveitser (2012) interprets an Indian delegate, who suddenly decides to pronounce part of his speech in Sanskrit. Shveitser stops interpreting, and after a while the door to the booth flies open and the local chief of protocol or organizer of the conference attacks Shveitser for not interpreting Sanskrit. An absurd dialogue ensues:

> [Р]аспахнулась дверь, и в кабину влетел дюжий молодец с повязкой «распорядитель»: «Почему не переводите?» – «Но ведь это санскрит!» – «Ну и что?» – «Это же мертвый язык». – «Как так мертвый? Ведь он же говорит».
>
> [T]he door swung open and a broad-shouldered man wearing an “organizer” armband flew into the booth: “Why aren’t you interpreting?” – “But it's Sanskrit!” – “So what?” – “It's a dead language.” – “How can it be dead? He’s speaking in it.” (Shveitser, 2012, p. 115)

Fortunately for Shveitser, the delegate then translated himself what had been said into English.

Photographers

Korchilov writes about airbrushing interpreters out of pictures in the USSR. According to him it was meant for propaganda purposes. The point was to show Soviet leaders as people so intelligent and talented that they need no help to converse with foreign guests:

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[49] Ukrainian parliament.

> Generally, the photographers […] would simply airbrush the interpreter out of the pictures, showing Soviet leaders with their foreign guests, making it seem as though in their infinite wisdom Soviet leaders conversed with their counterparts from whatever country in that foreign language. (Korchilov, 2009, p. 30).

It is unclear what motivates such an interpretation on Korchilov's part, as there are plenty of photographs showing leaders with their interpreters, and such documents are abundantly included in all of the studied interpreters' memoirs. Pavlov writes about the exact opposite situation, when Stalin kept the interpreter in the frame, when photographs were taken at the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact:

> Сталин попросил меня встать рядом с ним и быть переводчиком между ним и Риббентропом. Так я оказался на фотоснимке рядом со Сталиным, который обхватил меня рукой. Если и впредь на некоторых фотографиях и в кадрах кинохроники я оказывался рядом с ним, то это случалось по его велению. Я никогда не стремился выпячивать себя и старался держаться скромно.
>
> Stalin asked me to stand beside him and to interpret the conversation between him and Ribbentrop. This way I ended up in the photograph with to Stalin, who put his arm around me. I appeared near him in some photographs and newsreels, because it was Stalin's request. I myself never wanted to show off and tried to keep a low profile. (Pavlov, 2000, p. 99)

Korchilov assigns no political meaning to American protocol trying to keep the interpreter out of the picture. Once, he and his American counterpart had been asked to step aside so that Bush and Gorbachev were to be in the picture alone (driving a golf cart). Korchilov (1999) remembers being told that "the idea was to create a photo op for history 'without any extraneous factors'" (p. 270). However, Bush and Gorbachev had a different opinion on the matter:

> When both presidents climbed on board, Bush turned back and shouted, "Why are you standing there, guys? Come on, get in! How can we talk without you?" Indeed, how could they? Upon hearing those words, the protocol people looked visibly unhappy–all their planning had just gone overboard. (Korchilov, 1999, p. 270)

Palazchenko recalls a similar incident, with a photo opportunity for Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush against the backdrop of New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty. A podium was installed for the politicians and the interpreters were asked to stay near it, but out of the picture. They had to shout up the translation of whatever has been said. However, Palazchenko (2009) writes that "the arrangement did not quite work, and after a few awkward moments Gorbachev and the others waved me up to join them" (p. 107).

5.2.3. *Remaining an interpreter, or quitting*

5.2.3.1. Interpreter's choice

Interpreter's political convictions

An interpreter, although he or she is supposed to remain neutral, still has an opinion and convictions (political, religious, or ethical). As Sukhodrev (1999) writes: "переводчик тоже человек, и у него есть свои ощущения и своя реакция, и свои эмоции, и свое отношение к происходящему, и […] личное мнение, которое, правда, он не выказывает, но которое может не совпадать со взглядами сильных мира сего" [the interpreter is also a person, with his own feelings, reactions, and emotions, his vision of the events unfolding, and [...] a personal opinion, which he does not express, but which may not coincide with the views of the powers that be] (p. 8). Sometimes these opinions can make the tasks of the interpreter difficult or even impossible.

