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Interpreting conflicts and conflicts in interpreting: A micro-historical account of the interpreting activity in the Korean Armistice Negotiations

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The Korean Armistice Negotiations are among the major historical events shaping geopolitical situations in East Asia after World War II. While previous studies of the negotiations followed mainly the approach of traditional historical research, the present study offers a new perspective of the ‘neglected’ participants – the interpreters who worked for the series of negotiations. An analysis of “post-hoc accounts” of interpreters, using a micro-historical approach, demonstrates complexity of interpreting for wartime negotiations and reveals various conflicts in the interpreting of armistice negotiations as perceived by the interpreters. Intense conflicts were found in the interpreting activity, including: conflicts between the interpreters on both sides of the negotiations, hidden conflicts between the interpreters and their principals, conflicts between different interpreter roles, conflicts over language use between the two sides of the negotiations, and conflicts arising from misconceptions of the interpreting activity. It was also discovered that the interpreters in the armistice negotiations were generally loyal as the army soldiers instead of maintaining a neutral stance, such as is expected from professional interpreters nowadays. The micro-historical study of the interpreters’ accounts of the major historical events can be useful in exploring and explaining what is hidden behind the complexity of conflicts, thus offering a new approach to interpreting studies as well as to historical studies.

1. Introduction: A micro-historical approach to the Korean Armistice Negotiations

The Korean Armistice Negotiations, which started on 10 July 1951 at Kaesong, then suspended and later resumed on 25 October 1951 at Panmunjom and continued until the armistice was signed on 27 July 1953, lasted over two years and “required some 575 meetings¹ before

agreement could be reached” (Foot, 1990, p. ix). The duration of the negotiations and the number of meetings suggest that the Korean Armistice Negotiations were a major historical event that deserves the academic attention both of historians and of other researchers.

Most of the previous literature on the Korean Armistice Negotiations followed the approach of traditional historical research and concerned essentially with politics and the military consequences, which last until today. However, the research efforts have concentrated on the VIPs in history, or the “great deeds of great men, statesmen, generals”, and not on “virtually every human activity” (Burke, 1992, pp. 3–4), with only occasional passing remarks on the ever-present component of the negotiations – the interpreting activity – and even fewer on the interpreters as hidden participants. Previous historical accounts have focused on the international and national settings, the leading delegation members and the major issues of the negotiations, such as the cease-fire arrangements, the demilitarized zone and the repatriation of prisoners of war, and on the aftermath of the war, all with attempts to explain and construct the significance of these perspectives within the overall history of conflicts, within the traditional paradigm of historical research. Little has been said about the interpreters, who functioned as omnipresent facilitators in the negotiations that were conducted in three different languages². Even in “the most comprehensive account of the negotiations” (Robin, 2001, p. 626)³ – in the book: *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* by Rosemary Foot (1990), “an in-depth and lucid analysis” (Moon, 1991, p. 410) of the armistice talks was provided but little mention of the interpreting activity involved in them can be detected throughout the book. This has also been the case with the books published in Chinese – for instance, *Witnessing the Panmunjom Negotiations* (Guo Weijing, 2008), in which the author gives a detailed account of the whole historical event, from the initiation of the negotiations to the problems negotiated and to the final result of the negotiations, without much about the interpreting activity either. Interpreting was an indispensable component of the negotiations, without which the negotiations could barely have proceeded, as the negotiating parties were separated by the language barrier between English, Chinese and Korean.

The present study aims to investigate the historical event of the Korean Armistice Negotiations from the perspective of the ‘neglected’ participants – the interpreters who worked in the series of negotiations. It will explore this historical event through what Munday (2014) termed “post-hoc accounts” (p. 64) of the participants, especially those of the interpreters, in an attempt to contextualize the interpreting activity in wartime negotiations, the complexity of the role of the interpreters, and the interpreters’ perception of various conflicts that arose in the negotiations. It is hoped that the otherwise neglected details and

viewpoints will be able to provide suggestive insights concerning some hitherto unrecognized historical facts.

This study employs a microhistorical approach, as outlined by Levi (1992), Burke (1992), and Ginzburg (1980; 1993), and later adapted and tailored for translation studies among others by Adamo (2006) and by Munday (2014). Munday (2014) used primary sources to study “the history of translators through their personal papers, manuscripts and related archives and other testimony” (p.64), with a strong belief that “they are indispensable resources for the investigation of the conditions, working practices and identity of translators and for the study of their interaction with other participants in the translation process” (Munday, 2014, p. 64).

