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## A PARROT PERCHED ON A RIFLE: MILITARY INTERPRETERS IN THE KOREAN CONFLICT 1945-1953

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**A PARROT PERCHED ON A RIFLE:  
MILITARY INTERPRETERS IN THE KOREAN CONFLICT 1945-1953**

A Dissertation Presented

by

HYONGRAE KIM

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2020

Comparative Literature Program  
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

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## **DEDICATION**

To Hyewon.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A PARROT PERCHED ON A RIFLE: MILITARY INTERPRETERS IN THE KOREAN CONFLICT 1945-1953**

SEPTEMBER 2020

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This dissertation presents an overview of interpreting during the Korean War by examining shifts in the positionality of interpreters during the preparatory, engagement, and conclusionary stages of the conflict. Here, the preparatory stage refers to the U.S. military occupation of south Korea (1945-1948), the engagement stage refers to period of active military engagement between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and its allies against the Republic of Korea and the United Nations Command (1950-1953), while the conclusionary stage refers to the Korean Armistice Negotiations (1951-1953). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Moira Inghilleri's (2005a) influential argument that interpreting takes place in a "zone of uncertainty," this dissertation explores how new interpreting habitus emerged as the communicational purposes and power dynamics within the military field were oriented, disoriented, and reoriented with the progression of the conflict. The variation in who was allowed to act as an interpreter, the tasks interpreters were assigned, and the norms that dictated how interpreters should act and react during interpreted events indicates a need to reconsider traditional notions of interpreting.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Overview of Chapters

The Korean War (1950-53) is remembered as an important event in international history because it was the first “United Nations War” (Edwards 2013, 1) and was dubbed as such because when the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) invaded the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea) on June 25, 1950, and in response the recently formed United Nations deployed the United Nations Command (UNC), a coalition of troops assembled from sixteen UN member states, to counter the North Korean attack. North Korea, in turn, would later be aided by troops dispatched by the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The multilingual makeup of the UNC required that the organization rely on the services of numerous interpreters who helped bridge the language gaps between coalition partners, facilitate communications with the local populace, and aid in the gathering of intelligence about the enemy. It is due to the presence of troops from various linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds, and the significant role interpreters and translators played throughout the war that this internecine war has been recognized as “a particularly fertile ground for research on language” (Müller 1984, 83).

The body of research on interlingual communication during the Korean War, however, remains relatively small, though some insightful research on interpreting and interpreters during the Korean Armistice Negotiations (1951-53) has been conducted and presented by scholars of Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS). María Manuela Fernández Sánchez has published two papers, “Understanding the Role of Interpreting in

the Peacemaking Process at the Korean Armistice Negotiations (Panmunjom 1953)” (2010) and “A Bilingual Officer Remembers Korea: A Closer Look at Untrained Interpreters in the Korean War” (2012). On this topic both examine the technical and emotional difficulties interpreters faced while working at the armistice talks. Her findings indicate that interpreters at the armistice negotiations experienced role conflict, perceptions that their work was underappreciated, high performance expectations and perceived skill inadequacies, all of which have been identified as causes for “burnout” (Schwenke et al. 2014; Shlesinger 2007).

In “Interpreting Conflicts and Conflicts in Interpreting: A Micro-historical Account of the Interpreting Activity in the Korean Armistice Negotiations,” Binhua Wang and Minhui Xu (2016) engage in a nuanced study of “post-hoc accounts” of interpreters who served at the Korean Armistice Negotiations. Wang and Xu examine the complex networks of relations that took form during the wartime negotiations and analyze the various conflicts that took place during interpreted events. These conflicts included disagreements over language use between the two sides, disputes between the interpreters and their military superiors arising from misconceptions about interpreting activity, and differences of opinion between different interpreters. The study reveals that the ethical code these interpreters adopted dictated that rather than acting as neutral mediators, which is often expected from professional interpreters in a civil setting, they act as loyal members of the military.

Though these publications have provided much needed insight into the role interpreters played during the Korean Armistice Negotiations, a conspicuous shortcoming in the existing research on the Korean War is that it does not account for the activities of

interpreters at different stages and locales of the war. Previous research by Hillary Footitt and Michael Kelly (2018) and Jesus Baigorri-Jalon (2011) has demonstrated that interpreters play different roles during the preparatory process, the war operations, and the post-conflict period. During the preparatory process, interpreters are recruited to work in diplomacy and intelligence, but once direct warfare breaks out, interpreters are required to mediate communications among military personnel who speak different languages, facilitate interactions with local civilians, aid in the control of occupied territories, partake in to production of propaganda material, participate in the interrogation of prisoners of war and support the evacuation of non-combatants. At the end of hostilities, interpreters are required to work in peace negotiations, demobilization, and the management of resistance or liberation movements. While previous studies that examine interpreting during the Korean Armistice Talks have furthered our understanding of diplomatic interpreting within the military as a conflict neared its end, much remains to be said about the role of linguistic mediation while preparations for war are underway and contributions interpreters make “on the ground” while hostilities are unfolding.

In an effort to address these gaps in research about interpreting during the Korean War, the current study engages in a comparative study of all three stages of the conflict, namely,

- (1) the preparatory phase – the U.S./U.S.S.R. military occupation of Korea (1945-48),
- (2) the engagement phase – the violent confrontation between the militaries of North and South Korea and their respective allies (1950-53), and,
- (3) the conclusionary phase – the Korean Armistice Negotiations (1951-53).

By expanding the scope of research to include the events that led to the war, the period of

direct military engagement, and the circumstances that prompted its discontinuation, this study will provide a more comprehensive picture of wartime interpreting during the Korean conflict. The objective of this investigation is to reveal how the identity of interpreters and what it meant to interpret was oriented, disoriented, and reoriented by the shifting structures of hierarchy and power within the military field during the three stages of the Korean conflict. The basis of this approach is grounded in the assumption that interpreting is a socially-situated activity and, as such, who is allowed to function as an interpreter in any given context and what is perceived as legitimate interlingual mediation is liable to shift as the communicative objectives of social agents and organization, as well as the conditions under which interpreting takes place change.

The empirical data presented in this dissertation draws from a diverse corpus that includes military documents, archival material, personal memoirs, biographies, interviews, historical studies and short stories. The documents collected from the online Korean History Database and the United States National Archives at College Park, which includes meeting notes, letters, and newspaper articles, are a crucial source of information on the positionality of interpreter within the various power structures that arose during different periods of the Korean conflict. The inclusion of these documents in my research is significant as they are previously unpublished and are therefore under scholarly examination for the first time.

In addition to the archival documents, I also draw on a variety of biographical material (memoirs, autobiographies, and interviews). The use of these sources is often marginalized in social scientific research (Watson 1976, 95) as questions have been raised about the reliability of autobiographical accounts and the vulnerability of such

material to manipulation by other parties such as ethnographers, interpreters, and interviewers. Despite these potential shortcomings, many studies conducted within the social sciences make use of biographical materials, albeit with careful consideration of their application, because, as Perk (1998, 69) points out, the life stories told by individuals provide “a much closer view of personal involvement in the history, which may compensate for the chronological distance” in most history publications. Furthermore, what information individuals choose to include and omit, as well as the subjective manner in which this data is narrativized is a strong indicator of the narrator’s ethical beliefs, which can be as valuable as objective facts. Thus, I have opted to include excerpts from the writings of military interpreters who worked with the U.S. military during the Korean War and the Korean Armistice Negotiations.

Lastly, I consult fictional representations of interpreters and translators, or transfiction, written during this period by Korean writers and U.S. military personnel who lived in Korea during the U.S. military occupation and/or the Korean War. As stated earlier, historical records which mention interpreters or interpreting during the Korean War are limited. Due to the absence of relevant transcripts or recordings, it is difficult to engage in traditional discourse analysis and reveal how individual interpreters worked within the social structures in which they were positioned. The fictional works seen in this study provide vivid portrayals of communicative exchanges mediated by interpreters caught in the midst of the Korean conflict. Such depictions of translators and interpreters in literary works are valuable sources of knowledge about the interpreting profession in history. An added benefit of engaging with transfictional works is the fact that fiction can speak to the emotional aspects of translation in a way that nonfiction often does not, and,



as such, is a particularly useful resource for “exploring the impact of feelings like desire, empathy, shame, anger and fear” on interlingual communication (Spitzl 2014, 363-368). Such details are particularly relevant to the present study insofar as it examines how interlingual mediation takes place under the pressures of conflict, during which tensions are high and violence is likely to erupt at any moment. While this study is grounded in a macro-sociological approach, it recognizes the fact that excerpts taken from fiction offer details about interpreting in the context of violent warfare which would otherwise be inaccessible, and thus views them as useful resources for providing description and analysis of interpreting practices during the Korean conflict.

The contents of this dissertation are organized as follows: chapter one reviews the existing literature within TIS that engages with translators and interpreters during violent conflict situations. It introduces the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, habitus, and zones of uncertainty as the theoretical basis of this study. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework is particularly effective when applied to the study of interpreters because interpreting often takes place in social contexts in which differing communicational objectives and unequal social status among agents and institutions engaged in interpreted events is the norm. The Bourdieusian framework introduced in this chapter serves as the foundation for the central argument of this study: that the identity of the interpreter and the norms of interpreting are prone to change as the communicational purposes and the power dynamics between social agents engaged is oriented, disoriented, and reoriented by changes that emerge within a social field.

Chapter two examines how interlingual communicative encounters were mediated during the U.S. military occupation of southern Korea. I first elaborate on the

circumstances that led to the division and occupation of Korea by the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. and reveal how faulty planning by the United States military, Korea's history of subjugation under Japanese colonial rule, the frustration felt by the Korean public towards foreign intervention by the two superpowers, and the ideological hostilities brought on by the onset of the Cold War created tensions between American officials within the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), the Korean public, and Korean civilian interpreters working for the Military Government. Memoirs, military records, fictional works, and newspaper articles are consulted to reveal why the Military Government earned the moniker "the interpreter's government" and what caused widespread negativity to be felt towards the so-called "malicious interpreters" working for the U.S. military.

Chapter three begins with a brief historical review of the Korean War. It explains why the military brass of the United States opted to rely on interpreters provided by the South Korean military rather than train its own linguists. The tensions that arose between UN Liaison Group officers (interpreters), U.S. Korean Military Assistant Group (KMAG) officers, and Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) unit commanders during interpreted events are the main focus of this portion of the dissertation. I argue that although both KMAG officers and ROKA commanders sought to gain control over the interpreting habitus, the balance of power between the two sides and the mutual animosity felt between UN Liaison Group officers and their military superiors prevented either of these interlocutors from fully asserting their dominance during interpreted events held during the war.

Chapter four focuses on the form and function interpreting took during the

Korean Armistice Negotiations. I consider a range of factors, such as the affiliation of United Nations Command (UNC) interpreters, their military rank, the diplomatic conference setting, and the presence of enemy interpreters who monitored the interpreter's work. These factors collectively served to uncompromisingly constrain the interpreter during the armistice talks, forcing them to function as "faithful echoes" of their military superiors when interpreting. I argue that while institutions of power, such as the U.S. military at the Korean Armistice Negotiations, may possess the power to compel interpreters to function as so-called linguistic conduits, illusionary assumptions of what constitutes objective approaches to interpreting can hamper rather than encourage coherent interlingual/cultural communication and discourage the interpreter's moral and professional unaccountability.

Chapter five ties the study together by comparing how the communicational goals and power dynamics between interlocutors engaged in interpreted events during each stage of the Korean conflict led to the formation of unique interpreting habitus specific to the context in which interpreting was taking place. It considers how changes to the interpreter's position within the military field influenced their ability to ensure that the communication objectives of social agents engaged in interpreted events are met. I argue that while interpreters can take on different roles based on the contexts in which they engage, interventionist tactics are often the result of pragmatic necessity rather than ulterior personal or political motives. On the other hand, mechanisms instituted to guarantee the neutrality of the interpreter and the fidelity of their words to the original statement are often imposed to ensure the maintenance of structures of power, encourage moral unaccountability, and ultimately obfuscate communication in order to satisfy the

strategic aims of the institutions of power.

## **1.2. Literature Review: Interpreters in Violent Conflict**

While early scholars of translation of interpreting in the 1960s were interested in issues of so-called “equivalence,” the interests of the field shifted in the mid-1980s towards the exploration of issues of power, ideology, resistance, ethics, and activism which revealed translators and interpreters to be active participants in the transfer of written texts and oral exchanges rather than unbiased conduits (Even-Zohar 1978, Hermans 1985, Lefevere 1992, Niranjana 1992, Spivak 1993, Toury 1995, Venuti 1995, Mikkelsen 1998; Wadensjö 1998; Angelelli 2004a, 2004b; Shlesinger and Pöchhacker 2010). These studies challenged previous notions that interlingual/cultural communication should or even can take place in a neutral vacuum and argued that in fact that translation and interpreting actually occurs within confrontational social spaces in which different parties vie for power by controlling the form and flow of linguistic exchange.

Due to the confrontational nature of translation and interpreting, metaphors of violence were often used as part of the language employed during discussions among scholars in the field, yet studies conducted in the field rarely engaged with the topic of interlingual communication within the context of violent conflict. Myriam Salma-Carr was one of the first to point out the longstanding paradox in TIS to view translation in terms of violent metaphors yet represent the individual language mediator as situated in a position of “in-between” where risks to their wellbeing are “manageable” (Salama-Carr 2007, 1). She urged researchers to engage with actual situations of political, cultural, and

ideological confrontation in which the translator/interpreter is firmly embedded in rather than merely serving as a metaphor for the tensions and conflicts that inevitably arise during intercultural communication. A large body of studies have since examined how language mediators function under conditions of fierce hostility.

Given that wars are typically fought between countries and peoples who speak and write in different languages, there is an inherent requirement for interlingual communication within the context of warfare. While the ability to communicate with one's allies and adversaries is crucial to the waging of war, the role of translators and interpreters is often overlooked by the media, policymakers, and scholars outside of Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS). As Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly note,

Until the turn of the twenty-first century, foreign languages, translation and interpreting were almost totally absent from discussions about war and conflict, receiving little attention from academics (such as military historians, translation scholars, and international relations specialists), from the military themselves, or from the general public. The tacit assumption seemed to be that most wars are fought with allies, and against enemies, who obligingly speak our own language.  
(Footitt and Kelly 2018, 166)

Rosendo and Persaud (2016, 2) surmised that possible reasons for the lack of historical records and studies pertaining to interpreters may be due to the primacy of the written word over the spoken word, which implies that the work of translators is more likely to have been examined than that of interpreters due to the often perceived lower social status of these spoken language brokers, and the fact that when historians leave records of historical events, they must choose what details to include and which to leave out, meaning that the participation of individuals of secondary roles, such as interpreters, tend to go unrecorded. After all, the annals of war do not provide details about every human activity but tend to chronicle the "great deeds of great men, statesmen, generals"

(Burke 1992, 3-4). Even on those rare occasions when the presence of the interpreter is acknowledged, records often lack detailed descriptions or commentary on the most-often unnamed interpreter's work. The marginalization of interpreting and interpreters is also evident in visual portrayals of wartime interpreters, as Fernández Sánchez notes that interpreters are very rarely the focus of the wartime photographs in which they are featured, and "this position reflects both the function of interpreters as mediators and the marginality of their role" (Fernández Sánchez 2014, 173).

