

The Silent Voice in Diplomacy

Dr. Karin Sibul¹,

¹Independent Researcher, sibulkarin@gmail.com

Received: 01/06/2022

Accepted: 13/06/2022

Published: 27/05/2023

Abstract:

Diplomatic interpreting is a niche field in Interpreting Studies. After having worked as a freelance diplomatic interpreter in Estonia for several years, the author offers an insider's view into linguistic challenges she encountered and into how both interpreting and translation helped her succeed in her diplomatic interpreting assignments. During the scrutinised period (1992–2006), diplomatic interpreting supported the Republic of Estonia's aspirations to be recognised and accepted in world politics as a sovereign state that had regained independence in 1991. The author reflects on diplomatic interpreting from the angle of (un)interpretability of culture-bound terms and the speaker's idiolect.

Keywords: diplomatic interpreter, Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital, (un)interpretability.

1. Introduction

In her seminal work, *Interpreters as Diplomats: A Diplomatic History of the Role of Interpreters in World Politics*, political scientist Ruth Roland brings into the limelight “a very special, too often unappreciated, career field” (1999). She outlines two reasons why historians have ignored translators and interpreters.

First, there is often a total lack of historic documentation. People of power and influence in centuries past seldom considered a mere interpreter's name to be worth recording. Second, most historians, confined to “important” events and to the limitations imposed by the desired size of their books, cannot be expected to include every intriguing tidbit they may uncover (ibid. 1999: 8).

Roland also draws attention to a “missing link” in the chronicles of political history.

Library shelves overflow with accounts of bilateral and multilateral conferences, meetings with heads of state, as well as regular, ongoing political and economic contacts at the international level. Surely, thoughtful readers must often wonder about the practical, functional aspect of intercourse among nations, of which none is more basic than language (ibid: 7).

The Republic of Estonia proclaimed its independence in 1918 when Estonian was first introduced as the official language and thereafter as the state language. Estonia was independent from 1918 to 1940. The Soviet Union occupied Estonia in 1940 and again after World War II in 1944. The concept of the state language was abolished. Russian was enforced in Estonia with the covert aim of imposing bilingualism and achieving a gradual switch to Russian monolingualism. Estonia was forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union and was a Soviet republic from 1944 to 1991. Following the restoration of political independence in 1991, Estonia faced the task of transforming itself from a Soviet republic with an introverted and command economy into a developing democracy and open market economy. Socio-political changes brought legal, fiscal, financial and other reforms along with them, accompanied by new terminology. The issue the author faced in the early years of her career as a diplomatic interpreter, therefore, was how to cope with terminology still not firmly established in the Estonian language.

2. A note on terminology

The definition “diplomatic interpreting” – as it is used in international intercourse – is used to describe a special type of conference interpreting, since “the focus is placed on high levels of professional skills” (Pöchhacker 2011: 208) and requires the ability to interpret extremely complicated speeches. Christopher Thiéry points out that diplomatic interpreting in the contemporary world “is often taken to refer to the manner in which language barriers have been overcome in meetings of heads of state and dignitaries over the centuries and up to the present day” (2015: 107). According to Thiéry, “modern-day diplomatic interpreting is in fact conference interpreting in a diplomatic setting” (ibid: 107). In modern interpreting terminology, this kind of interpreting may also be called “political

interpreting” (Baker 1997: 124) or “interpreting in political interviews” (ibid: 111). Other authors called this interpreting mode “interpreting in diplomatic settings” (Buri 2015). Examining *Voices of the Invisible Presence: Diplomatic Interpreters in Post-World War II Japan*, Kumiko Torikai calls the interpreters “simultaneous conference interpreters working in diplomacy” (2009: 10).

3. Methodology

The empirical material for this article is based on the autoethnographic analysis of the author’s logbook. It covers her thirty-nine years as a conference interpreter and, more specifically, her diplomatic interpreting assignments from 1992 to 2006, stretching from the restoration of Estonia’s independence to its accession to the European Union and NATO, which both took place in 2004. The logbook is, in the author’s view, a valuable set of empirical data. During the period examined (1992–2006), the author carried out a total of 1,302 interpreting assignments totalling 2,565 workdays, an average of 183 working days per year. The logbook entries are brief: they contain the date, the name of the interpreting event and the mode of interpretation. Short comments are added only if something exceptional or remarkable took place.