Microhistorical investigation is a research practice “essentially based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and an intensive study of the documentary material” (Levi, 1992, p. 95). Unlike the traditional paradigm of historical studies, which offers “a view from above” and concentrates on the great and the powerful, microhistory is concerned with “history from below” (Burke, 1992, p. 4), taking account of the views of ordinary men and of their experience of social change. The key point of the argument for microhistory studies is the “irreducibility of individual persons to the rules of large-scale systems” (Levi, 1992, p. 97). In the microhistorical approach much importance is given to individual recollections, and small scale analysis is conducted through thorough exploration of details of post-hoc personal accounts of otherwise unknown individuals who reflect on past events in their personal writings (such as memoirs, papers, diaries, and manuscripts), on the basis of the belief that “microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved” (Levi, 1992, p. 97). The microhistorical approach makes it possible to understand the daily lives and social spaces of ordinary individuals, and thereby to reconstruct their ideas and attitudes and their interactions within social structures. There exist various exemplary studies from the perspective of microhistory, especially in the fields of anthropology and ethnography (among others), where thick description (as outlined in Geertz, 1973) is found most successful in “using microscopic analysis of the most minute events as a means of arriving at the most far-reaching conclusions” (Levi, 1992, p. 98). One of the most well-known studies is Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980), a microhistorical study of a sixteenth-century miller who was executed by the Inquisition, on which Roger Chartier commented: “It is on this reduced scale, and probably only on this scale, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of belief, of values and representations on one side, and social affiliations on another” (Chartier, 1982, p. 32).

Levi’s (1992) seminal work outlined the following approach to studies within the paradigm of microhistory:

The microhistorical approach addresses the problem of how we gain access to knowledge of the past by means of various clues, signs and symptoms. This is a procedure which takes the particular as its starting-point (a particular which is often highly specific and individual, and would be impossible to describe as a typical case) and proceeds to identify its meanings in the light of its own specific context. (p. 102)

Employing the microhistorical approach, we attempt to investigate the historical event of the Korean Armistice Negotiations as recollected by the interpreters and other relevant participants. As the negotiations were held between representatives of the two warring sides: the Korean's People's Army (KPA) and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (CPVA) on one side and the United Nations Command (UNC) headed by the United States on the other side, we focus on the interpreting activity involving three languages in the negotiations, which is a much understudied area. According to our search for relevant publications and historical archives, the book *Faithful Echo* by the interpreter of the U.S. delegation Robert B. Ekvall is the only book-length recollection about the interpreting activity in the negotiations. We use it as a primary source of data for analysis, which is supplemented by sporadic accounts of the interpreting activity in the truce talks from Chinese interpreters (e.g., Ji, 2008).

2. Particularity and complexity of the interpreting activity in the Korean Armistice Negotiations

An examination of the whole process of the Korean Armistice Negotiations reveals that interpreting activities were part and parcel of the negotiations, the particularity and complexity of which will be discussed below.

2.1. Careful and intense preparation for interpreting in military campaigns

The negotiations were initiated when the Korean War moved into a stalemate, with neither of the warring sides gaining territory. A common perception was that "a ceasefire would now be advisable and desirable" (Foot, 1990, p. 1) and truce talks were believed to be a reasonable choice for a way out. On 30 June 1951 General Matthew B. Ridgway, Commander of the UNC, made an offer to begin negotiations, which was accepted on 1 July 1951 by Kim II-Sung, General of the Korean People's Army, and Peng Dehuai, General of the Chinese People's Volunteer

Army (Guo, 2008, p. 4). The first meeting in the negotiations began at Kaesong on 10 July 1951.

As both sides were fully aware that the armistice negotiations were so vital that they would decide war or peace on the Korean Peninsula and even the post-war world order, they took the negotiations very seriously. In a meeting that Li Kenong⁴ convened, all the Chinese delegation members were briefed on the basic principles of the negotiations. All delegation members were reminded to treat the negotiations as a fight: whatever was said could not be taken back, so every word uttered should be treated with great care; it was better to utter a statement one day late than one minute early; it was preferable to use prepared statements (Chai & Zhao, 1992, pp. 125–126). On the U.S. side, equal importance was attached to the negotiations by General Ridgway, who flew with the U.S. delegation from Tokyo to Seoul and saw them off at the departure point of the chief delegate's helicopter (Guo, 2008, pp. 26–27).