More scholarly interest in interpreting in the history of conflict has begun to emerge over the past several decades within TIS, as evinced by the works of authors such as Gaiba (1998), Roland (1999), Delisle and Woodsworth (2012), Baigorri (2014). This rise in research on interpreting in violent conflict is the result of trends that have emerged since the "cultural turn" in TIS. Particularly relevant to the present study is research conducted on the involvement of interpreters in modern conflicts, such as the role of interpreters working with French, British, and U.S. troops during World War I (Heimburger 2012) and in the campaigns in Europe and the Pacific during World War II (McNaughton 2007, Takeda 2009, Tryuk 2012, Footitt and Kelly 2012, 2018; Footitt and Tobia 2013). Other publications report on recent African conflicts in the Darfuri (Hari 2008), the Former Yugoslav Republics (Stahuljak 2000, 2009; Dragovic-Drouet 2007; Baker C. 2010a, 2010b; Kelly and Baker 2012), and Iraq and Afghanistan (Baker, M. 2006, 2010; Inghilleri 2008, 2009, 2010; Tipton 2011; Rafael 2007, 2012). There are also revealing first-hand accounts of military linguists' experiences in the U.S. detention facility in Guantánamo Bay (Saar and Novak 2005).

There have also been a number of collected works published on the topic of

translation and violent conflict. The studies collected in *Translating and Interpreting Conflict*, edited by Salama-Carr (2007) engage with topics including the role of “fixers” working for Western Media during the U.S. invasion of Iraq (Palmer 2007), translation and interpreting practices during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (Dragovic-Drouet 2007), translators and interpreters during the Opium War (Wong 2007), and several more. A special issue of the academic journal *The Translator* (Inghilleri and Harding 2010) entitled “Translation and Violent Conflict” discusses a range of relevant topics, such as the decision to and consequences of interpreting during the war in Iraq (Inghilleri 2010), narratives of translators and interpreters in war zones and the construction of narratives of conflict by translators and interpreters (Baker 2010), the translation of Bosnian and Serbian poetry during the violent breakup of Yugoslavia (Jones 2007), the management of interpreters recruited to work in British war crimes trials following World War II (Tobia 2007), and the depiction of translators as traitors in historical records, film, fiction, and news reports (Beebee 2007). The special issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia* (Rosendo and Persaud 2016) on “Interpreting in Conflict Situations and in Conflict Zones throughout History” is also a valuable source for research on the history of interpreting. It contains a collection of studies on the history of interpreters in various historical contexts such as interpreters working for the Dutch East India Company during the Sino-Dutch War (1661-1662) (Chang 2016), French interpreters during World War I (Cowley 2016), interpreting in Nazi concentration camps during World War II (Tryuk 2016), as well as the role of mediators in more recent conflicts in Afghanistan (Tălpaș 2016) and Kosova and Macedonia (Todorova 2016).

Taken as a whole, this growing body of literature on military interpreting

provides a clear picture of the critical role that interpreters play in influencing both the progression and representation of a war, irrespective of the historical period or geopolitical nature of the conflict. The study of interlingual communication and warfare will likely continue to entice scholars of TIS because this context has proven to be a fruitful ground for the testing of theories developed within the field. Though the extreme conditions of war might appear to have little to do with the circumstances interpreters typically encounter in a civilian setting, in fact, it is under the duress of violent warfare, where implicit hierarchical structures of power are explicated, that the discursive structures formed in interpreted interactions become clearly visible and the tensions over legitimate forms of communication are most starkly revealed.

### **1.3. Sociological Approaches to Interpreting in Violent Conflict**

A variety of methodological approaches have emerged from existing research on military interpreting, though most studies are cross-disciplinary in character. “Historical perspectives” draw on case studies, oral histories, and archive material to understand the sociopolitical and historical context of particular conflicts that involved interpreting and interpreters. One such work is Ruth Roland’s *Interpreters as Diplomats: Diplomatic History of the Role of Interpreters in World Politics* (1990), which is an historical account of the numerous roles interpreters assume in diplomatic and political history that relies on anecdotes, interpreters’ diaries, and governmental administrative records. Roland notes that from ancient times to the Cold War era, interpreters have played a crucial role in military conquests and political negotiations in which they may accrue significant power due to their political or military affiliations, and where they are liable



to “grossly abuse their power” rather than voluntarily abide by any professional codes when faced with conflicting ideologies and risk to their own lives (Roland 1999, 171). But while Roland’s work sheds light on the work of interpreters that had previously been ignored, because it was written for the general reader by a political scientist, the book does not pay much attention to topics often discussed in TIS, such as interpreter training or modes of interpreting.

In *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, Gaiba (1998) investigates the interpreters and the interpreting arrangements at the Nuremberg Trial. The strength of this study lies in the breadth and depth of information the author collected on interpreting at this historic venue, which prior to the publication of this book had not been extensively discussed. Based on an examination of a wide range of materials including transcripts, archival documents, microfilm and interviews with several interpreters, Gaiba describes the preparation stage, the interpreting system, the impact of interpreting on the proceedings, and the personal backgrounds of some of the interpreters.

“Textual approaches,” or narrative approaches, on the other hand, consider how interpreters exercise their agency against the politically-inflected narratives that are constructed by institutions of power to garner domestic and international support for a war. In *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*, Mona Baker (2006) employs narrative theory to examine the role played by translators and interpreters in mediating conflict in various arenas of conflict, including Guantanamo, Iraq, and Kosova. Baker argues that translation, and by extension interpreting, is not an innocent act but “part of the institution of war” (Baker 2006, 1-2) as translators and interpreters participate in the

active circulation, promotion and resistance against narratives that are circulated through a society and between societies via translation and interpreting. Baker emphasizes that though interpreted utterances may serve as weapons for waging war, they may also be used as acts of subversion:

undermining existing patterns of domination cannot be achieved by concrete forms of activism alone – demonstrations, sit-ins, civil disobedience – but must involve a direct challenge to the stories that sustain them. As language mediators, translators and interpreters are uniquely placed to initiate this type of discursive intervention at a global level.

(Baker 2006, 6)

The insight that interpreting can be used as a tool to combat the narratives of powerful institutions was further examined by Julie Boéri (2008) who applies narrative theory to examine the emergence of interpreting communities that adopt an activist approach to interpreting.

Finally, research adopting a more “sociological approach” examines the networks of power and structures of hierarchy and power that dictate the actions of social institutions and agents in the context of a particular conflict. The sociological perspective is readily applicable to the studying of interpreting as interpreting is a socially regulated activity that takes place between social agents, rather than being a purely linguistic exchange. The earliest published research to draw attention to interpreting as a socially situated activity was penned by sociologist R. Bruce W. Anderson (1976). Anderson modelled interpreting as a three-party interaction, with the bilingual interpreter assuming the pivotal mediating role between the monolingual producer and the monolingual consumer. He argued that the power of the interpreter arises from their position in the middle which has “the advantages of power inherent to all positions which control scarce resources” (Anderson 1976, 218-219). This advantage, when combined with the relative

ambiguity of the interpreter's role, allows the interpreter considerable latitude in defining their own behavior vis-à-vis the client(s). Unfortunately, his work was not taken up by interpreting scholars until over a decade later.

The work of Miriam Shlesinger (1989), who applied of Gideon Toury's theory of translation norms to interpreting, paved the way for research that viewed interpreting as a social act, and not merely a linguistic activity. The notion of norms, developed by Toury (1995) mainly in the context of literary translation, is one of the most influential concepts in TIS. Toury was amongst the first scholars to underscore the fact that translation takes place amid complex cultural, political, and historical contexts, and, like all other social behavior, is regulated by norms. With regards to translation activity, Toury viewed norms as "the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community—as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate—into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations" (Toury 1995, 54-55). His view of translation as a norm-governed activity inspired many TIS scholars to focus on the target text and culture rather than on the correspondence between the source and target texts, to describe translation activities rather than prescribing them, and to pay attention to the cultural and sociological aspects of translational phenomena rather than limit analysis to the linguistic features of a translated text.

Later, the work of Cecilia Wadensjö (1998), drawing from the work of Erving Goffman (1981), highlighted the triadic nature of interpreter-mediated events, which encouraged scholars in the field to apply discourse analytic and sociological models to the empirical study of interpreting. Two currents of research have emerged from this body of work: the micro-sociological approach, or social interactionist approach, which

widely uses discourse analysis as its theoretical framework, and the macro-sociological approach, which draws on social theories, most notably the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, to account for interpreters' agency in interpreted social interactions.

The macro-social approach to the study of interpreting was pioneered by Moira Inghilleri, who presented (2003) a theoretical model to examine translation norms in interpreting by incorporating Toury's notion of norms with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, and Bernstein's pedagogic discourse. She uses asylum hearings as examples to argue that norms are realized in and through interactions between the interpreter and various other participants of the interpreted event. Inghilleri's work came in response to an earlier attempt by Daniel Simeoni to apply Bourdieu's theories to TIS in his article "The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus" (1998) in which Simeoni rather depressingly theorized that over the centuries the "translational habitus" had contributed to the internalization of submissive behavior on the part of the translator which has led to the low social prestige of the profession. Simeoni argued that the translator's "voluntary servitude" significantly contributed to the secondariness of their activity (Simeoni 1998, 6). The question of the translator's alleged subservience is directly addressed by Inghilleri (2005b) who offered an alternative reading of Bourdieu's theorization of the habitus of translators and interpreters, suggesting that they can be "both implicated in and able to transform the forms of practice in which they engage." She examines acts of interpreting in relation to the social practices and relevant fields in which they are embedded, rather than seeing interpreting as taking place in its own static professional field. Bourdieu's field theory has proven to be a useful framework for the

study of interpreting as a social act and interpreters as social agents, serving as an alternative to theories developed within Descriptive Translation Studies, which often fail to consider the agency of individual linguistic mediators by focusing excessively on the systems in which they function.

#### **1.4. Habitus, Field, Capital, and the Zone of Uncertainty**

Over the past two decades, a significant number of scholars have applied Bourdieu's sociological approaches to TIS (Simeoni 1998; Gouanvic 2005; Inghilleri 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Wolf 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2015; Torikai 2009, 2014; Grbić 2014; Guo 2017), and his concepts of "habitus," "field," and "capital" are widely discussed in various contexts, from asylum interpreting to the professionalization of translation and interpreting. Inghilleri (2005a, 126) notes that Bourdieu's sociological approach "provides a set of powerful tools" for conceptualizing interpreters' practices, especially their "reproductive or transformative" roles in particular historical and socio-cultural contexts. Bourdieu's theoretical concepts are interrelated and can be employed to analyze the practices of social agents and the dialectical relationship that emerges between agents within social institution. According to Bourdieu, social space is a "multidimensional space" comprised of multiple fields in which agents' positions are defined according to the types of capital they possess or accrue (Bourdieu 1991, 229). Bourdieu understands "fields" to be confrontational spaces in which individuals and institutions struggle for the production, attainment, and dissemination of capital. Here, "capital" refers to any assets (cultural, economic, social, etc.) which social agents collectively or individually view as valuable and are associated with both material and

symbolic wealth. It is important to note that Bourdieu posits a social world (what he sometimes refers to as the field of power) comprised of multiple fields, each capable of being further divided into subfields. Each subfield, though it follows the overall logic of the larger field with which it is associated, has its own internal logic, rules and regularities. Though fields are hierarchized, with the most dominant agents and institutions holding considerable power, there is nonetheless space for agency and change within and between them. An agent's "habitus" is formed based on an agent's position within a field and can be understood as an acquired schemata, dispositions, or, "a sense of the game, ordinarily described as a 'spirit' or 'sense' (philosophical, literary, artistic, etc.)" (Bourdieu 2000, 11).

Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this study first reconstructs the social space in which the Korean conflict was fought in order to contextualize and analyze interpreters' practices throughout its duration. Bourdieu offers three steps which can be used to investigate a given field and the social agents who occupy it:

1. analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power;
2. map out the objective structures of relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which this field is a site;
3. analyze the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field...a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized.

(Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992a, 104-5)

Inghilleri outlines this conceptual approach in relation to interpreted events in the asylum system as follows,

In interpreted events, where multiple fields and habitus intersect, social agents representing well-established professions (e.g., judges, solicitors, civil servants) will reproduce with some certainty what they feel to be the 'objective' structures of their respective fields. Such agents will possess culturally significant forms of

capital linked to their respective fields, in this case the legal and political fields, which confer prestige, status and authority upon them. These fields are part of the larger universe of symbolic institutions that reproduce existing power relations through the production and distribution of a dominant culture that tacitly confirms what counts as legitimate linguistic and cultural knowledge in the context of the legal system. But what of interpreters if, as suggested above, the interpreting profession occupies a far less certain social position? Their relationship to any or all of the inter-locking fields that converge on the interpreting context may reflect this positioning, making it more likely that others will define and control the social/interactive space through the imposition of their respective habitus.

(Inghilleri 2005a, 5)

Nevertheless, she indicates the potential for what she refers to as an “interpreting habitus” to emerge in which interpreters can and do exert equal or greater control over interpreting activity, including in situations where this involves the disruption of pre-established power relations.

I would argue that a specific interpreting habitus can emerge from interpreting activity that simultaneously disrupts power relations and structures interpreted events in such a way as to allow all participants to operate with a shared understanding regarding interpreting activity. However, the specific ways that a particular interpreting context is structured by and structures the interpreting habitus – which or whose normative practices prevail – will depend on the interplay in social/interactional space between social agents, field(s) and their accompanying habitus. The interpreting habitus is thus, like habitus more generally, by its very nature, contingent upon macro and micro orderings of experience.

(ibid.)

In this dissertation, the emergence of an interpreting habitus within the military field and across three different phases in which interpreting took place during the Korean conflict is identified and analyzed: the U.S. military occupation, the Korean War, and the Korean Armistice Negotiations. The three stages are distinctive due to the particular identities of the interpreters, the specify communicative purposes of each event, and the specific social and geopolitical conditions under which the interpreting occurred. The distinction between the events is primarily temporal, though there is an overlap between

the Korean War and the Armistice Talks, as the negotiations took place while the war was still being waged. To some extent, therefore, the categorization is also geographical, as the armistice negotiations were restricted to two sites, Kaesong and Panmunjom, while the entirety of the Korean peninsula was made a battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of a “fictive kinship” as regards to the interpreters’ relationships to members of the military will also be examined and will include local civilian interpreters working for the U.S. occupational government, South Korean military interpreters working with U.S. military officers, and the relationship between U.S. military interpreters and their military superiors at the Korean Armistice negotiations. In doing so, it will reveal how the physical, political, cultural, and ideological proximity of these interpreters to the institutions they served determined how closely they aligned themselves with the role morality and ordinary morality of the U.S. military institution.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Surviving in Violent Conflicts: Chinese Interpreters in the Second Sino-Japanese War 1931-1945*, Ting Guo (2017) also looks at interpreters working across three different contexts: the Kuomintang (KMT), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the Japanese military during the Second Sino-Japanese War, focusing on the asymmetry in the role they played in each group. The KMT, she notes, only required the services of Japanese-Chinese interpreters or translators for diplomatic negotiations and intelligence gathering during the war, for which it had an adequate supply as a significant number of Chinese had studied in Japan. The Chinese Communist forces had the least need for interpreters. Their main partner was the Soviet Union and their interpreting needs could be met by Chinese cadres who had studied in Russia. The Communist Party used only party members as interpreters and felt confident of their loyalty. In contrast with the Chinese, the Japanese invading forces needed an extraordinarily large number of competent interpreters. There were, of course, a number of Japanese who had studied Chinese; there were also the members of the colonized Taiwanese population, who generally had to use Japanese language in school and thus became bilingual. In addition, an estimated 50,000 Chinese, many of them in the occupied areas, held college degrees from Japanese universities. Despite this large pool, the number was insufficient, and the Japanese had to recruit locally. Those who cooperated with the Japanese were often deemed traitors and collaborators. Some were targeted during the conflict and many labeled traitors afterward, showing how interpreters so often find themselves on the frontlines of combat and in the crosshairs after defeat.