Krivoshein is the son of White Russian aristocrats, and a deeply religious man. He therefore has a strong aversion for the Communist regime and ideology. He writes: "я, понятно, питал к коммунизму осмысленную ненависть, четкое и продуманное отвращение" [I understandably harboured a meaningful hatred for communism, a clear and well-thought-out disgust.] (Krivoshein, 2014, p. 19). This aversion does not prevent him from working for Soviet newspapers as a translator or for Soviet officials as an interpreter in the 1960s. However, his political convictions are reflected in Krivoshein's opinion of the materials which he has to interpret or translate. He writes that "практически все переводимое […]– пропаганда и безобразная ложь" [almost everything I interpreted was propaganda and ugly lies] (Krivoshein, 2014, p. 52). He feels a need to justify his working for communist newspapers and citizens when he writes "но ведь переводчик ни при чем, не он все это сочиняет" [but the interpreter has nothing to do with it, he's not the one who writes it all] (p. 52). At the same time, he takes the right to refuse to translate materials that are for him unacceptable for ethical and religious reasons: "дважды, в период накала хрущевских гонений на Церковь, я отказывался переводить тексты, авторы которых изыскивали новые доводы в пользу того, что Бога нет" [twice, during the period of the heat of Khrushchev's persecution of the Church, I refused to translate texts, the authors of which were looking for new arguments in favor of the fact that there is no God] (Krivoshein, 2014, p. 105).

Palazchenko (2009) too feels a rejection towards the Soviet regime before the coming to power of Gorbachev and the *perestroika*. At the beginning of his career, Palazchenko (2009) was teaching, however "practical work as translator and interpreter attracted [him] much more" (p. 13). Despite this, the interpreter feels a moral dilemma when offered a much more exciting job in the translation department of the Foreign Ministry: "There was, of course, the moral

problem. I was beginning work for the government, and I knew that would mean sacrificing some of my freedom and independence” (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 13). Palazchenko only accepts the job after coming to a compromise with himself. He writes:

> I believed I was doing it not as a party official or a propaganda hack but as a professional working in a field that was inherently dedicated to reaching mutual understanding rather than fomenting conflict. So for me it was an acceptable compromise. (Palazchenko, 2009, p. 13)

The feeling of rejection disappears when Gorbachev comes to power and Palazchenko becomes sympathetic to his cause. However, after the failure of Gorbachev’s reforms, the coup d’état and the creation of a new government, Palazchenko again feels a strong rejection towards the newcomers and does not want to work for them, even when offered a position. Palazchenko (2009) writes: “I told [them] I would not work for the new government and that I was ready to spend the next few years working as a night watchman rather than do so” (p. 377). He quit.

Party line

Convictions are not always personal, but can be ‘imposed’ from the top. Berezhkov (1993) recalls that before working for Mikoyan (as cited by Berezhkov) hints that the interpreter must first become a Party member: “Кстати, вы еще не член партии. Советовал бы вам решить этот вопрос” [By the way, you are not yet a member of the party. I would advise you to address this issue] (p. 148).

This request puzzles Berezhkov, and the soon-to-be interpreter ponders whether the job is worth taking such an important step. Initially, for Berezhkov, joining the Party should not be a means to an end, but a conscious political choice based on a deep conviction. He remembers thinking: “По-видимому, вступление в партию – одно из условий приема в наркомат. Но как мне самому решиться на этот серьезный шаг? Не делать же его лишь для того, чтобы быть зачисленным в секретариат наркома!” [Apparently, joining the Party is one of the conditions for entering the Commissariat. But how do I take such a serious decision? I couldn't do it just to be admitted to the secretariat of the Commissar!] (p. 149). The interest in the job position prevails and Berezhkov complies.

His ordeal does not stop there, however, as the next “level” of the game—an interview with Molotov—holds another surprise for him. Molotov cites a long sentence out of *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, a work by Vladimir Lenin, and asks Berezhkov whether he knows where the quote is from. Luckily, the interpreter knows the answer, even though he writes that “мне повезло. Выбери Молотов другую цитату, не знакомую мне, и я бы провалился” [I got lucky. I would have failed had Molotov picked a different quote, one unfamiliar to me] (p. 166). Molotov is satisfied.