Interpreting Studies do not offer many tools for the analysis of such a logbook. One possible solution was to apply autoethnography, a method more commonly associated with other disciplines and rarely used in Interpreting Studies. This method combines “cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details” (Chang 2008: 46). In autoethnography, a narrative arising from personal experience is constructed and then understood in a broader social context. The understanding comes from the so-called insider’s point of view; in the case of Estonia, this is that interplay between interpretation and the politico-cultural context. An autoethnographic analysis contributes to a better understanding of a societal phenomenon. Kumiko Torikai has applied oral history as a method and her research is an excellent example of how personal narratives can be successfully applied to the analysis of personal experiences (2009).

The author has also relied on interviews and communication with her four diplomatic interpreter colleagues (a German-language interpreter from Estonia, an English-language interpreter from Latvia and two English-language interpreters from Lithuania). The author’s retrospective view examines the time in office of two presidents over three terms. Estonia regained independence in 1991 and

presidential elections took place in 1992. In this period, President Lennart Meri of Estonia took office for the first of his two terms, which both lasted nine years. During the fourteen years under scrutiny, the author carried out 191 diplomatic interpreting assignments for presidential meetings, including twelve meetings with kings and queens from four countries (the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden and Denmark) and fifty-two meetings with twenty-four heads of state. Altogether, this represented 244 days of work. In addition to interpreting formal addresses and speeches, the author also worked at face-to-face meetings and interpreted spontaneous conversations and banter between royals, heads of states and the president of Estonia. Events ranged from the UN General Assemblies and European Council meetings to state visits, news conferences and various ceremonies; from meetings with presidents of the United States to small talk with other presidents during conference coffee breaks. Modes of interpreting ranged from simultaneous to consecutive and *chuchotage*, or whispered interpreting.

4. Estonia's bid to gain symbolic capital

During Estonia's dramatic political and economic changeover, the credibility of reforms and that of the president occasionally depended not only on the field of origin, but also on the field of reception: that is, to what extent the interpreters mastered Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and delivered the president's message correctly, so that it was received by the audience without distortion or ambiguity. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu warned of "misunderstandings in international communication" because "texts do not bring their context with them" (1999: 221). The interpreter's knowledgeable use of up-to-date terminology and efforts to master continuously revised terminology were therefore significant to allow heads of state and government to express themselves their own language, a right enshrined in several legislations. British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston expressed this concept as early as 1851: "every Government was entitled to use its own language in official communications" (Satow 2011: 67). A more recent and tangible example is the multilingual policy of the European Union, which has 24 official languages (EU multilingualism).

The author draws upon the theories illustrated by Pierre Bourdieu, in particular those defining symbolic capital as accumulation and enhancement of prestige and recognition. The author extends the concept of symbolic capital from individuals to states, in order to demonstrate Estonia's bid to boost the state's

symbolic capital. To paraphrase Bourdieu, the interpreter is an agent who enjoys the privilege of contributing to the field within which (s)he functions, and is thus associated with the symbolic capital needed by a newly independent country. The representative of the state exercises the right to use the state language with the help of interpreters, thus making a bid for the state's symbolic capital. The use of Estonian is therefore directly linked to the prestige of the state language, which contributes to the growth of the state's symbolic capital. A diplomatic interpreter's use of relevant and correct terminology increases the recipient's confidence not only in that interpreter, but also in the state. In the author's opinion, Bourdieu's approach could be used to explain how the interpreter's work contributes to the accumulation of the state's symbolic capital. The interpreter's explicit professionalism exhibited with the use of correct terminology indirectly augments that symbolic capital. To do so, the interpreter and the act of interpreting must be seen as credible (cf. Sibul 2017b). In the data collected by the author, the invisibility of the interpreter emerged also in the fact that organisers, security staff and frequently foreign ministry and presidential staff might not understand what interpreters need to be able to do their job properly. This is understandable given that handbooks and histories of diplomatic protocol rarely mention interpretation but rather overlook linguistic communication (Black 2010; Berridge 2010). *Satow's Diplomatic Practice* (Roberts 2009), the sixth and revised edition of Satow's ground-breaking historic book, is an exception in that it dedicates a longer section to languages, "The Languages, Forms and Means of Diplomatic Intercourse". Other books tend to limit themselves to a historic overview of the languages used in diplomatic intercourse (Hamilton/Langhorne 1995) or rely on Satow's description of the transformation of English into a diplomatic language (Satow 2004: 25–50). An important event in Estonia in which interpreting (for a language that was nearly extinct) obtained recognition took place in 2011. It occurred on the occasion of a speech by President Toomas-Hendrik Ilves of Estonia that was interpreted into Livonian on 25 November 2015 at a conference entitled *Livonians. Country. People. History*.² The interpreter was Dr Valts Ernštreits, whose doctoral dissertation examined the evolution of written Livonian