The concepts of “role morality” as defined by professional codes of conduct, and “ordinary morality” as driven by personal feelings of responsibility for one’s actions within a specific cultural context are amongst the issues discussed in *Interpreting Justice: Ethics, Politics, and Language* (Inghilleri 2012) in which the expectations and realities of interpreting in different types of conflict situations are discussed at length. Whether in the mass arrest of undocumented workers in a meat-packing plant in Postville, Iowa, asylum adjudication procedures in the U.K., or within the U.S. forces during the Iraq invasion and subsequent occupation, in each setting the impossibility of interpreters achieving a neutral stance prescribed by codes of conduct is in evidence. The book concludes that professional codes of interpreter conduct which focus purely on “role morality” do not sufficiently take into account the varied contexts in which interpreted communication takes place and tend to disregard the matter of the interpreters’ responsibility to morally respond to injustices they observe while performing their work. Inghilleri’s examination of local and contract interpreters in Iraq is particularly relevant to this dissertation as it reveals the ethical choices made by local interpreters both to serve and while serving with the U.S. military and the interpreting habitus that emerged as a result of the social, economic, and political conditions under which they worked. She argues that interpreters in violent conflict zones cease to be mere linguistic conduits and instead often adopt a “fictive kinship” with the military that further shields them from the ethical demands of their role. As such, interpreters, like combatants, can become “embodied conduits” of the political and military institutions they agree to serve, and adopt the same “role morality” as the soldiers with whom they serve (Inghilleri 2012, 112).

The current study adopts the view that interpreting takes place in “zones of

uncertainty”, a term Bourdieu uses to refer to weak positions located in the gaps between fields, where different fields converge, and interlocutors, each with a different “feel for the game,” interact with other agents and assert with varying levels of certainty the validity of their social practices, or habitus (Inghilleri 2005a, 4).

Bourdieu views zones of uncertainty as contradictory and potentially liberatory spaces within a social structure in which contradictions emerge from a convergence of conflicting world views that momentarily upset the relevant habitus. He suggests that zones of uncertainty are located in the gaps or spaces between fields – hence their lack of clear social definition.

Following Bourdieu, I argue for a view of interpreting as a potentially social and disruptive space where contradictions may emerge due to the convergence of distinct fields, and the social/institutional/discursive practices associated with them. The possibility of gaps or spaces emerging between fields will always be contingent upon the particular context in which an interpreting event takes place and the wider network of power that exists outside of or emerges within it. The level of uncertainty can become higher when the value of the symbolic capital of a dominant institution of power goes unrecognized, enabling others to challenge the normative view of what constitutes a legitimate practice. In some cases, a more empowered interpreter may be able to use their own linguistic or cultural capital to challenge existing normative practices and demand that new ones be employed. On the other hand, when the level of uncertainty is low, the dominant institution is more likely to assert its control over the interpreting habitus.

This dissertation will examine how, within competing military fields, the interpreting habitus transformed across three stages of the Korean conflict due to a number of factors including, the different status of the military and civilian interpreters, the value of the symbolic capital they and other relevant social agents possessed, and the

social hierarchies that emerged as the local and geopolitical conditions evolved. It will show how, when the authority of different institutions of power was challenged or when the value of some interpreters' linguistic capital became highly valued, the interpreting habitus underwent additional significant transformations. Under these circumstances, the prior assumption of the institutions and the social agents involved were brought into a new relationship during which, in certain stages of the war, the habitus of some or all participants was disrupted, challenging their previously taken for granted specialized knowledge and networks of power.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE U.S. MILITARY OCCUPATION OF KOREA (1945-48):**

#### **A GOVERNMENT OF, FOR, AND BY THE INTERPRETER**

The current chapter will reveal how the power dynamics between social agents engaged in interpreted events shaped the form that interlingual communication would take within the field of military occupation in southern Korea (1945-48). Employing Bourdieu's theoretical approach as a framework for examination, this chapter will first examine the position of the military field of occupation vis-à-vis larger fields of power, namely the diplomatic field in Northeast Asia leading up to and during the occupation. In his works, Bourdieu defines fields as "historically constituted areas of activity with their specific institutions and own laws of functioning" (Bourdieu 1990, 87). As such, a study of the military field in Korea during the U.S. occupation must expand beyond the period under direct examination and include the circumstances that preceded it, most notably the Japanese colonization of Korea (1910-45) and the U.S.-Japanese conflict during World War II (1941-45). The chapter will then introduce the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) and the communicational challenges it faced during the occupation. Various factors forced the Military Government to rely heavily on the services of locally recruited Korean civilian interpreters, as a result of which it was mocked as a "government of, for, and by the interpreter" and an "interpreter's government."

#### **2.1. WWII and its Aftermath in Northeast Asia**

The Korean peninsula, divided along the 38th parallel into communist North and capitalist South, stands as one of the final vestiges of the Cold War. The roots of the division can be traced back to 1910, when Korea, which existed as a unified state for more than a millennium, was colonized by Imperial Japan. World War II broke out in the Asia-Pacific Theater when the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service attacked various U.S. Navy bases, most notably Pearl Harbor, to prevent the U.S. Pacific Fleet from intervening in its military actions in Southeast Asia, where it sought to seize control over the European colonies in the region. The surprise attack, which was condemned for being carried out without a declaration of war, provided the Japanese army with an advantage during the early stages of the war; it left the U.S. military in the Pacific severely depleted, allowing the Japanese to expand into much of Southeast Asia (Willmott 1983: 14). The United States Navy, however, was able to quickly rebuild its forces and after two decisive victories in 1942, at the Battle of Guadalcanal and the Battle of Midway Island, the tides of war turned in favor of the United States. Following these two defeats, Japan was unable to further extend its sphere of power, which might have provided it access to more resources with which to mount an offensive. The resurgent United States implemented a strategy of “island hopping” or “leapfrogging” and steadily captured Japanese territory in the Pacific (Roehrs and Renzi 2004, 122). A series of bases were built on these captured islands, allowing for direct and massive bombing raids over the Japanese mainland, at which point Japan’s defeat was inevitable.

In late 1943, with victory seemingly a matter of time, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek met in Cairo to discuss the shape Asia’s political landscape would take

following Japan's surrender. The results of these talks were issued on November 27, 1943 in the Cairo Declaration, which states that the Allies would continue deploying military force until Japan's unconditional surrender and that they had agreed that after the war, Japan would be stripped of all the overseas territories it had gained after 1895 (Latourette 1957, 627). The United States, the United Kingdoms, and China also proclaimed:

The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent.<sup>2</sup>

The vague phrasing regarding the time frame envisioned by the leaders of the Allies before Korea would be granted full independence left much up to speculation and would later be the source of widespread discontent amongst the Korean people. It was later revealed that, in fact, Roosevelt believed Korea would require a period of tutelage of up to forty years before it could be granted sovereignty while Stalin, on the other hand, advocated that such intervention be limited to a period of five years (Barry 2012, 38).

With Japanese forces on the defensive, the Allies once more called for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Armed Forces on July 26, 1945, in the Potsdam Declaration, proclaiming that the only alternative would be "prompt and utter destruction."<sup>3</sup> The Declaration, signed by U.S. President Harry Truman, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, and Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, affirmed that once the Japanese were defeated the terms of the Cairo Declaration would be carried out and

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<sup>2</sup> For the text of the Cairo Declaration, see McNelly, *Sources in Modern East Asian History and Politics*, 154.

<sup>3</sup> For the text of the Potsdam Declaration, see McNelly, *Sources in Modern East Asian History and Politics*, 166-168.

Japanese sovereignty would be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku, which constitute the Japanese mainland. The Japanese leadership responded to the Declaration with their own pronouncements to fight to the bitter end. On August 6, 1945, the United States detonated an atomic bomb over the city of Hiroshima and on August 8, 1945 the Soviet Union, which had thus far avoided conflict with the Japanese in accordance with the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, declared war on Japan and invaded the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, in northeastern China. Later that day, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki. While there was considerable pushback from the military, on August 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito gave a recorded radio address to the Japanese Empire announcing the surrender to the Allies, thus ending the war.

On August 17, 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Douglas MacArthur issued General Order Number One for the surrender of Japan.<sup>4</sup> The order instructed the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters to direct its military and naval commanders in the field to surrender their forces and weapons to specifically designated representatives of the Allied Powers (the United States, Great Britain, Soviet Union, and Republic of China) who had divided Japanese territory into four zones. The U.S. would occupy Japan, as it had conducted the attacks on Japan's main islands, as well as Korea south of the 38th Parallel. The Soviets would take the surrender of Japanese forces in Manchuria, Korea north of the 38th Parallel, and Karafuto (southern Sakhalin). The British military would conduct operations in Southeast

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of the drafting of General Order No.1 see Gallichio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia*, 75-92

Asia south of the 16<sup>th</sup> Parallel and troops in China (excluding Manchuria), Formosa, and Indochina north of the 16<sup>th</sup> Parallel would surrender to the representatives of the Republic of China.

The Soviet Union entered northern Korea on August 14, 1945 and arrived in Pyongyang, the largest city north of the 38th, on August 24, 1945. It established the Soviet Civil Administration (SCA) as the occupying government on October 3, 1945, and the United States military, preoccupied with circumstances in Japan, only arrived at Incheon harbor on September 8, 1945, and established the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) in Seoul, the capital of the country.

## **2.2. The Dismantling of the People's Republic of Korea**

Historians agree that the decision to occupy and divide Korea stemmed from the inability of American bureaucrats to comprehend the possibility that a potent sense of nationalism or will for unification and independence could exist in Korea (Cumings 1981, Lee 1982, Gallicchio 1988), despite the fact that Korea had stood as a single unified state since the 10th century, sharing a common ethnicity, language, and culture, with well-recognized national boundaries. It was therefore unsurprising that the people resisted the idea of trusteeship and felt humiliated by the prospect of yet another period of great-power "tutelage," having just endured thirty-five years under Japanese colonial control. If any country should have been divided following World War II it was Japan, which like Germany, was an aggressor. Instead, as a result of the ideological rivalry brewing between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, it was countries like Korea, China, and Vietnam that suffered this fate. As a former German ambassador to Korea would



comment, “While we Germans were divided after the war because of our sin, the Koreans were divided because of their innocence” (Breen 2004, 117).

The U.S. occupation felt further unjustified owing to the fact that in August 1945, when it became clear Japan would lose the war, an indigenous governing body, the People’s Republic of Korea (PRK), had been established in consultation with Japanese colonial authorities before the U.S. or U.S.S.R. arrived in Korea. According to William Stueck and Boram Yi (2010, 180-181), “fearing that Koreans would respond by attacking the more than 378,000 Japanese civilians and 163,000 Japanese military [...] Abe approached Yo Un-hyung” who organized the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI) with the assent of General Abe Nobuyuki, the last Japanese Governor-General of Korea, in preparation for Korean independence.<sup>56</sup> Immediately after

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<sup>5</sup> For all references to and mention of places and people in Korean, I have kept the spelling of Korean names according to the Romanized versions appearing in the archived documents for ease of possible later reference to the archives. Most historical documents produced during the Korean War did not consistently follow any format at the time, so spelling can be highly idiosyncratic and variety. For my own writing, I have used the Revised Romanization of Korean developed by the Republic of Korea National Academy of the Korean Language, with the noted exceptions of well-known figures like Syngman Rhee, who are often associated and referenced with particular rendering of their names.

<sup>6</sup> Under Yo’s leadership, People’s Committees sprouted up throughout the country to coordinate Korea’s transition to independence. The CPKI called for the cooperation of all political groups and factions in its efforts in enacting a land program which would enable tenants to purchase their farms on easy terms, guarantee the ousting of Korean collaborators and Japanese from positions of authority, extend the suffrage, enable the formation of cooperatives, increase wages, stabilize the economy, and minimize governmental intervention in the private domain. Though there were over forty parties representing all shades of opinion included in the original coalition, all parties were united in their views on key topics such as the expulsion of the Japanese, seizure of their property, immediate independence, and self-government. To implement these programs, it was agreed by the leaders in Seoul that each province would establish its own government in accordance with the basic principles of the program. Such a procedure, it was believed, would allow all regions to solve local problems without the need to refer back to Seoul and effect a governmental stability impossible to achieve through immediate centralization. Provincial leaders were informed of the plan before the

the announcement of Japan's surrender, resistance leaders of the CPKI called upon the Japanese Governor-General and proposed that in order to preserve law and order, prevent political and economic chaos, and construct a Korean government in harmony with the wishes of the people, all authority be turned over to their coalition, which would prepare for complete Korean independence by establishing the People's Republic of Korea (PRK). Abe willingly assented, with the understanding that the existing Japanese colonial governmental structure would not be dissolved, and that Japanese soldiers and civilians would not be molested in the aftermath of the war. The governor's conditions were supported by the CPKI and the organization assumed *de facto* control over the Korean peninsula (Millett 2005, 43). Soon after, the Committee held a representative national assembly in Seoul and on September 6, 1945, the delegates formed a national government with jurisdiction over all of Korea.

It was in the name of this government that Yo Un-hyung sent a delegation that included his brother Yo Un-hong, his secretary Cho Han-yong, and their interpreter Baek Sang-gyu, to greet the commander of the U.S. military occupational forces, Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, upon his arrival at Incheon on September 7, 1945. Hodge, who had orders from Washington to deal directly with the Japanese Governor-General in effecting the transfer of authority, was completely unprepared for such a move. He denied the Korean delegates an audience, opting to discuss these matters with the Japanese colonial authorities in the absence of Korean representation (Henderson 1968, 205-206).

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surrender and were, therefore, able to act instantly upon news of the Allied victory.

The U.S. military claimed to have come to Korea to help its people form a democratic government that represented the aspirations of all. Yet at the same time, Washington took the view that Koreans lacked the training necessary for administrative duties, making it necessary for Military Government to assume governmental responsibility in southern Korea. The fact that there was already a functioning governmental body, recognized by the Japanese Governor-General, with People's Committees successfully operating throughout the country, complicated the issue as it contradicted the very premise of occupation.

The U.S. military's approach to the matter was to act as if it were forming a military government in *enemy* territory, as was the case in Japan, in which case standard procedures would dictate that it adopted the following attitude towards local political bodies:

Neither local political personalities nor organized political groups, however, sound in sentiment, should have any part in determining the policies of military government. Civil affairs officers should avoid any commitments to, or negotiating with, any local political elements except by direction from higher authority.<sup>7</sup>

This was not the case in Korea, however, as the Americans themselves had claimed that Korea was an independent and friendly state, and thus the standards mentioned above should not have been readily applied to the circumstances in southern Korea.

Truman attempted to clarify the U.S.'s stance in the following public statement made on September 18, 1950, in which he intimated that the efforts of the PRK to establish immediate independence were to be disregarded:

The assumption by the Koreans themselves of the responsibilities and functions of a free and independent nation [...] will of necessity require time and patience. The

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<sup>7</sup> FM 27-5, p 0, 1.7.

goal is in view, but its speedy attainment will require the joint efforts of the Korean people and the Allies.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. military used Truman's words as the basis for ignoring the authority of the PRK, declaring that "United States policy prohibits official recognition or utilization for political purposes of any so-called Korean provisional government or other political organization by United States Forces."<sup>9</sup> By refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the PRK and choosing rather to treat it as just another political party—one that it actually viewed as a latent challenge to its occupational authority—the U.S. blatantly refused to respect or acknowledge the will of the Korean people and their right of self-determination.<sup>10</sup>

Enraged by the Military Government's treatment, Koreans flocked to the streets in protests against the Military Government while the Republic's leaders argued that the PRK represented a unified government of all Koreans, regardless of the dividing line, and that it was likewise recognized north of the artificial border as well.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. military ignored the Republic's demands for recognition and on October 10, 1945, Major General A. V. Arnold, the newly instated U.S. Military Governor of Korea stated in a press conference that the Military Government was the only government in southern Korea, and demanded that the Korean people put an end to the pronouncements of what he

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<sup>8</sup> Department of State Bulletin, XIV, p 108.