The preparation on both sides was intense. They prepared for every issue to be discussed, for possible arguments and counterarguments and for charges and countercharges. According to the recollection of Yang Guanqun (Yang, 2000), an officer who participated in the negotiations, careful preparation was made at every stage on the Chinese and Korean sides. Before every meeting with the U.S. delegation at Panmunjom, there would be a preparatory meeting between the KPA and CPVA representatives, in which they discussed the content of their statements as well as possible counterarguments. Drafting of statements would always be done by Qiao Guanhua, one of the leaders of the Chinese delegation, and his assistants. Once the statements were ready, they would be sent to the translators for translation into English (Yang, 2009, p. 41). Even the American interpreter noticed their careful preparation: "The Chinese take negotiating very seriously and prepare for everything" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 57). On the American side, preparation was taken seriously too. Every night the negotiators would discuss in detail the statements to be made, prepare answers to possible questions, and even prepare translated versions of their statements in order to make sure that the translations would deliver exactly what they intended to say. Leaders on both sides would demand their men to "pay great attention to every movement of the delegation on the other side" (Chai & Zhao, 1992, p. 128). The intensity of preparation was also evident in staffing. "The UNC side had quite a few stenographers who were able to record every word that we had spoken, but we only had one stenographer... so the three of us [interpreters] were also assigned to learn English stenography" (Guo, 2000, p. 125). As perceived by the interpreters, because of the existence of visible tension and the atmosphere of conflict both at and away from the negotiating table, every day was a fighting day. Because the whole negotiation process, especially the political meetings, involved multiple staff meetings at every level, the interpreters had a very heavy workload:

they often had to interpret for eight or more hours a day (Ekvall, 1960, p. 46).

2.2. Particularity of the sites and setting of the negotiations

The sites of the negotiations kept changing with alteration of the actual areas controlled by the two warring sides. The negotiation was first held at Kaesong, a border city on the southern side of the 38th parallel of latitude under the control of the Republic of Korea. As the negotiations continued, ground action continued and the actual areas controlled by the two sides changed with the movements of war. The UNC gained more territories on the eastern front, while the KPA and CPVA gained more on the western front, and Kaesong was soon captured by the KPA. The U.S. refused to hold negotiations within the area controlled by the KPA, so it was agreed that the negotiation site be moved to Panmunjom, an abandoned village on the *de facto* border between North and South Korea (Ji, 2013, p. 77). There, a tent was set up athwart the 38th parallel of latitude, with fighting troops on both sides. “A narrow green baize table was placed in the center of the tent and down the center of that table ran the 38th parallel” (Dean, 1960, p. 9). As the ground action did not stop, the boundary line changed with the changes of the actual controlled areas at the front. The center line of the table had to be identical to the actual boundary line of the two sides, so the table, even the tent, would always be adjusted in accordance with the changes of the actual boundary line (Ji, 2013, p. 77). The two sides involved in the negotiations entered the tent from opposite entrances and no cross-over was allowed. The CPVA and KPA representatives entered from the north with no right to cross to the southern part, and the U.S.-headed UNC delegates entered from the south with no right to cross to the northern part (Dean, 1960, p. 9; Ji, 2013, p. 77). Such a setting and form of the negotiations were very special and had no precedent in history (Yang, 2010, p. 37). From such a perspective, the negotiation sites can be regarded as part and parcel of the real theatre of war. It was at this front of war that the two camps fought with words – through the interpreters.

The atmosphere of the negotiations and their interpreting also corresponded with the actual military operations on the battlefield. Li Kenong told the Chinese delegation members that to negotiate was to fight, that it could not be separated from the actual movements in the battlefield (Chai & Zhao, 1992, pp. 125–126). Every day the delegates followed the actual movements at the front and marked the actual separation line on the map before the negotiations started (Chai & Zhao, 1992, pp. 175–177). Obviously, the winning side at the front had an advantage in negotiating what they desired.

It is interesting to note that the setting of the negotiations in the plenary sessions could be both advantageous and disadvantageous to

interpreting. The interpreters were arranged sitting at a small table behind their spokesmen at the main conference table. This arrangement afforded opportunities for interpreters to lean on their supports: word lists and dictionaries were handy and an assistant was always ready to check words and texts and to hand over pertinent documents. While that might help to improve working conditions for the interpreters, such an arrangement reduced the sense of immediacy, as that might make it difficult for the principal (the speaker) to consult with his interpreter, and if the interpreter did not hear correctly or missed some of the words spoken, or if he needed to cross-check what had been said, he had to stop the meeting temporarily and walk to the conference table, which might slow down the process. In staff meetings later, however, the interpreter sat at the conference table to the left of the spokesman, which created a sense of immediacy but removed supports for interpreters such as assistants and reference books. The interpreter was left only with his own prepared texts and his pad for note-taking – he was left to ‘fight independently’ (Ekvall, 1960, p. 63).