Conflict

Yerofeyev quits his position as Molotov's assistant and asks to be sent abroad to work in a Soviet embassy. The reason is that Yerofeyev is upset with Molotov, after the principal allegedly criticised the interpreter for always being sick. Such words hurt the interpreter very much as he has been working for ten years and has never been ill before. Yerofeyev (2005) writes:

> Узнав о моем заболевании, [Молотов] выразил недовольство тем, что «этот Ерофеев все время болеет». Меня это сообщение буквально взорвало: десять лет непрерывной службы и вот тебе на – «все время болеет». Вернувшись через несколько дней на службу, я с настойчивостью стал добиваться у Молотова, чтобы он согласился отпустить меня в МИД на оперативную дипломатическую работу.
>
> Upon learning of my illness, [Molotov] was upset that "Yerofeev is sick all the time". When I heard of this, I literally burst with anger: ten years of uninterrupted service and here you are– "sick all the time". When I returned to work after a few days, I insisted that Molotov agrees to let me go to the Foreign Ministry for diplomatic work on the ground. (p. 159)

Pursuing another career

Many interpreters eventually decided to let go of interpreting and pursue a different career instead. Birse (1967) went back to his pre-war occupation: banking. Later on, he becomes a Russian instructor at Cambridge. His former experience is not completely forgotten, as he teaches the "business of interpreting to the more advanced students on the course" (Birse, 1967, p. 224).

Most of the interpreters studied chose to follow the diplomatic path. It is a natural development, since they were already considered to be diplomats while being interpreters. As their career unfolded, some decided to become full-fledged diplomats and leave interpreting behind. Bohlen (1973) eventually forgoes not only his role of interpreter, but also that of Sovietologist, to become ambassador in Paris. He finds that his language skills are very useful in his diplomatic career, as he finds that "my ability to speak the language gave me an advantage over diplomats who had to rely on interpreters" (Bohlen, 1973, p. 390).

Ironically, Vyshinsky, one of Troyanovsky's superiors, predicted that the interpreter would not be able to progress further on the career path. He once told the interpreter, as cited by Troyanovsky (1997): "[Вышинский] однажды даже сказал мне: «Ваш язык – враг ваш». Он имел в виду, что мои знания английского языка мешают мне продвигаться по службе"

[Vyshinsky once told me: “your tongue is your enemy”.[50] He meant that my knowledge of English prevented me from climbing the career ladder] (p. 128). Why would the English language skill be a problem for further progress in Troyanovsky’s career? Perhaps, in those difficult times, speaking a foreign language could lead to being accused of spying or sympathizing with the West. Or, perhaps, Troyanovsky was more use to the MFA as an interpreter and translator than an actual full-fledged diplomat. In any way, Vyshinsky turned out to be wrong. Troyanovsky becomes ambassador to Japan and later China; a position in which his interpreting skills do not disappear completely and help him in his work (trained memory, good knowledge of the international relations situation, etc.).

Sukhodrev (1999), who came to replace Troyanovsky, also leaves, in his time, to become a Soviet Union representative and special assistant to the U.N. Secretary General. In his memoirs Sukhodrev mentions the young and talented Palazchenko who eventually comes to take his place.

5.2.3.2. Losing one’s position

Intrigues and resentment

In previous sections I have analysed how office intrigues can affect an interpreter’s everyday life and work. However, such intrigues, and sometimes outright political repressions, can result in the interpreter losing his or her job.