<sup>9</sup> SCAP, Summation, No. 1, p 177

<sup>10</sup> The U.S. military government also refused to recognize the members of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, led by Kim Gu, who was obliged to enter the country as a private citizen.

<sup>11</sup> Yo Un-hyung stated that it was "only after the lapse of more than a month since coming to Korea" that General Hodge and Arnold "condescended to receive" him. Letter from Yo Un-hyung to Kim Yeong-jung, July 18, 1947.

termed “irresponsible political groups.” This statement crystallized a large part of Korean thinking into an anti-American mold: the liberators had become the oppressors.

If the sole reason U.S. troops were sent to the Korean peninsula was to “aid the Korean people to achieve their independence” and to establish a democratic government by their “free choice,” and if the authorities in Washington did “believe in the right of the Korean people to determine for themselves the kind of economy and political organization they require,” why did the PRK receive such treatment?<sup>12</sup> Why did Washington insist on administering an election when a popular government already existed?

The decision to occupy Korea, disregarding the pre-existing indigenous governing body, and establish the Military Government is intricately linked to the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of a new power dynamic in Northeast Asia following World War II. The United States wished Korea to operate according to the American framework of beliefs, not the Soviet’s communist model. The PRK, as it existed upon the arrival of the 24th Corps, was not dominated by American ideology, though it was not strictly speaking communist in nature either. Instead, the Republic was the embodiment of Korean aspirations for a democratic socialist government, a form of government that over eighty percent of Koreans favored according to a study conducted by the USAMGIK during its first year of occupation. Any recognition of the PRK’s sovereignty and independence, which appeared to be more closely aligned to Russian ideals than American ideology,

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<sup>12</sup> Department of State press release, August 30, 1946. The President’s Message to Congress on the State of the Union. Department of State Bulletin, XIV, 139.

however, would have signified a diplomatic defeat and weakening of the United States' influence in the region.

### **2.3. The Establishment of the United States Army Military Government in Korea**

The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) was established on September 8, 1945 and maintained administrative authority over southern Korea until August 15, 1948. The Military Government was terribly unprepared for the challenges it would face, as it lacked knowledge of the language, history, culture, and political situation in Korea. Most importantly, Hodge, the commander of the 24th Corps of the U.S. Tenth Army, and his subordinates, failed to distinguish between Koreans and Japanese as four days before arriving in Seoul, Hodge told his officers that Korea “was an enemy of the United States” (Cumings 1981, 126). The general was also widely quoted as calling Koreans, “the same breed of cat” as the Japanese. This meant that from a command point of view “no separation had been made between the Japanese and Korean occupations [and] there was a tendency to place both Japan and Korea in the same category” (Meade 1951, 76). The historian Michael Breen supports this argument as he claims, “There was a tendency to see [Koreans] as low-class Japanese” (Breen 1998, 118).

Hodge's disregard for the sociopolitical circumstances in Korea led to a number of faulty policy decisions. In addition to dismantling the PRK, on September 9, 1945, at a surrender ceremony, Hodge announced that the Japanese colonial government, including its Governor-General and its technical and administrative staff, would remain intact. This move was, naturally, met with a major public outcry, in response to which Hodge

reluctantly replaced the Japanese Governor-General with Major General Arnold and remove all the Japanese bureau chiefs, though he in turn, enlisted the former Japanese bureaucrats as his advisors. Hodge later defended his use of Japanese personnel with claims that the U.S. would have experienced “great difficulty operating with any sweeping removal of Japanese unless we are willing to accept chaos” because “all utilities, communications, etc., are Japanese-operated and government controlled” and the U.S. Military Government was “entirely inadequate to cope with this situation” (Dobbs 1981, 37-38).

The decision to retain members of the Japanese colonial government as advisors caused a second outpouring of discontent from the Korean people, forcing Hodge to establish the Korean Advisory Council within the Military Government in October 1945. Nine out of the eleven Council seats were given to members of the Korean Democratic Party, a right-wing political group that was formed at the encouragement of the U.S. which was primarily made up of large landowners, wealthy businesspeople, and former officials in the Japanese colonial government. The chairman, Kim Seong-su, was a large landowner who had been a member of Japan’s Central Council. Clearly unrepresentative of the Korean public, the Advisory Council was, according to one observer, “universally hated and distrusted throughout Korea” (Cumings 1981, 148). This was another source of bitterness among the Korean people as much of the Korean elite had previously worked directly or indirectly with the Japanese for material reward and defense of their own interests. By employing such personnel, the U.S. Military Government justified the actions of the Japanese colonial government and the Korean elite who had colluded with them. Ordinary Koreans wishing to see their country independent, unified, and tackling

its social and economic problems felt betrayed at the deep conservatism that distinguished the occupation. As USAMGIK official E. Grant Meade later wrote, “the establishment of the Council ended the period of general Korean unity and opened an era of extreme confusion” (Meade 1951, 159).

In effect, the dominant operating philosophy of the American Military Government mirrored the oppressive approach of Japanese colonialism as it blatantly disregarded the aspirations of the Korean people for self-government, ignored its historical past, and enforced an occupation to enlarge its sphere of influence. The U.S. Military Government, by choosing to bolster the *status quo* in Korea by resisting thorough reform of colonial legacies, generated monumental opposition against its presence, thereby inheriting an enmity amongst the majority of the Korean people that had previously been directed at the Japanese colonialists (Cumings 2005, 192). This dissatisfaction was manifested in the form of mass demonstrations and uprisings that persisted throughout the occupation. Judging that it was the People’s Committees operating throughout the country that were the cause of such resistance, the U.S. military dedicated the first year of its occupation towards forcefully dismantling these organizations. This push by the U.S. was met with a massive rebellion that spread over four provinces in the fall of 1946. Although the U.S. military was able to quickly suppress these revolts, radical activists nonetheless developed a significant guerrilla movement in 1948 and 1949.

#### **2.4. The Establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea**



In addition to the dissatisfaction felt by Koreans due to the policy decisions made by the U.S. Military Government, the Korean people were also enraged by the arbitrary division of their country, one that grew increasingly rigid as U.S.-Soviet relations deteriorated. The end of World War II terminated the alliance between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., which eliminated the buffers that existed between the two ideological camps and led to the rise of an ideologically fueled rivalry that would last throughout the Cold War. The Korean peninsula, thus, became a microcosm of the emerging Cold War order as it morphed into a battle ground between two contending powers. Hugh Borton, Division Chief, Japanese Affairs, Department of State, summed up the situation succinctly:

Originally that was a military division [...] It was made to assist us and our Allies, the Russians, in fighting the Japanese in Korea. But they surrendered before we got there and the military division stuck and became a political one.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, as world relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated, each government became more insistent on a solution of the Korean problem which would prevent the other from bringing the whole territory within its sphere of dominant influence. Thus, during the three-year occupation, the division between the two zones deepened and the difference in policy between the occupying powers led to a polarization of politics (Robinson 2007, 108-109).

The Soviet-U.S. Joint Commission, which was established to aid in the construction of a unified Korean government, met twice, once in 1946 and 1947, so that the two sides could work towards a unified administration, but they failed to make

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<sup>13</sup> Broadcast over NBC. 7:00pm EST December 28, 1946

progress due to increasing Cold War antagonism (Buzo 2002, 59-60). After the failure of the Joint Commission meetings in 1947, it became apparent that the formation of a unified Korean government would be impossible under the current conditions. The United States handed over the matter to the General Assembly of the United Nations which on November 14, 1947. The General Assembly passed Resolution 112 (II), which created the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), whose mandate was to supervise free and open elections, assist in the withdrawal of the occupying forces, and guide the new political entity to full independence. The UN decided elections were to take place no later than March 31, 1948, and that UNTCOK would have the right to verify any aspect of the election process that it wished. American and Russian armed forces would have to be withdrawn from Korea as soon as possible and within three months of the formation of the Korean government (Luard 1982, 232).

The Soviets argued that the Resolution 112 (II) would break the 1945 Moscow Accords and violate Articles 32 and 107 of the UN Charter. Article 32 requires that both sides of the dispute be consulted, but Korean representatives from northern and southern Korea were never invited to address the UN and Article 107 denied jurisdiction to the UN over post-war settlement issues (Hart-Landsberg 1998: 85). The U.S.S.R. was unable to stop the passing of the resolution because their veto rights were limited to issues brought up in the Security Council and did not extend to decisions made by the General Assembly. Instead, northern Korea and the Soviet Union publicly opposed the creation of UNTCOK and refused to participate in any election administered by the Commission or support any of its activities. When the members of the Commission arrived in Korea in January 1948 to begin an assessment of the situation, it became clear that UNTCOK

would not be able to fulfill the conditions set by the UN resolution as they were denied entrance into northern territory. A report was made to the Interim Committee of the UN General Assembly, which operated when the General Assembly was not sitting, and a decision was made on February 26, 1948, that UNTCOK should adhere to the original intention in so far as this could be accomplished: elections would be supervised in the south but nothing could be done about the north (Luard 1982, 234).

During the following month, elections were held for Korea's National Assembly, in which the northern Koreans refused to participate. Soon after, Syngman Rhee was chosen by the National Assembly to be the first President of the Republic of Korea. The United States then transferred authority to this new government, and on January 1, 1949 accorded it full recognition. The Soviet Union responded to the establishment of the ROK by holding elections in the north for a Supreme People's Assembly. With Kim Il-sung at its helm as the Prime Minister, this Assembly drew up the North Korean constitution and founded the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which proclaimed authority over all of Korea. In early 1949, the Russians withdrew their troops from North Korea and in June 29, 1949 the United States withdrew its own forces from South Korea.

To the Korean people, who had hoped for independence, the occupational forces, who arrived as benefactors who had liberated them from Japanese colonization, ended up opposing the nation's independence and unification despite popular protest. The two foreign powers left behind two diametrically opposed governments, each claiming sovereignty over the whole of Korea, setting the stage for the largest international conflict following World War II—the Korean War.

## 2.5. Nisei Interpreters in Korea

The U.S. military was exceedingly underprepared for the administrative duties of an occupational force when it seized control over the southern half of the Korean peninsula. Traditionally, the United States had shown limited interest in the country. As historian James Matray (1985, 5) explains, “Korean affairs had been the exclusive concern of closer and more powerful neighbors—Russia, China, and Japan” while “the United States had seen no national interests worth defending on the Korean peninsula.” America’s attitude towards peninsular affairs remained largely unaffected during World War II and Korea was scarcely considered in postwar planning, even after the Cairo Declaration in November 1943 and the verbal agreement on international trusteeship at Yalta in February 1945. It hardly comes as a surprise that “the Korean policy of the United States in 1945 was very poorly coordinated” (Kim 1975, 53) and “a view widely held among historians is that the United States forces coming into the Korean peninsula had practically no preparations to deal with the problems awaiting them” (Lee 1982, 32).

Amongst the various difficulties the U.S. Military Government faced during the occupation, the most salient were the

difficulties imposed by barriers of language – the mechanical linguistic problem, the difficulty of achieving a meeting of minds, and the frequent impossibility of being certain whether there has been a meeting of minds or not. On all levels the occupation forces were constantly confronted with problems of language.

(HUSAFIK 1948)

Despite the important role interlingual communication would play throughout the occupation, the U.S. military failed to make the appropriate preparations needed to meet the various challenges interpreting and translation would pose before arriving in Korea. In fact, when Hodge and the 24th Corps first landed in Incheon Harbor on September 8,

1945, they were without so-much as a single Korean language specialist. The Armed Forces Pacific (AFPAC), the command group above the 24th Corps, made a belated search for Korean interpreters in August 1945 but “it was able to find only six paroled Korean prisoners of war, who were accordingly attached to the 24th Corps” (HUSAFIK 1948).

It was only in October of 1945, several months after Hodge landed in Korea, that the U.S. military sought to train Korean linguists at the U.S. Military Intelligence Service Language School, where the Japanese translators and interpreters were trained during World War II. This was a classic instance of too-little-too-late, as the Korean-language class was made up of only “eight students under a Korean American officer, Lt. Calvin Kim” (McNaughton 2007, 417). Needless to say, this number could hardly meet the immense demand for Korean-English mediators under the Military Government.

On the other hand, the U.S. occupational forces were accompanied by a total of approximately thirty *Nisei* (second generation Japanese immigrants to the U.S.) interpreters and translators who were assigned to the headquarters, the Military Government, and military divisions in local provinces. These Japanese interpreters and translators were critical to the success of Hodge’s initial mission, which was to “take the Japanese surrender, disarm the Japanese armed forces, enforce the terms of the surrender, and remove Japanese imperialism from Korea” (Hodge 1948). The *Nisei* mediated between U.S. and Japanese military units as the Americans disarmed and relocated the approximately six-hundred-thousand Japanese troops stationed in Korea, who were gradually removed to Jeju island off the southern coast of the Korean peninsula before being repatriated to Japan (McNaughton 2007, 411).

After taking Japan's surrender, Hodge's second mission in Korea was to "maintain order, establish an effective government along democratic lines to replace the Japanese government in Korea, and rebuild a sound economy as a basis for Korean independence" and "train Koreans in handling their own affairs and prepare Korea to govern itself as a free and independent nation" (Hodge 1948). This mission required that Korean-English interpreters mediate communication to facilitate cooperation between the U.S. occupational forces and the Korean populace. As the U.S. had landed in Korea "without trained Korean language personnel in their ranks" (Fishel and Hausrath, 1958, 8) the Military Government decided to continue using *Nisei* interpreters as their substitutes. While *Nisei* interpreters initially stood-in for Korean interpreters, their ability to function as efficient mediators in Korea was severely limited, for the following reasons.

First, while the success of this approach hinged on the premise that a large portion of the general Korean public could converse in Japanese, the actual number of Japanese speakers in Korea was not as high as the U.S. military assumed. The number of Koreans who reliably understood Japanese did not reach 20 percent of the population until 1943, when 22.15 percent or 5.7 million Koreans were able to understand Japanese (22.15 percent) (Kim-Rivera 2002, 266-267). It should also be noted that it is unclear what categories were used to define "understanding" Japanese, which is distinguishable from having a "command" of the language, which is the requisite for effective communication via interpreter. Regardless, this number could hardly justify the usage of Japanese interpreters as the primary channel of interlingual communication between the U.S. military and the Korean people.

