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Re-evaluating the interpreter's contribution to history: a study of Pavel Palazhchenko's Profession and time: *The notes of an interpreter-diplomat*

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**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

**FACULTÉ DE TRADUCTION
ET D'INTERPRÉTATION**

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**Re-evaluating the interpreter's contribution to history: a study of
Pavel Palazhchenko's *Profession and time: The notes of an
interpreter-diplomat*.**

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté de Traduction et d'Interprétation

Pour l'obtention du MA en Interprétation de Conférence

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Abstract

This article assesses the contribution to history made by Mikhail Gorbachev's interpreter Pavel Palazhchenko. The study focuses on Palazhchenko's most recent Russian-language memoirs *Profession and time: The notes of an interpreter-diplomat* (2020), as well as interviews and video recordings of public appearances. Palazhchenko was the principal interpreter to Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in the period 1985-1991, during which time both the Cold War and the nuclear arms race came to an end thanks to intense negotiations and frequent face-to-face meetings between Soviet and US leaders. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Palazhchenko has worked alongside Gorbachev at the Gorbachev Fund and has continued to interpret for him. Previous studies of interpreters' historical contribution have tended to diminish their importance. I argue that Palazhchenko's agency was enhanced by his close relationship with Soviet leaders, and that his contribution to the team of people that led historical progress towards peace should not be reduced to that of a "semi-visible" interpreter with negligible historical importance. I also contend that the moral choices he made have the markings of an activist as well as a diplomat. Finally, I assert that the recent publication of his memoirs in Russian constitutes a valuable and politically engaged contribution to history that pushes back against current official discourse. Lines of study that could build on this article include: the contribution of interpreters to the social groups they regularly accompany, the value of longstanding "personal" interpreters to the speaker and the audience, and the connection between activism and interpreting.

Keywords: interpreting, history, semi-visibility, Cold War, Pavel Palazhchenko, Mikhail Gorbachev.

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“Pavel was with me in the most difficult situations, including some about which not everything can be told to this day. He was trusted by presidents and Secretaries of State. Pavel was part of a team of people who held the world back from nuclear catastrophe.”

Mikhail Gorbachev (Palazhchenko, 2020, back cover)

1. Introduction

In his wide-ranging essay on Soviet interpreters, ‘Interpreting for Soviet leaders: The memoirs of semi-visible men’, Andrei Rogatchevski concludes that “saving the world is just not in the interpreter’s job description” (2019, p.460). His article challenges the traditional view that interpreters and translators should be invisible (Venuti, 1995, Mason and Ren, 2012). Nevertheless, he believes that an interpreter working with powerful leaders can influence specific situations in certain discreet, usually practical ways, but never have a lasting impact on history. This emphasis on discretion is found within the interpreting community itself, notably in the AIIC Code of Professional Ethics, which emphasises “professionalism”, “confidentiality”, “integrity”, and “reserve” as attitudes owed to the “client”. Interpreters are also frequently referred to as “service providers”, the idea being that they are an external actor providing a punctual service. Of course, there are many kinds of interpreting, and diplomatic interpreters, the topic of our essay, are a particular breed (Olsen et al, 2021). However, the furthest Olsen et al go in appraising the diplomatic interpreter’s contribution to history is to say that “it is thus conceivable that the impact of interpreting on the process of negotiation and subsequently on the final adopted text is not inconsiderable” (2021, p.74). Mikhail Gorbachev’s assessment of Pavel Palazhchenko forces us to rethink this appraisal.

Gorbachev was a unique historical figure. He presided over Perestroika and reform in the USSR and its eventual collapse. He concluded historic agreements on nuclear disarmament with the United States, most notably the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) and Strategic Arms Reduction (START I) treaties. Throughout this time, Pavel Palazhchenko was at his side in his dealings with the English-speaking world. Gorbachev spoke minimal English and could not have communicated with the English-speaking world without the help of an interpreter (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 16:50). Although Palazhchenko rejects being Gorbachev’s “personal interpreter”, arguing that no such position existed in the Soviet nomenclature, his

presence with Gorbachev at English-language negotiations during this time was almost unwavering (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 02:34). After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, he followed Gorbachev to the Gorbachev Fund, and has continued working there alongside him to this day. He has continued to interpret for Gorbachev, notably during international visits (Wyoming videos, 2011; TheLBJLibrary, 2017; Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2021).

Palazhchenko's new Russian-language book of memoirs *Profession and time: The notes of an interpreter-diplomat* (*Professiia i Vremia: Zapiski Perevodchika-Diplomata*, Palazhchenko, 2020) gives us his eyewitness account of the events he lived through, particularly during the Perestroika years of 1985-1991. Palazhchenko has published a previous book of memoirs in English, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The memoir of a Soviet interpreter* (1997), but he says that his new book is a more subjective account, adapted to the Russian audience (BiblioTV, 2022, 07:00). It also comes at a time when Palazhchenko has repeatedly called for improvement in US-Russia relations in public interviews (Seattletimesdotcom, 2018). In the context of the ongoing Ukraine war, two years after the book's initial publication, Palazhchenko's recollections have taken on a new relevance. The book itself was first published by the *Novaia Gazeta*, the publishing house of Russia's leading independent print newspaper, which has since shut down its activity due to government-imposed restrictions on the press in Russia.

Palazhchenko's close association with Gorbachev both during and after Gorbachev's time as leader of the Soviet Union, over several decades, is exceptional for an interpreter. In this essay, I will seek to answer the following question: how does a close and lasting relationship to a historical figure modify the interpreter's role as a merely "semi-visible figure" who has a negligible influence on historical events?

I will analyse how Palazhchenko positions himself in relation to Gorbachev who he considers to be "among the top three or top five persons of the 20th century who made the world better" (RT, 2011). This main research question could be further nuanced as follows: How does his close association with such an important figure square with Rogatchevski's claim that "saving the world is just not in the interpreter's job description"? What about in the job description of an "interpreter-diplomat"? Did the relationships that Palazhchenko formed with colleagues and participants facilitate the historic decisions that were made? Does Palazhchenko's deep immersion in the events of the time give his eyewitness account greater historical legitimacy?

What role does emotion and ideology play in Palazhchenko's decision-making as an interpreter and as a person, given that he "believed in what [Gorbachev] was doing" (RT, 2011)?

To answer these questions, I will proceed first of all to a brief historical overview of the years leading up to the Gorbachev era and the Gorbachev era itself. I will then review current academic research along the three lines of enquiry in interpreting studies that are most relevant to my question: relations of power, interpreting as diplomacy, and memoir-writing as history-writing. Finally, I will analyse *Profession and Time: The notes of an interpreter-diplomat*, interviews given by Palazhchenko over the last few years as well as his Facebook posts through these theoretical lenses. I will seek to assess to what extent Palazhchenko fits within this framework, and whether his unique relationship with Gorbachev forces us to reassess his role as an interpreter and a historical figure.

2. Historical Context

2.1. The Cold War before 1985

Negotiations between the US and the USSR from 1985 to 1991, Palazhchenko's years working with Gorbachev, were steeped in the history of the Cold War leading up to that point. The Cold War pitted against each other the ideologies of East and West, and more specifically of the two great superpowers, the US and USSR. Foreign policy became of paramount importance. According to White, "the central issue in global terms, for any Soviet leader, was the relationship with the other superpower" (1993, p.198). The US and the USSR vied for power and influence. It was a contest that was both material and psychological, and exposed the world to the threat and fear of great peril and even total destruction (Sanchez, p.398). In this light, it is understandable that arms control became the crux of diplomatic ties between the two superpowers (White, 1993, p.198). At every level, relations between the two countries fluctuated between periods of relative tension and relative 'détente' after the wartime alliance. One of the indicators of détente came to be arms control treaties, either bilateral or within larger international agreements. Key treaties include the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1971 treaty prohibiting the testing of nuclear weapons on the seabed, the 1972 related treaties signed between Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon, the 1973 agreement on the prevention of nuclear war and the 1979 SALT II treaty. However,

this last treaty was not presented to the US Senate for ratification as a result of the mounting tensions between the two superpowers. These were due, among other factors, to the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, the 1980-81 crisis in Poland and US support for Contra guerrillas in Nicaragua. By the early 1980s, relations were at a low point, with newly elected President Ronald Reagan christening the Soviet Union the 'evil empire' (White, 1993, pp. 198-9).

2.2. Foreign policy in the Gorbachev years

Into this fray stepped Mikhail Gorbachev, elected General Secretary of the CPSU on the 11th of March 1985. It soon became clear that his administration would turn to a type of "new thinking" in international affairs (White, 1993, p.192). Gorbachev's central proposition was that global problems demanded global solutions to which socialism alone could not provide a solution (p.195). Before that, Reagan had also begun seeking ways of building personal ties with Soviet leaders, sending hand-written letters to Gorbachev's predecessors Brezhnev and Chernenko (Wilson, 2018). According to White,

most fundamental (...) was the climate of hostility and mistrust that existed between East and West during the 'new cold war' of the late 1970s and early 1980s; and it was the dissipation of this climate, above all through a series of face-to-face meetings between the Soviet and American leaders that contributed most directly to the resumption of progress in arms control and other matters (1993, p.200)

As a result of this new approach, a string of high-level meetings and visits between US and USSR heads of States and delegations were organised over the following years: Gorbachev-Reagan in Geneva in November 1985, Stockholm in September 1986, Reykjavik in October 1986, Washington in December 1987, Moscow in May-June 1988, Gorbachev-Bush in Malta in December 1989, Gorbachev's presidential US visit in 1990 and a final Gorbachev-Bush summit in Moscow in July 1991. These led to the signing of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987 and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty or START in 1991, which resulted in unprecedented reductions of both sides' nuclear arsenals (1993, p.200). They also changed the way the two superpowers perceived each other, and effectively put an end to the Cold War: "by the end of 1988 the American Secretary of State, George Schultz, was convinced that the Cold War was over" (Brown, 1996, p.307). In Malta in 1989, the Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov quipped that "we buried the Cold War at the bottom of the Mediterranean" (Brown, 1996, p.240). Ever-present at these meetings was Gorbachev's interpreter Pavel Palazhchenko.

2.3. *Gorbachev as a historical figure*

Gorbachev's impact on history was considerable. According to Brown, he "did more than anyone else to end the Cold War between East and West" and "has strong claims to be regarded as one of the great reformers in Russian history in Russian history and as the individual who made the most profound impact on world history in the second half of the twentieth century" (1996, p.317). This understanding of the grand scale and positive nature of Gorbachev's work is noticeable in writing that was published without the benefit of hindsight. Lilly Marcou for instance, writing in 1988, concludes her book on Gorbachev with wishing him all the best in the endeavour he has undertaken "for the good of the USSR and the world" (1988, p.270). Of course, geo-political change of the scale observed under Gorbachev is due to a large number of factors, and ongoing debates about the causes of the fall of the Soviet Union are testament to that fact. Nevertheless, Brown claims that "the Gorbachev factor *was* the most crucial of all" (Brown 1996, p.318), arguing that without his willingness to yield power in the pursuit of reform, the historical change that swept through the Soviet Union and transformed global politics could not have taken place. Gorbachev is a towering historical figure, and this essay will seek to understand Palazhchenko's relationship to him in this light.

2.4. *Gorbachev's Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze*

This essay will also bear in mind the fact that Gorbachev did not act alone. As Brown (1996) recounts in Chapter 4 of *The Gorbachev Factor*, Gorbachev proceeded to a number of high-level political appointments in order to bring in reliable allies (1996, p.109). Most relevant to this essay is his appointment of Eduard Shevardnadze as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1985. This was a surprise appointment, as Shevardnadze had limited foreign policy experience (Brown, 2007, p.19 & 84). However, over the coming years, he carved himself out a crucial position, seeing eye-to-eye with Gorbachev and executing the Soviet leader's foreign policy (Brown 1996, p.277). Shevardnadze came to play a critical role in US-USSR relations, impressing high-ranking American officials with his "willingness to be influenced by a strong argument and to defend that position subsequently in Moscow as well as his candour about Soviet mistakes and problems" (Brown 1996, p.239). As a politician by trade, Shevardnadze was closer to the Western mould for a Minister of Foreign Affairs, improving relations with the West:

Sir Geoffrey Howe (then British Foreign Secretary) remarked that when he was talking with Shevardnadze he felt he was talking to a fellow politician, not a bureaucrat. Gorbachev's close aide Chernyaev – while rightly dismissive of any suggestion that Gorbachev was pursuing Shevardnadze's foreign policy, rather than the other way round – has acknowledged that Shevardnadze personally made 'a huge contribution to the realization of the policy (Brown 1996, p. 215)

Given Shevardnadze's important role in the era's historical process and his closeness to Gorbachev's line, at least until his resignation in 1990, this essay will also consider the relationship between Palazhchenko and Shevardnadze, for whom he interpreted regularly during this period.

2.5. A political course born of conviction

The final historical aspect I will regularly refer to is the fact that much of what Gorbachev and his followers did, both during his time as leader of the Soviet Union and after, was done out of conviction, with a sense of greater purpose. During his time as General Secretary, this purpose was reform. According to Brown, Gorbachev believed that moving on from outworn dogma had to be part of a project of reform and cleansing (1996, p.121). This new Soviet thinking based on humanistic universalism in international affairs was at odds with past Soviet thinking (Brown, 1996, p.221). Gorbachev himself writes that "above all, what kept me going was the certainty that Perestroika had been and remained historically essential" (Gorbachev, 2016, p.11). After stepping down as president of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the USSR, Gorbachev set up the Gorbachev Foundation, that would publish reports on the restructuring of the USSR, monitor the main processes at work in the life of post-Soviet Russia and study the international and global processes surrounding Russia (Gorbachev, 2016, p.21). Among those who joined him at the Gorbachev Foundation was Pavel Palazhchenko, who has continued working alongside Gorbachev, including as an interpreter, for over three decades now. Gorbachev writes:

My closest colleagues and assistants from the Office of the President of the USSR came to work at the Foundation, including Anatoly Chernyaev, Georgiy Shakhnazarov, Vadim Medvedev, Vadim Zagladin, Pavel Palazhchenko, Georgiy Ostrounov, Alexander Veber and Viktor Kuvaldin. They were all top-level professionals with distinguished titles and academic degrees (...) Their motives were altruistic and based on conviction rather than the pursuit of money or other rewards: their salaries in the Foundation were substantially lower than they could have commanded as government employees. None of those who had worked with me in the Kremlin or at Communist Party headquarters in Old Square ended up with palatial mansions and luxurious villas, or had foreign bank accounts (Gorbachev, 2016, p.21-22)

In fact, Pavel Palazhchenko himself has repeatedly stated in interviews that he believed in Gorbachev's work (RT, 2011). This essay article will consider this when examining Palazhchenko's role as an interpreter and participant in historical events.