2.3. Tension between the working languages of the negotiations

The working languages in the negotiations were Korean, Chinese, and English (Ji, 2013, p. 77), as clearly stated in the procedural agreement concerning the truce talk meetings: “The three languages, Korean, Chinese, and English, are of equal rank and validity. Thus all meetings must be held in the three languages” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 20). At the beginning of the negotiation, each meeting would begin with reading of the prepared statement by the chief of each delegation, which was interpreted into the other two languages. The interpreter usually read the prepared translation at this stage, at which point both sides moved cautiously. After reading of statements and hearing their interpretations, the two sides exchanged the statements, and the meeting of that day was over. Each side would then go back to its own quarters, carefully study the statement of the other side, prepare for answers and questions accordingly, and arrange for the next meeting (Ji, 2013, pp. 77–78). Aware of the big differences among the three working languages used in the negotiations, the American delegation later admitted that every statement was carefully prepared and precisely formulated the evening before, to guarantee that what they intended to say could be expressed correctly and precisely in the other two languages (Dean, 1960, p. 9). Interpreted consecutively in each of three languages, the negotiations moved at a very slow pace and were rather protracted.

The words and expressions in the negotiations and their interpreting reflected the status of the war and the tension between the two sides of the negotiations. As perceived by Robert Ekvall, the American interpreter, when the truce talks were proceeding with the war

going on, “words were bullets across the table”, while after the signing of the armistice agreement, “courteous phrasing and vicious invective were strangely mixed as each side tried diplomacy without quite forgetting the habits of war” (Ekvall, 1960: 50-51).

2.4. Interpreters as one-sided advocates in the negotiations

Unlike the typical practice of professional conference interpreting nowadays, in which interpreters are expected to be neutral mediators to facilitate communication across languages, in the Panmunjom negotiations both sides had their own interpreters and neither expected their interpreters to be neutral. The interpreter was not a “detached observer” (Salama-Carr, 2007, p. 7) but a member of his own camp serving its national interest and political agenda and assuming the same position and attitude as his principal.

The American interpreter Robert Ekvall would even align himself with his delegation in perceiving the linguistic advantage that the other side had. Although the dominant modality of interpreting was consecutive in the Panmunjom Negotiations, it was also common in the meetings that when the opposite side was speaking, the interpreter would whisper to his principal about the general nature and purport of the speech, so that the principal would learn the purport of his enemy in a short time and begin to write out the reply and pass it to his interpreters for rendering consecutively into the other two languages. In some cases when the principal happened to know the language of the opposite side, e.g., when Pu Shan or Huang Hua acted as the chief negotiator of the Chinese delegation, he would gain the advantage of having some time for preparing an answer or a retort in advance. According to Ekvall (1960, p. 55), having such linguistic proficiency was regarded as a strong competitive advantage by both sides, because whoever had this advantage would probably have the upper hand in the word fight.

2.5. Interpreters as military officers in the negotiations

The interpreters on both sides in the Korean Armistice Negotiations were not civilians. Unlike interpreters on most other interpreting occasions, they were enlisted military officers.

On the American side, the interpreters were appointed army officers who had been given certain military ranks. For example, Robert Ekvall was given the rank of captain when first appointed as an interpreter in Burma as an interpreter for the allied army and then in Korea. He was then appointed captain, liaison officer, major and colonel through his interpreting career (Ekvall, 1960, p. 11, p. 43). That means he

was regarded as a member of his delegation and was actively involved in preparing for and discussing the details of the negotiations.

On the Chinese and Korean sides, the interpreters were also members of the army – a photo taken at the negotiation site showed the interpreters in military uniforms (Chai, 2008, photo 8), though there was no mention of their ranks. Guo, one of the interpreters, recalled that many members of the Chinese delegation were selected from different institutions of the central government (Guo, 2008, p. 18) – that is, they had previously been civilians before joining the army in Korea to perform the task of interpreting. Therefore, after the arrival of the interpreters in Korea, military training became routine for them (Chai & Zhao, 1992, p. 150). Although there is no record indicating that the interpreters participated in the preparation or finalization of the negotiation details, it is a fact that, later, some of the interpreters were promoted to become high ranking officers, or even ambassadors. For example, Huang Hua, an interpreter and negotiator at the negotiations, became an ambassador later.

3. Conflicts as perceived by the interpreters in the negotiations

3.1. Conflicts between the interpreters of the two sides

Interpreters' recollections indicate that the interpreters in the Korean Armistice Negotiations would always keep a vigilant eye on their counterparts on the other side. The American interpreters noticed that the Chinese interpreters did extremely careful preparation as complete texts would always be read out rather than interpreted. To the American interpreters, their interpretations were precise and bombastic, but their habit of depending on prepared translations would become a handicap when ad lib speech followed (Ekvall, 1960, p. 67). There existed a competition, conscious or unconscious, between the interpreters on the two opposing sides. When the Chinese interpreter had difficulty in rendering the phrase "lamb chops" and Ekvall interpreted it as "the cutlets from an infant sheep", the latter would have a sense of psychological victory over his Chinese counterpart (Ekvall, 1960, p. 82). When sometimes an interpreted version or a better choice of words from the other side of the negotiations had to be adopted for the sake of accuracy, it was perceived as "sharpening my sword at the grindstone of the enemy" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 84). The Chinese interpreters had similar recollections but with a different perspective. They noticed that the translation/interpretation of the opposite side was "not good enough", and they had to rely mainly on their own (Chai & Zhao, 1992, p. 132).