Second, the Korean people displayed resistance towards communicating with U.S. military personnel through Japanese interpreters. The future president of the ROK, Rhee Syngman stated “We shall not teach the Japanese language in our schools. We are Koreans. If the Japanese wish to speak with us in the future let them learn Korean!” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 173). The presence of the *Nisei* suggested to the Korean people, who had endured thirty-five years under Japanese colonial control, that the United States acknowledged Imperial Japan as a legitimate counterpart whose language it was willing to learn in order to communicate on equal terms. The absence of Korean interpreters indicated to the Korean people that the U.S. military did not see the need to communicate with or feel the necessity to cooperate with them. As U.S. Colonel William P. Jones Jr. (1959, 1-2) writes:

expecting others to make the effort to learn his language, an arrogance that suggests we are no different from the former colonial rulers. For foreigners to make the effort to learn the local working language is to demonstrate – often dramatically – a sense of respect for the people who speak that language. To avoid the effort can sometimes be interpreted as a show of disrespect.<sup>14</sup>

Under such conditions, Koreans felt themselves once again at the mercy of a foreign power while they themselves were barred from participating in the recontextualization or the reconstitution of social order. Of course, these *Nisei* interpreters were not of Japanese nationality, and were therefore not directly related with Korea’s colonial past, but the Korean people remained distrustful towards *Nisei*, “because of the Korean conviction that a Japanese remained a Japanese even if born in the United States and wearing an American uniform” (Meade 1951, 82-83). Such racial antipathy, however, was not one-

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<sup>14</sup> US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs. *Language Training for Foreign Aid Personnel. 86<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. Washington DC: GPO, 1959*

sided as “many *Nisei* exhibited the traditional Japanese disdain for Koreans and the Korean language” (McNaughton 2007, 143). This mutual distaste created hostility in an environment in which tensions were already palpable, thus serving as a hindrance to communication and cooperation.

An additional problem that arose when employing *Nisei* interpreters in Korea is depicted in the following remarks made about a *Nisei* interpreter at the surrender of Jeju Do.

Green’s [the senior American officer] remarks were translated into Japanese by an interpreter, a *Nisei* who looked very embarrassed and stumbled badly over the job [...] He got most of the information we wanted, most of it correctly in all probability, but it was hard and slow going. Everything had to be translated, often through two intermediaries. Questions and answers were frequently misunderstood: at times a matter had to be dropped out of sheer fatigue. And the Japanese, who were permitted to ask questions towards the last, appear to have been equally obscure on certain of the answers that painfully sifted through them.  
(HUSAFIK 1948)

Based on this statement, some *Nisei* interpreters stationed in Korea appear to have lacked the linguistic and communicational skills needed to function as competent mediators. It is possible that the more competent *Nisei* interpreters were stationed in Japan, which was also under U.S. military occupation at the time, while the less adept linguists were deployed to Korea. The questionable linguistic capabilities of the *Nisei* interpreters dispatched to Korea, coupled with the low number of Koreans capable of or willing to conversing in Japanese, undermined the practicality of employing the *Nisei* interpreters in Korea.

## **2.6. Local Korean Civilian Interpreters**



As a result, the USAMGIK was forced to “depend almost exclusively upon natives for the vital work of interpreting” (HUSAFIK 1948). The need for Korean-English interpreters grew more pressing as the occupation dragged on and an increasing number of Koreans were employed by the Military Government. By December 1945, almost seventy-five thousand Koreans were working for the USAMGIK, and in December of 1946, the governance structure of the USAMGIK was reorganized so that each bureau would be co-headed by an American and a Korean. This meant that any policy decisions would require consultation between the two sides and the consent of both. Despite having to work side-by-side with their American counterparts,

less than ten percent of the higher officials in Military Government have any understanding whatever of English. Less than one-half of the number who do understand English are able to speak it effectively. It is absolutely necessary for Americans to be able to talk and to get over ideas to Korean officials. This can be done only through interpreters [...] I think we might add that practically no American can speak Korean.

(National Archives and Records Administration, November 15, 1946, 11)

In the absence of Korean civilian interpreters, communication and coordination between U.S. and Korean personnel would have been virtually impossible, making interpreters vital to the operations of the occupational government.

Interpreters were recruited by the USAMGIK throughout the occupation. The task of selecting local civilian interpreters was at first managed by Yasuma Oda, a former official of the Japanese Government General, because no American military personnel possessed the linguistic skills necessary to properly administer the selection process. The first round of recruiting Korean interpreters, carried out shortly following the arrival of the 24th Corps, was judged as being “fairly successful” as “a considerable number turned up” to work (HUSAFIK 1948). The military assessed that “[a]lthough not fluent in

English, they were for the most part satisfactory” (ibid.) and a large portion of this original group eventually ended up working for the Military Government. Soon afterwards, due to a rising need for Korean interpreters among the U.S. military units stationed in Korea, a secondary call for interpreters was sent out but this second search “yielded only a loan harvest, but some Koreans were hired as interpreters, translators, and civil censors” (ibid.). The fact that the second group was judged to be inferior to the first demonstrates there was a limited number of Koreans able to speak and understand English in the country at the time.

The low number of capable English speakers in Korea was due to the fact that “the forty years of Japanese rule, especially that last decade when Japan was at war, was a major interruption in English education in Korea” (Kim-Rivera 2002, 279). In 1939, the Japanese imperial government declared English an enemy language, banned the import of Western books, fired all British and Americans in official positions, forced missionaries to leave its territories, drastically reduced the instructional hours of English, and removed the subject from the higher-education entrance exams. Under the highly discouraging atmosphere the Japanese government created against the English language, “both the quality and the quantity of English language education suffered a great deal” (Kim-Rivera 2002, 272). The bulk of the interpreters who worked for the Military Government were individuals from wealthy families who had studied in the United States and “only one in five had learned English in Korea” (Dong 2005, 112).

The limited number of Koreans capable of communicating in English meant that the supply of interpreters within the linguistic market the Military Government had constructed upon its arrival could not meet the demands for this resource. In the

following excerpt, Jeon Suk-hui, who worked as an interpreter during the occupation, comments on the difficulty the U.S. Military Government faced when recruiting interpreters, and the lengths to which its staff was willing to go to find capable personnel (Jeon 2005, 107):

When the U.S. soldiers arrived they discovered that all the Americans and Koreans could do was stare at each other's faces and say "hello" and "okay" because no one spoke good enough English to communicate [...]

They thought someone who had been to university would speak at least a little bit of English. That is when the name "Jeon Suk-hui," a graduated from Ewha Womans University, caught their eye.

Three or four American officers from the Military Government came to our hospital and asked me to become an interpreter. They were not soldiers, they were officers. I showed them my baby and told them that it would be difficult for me to work for them. Of course, I spoke in English. They visited several times afterwards to persuade me to change my mind.

Peter Hyun, who worked as an interpreter for the Military Government, wrote the following about the interview process he underwent when he applied for a interpreting position at the USAMGIK in the early winter of 1945, when he was seventeen years old:

The only job I could come up with in Seoul right after liberation was working as an interpreter for the U.S. occupational forces. The best and favorite subject during middle school in Hamheung was English. To be frank, I never studied conversational English. Of course, my English skills were not very good [...] but so what? I decided to give it a try! I was as courageous as I was young and foolish. I visited the Human Resources office of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. I must have looked very young because the bulky Army Major sitting behind the desk asked me how old I was. I added three years to my actual age [...] I couldn't believe it. I got the job so quickly and easily! There weren't even any detailed questions about by work experience or qualification.

(Hyun 1996, 29-30; my translation)

Hyun's experience reveals that the supply of interpreters within the linguistic market which the Military Government had constructed upon its arrival could not meet the demands for this resource. In a market in which the already high demand for interpreters continued to rise whilst the supply remained stagnant, the Military Government had to

resort to recruiting interpreters without properly assessing whether or not they possessed the requisite linguistic abilities to fulfill their function as linguistic mediators. Thus, Jeon also indicates that English language abilities amongst the interpreters varied considerably as “at the time there were many interpreters who were complete hokey” (Jeon 2005, 108).

## **2.7. Interpreters as Intercultural Agents**

During the U.S. occupation of southern Korea, however, the presence of USAMGIK interpreters was readily felt by all interlocutors participating in an interpreted event, as evinced in the following statement made by a former Military Government official:

It can readily be understood how an interpreter could in time come to know his principal's job almost as well as the principal and, if granted enterprise, act on his own in answering questions and reaching decisions while interpreting, or even independently while his principal was absent. It was a common enough experience to hear one's interpreter and a Korean conversing at a greater length than demanded by the translation at hand. This led in some cases to suspicion of interpreters, but always there remained the answer that the rendition of an American thought into Korean terms was more than a mere exchange of words.  
(HUSAFIK 1948)

This excerpt indicates that interpreters were not restricted to functioning as “conduits” but actively intervened in interlingual communicative exchanges, at times overstepping the limits of what is often considered the normative role of the linguistic mediator, as they were entrusted with extralinguistic functions to supplement for the lack of knowledge USAMGIK personnel possessed regarding Korean language, politics and culture.

Though this historical record does not provide detailed accounts of how interpreters intervened in interpreted events, the short story “Rice” by Henry Steiner

(1951) provides a detailed depiction of a Korean interpreter working with an American military officer during the Korean occupation. Though this is a fictional work, given the fact that Steiner lived in southern Korea from 1946 to 1947 while working as an engineering field supervisor for the Military Government, much of what is described in this story would have been inspired by observations made while the author was stationed in Korea.

The story follows Song, a Korean interpreter, who accompanies Captain Frazer and Sergeant Biancoli as they pay a visit to Han, an elderly rice farmer. Their goal is to persuade Han to sell his rice harvest to the USAMGIK at a reduced price, as part of the Rice Collection Program, but if necessary, the American military men are willing to forcefully confiscate his stores.

“Tell him if he doesn’t sell, we’ll confiscate the rice.”

Mr. Song said placatingly in Korean, “The people in the cities are starving. They cannot pay the high price on the open market. That is why the government sets this low price and makes out a quota.”

“The government of thieves! Let those in the cities come back to the land if they wish to eat.” Mr. Han’s eyes, the color of yellow river-water, became bright and wet with emotion. “Let them depend on the rain as I do and starve when it does not come. Let the river sweep away all they have. For years, I have worked the land for the Japanese and saw them take my rice away. Now I have the land and the rice. The government wants to take it away again. It is the same as the Japanese.”

“What does he say?” Frazer asked.

“One moment please, Captain Frazer.” And then in Korean to the old man, “But this is not for the Japanese. This is for your own people. The Americans are helping us.”

“Yes, I know. They will sell the rice to the robbers for five times what they give me. Then the robbers will sell it to the people for ten times. What do these foreigners know!” The speech came shooting out of the old man’s mouth.

“You are right,” Mr. Song said, “some of the rice may go to thieves, there to be sold again, but is it no comfort to know that you are behaving justly, that you are helping others who would starve without you? At least you will gain merit in the eyes of God no matter what sins others may commit.”

The old man ignored him again.

Mr. Song turned to Frazer and said, “He says no.”

“You mean you talked that much and all he said was no? You interpreters are all alike.”

(Steiner 1951, 7-8)

In this excerpt, rather than mimicking the American captain’s menacing tone, or relaying his threatening message, the interpreter instead attempts to first pacify the elderly man by explaining the circumstances that have necessitated the Rice Collection Program. Even when Captain Frazer asks that the farmer’s response be communicated to him, rather than informing him of the farmer’s thoughts on the matter, the interpreter opts to continue persuading Han. He negotiates on behalf of the Americans, imploring the elderly farmer to recognize the fact that the U.S. Military Government is requiring that he sell his rice for reasons different from those of the Japanese colonists who stole Han’s previous harvests. Only when Song determines that he can do no more to convince Han to reconsider his stance does the interpreter relent and offer the American officer the short interpretation, “He says no.” Here the interpreter decides to omit much of what was said, choosing rather to relay the central message without voicing the criticism expressed by Han, in an attempt to diffuse the rising tension within the interpreting event. While Frazer does voice his displeasure with Song’s approach, his comment that “You interpreters are all alike” reveals that it was considered normative behavior for the interpreter to speak on behalf of both interlocutors, to select what should be embellished or omitted from a dialogue, and to facilitate discussion so that the communicative goals of the exchange might be achieved.

The interventionist role USAMGIK interpreters assumed during interpreted events was met by criticism and condemnation by both the Military Government and the Korean public, who were preconditioned to believe that interpreters ought to transfer

rather than construct meaning. The active role interpreters adopted during interpreted events led some Korean politicians to fall under the impression that it was the interpreters who were actually in charge of overseeing the administrative duties of the Military Government rather than its American officials, and thus they were the ones to blame for its many policy failures. This idea became so widespread that one Korean political organization went so far as to claim that the idea of trusteeship itself originated not from U.S. policymakers but came,

[f]rom the interpreters of the U.S. Army and Military Government who are of the opinion that in Korea we have no leader who is capable of leading us and therefore our independence should be delayed...It is not unreasonable, therefore, that U.S. authorities should think of a trust system for Korea.

(HUSAFIK 1948)

This is, of course, far from the truth as the idea of trusteeship over Korea was first discussed between Roosevelt and Stalin while World War II was still underway, and detailed plans for the length and form of the trusteeship were decided on during the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in December of 1945. Regardless of the truth, however, this incident demonstrates how influential interpreters were seen to be in the eyes of the public.

## **2.8. Public Perceptions of the Malicious Interpreter in Fiction and the Media**

Two translation-related events during the early months of the U.S. occupation had a notable influence on the recasting of Korean views of the U.S. presence into a negative mold. The first widespread controversy had to do with the translation of the Cairo Declaration. In November 1943, the leaders of the U.S., the U.K., and the Republic of China committed themselves to the liberation of Korea following Japan's defeat by

specifying in the declaration that Korea would be granted independence “in due course.” The translation of the Cairo Declaration that circulated in Korea, which had been prepared by official Japanese sources, translated the ambiguous phrase “in due course” into the equivalent of “in a few days” (Stueck and Yi 2010, 186). According to Hodge, in his report to MacArthur,

One of greatest difficulties here in maintenance of order is the idea planted firmly in the minds of all Koreans that Korea is now...a free and independent nation...In talking to educated Koreans I discovered that translations of the Cairo Statement to Koreans have been “in a few days” or “very soon” rather than “in due course” in reference to the time of Korean independence. That is said to apply specifically to Proclamation Number One. Request that any future translations be carefully checked.<sup>15</sup>

Hodge later made a public announcement that Korea in fact would not be granted immediate independence and instead, that Koreans would have to earn their liberation by “demonstrate[ing] to the democratic nations of the world and to me as their representative your capacities and abilities as a people and your readiness to accept an honored place in the family of nations” (HUSAFIK 1948).

The situation was further exacerbated in December 1945 when the decision to establish a trusteeship over Korea was announced. To the Koreans, who had anticipated immediate independence, the decision to implement a five-year trusteeship was humiliating, and cooled their initially warm welcome to United States troops as liberators. Anti-trusteeship demonstrations were staged across the country. It was later assessed that to some extent the reaction was due to the fact that the word “trusteeship,” when translated into Korean, was the same word that had been used by the Japanese

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<sup>15</sup> Radio CG USAFIK to CINAFPAC Adv, 131031/I Sept 45.



authorities to refer to their colonial control over the country. General Hodge made the following statement in an attempt to pacify the public:

I fully understand what the word “Trusteeship” means to Koreans. In the meaning that you apply to that word, it is even more abhorrent to me as a responsible representative of my nation than it can be to you. The diplomats of the great Powers do not use the word in the same meaning as do Koreans, because they did not exercise forty years of Japanese domination. If they did understand your thoughts of the term “Trusteeship” they would use another term to express the assistance and advice they are willing to give Korea. I can assure you that I need no demonstration of any kind to make me do all in my power to remove all references to “Trusteeship” from future discussions of Korea.

(HUSAFIK 1948)

The general’s belated response did little to mend the damage already done to public relations with the Korean people; instead it appeared that the Americans were replacing rather than removing the former colonial overlords.