3. Theoretical Framework

It is often said that interpreting is an understudied field of research. However, recent years have seen the publication of large academic compendiums on interpreting, such as *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (2015), and the *Routledge Handbook of Conference Interpreting* (2022). These demonstrate that interpreting studies have come to encompass a very wide range of subjects, drawing upon a vast array of academic approaches. The interpreter's role has been picked apart along regional, cultural, sociological, theoretical, cognitive, ethical, and philosophical lines. Furthermore, the memoirs of interpreters are a subject that has already commanded significant academic attention (Sanchez, 2011; Rogatchevski, 2019; Tsaregorodtseva, 2021). It is therefore necessary to narrow the scope of this essay, in order to focus our analysis of Pavel Palazhchenko's most recent memoirs. I have decided to analyse *Profession and Time: The notes of an interpreter-diplomat* (2020) using a theoretical approach centred around three interlinked aspects of the interpreter's role: relations of power, the interpreter as diplomat, and memoirs as a form of history-writing. I believe these three lines of study, taken together, can come closest to answering the question of whether an interpreter can save the world or influence the course of history. The aim of this essay is to describe how Palazhchenko fits in to theoretical models concerning these three aspects of the interpreter's role, and to what extent his close personal association with Gorbachev pushes him beyond the boundaries of these models.

3.1. Power

3.1.1. The five interactional powers

Historically, according to Ian Mason and Wen Ren (2012, p.234), interpreting has been a crucible through which power relations are forged. This is particularly true in cases where "any encounter with foreigners constituted a sharp contrast between the powerful and the

powerless”, such as ancient Egypt or during the colonisation of America. Interpreters made communication possible, but also often served to maintain and reinforce power relations, while occasionally altering them. However, understanding the role that interpreters play in power relations is complicated by the expectation that “an ideal interpreter should not make people feel his/her presence” (2012, p.235), an impression compounded by the metaphors often used to describe interpreters, such as “conduit”, “echo machine” or “voice box”. Mason and Ren unravel this paradox by discussing the interpreter’s opportunity to exercise power, in the Foucauldian sense of influencing power relations within a network. The five “interactional powers” that an interpreter can exercise are used by Andrei Rogatchevski (2019) to analyse the work of high-level Soviet interpreters. The memoirs of Soviet interpreters, according to Rogatchevski, have tended to be unusually frank, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in contrast with those of high-level interpreters whose clients remained in positions of power. He argues that much like interpreters who had worked for high-ranking representatives of Hitler’s Nazi Germany, these interpreters were able to give their version of events post factum without fear of repercussions. Rogatchevski’s article analyses the interpreter’s role “in the service of an all-powerful client” (2019, p.445). Within this paradigm, he analyses five aspects of the Soviet interpreter’s agency, expressed as interactional powers.

The first is semi-visibility, where the idea that an ideal interpreter should go completely unnoticed comes up against the reality of the interpreter being an additional person in the room, with their own physical needs, such as food, space, or medical attention, that cannot always be ignored. The second is co-interlocution, where the interpreter exercises his agency to avoid unnecessary strife, for instance by withholding certain remarks or softening the speaker’s tone. Then comes empowerment, which involves more active intervention on the part of the interpreter, for instance to ensure that participants are receiving their fair share of speaking time or by giving cultural or interpersonal advice. The fourth is non-neutrality, which affects the emotional side of an interpreter’s work, situations where he may disagree with what is being said. This can lead to the interpreter taking sides emotionally, and even lead to distress when what is being said is particularly absurd or unpalatable to the interpreter. Almost invariably, however, the interpreter’s professional duty to interpret will take over. Finally, positioning is pointed out as a common source of awkwardness for interpreters. It specifically concerns the interpreter’s physical location in regard to the client. Positioning must be distinguished from positionality, which “is traditionally defined as a person’s perspective shaped by their class, race, gender, nationality, political and religious affiliations, sense of place in power hierarchies,

and status as an insider or outsider” (Ruiz Rosendo, 2019b). Good physical positioning is often hard to find, as one has to be close enough to interpret, but not too close to avoid awkwardness or stealing the media spotlight. Rogatchevski concludes that whatever agency an interpreter working for Soviet leaders may have within the framework of these interactional powers, the influence they are able to have on world events is minimal. I will ask whether Palazhchenko’s relationship with Soviet leaders gave him any additional weight in the exercise of his interactional powers.

3.1.2. Professional and collegial identity

Sebnem Bahadir (2010) develops the question of the interpreter’s role in power relations by drawing a line between the work of community and conference interpreters. Both are “service providers”, but a “conference interpreter is expected to establish communication between so-called experts”, whereas in community interpreting, “the dividing line between advocacy and interpreting is blurred” (2010, p.125). The community interpreter actively helps his client’s cause in the struggle for empowerment, firstly by allowing them to be represented in the discussion, and secondly by standing up for the rights “denied to the speechless individual for whom she interprets” (2010, p.127). Bahadir also argues that the interpreter’s position as “the third person” stabilises the social group involved in the interaction. It is interesting to note that during high-level negotiations between the USSR and the US, two interpreters, one from each side, were almost always present, and usually a number of adviser and helpers also spoke both English and Russian. Henry Kissinger wrote that “if Sukhodrev ever had difficulty with a word or phrase, a chorus of voices chimed in to help him” (Sanchez, 2019, p.408). Sukhodrev has an oft-quoted line that “in my profession and at the level at which I work, and my colleagues, like myself, nothing is lost in translation” (Sanchez, 2019). The end of the sentence is striking, but the fact that he mentions himself and his colleagues in the same breath suggests that perhaps teamwork is relevant to the quality of the service provided. Interpreting at the highest level therefore appears as a more stable structure than community interpreting where the interpreter is alone, as mistakes can be corrected, and missing words filled in by other. In terms of power, stabilising the social group and the process of communication through several interpreters can be seen as a way of rectifying power imbalances between participant negotiators. Bahadir also advocates for interpreters to develop a “professional identity”, an identity that is “performative, constructing the interpreter as participatory and active, articulate and committed — a voice that is heard and a body that is seen” (2010, p.135). On top of professional identity, I will also seek to analyse the extent to which a collective “collegial identity” between interpreters during high-

level negotiations acts as an effective bulwark against power imbalances between the participants. I will study how Palazhchenko defines his own “professional identity”, and whether Palazhchenko’s close relationship with Gorbachev, as well as his relationship with interpreters from the American side, may have helped forging a “collegial identity” between interpreters, but also between interpreters and participants, that may have helped during high-level negotiations.

3.1.3. *Hierarchy*

Maria Manuela Fernandez Sanchez (2011) also considers the question of power during meetings between the US and the USSR in the Cold War. She writes of Sukhodrev that he was “a considerable power in the sense that he was ‘visible’, he was competent and reliable (...) because he fulfilled expectations as a neutral, impartial interpreter in a diplomatic setting” (2011, p.179). Sukhodrev’s power is rooted in his reputation, his longevity, and the very high quality of his interpreting. As much as Sukhodrev, the archetypal Soviet interpreter, can be said to have been “powerful”, it is also important to note that there were quite clearly constraints on this power, dictated by the circumstances he worked in. Sanchez writes that “interpreters [in the early Cold War] did not believe in crass ideological pronouncements” (2011, p.180). Nevertheless, they were still required to interpret what was being said. Sukhodrev recounts an occasion where he was particularly dismayed by the nonsensical nature of Khrushchev’s words but was nevertheless forced to interpret them (Rogatchevski, 2019, p.454). Praise given to interpreters tends to focus on linguistic and decorative aspects of their work, rather than their tangible influence on an event: “The press coverage (...) generally includes the laudatory comments of the work of these ‘outstanding interpreters’ and praise their ability to faithfully render the message as well as their fluency, the quality of their English, their flawless accent and even their personal appearance” (Sanchez, 2019, p.404). Some Soviet interpreters, such as Troyanovsky, only allowed themselves to clean up their client’s linguistic style at events of less formal events, however much they might have wanted to do so at other times (Sanchez, 2011, p.185). This points to the fact that most Soviet interpreters, for all their theoretical power as mediators of communication, were mostly subordinates in the work that they did. This essay will seek to analyse whether Palazhchenko was ever able to go beyond this role as a subordinate during his time with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze.

3.1.4. *Constraints*

With power come constraints. Sanchez goes on to remark that “power implies human agency, it implies having the opportunity to ‘act differently’, but in addition to this, the exercise of

power is related to social structures, such as political and diplomatic settings, that condition the action of specific agents” (2011, p.179). As a long-time employee of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which maintained a strict line on international issues, the fact that political constraints were imposed on Palazhchenko is obvious. His position was one that brought him closer to centres of power, but also made him more dependent on them. Interpreting is a socially situated practice, and therefore accounts of interpreting must explain the cultural and ideological and physical constraints that influenced their work (Angelelli, 2004, p.24). This essay will seek to analyse the social locus in which Palazhchenko worked, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, what form political constraints took and to what extent they restricted Palazhchenko’s agency. I will also ask the question of whether Palazhchenko’s close relationship with the Soviet leaders he interpreted for ever gave him licence to circumvent these constraints.

3.1.5. Responsibilities

The flip side of power is responsibility, which can be seen as both a privilege and a burden. Sanchez writes that for interpreters such as Sukhodrev and Troyanovsky, being held responsible meant both being the spokesperson of Soviet leaders during political encounters, and fulfilling a large variety of other, frequently sensitive, assignments (2011, p.186). Failing to live up to one’s responsibilities, in Sukhodrev’s case for instance, can be a source of distress. In one example, he says himself to be “mortified” because he has not acted as a “true interpreter” (Sanchez, 2011, p.186). The idea of responding like a “true interpreter” is a nebulous one, and it is clear here that this a responsibility and a standard that Sukhodrev has, at least partly, imposed on himself. Bahadir (2010) has written about the Derridean concept of profession, the idea that “to profess is to make a pledge while committing one’s responsibility” (2010, p.134) and how this concept of profession can be applied to interpreting. According to Bahadir, “the primary ethical principle for [the interpreter] is to take on the responsibility for the promise that cannot be kept” (2010, p.134). The promise here is that of the invisible interpreter, allowing seamless communication between two individuals who do not share the same language. This standard of interpreting is unachievable but tends to be the goal that interpreters set themselves. This essay will study Palazhchenko’s thoughts on his responsibility as interpreter, where he believes it arises from, who he feels he owes it to, and how this is reflected in his personal and professional identity, as well as his relationship with Soviet leaders.

3.2. *Diplomacy*

3.2.1. *Fluidity of tasks and recognition*

Interpreting and diplomacy have always been closely linked, and Palazhchenko, in the title of his memoirs, describes himself as an “interpreter-diplomat”¹. According to Bowen et al (2012, p.269), “the further back we go in time, the more difficult it is to draw a clear line between the two [interpreting and diplomacy]”. This suggests that their origins are much the same, the peaceful mediation of conflict or disagreement between sides. Indeed, diplomacy is traditionally identified as a mechanism of international politics that helps avoid war (Sanchez, 2019, p.400). In Palazhchenko’s case, this was nuclear war. Diplomacy as a mechanism requires many different actions and forms of communication, and interpreters in the Soviet Union were often called upon to carry out tasks that went beyond merely interpreting. Interpreters were both advisers and spokespersons for the political leaders of the time, but in some situations, they were ignored or seen as translation machines (Sanchez, 2019, p.414). The roles given to Soviet interpreter-diplomats were therefore rather fluid, and the acknowledgement they received also fluctuated. This essay will analyse whether Palazhchenko’s close association with Soviet leaders provided him with any additional stability in terms of the interpreter-diplomat tasks he was expected to accomplish and the recognition he received.

3.2.2. *Theatrical performance*

Beyond the tasks attributed to interpreter-diplomats, a key similarity between the two activities is performance. According to Sanchez, “Diplomacy is about meeting and dealing with the Other, although the identity of diplomats is related to being the Other and staging it” (2019, p.401). As an activity, it shares a lot of features with theatrical representation and performance (Sanchez, 2019, p.400). A similar dynamic seems to apply to interpreting. Sukhodrev, for instance, “was the visible spokesperson of Soviet ideology and played this role for many years” (Sanchez, 2011, p.179). As we saw earlier, Sukhodrev did not always believe in what he was interpreting but played the role of spokesperson faithfully all the same. Palazhchenko, however, has repeatedly stated that he “believed in what Gorbachev was doing” (RT, 2011, 09:35). This essay will examine to what extent Palazhchenko perceived his work as a performance, both as an interpreter and as a diplomat. I will analyse whether the fact that Palazhchenko supports and

¹ His self-ascribed job description is in fact even broader, because the Russian word *perevodchik* means both interpreter and translator.

identifies with the work being done give him additional agency compared to Sukhodrev, given that he is working for a cause that he believes in.

3.2.3. Ambiguousness of identity

One of the things that have historically allowed both interpreters and diplomats to work at the crossroads of different cultures and countries is the ambiguousness of their identity. Sukhodrev, for instance, grew up in the United Kingdom and then went on to work in the USSR. He was famously able to adapt his English accent depending on whether he was speaking to British or American representatives (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2014, 11:45). In this, he is perhaps similar to the dragomans studied by Nathalie Rothman. Working between the Venetian and Ottoman empires, “their ambiguous identity (...) places them at the intersection of political and ethno-linguistic boundaries” (Rothman, 2015, p.218). This in-between state can have both positive and negative outcomes. Gustave Hilger, who worked at the German Embassy in Moscow until the outbreak of the war against the Soviet Union in 1941, “sometimes felt himself torn between the Russian and German cultures” (Salevsky, 2014, p.266). This also had repercussions on the attitude of his superiors towards him. Herwath, quoted in Salevsky (2014, p.267), writes that “Hitler expressed himself disparagingly about this russified German of whom one could not know which side he was on”. This essay will seek to examine whether Palazhchenko can also be said to have an ambiguous identity that contributes to his work as an interpreter-diplomat, whether he considers this as generally positive or negative, and whether this had any influence on his relationship with Soviet leaders.