It seems safe to say that Pavlov’s departure from the MFA was the result of Molotov’s resentment. After Stalin’s death on 5 of March 1953, Molotov summons Pavlov to his office. He demands that the interpreter expresses his opinion of Stalin’s harsh criticism of Molotov at a recent Party Congress. Pavlov limits himself to a vague “I was surprised” answer and leaves. The interpreter then theorizes that the objective of this out-of-the-blue questioning was to test Pavlov’s loyalty to Molotov. Apparently, the latter was not satisfied, because Pavlov was not included in the newly formed MFA, and instead was sent off to work in a publishing house (Pavlov, 2000). It is only much later, in 1972, when Pavlov accidentally meets Mikoyan (they knew each other since the times when Pavlov was an interpreter), that he? provides an explanation for what happened. According to Pavlov (2000), Mikoyan said: "Все дело в том, что Молотов ревновал Вас к Сталину. Но почему он ревновал Вас к мертвому Сталину, непонятно. Странный человек Молотов" [“The problem was that Molotov was jealous of

[50] Interestingly, Sukhodrev (who spoke of Troyanovsky as his mentor and friend) titled his memoirs as “Yazyk moj – drug moj” [My tongue – my friend], perhaps as a veiled reference to this episode that Troyanovsky might have told him about.

your relationship with Stalin. But why was he still jealous when Stalin died, that I cannot say. Molotov is a strange man."] (p. 111).

Molotov's dislike of Pavlov is confirmed by Yerofeyev. Apparently, the resentment was also fuelled by the fact that Pavlov was close to Beria, an opponent and even outright enemy of Molotov's. Yerofeyev (2005) writes that "Молотов удалил из своего секретариата и отличного переводчика, своего помощника Владимира Павлова, не простив ему личных связей с Берией, в частности и того, что он согласился преподавать английский язык в его семье" [Molotov also removed his excellent interpreter, his assistant Vladimir Pavlov, from his secretariat, not forgiving his personal connections with Beria, in particular the fact that he had agreed to teach English to his family] (p. 158).

Political repressions

Political repressions often took the shape of dismissing an undesirable person from their position. In a previous section I have mentioned a colleague of Yerofeyev's who was fired from Molotov's secretariat for possessing a postcard with a caricature of Stalin. Unfortunately, he was not the only one to suffer such a fate.

Krivoshein, as a former convict, has a Soviet passport that ties him down to a specific living location in a small provincial town. However, most of his work is done in Moscow, simply because the capital is the centre of cultural and political life and offers employment to interpreters and translators. The police choose to ignore Krivoshein's transgression because he can justify being needed in Moscow as a highly-skilled specialist. Krivoshein (2014) remembers that: "откажись я тогда от переводов – сразу же из Москвы был бы выгнан. Милиция закрывала глаза на почти постоянное мое в столице пребывание, несмотря на зафиксированное в паспорте административное ограничение" [If I had given up on translations then, I would have been expelled from Moscow immediately. The police turned a blind eye to my almost permanent presence in the capital, despite the administrative restriction recorded in my passport] (p. 103).

Berezhkov's career as an interpreter for Stalin and Molotov ends because of Beria, the NKVD chief. The latter suspects Berezhkov to be an enemy of the people because the interpreter's parents allegedly fled from Kiev and "ушли на Запад" [went to the West] (p.356). This made them traitors in the eyes of the secret police, and Berezhkov, guilty by association, becomes a *persona non grata*. Berezhkov (1993) learns about this from Molotov, who summons him to his office, and tells him that Beria "ставит вопрос о нецелесообразности дальнейшего использования вас на нынешней работе" [questions whether it is appropriate to continue employing you in your present job under these circumstances] (p. 356). Both Stalin and Molotov agree that it is better for Berezhkov to leave, and find him a position as editor in

a magazine. The interpreter speculates that Molotov “договорился со Сталиным о том, чтобы под решением о моем переводе в журнал стояла подпись самого «вождя». Это, видимо, и преградило дорогу бериевскому «расследованию»” [arranged it with Stalin that the official decision transferring me to the magazine would be signed by the “leader” himself. That is what must have blocked Beria’s “investigation”] (Berezhkov, 1993, p. 358).

A similar story happens to with Troyanovsky (1997), as he writes that “в июле 1948 года, моя карьера в качестве переводчика Сталина неожиданно закончилась” [in July 1948, my career as Stalin's interpreter came to an abrupt end] (p. 165). He is sent away to work as an editor (we can see a certain parallel with Berezhkov’s faith here.) At first the interpreter does not know why he’s being fired, and discovers the reason only ten years later: Troyanovsky’s father was close to people who expressed very critical views about Soviet policies. Upon learning of this, Molotov “счел за благо перевести меня из своего секретариата в один из так называемых территориальных отделов” [decides that it would be best to to transfer me from his secretariat to one of the so-called territorial divisions] (Troyanovsky, 1997, p. 165). Five years later, after Stalin’s death in 1953, Molotov recalls the interpreter back to the MFA and his diplomatic career resumes.