A natural extension of the view that equated the U.S. Military Government with the Japanese Colonial Government was the idea that the groups aiding the Americans, especially the local interpreters, were the successors to the *chinilpa* (pro-Japanese collaborators). As stated earlier, the Japanese government radically reduced the study of English in schools once the war in the Pacific began. The majority of interpreters that worked with the Military Government had thus studied overseas and only wealthy families could afford to send their children abroad. Following liberation, the majority of these wealthy landowners began to support the far right party, the Korean Democratic Party, which had deep vested interest in the status quo and felt the threat of communism most keenly. A significant number of “collaborationists” from the Japanese occupational period were also drawn into this group. A staunch anti-communist, Hodge lent his support to the far right. The majority of the approximately 400 interpreters who worked for the Military Government, including Hodge’s personal interpreter Lee Myo-muk, were

members of or closely associated with the Korean Democratic Party. In the eyes of the Korean people, the Japanese collaborators, the wealthy landowners, and the Military Government interpreters were cooperating to maintain the social hierarchy established during the colonial era.

The perceived relationship between the U.S. Military Government, former Japanese collaborators, and interpreters, which was the subject of widespread condemnation, is aptly represented in the following description of a poster seen by U.S. Colonel Glenn Newman of the U.S. Military Government:

An American soldier, blindfolded, is shaking hands with a Korean who holds a Japanese flag and a bundle of 100 yen notes. Between the two is an interpreter labeled as “Bribed by Traitors and Pro-Japs.

(HUSAFIK 1948)

The American soldier in this poster is drawn wearing a blindfold to suggest that the United States was oblivious to the circumstances in Korea. The Korean holding a Japanese flag and a bundle of Japanese money is a representation of former Japanese collaborators who were now seeking to forge ties with the United States and the interpreter, positioned at the center, is bridging the two parties, thus ensuring that the existing social hierarchy will prevail under the new regime.

The perception that interpreters were running the Military Government led to that institution earning the moniker the “interpreter’s government,” which was a “government of, for, and by interpreters” (Taylor 1948, 372). These interpreters were referred to as “malicious interpreters” by the Korean media. This idea was examined in many *transfictional* works produced in Korea during the occupational period. Among these works, Chae Man-sik’s “Mister Pang” stands out as an exploration of the social role

played by interpreters following the end of the war and the arrival of the United States.<sup>16</sup> The story presents two characters, Paek Chisa and Pang Sambok, and demonstrates how the ability to speak English reversed the fortunes of two Koreans in 1945. The allegiance of the two characters is underlined by the English and Japanese honorifics the two use when referring to each other: Paek Chisa is referred to as Paek-*san* while Pang Sambok is called *Mister Pang*. The lower-class Pang Sambok, a cobbler, managed to put his limited English skills to use as an interpreter for an American officer, resulting in a dramatic rise in wealth and status. The following excerpt describes the house Pang purchases just three days after becoming an interpreter.

Mister Pang [...] moved to his present house—said to be the company house of a bank director before Liberation—from the Hyonjo-dong rented room three days after becoming an interpreter for the lieutenant. Upstairs and down, it was decorated half in the Western style, half in the Japanese—altogether a palatial mansion.

(Chae 2017, 177)

The fact that the U.S. military interpreter, Pang, moved into the house of a former Japanese collaborator, the bank director, indicates that the interpreter has replaced the colluder as the face of the Korean upper-class. Rather than redecorating the house in the “Western style,” which would indicate a clear break from the past, however, the mansion is decorated half in the Western and half in the Japanese style. This passage hints at the

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<sup>16</sup> Chae Man-sik, a Korean novelist, playwright, literary critic, essayist, reporter, and editor who produced 290 novels, short stories, plays, critiques, and essays during his career. In his work, Chae uses satire to discuss social issues such as class conflict, colonialism, national identity, and the intellectuals living under Japanese colonial and U.S. military occupation. During the U.S. occupation, Chae shifted his attention from colonialism to the difficulties of nation-building in Korea under U.S. occupation, amid the turbulence and confusion of ideological struggle and national division.

fact that though the Japanese colonial era might have ended, Japanese collaborators continued to maintain a strong hold on the wealth and power in Korea.

Soon after Pang moves into his new home, he is visited by the upper-class patriarch Paek Chisa, who prospered under the Japanese because his son held a position within the colonial police force. With liberation, however, his family was stripped of its wealth and targeted for retribution. Paek paid Pang a visit in hopes of persuading Pang to help him regain his fortune by using his connections within the Military Government to track down and capture the people who stole his riches. As payment, Paek promises to award Pang half of his estate, to which the interpreter quickly agrees. Although the interpreter has replaced the colluder as the beneficiary of foreign occupation, the fact that Pang agrees to help Paek regain his fortune indicates that ultimately the interpreter is working to maintain the social status quo that was established under Japanese rule.

Malicious interpreters also sparked the interest of the public when the topic of interpreting was reported on by major newspapers in southern Korea during the years between 1945 and 1950.<sup>17</sup> The large number of articles devoted to this topic is a clear indicator of the level of interest the public felt towards the empowered interpreters working for the Military Government. These articles provide a rough overview of how interpreters were framed by the media during the occupation.

- (1) Malicious Military Police interpreter sentenced to 10 years in prison
- (2) Emphasize principle of judiciary independence – eliminate machinations of interpreter and impure party members, lawyer’s association proposes to Military-Governor
- (3) Unjust outside interference and malicious interpreter domination renounced, determined to protect the judiciary, group of prosecutors submit petition

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from the Korean History Database of the National Institute of Korean History. <http://db.history.go.kr/>

- (4) U.S. Korea Joint Conference close examination crimes and consider punishment for malicious interpreters and corrupt officials
- (5) Criticism for misbehavior of U.S. official, Korean interpreters are a necessary evil
- (6) Fake interpreter steals 130 thousand won
- (7) Fake interpreter delinquent to be locked up for undermining Bar-Dance Hall
- (8) Interpreter steals military uniform to be sent behind bars
- (9) Abuse of U.S. military interpreter, several hundred thousand Won swindled, approximately ten malicious interpreters arrested
- (10) Delinquent interpreter prosecuted
- (11) Misdeeds of malicious interpreter, steals 140 thousand Won
- (12) Malicious interpreter exposed while trying to pocket supplies – candidate for Mayor’s secretary”
- (13) Thorough purge of malicious interpreter, seeking information on police torture”
- (14) Malicious interpreter uses handgun in robbery

A cursory examination of the titles shows that the majority of these articles report on the crimes committed by “malicious interpreters.” This would suggest that U.S. Military Government interpreters were subjected to public scrutiny. Considering that these interpreters were viewed as the new generation of foreign colluders, it is hardly surprising that media outlets focused on the malicious activities of this social group. A closer look at the contents of articles (1) through (3) provides a clearer picture of how interpreters and the act of interpreting in an occupational space were viewed by the Korean public.

Article (1), “Malicious Military Police interpreter sentenced to 10 years in prison,” is one of two articles which reports on the arrest of a Korean-Japanese interpreter who worked for the Japanese colonial government. This interpreter was charged with “participating in the electrical and water torture of 60 anti-Japanese activists while working for the Japanese Military Police.” The tone of the article grows particularly stern when it mentions that this interpreter aided the Military Police set their office on fire before fleeing Hoeryeong, most likely to dispose of any records of their inhumane interrogation methods, after Japan had announced its surrender to the Allies, which

proved that the interpreter was not working for the Japanese out of necessity but rather that he was “a national traitor” who was in fact loyal to the Japanese.

Article (2), “Unjust outside interference and malicious interpreter domination renounced, determined to protect the judiciary, group of prosecutors submit petition,” likewise discusses the misconduct of interpreters under the colonial government, though in more general terms:

When Japanese tyranny began the people suffered bitterly for the numerous cases of innocent civilians being imprisoned for unfounded accusations made by malicious interpreters while criminals were acquitted because they had bribed the interpreter.

This article indicates that interpreters under the Japanese authorities wielded considerable influence as it claims they could use their position to convince the police and court whether a person was guilty or innocence of a crime. It also suggests that these interpreters were prone to receiving bribes and that they were feared and hated by the public. This article, most importantly, shows that the criticism directed towards interpreters during the U.S. military occupation extends back to the Japanese colonial era.

The contents of Article (3), “Unjust outside interference and malicious interpreter domination renounced, determined to protect the judiciary, group of prosecutors submit petition,” show that interpreters were charged with interfering in court hearings during the military occupation. In an interview, former prosecutor, Seonu Jeong-won, states that “many people suffered because interpreters distorted what was being said” at the Military Government Court. Seonu claims he saw a court interpreter “send an innocent man to prison by making him guilty by saying ‘no’ when he should have said ‘yes’” (2005, 117). Seonu claims he later had the interpreter arrested, but while incarcerated the interpreter informed the authorities that the prosecutor who had had him arrested was actually a

communist. After hearing this, the prosecutor scolded the interpreters, saying “Hey you, it was terrible living under Japanese oppression, now that there are new masters have you decided to sponge off the Americans and harass Korean people?” Here again, the actions of interpreters working for the U.S. military government are seen as mirroring Japanese collaborators.

The contents of articles (1), (2), (3) show that interpreters working for the United States Army Military Government in Korea were viewed by the public as colluders working with a foreign institution who were willing to use their linguistic resources for their own personal gain. It was due to these factors that historians such as Jin Duk-gyu (1980, 46) tend to be extremely critical of Military Government interpreters:

These interpreters were individuals that lacked clear historical awareness or a sense of national identity. Most of them were obsessed with their own individual comfort and personal advancement. They began to play the role of a new social stratum within the hierarchy of power by using the backing of unchallenged power of the U.S. military they ruled over the Korean people. They were involved in all matters relating to rights and interests, committed countless corrupt crimes, increasing the level of socio-political confusion.

The reason interpreters engaged in corrupt activity appears to be linked to the dynamics of the linguistic market in southern Korea under U.S. occupation, which was characterized by an excess in demand. Excessive demand is created in a market when the price of a product or service is set below the equilibrium price. In this case, the consumers compete to purchase this product or service, and the high demand pushes up the price, making more suppliers willing to produce the product or provide the service as the price begins to rise to its equilibrium. The conditions under which the linguistic market operated during the occupation, however, were not typical market circumstances because the U.S. military maintained a monopsony—i.e., a situation in which there is

only one consumer of a good or service—over the demand for interpreters and translators. The following excerpt, taken from historical records of the U.S. military, suggests that the Military Government, which possessed wage-setting power as the largest employer of interpreters, set the price for linguistic services at an artificially low price, a fact that the institution was cognizant of:

[interpreters] were paid twenty yen a day; in spite of the low pay many educated English-speaking Koreans volunteered their services in order to improve their knowledge of English.

(HUSAFIK 1948)

The Military Government, however, was disinclined towards increasing the wages of interpreters and translators under its employment, based on the fact that they were already being paid more than Japanese interpreters during the Japanese colonial government.

Q. Are interpreters well paid?

A. Comparatively speaking, interpreters are paid higher than chief clerks and considerably higher than their position called for under the former government of Korea – under the Japanese. Their exact pay at present ranges from Civil Service grade 7 at the top to 10 at the bottom. The total monthly pay for the top grade at present, including the cost of living differential, is 1870 W. The total monthly pay for the lowest paid interpreter at present is 1670 W.

(National Archives and Records Administration, November 15, 1946, 12)

By undercutting interpreters, the Military Government opened the door to potential corruption. The political leader Won Se-hoon asserted that underpaying interpreters led to corruption and that there was a need to increase interpreter wages, as they have “been paid salaries which give them little more than tobacco money.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Research by Van Rijckeghem and Weder (2001) shows that countries with higher civil service wages have lower levels of corruption because higher salaries raise the stakes of engaging in corruption. Similarly, the “fair wage model” contends that officials engage in corruption only when they see themselves as not receiving a “fair” income, a perception that could be eliminated through higher salaries. This view corresponds with experts on corruption, such as Peter N.S. Lee, who notes that “it is not a question of paying sufficient salary to a man incorruptible but rather of not paying salary on which a man is



The artificially low pay offered interpreters meant that the countervailing force against engaging in corrupt activity, in other words the threat of loss of employment, was weakened while the incentive to seek alternative channels of income was strengthened. Under such circumstances, interpreters, who joined the Military Government for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons, did not feel the need to meet the expectations of the Military Government.

### **2.9. Interpreter Agency within a Zone of Uncertainty**

According to Bourdieu, the power that a social agent holds is derived from their position within a social field and the capital they possess. How then were interpreters able to gain access to capital and power that allowed them to challenge the authority of the Military Government during interpreted exchanges when the USAMGIK dominated the military and political field in occupational Korea? The empowerment of USAMGIK interpreters was made possible by the fact that interpreted events take place within a “zone of uncertainty” (Inghilleri 2005, 72). A “zone of uncertainty” is a social space in which agents from different fields converge, and the convergence of conflicting world views momentarily upsets the habitus of everyone involved. Social agents, seeking to reestablish social order amid the confusion, compete to assert with varying levels of certainty the legitimacy of their own social practices. Thus, interpreting activity becomes the locus of competition between social agents whose hierarchical relations and accompanying habitus are recontextualized. Typically, social agents and institutions in possession of larger amounts of capital, and therefore power, will dictate the terms under

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encouraged to be corrupt in order to meet his reasonable commitments.”

which the norms of interpreting are established. It is due to this fact that the interpreting habitus often remains oriented towards the maintenance of control possessed by dominant institutions and social agents over interlingual communication and interaction.

Nonetheless, it is always possible for a more dominant networks of power to be rendered unable to forcefully assert its authority during interpreted events if its position of power is challenged by the presence of an interpreter or other interlocutors who may diminish the value of the symbolic capital they possess. Such developments allow the interpreter to accrue symbolic and cultural capital that enables them to compete with social agents from more established professions and fields in the struggle over power and control of the social/interactional space in which interpreting activity takes place. When the authority of the dominant institution is challenged, an interpreting habitus that rejects the dominant institution's views regarding normative behavior may emerge. In this case, the role of the interpreter and what constitutes legitimate interpretive practice can be brought into question or redefined.

In the case of the USAMGIK, although the Military Government was the dominant administrative and military institution in the field of occupation, interpreters were able to challenge the organization's view of what constitutes legitimate behavior, able to produce new forms of interpreting practices, and able even to dominate interpreted interactions because of the significance of the linguistic and cultural capital they possessed. The value of the interpreter's capital was exponentially increased due to two factors. First, the demand for the linguistic capital these interpreters possessed was driven upwards as the USAMGIK transitioned to a bilingual organization. While the viability of daily administrative operations hinged on the assumption that the American

and Korean staff could cooperate and coordinate, none of the American staff and only a very limited number of the Korean staff could communicate with their counterparts. Second, the supply of interpreters in the linguistic market created by the USAMGIK could not rise to meet expanding demand because the study of English had been discouraged by the Japanese colonial government during the decade preceding the U.S.'s arrival.

According to the historians Fishel and Hausrath, the "interpreter's government" had the following effects:

- 1) It put civil affairs at the mercy of their Korean interpreters;
- 2) it made the Korean interpreter, unprepared by training and experience, the key man in civil affairs field operations;
- 3) it posed a serious security problem because of the difficulty of adequately screening interpreters under Korean conditions; and,
- 4) it exalted the influence of Koreans who spoke English and therefore were able to obtain direct access to civil affairs personnel.