² Historic Livonia comprises Northern Latvia and Southern Estonia. The last known native speaker of Livonian, Grizelda Kristina (b. 1910), who lived in Canada, died in 2013. Arguably, 177 people identify themselves as Livonians today. The Livonian language (also known as Liv) belongs to the Uralic languages, the Baltic-Finnic sub-group of the Finno-Ugric group. It is the closest language to Estonian. The Baltic-Finnic sub-group comprises Finnish, Estonian, Livonian, Votic, Ingrian, Karelian and Veps.

(2011).

5. The Importance of Translating Written Texts for Interpreting Tasks

President Meri set an example of how to apply diplomatic interpreting to reinforce the symbolic power of the official language in Estonia. His chief of protocol Piret Saluri helped shape diplomatic interpreting over the seven years she worked for him. President Meri was fluent in three languages and conversed in another two. In this case, what happens when the president speaks several languages? At each of Meri's inaugurations, he delivered his speech to the diplomatic corps in Estonian, and he was interpreted consecutively into English. As for other speeches, the one given by the doyenne was interpreted from English into Estonian, and speeches at the official parliamentary ceremony were interpreted simultaneously into English. In her interview for this study, Saluri elaborated on what she considered the fundamental concept of diplomatic relations: the notion of cultural foundation, which points out that, in the diplomatic setting, the dignity of one of the parties should not be threatened by making him or her speak a poorly mastered foreign language. Similarly, international events (conferences, congresses, etc.) held in Estonia should be declared open in Estonian. This was a principle that President Meri and his prime ministers adhered to. While Estonian prime ministers would deliver their speeches in Estonian and have them interpreted, President Meri enjoyed adding an element of surprise by switching back and forth between languages halfway through the speech, demanding great power of concentration from the interpreter. During President Meri's time in office, simultaneous interpretation was also used for the speech celebrating the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia. At the first celebration of this kind, in 1993, the author provided whispered interpretation for foreign journalists; from 1994 to 2001, she interpreted simultaneously for the benefit of the diplomatic corps. Later, it was decided that translated speeches would be distributed to the audience instead. In diplomatic interpreting, the interpreters are under enormous responsibility and pressure not to make any mistake that might cause a diplomatic incident and also have to deal with the trust and faith placed in them.

The author's interpreting assignments (diplomatic and non-diplomatic) and the interaction of the two types of assignments had a highly favourable impact.

Usually, prior to interpreting at the president's office, the author had interpreted the same topic or person at a conference or at another high-level meeting and was, therefore, already familiar with the topic. To give just one example, I would like to refer to the visit of the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Estonia from 31 May to 2 June 1994. He met with the prime minister, president and speaker of the *Riigikogu*, the Estonian parliament. The author was frequently asked to translated texts to accompany such meetings, which allowed her to enrich her vocabulary with highly specific terminology that otherwise might have been difficult to gather. A long-term working relationship with the presidential staff also helped her obtain additional information and memos prepared to brief the president. Discussing such meetings and topics added layer upon layer to the author's professional proficiency as an interpreter. If she had interpreted only for the president, she would have had statistically just about one and a half diplomatic interpreting assignments per month over fourteen years.

One of her most strenuous and comprehensive periods of terminological preparation preceded the official visit by His All Holiness, Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch to Estonia from 27 October to 1 November 2000. Another example is: on 11 November 2002, the president of Estonia received the delegation of Porvoo Communion, a communion of fifteen mainly northern European Anglican and Lutheran churches.³ Without preparation, the ecclesiastical hierarchy as well as terms of address would have been uncharted territory for the author. As the foreign ministry had previously asked the author to translate several documents related to the Porvoo Communion, the glossary she had prepared was helpful when preparing for the presidential meeting.