3.2.4. Media image and attention

The Cold War, its particular dynamics, and the way it was reported on also led to important changes in the perception of the interpreter-diplomat’s role. According to Baer (2014), the pressures of the Cold War era exposed the need for the interpreter to assume a role with far greater agency and to become a diplomat as well as a linguist. This double load may seem like a burden, but it also brought with it increased recognition in the new, image-driven media environment.

With the increasing visibility of interpreting in the media (...) highly qualified diplomatic interpreters were also seen more positively, as hybrid characters skilled in diplomacy and language, able to improve the image of diplomats, and justified in publishing personal memoirs (...) the interpreter gained prominence in public reception of the news and took up a new position in history as a figure directly involved in newsworthy events (Fernandez-Ocampo & Wolf, 2014, pp.11-12)

Palazhchenko's contribution to Gorbachev's media image has been acknowledged in academic literature (Wadensio, 2008). He interpreted for Gorbachev not only at high-level negotiations, but also for interviews, talk shows and speeches broadcast abroad. This essay will analyse how Palazhchenko greeted the increased media attention focused on himself, and what this additional media attention tells us about Palazhchenko's contribution to history.

3.3. *Memoirs and History*

3.3.1. Increasing visibility

Why do interpreters write memoirs? Andrei Rogatchevski (2019) puts it down to an attempt to reclaim visibility. Having been subject to the whims of their clients throughout their career, they are able to "provide us with an eyewitness account (...) as a coping mechanism in the form of an exercise in increasing their visibility" (2019, p.460). This is consistent with the view that the interpreters have tended to be omitted from history books due to the evanescence of the spoken word (Bowen et al, 2012, p.247). According to this view, the written word becomes a belated form of compensation for agency that was yielded during the interpreter's career. As a result, it is logical to assume that interpreters would use their memoirs to voice disagreements or suggestions that they were unable to express at the time of the events. Rogatchevski (2019) gives a number of examples of this, including those of Sukhodrev and Dollman, Mussolini's interpreter. This essay will analyse to what extent this applies to Palazhchenko, and whether his close relationship with Gorbachev tempered his willingness to make post-factum suggestions, or even allowed him to make these suggestions at the time.

3.3.2. Eyewitness accounts as history-writing

However, reclaiming a voice is not the only reason that interpreters might want to publish their memoirs. As Rogatchevski rightly states in his conclusion, they are also interested in "influencing the events post-factum by supplementing the public record with their own version of history" (2019, p.460). The place of memoirs, and more specifically interpreter memoirs in our appraisal of history has been the subject of academic research, and recently autobiographical works have taken up an important place in what is known as "unconventional history". In fact, "critical literature has recently analysed autobiography as a hybrid genre between history and literature" (Aurell, 2006, p.434). It is important to bear in mind the distinction between memoirs and autobiography, namely that "memoir is distinct from autobiography in that it characteristically involves inserting an individual life story into a larger

context of public or historic consequences”, whereas autobiography is an approach more focused on the development of the self (Lahusen, 2019). However, Aurell’s (2006) analysis of autobiography as unconventional history appears just as relevant, if not more relevant, to memoirs such as Palazhchenko’s, due to their engagement with historical events. He writes that “these texts are liberatory enactments of personal stories that they formulate as legitimate history – certainly unconventional from the point of view of traditional history, but valid nonetheless” (2006, p.444). He goes on to use Derrida’s claim that “Il n’y a pas de hors-texte” (“there is no outside-the-text”), the idea that all of reality and history is influenced by discourse, to assert that “the author who controls the historical text simultaneously heightens his or her agency. The more control the historian exerts on the narrative, the more his or her authority, paradoxically, augments” (2006, p.447). This is no longer just about the memoir-writing interpreter reclaiming agency from his client. This is about the interpreter claiming authority over the historical account of the events he took part in. The intention behind memoir-writing must be analysed. Paul Otto Schmidt, Chief Interpreter of the German Foreign Office from 1924 to 1945, wrote his memoirs because he felt the surviving bare records conveyed an incomplete and partly misleading impression (Salevsky, 2014, p.275). The will to set the record straight, to contribute to the historical understanding of past events, is clear. This essay will analyse to what extent Palazhchenko perceives his memoirs as a form of history-writing, and to what ends he uses his authority as an eyewitness, a close acquaintance of Gorbachev, and a memoir-writer.

3.3.3. *Interpreter’s emotions*

The memoirs of interpreters also serve as a repository of emotions. Sanchez writes that “in their personal accounts, interpreters reflect on the concerns and frustrations of their personal activity which help to enlarge our view of the issue of agency in instrumental and historical terms” (2019, p.414). This point can of course be enlarged to encompass more emotions than merely joy and frustration. Pleasure, curiosity, and conviction, among other emotions, are bound to play an important role. In her article on the interpreter-double agent Gottlieb Fuchs, who acted in the interests of the Resistance while interpreting for Nazi Germany, Ruiz Rosendo writes that “the study of ideology and emotions, inextricably linked to temporal and spatial considerations, should be taken into account to enrich our understanding of the interpreter’s agency in wartime” (2019a, p.59). These emotions, according to Ruiz Rosendo, arise from both internal and external factors. She writes that Fuchs’ actions were on the one hand dictated by his own morality, that his “decisions were influenced by considerations of what was morally

acceptable or not, and by a conception of what was right or wrong” (2019, p.59). At the same time, “emotions are very often associated with ideology in wartime”, and individuals involved in conflict tend to associate their emotions with the group they feel they belong to (2019, p.61). Of course, as Ruiz Rosendo points out, internal morality and exterior narratives are intertwined as sources of emotions and decisions, they transform each other, but the dichotomy will be useful as a starting point to study the source of Palazhchenko’s emotions and the decisions he makes. Ruiz Rosendo goes on to write that “Fuchs constitutes, in terms of Costalli and Ruggeri (2015) a ‘follower’: that is, a person who joins an ideological network created by the political entrepreneurs, the leaders of the Resistance” (2019a, p.66). The analogy between Fuchs and Palazhchenko will have to be tempered, because of the enormous difference between their respective historical contexts. According to many, the Cold War in fact came to an end during Palazhchenko’s time as Gorbachev’s interpreter during US-USSR negotiations, so it is even debatable whether he can be said to have interpreted in wartime, particularly given the unusual nature of the Cold War. However, this article will examine whether Palazhchenko can be said to be a political “follower” in the same way as Fuchs. I will analyse whether his actions and work were politically motivated, and whether his closeness with Soviet leaders influenced his emotions and the decisions they led him to take.

3.3.4. Emotions of those around as a driver of history

As well as providing an insight into the emotions of the interpreters themselves, the memoirs of interpreters can give an idea of the emotions and reactions of those around them. Although these are always filtered through the lens of the interpreter’s subjective perception, they do give a glimpse of what has often been noted as a blind spot of historical study – the “human factor”. Zubok and Pleshakov (1996, p.xii) write that the human factor “is the least understood and explained element of the Cold War”. Sukhodrev has also spoken about the importance of what he calls the “personal factor”. In his view, “the personal factor, or the personal relationship developed between two leaders, is crucial ‘at meetings where the stakes are so high, and at times when the very destiny of the world is likely to be affected’” (Bardos, 1990, p.1). The memoirs of interpreters give them the opportunity to publish their impressions of the “human factor”, the often-hidden personal aspects of international relations. This essay will analyse whether Palazhchenko’s close relationship with Soviet leaders gave him additional insight into the emotional processes that motivated the actions of those around him, and whether he perceives the human factor as an important driver of historical change.

3.3.5. Impact of the historical and political context on the written record

However, memoirs, including those of interpreters, should always be taken with a pinch of salt. As Heidemarie Salevsky (2014, p.255) writes, “the selective perceptions of individuals are shaped by their corporate and cultural memory”. She goes on to recall that biographical memory always rests on social interaction. It is therefore important to understand the social, political and cultural factors that may have influenced Palazhchenko’s writing, particularly given the closeness of his relationship with Gorbachev. Furthermore, the content of an interpreter’s memoirs may be influenced by the time of their writing. Valentin Berezkhov, Stalin’s interpreter, wrote three books of memoirs, published several decades apart. Based on her analysis of these books, Salevsky writes that “the relationship of the memoirs with the time of their publication and their dependence on social structures and the author’s personal life history is especially clear” (2014, p.272). Similarly, the fickleness of memory, and reality itself, means that memoirs cannot be blindly accepted “reflections of actual events” (2014, p.277). In fact, reading memoirs by different interpreters present at the same event may reveal two contradictory accounts. For instance, Erich Franz Sommer, the interpreter from the German side, “contradicts Berezkhov’s report with respect to Ribbentrop” (2014, p.273), namely that Ribbentrop had claimed that he sought to talk Hitler out of the invasion of Russia. Sometimes these contradictions will be unhelpful, but at other times, when they are less polarised, they make help to give a more rounded impression of a historical event. As a result, “personal memoirs must be critically examined, and official documents no less so” (2014, p.276). This essay will seek to bear this in mind throughout and will examine more specifically the social and political factors, both at the time of the events and at the time of the book’s publication in 2020, that may have guided Palazhchenko in the writing of his memoirs.

4. Methodology

My method in writing this essay had several steps. I began by reading existing academic articles and secondary sources addressing the role of interpreters in history, the study of individual interpreters, and the memoirs of interpreters, with particular focus on the Soviet Union. This gave me a broad idea of the recurrent topics and the main lines of study.

Following this, my main primary source was Pavel Palazhchenko's most recent memoirs *Profession and Time: The notes of an interpreter-diplomat* (2020). I read the book paying particular attention to Palazhchenko's reflections on his own role as an interpreter, while noting down the role he had to play in significant historical events. As I read through the book, my understanding of the way Palazhchenko could fit into the lines of research I had read about evolved, which helped me to establish the basis of a theoretical framework that would be relevant to him. Upon finishing the book, I returned to the secondary sources, analysing them more thoroughly, in order to write up a viable theoretical framework.

As I read the book, it also came as a surprise that Palazhchenko's memoirs were very much focused on his life leading up to 1991 and contained only very brief allusions to the decades since, which I had not expected as I was doing my initial exploratory research. This had two consequences. Firstly, I decided to narrow the historical scope of my essay, focusing primarily, but not solely, on the years 1985-1991. I studied history books and articles describing the Gorbachev years (1985-1991), to gain a better understanding of the political and historical environment Palazhchenko was working in, and to write up the historical context for my essay. Secondly, I turned to a number of other primary sources, in particular online video and print interviews given by Palazhchenko to various media outlets in recent years, as well as Palazhchenko's own Facebook blog. These became highly valuable sources on the years from 1991 onwards, and I decided to treat them on a par with the memoirs. Some of these were in-depth pieces of journalism, lasting up to three hours. A number of interviews were in fact published during the writing of this essay, which pushed me to check my analysis against new material. I was also able to find several recordings of Palazhchenko interpreting Gorbachev over the decades. I analysed these to observe the evolving nature of his role over time. I also turned to the last few years of Palazhchenko's popular Facebook blog, which constituted the initial trigger for him writing the book and is a precious source of subjective reflexion on his part.

In working through these various sources, I noted down quotes and passages that seemed most relevant to my research question. Once I had established a theoretical framework that corresponded to the main themes apparent in the various primary sources, I was able to go back on these quotes and passages and categorise them in line with the theoretical approaches I had chosen. Writing the essay involved placing these quotes and passages within the theoretical categories I had chosen, and discussing the extent to which they confirmed, contradicted, or nuanced previous academic assumptions.

I hope that through this diverse array of primary sources and through their triangulation, I have been able to obtain a rounded view of Palazhchenko's role in the historical period 1985-1991, of the way his relationship with Gorbachev has evolved, and the way that Palazhchenko has presented himself in more recent public appearances.

By far the majority of these sources were in Russian and untranslated, and therefore difficult for an English-speaking audience to access. Translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

5. Findings

5.1. Power

5.1.1. *The five interactional powers*

5.1.1.1. *Semi-visibility*

The interpreter's semi-visibility arises from the uneasy collision of the ideal of an interpreter's invisibility with the reality of his physical presence. As described by Rogatchevski, semi-visibility can be understood as an interactional power, as the interpreter's presence influences proceedings. However, it can also lead to unpleasantness for the interpreter, for instance when his bodily needs, such as food, are forgotten, or when his presence is only acknowledged when he makes a mistake. Rogatchevski retells how Sukhodrev describes his interactions with Mikhail Gorbachev, underlining that Gorbachev pushed him further into invisibility: "for him, interpreters were furnishings of sorts, the same as tables, chairs and pencils" (Sukhodrev, 1999, p.423). Palazhchenko has no such complaints about Gorbachev's behaviour towards him, indicating perhaps that the relationship they formed over the years made Gorbachev himself more aware of the importance of interpreters. In fact, Palazhchenko tells us that at dinners, "[Gorbachev] always said 'this is my assistant, he must sit here, at the table'", both during Gorbachev's time at the head of the Soviet Union and after (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:42:40). This does not mean that Palazhchenko's needs were always attended to, however. He tells the story of how he joined Margaret Thatcher and Gorbachev in a Rolls-Royce, hit his head against the roof and bled from his forehead. He covered it up with a tissue and kept interpreting. When asked whether the two leaders felt sorry for him, he says "they had other

concerns” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:41:40). It seems that even if political leaders are aware of the presence and importance of the interpreter, during the task of interpreting itself, the priority is invisible conduit first, physical presence second.

However, outside of working hours, Palazhchenko’s presence was appreciated. Throughout his career as a diplomatic interpreter within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he had the chance to converse with high-ranking political figures on a personal basis, an early example being his opportunity to speak with General Lieutenant Nikolai Detinov at the beginning of the 80s (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.152). Much later, in the 2000s and after the end of both men’s careers at the highest level of diplomacy, George Bush Sr invites Palazhchenko and his family to his estate in Maine. Palazhchenko also mentions being invited to lunch by George Schultz, the former US Secretary of State (Sarkisov, 2022). Clearly, Palazhchenko’s value goes beyond his role merely as an interpreter, he is appreciated as a person and as a friend. Without his close relationship to Gorbachev, however, and the important role he played at successive top-level diplomatic negotiations, it is unlikely that he could have developed close relationships with these political figures. His active participation in social interaction is shown for instance by the joke he makes during a game of quoits in the course of Gorbachev’s 1990 US visit, to the amusement of Bush Sr (Palazhchenko, 2010, p.232). He replaces the President’s wayward quoit on the stick while no one is looking and then congratulates the President on his successful throw. In Palazhchenko’s case, therefore, semi-visibility has to be understood differently depending on the context. During the actual work of interpreting, his needs certainly did not come first, he was expected to do his job. But beyond that he was valued as an individual by a number of important historical figures.