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 8-9)

Countermeasures against the empowerment of interpreters were discussed during the Joint America-Korea Conference, during which the head of the Korean delegation, Kim Kiu-sic suggested that Military Government interpreters might be kept in check if the U.S. military could carry out the three following measures:

- 1) Language qualifications to be tested by both Koreans and Americans before employment
- 2) Duties and activities should be outlined and he should be told how far his responsibilities go. The trouble is that these interpreters are used sometimes as informers, advisors, liaison officers, etc.
- 3) Classification:
  - a. Interpreters or translators attached to the higher officials of M.B.
  - b. Those attached to bureau chiefs and governors of provinces
  - c. Those attached to sub-officials such as section chiefs.

(National Archives and Records Administration, November 4, 1946)

Indeed, had the Military Government been able to enact these three measures, namely improving the recruitment process, clearly defining the interpreter's duties, and establishing a system for personnel management, it would have been better able to dictate the terms under which interpreters operated. However, Kim overlooked the fact that it was precisely the organization's inability to select, train, and manage its linguistic staff rather than a disinclination to do so that created the conditions for USAMGIK interpreters to monopolize the channels of interlingual/intercultural communication in the first place.

After discussions were completed, the members of the Joint Conference sent a letter to General Hodge which contained the following suggestions for tackling the problems associated with interpreting:

Interpreters are essential in any governmental organization such as Military Government where the language barrier is so great. However, dishonest and venal interpreters have unique opportunities not only for personal gain but for the furtherance of the political power of the particular group with which they may happen to be associated. The utilization of interpreters should be carefully limited to tasks where the officials concerned cannot perform their missions satisfactorily because of language difficulties. Such officials should carefully check the work of interpreters in important matters.

(National Archives and Records Administration, February 4, 1947)

This statement does little in the way of providing the Military Government with practical guidance for managing its interpreters. The recommendation that officials limit the use of interpreters to tasks for which their services are indispensable was hardly a viable option as there were no American military personnel able to speak Korean, and less than five percent of Korean officials in the USAMGIK were capable of conversing in English. Such a move would have required that American staff restrict dialogue to the handful of Koreans who could converse in their language, and the Military Government was

already under fire by the Korean public for its preferential treatment of English speakers. Under such circumstances, the suggestion that U.S. staff somehow monitor the work of the organization's interpreters rings hollow as well. Thus, rather than providing effective countermeasures, the contents of this letter reveal that the Military Government's inability to access the linguistic capital required for interlingual communication barred it from asserting dominance over the interpreting habitus.

The circumstances seen above should not, however, simply be understood as a case in which interpreters forcefully wrestled control away from the Military Government. An interpreting habitus emerges through interactions between social agents rather than being constructed by one group. In other words, the interpreting habitus that arose within the USAMGIK was a natural result of the lack of linguistic and cultural capital USAMGIK officials possessed during interactions that required fluency in the language and culture of their counterparts. It was due to this fact that "Many Military Government officials came to rely heavily on interpreters for the conduct of business far beyond that of mere translation" (Historical Office of the U.S. Command in Korea, 1948). In sum, the interpreting habitus was reoriented towards the interpreter because their specialized position with respect to linguistic and cultural knowledge was acknowledged by interlocutors in the field, which provided them with the symbolic capital necessary to assert their dominance over interlingual communication.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE KOREAN WAR (1950-19 53): A PARROT PERCHED ON A RIFLE**

Given that the United Nations Command was comprised of troops from sixteen United Nations member states, the success of its military operations was highly reliant on the work of interpreters and translators. Despite the critical role they played during the Korean War, however, little is known about these linguistic mediators. This chapter first reveals how Korean-English interpreters, known as UN Liaison Group officers, were recruited, trained, and utilized during the Korean War (1950-53). Particular attention is paid to the triadic relationship between UN Liaison Group officers, U.S. Korean Military Assistance Group officers, and ROK Army officers.

#### **3.1. Diplomatic and Military Fields in Northeast Asia**

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the international arena was dominated by multinational wars which cut across national borders and spanned multiple continents. The aftermath of the disastrous Second World War saw the beginning of an era defined by the decline of former colonial powers, the simultaneous rise of the Soviet Union and the United States, and the creation of supranational organizations such as the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace. On the Korean peninsula, the end of the Second World War signaled the collapse of the Japanese Empire and the end of colonial rule. The power void left by the Japanese was promptly filled by the militaries of the Soviet Union and the United States, who divided the country along the 38th Parallel and established military governments in the two zones. Though the United Nations attempted to unify the two Koreas by administering joint elections, this effort

failed because UN agents were prevented from setting foot in the communist zone north of the border. Separate elections were held in 1948, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea) were launched that same year. The Soviet and American militaries soon after departed, leaving behind two diametrically opposed governments, each claiming sovereignty over the whole of Korea, setting the stage for the Korean War.

As soon as the two governments were founded, they began preparations for military confrontation. In the South, this mandate was spearheaded by Syngman Rhee, the first president of the Republic of Korea, who maintained that a peaceful coexistence between the two Koreas was impossible and reunification needed to be secured by any means possible. What prevented Rhee from launching an all-out war with the North Koreans was the fact that the United States refused to support his plan for the reunification of the Korean peninsula by force. At the time, the U.S. was preoccupied with countering Soviet geopolitical expansion in Europe. As part of this effort, Truman announced the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to contain the communist threat in Greece and Turkey, which became the foundation of America's policy of Soviet containment throughout the Cold War. This move was followed by the Marshall Plan in 1948, an initiative to aid Western European economies rebuild after the end of World War II, and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, a military alliance established to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.

The premier of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Il-sung, was equally adamant about the need to unify the country by force and constantly sought Stalin and Mao's support for a war against the Republic of Korea. In the years following the

establishment of the two Korean governments, however, neither of North Korea's two major allies had sufficient motive to unleash a war on the Korean peninsula. Unifying the Korean peninsula was not a high priority for Stalin, who faced a greater challenge in Europe as Western European states began to rebuild themselves, with the aforementioned support of the United States. When Kim Il-sung first breached the matter, asking for "permission to begin military operations against the south" (Shtykov 1949), the Soviet Politburo responded with, "It is impossible to view this operation other than the beginning of a war between North and South Korea, for which North Korea is not prepared either militarily or politically" (Communist Party of the Soviet Union Politburo 1949). While refusing his proposal, Stalin nonetheless "found Kim's reunification ideas interesting enough to discuss them with Mao" (Goncharov, Lewis and Xue 1993, 139). At the moment, the Chinese likewise had little to gain from a war on the Korean peninsula. The Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communist Party of China, led by Mao Zedong, had been raging on since 1927, although the two had briefly combined forces against the Japanese. It was only in 1949 that, after more than two decades of fighting, Mao's communist forces finally defeated Chiang's army and established the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite the fact that Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters had fled across the Taiwan Strait, the newly established PRK was faced with a myriad of domestic issues, including eliminating the last vestiges of opposition on the mainland, erecting a stable political system, and revitalizing the economy. Preoccupied with matters closer to home, Mao had no reason to incite a clash on the Korean peninsula.



It was only in 1950 that shifts to the balance of power on the international stage convinced Stalin to accept Kim's calls for a war for the reunification of Korea. The most important factor was without question the establishment of the PRC, which successfully placed the whole of mainland China under communist control. In addition to the enlargement of the communist sphere of influence, this development was interpreted by party leaders in Moscow as a sign that Washington was reluctant to actively intervene in East Asian affairs. Stalin therefore believed he could support a North Korean military push for unification without risking all-out war with the United States. Nonetheless, as a cautionary measure, Stalin insisted that Kim receive Mao's approval for operations, and warned that "if he ran into difficulty with the United States, he would have to depend on China, not the Soviet Union, to bail him out" (Stueck 2002, 73). In May, Stalin also sent a telegram to China's leadership declaring, "The present situation has changed from the situation in the past [so] that North Korea can move towards actions" (Vyshinsky 1950). At this point, Stalin was still the unchallenged chief of the international communist movement, and Mao could not openly dispute his authority on such matters. Furthermore, Mao had himself very recently reunified China by force and could thus not justifiably oppose Kim from pursuing a similar goal by identical means. For these reasons, when Kim Il-sung called on him for support, Mao promised that the DPRK had the PRC's backing, should a need arise.

Preparations for war began as soon as Stalin gave the go-ahead. Hundreds of Soviet military advisors had remained in North Korea after the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and more still arrived in May and June of 1950. Large amounts of mobile artillery and tanks were also sent from the U.S.S.R., with

technical staff to prepare and maintain the weapons. Though Stalin made it clear that this would be a “Korean” war, which would be limited to the Korean peninsula, as he did not want to risk the outbreak of a third world war, he promised that the Soviet Union would assist the North as best it could within those parameters. Kim Il-sung pledged “the attack will be swift and the war will be won in three days: the guerrilla movement in the South has grown stronger and a major uprising is expected” (Lankov 2015, 10) once the Northern army crossed the border. Fully in agreement on these matters, the three communist leaders set the time for attack for late June.

### **3.2. The Outbreak and Progression of the Korean War**

On June 25, 1950, the North Korean military crossed the 38th Parallel and began its attack on the Republic of Korea. Their plan was to rapidly advance southward, capture the capital city of Seoul and encircle the Republic of Korea Army in the central region of the country. Seoul fell on the third day of the attack and Rhee and his administration, as well as hundreds of thousands of refugees, fled to the southeast coast. In late July, Kim Il-sung reported to Moscow that he was confident the war would last less than a month.

Although North Korea held the upper hand militarily, the international community’s reaction to the war made the fulfillment of Kim’s prediction unlikely. In Washington, Truman immediately decided that the war was a case of outright Communist aggression, claiming in a statement made on June 27, 1950, that “The attack on Korea made it plain beyond all doubt that Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war” (Truman 1956, 339). In Truman’s eyes, this attack, which was orchestrated by the Soviet Union,

was carried out to reduce American influence in the Asian continent and to test the mettle of the United States and its allies on a global scale. It was widely held at the time that the Soviet Union had masterminded the North Korean attack and that Kim Il-sung was Stalin's puppet (Kennan 1968, 395). According to Truman, this gave America a moral imperative to act. "If we don't put up a fight now," Truman proclaimed to his staff, there is "no telling what they'll do" (Neal 2002, 182).

A number of events surrounding the attack on South Korea made Truman anxious. First, the Soviet Union had successfully tested an atomic bomb in 1949, ending the United States' monopoly on the weapon. Second, in Europe, Soviet intervention in Greece and Turkey had given rise to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which funneled aid to war-torn Europe in the hopes of warding off communist political victories. Most importantly, in Asia, China proper had been unified under Mao Zedong's communist party, whereas the U.S.-backed Chiang Kai-shek had been forced to retreat to the island of Formosa (or Taiwan). After defeating Chiang, Mao had quickly moved to ally himself with the Soviet Union, and the two sides signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in February 1950. The Truman administration faced fierce criticism for the unexpected communist takeover of China, which was often referred to as the "loss of China" (Newman 1992, ix). This critique played a large role in the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy, which placed Truman and his advisors under pressure to not appear "soft" on communism. When North Korean troops invaded the South, the Truman administration was eager to seize the opportunity to defend a noncommunist government from invasion by communist troops in hopes of gaining approval for its anticommunist campaign.

In the days following the outbreak of the Korean War, a series of critical decisions were made within the United Nations Security Council, propelled by the United States, regarding its response to the North Korean invasion of South Korea. Word of the North Korean attack first reached Washington via a radio message from Seoul to the Department of State sent by United States Ambassador to Korea, John J. Muccio, who stated: “It would appear from the nature of the attack and the manner in which it was launched that it constitutes an all-out offensive against the Republic of Korea” (FRUS 1950, 125-126).<sup>19</sup> News of the North Korea attack was soon passed on to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Trygve Lie, who reportedly immediately exclaimed, “This is war against the United Nations” (Chace and Carr 2006, 68): Lie called a meeting of the Security Council for the next day at 2 p.m. (New York time) to debate, amend, and revise a resolution with respect to the situation in Korea. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 82 was adopted on June 25, 1950, by a vote of nine to zero. The Soviet delegation, which could have vetoed the decision, was not present at the Security Council when the resolution was passed, because it had boycotted meetings since January 10, 1950 over the issue of Chinese representation at the United Nations (Pak 2000, 109).

UNSC Resolution 82 stated that the armed attack upon the Republic of Korea by forces from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea “constitutes a breach of the peace.” It called for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of North Korean armed forces to the 38th Parallel, and, finally, “all [United Nations] Members to

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<sup>19</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States is hereafter cited as FRUS.

render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution and to refrain from giving assistance to the North Korean authorities.”<sup>20</sup>

While the UNSC was debating how to respond to the North Korean attack, MacArthur, who was stationed in Tokyo, was ordered to send ammunition and equipment to South Korean forces so as to prevent a North Korean occupation of the capital area through the usage of air and naval cover to assure their safe arrival, provide ships and planes to evacuate American families from Korea and to protect the evacuation, and dispatch a survey party to Korea to monitor the situation and determine how best the U.S. might assist the ROK. On the evening of June 26, 1950, MacArthur reported to Washington that South Korean forces could not hold Seoul and that the ROK military was on the brink of “a complete collapse” (Korean Institute of Military History 1997, 252).

As the situation on the Korean peninsula further deteriorated, on June 27, 1950, the UN Security Council passed the momentous UNSC Resolution 83.<sup>21</sup> This statement once again called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for the North Korean authorities to withdraw their armed forces to the 38th Parallel. It was also noted that North Korea had failed to comply with UNSC Resolution 82, and thus “urgent military measures are required to restore international peace and security.” The resolution recommended “that the Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore

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<sup>20</sup> The full text of UN Security Council Resolution 82 may be viewed through the search engine of the United Nations at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/82>

<sup>21</sup> The full text of UN Security Council Resolution 83 may be viewed through the search engine of the United Nations at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/83>

international peace and security in the area.” The passing of this second resolution was an exceptional event in the history of the United Nations as it was the first time the UN requested military action from its member states to defend a country under military attack. Also noteworthy is the fact that, at the time, the ROK was not a UN member state.

Despite calls for peace, the war waged on, and North Korean forces were able to continue their rush southward. On July 7, 1950, the UNSC passed Resolution 84.<sup>22</sup> Having previously recommended that members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the South Korean state as may be necessary to repel the attack and restore peace and security to the area, the Security Council further recommended that all members providing military forces and other assistance to the Republic of Korea make these forces and assistance available to a unified command under the United States of America. In addition, they requested that the U.S. appoint the Commander of this organization, the United Nations Command, and task the Commander with reporting to the UNSC on circumstantial developments. In other words, the U.S. was hereby granted nearly unlimited authority over all UN-backed military operations on the peninsula. National militaries participating in the war as part of the United Nations Command (UNC) would be required to march under the UN flag. After the resolution was passed, Truman appointed MacArthur as Commander of the UN forces on July 8, 1950. The Republic of Korea, though not a member of the UN, likewise placed its military under MacArthur’s command on July 15, 1950, and on July 25, 1950, the UNC was officially established under the leadership of MacArthur.

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<sup>22</sup> The full text of UN Security Council Resolution 84 may be viewed through the search engine of the United Nations at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/84>

In total, sixteen countries sent troops and forty-one sent some form of equipment or aid to support the United Nations' efforts against the forces of North Korea, which would later be aided by China. The success of this first "United Nations War" was of vital importance to the international organization if it hoped to maintain legitimacy. Failure to counter the North Korean attack would have caused the young institution to lose credibility just five years after its creation. Truman went so far as to state that the goal of the war effort was "to bring the United Nations through its first great effort in collective security and to produce a free world coalition of incalculable value" (Rovere and Schlesinger 2009, 104).