An interpreter is exposed to current and up-to-date terminology in both the source and the target language. At the diplomatic level, meetings are focused and concise, albeit full of terminology, sometimes covering ten topics in ten minutes. Expressions such as *axis of evil*, *rogue states*, *Wider Europe*, *Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas* and others may be unfamiliar to the interpreter unless he or she has a keen interest in current events. Nuances of diplomatically poignant expressions, such as *doors remain very much open*, *very firmly open*, *differentiated approach*, *proximity instrument*, *like-minded states*, *real*

³ The Porvoo Communion is a communion of churches that signed an agreement to 'share a common life in mission and service' in 1996. These churches are either Anglican or Lutheran. The Porvoo churches agree on certain fundamental issues, but Porvoo is not a new denomination.

*cooperation versus promotion, Governing Council versus Coalition Provisional Authority, Core Group versus Liaison Group, soft security versus civil security, and others, if properly used, increase the interpreter's reliability not only in the eyes of the president's opposite number in the foreign country but also in the eyes of the presidents' advisors and foreign ministry staff. Each of the desk officers or advisors has a detailed knowledge of a subject field or country, whereas the interpreter has to master navigating through all these dangerous waters (through diligent preparation and glossary compilation). One-off acronyms may be highly country or field specific (e.g., NEI, EPINE, FEMIP, PSSA, etc.). Titles and terms of address are culturally specific: *The Right Honourable, His Excellency, Your Excellency, Your Holiness, His Lordship, HM Ambassador, Minister Delegate by the Prime Minister for Ethnic Minorities*, etc. A diplomatic interpreter has to be quick to differentiate between *note takers, floaters* and *pin holders*. Names of agreements, treaties and covenants vary from country to country: an *Agreement on Cultural Cooperation* is concluded with Croatia, but an *Agreement on Cultural Relations* with Romania; a *Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement* with Croatia, but an *Agreement on Trade and Economic Relations* with Romania, to give but a couple of examples. These few examples demonstrate that translating written texts is an excellent way of working on one's vocabulary. The author translated texts from English into Estonian and from Estonian into English on topics ranging from research papers to detailed fiscal reports and from formal addresses to conference presentations. This allowed her to build on her otherwise scarce Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) in various subject fields. Long hours spent on written texts pondering terminology translated into easier assignments as an interpreter and helped to lay the foundation of the author's reputation as a diplomatic interpreter.*

6. Overcoming disbelief

Speeches given by visiting foreign dignitaries are usually not provided in advance, although they often mention local trivia and the current affairs, which is one of the most challenging aspects of the interpreter's work. Such speeches are written in a way that seeks to establish a bond of trust with the audience right from the outset, with plenty of hints meant to show the president's knowledge of the local culture right from the very beginning. Take, for example, an excerpt from President Barack Obama's speech in Warsaw:

The faithful come together at churches like *Saint Stanislaus Kostka*. We have a parade for Polish Constitution Day. And every summer, we celebrate the Taste of Polonia, with our *kielbasa* and *pierogies*, and we're all a little bit Polish for that day. (italics added) (Obama 2014)

A Lithuanian interpreter who interpreted the speech from English into Lithuanian shared his emotions:

When, after some time of anxious waiting before the speech, sentences like these are thrown at the interpreter, it is easy to get lost and start doubting your judgment. This is particularly true when the interpreter is not a native of the country where the speech is given. A reference to a Polish saint and *kielbasa* and *pierogies* may be too much. Knowledge of Russian or Polish helps, but references like these can catch any interpreter off-guard.⁴

It is impossible to know everything beforehand, but anticipating local niceties may help interpreters when faced with unexpected things. A golden rule for diplomatic interpreters to remember is that they should be aware that any topic may come up suddenly and without anticipation. To give but one example from the author's experience, on 11 September 2001, a news conference with prime ministers Mart Laar of Estonia and José María Aznar of Spain had just started when news arrived of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre's Twin Towers. Interpreters in such situations, caught unaware, have to make a split-second decision, even if the source language is their mother tongue, about whether they have understood the message correctly. Another unexpected turn of events dates back to 1996. President Lennart Meri was delivering the annual Estonian version of the state of the union address to mark the 78th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia on 24 February when suddenly the lights went off. The audience of about one thousand was left in the darkness. The author, who interpreted the speech, was located far away from the hall in a windowless attic room, nowhere near the sound technician, unaware of the total power outage, alone in the darkness. It took time before the news reached the interpreter and power was restored.