Each interpreter was under constant inspection and challenge from the opposite side. When the interpreter on one side was performing his

interpreting task, his counterpart on the other side would feel relaxed because he was listening to his own native language⁵ and acting as a spectator or proofreader, though he could not “openly and officially correct the interpretation” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 115). However, when he detected a mistaken interpretation, or when some phrases or sentences were dropped out, he could whisper comments or scribble a note to his principal indicating the mistake or the omission. This led to another aspect of the function of interpreting which enforced the interpreter’s identification with his principal, who should not be prevented from knowing the real meaning of the mistaken interpretation and so was informed exactly of what had just been said. To a negotiation interpreter, the picking up of omissions is “of much greater importance” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 117), for the loss caused in the omission may lead to “serious consequences in the future course of the negotiations” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 117), and the interpreter “dare not let a phrase or sentence be lost, thereby having no meaning for his principal” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 117). If the opposite principal made an issue of the idea just rescued by his own interpreter, the interpreter who had left it out had “the unhappy feeling of having been measured by his foes” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 117). Obviously, this role of inspector-whisperer-scribbler allowed for a kind of self-protection for the interpreter’s own sake as, if he had let the mistake pass, it might have returned to haunt him (Ekvall, 1960, p. 117).

3.2. Hidden conflicts between the interpreters and their principals

In the Korean Armistice Negotiations, the relationship between the principals and the interpreters was like that between high-rank officers and their inferiors. The interpreter was expected to follow his principal closely and to echo what the principal said exactly no matter how difficult the task might be. The relationship between the interpreter and his principal was basically an inferior-superior one, seasoned with the interpreter’s knowledge reserve, language proficiency, individual personality and surrounding circumstances. Robert Ekvall gives a few accounts of the relationship between principals and interpreters in his book. He recalled that Pu Shan⁶, the Chinese staff officer and negotiator, spoke excellent English as a Harvard PhD and his English proficiency was much higher than that of his interpreter. However, by rule, the negotiator was limited to speaking only his native language. When the interpretation failed to deliver the excellence of his forceful and polished rhetoric, he was unsatisfied and showed impatience and even pain. When he could stand it no longer, “he would stop his interpreter with a fierce whisper ‘No-no, not that. Here read this.’ He himself would write out the English interpretation of what he had said and pass it to his interpreter to read.” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 56) Although that did not happen often, this type

of conflict revealed the inferior status of the interpreter, which was like that of a lower-rank soldier to his superior.

The American interpreter experienced conflicting moments with his principal too. Ekvall was once ordered to listen carefully and to point out any misinterpretation, which he did, and was then hated by his counterparts on the other side. When one day nothing was detected that needed a correction, he relaxed and remained inconspicuous. On those occasions his principal would growl “Damn it, Ekvall, what’s the matter? You asleep?” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 36). This typically demonstrates the notorious Catch-22 situation for an interpreter in such a situation: he would be hated by his counterparts if he did and would be scolded if he didn’t.

The more obvious and direct conflict came when, during the negotiations, the principal decided not to stick strictly to the prepared text, a priority enjoyed by him as the interpreter’s superior. He sometimes turned to ad lib speaking, making changes, additions, or embellishing rhetoric, or sometimes lapsed into his common native dialect, which amounted to an ultimate test or even to inaccessibility to the interpreter, who found himself stumbling over certain phrases and producing ill-matched phrases, sometimes even contradictions (Ekvall, 1960, p. 69). Then the interpreter would be blamed. The usual scene was that if the interpreting went on smoothly and precisely, it was regarded as natural and nothing surprising; but if less understanding or progress was achieved in the negotiations, the interpreter might become the target, or even the scapegoat for the failure. Torikai (2009) has made similar comments in the book of *Voices of the Invisible Presence – Diplomatic Interpreters in Post-World War II Japan*:

Ironically, the only time the presence of interpreters is highlighted is when they are held responsible for their alleged mistranslations. When things are going well, nobody pays attention to interpreters. Only when they make a mistake, or say something perceived as such, they find themselves in the spotlight ... Nobody notices the interpreter as long as he is doing all right, but the moment he makes a slip, he becomes the focus of attention. (p. 3)