One might even say that some of the tension related to semi-visibility dissolved as a result of Palazhchenko’s almost unwavering presence alongside Gorbachev. To some, he came to be directly associated with the Soviet leader. Palazhchenko recounts how Margaret Tutwiler, Spokesperson for the US Department of State, told him about watching Gorbachev’s speech on the 22nd of August 1991, after the failure of the August Coup, interpreted by Palazhchenko: “You cannot imagine how happy we were to see Gorbachev on the television and to hear your voice” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.320). For those in the English-speaking world who had worked with Gorbachev and had come to appreciate him, Palazhchenko’s voice was part of the way they saw Gorbachev and related to him. This is all the more remarkable for the fact that Palazhchenko was interpreting Gorbachev simultaneously, a mode that theoretically increases the interpreter’s invisibility. As a result, while the effect on tangible power relations and

decision-making remains to be seen, it can be argued that among those who worked with them directly, Gorbachev and Palazhchenko came to be perceived as a tandem. As far as interactional powers go, the increased visibility afforded to Palazhchenko through his association with Gorbachev enhanced his position as a respected and appreciated figure.

5.1.1.2. Co-interlocution

Co-interlocution is treated by Rogatchevski as the interpreter's choice to omit or soften some of the original, often in order to avoid unnecessary tension (Rogatchevski, p.449). However, co-interlocution can also be applied to minor tweaks made to the style of the original to ensure that it gets across more effectively. While it is important to distinguish translating from interpreting, it is interesting to refer to Palazhchenko's description of the over-literal stylistic tradition prevalent among translators in the Soviet Union, particularly at the TASS and Novosti news agencies, that was often mocked in English-language media, when it was not downright incomprehensible. Deviating from this tradition required a certain amount of "bravery". Fortunately, he writes, the "State standard" within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was determined by Viktor Sukhodrev, the long-standing and highly respected interpreter of Soviet leaders from Khrushchev onwards, whom young interpreters could call upon to defend stylistic improvements (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.61). This shows that in the Soviet tradition of written translation at least, personal initiative was required on the part of the translator to go against the grain to improve style and comprehensibility. This can be considered a form of co-interlocution.

However, Palazhchenko sets the limits of co-interlocution firmly, dedicating an entire page to rebutting claims that he was constantly "saving" Gorbachev from the Soviet leader's style. Here is what he writes:

Among their criticisms of Gorbachev were "linguistic" and "stylistic" arguments. And to this day, from time to time, they lash out (...) at the particularities of Gorbachev's southern Russian dialect, the misplaced stress in two or three words and so on (...) Sometimes this even takes the form of a "compliment" to the interpreter: say, Gorbachev is rambling on about something here, you can't work out a thing, but thank God, the interpreter is saving him. (...) Certainly, Gorbachev's manner of speaking cannot be called smooth (...) He was not concerned with style or grammar (...) But I can say this with absolute certainty: although in my interpretation his sentences acquired grammatical correctness and a certain stylistic touch, I never allowed myself to make anything up or to edit the content of what had been said. Unfortunately, at some point our intelligentsia decided it did not want to understand Gorbachev, and if it had wanted to, then the "incompatibility of form and content" would not have been an obstacle. Politics were key, not style. And it was not because Gorbachev's speeches

were well interpreted that our Western partners understood him. If there is no substance, no interpreter will help you out. Gorbachev had that substance. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p. 134-5)

Palazhchenko clearly states that the client's intentions come first, the interpreter's stylistic tinkering second. Nevertheless, applying grammatical correctness and a certain style was part of what he did as an interpreter. His voice, as we saw above, became a part of how Gorbachev was perceived abroad. It can be argued therefore that through co-interlocution and his long association with Gorbachev, Palazhchenko acquired additional agency at the level of style, if not of content.

Palazhchenko also addresses the issue of intonation in interpreting, saying:

You have to try and communicate intonation, but perhaps not to the same level. It would be strange if, for example, a speaker is making gestures or waving his hands about. If the interpreter does the same (...) it might start looking like puppet theatre. So (...) interpreting is closer to subtitling than to dubbing because the emotions of the speaker, the negotiator, or the head of delegation, are visible anyway. (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 24:44)

Once again, his vision of interpreting is that of a joint endeavour, where the interpreter supports the speaker. The overall impression to the listener arises from the combination of the visible speaker and the audible interpreter. To achieve this effect, the interpreter must maintain agency, they cannot be blindly copying every word and movement of the speaker, at the risk of tipping over into absurdity. Co-interlocution is a useful notion for understanding this dynamic: the speaker leads the way, they provide the substance, the intention, and the visible emotion. The interpreter accompanies them by producing speech that is equivalent and comprehensible, adding the equivalent, but dialled down, audible emotion.

5.1.1.3. Empowerment

Empowerment is the step beyond co-interlocution, where the interpreter has a direct impact on power relations by influencing speaking turns or by giving advice or providing additional information to either party. As Palazhchenko became a recognised figure in diplomatic circles, his opinion came to be sought quite regularly. The first time this happens it comes as a surprise to him. He recounts the aftermath of a meeting between Shevardnadze and Reagan during the 1986 spy scandal, a tense period in US-Soviet relations. The only people present during the meeting were Shevardnadze and Reagan, the American interpreter Dimitri Zarechniak and Palazhchenko himself. After the meeting, Shevardnadze invites Palazhchenko to the Soviet Embassy to join the Soviet Ambassador to the US Yuri Dubinin, as well as deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh and his two assistants.

At last, breaking the silence that hung heavy in the room, the ambassador asked:

“What was your impression, Eduard Ambrosevich?”

“Not very good,” Shevardnadze answered after a short pause and unexpectedly looked at me. “What do you think?”

I was surprised. My opinion, seemingly, should not have any weight. But if asked, you answer.

Rising from my seat, I said:

“I thought the meeting did not go too badly. Of course, Reagan repeated the official position on the spy affair, but he did not speak particularly harshly, and on other issues he was more constructive than might have been expected. And he did not reject the idea of meeting with Gorbachev.”

Perhaps the minister felt my assessment was a little embellished, but he did not object. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.115)

Although it is difficult to establish to what extent Palazhchenko’s opinion is taken on board, it is important to note that it was solicited. Clearly, his position as one of only four people who were present at this important meeting gives him an insider’s view. He also feels confident enough to disagree with Shevardnadze. The extent to which this might have impacted Shevardnadze’s views and influenced the course of foreign policy is impossible to establish. However, Shevardnadze seems to value Palazhchenko as a sounding board at the very least, and Palazhchenko exercises his agency to temper Shevardnadze’s more pessimistic impression of the meeting with Reagan. At a time where tensions could easily run high, this relatively optimistic opinion may have helped shape the worldview that was necessary to improve US-Soviet relations.

Later in Palazhchenko’s career, it becomes clear that his recollections and opinions are sought after not just because he happens to be around. In the autumn of 1990, Shevardnadze calls Palazhchenko to check what he remembers of a meeting with the American delegation in the lead-up to the discussion of Resolution 678 at the Security Council concerning the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

I was at home, the phone rang, I picked up. It was Shevardnadze. I think this was the first time he called me at home.

“We are sat here and are trying to re-establish the full picture: what happened after the 8th of November”, he said, “I asked the assistants to check the transcripts, but I want to ask you as well. Do you definitely remember that, according to the American proposal, there was to be a pause after the adoption of the resolution?”

I answered that this was exactly how I had understood Baker. He had not said that force could be used immediately after the adoption of the resolution.

(...)

“Very well, we’ll base ourselves on that”, said Shevardnadze. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.258)

Palazhchenko therefore plays a decisive role in establishing the record on which the Soviet leadership base their further actions. His memory is taken as an authoritative account of the conversations held with the American leadership, and his confirmation of the written record is actively sought out. This role as a repository of past conversations is a form of empowerment within the era's political context.

A similar story can be found in Palazhchenko's relationship with Gorbachev. After the signing of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty in December 1987, he recounts the following conversation:

“You know, Pavel, this is a great day. We were enemies for a long time. And a lot of harm came of that. We too made a lot of mistakes.”

This struck me, and well, I decided to ask him:

“Afghanistan?”

“We'll take a decision.”

I think that he had already decided then. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.146)

Once again, Palazhchenko does not seem to rate highly his own personal influence on decision-making processes. However, it is striking that he would have the confidence to introduce a new topic to a conversation with Gorbachev, particularly a topic as sensitive as the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, which had not yet been decided. As a result, Palazhchenko, in his position as regular interpreter and through his own agency and initiative, takes part in forming the discourse and the questions that surround Gorbachev during these historic years. While it cannot be said that he necessarily changed the course of history in this way, this can be described as a source of empowerment for the interpreter, who is able to introduce his own concerns into conversations with the leader he works for.

At a more practical level, Palazhchenko uses his position as interpreter and trusted advisor to influence the context in which leaders come to meet. Reagan's visit to Moscow in 1988 had been conducted on good terms. On the final evening, a visit to the ballet had been planned, followed by a dinner involving the Reagans and the Gorbachevs. However, Gorbachev was upset by the American security services request for additional security checks before the ballet. As a result, he considered cancelling the dinner.

Medvedev, the head of security, made his opinion heard:

“Let's cancel the dinner if they don't trust us. We've worked so hard to make sure the visit went well, and they...”

Gorbachev looked at me. Raisa [Gorbachev's wife] asked:

“What do you think?”

“Honestly”, I answered, “If we can avoid cancelling the dinner, then it would be better not to cancel it. The visit has gone well, it would leave a bad taste” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.164)

The dinner went ahead as planned. Here, Palazhchenko is being called upon as a cultural and diplomatic expert, but also as a cool head at the end of a long and inevitably stressful visit from the US president. This is possible in part because of his close association not just with Gorbachev, but also with Gorbachev’s family. Indeed, Raisa Gorbacheva, Gorbachev’s wife, is the one who turns to Palazhchenko for advice. This is a clear indicator of Palazhchenko’s empowerment in terms of ensuring that good manners are observed, and mediating, at the logistical level, the relationship between two leaders.

5.1.1.4. Non-neutrality

Non-neutrality arises from the interpreter’s inner disagreement or alignment with what he is in charge of interpreting. However, the diplomatic interpreter’s duty of neutrality is so strong that this rarely leads to changes in his behaviour (Rogatchevski, 2019, p.453). Throughout his latest memoirs, Palazhchenko gives his personal impressions about the historical events that he was party to during his time as an interpreter. Furthermore, he has mentioned in interviews that by 1989-90, he was able to discuss opinions relatively freely with high-ranking members of the diplomatic service: “By 1989, 1990, I had already worked a couple of years in the Department for the United States and Canada, I was having reasonably frank conversations with Shevardnadze and various deputies, but not with Gorbachev.” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:31:00). As discussed above, Shevardnadze occasionally sought Palazhchenko’s advice or opinion. In fact, this went beyond merely checking his recollection of talks. In 1989, Shevardnadze confides in Palazhchenko his fear of the nationalist movements such as “Pamiat” gaining ground across the country. Palazhchenko tells him this will not happen and gives the example of his own mother’s constituency, where a softer nationalist took part in elections and failed miserably (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.190). In his position as an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that is to say beyond his role as a pure interpreter, Palazhchenko was therefore able to express his own personal opinions, obviously influenced by what he witnessed during high-level talks as an interpreter, relatively freely within the hierarchy, although there remained, at that time, a certain distance between him and Gorbachev.

Nevertheless, unless expressly asked, Palazhchenko would often keep his opinion to himself. For instance, he disapproved of Shevardnadze’s words during a protest that took place during the August Coup. He writes:

Listening to [Shevardnadze], I inwardly disagreed with him but, as was the case many times before and after, I thought about the fact that politicians are living people, with their human imperfections and flaws, that one needs to forgive them. But they themselves do not always forgive them in one another. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.319)

This is an opinion that he has repeated in interviews, stating that although taking the initiative during high-level talks as the interpreter was not formally forbidden, it was not something he had ever considered, given the fact that he believed that “they know what they are doing” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:30:30). Whatever his thoughts on a particular situation, and he mentions particular frustration at the repeated collapse of the INF treaty talks because of both leaders’ fixation on the US’s Strategic Defence Initiative (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.136), he never believed that it was his place to voice them during his time as interpreter of high-level talks in the period 1985 to 1991.

During the act of interpreting, however, maintaining a front of neutrality is not only an ethical, but a purely practical requirement.

I have often been asked whether an interpreter has his own opinion about what he is interpreting, and whether there were occasions where I disagreed with what Gorbachev was saying. Generally speaking, in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, the “subjective factor” should not be present, you simply cannot afford to be distracted. But, of course, sometimes value judgements and emotions crop up in your head. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.135)

These value judgements and emotions can be both positive and negative, sometimes both during the course of a single press-conference, such as that given by Gorbachev on the 22nd of August 1991, following the failure of the August Coup:

I was of course glad to be sitting in the simultaneous interpreting booth and interpreting Gorbachev, alive and healthy (...) But his words about hoping, as before, to reform the CPSU, sounded completely dissonant with the feelings that prevailed at the time. This path will cost him dearly, I thought, of course trying “not to get distracted from the text”. It has not happened often during my work, but this time, alongside the interpretation, the most unpleasant thoughts began to enter my mind. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.320)

This complex emotional relation to ongoing events around Gorbachev is a consequence of Palazhchenko’s close relationship with him. He feels emotionally connected to Gorbachev’s person, while having a deep understanding of the political dynamics at work. In this case, his non-neutrality risks hampering the quality of his interpretation, and he is forced to battle against it. In other cases, his non-neutrality, and his alignment with Gorbachev, is a helping factor. He states for example that: “my work was not difficult, because I supported Perestroika, I supported the new foreign policy, from the inside, with all my soul” (Biblio TV, 2021, 09:00).