Decades later, during what seems to be completely different times, the fear of repression resurfaces. After the *coup d’état* of 1991 and Gorbachev losing power to Yeltsin, Palazchenko (2009) does not only fear for his personal safety, but definitely expects to lose his position. The situation is even more complicated: while Palazchenko works for Gorbachev’s government and will be dismissed with it, his wife Lena works for the MFA and officially there is no reason for her to lose her position. However, her marriage to a Gorbachev supporter could be a reason to distrust her. Palazchenko (2009) recalls that “we knew it would be tough. Above all, it would be tough psychologically, a kind of political exile for me, and tough also for Lena, in the uncomfortable position of being watched closely in a certain way” (p. 310).

5.2.4. Conclusion

According to the present study, the political conjuncture does indeed impact the professional life of an interpreter. First, at the stage of choosing a career, an aspiring interpreter could be seduced by the promise of international travel and discovery. However, many interpreters in the studied timeframe became interpreters because of circumstances. On the one hand, they had fluent command of foreign languages. On the other hand, the conjuncture (war operations and negotiations, creation of international dialogue platforms, intensifying of international exchanges in general, political purges at home that decimated specialists in State institutions) created a high demand for such language specialists. The State’s need for interpreters pushed

the authorities to create, maintain, and reinforce education establishments for the profession. International relations in the Cold War, centred on the USA–USSR confrontation made the English-Russian combination preponderant for Soviet specialists, far ahead of French-Russian or Spanish-Russian.

Second, the political conjuncture influenced the working process of interpreters. The high stakes of negotiations pushed politicians to speak clearly and orderly, to provide interpreters with documents in advance and to abstain from jokes. Not all principals, however, were aware of the difficulties faced by interpreters and had no experience of working through interpreters, which made the interpreting process more challenging. Moreover, not all negotiations were meant to come to a political agreement, quite the contrary. Situations of purposeful non-communication made the interpreter's task difficult as they had to find (and then convey) at least some sense in messages that, by design, had none. Interpreters working in State ministries and the government were more than interpreters. They had to accomplish many other tasks in addition to their interpreting duties, amongst which the most important for this thesis was the task of cultural mediator. This task aimed at explaining puzzling cultural phenomena and behaviours to oblivious politicians who spoke no foreign language and knew little of foreign cultures, in the hope of avoiding political and diplomatic incidents. Interpreters and their interpretation could be instrumentalized for political ends, by various actors. Colleagues or superiors could attempt to exploit the interpreters for information. The interpreter could also be an informal communication means when official channels fell through. The press sometimes exploited awkward interpretations for buzz or propaganda purposes. Finally, the political conjuncture affected the general working atmosphere and relations between colleagues.

Lastly, the political context had an impact on the career's end. Interpreters could leave because they aspired to a change of profession. Most often they oriented themselves towards diplomacy, which is not far removed from the profession of interpreter and remains in the field of international relations. Sometimes, the interpreter left because his own convictions conflicted with the values of the State. The specialist could also be dismissed for political reasons. He could get caught in the irrational machine of political repressions, or fall victim to office politics and intrigues plotted against him by superiors or rivals.

6. Conclusion

My research unveils new details of the lives of Soviet Cold War interpreters and contributes to the study of the history of interpreting It adds to the understanding of the various dark sides of the profession of high-level interpreter, the possible advantages and disadvantages of being the man (or woman) in the middle.

I set out to answer the following research question: *What is the impact of the political conjuncture on a high-level interpreter's life?* In order to do that, three different levels of political conjuncture were identified: international, domestic, and personal. I argue that all three levels have an influence on interpreters, as they impact both their professional and personal lives. An extreme case of political conjuncture was examined: the USSR during the Cold War, a conjuncture that comprises ups and downs on both the international and domestic level. I have specifically focused on the impact on Soviet interpreters and foreign interpreters working in or with the USSR. Several types of impacts were categorized into two main groups: impact on the interpreter's personal and professional life.