3.3. Conflicts between different roles of the interpreters

In the Korean Armistice Negotiations, the interpreters were under military discipline to behave as soldiers and to obey their principals. However, the interpreter’s conscience is more of a linguist than of a soldier, which means their professional function might not always be in line with the military discipline and consequently that would lead to inner conflict within the interpreter: the conflict between the interpreter’s professionalism and a soldier’s absolute obedience to orders. The

interpreter was expected to convey faithfully and precisely what his principal had said – as Ekvall noted – the interpreters had their own perceptions of the requirements and demands stemming from the particular rhetoric, syntax, semantics, and all other resources of the other language, which were both compulsory and reasonable to them, but their principals might not perceive these requirements and demands. When the principal used meaningless words and expressions which were the most difficult to put into the other language, the interpreter would tend to become irritated (Ekvall, 1960, pp. 73–74).

At the Panmunjom truce talks, the topflight American Korean-language interpreter could no longer bear this kind of irritation and at one point he yelled that he would quit his job: “I am not going to interpret anymore of that crap while the people on the other side of the table sit and smirk ... No one can pay me enough to put that mess of meaningless words into good honest Korean while the other side ... sits and grins” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 75). As perceived by Ekvall, the irritation came not so much from any language incompetence of the interpreter as from the sense of helplessness of a soldier when his principal was forced into a corner and he had the feeling of being defeated, along with his principal, by the enemy side (Ekvall, 1960, p. 75). At this specific moment, his identification with his principal’s position would become a torment. Nevertheless, because he was both an interpreter and a U.S. army officer, he had to observe military discipline and had no way out other than to stay with the delegation and continue with his interpreting job, no matter how irritated he became. That can also be taken as evidence of the interpreter’s advocacy for his principal in negotiation interpreting.

The interpreter was also expected to keep his own emotions or biases under control so as not to either facilitate or impede the negotiation. The prevailing norm of expectation was that the interpreter should act as an echo of his principal. Besides searching for the most appropriate words or expressions, he was also expected to echo exactly the tone and rate of his principal, so as to be identified with his principal as closely as possible. Ekvall (1960) pointed out that in his day one of the primary rules of interpreting was that “the interpreter must not permit his own ideas, feelings, prejudices or convictions to intrude upon performance of his task” (p. 98). He illustrated this point by giving an account of an interpreter at Panmunjom who hated the opposite side with burning intensity and would rather fight with them than interpret to them, so that he made “the simplest statement of fact or opinion sound like a challenge to mortal combat” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 99). As a result, there were “appreciably fewer agreements reached and less business accomplished at the meeting where he interpreted, and in spite of his superior qualifications, his usefulness was sharply limited” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 99).

The interpreter also had to refrain from the temptation to intrude, not only out of inner compulsion but also as a result of anything proffered in the course of the meeting as bait. At some rare moment, a speaker

might not follow the game rule: he might ignore his own interpreter and speak directly to the interpreter of the other side. Ekvall had such a recollection: when the Chinese delegate sensed that his interpreter had failed in conveying his intended message and had missed the mark, he turned to Ekvall directly and said “Colonel Ekvall, you certainly understand what I really mean, don’t you?”. Ekvall recalled that he could only look noncommittal and did not acknowledge any special understanding in which his principal had had no part, because to a professional interpreter the correct thing to do was to control the temptation to speak or to nod (Ekvall, 1960, pp. 100–101).

It is also perceived that the interpreter had to reconcile paradoxical contradictions in his character and personality. Ekvall summed up two contradictory features which a successful interpreter was expected to have: “He may not be stolid and at the same time he must grimly and successfully refuse to panic” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 70). When the principal spoke too fast to permit the taking of adequate notes, or changed his mind and figures of speech, or used dangling phrases or sentences with no proper end, the interpreter, caught in a torrent of words, was expected to render his principal’s speech “equally clear or cloudy in another tongue” (Ekvall, 1960, p. 70). What is interesting is that the refusal to panic – to be tough, not only physically but also mentally – can also be perceived as a characteristic of a soldier.

3.4. Conflicts over language use between the negotiating parties

Wars of language could always be perceived in the Korean Armistice Negotiations, which were held between two warring parties or enemies. Very often, arguments and counterarguments, charges and countercharges lasted for hours, with extra difficulties for interpreters when the languages became filled with hesitations, circumlocutions, and all possible nuances. Sometimes the rotating riposte and attack impeded the negotiations with endless recriminations, which more than once led the American ambassador to walk out from the negotiation. Ekvall remarked that such incidents “marked a turning point in Sino-American relations”, and gave the Americans some “psychological advantage” which they had never had before, for they could “press them (the Chinese delegates) a little harder” after this during the negotiating process (Ekvall, 1960, p. 49). Such walkouts from the tent occurred a few times during the negotiation process. On the Chinese side, one such incident was recalled by Yang (2009, p. 37) as follows: when the American delegation walked out of the tent, all the Chinese representatives sat up in their seats, with presence of mind, and waited in the tent until all members of the opposite side left. Such different accounts of similar incidents reflect the different perceptions of the two opposing sides, who employed different strategies

in their fight, in attempts to gain what they deemed proper in the 'second front' of the war.