7. Interpretation into the foreign language

Unlike conference interpreters, diplomatic interpreters usually interpret

⁴ Arunas Sileris, e-mail message to the author, 16 September 2014.

from their mother tongue into the foreign language (Fleming 2014; Obst 2010: 11). Even so, this may present unexpected stumbling stones. If the president refers to “a Siberian lice comb”⁵ or to “a unique boat carved out of a single trunk of an aspen tree”⁶ in his foreign policy speech, the interpreter may be caught unaware. The question then is whether the speech is interpretable and the interpretation performable. According to White House interpreter Harry Obst, meetings in which one has to interpret from a foreign language into one’s mother tongue are more difficult for the interpreter “because you are not familiar with the names of the people, places and institutions in those countries, plus you usually know very little about their national policies and problems” (2010: 109). This situation is very familiar to interpreters of smaller languages such as Estonian, who nearly always interpret in both directions. The only times the author has interpreted for the president from Estonian into English – that is, in only one direction and into her foreign language – were at meetings with US presidents who brought along their own English-Estonian interpreter.

Speeches made by presidents may be held indoors or outdoors. However, the ways of the past, where there was an actual interpreter standing beside them, seem to be disappearing. International preference is for simultaneous interpretation, which moves the interpreter to the back of the room and allows for bigger margins of error compared to having one standing next to the president interpreting in the consecutive mode or rereading a translated text. US Secretary of State Madeline Albright outlines another aspect of this – that of bonding:

What I think is very interesting, is the role of interpreters in foreign policy and how important it is to have somebody who not only does the interpreting, but helps with the nuances, because they are essential in most of these conversations. So the role of the interpreter in creating that kind of relationship between two leaders is very important (2006).

What I think is very interesting, is the role of interpreters in foreign policy and how important it is to have somebody who not only does the interpreting, but helps with the nuances, because they are essential in most of these conversations. So the role of the interpreter in creating that kind of relationship between two leaders is very important (2006).

8. (Un)interpretability

⁵ *Siberi täikamm* in Estonian.

⁶ *Ühepuulootsik* in Estonian.

For diplomatic interpreters, the interpretability or uninterpretability of a speech largely depends on their general knowledge (see also Snelling 2009). An Estonian-German interpreter recalled the visit by President Roman Herzog of Germany to Estonia in 1998.⁷ President Meri's opening words in Estonian were from Genesis 1:2: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters". Later even the president (who was fluent in German) was impressed by the interpreter's knowledge, as she happened to know it properly in German. Another example is from the author's experience, and demonstrates that sometimes sheer luck helps. In 1996 Hillary Clinton visited Estonia. The First Lady quoted a poem by Kristjan Jaak Peterson, "Kuu" ["Moon"], in English;⁸ it just so happened that the author knew the original by heart.

Kas siis selle maa keel

Laulu tuules ei või

Taevani tõustes üles

Igavikku omale otsida?

Cannot the tongue of this land,
In the wind of incantation,
Rising up to the heavens,
Seek eternity?

If she had not, she would have opted for omission, as any attempt to interpret a poem is doomed to fail and to embarrass the interpreter.

Diplomatic interpreting and strategies used by diplomatic interpreters have been studied by Mona Baker (2000) and Cecilia Wadensjö (2008) among others. If in his economic policy speech the president refers to "boats swashing in the primordial broth of the mother's womb",⁹ the interpreter may be caught unaware. What is the strategy to opt for in such a case? Is an omission acceptable or should the interpreter come out with something like "a unique Komi-Zyrian boat carved

⁷ Kersti Kittus, interviewed by the author, 19 June 2012.

⁸ The translator of the poem is unknown.