Non-neutrality, therefore, can be both a help and a hindrance to the interpreting process. Palazhchenko's non-neutrality, due to his close emotional connection with Gorbachev and his platform, was particularly strong. If at times he was forced to battle against negative thoughts while interpreting, it also played a role in making his job easier.

In later years, Palazhchenko was able to share his opinion more widely. His position within the Gorbachev Fund allows him to do so, and therefore the issue of non-neutrality withers away somewhat. Gorbachev actively turns to him for his opinions and advice (Sarkisov, 2022). He is also able to draw on his experience from his years at the highest level of politics to give his opinion on current events:

I do not consider myself an expert in the sphere of political research, although I do have a certain level of expertise (...) Through the Gorbachev Fund, I periodically present my thoughts and ideas in spoken and written form, I take part in preparing reports. Furthermore, I present my thoughts quite frankly to Gorbachev in written form. (Sarkisov, 2022)

Working at the Gorbachev Fund, he has more freedom to express his opinion, and he is closer to Gorbachev. In electing to work at the Gorbachev Fund, Palazhchenko has chosen a position where he can both be aligned with what he interprets and express his opinion if he disagrees. Although he is further from the centre of political power, his agency as an interpreter and an individual is enhanced.

5.1.1.5. Positioning

Another interactional power that characterises the interpreter's role is positioning, essentially the physical space they take up, where they are placed by others or where they choose to stand, and to be distinguished from positionality, the way that an interpreter's perception is shaped by their belonging or otherwise to certain groups (Ruiz Rosendo, 2019b). Like other interpreters before him (Rogatchevski, 2019, p.456), Palazhchenko's positioning is not always enviable. He mentions, for instance, getting completely soaked at a closing ceremony because no one was holding an umbrella for him (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.145). In another example, he says that while he was working, he had to avoid drinking too much, to reduce the need to go to the toilet when he was needed by the leaders' side (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:44:30). There were also occasionally times where he went hungry as an interpreter because he did not have a seat around the table, although generally Gorbachev, most of the time as leader of the Soviet Union and systematically afterwards, would request a seat for Palazhchenko (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:42:40). It is clear that with time, the importance of Palazhchenko's positioning as the interpreter became clear to Gorbachev.

One of the biggest changes, in terms of the interpreter's positioning, made during Palazhchenko's career was the switch to simultaneous interpreting during high-level negotiations, which coincided with Palazhchenko's move from the UN in New York to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Tête-à-tête" meetings between State officials, however, maintained consecutive interpreting as the norm. Here is what he says about the switch, which was trialled at Helsinki in 1985, Shevardnadze's first Soviet-US negotiations as Minister of Foreign Affairs:

And then came Shultz's proposal to conduct the part of the negotiations where the entire delegations were present with simultaneous interpreting. The main argument was to save time (...) Kornienko, the senior deputy minister and an extremely authoritative and conservative individual, was against. He said it was easier to control interpreters with consecutive interpreting. But the recently appointed assistant to the Minister Sergei Tarasenko convinced Shevardnadze that there was absolutely no risk, that the interpreters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were good. Additionally, Shultz said: let's give it a try, if it doesn't work, then we'll give up on it. But the opponents of simultaneous interpreting probably had another unsaid argument: Shevardnadze was inexperienced in international affairs, he might not have his bearings on a particular topic, perhaps there wouldn't be time to formulate the correct reaction. The decision to agree with Shultz's proposal was taken literally at the last moment. And that's how I ended up in Helsinki. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.92)

Although it might seem that simultaneous interpreting, in rendering the interpreter less visible and confining him to the periphery of the meeting, would weaken the interpreter's agency, it is clear that in fact the move to simultaneous interpreting was possible precisely because interpreters and the quality of their work were trusted, and they did not need to be overly controlled. Furthermore, interpreters such as Palazhchenko very clearly passed this test of trust, given that simultaneous interpreting at bilateral negotiations then became the norm (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.92).

One peculiarity of Palazhchenko's positioning as a result of his unwavering presence over a long period was the fact that he often just happened to be around. This led to situations where his interpreting skills were useful to Soviet leaders in circumstances far removed from official negotiations. In September 1988, Shevardnadze and Palazhchenko were in the US during the presidential campaign.

Shevardnadze was interested in the [electoral] process itself, and he even asked me to interpret the candidates' debates that were being shown on television. The conditions to do so were unsuitable as it was impossible to set up genuine simultaneous interpreting. We could not even find a headset for the television, but I did what I could, and I was able to explain some things as it went along. Shevardnadze listened attentively. After that, he had meetings with both candidates. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.167)

The fact that Palazhchenko is a permanent and trusted member of the delegation is valuable here, and he can be called upon to perform interpreting tasks outside of conventional meetings. Thanks to him, Shevardnadze is better prepared for his upcoming meeting with the two presidential candidates. The physical positioning of the interpreter, therefore, does not systematically lead to awkward situations or needing to cater for an additional person. The fact that he is a physical person who spends time around the delegation means that he can provide precious assistance in unexpected situations.

Finally, it is interesting to analyse how Gorbachev and Palazhchenko deal with the issue of positioning in their more recent appearances as representatives of the Gorbachev Fund, after the end of Gorbachev's time as Soviet leader. Some interviews are conventionally conducted with only Gorbachev in shot and Palazhchenko's voice audible in simultaneous, as in 2005 (The Agenda with Steve Paikin, 2021). There are also speeches, from 1992 for example, that are given by Gorbachev with Palazhchenko interpreting consecutively, phrase by phrase, from the back of the stage, as would have been done during official visits during Gorbachev's time as Soviet leader (Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, 2021). But one set-up is quite striking, and it seems as though it may have been used with more regularity as time went on, particularly during Gorbachev's 2011 visit to the United States. In the recordings of Gorbachev's Q&As at the LBJ Presidential Library and at the University of Wyoming in 2011, Palazhchenko sits right next to Gorbachev (Wyoming videos, 2011; TheLBJLibrary, 2017). He interprets Gorbachev simultaneously, with his microphone turned up louder than Gorbachev's. However, he has no headset, and he is effectively engaged in a kind of chuchotage to the entire audience. This is likely to be a challenging set-up for an interpreter, but Gorbachev takes Palazhchenko into account when speaking, slowing down his speech or inserting a pause when it seems Palazhchenko needs to catch up. The two seem united in the act of communicating with the audience. This form of interpreting allies the immediacy of simultaneous interpreting with a simpler technical set-up, as the whole audience does not need to be provided with headsets. However, it also requires trust between the speaker and the interpreter, as the speaker's voice is drowned out at times, while the speaker has to accommodate for the interpreter catching up from time to time. It also makes the interpreter more visible, as he takes centre stage with the speaker. This is trust that Palazhchenko has earned through decades of working alongside Gorbachev. By this stage, they seem to position themselves as equals, working in tandem during acts of communication with an English-speaking audience.

5.1.2. *Professional and collegial identity*

The interpreter's professional identity and, this essay will argue, the collegial identity between interpreters, help to stabilise power relations between participants of an interpreted discussion. Palazhchenko himself is aware of the professional nature of the role he is expected to play, of the promise, as Bahadir (2010) puts it, made to represent the interpreted person correctly, while remaining critical of one's own performance. Palazhchenko makes the distinction between knowing English well and performing the professional role of an interpreter. In answer to a question on whether he was the best expert on the English language in the Soviet Union, he answers: "I don't think I was (...) but I was suited to the task [of interpreting]" (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 04:00). On the importance of the notes that he took during discussions between world leaders, particularly when he was, as happened at times, the only person taking notes, he is asked: "Did you understand how much depended on your word, one way or another, that there was so much on the table? – Well, it is a professional task" (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:02:40). Note-taking is different from interpreting, but it remains an act in properly representing the participants of the discussion. Accurate notetaking is necessary to ensure that there is a written record of oral discussions to which all parties can later refer to. By laying the basis for future discussions on an even ground of understanding, notetaking plays an important role in stabilising and ensuring continuity in power relations. Finally, Palazhchenko was also aware of the importance of being critical in regard to his own performance and ensuring that it is done well. In answer to the question of whether he ever made a mistake, he is a little more modest than Sukhodrev, saying: "There was never a mistake that was not corrected" (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:30:00). His attitude to his own interpreting is therefore dynamic and critical, which allows him to ensure that he is fulfilling his professional tasks. For Palazhchenko therefore, his professional identity is that of a professional interpreter, distinct from the role of language expert. It is an identity that also requires awareness of what is at stake, and a critical attitude towards one's own work. By being a "participatory and active" third participant (Bahadir, 2010, p.135), Palazhchenko corresponds to the Derridean professional identity described by Bahadir, according to which the interpreter's critical approach to their own role involves them being aware of their own presence and function in mediating communication and allows them to best represent the participants, stabilising the social group and power relations at work during an interpreted conversation.

The other stabilising factor present during high-level discussions is that of collegial identity, the presence of several interpreters, as well as the participants' own relationship of trust with

interpreters. Palazhchenko regularly refers to interpreters as a group, saying for instance that Gorbachev “was able to develop relations with our profession” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:43:00), while his “colleagues have warm and dignified memories of working with Gorbachev” (Biblio TV, 2021, 16:00). He also explicitly refers to Dmitri Zarechniak, the American interpreter who was present at many of the same high-level talks as Palazhchenko, as his “colleague” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.115). He praises the prevailing behaviour within the interpreting community: “relations within the interpreting community, as a rule, are positive, good-natured, which is unusual for many professional communities. Indeed, we all know (...) that nobody’s work is perfect” (Sarkisov, 2022). Interpreters are connected by a shared and conscious vulnerability to imperfection. At the same time, interpreters, within some environments, also recognise their own importance. When Palazhchenko begins working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1979, his boss tells him:

“Remember, we are the only real specialists here. The others are replaceable. Anyone can write and talk, but we are the only ones who can translate well.”

And he also gave me some advice:

“Soon you will start going to talks with deputy ministers. Remember, ambassadors, heads of department will ask you afterwards what happened. Do not say anything. It is not from you that they should find out.”

(Palazhchenko, 2020, p.57)

In fact, according to Palazhchenko, confidentiality binds the interpreting profession and shapes collegial identity. Sometimes this is not recognised outside of the profession. Palazhchenko recounts, for instance, how Bush Sr occasionally conducted talks with Palazhchenko as the only interpreter present. This was done with the stated aim of ensuring there would be no leaks, which tended to come from the American side. However, Palazhchenko makes the point that this was a symbolic gesture of good will and that as far he knows, interpreters had never been at the origin of leaks. “Ours is a special corporation”, he says (Biblio TV, 2021, 13:20). Of course, leaks from high-level talks are very destabilising, and risk compromising the delicate power balances at work. The fact that interpreters such as Palazhchenko place such high emphasis on confidentiality and take pride in the collegial identity that ensures it demonstrates the role of collegial identity in stabilising power balances during high-level talks. At the same time, the fact that Bush Sr was willing to have Palazhchenko as the only interpreter present demonstrates the trust that Palazhchenko had acquired over his years working with Soviet and American leaders. As a result, it is clear that Palazhchenko came to play an important role in

the network of trust among interpreters and between interpreters and leaders that allowed for successful talks.

5.1.3. *Hierarchy*

In terms of hierarchy, interpreters have generally been seen as subordinates to the powerful clients that they serve, despite the theoretical or interactional powers they may have wielded. Palazhchenko seems to support this view, saying for instance: “I was not an adviser. I occupied a very small spot in the hierarchy” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 2:27:30). However, that is not to say that he was entirely submissive to instructions coming from above. In 1976, during his time working at the UN in New York, he was approached by an American acquaintance who invited Palazhchenko to meet “a very interesting person”, clearly from the secret services.

I did not answer. According to the instructions for Soviet citizens abroad, I was supposed to go running to the consulate to report on the “attempted approach”. This would have ended with me being sent home, and my entire life would have been changed in an instant. I was a law-abiding citizen and even ideologically driven to an extent, but I was not an idiot and did not report anything. And when this acquaintance repeated his offer a couple of weeks later, I said to him:

“Tell this interesting person, that I will be much more useful to my country and to yours if I do my work honestly.”

In the end, this turned out to indeed be the case. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.47)

This indicates a capacity to distinguish between respect towards superiors and self-destructive obedience. In 1985, Palazhchenko accompanied the Soviet delegation to the General Assembly in New York for the first time and was in charge of translating the speech to be delivered by Shevardnadze. His team had some trouble with the term *кликушество*, which they decided to translate with the word “hysterics”. However, an assistant felt that was not quite right and checked with Kornienko, the senior deputy to the minister, the main authority on American affairs, who said that the word to use was “necromancy”. Palazhchenko and his colleagues knew that this was wrong but did not know what to do and struggled with the issue for a long time.

And somehow it turned out that in the “unofficial translation” published the next morning, the initial choice of words was kept. Well, somehow is not the right word – taking a deep breath, I took this upon myself, without asking for any more advice. Perhaps, I hoped, no one would pay attention. And that’s in fact what happened. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.97)

Clearly, the rules of hierarchy weighed heavy on Palazhchenko’s mind, and he did not take the decision to bypass them lightly. However, in this situation, his duty to produce a good translation and to avoid using a word that was absurd in the context came first.

With time, of course, Palazhchenko himself became an authority on interpreting and translating. Hierarchy was more likely to have an effect on how he spent his time as an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rather than on what exact words he chose in his interpretations and translations. However, at times, his position as the principal interpreter of high-level meetings did in fact allow him to circumvent the advice of his superiors. In August 1990, there was tension in Soviet-US relations due to divergent positions on Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. However, after another round of negotiations, Palazhchenko feels that he is in need of a holiday, and plans to travel to Czechoslovakia. His superior, Georgii Mamedov, asks him whether this is really the best time to leave, when the Americans might begin bombing Iraq at any moment and Palazhchenko could be called upon to interpret at short notice. Palazhchenko answers that Baker denies those rumours and is planning to go on holiday too, which he knows because Shevardnadze and Baker exchanged holiday plans during the last round of talks (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.244). Thanks to his privileged position as the interpreter of these high-level talks, Palazhchenko is an insider to information that he would otherwise not have access to. This information allows him to better plan his personal life, but also evade the disapproval of his hierarchical superior. His position as interpreter increases his agency vis-à-vis his hierarchy.