There were various occasions of arguments and counterarguments for choices of specific words or expressions in the interpreting activity, which appeared to be linguistic problems or difficulties due to a lack of equivalents in the two languages. However, many a time they also revealed the essential conflicts of viewpoints which were disguised as textual matters. At these moments, the interpreter's linguistic competence became a decisive factor for gain or loss. If the interpretation was inadequate, the interpreter might intensify the conflict atmosphere by creating new conflicts, causing an upgrade of the word war.

3.5. Conflicts arising from misconceptions of the interpreting activity

The interpreters also encountered conflicts with outsiders of the interpreting activity. There were misconceptions about the images of interpreters in the negotiations. In the first few days of his arrival at Panmunjom, when Ekvall was waiting for further orders about his job as an interpreter, one disgruntled officer, believing that Ekvall's rank was too high for a mere interpreter, suggested that he "be declared superfluous and sent away from Panmunjom" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 45), which revealed a typical misconception of the value of interpreters. The interpreters' functions were often unrecognized in the war zones, especially by combatants.

As an experienced interpreter in war zones, Ekvall had psychologically prepared himself for such misconceptions. When requested to go to Burma with the U.S. Army because of his knowledge of Chinese, he asked for an army title. He said he would go, but not as a civilian, because "[A] civilian with the army can be a forlorn creature" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 29).

One of Ekvall's best friends, a fellow officer at Panmunjom, once uttered a vehement denunciation that the interpreter was nothing but a damned parrot: "He [the speaker] says 'Squeak, squeak, squeak', and you say 'squawk, squawk, squawk'. A hell of a job!" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 70). Even some administrators, too, would sometimes call their interpreters "prima donnas" and considered them "too temperamental for any good use" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 70). Such remarks are typical of a layman's expression of contempt and disdain out of ignorance of the job of interpreting, which, according to the interpreter Robert Ekvall (1960), was "a function in itself" (pp. 31), and the interpreter's knowledge of the foreign language a tool "for the unearthing of facts and for getting things done". (p.37)

4. Particularity of norms and ethics for the interpreting activity in the Korean Armistice Negotiations

Unlike other types of interpreting activities, in which the interpreter is expected to be an objective and neutral facilitator and mediator, in interpreting for the Korean Armistice Negotiations it was often difficult for the interpreters to find politically or even linguistically neutral spaces. For the interpreter in the negotiations, who had to take political positions and serve his own camp, a soldier's fidelity and loyalty would always override the norms of interpreting.

As can be seen from the recollections of those interpreters working for the negotiations, absolute fidelity and loyalty to their principals and their camps were considered the norm expected not only by the interpreter, but also by the principal. This was the true ethics underpinning the whole interpreting activity in Panmunjom.

As illustrated in the above sections, the negotiations were a special battle field between the two opposing camps. Everything the negotiator said, together with the way he said it, was believed to be meaningful. Therefore absolute faithfulness, or fidelity, was the norm that was strictly observed. The rule of strict faithfulness in negotiation interpreting, as understood by Ekvall, was that "the interpreter must never add, even in the interest of clarification, anything of his own to what is being said; and conversely, he must never subtract, for neither subtraction nor ... omission is permissible" (Ekvall, 1960, p. 102). Even when the principal meant to fuzz it up and create confusion, the interpreter was not expected to make any clarification or shed further light, for obscurity sometimes had its uses. The rule of strict faithfulness was also perceived by Churchill's wartime Russian interpreter, Major A.H. Birse, who had similar reflections in his *Memoirs of an Interpreter*: "The speaker might be purposely vague or irrelevant, in order to gain time or watch his opponent's reaction", and the interpreter was "obliged to sink all individual feelings and cling to the exact reproduction of what was being said", for the first duty of the interpreter was "loyalty to one's chief [principal]" (Birse, 1967, p. 114). The principal had the same expectation. Churchill would want his interpreter "to be exact in translation", and was happy when the interpreter "got him across" very well (Birse, 1967, p. 101, p. 104). Similarly, Ekvall recalled a most unhappy staff meeting in Panmunjom when he had to interpret "the most amazing jumble of contradictions ever uttered", and had been tempted to "insert one or two explanatory phrases"(Ekvall, 1960, p. 103) to make everything clear, but he managed to hold true to his principal's words – to be loyal to his principal – and he left the other side in bewilderment, while he himself felt humiliated. However, his principal praised him for doing a good job, because he perceived that the opposite side did not understand, which was exactly what he intended. "If they had understood I would have known

that you were misinterpreting. They weren't supposed to understand. I was purposely fuzzing it up." (Ekvall, 1960, p. 103).