⁹ *Emäisa ürgpulgongis hulpivad laevukesed* in Estonian.

out of a single trunk of an aspen tree”¹⁰ or “capitals are playing football at the European crossroads with bloody human heads”? ¹¹ The interpreter has a millisecond to take a decision. Situations like these are challenging for an interpreter standing next to the president and may have a catastrophic outcome. In 1991 Hans Dietrich Genscher, the German foreign minister, visited Estonia and gave a joint press conference with Estonian president Lennart Meri. The Estonian-German interpreter stopped for a second too long to find the best equivalent in German and President Meri, fluent in German himself, interpreted his own speech into German, ending it with a comment: “Well, you see the kind of working conditions we have here. I even have to do the job of the interpreter myself.” Needless to say, the interpreter was so embarrassed that she never interpreted again. This is a well-known case among interpreters in Estonia.

A diplomatic interpreter has to make swift and conscious decisions. Based on job experience, the interpreter must analyse what is being said quickly and accurately: “He cannot select a word in the target language before he has determined the exact meaning in the source language” (Obst 2010: 38). If the president uses the expression *vorst vorsti vastu*, the interpreter may make a conscious choice to opt for “tit for tat” to make it understandable for the English-speaking audience. The literal interpretation of the phrase – “sausage for sausage” – would not make sense. However, what if the president, known for his figurative idiolect, then continues to expand upon the idea of sausages? Should the interpreter continue to use “tit” or maybe “tat”? Or should he or she add a quick explanation of the literal meaning of *vorst vorsti vastu* to facilitate understanding? How would the interpreter’s performance be rated? Does the strategic choice made here, whatever it may be, have anything to do with the interpreter’s familiarity with the subject and the specific topic? In this particular case, the answer was no: the president who used the term is a famous Estonian author and film director, known to enjoy verbal sparring and keeping the audience in suspense as they await another witty comparison. These types of unanswered questions in Interpreting Studies, however, deserve to be researched. Continuing with this example, the interpreter might omit “tit for tat”, hoping that the following highly intellectual discussion will not focus on sausages. She might do the same with *puulane ja tohtlane* [wooden man and birch-bark maid], two well-known characters from Estonian folklore who transport wealth for their master,

¹⁰ *Sürja-komi ühepuulootsik* in Estonian.

¹¹ *Pealinnad veriste inimpeadega jalgpalli mängimas Euroopa ristteedel* in Estonian.

but she definitely could not omit the concepts of *kratt*¹² and *rehepaplus*.¹³ Both of these concepts are actively used and often find their way into speeches in the most unexpected of situations. A *kratt*

is a creature that anybody can make for himself, but it must be done so secretly that no human eye sees it. Its body is a broomstick, its head a broken jug, its nose a piece of glass, and its arms two reels which have been used by an old crone of a hundred years. All these things are easy to procure. You must set up this creature on three Thursday evenings at a crossroad, and animate it with the words, which I will teach you. On the third Thursday, the creature will come to life (Kirby 1894/2006).

When the term *kratt* has arisen while she was interpreting, the author has chosen to say the Estonian word and added “an Estonian house-spirit”. The term *rehepaplus* also has its origin in folklore but recently a contemporary Estonian author, Andrus Kivirähk, has made the concept popular. His novel *Rehepapp ehk november* (2000) [*The Old Barny*] led to the birth of the concept of *rehepaplus* [old-barnyism], which in the press acquired the meaning of “constantly thinking of the easiest way to appropriate something to one’s own use” (Heinapuu/Kikas 2004: 102). Eric Dickens (1953–2017), who has translated excerpts from the novel into English, has explained: “To sum up, I fear that since the English-speaking world, especially Britain, knows so lamentably little about Estonian history and culture, people would only be able to laugh at the slapstick and miss all the cultural digs, parallels and references” (2002).

Culture-bound terms are a problem trigger and when working, the author’s approach was to deal with them on a case-by-case basis. For example, when simultaneously interpreting President Meri’s anniversary speech, she interpreted literally the following thought:

Europe does not expect Estonia to represent a German or Belgian way of thinking but a characteristically Estonian one, as the strength of Europe lies in the interoperability of various ways of thinking. Europe needs Pearu and Andres, Paul Ariste, Jaan Einasto and Endel Lippmaa, not Coca-Cola bottled in Estonia.¹⁴

No text of President Meri’s speeches was ever provided in advance; therefore, it was impossible to prepare for the unexpected. In this particular case,

¹² Translated as ‘treasure-bringer’, ‘goblin’ or ‘house spirit’.