The impact on the personal life of interpreters is threefold: there is an impact on their physical health safety, their emotional and psychological state and their personal relations. The physical health and safety can be endangered directly by war (international politics), as well as indirectly via political repressions (domestic politics). Accidents can also take place, as can voice straining due to working too long without being replaced by a colleague. The interpreters can also find themselves in the middle of a politically motivated assault against their principal. High-level interpreters can also lack sleep in periods of political crises, when they are called upon to work more often than usual. Often, their workday is extremely long, and there is little time to properly eat. During banquets, most of the time the interpreter has to go hungry. Moreover, politics are a constantly evolving matter and emergencies can take place at any time. As a result, interpreters must make themselves available 24/7 to work at urgent and unscheduled meetings.

The emotional state and the psychology of the interpreter are also affected by the political conjuncture. The emotions can be positive, when interpreters take great pleasure in their work, when they are being appreciated by their principals, and when they are sometimes even rewarded and decorated by an order. The greatest pleasure comes from the feeling of being useful and taking part in historic events. Negative emotions can too be triggered by the conjuncture: political discrimination can lead to isolation and depression-like feelings. When talks are stalling, a feeling of frustration and disappointment can affect the interpreter. The high stakes of the talks and the proximity to high-ranking, sometimes authoritarian, politicians are also a source of great stress. If the relation with the principal is not good (e.g., politicians

doubting their interpreter's competence), it adds another layer of stress to the interpreter's work. Moreover, the interpreter, who speaks for his principal, sometimes cannot help feeling ashamed of an unsuitable behaviour on the part of the politician. Another set of difficulties come from the fact that the interpreter can be very young and inexperienced when being recruited, thus the professional can feel that he is not up to the task. Sometimes interpreters have been confronted with death, be it either war and destruction during WWII and crises of the Cold War, or more directly when their principal is asked to come to another's politician funeral. Finally, profound pain can result from interpreters being dismissed from their position, realizing that they are is replaceable.

Personal relations with family and friends can be affected by the political conjuncture. Becoming a politically repressed *persona non grata* leads to losing many friends and acquaintances. Siding with one protagonist in a domestic conflict leads to losing friends among those who side with the other party. Long working hours and incessant travel can break up an interpreter's marriage. The interpreter can also become the object of politically-based prejudice, such as nationalistic or ideological discrimination. The interpreter can also be discriminated against based on personal criteria: being married or not, having worked before with the principal or not. A whole slice of the interpreting profession—simultaneous interpreters—used to be discriminated against, as people did not at first trust that SI can be as performant as consecutive.

Interpreters' entire professional lives, in their beginning, middle and end, are subject to the political conjuncture. Firstly, the choice of career can be influenced by the personal desire of the aspiring interpreter to be part of world level politics, accompany heads of states and governments and travel the world. The recruitment can also be done in a random manner dictated by political circumstances: high demand for language specialists because of war, and because of the multiplication of international dialogue formats in the post-war period. Politically motivated purges at home lead to a lack of personal and specialists, which had to be compensated by ad hoc recruitment too. The demand for certain languages is also dictated by the preponderance of certain countries on the international arena and the emergence of "international languages" used by international organizations. Because of the high demand, authorities create and/or reinforce the education system for interpreters at home. They also actively encourage young people to choose the interpreting career, and to perfect their skills via additional education, in diplomacy for example.

Secondly, the political context defines the interpreting work and routine. The career of a high-level interpreter comprises several important perks that make the career desirable: financial comfort, proximity to powerful people, traveling the world. However, there are also downsides to interpreting at the very high level. The interpreting process can be made easy

or difficult, even impossible, depending on whether or not there is a political will to be understood and to go forward in negotiations. The principal's attitude can also be helpful if they speak clearly and at a good pace, or harmful if they do not take the interpretation process into consideration, not making an effort in their expression. High-level interpreters are also confronted with confidentiality issues when dealing with politically sensitive matters, this puts an extra strain on them. High-level interpreters in the time period and place studied where most of the time combining their interpreting task with other work: administrative, secretarial, or diplomatic. However, their multilingual nature and sensibility to cultures brought forward their roles as cultural mediators that help politicians not only to communicate, but also to understand each other's cultures, customs, world views. The interpreter is therefore called upon to prevent politicians from making blunders and losing face.