Finally, Palazhchenko's close association with his ultimate hierarchical superiors, Shevardnadze and Gorbachev, has an important impact on his own career progression. During Gorbachev's visit to the US in 1990, he offers Palazhchenko a position in his soon-to-be-formed presidential administration. Palazhchenko does not give him an immediate answer as he is unsure whether he wants to leave the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Gorbachev gives him time to think about it. In December that year, however, Shevardnadze's shock resignation and the rift that appears between him and Gorbachev puts Palazhchenko in a difficult situation. He asks for a meeting with Shevardnadze to discuss his personal situation, which Shevardnadze grants him. Palazhchenko transcribes a large part of this conversation in his book. He is torn between four options. The first is staying at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but, he tells Shevardnadze, "I struggle to see myself at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs without you. It is a hierarchical organisation, with all the consequences that has". The other options are asking to be sent to work abroad, leaving the Ministry of Affairs completely for something else, or starting work within the new presidential administration (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.267). As his comment about the nature of the Ministry shows, Palazhchenko has managed to develop a privileged position within the current hierarchy and is uncomfortable about having to work for

someone else. In fact, his final decision is to go work with Gorbachev within the presidential administration. Although it cannot be said that Palazhchenko entirely subverts the hierarchies in place, his position as interpreter by the side of both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev has given him the privileged opportunity to choose the hierarchy he will work for at this period in time, and to be able to seek advice from his superiors about his personal situation. His close association with these Soviet leaders and the trust he has acquired from them mean that although he does not overturn hierarchical decision making in terms of policy, he is able to exercise his agency to choose the hierarchical structure he will work for at a time where rapid political change is happening in the Soviet Union.

5.1.4. Constraints

It is worth studying in a little more detail the structures within which Palazhchenko worked, the constraints, in terms of expressing personal views and implementing them, these structures imposed on him, and whether or not his unique position allowed him to circumvent them. I will focus on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The constraints imposed on Palazhchenko, as an interpreter, in terms of expressing a personal opinion, are understood by his colleagues at the Ministry. After the 1985 Geneva summit, he recounts the heated discussions that took place between careful optimists and eternal pessimists. His opinion, however, was not overly sought as everyone seemed to understand he had to “keep within certain bounds” (p.111). While this is useful in ensuring that Palazhchenko does not say more he should, it also limits his chances to share opinions with colleagues at the Ministry, which could potentially influence the way they work. However, as Palazhchenko himself makes clear, his principal role as a diplomat and an interpreter was not to try and have his own point of view implemented:

I was an employee at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is by definition a diplomat. A diplomat defends the position of their country. A diplomat can seek to influence this position, but this is a possibility that few of them have. Those who have this possibility are the high-ranking diplomats and sometimes their subordinates because sub-departments of the Ministry work on, elaborate various positions, agree on positions (...) various documents are written, these can sometimes influence the State's position, or the position of its leaders. But that is not the main task of diplomats, including interpreters. Their main task is to explain, to clarify these positions. (Biblio TV, 2021, 03:00)

The nature of Palazhchenko's role at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs therefore usually meant that he could not impact policy.

However, having entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanks to his interpreting and translating skills, Palazhchenko was then able to climb the echelons of the diplomatic ladder.

By 1990, on top of being the principal interpreter for English, he had acquired a relatively senior diplomatic role within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had the chance to contribute to writing key documents. For instance, in 1990, Baker presented to Shevardnadze his idea for a draft resolution to be presented to the UN Security Council on intervening in Iraq. Shevardnadze was not particularly favourable to the idea, but Palazhchenko believed it was a good sign that the US was seeking to act with the legal support of the UN and said as much. Gorbachev also believed the resolution was a good idea, and so the Ministry began work on a note with suggestions and recommendations concerning the draft resolution to be sent to the US Administration. Palazhchenko was part of the team that worked on this document, and although one of his suggestions for an opening line was struck down by his superiors as overly positive, his recollections of the discussions held by Baker with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were repeatedly sought. He also played an active role in the discussion that led to the suggestion of a “pause of goodwill” being introduced to the draft resolution, a pause that would give Saddam Hussein a window to react constructively to the Security Council resolution if adopted (Palazhchenko, 2020, pp. 253-55). In 1991, shortly after the August Coup, Palazhchenko recognises a paragraph in Gorbachev’s upcoming speech to the Congress of People’s Deputies as his own work. He had sent a note arguing that Gorbachev should support the republics’ application to become members of the United Nations, while maintaining the Soviet Union as a permanent member of the Security Council, and this was used in the speech text (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.323).

It would be an overstatement to suggest that Palazhchenko defined Soviet State policy or guided Gorbachev’s decisions at any point. However, he was involved in crucial discussions that led to the elaboration of policy, and his unique position as the interpreter at key meetings meant that he often had useful contributions to make. Although it cannot be said that he circumvented the constraints imposed on a diplomat, he came to have influence that was small but not negligible within decision-making circles thanks to his position as interpreter and the long time he spent at the Ministry.

5.1.5. Responsibility

With power comes responsibility, and that is in fact the first thing that comes to Palazhchenko’s mind when, in May 1985, he is first called up to interpret for Gorbachev during Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to the USSR:

Interpreting at the highest level is a particular kind of responsibility (...) I immediately assumed that the way my “debut” went would decide whether I would “work visits” in the future. It would be insincere to say that I was indifferent to this. (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.86)

Alongside the obvious responsibility of interpreting for leaders, Palazhchenko feels responsibility towards himself and towards his own future career. Part of this responsibility involves preparation, which he sees as crucial in providing good-quality work:

Interpreters, to an extent, can be compared to goalkeepers, because it’s a big responsibility (...) If an interpreter does not prepare sufficiently for work, for negotiations, or allows himself to relax, then even for the most capable people things can end with a goal at the back of their own net and a broken career. There are examples of this happening. (Sarkisov, 2022)

He is also aware of the responsibility that comes with taking notes at high-level meetings, notes that are then used by politicians and historians, and insists that being conscious of this responsibility is crucial to making sure you approach the task sufficiently seriously (Biblio TV, 2022, 24:00). Similarly, interpreting press-conferences organised around high-level negotiations, is a huge responsibility that Palazhchenko was aware of, knowing that millions of people were listening to his interpretation. He states that this was as big a responsibility as interpreting at the negotiations themselves (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:52:45).

However, perhaps more interesting is the responsibility that Palazhchenko is thankful he did not have. When asked about taking the initiative during negotiations, he states that this is something he never considered doing, as he was working with people who were “pre-destined for power and responsibility” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:30:20). Similarly, he says “Director of the 12th Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Defence [in charge of the nuclear arsenal] – now that’s a colossal responsibility” (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:00:00). The responsibility of an interpreter, even at the highest and most public level, was one that Palazhchenko was ready and suited to shoulder, whereas the responsibility of chief decision-maker was not one he sought. This brings us back to the idea of professional identity analysed by Bahadir. Interpreting is about taking responsibility for a promise that cannot be kept, that of seamless communication, hence the need for a critical professional identity that takes this into account. However, the interpreter’s professional identity, as Palazhchenko shows, must also involve critically understanding the extent of responsibility one is willing to shoulder. Palazhchenko is fully aware of responsibility when it befalls him, and uses this to do the best job possible, but is also aware of forms of responsibility that he does not wish and does not feel suited to take on.

5.2. *Diplomacy*

5.2.1. *Fluidity of tasks and recognition*

Diplomacy requires an array of communication tasks, and interpreters are often well-suited to fulfil many of them. As a result, the tasks they are expected to take on within diplomatic structures can be quite fluid, as is the recognition they may receive. As we have already seen, Palazhchenko, on top of interpreting, was often put in charge of notetaking, translating and even document writing. His specific skills meant that he would sometimes be called upon to accomplish tasks that were not originally his, such as the time in 1986 where he was called in the middle of the night to check the translation of a Gorbachev speech (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.111). Also in 1986, he has a holiday interrupted as he is called back to translate a letter that Gorbachev wishes to send to Reagan (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.113). On another occasion in 1987, in preparation for Gorbachev's visit to Washington, due to the fact that was now filling several positions in the Ministry's workflow system, Palazhchenko found himself translating the texts of speeches that he had written himself, after they had been approved by a different department (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.140).

However, within the rigid structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was expected to hold a specific position. In 1987 for instance, he was moved from the Department of Translation to the Bureau for the USA and Canada, becoming assistant director of the Department for Military and Political affairs. Nevertheless, Shevardnadze specifically asks for Palazhchenko to keep all his interpreting duties despite the transfer (HerzenLive, 2022, 12:30). In the summer of 1991, Palazhchenko is asked by Gorbachev's wife, Raisa Gorbacheva, to go to London to help the English translator of her book, David Floyd (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.295). By this time, Palazhchenko is working within the presidential administration, rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but this request clearly reaches beyond his usual duties, and demonstrates the affinity that had developed between Palazhchenko and Gorbachev's family. In December 1991, concerned by Gorbachev's fate, Palazhchenko contacts Baker, who then discusses Gorbachev's fate with Yeltsin (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.359). Palazhchenko is also in charge of organising, and of course interpreting, Gorbachev's final phone call as leader of the Soviet Union with Bush Sr, on the 25th of December 1991, two hours before Gorbachev's resignation speech (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.361-2). It seems therefore, that Palazhchenko's close relationship with both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev, as well as the fact that he was trusted to do his job well, did not ease his burden, but instead multiplied the number of tasks, as interpreter, translator,

and diplomat, that he was asked to perform. By the end, Palazhchenko was taking it upon himself to communicate with the Americans to try and protect Gorbachev. In this way, he put his diplomatic skills and contacts in the service of friendship.

Recognition for an interpreter can come in various forms. As we have just seen, recognition of a job well done by Palazhchenko often took the form of giving him yet more work to do. However, his long-lasting friendship with Gorbachev, and the fact that he was later invited by Bush Sr and Shultz on personal visits to the USA (Sarkisov, 2022) demonstrates that his work was recognised and appreciated by all parties to the negotiations he was involved in. At an official level, he was awarded an Order of the Badge of Honour in 1988 for his work on the INF Treaty (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.165). This is not the most prestigious award, but it is official recognition all the same. There were other perks, for instance being flown business class from New York to Geneva in 1985 (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 35:50). Interpreting at the highest-level also allowed Palazhchenko to rise more rapidly through the Ministry hierarchy, rising from assistant secretary to senior adviser in just seven years. His position in the Ministry hierarchy determined his salary, but it was never particularly high. During his time working there, he was so busy that he did not get round to officially moving out of his one-bedroom flat until 1991 (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:53:00). In fact, Palazhchenko states that the summit that brought him most satisfaction was Washington 1987, when the INF Treaty was signed, in part due to the personal connection he felt had developed between himself and Gorbachev as a result of the success of the negotiations (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 45:00). In 1991, Palazhchenko calls Shevardnadze on his birthday, and Shevardnadze thanks him for everything he did for him. He also uses the informal Russian “you” to address Palazhchenko for the first time (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.273). It seems that overall, his job as interpreter and diplomat was able to provide him personal recognition through the friendships he developed over the years.

5.2.2. *Theatrical performance*

Diplomacy and interpreting are both forms of performance, ways of representing the Other. As mentioned before, Palazhchenko’s career at the highest level almost perfectly coincided with Gorbachev’s years as leader of the Soviet Union, and for some English speakers, his voice came to be inseparably associated with Gorbachev (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.320). Palazhchenko himself was very much aware that his role as a diplomat was to communicate a position, rather than elaborate it (Biblio TV, 2021, 03:00). He was aware of the need to switch off his own emotions at times, for instance during Gorbachev’s last phone call as Soviet leader with Bush

Sr on the 25th of December 1991 (Palazhchenko, 2020, p. 362). In fact, Palazhchenko mentions that the theatrical performance inherent in politics would sometimes irritate him. He writes that Reagan “was sociable, always ready to tell a story, to make a joke. Sometimes this was annoying, it would seem that he was nothing more than an actor who played his role well” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.236). Sometimes, political leaders themselves were aware of the performative aspect of diplomacy, and deliberately chose to take off the mask. For instance, during Gorbachev’s attempts to establish the structures that would underpin the Union Treaty agreed on by a number of republics on the 14th of November 1991, he needs to speak urgently to John Major, the UK prime minister at the time, to obtain informal approval for this new Union’s potential ambassador in London, which would have a knock-on effect on other appointments.

“Pavel” said Gorbachev, “We need to get in touch with Major. Tell him I want to speak with him urgently. In fact, tell him this is not about bilateral relations or international issues... I need to speak with him before I take an important decision” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.348)

The phone call is promptly organised. In this case, usual protocol and the performative nature of diplomacy are eschewed in favour of the personal connection between political leaders. Everyone involved is aware of the performance involved, and it can occasionally be switched off.

However, Palazhchenko’s was an unusual situation in that the new course set by Gorbachev at the head of the Soviet Union corresponded to his own beliefs. Before Gorbachev’s arrival, Palazhchenko was already working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He had done some interpretation, including that of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko, but he did not feel any great hope or belief in the work he was doing. He recounts:

Gorbachev’s arrival and the changes that took place in our country, and in our foreign policy, were deeply positive for me, because I could escape double-think, and support, and not just interpret, what was going on in the country, and follow my heart, as the saying goes. (Biblio TV, 2021, 07:40)

Through a stroke of luck, Gorbachev’s arrival and Palazhchenko’s appointment at his side, Palazhchenko was able to represent an Other whose beliefs corresponded to his own. In this regard, it can be argued that Palazhchenko, by performing a role that he believed in, was able to turn diplomacy, and interpreting, into a form of activism.

5.2.3. *Ambiguousness of identity*

Historically, diplomats and interpreters, as a consequence of the in-between nature of their role, often had ambiguous identities. Sukhodrev, famously, could switch his accent depending on who he was speaking to (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2014, 11:45). Palazhchenko, however, had a more typical Soviet upbringing than Sukhodrev, who spent much of his childhood in England. Palazhchenko grew up in the town of Monino in the Moscow region. His mother was an English teacher, through school and university he was taught British English, but he took on the American accent during his years working at the UN in New York. During negotiations with the British, he thinks slivers of a British accent may have appeared, but it is not something that he paid particular attention too, nor is pronunciation something that he feels is crucial to the task of interpreting, highlighting instead the importance of rhythm (Biblio TV, 2021, 29:00). Overall, it does not seem that his accent or manner of speaking was something that he gave much importance to in terms of defining his identity.

Recently, in a Facebook post from the 5th of April 2022, he addresses the issue of identity. I have translated this post in full.