Obviously, such a special normative rule of strict faithfulness imposes a strong binding power in negotiation interpreting. As perceived by Ekvall (1960), when serious matters are being discussed at a conference table, none of these interpreting strategies – addition, clarification, subtraction, compression, omission – are allowed, even for the sake of facilitating communication.

The military discipline strengthened the interpreter's loyalty to his principal in the negotiations. He is not expected to be loyal to the client or to the target audience, or to become a bridge for communication, as interpreters on other occasions are expected to be. He must be loyal only to the original speaker. All the other ethics involved in the profession of interpreting/translation, which were outlined by Chesterman as ethics of representation, ethics of service, ethics of communication, and norm-based ethics (Chesterman, 2001, pp. 139–142), become secondary to the ethics of loyalty and absolute faithfulness to the principal's speech.

5. Conclusion

The present analysis of the interpreters' post-hoc accounts of the Korean Armistice Negotiations shows that the interpreting activity in the negotiations was part and parcel of the theatre of war. It was a second battle field in which everything involved was related to the military operations on the war front: all conflicts encountered during the interpreting of negotiations were closely related to the actual movements of the war. It is clear that, in the interpreting activity of the Korean Armistice Negotiations, absolute fidelity was regarded as the ultimate norm and loyalty towards the principal was the prime ethics strictly observed by the interpreters.

Such analysis can give us some new insights of the historical event from the perspective of interpreters as well as new understanding about the activity of negotiation interpreting. As is demonstrated by the current study, the interpreters' recollections can make a worthy contribution to the recording and understanding of history, though they might be mediated and to some degree self-serving, and might be influenced by the interpreters' own ideological background. However, they reveal the important information and actual working conditions of negotiation interpreters, which are otherwise very difficult to access. If we agree that "a historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of all the persons who participated in it" (Ginzburg, 1993, p. 24), the interpreters' accounts of interpreting at the Korean Armistice Negotiations deserve a place in academic attention which they have not gained until recently. Although such personal recollections by interpreters involved in major historical events have their

limitations, they can provide us with valuable information and first-hand materials which have remained untouched in previous studies. New insight into the interpreters' role may shed new light on accounts of major historical events. For instance, one of the most influential writings about the Korean Armistice Negotiations comes to the conclusion that, because the American side did not win the Korean War, they tried to win back something in the negotiations, but they failed again due to the "military staff rather than [the] diplomatic [staff]" (Chai & Zhao, 1992, p. 177). Contrary to this statement, the interpreter Ekvall had feelings of victory, both virtually and psychologically, on quite a few occasions during the negotiations, during which, in his opinion, his principal demonstrated excellent diplomatic skills. While on the same matter, the Chinese interpreters expressed the idea that "what they couldn't get in the war front, they couldn't get in the second front either" (Chai & Zhao, 1992, p. 177).

The microhistorical study of interpreters' accounts of major historic events can provide a new perspective on the complexity of the interpreters' role in conflict zones and on the various conflicts involved in negotiation interpreting. It can also help to explore and explain what is hidden behind the complexity of the conflicts, thus offering a new approach to interpreting studies as well as to history studies.

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- 1 According to Yang Tao (2010), the number of meetings at various levels totaled 733.
- 2 This is quite typical of the historical sources in general and in post-WWII historical events in particular. For instance, little was said by conventional history about interpreters at the Nuremberg or at the Tokyo trials. The interest in the interpreters has increased with the strengthening of the social perception of their role(s) and with the rise of interpreting studies as an academic discipline (e.g., Baigorri-Jalon, Sanchez, & Manuela, 2010a; Sanchez & Manuela, 2010b; Torikai, 2009).
- 3 The book attracted intense attention after its appearance and received six book reviews within the first two years of publication, which is a clear sign of popularity.
- 4 Li Kenong and Qiao Guanhua were regarded as the actual leaders of the CPVA delegation in the Panmunjom Negotiations, though they didn't show up at the negotiation table.
- 5 The interpreter in the Negotiations interpreted only for his own principal, who shared with him the same mother tongue. That means he always interpreted his native language into a foreign language, unlike in the common practice of interpreting, where the interpreter usually interprets into his native language.
- 6 Pu Shan was Director of the Secretariat of the Chinese delegation, which took charge of all the practical work of the negotiations and to which the interpreter group belonged. In other words, Pu Shan was not only the principal, but also the direct boss of the interpreters.