The interpreter and his interpretation can be instrumentalized by different actors: by the principal, colleagues, journalists, or even interpreters from "the other side". The instrumentalization almost always pursues a political end. An unfortunate interpretation can be used for journalistic buzz, for state propaganda, or for undermining political opponents. The interpreter himself can serve as an unofficial communications channel to pass "off the record" messages. Work relations are affected by the political context too. Politicians and principals are humans too, and informal relations between the interpreter and the principal are not unheard of. Seeing eye to eye on political matters can forge a strong bond between the interpreter and his principal and lead to friendship and informal relations. On the contrary, a principal who has lost in the political game and has been relegated to an unimportant position after a change of regime can sometimes take out his frustration on the interpreter, or even hold a grudge against him. Relations with other colleagues (horizontal and non-hierarchical) can result in competition over the best assignments, but also in gossip about promotions, resignation and other office politics. The entire work atmosphere is heavily impacted by domestic conjuncture, ranging from a gloomy dystopian atmosphere during Stalin's times to a much more light hearted and stress free "glasnost" era under Gorbachev. Different domestic forces (government, ministries, secret police) can enter into conflict with each other, which also reflect on interpreters and their work. Relations with foreign colleagues can sometimes take the shape of conflict and misunderstandings.

Finally, the decision to stay or to quit one's interpreting position can be influenced by the political context. When the interpreter's political convictions clash with that of their principal, the interpreter can choose to walk away, or make a compromise with himself and stay. Feeling a lack of appreciation from the principal or aspiring to another career, often in diplomacy, can also motivate the interpreter to move on. However, the interpreter can also be removed from his position as a result of political repressions and intrigues.

6.1. Limitations

My study has several limitations. In section *5.1.2. Psychological and emotional impact,* at times conflation can occur between the *causes* of various emotions (i.e., war, authoritarianism, and so on); and the *impact*, that is to say the emotions themselves (fear, stress) as felt by the interpreters.

Moreover, I have chosen to study the Cold War, an extreme case of political conjuncture, limited in space and time and highly intense in the sense of the political developments that took place. It would be interesting to study whether the same impacts identified would be felt by interpreter in a more "normalized", less extreme political context of the modern-day world.

The studied pool of interpreters is a very specific and limited one: high-level interpreters working at the ministerial level. One could rightly ask: But what about military interpreters? They might not work at the ministerial level, but they work in situations—war and international confrontation—utterly defined by political conjuncture. Probirskaja (2016) highlights the fact that high-level interpreters that worked during WWII, known in the USSR as the Great Patriotic War, are hailed as war heroes and veteran. The public narrative ascribed a certain glamour to them, however, they are not fully representative of the profession. Very little is known of Soviet military interpreters, including interpreters that worked during the less glorified Afghan war. Due to the negative memories attached to the Afghan war, those interpreters are seen as the "quiet war heroes". They did not write memoirs, that became successfully published and widely read, as they do not have a glamourous aura about them. Probirskaja (2016) writes: "whereas the veteran interpreters of the Great Patriotic War are represented unconditionally as heroes, the veteran interpreters of the Afghanistan war do not have such a glorious status, but are depicted rather as forgotten and unknown heroes" (p. 221).

One exception to this general silence of military interpreters is perhaps Yelena Rzhevskaya, a female military interpreter who had to endure the horrors and trials of WWII, and whose memoirs have been published extensively. She may not have interpreted at the highest political level, at Teheran, Yalta, or Potsdam, but the scourge of war still fell on her with all its strength and left indelible traces. She felt the political conjuncture acutely, as "a military interpreter is in a unique position during the cataclysm of war. He or she is in constant contact with the belligerents on both sides" (Rzhevskaya, 2018, p. xx). Tactic and strategic decisions, increased aggression or peace negotiations: these are all political decisions made by the conflicting sides, and all reflect on the military interpreter's missions.