¹³ Translated as ‘old-barnyism’.

¹⁴ The President of the Republic’s speech to mark the 82nd anniversary of the Republic of Estonia on 24 February 2000.

the interpreter assumed that the diplomatic corps present had some knowledge of Estonian culture and got the message. It is worth remembering that diplomatic interpreters do not have the time a translator does to search for the most justified choice of words or to consult various reference books. According to Obst, diplomatic interpreters “work with only the knowledge in their head” (2010). Good general knowledge, carefully studied subject matter and vocabulary are valuable assets. The interpreter should not dull the speaker’s figurative language nor any extravagant use of language, in particular, if it has become the speaker’s brand.

9. CONCLUSION

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital allowed the author to explore and describe the interpreter’s position for the first time in the context of the state’s symbolic capital. Interpreters as agents in the field were privileged to contribute to the state’s symbolic capital while remaining invisible. Looking specifically at President Meri, he was an experienced speaker, a master of unexpected metaphors and parallels whose figurative language captured the audience and converted boring political speak into memorable speeches. He became well-known for intertwining historic detours, attention-grabbing facts or associations in official discussions. There is little an interpreter can do to prepare for this type of speech other than to have comprehensive general knowledge, broad vocabulary and be well aware of the speaker’s idiolect. In the case of President Meri, the interpreter had to keep in mind Meri’s intention to educate and involve his audience as he strove to explain Estonia’s aspirations. Generally speaking, the interpreter’s performance is also monitored by the president during consecutive interpretation, making the interpretation of the president’s speech from English into Estonian especially challenging for the interpreter, not to say scary: the interpreter must convey the president’s ideas in his figurative mother tongue.

The author’s recommendation for a diplomatic interpreter is to consider the tremendous emotional and psychological pressure any such interpreting assignment involves and to be ready to cope with it without sacrificing quality and meaning of the message. In the diplomatic environment, there is little possibility to interrupt the speaker or clarify potential misunderstandings. Given such conditions, doing written translations and other interpreting assignments helped the author to expand and diversify her vocabulary and came in handy in many a

tricky interpreting situation.

When researching or discussing diplomatic interpreting it is important to be aware of the coping tactics used by diplomatic interpreters if the speech contains uninterpretable phrases and the interpreter feels like the interpretation thereof may be unperformable. This is like standing under Niagara Falls: with an unstoppable flow of water coming at you, there is no getting back up once you fall. An interpreter doing diplomatic interpreting has to cope with extreme stress and occasionally long working hours. For the author the silent voice in diplomacy is the interpreter's voice. Indeed, the interpreter's voice has to be heard while his or her person remains invisible. In the words of Seth Mydans, the diplomatic interpreter must be "present but not present" (2005). He or she must resort to all existing knowledge generated, as his or her invisible efforts contribute to the state's symbolic capital. In hindsight, the author considers freelance translating and interpreting a wise decision that helped her cope with linguistic challenges..

10. Bibliography List :

- Alonso-Araguás, I. / Baigorri-Jalón, F. (2004). "Iconography of Interpreters in the Conquest of the Americas", *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 17/1, 120–53.
- Baigorri-Jalón, J. (2014). *From Paris to Nuremberg: The Birth of Conference Interpreting*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Baker, M. (1997). "Non-Cognitive Constraints and Interpreter Strategies in Political Interviews", in Karl Simms (ed.) *Translating Sensitive Texts: Linguistic Aspects*, Amsterdam/Atlanta, Rodopi, 111–30.
- Berridge, G. R. (2010). *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Black, J. (2010). *A History of Diplomacy*, London, Reaktion Books.
- Buri, M. R. (2015). "Interpreting in Diplomatic Settings", *Communicate! The AIIC Webzine* <<http://aiic.net/page/7349/interpreting-in-diplomatic-settings/lang/1>> accessed 5 December 2015.
- Bourdieu, P. (1999). *The Logic of Practice*, Richard Nice (trans.), Cambridge, Polity.
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as Method*, California, Walnut Creek.
- Dickens, E (2002). "Old Barny – or, is Humour Translatable?", *ELM* 14 (spring).
- EU multilingualism.
<<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/20150201PVL00013/Multilingualism>> accessed 17 December 2017.
- Fleming, D. (2014). "A Brief History of Conference Interpreter Training (CIT)", the website of the SCIC <<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/multisite/scicnet/home>> accessed 21 April 2014.
- Hamilton, K. / Langhorne, R. (1995). *The Practice of Diplomacy*, London/New York, Routledge.
- Hanson, R. (2011). "Teadusdoktor käib mööda liivi radu" [in English "A PhD Degree Holder Takes the Livonian Path"], *Tartu Postimees* 9 December.