Why are things so difficult at the moment?

Because I am Russian.

There is different blood mixed inside me. Blood that I know about. And some of my blood I probably do not know about. My ancestors lived in regions where everything would mix.

But I have always felt Russian. I studied foreign languages, understood their different beauty, rejoiced in that, but I always came back and continue to come back home.

I was in different countries. More than ninety last time I counted. I even grew close to Italy. I sincerely love Paris, New York, Vienna. But not the way that I love Moscow's side streets – Eropinsky and Mansurovsky lanes, and generally everything around Ostozhenka street, where I have walked countless times since my student years and which, although it has now been ruined by “elite housing developments”, is still close to my heart.

And Russian landscapes, modest, often neglected, and sometimes godforsaken, are still mine, and I can look at some little birch tuft for a long time.

Roman Rappoport recently gave me an accordion that had come to him by chance, it turned out that it was a German customised instrument that made the sound of an accordion. After a break of many years I began to remember my “old repertoire”, and I did not start with the Champagne Tango, that I had once impressed my classmates with at Pioneer camp, nor with the Turkish March, that I played at an exam at the Monino musical school, but with something Russian – Golden Grove, In the Frontline Forest (at the same moment, I remembered the Ukrainian The Night is Full of Moonlight – I also used to play it).

I will never forget how Vova Krasnov and I, who shared a desk during all ten years of school, first read, at the age of fifteen, the poems from *Doctor Zhivago*, that had by some miracle been published in “Yunost” magazine in 1965. Russian poetry is the most precious in the world.

All of this is incommensurably dearer to me than politics and mind games.

I will be Russian to the end of my days, and I will most likely die in Russia. That is why things are so difficult today.

In defining his own identity, Palazhchenko certainly does not seem torn between cultures, although he does also regret the fact that he has not visited that many Russian cities, despite having been to so many foreign countries (Sarkisov, 2022). Instead, part of his identity is tied up in the history of the Soviet Union. He mentions that the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union in August 1968 was a heavy disappointment and a personal tragedy for him (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.245). Similarly, the pain he currently feels, as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, derives from the fact that he fundamentally identifies as Russian. An important part of his identity is also the work that he does, he tells aspiring interpreters that it is essential to genuinely believe that they are doing something useful, even if it does not always seem like it (Sarkisov, 2022).

Part of his identity is also associated with Gorbachev himself. After Gorbachev’s resignation and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many diplomats began serving the newly formed Russian Federation instead. Palazhchenko writes that “as diplomats they were faithful to the centuries-old tradition – power changes hands, but the service remains. But I was too closely associated with Gorbachev, and I felt that going from hand to hand from one ‘master’ to the next would simply be indecent” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.359). As a result, he leaves the diplomatic service. In this sense, Palazhchenko has to be understood differently to other diplomats. He was fortunate to work for a cause that he believed in, and once this was no longer possible within the State diplomatic structures, he could no longer imagine himself continuing to represent an “Other” that he did not believe in. The ambiguousness of diplomats’ identity is therefore not the most appropriate prism through which to understand Palazhchenko. His identity is rooted in the country he comes from, the work that he does, and the people he works with. When we seek to evaluate his historical contribution, it is important to consider that he was not just a diplomat serving a State, but also an activist serving a cause.

5.2.4. Media image and attention

The Cold War coincided with a media environment that was increasingly image-driven, and the Soviet-US summits drew great media interest. As a result, Palazhchenko received

significant media attention, even if tangential at times. For instance, he twice appeared on the cover of Time magazine (20th of October 1986 and 6th of June 1988). He also tells the story of how he was recognised in the street in Moscow, and people began discussing current affairs with him, asking him what he was planning to do in the aftermath of the 1991 August Coup (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.318). However, protocol officers often tried to get interpreters out of the frame of photoshoots. Palazhchenko tells the story of how he was asked to stand at a distance from Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush Sr for a photoshoot in front of the statue of Liberty. A few pictures were taken with the leaders pretending to communicate, but Gorbachev soon called Palazhchenko over to help interpret. Interestingly, the newspaper editors chose to use the pictures in which Palazhchenko was also present, rather than the interpreter-less pictures preferred by the protocol services (Biblio TV, 2021, 12:20). Palazhchenko states that he has never felt like a TV-star, but that he has enjoyed the attention he has received (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:51:50).

The media, including in the West, maintain an interest in Palazhchenko to this day, as testified to by recent interviews for Associated Press, Fox News and TBN Live. The official record, however, does tend to erase interpreters, and it is interesting to compare the visual and written records of his time as interpreter for world leaders. *The Last Superpower Summits* (Savranskaya & Blanton, 2016) is a thoroughly researched anthology of archive material surrounding the Soviet-US summits held from 1985 to 1991. Despite the fact that Palazhchenko produced many of the transcripts used in the book, his name is referred to just three times across 1013 pages. If one looks at the much shorter collection of pictures provided however, Palazhchenko is a far more noticeable presence. Out of sixty-one pictures provided, Palazhchenko appears in sixteen, despite there being no intention of underlining the interpreter's presence. Palazhchenko provides a larger array of pictures with himself included in his own book. Although the official written record may overlook the role of interpreters and secondary diplomats, given that their conversations are not those that are transcribed, the visual history of the period tells a different story. Palazhchenko was an integral and consistent member of the group of people who led to the end of the Cold War and the historic disarmament process of two superpowers. He played a central role in mediating communication between the leaders, and the visual media coverage of the period reflects this.

5.3. *Memoirs as History*

5.3.1. *Increasing visibility*

One of the explanations frequently given for interpreters writing memoirs is that they serve as a mechanism for increasing visibility, for expressing that which they could not express at the time of the historical events due to their position. Certainly, this is partially a motivation for Palazhchenko's *Profession and time: The notes of an interpreter-diplomat*. As he explains in a public book presentation, this is meant as a book about himself, and "not just about Gorbachev" (Biblio TV, 2022, 07:00). He underlines the fact that he was directly involved in the elaboration of the INF Treaty in his discussion of "good" treaties (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.151)². He also takes the opportunity to express thoughts that he could not express at the time, such as his frustration that the US's unrealistic Strategic Defense Initiative remained a stumbling block in US-Soviet disarmament talks for so long (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.136)³. Similarly, he recounts a conversation in a bar in Nevada with a senior nuclear scientist who was part of the Soviet delegation. The scientist began justifying the Stalinist repressions, and Palazhchenko recounts how he chose to keep silent at the time (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.156).

Palazhchenko also underlines the role interpreters in general play at historic events. He recounts how he listened in on the interpretation of his colleagues at the Security Council meeting that adopted resolution 678, on Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, including the Soviet Union's proposal for a pause of goodwill, writing that this was "a great day" for the UN. On a number of counts therefore, Palazhchenko seeks to increase his own visibility, promote recognition of his work to an extent, vent some of his personal frustrations post factum, but also increase the visibility of interpreters in general. However, Palazhchenko is also well aware that certain significant historical events surrounding Gorbachev took place without Palazhchenko's input. About November 1991, he writes: "I did my everyday work, understanding full well, that it occupied a second-row, perhaps even a third-row seat in comparison with the fate of the country that was being decided in the sticky negotiations between Gorbachev and Yeltsin" (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.346).

² The three examples of "good" treaties he discusses are the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972), the INF Treaty (1987), and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015). According to Palazhchenko, good treaties are those that have been elaborated by both sides in good faith, taking into account each other's reasonable interests. These treaties remain relevant even when they are no longer in force or when they are no longer legally-binding.

³ The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was an idea for a space-based shield against nuclear weapons pursued by the Reagan administration but ultimately discarded due to technological unfeasibility. Also nicknamed the "Star Wars" project.

The fact that Palazhchenko still works with Gorbachev means that this memoir cannot be entirely equated with the “tell-all” memoirs of other Soviet interpreters. During interviews, Palazhchenko often makes the point that he is only willing to speak of the details of Gorbachev’s life, for instance regarding Gorbachev’s state of health, that Gorbachev himself has spoken about publicly (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 2:27:30). There are also some difficult questions that he has never raised with Gorbachev despite decades of working with him, for example whether Gorbachev felt wronged by Bush Sr in the final weeks of the Soviet Union, when a leak from the White House in late November 1991 suggested the USA was on the cusp of recognising Ukraine’s independence, just as Gorbachev was trying to finalise the Union Treaty that could have maintained close ties between Ukraine and the rest of the Union (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.349). While Palazhchenko does increase his own visibility, and that of interpreters in general, he certainly does not seek to do so at the expense of Gorbachev and the key political decision-makers of the time.

5.3.2. *Eyewitness accounts as history-writing*

Another possible reason for interpreters writing their memoirs is to use their authority as eyewitnesses of historical events to supplement the public record and provide their own version of history. This position as eyewitness is one that Palazhchenko places more emphasis on than his desire to increase the visibility of interpreters. In fact, he goes to significant lengths not to overstate his role in the historical events he took part in, writing in the first paragraph of the foreword, “my role at the time was modest, my participation in the events that marked the end of the Cold War was accidental and of course, unplanned – these things can never be planned, and one’s participation in them all the more so. But I saw a lot and, I hope, reached some sort of understanding” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.6). It is this position as eyewitness, and the understanding he reached, that Palazhchenko seeks to place at the service of the historical record. Palazhchenko’s worth as an eyewitness was recognised by political leaders themselves. On the 10th of December 1987, Gorbachev and Bush Sr held an informal but very substantive conversation in the car from the centre of Washington to the Andrews Air Force Base. Palazhchenko was the only interpreter present but could not take notes. Understanding that this was an important conversation, Gorbachev then asks Palazhchenko to produce a transcript based on his memory. Palazhchenko recalls that later on, Gorbachev and Bush Sr would use the words “as we said in the car” as a type of code word between them (Palazhchenko, 2020, pp.146-7).

Similarly, Palazhchenko cites his own memory as one of the three main sources for his book and vouches for the fact that the meaning of any words he paraphrases corresponds to the original meaning (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.7). On top of his eyewitness account, he regularly gives his own opinion on historical issues, for instance on when the Cold War could be considered over, what constitutes a “good” treaty, or whether the Soviet Union could still have been saved if the 1991 August Coup had not taken place (Palazhchenko, 2020, pp. 202, 151 & 306). At the same time, Palazhchenko’s memoirs shift nimbly between events at which he was directly present, and events that he followed as a normal citizen, often receiving his news through the television. This is the case for Shevardnadze’s spectacular resignation in 1990, the August Coup and the tanks surrounding the Parliament on the 19th of August 1991, and the signing of the Belovezha Accords on the 8th of December 1991 marking the end of the Soviet Union (Palazhchenko, 2020, pp. 266, 318, 351). In this way, Palazhchenko is able to present himself both as a participant in historical events and a typical citizen, interested in and concerned by political developments. It can be argued that this gives him both the authority of the eyewitness and the relatability of the common man, giving his take on history a particular weight for a reader. This unusual position that the interpreter has, as both an insider among the political elite and an ordinary citizen, could be studied further in terms of the historical weight this gives to their memoirs.

Historical researchers have also used Palalazhchenko’s previous book of memoirs, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The memoir of a Soviet interpreter* (1997) as a source during studies about the end of the Cold War, which Palazhchenko says is a source of pride for him (HerzenLive, 2022, 04:18). It makes sense therefore to see the new book of memoirs as a further contribution to the historical record. After the book was published, Palazhchenko received criticism that the book was an apologia of Gorbachev. In fact, he is completely open about the fact that the book is an apologia, saying that he believes that Gorbachev deserves this apologia and Russian society needs this apologia. Indeed, he feels that the current discourse in Russia, “stimulated from above”, is extremely unfair to Gorbachev, who it has designated as a “scapegoat” (Biblio TV, 2022, 12:00). According to Palazhchenko, this arises from a non-objective analysis of the historical reasons that led to the painful period Russia endured in the 1990s. Palazhchenko states that he has sought to present the course of events to make clear why he feels that the accusations Gorbachev has suffered over the years are a distortion of the truth (Biblio TV, 2022, 15:00). In this regard, Palazhchenko is clearly seeking to set the historical record straight and, to an extent, his memoirs are a political undertaking. In fact, one

of the tasks of the Gorbachev Fund, according to Palazhchenko, is to “somehow facilitate the establishment of historical truth” (Biblio TV, 2022, 1:14:00). Through his work and through his writing, Palazhchenko is heightening his agency, seeking to influence the historical discourse surrounding Gorbachev and by extension have an impact both on the historical record and on the outside world, which is, according to Derrida, constantly immersed in and shaped by discourse.

5.3.3. *Interpreter’s emotions*

Interpreters’ emotions can be strong drivers of their decisions, particularly when they influence ideology. We will examine whether this is the case for Palazhchenko and whether he can be considered an ideological and political “follower”. Palazhchenko’s ideology, to an extent, was already forged before he began working with Gorbachev. He says for instance: “As an individual, my personality was formed in the 1960s, and I am a person, who in those years, harboured hope for the development of our country in a direction that we later called democratic, in the direction of greater freedom”. He felt hope, but he also felt bitter disappointment, saying that his hopes were destroyed in 1968 with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops (Biblio TV, 2021, 5:45). Some convictions have remained with him throughout his life, for instance he declares that he will forever be a supporter of a nuclear-free world (Sarkisov, 2022). As discussed earlier, Gorbachev’s arrival gave Palazhchenko the opportunity to work for a cause and a person he believed in.