My study is also incomplete as it features only men. Women in the profession have to face similar but also many other, women specific problems, when interpreting in a political context. The absence of women in my research is a genuine lacune. Yet, it is understandable as most high-level interpreters, in and outside the USSR, used to be men. Rzhevskaya (2018) as a female military interpreter, also euphemistically mentions “a woman’s less than perfect physiological adaptation to the vexing exigencies of army life” (p. 26) and readily admits that “at first it was not easy to be the only woman among men” (p. 39).

6.2. Recommendations for further studies

There is still much to be discovered by future researchers in terms of difficulties linked to social, racial, gender, and other types of discrimination that interpreters face. Different political contexts present an interest too, for example, different countries and timeframes in which certain types of discriminations are still commonplace or even institutionalized.

Further studies could also analyse the inverse relation, that is to say: **What impact do interpreters and their interpretation have on the political process**? The high stakes of political negotiations ask for accurate and precise interpreting, however, interpreters are not machines. They are humans and can make mistakes. Those interpreting mistakes can sometimes go unnoticed, or can be blown out of proportion. Unfortunate interpretations of Khrushchev’s obscure jargon in English sounded like a threat in the context of the Cold War and contributed to worsening of Soviet-American relations.

Interpreters can potentially influence history itself. Many interpreters’ notes were integrated into memoirs and have been studied as recollections of witnesses of historic events. Birse (1967) recalls that Churchill asked the interpreter to share notes with him, so that he could use them for his own autobiography. Yerofeyev (2005) was asked to participate in the proofing of a chapter on French-Russian relations in Charles de Gaulle’s memoir. Palazchenko (2009) proofed the English version of Gorbachev’s autobiography. The life chronicles of these statesmen have later become important sources for historians who study the corresponding time period. The memoirs of the interpreters themselves are sometimes positioned as historic sources and the authors reflected this in several titles such as: *Translating History* (Korchilov, 1999), *Witness to History* (Bohlen, 1973) or *History in the Making* (Berezhkov, 1983).

However, Salevsky (2014) questions the reliability of interpreters’ memoirs for history as a science, and stresses that different interpreters give conflicting accounts of the same events. Striking evidence for that are the diverging depictions of Khrushchev’s visit to Hollywood. Sukhodrev (2009) describes the leader’s behaviour during the evening as *bon enfant*, but still calm and dignified, as he meets with Hollywood filmmakers, actors and

actresses (Sukhodrev, 1999). Akalovsky claims however that “Khrushchev started slapping the girls, dancers, on their butts and so forth. He had a great time” (Kennedy, 2000). Akalovsky and Sukhodrev, as witnesses from different “sides of history” do indeed have different viewpoints.

I have mentioned interpreters eventually becoming diplomats and thus becoming proactive on the international science. Perhaps these career decisions are linked to a gradually developing feeling that they “outgrew” the interpreting profession and aspire to play a more decisive role. With a great deal of awareness and self-irony for himself and the profession, Palazchenko (2009) makes the following comment:

> Most [interpreters] are talented people with a good mind, an ability to grasp things quickly, and a broad knowledge of many subjects and issues. […] Very soon one begins to feel that knowing and understanding so much, one could do more important things. Much of what must be interpreted begins to sound silly, and one develops a condescending attitude to diplomats, government ministers and even heads of states. (p. 7)

This aspiration is echoed when Menzel (2019) writes about interpreting and translating as potential “political activism”. She describes grassroots movements “of transnational mediation that formed in the early 1980s, when thousands of American citizens began to establish personal relations with citizens of the Soviet Union” (p. 466). This unofficial, “citizen” diplomacy movement was supported and enabled, among other people, by several interpreters. Tired of stalling and unproductive political discussions, they aspired to bridge the gap between Cold War rivals, and creating a platform for dialogue and understanding. This movement enabled interpreters, and other citizens, to become active actors in international relations, instead of being purely a means to an end: communication between other people.

Today international relations are not limited to solely round table negotiations at the highest level. Each citizen who travels and comes in contact with other cultures becomes an ambassador for his or her country. With their great knowledge of languages, and political and cultural sensibilities, interpreters can potentially make great, if unofficial, diplomats, and contribute to building sustainable peace, if one day they choose to step out of their booths.

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