- Heinapuu, O. / Kikas, K. (2004). "Folk Belief or Anecdote", *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 26, doi:10.7592/FEJF2004.26.rehepapp.
- Kirby, W. F. (1894/2006). *The Hero of Esthonia [sic] and Other Studies in the Romantic Literature of that Country* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1894). Also see the Project Gutenberg e-Book (2006), <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19438/19438.txt>>.
- Kivirähk, A. (2014). *Les Groseilles de novembre*, Antoine Chalvin (trans.), Paris, Le Tripode.
- (2002) *The Old Barny*, chapter 1 translated into English by Eric Dickens, *ELM* 14 (spring).
- (2000) *Rehepapp ehk November*, Tallinn, Varrak.
- Mydans, S. (2005). "A Quiet Middleman for Presidents and Comrades", Saturday Profile, *New York Times* 1 October.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/01/world/europe/a-quiet-middleman-for-presidents-and-comrades.html>>.
- Obama, B. (2014). Remarks by President Obama at the 25th Anniversary of Freedom Day, Warsaw, Poland, the website of the Office of the Press Secretary, The White House (4 June 2014), <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/04/remarks-president-obama-25th-anniversary-freedom-day-warsaw-poland>>
- Obst, H. (2010). *White House Interpreter: The Art of Interpretation*, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, AuthorHouse.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2011). "Conference Interpreting", in K. Malmkjær / K. Windle (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 307–24.
- Roberts, I. (ed.) (2009). *Satow's Diplomatic Practice*, 6th ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Roland, R. A. (1999). *Interpreters as Diplomats*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press.
- Satow, E. (2011). *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* Vol. 1., New York, Cambridge University Press. First published 1917 by Longmans, Green and Co, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta.
- (2004). "Diplomacy and the Language and Forms of Diplomatic Intercourse", in C. Jönsson / R. Langhorne (eds.) *Diplomacy*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage, 25–50
- Sibul, K. (2017a). "Legal Interpreting in Estonia during the Political Transition (1987–1997)", in A. Liimatainen / A. Nurmi / M. Kivilehto / L. Salmi / A. Viljanmaa / M. Wallace (eds.) *Legal Translation and Court Interpreting: Ethical Values, Quality, Competence Training in the series Forum für Fachsprachen-Forschung*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 125–47.
- (2017b). "Terminology Case Study: A Conference Interpreter's Viewpoint", in P. Faini (ed.) *Terminological Approaches in the European Context*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 365–80.
- Snelling, D. (2009). "The Interpreter's General Knowledge", *The Interpreter's Newsletter* 14, 91–98.
- Thiéry, C. (2015). "Diplomatic Interpreting", in F. Pöchhacker (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Interpreting Studies*, London / New York, Routledge, 107–108.
- Torikai, K. (2009). *Voices of the Invisible Presence: Diplomatic Interpreters in Post-World War II Japan*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Wadensjö, C. (2000). "Co-constructing Yeltsin—Explorations of an Interpreter-Mediated Political Interview", in M. Olohan (ed.) *Intercultural Faultlines. Research Models in Translation Studies I: Textual and Cognitive Aspects*, Manchester, Northampton, St Jerome, 233–52.

- (2008). “The Shaping of Gorbachev: On Framing in an Interpreter-Mediated Talk-Show Interview”, *Text & Talk* 28/1, 119–46.
- William J. Clinton Presidential History Project interview with Madeleine K. Albright (30 August 2006), <http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_2006_0830_albright.pdf>.