Occasionally, Palazhchenko feels torn between the cause and the person, demonstrating the strong feelings he had for both. Shortly after joining the president’s new administration, Palazhchenko felt serious doubt about his decision to do so after Gorbachev failed to swiftly denounce the violent actions of pro-Soviet forces in Vilnius on the 13th of January 1991. He writes that “this was not the Gorbachev that I wanted to work with”. After several sleepless nights, he is considering asking for a transfer abroad instead of working in the presidential administration. But Chernaiev, the head of Gorbachev’s staff, tells him that he would be working with the US and disarmament in the new administration, as the strongest possible candidate. The call of the cause is strong, and he decides to stay as a result (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.272-3). After Gorbachev’s resignation, Palazhchenko once again had to make a career choice, having received an offer to return to diplomatic service. Again, he chooses to stay with Gorbachev, this time because he felt it was important to provide professional and moral support to Gorbachev at that time, and that Gorbachev had deserved this support (Biblio TV, 2021, 1:15:00). His main motivation this time is the personal connection he has with Gorbachev, but

also a sense of loyalty and righteousness. In fact, his emotions and identity are tied up in the cause he served and the people he worked with. He writes that “in 1992, the mediator for solving the nuclear issue [Soviet nuclear weapons were located on the territory of several former Soviet republics with an uncoordinated foreign policy, including Ukraine] was once again Baker. But already without me this time, thank God. I would have been ashamed” (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.360). It is clear that the people Palazhchenko work with, and the cause he serves, are an important part of his sense of self-worth.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, he has worked with Gorbachev at the Gorbachev Fund, as well as interpreting in various international institutions such as the UN and the Council of Europe. Palazhchenko has been able to continue to pick his fights. He chose not to take part in Gorbachev’s campaign during his 1996 election run, because he felt that Gorbachev should not attempt this campaign (Biblio TV, 2022, 1:24:30). Repeatedly, therefore, Palazhchenko was able to make career decisions based on his own convictions and ideology. Often that meant following Gorbachev, but not always. In a sense, he is a “follower”, as Costalli and Ruggeri (2015) understand it, of Gorbachev the political entrepreneur. However, his situation was different from that of Gottlieb Fuchs. Palazhchenko was not acting during wartime, even though he had to navigate political tensions at various levels. He was in a less polarised environment where he was able to take decisions that could often accommodate both his personal ideology and the connection he felt with Gorbachev, maintaining strong personal agency in his decision-making.

5.3.4. Emotions of those around as a driver of history

Finally, the memoirs of interpreters can provide insight into the “human factor” that shapes international relations. Palazhchenko in his memoirs seems sensitive to the feelings of those around him and the general mood in the room, which should probably be expected from an interpreter. After interpreting meetings with high-ranking American representatives in September 1991, Palazhchenko writes that he is convinced that at that time they considered the collapse of the Soviet Union not only avoidable but also undesirable (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.324). During negotiations for the Soviet-US agreement on the reunification of Germany, Palazhchenko writes that he did not feel, from either side, any kind of “shock” at Baker’s proposal to put into writing the fact that the reunited Germany would choose what alliance it would choose to join, despite the fact that some have been able to get a lot of polemical mileage out of this supposed “shock” since (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.234). The general impression that one gets from Palazhchenko’s impressions of the emotions of those around him is that high-

level talks were often less melodramatic than they are sometimes made out to be, and that there was often a genuine effort to understand each other. This is clear for instance from the transcript of Baker's conversation with Shevardnadze and Gorbachev on the 16th of December 1991, where Baker seeks to understand what the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) project really entails.

All the same, Palazhchenko states that Gorbachev is an example that shows that the role of individual personalities on history is considerable, explaining how the enormous progress made on disarmament under Gorbachev was only possible thanks to Gorbachev taking difficult decisions, and being able to bring people, from the political leadership to the military, along with him (Biblio TV, 2022, 43:10). In another interview, Palazhchenko is asked to define what motivated Gorbachev. He bats away the overly complex political concept of "liberal" and instead lists a series of convictions and emotions: human decency, a striving for freedom, a feeling for the absurdity of certain situations, such as the travel exit ban and Sakharov's house arrest, a feeling for what is worthy of a great power and what is not, and trust in other people (Biblio TV, 2021, 1:07:00). Decades of working with Gorbachev and interpreting him gave Palazhchenko the impression that what ultimately lay at the root of Gorbachev's work and reforms were these basic human emotions.

At the same time, Palazhchenko warns against thinking that good personal relations can solve all problems at the international level. In a Facebook post from the 27th of March 2019, he lists his observations of the relationships between US and Russian presidents since the fall of the Soviet Union and compares them with those of the leaders he interpreted for from 1985 to 1991. He notes that despite the fact that the attention paid to the personal relationship of presidents has grown, relations have steadily worsened. He warns against betting solely on good personal chemistry for a "great deal" or a "breakthrough". Instead, he notes that the progress made under Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush Sr was based on work done on tangible issues first, that progress was possible thanks to certain shared emotions, such as a visceral disgust for nuclear weapons, and that good personal relations came last. In understanding the intricacies of diplomatic work, but also having personal access to political leaders and assessing their emotions, Palazhchenko is therefore in a position to provide a unique view on the emotions and the "human factor", as well as their role as drivers of political change.

5.3.5. *Impact of the historical and political context on the written record*

In analysing memoirs, it is important to consider the context in which they are written, and the context in which they are received. At a very basic level, Palazhchenko states that the book would probably not have come into existence without the presence of two contextual factors: Facebook and the coronavirus pandemic (Biblio TV, 2022, 02:49). The interest attracted by his blogposts on Facebook convinced him of the fact that there would be an audience for his book, and the pandemic gave him the time he needed to put it together. To this day, 6000 copies have already been sold and several reprints have been necessary after an initial first print of 1000 copies (HerzenLive, 2022, 06:00). Although the amount of interest has been a surprise even to Palazhchenko, it is important to bear in mind that he was writing for an audience and would likely be seeking to answer certain questions or even criticisms.

In fact, he was seeking to respond to a certain view of the world, as well as specific accusations made against Gorbachev. He is also responding to what he calls the geopolitical cynicism prevalent in Russia, which maintains that all the USA's actions were directed at destroying the USSR (Biblio TV, 2021, 41:45). He states:

When I read the transcripts, when I remember how things were in Malta, I see how different that is from the polemical, critical denunciations that I see sometimes in articles, even in those of academics (...) that this was a geopolitical Chernobyl, that Gorbachev betrayed us. (Biblio TV, 2022, 46:00)

Palazhchenko's memoirs are therefore also a reaction to the political context in which he writes. While the situation in Russia in 2020 had not deteriorated to the extent it has today, in 2022, history was already a heated issue and had been for a while. Going against the prevalent and official discourse on Gorbachev is a brave step, and a political one. Palazhchenko in fact goes even further than merely responding to current criticisms of Gorbachev. He looks to the future. He praises Gorbachev's work as Soviet leader, saying that it was a significant attempt to restructure the country based on the principles of freedom and democracy. He goes on to state that such an attempt will without a doubt be repeated in the future and at that moment, people will remember Gorbachev (Biblio TV, 1:17:00). By telling the story of the Gorbachev years, Palazhchenko hopes that they may serve in the future to change Russian society.

Depending on the political context, historical accounts can suddenly become highly relevant. In the current context, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, controversy has been stirred around supposed American assurances to the Soviet Union that NATO would not expand eastwards. Much of the controversy has surrounded the content of conversations between Baker and Gorbachev in 1990 surrounding the reunification of Germany (McCarthy,

2022). In recent months, Palazhchenko, who was present at the time and transcribed the conversations, has been repeatedly asked about what was said (Biblio TV, 2022, 45:20; HerzenLive, 2022, 59:10)⁴. These events are also partly retold in his memoirs (Palazhchenko, 2020, pp.233-40). He states that Baker's words have been taken out of their context [German reunification] to serve the Vladimir Putin-endorsed conception of NATO treachery (Biblio TV, 2022, 48:00). Memoirs must be regarded critically, but Palazhchenko, and diplomatic interpreters in general, have the additional advantage of being able to refer back to transcripts of conversations held and agreements signed at the time, and which, in Palazhchenko's case, corroborate his version of events. Even in a heavily polemical context, it seems a mistake to ignore his point of view, which combines written evidence with an eyewitness account to provide context. While it may be argued that Palazhchenko's memoirs lose some value as a historical source due to his close association and his acknowledged bias towards Gorbachev, the more interesting point is that Palazhchenko has made an active choice to go against prevalent discourse at a time when it was not necessarily easy to do so, thus reinforcing his credentials as an activist.

In studying an eyewitness account, one must be aware of a couple of pitfalls. Palazhchenko himself is aware that, because he was only involved in a select portion of high-level political activity, his overview of the events that took place can only be partial. He draws attention to that fact he is far better suited to report on the era's international relations than on the intricacies of internal politics (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.346). Furthermore, his subjective impressions may differ from those of other people. Sukhodrev, for instance, does not remember his time working with Gorbachev warmly, saying that the Soviet leader considered interpreters "furnishings" (Sukhodrev, 1999, p.423). The time that has passed may also affect the memory of the writer, for example, he cannot remember what exactly his salary was during his time at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 1:53:10). However, Palazhchenko vouches for the accuracy of that which he has chosen to recount, and the majority of it is backed up by published transcripts (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.7). The hindsight afforded by the passing decades also has an advantage, however, as he is able to compare the two eras. For instance, he

⁴ Palazhchenko's view is that these conversations were clearly rooted in the context of German reunification. The agreement on the reunification of Germany included a clause according to which, although East Germany would fall under NATO auspices, NATO infrastructure would not be deployed there. To accusations that Gorbachev should have demanded further assurances for other Eastern States or that the Americans implied further assurances, Palazhchenko responds that at the time it was absurd to consider NATO expansion further east given that the Warsaw Pact was still in force, and therefore future eastern expansion was not and could not have been a topic of discussion in those meetings.

compares the USA's scrupulous compliance with UN procedure to intervene during the Kuwait war with their behaviour in later years (Palazhchenko, 2020, p.251). The time that passes between historical events and their recollection is not necessarily a bad thing therefore, as they may be placed in a more fleshed-out context.

6. Conclusions and further study

The initial question that drove this essay was whether Palazhchenko's close and lasting relationship with a historical figure modify his interpreter's role as a merely "semi-visible figure" who has a negligible influence on historical events. Previous studies of the role of interpreters in historical events have focused on the interpreter's peripheral role, and the impact of these events on the interpreter rather than vice versa (Rogatchevski, 2019; Tsaregorodtseva, 2021).

However, in Palazhchenko's case, his unwavering presence made him an essential component of the groups that led to the end of the Cold War. The analysis of semi-visibility and empowerment demonstrated that participants are unlikely to ignore the physical and social existence of an interpreter, particular one who, like Palazhchenko, spent days at a time with them during many years. The friendly relations which he has maintained with many political figures shows that an interpreter in Palazhchenko's position does not simply interpret and must not be understood as an interpreter only. Instead, Palazhchenko is an important component of the social circles that are formed during these negotiations and visits. Further research is needed into the social role regular interpreters play in the circles they interpret for.

The study of co-interlocution, non-neutrality and positioning showed that Palazhchenko and Gorbachev gradually became a tandem, both in terms of their perception by an English-speaking audience, and the fact that they are communicating a shared position, rehearsed and perfected hundreds of times. This shared position had a positive impact on Palazhchenko's interpreting, simplifying his task while dissolving some of the ethical dilemmas inherent in interpreting, such as the morality of repeating words which one knows to be wrong or harmful. Paradoxically, Palazhchenko's increased visibility has in fact given Gorbachev a distinct English-language voice, overcoming the barrier to "pure" communication that interpreting has previously been seen as and countering the traditional claim that an "ideal interpreter should

not make people feel his/her presence” (Mason and Ren, 2012, p.235). Future studies of interpreting would do well to analyse in more detail whether “personal” interpreters, familiar and aligned with the client’s position, are able to produce higher quality interpreting, as well as the effect that familiarity with the interpreter has on the perception of the speaker by the audience.

Palazhchenko’s position as a diplomat gave him increased, albeit limited, influence on policymaking. However, Palazhchenko was well aware of the constraints, responsibilities, and ethical standards he was held to. These helped to form professional and collegial identities which were essential in stabilising the power relations at work during high-level negotiations. While ethical standards are often held up by the interpreting community as essential to maintaining the integrity of the profession, I believe insufficient emphasis is placed on the fact that these ethical standards are indispensable to creating the framework of trust between participants necessary for successful, sometimes world-saving, discussions to take place. Those who uphold unexciting ethical standards such as confidentiality will of course always stay away from the limelight, but their importance should not be neglected.

Furthermore, Palazhchenko’s close association with Soviet leaders, possible only because of his status as the principal interpreter, increased his agency in terms of choosing the hierarchies he was willing to work for. He was also aligned with them in terms of values, and his identity was tied in with them as people and the cause they worked for together. This is what motivated most of Palazhchenko’s career decisions. As a result, Palazhchenko’s positionality is most strongly influenced by the group he works with and the cause he serves. Given this alignment between the interpreter’s positionality and the cause his speaker serves, Palazhchenko’s historical contribution should be understood as a form of activism, and not simply a happy accident. Many of the choices Palazhchenko made were moral choices. Future studies of interpreting could further analyse the link between activism and interpreting. Of course, not every interpreter has the good fortune of finding a client who so closely coincides with their own views, but repeated life choices that provoke a gravitation towards certain clients can perhaps be considered a marker of activism or absence thereof.

Palazhchenko’s most recent form of activism has been the publication of his memoirs, in Russian, in 2020. Although it is true that the photographic record better reflects his contribution in the period 1985-1991 than the written record, his memoirs are not primarily “a coping mechanism in the form of an exercise in increasing [his] visibility” (Rogatchevski, p.460,

2019). Far more relevant is Palazhchenko's response to the current historical discourse in Russia and particularly its treatment of the Gorbachev years. Palazhchenko provides both his historical testimony as an eyewitness and his analysis of the mechanisms, including individual emotions, that lead to historical change. In doing this, he actively pushes back against what he sees as the anti-Gorbachev agenda of Russian official discourse. This anti-Gorbachev discourse involves a rejection of negotiation, compromise and good faith, and a revulsion to yielding power. By publishing these memoirs thirty years after the events, Palazhchenko is able to recontextualise the historical progress made during the years 1985-1991 against the backdrop of the failures of both Russia and the USA in ensuring more peaceful relations since.

In conclusion, Palazhchenko's longstanding relationship with Gorbachev did modify his role as a "semi-visible figure" with negligible historical influence. Saving the world is not a one-person job, and Palazhchenko played a crucial role in the circles that secured the end of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. Thanks to his relationship with Gorbachev, Palazhchenko's agency, visibility and responsibilities were heightened. Due to his alignment with Gorbachev, Palazhchenko was able to combine diplomacy with activism. Through his support for Gorbachev, he has written a memoir that goes against the current historical discourse in Russia and provides valuable insight into the mechanisms behind historical international cooperation. Can Palazhchenko himself be considered a historical figure? I will perhaps leave him the last word, as he has had the chance to answer this question himself with typical modesty: "Of course not, but I am a person who had a hand in history" (V gostiakh u Gordona, 2019, 2:48:00).

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