While these critical decisions were being made at the UN Security Council, the South Korean government, military, and people were continuously forced into retreat by the Northern onslaught. The UN forces sent to aid the South Koreans were likewise repeatedly defeated by the advancing North Korean Army until they were forced back to the Pusan Perimeter, a 140-mile defensive line around the southeastern tip of the Korean peninsula that includes the port of Pusan. The Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) and UNC mounted a last stand around the perimeter, warding off North Korean attacks for six weeks, between August to mid-September. While the ROKA and UNC successfully defended this border, the United States, which had firm footing in Japan, continuously dispatched reinforcements and supplies to Pusan harbor. By early September, MacArthur's troops outnumbered the DPRK's Korean People's Army (KPA) 180,000 to 100,000 soldiers, giving it the manpower needed to successfully mount a counterattack against the North (Appleman 1961, 61).

On September 15, 1950, MacArthur masterminded an amphibious landing at Incheon, a harbor city west of Seoul, which was well over 100 miles north of the Pusan Perimeter (Stokesbury 1988, 67). His objective was to liberate Seoul and threaten to cut off North Korean troops in the south of the peninsula. This risky tactic was a tremendous success. The UN forces that landed in Incheon defeated the North Korean units surrounding Seoul after only a week's fighting. The UNC in Pusan pushed northward as the KPA retreated and Seoul was recaptured by ROK forces on September 25, 1950. By October 1, 1950, the communist troops that had marched on South Korea were all fleeing north of the 38th Parallel.

With the North Korean forces in full retreat, the vital issue under consideration in the United Nations was the matter of whether the organization's forces should cross the 38th Parallel into North Korean territory and attempt to reunify the country by force. This topic had not been discussed at length earlier but there was a general understanding that the aim of the UN's military venture was to restore the status quo by driving the North Korean Army north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. As UN forces rapidly approached the former border, arguments erupted within the UN for and against advancing past the parallel. Those in favor of a northward push argued that it was evident that there could be no lasting peace in the region if Korea remained divided into two ideologically polar states. During the U.S.S.R./U.S. occupation of northern and southern Korea, the policy of the UN had been to accomplish a unified Korea through the arrangement of free elections under UN auspice. The United Nations was still committed to this past decision and in dispute with North Korea, which had refused to permit UN supervision of elections north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. On the other hand, an attempt to unify Korea by force entailed



potential danger as there was no sure way to know how China or the Soviet Union would respond to the potential downfall of their ally. The Soviets could justify its entry into war with claims to some residual interests in the country while China might intervene since the disappearance of a communist state on the Korean peninsula would threaten its national security as it would place a U.S. ally next to its borders. The consequences of intervention by the Soviet Union or China could go so far as possibly sparking a third world war. In the United States, the success of the Incheon Landing had led to the rise of sufficient support for crossing the border. On September 30, 1950, U.S. Defense Secretary George Marshall sent a secret message to MacArthur stating, “We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38th Parallel” (Weintraub 2000, 157-158). With his government’s support, MacArthur ordered UN troops to cross the 38th Parallel into North Korean territory on October 7, 1950 (Stokesbury 1988, 79). The North Korean capital, Pyongyang, was captured on October 19, 1950 and UN troops continued to press northward, drawing closer to the North Korean-Chinese border (ibid.: 90).

Stalin, who had been repeatedly promised a swift victory, was furious with the North Korean defeat and accused the North Koreans and his own military advisors of incompetence and negligence. On October 1, 1950, Stalin sent a message to Mao stating, “the situation of our Korean friends is getting desperate [...] I think that if in the current situation you consider it possible to send troops to assist the Koreans, then you should move at least five-six divisions towards the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel at once” (Roberts 2019, 323). Upon receiving this message, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership met in emergency sessions from October 2-5, 1950 in order to decide on whether or not China

would intervene. Mao was very clear from the start that he wanted Chinese forces to move into North Korea, as per Stalin's request. Furthermore, the Chinese communists owed the Koreans a debt of gratitude from the Chinese Civil War, in which many Korean communists had participated, and Mao himself had promised Kim he would provide him with assistance if needed. However, there was considerable opposition within the Chinese Politburo, and Mao was forced to decline the request for an immediate intervention with the statement that "such action may entail extremely serious consequences." After receiving yet another more urgent request from Stalin to intervene, on October 5, 1950, Mao was able to convince members of the Politburo to overturn their previous decision and agree to send up to nine divisions to fight in Korea. After additional negotiations, on October 13, 1950, Mao finally made the decision that the PRK "should go ahead and cross the Yalu" into North Korea (Yufan and Zhihai 1990, 111).

While Stalin and Mao prevaricated, the UN military advance northward continued. The Chinese forces, constituted as the People's Volunteer Army (PVA), entered Korea the same day as the North Korean capital fell, with approximately two hundred thousand men. China justified its entry into the war as a response to "American aggression in the guise of the UN" (Fuchs, et al. 2018, 291). At the time, U.S. intelligence knew of China's intention to intervene in the war, but they did not know where their troops would attack from nor how many troops they were willing to dedicate to the cause. Thus, the UNC was taken by surprise on November 1, 1950 when the Chinese forces attacked the U.S. First Cavalry Division near the city of Unsan. The Americans were caught wholly unprepared and suffered terrible losses. Mao then ordered the Chinese troops to wait for reinforcements before proceeding. This led MacArthur to

his biggest miscalculation of the war, ordering an offensive against the Chinese troops who he still believed were few in number. The result was a complete disaster for the UN forces. The PVA counterattack not only destroyed the offensive, with heavy losses on both sides, but forced the UNC into retreat. By December, the UNC was entirely pushed out of North Korea and on January 4, 1951, Seoul fell to the Communist forces for the second time. On April 11, 1951, Truman delivered his “Preventing a New World War” speech and dismissed MacArthur, a move that was brought about after the general publicly argued that the United States “take the war to China” (Ryan 1981, 576).

By intervening in the Korean War, the newly established People’s Republic of China demonstrated to its domestic population the freshly instituted communist regime’s dedication to defending the country’s national sovereignty and communist ideology while flaunting to both its allies and rivals the country’s ability to hold its own against the United States. The intervention of China created a pseudo “balance of power” on the Korean peninsula. In mid-March 1951, UN forces retook Seoul for the second time, and their forces were able to establish and hold a fragile front line very close to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The Chinese tried to dislodge them in April but failed due to the UN’s superior air support. The communist forces attempted an offensive in the spring of 1951, but the war had already taken the form of trench warfare. By the summer of 1951, Seoul had changed hands four times, the conflict became a war of attrition, with the front line set up close to the original border, the 38th parallel.

By June, Mao was ready for a cease-fire, but Stalin argued that the war “gives the possibility to the Chinese troops to study contemporary warfare on the field of battle and [...] shakes up the Truman regime in America and harms the military prestige of the

Anglo-American troops” (Combs 2012, 149). In the south, Syngman Rhee likewise urged the UNC not to settle before the country was reunified. Meanwhile, international support for the war continued to wain: in Europe, the war had never had much resonance and most people simply wanted the conflict to end before it spread there, the developing world expressed little support for the war, and two thirds of Americans believed that the U.S. should pull out of Korea altogether.

For the remainder of the Korean War the ROKA/UNC and the KPA/PVA continued to wage battle but exchanged little territory. As such, the two sides were eventually forced to devise an alternative strategy to end the war because neither the UNC nor the Chinese and North Korean commanders were willing to gamble on a large-scale offensive. Although the Korean Armistice Talks finally started in the summer of 1951, the war continued on the battlefield and amassed thousands of casualties without meaningful military gains from either side.

### **3.3. Interpreting during the Korean War**

Interpreters played a particularly consequential role within the UNC because this organization was comprised of troops dispatched from sixteen UN members states.<sup>23</sup> The ROK and the U.S. militaries made up the overwhelming majority of this military coalition, and thus, ensuring smooth interlingual communication between these two groups was of maximum importance for the success of the UNC’s military operations.

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<sup>23</sup> During the war, the demarcation between interpreter and translator was not clear, as a single individual was often assigned to do both. Individuals tasked with both functions were more often referred to as “interpreter” rather than “translator.” The current study will adhere to this approach.

The U.S.'s lack of capable Korean interpreters was both evident and problematic even before the official outbreak of violent conflict. In early 1950, the United States Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA), which controlled and operated all communications intelligence and communications security activities within the Department of Defense, had no technical expertise on the Korean peninsula. The single self-trained Korean linguist possessed no Korean dictionaries, typewriters, or books pertaining to Korea. The agency, like most other national and operational level communications intelligence organizations at the time, focused on Soviet military communications targets and, thus, "North Korean codes had of necessity been grossly neglected" (Blair 1987, 171). The agency thus failed to conduct communications intelligence collection or analysis against North Korean targets until April 1950, and, as a result, the U.S. military misjudged the danger posed by North Korea and the imminence of the attack on South Korea, as analysts had believed "there will be no civil war in Korea this spring or summer" (Finley 1995, 382).<sup>24</sup> The lack of Korean interpreters continued to hinder the U.S. military's wartime operations in Korea; military historians Wesley R. Fishel and Alfred H. Hausrath acknowledge that during the war the inability of United States military to access the Korean language and clearly communicate with its

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<sup>24</sup> Naturally, the challenges of communicating with allied forces presented difficulties not only for the UNC but the communist alliance as well, as the lack of a common language between the Chinese-North Korean Joint Air Command and the Russian Air Force was a tremendous hindrance to cooperation between the communist militaries. The resulting lack of coordination between the Sino-Korean ground forces and the Russian air units led to North Korean AAAs targeting Soviet fighters and a Russian pilot shooting down a Chinese MiG after mistaking it for an American F-86 Sabre (Halliday 1993: 154).

partners was “responsible for many operational situations and errors that proved costly in lives, money, and time” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 1).

When the United States decided to deploy troops to the Korean peninsula, the country’s military brass and policymakers believed U.S. military intervention would bring about a swift end to the conflict. Although initially taken aback by the rapid advance of the North Korean military, the atmosphere in Washington soon turned to one of euphoria following the success of the Incheon Landing on September 15, 1950, and a definitive victory against the communist enemy seemed only a matter of time. In early November, the Associated Press reported that an emboldened MacArthur told his staff, “You tell your boys that when they get to the Yalu (River) they are going home. I want to make good on my statement that they are going to eat Christmas dinner at home.” Soon after, the UNC commander launched the so-called “Home-by-Christmas” offensive on November 24, 1950, with “unwarranted confidence...believing that they comfortably outnumbered enemy forces” (Mossman 1990, 23-24). The northern push, carried out with the objective of conquering all of North Korea and ending the war, was quickly abandoned in light of the massive assault by the PVA, which had come to North Korea’s aid in late October. MacArthur was relieved from his post in April 1951, and the war stretched on until the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed on July 27, 1953.

### **3.3.1. UN Liaison Group Officers**

It was largely due to the U.S. military’s overconfidence and belief that the Korean War would be a short-term commitment that “the Army Language School (ALS) did not gear up for a major expansion, as had occurred to meet the needs for language skills in

World War II” (Müller 1986: 104). As a result, throughout the period of “active combat in Korea from 1950 to 1953—the period of prime need for the Army—US military interpreters were not available” (Hausrath 1957, 121). In their stead, “the [U.S] Army was forced to rely on non-Americans for linguist services in Korea” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 1).

It was the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) that assumed the duty of selecting, training, and managing Korean-English interpreters by establishing the UN Liaison Group on July 7, 1950. Though initially a relatively small group of first lieutenants, the organization grew expeditiously following the UN Security Council’s pledge to come to the aid of the ROK. According to KMAG and ROKA headquarters, “more than 1,800 Korean-English interpreter-officers were on duty in the ROKA at the close of the Korean hostilities” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 32).

The position of UN Liaison Group officer was considered an attractive one because these interpreters were not expected to actively participate in armed combat. Unlike other commissioned officers who led enlisted soldiers on the battlefield, the official duty of the UN Liaison Group officer was limited to mediating communication between U.S. and ROK counterparts:

Interpreters are assigned or attached to units by Headquarters ROK Army as may be required and they are to be used for interpretation and translation duties only. They will not be assigned to other duties.

(Office of the Chief KMAG, 1953)

Furthermore, there was the added advantage that officers were paid a higher salary than enlisted soldiers, and UN Liaison Group officers could improve their English language skills during their military service. During the war, English was a vital tool for survival, as even children learned a few English words in order to beg for food from the U.S.

military, as well a ladder for success, as ROK President Rhee Syngman was noted for giving preferential treatment to people proficient in English. The ROK Defense Minister, Shin Sung-mo, was one individual who benefited greatly from his ability to speak fluently in English, a fact that is highlighted and vilified in the poem “Shin Sung-mo” by the Korean poet Ko Un.

he used to sail on an English boat  
and was thought competent  
because he knew the language  
he was loved by the president who was also well versed in English  
in no time he was named the Defense Minister  
he was living the dream  
before the war he said  
we will lunch at Pyongyang  
and supper at Sinuiju  
this is our chance  
our national army shall chase them to the Yalu River  
so that our dream of national unification may come to pass  
such utter nonsense

(Ko 2004, 180-181; my translation)

Due to the various privileges these military interpreters enjoyed, many hoped to serve as UN Liaison Group officers and candidates were selected through a fiercely competitive selection process. Anyone wishing to join the UN Liaison Group was first required to submit documentation verifying that they were, “a man of the Republic of Korea, civilian or army personnel [EM] who have completed the entire course of high school or higher” (Hausrath 1957, 120). If their paperwork was accepted, the applicants

then appeared for a written examination administered by ROKA. A special KMAG Selection Board (under the KMAG AG) then gave those who passed the written test an oral examination. This board recommended to ROKA AG and G1 those candidates it found competent to enter the school.

(ibid., 122)

According to former UN Liaison Group officer Kim Il-pyong, during the examination, candidates were



tested on their ability not only to speak in English but also their knowledge of Korean history and ability to translate. They were not only tested to see if they could speak English but also to see if they could read various English books, understand Anglophone culture, and translate into Korean. It was therefore a comprehensive exam of the candidate's linguistic skills.

(Kim 2012; my translation)

Due to the position's appeal and the examination's high-level of difficulty, most candidates who were selected were "either university graduates, university students, or career men [...] who could be considered 'intellectuals'" (Lee 1988, 213-14).

Those who passed the entrance exam were sent to the English Interpreter (UN Liaison) Officer Training School, where they received military and language training for three to four weeks. The mission of the school was,

to train the selected Republic of Korea personnel in the Republic of Korea Army military in English; techniques of interpretation and translation, and the technical military working knowledges and the basic military training as they require to the service of the excellent interpreter [English] officer in every field of any organization so that they can contribute to the sufficient operations of the Republic of Korea Army which has been held by the most close cooperation and coordination with the United Nations Army, and also to the development of the Republic of Korea Army.

(Hausrath 1957, 120)

While the Training School's goals were lofty enough, when compared to the 46 weeks of language training provided at the U.S. Army Language School (ALS), the training UN Liaison Group officers received was exceedingly short. UN Liaison Group officer themselves considered the course they had taken at the interpreter school "to have been too short and sketchy to meet their actual needs and recommended that it be increased in length from 3 to at least 6 weeks; in three instances the suggestion was that it be at least 2 months long" (Hausrath 1957, 122). The following excerpts show that it was also not uncommon for cadets to be posted after having spent only one or two weeks at the school due to the urgent need for their services at military headquarters and field units.

The head of the newly established “UN Liaison Officer Group” was Lieutenant Colonel Kang Young-jun. The name and branch of service “UN Liaison Officer” had not previously existed within the ROK Army. Due to the rapid expansion of the Army during the early phases of the Korean War, the extension of the war, and the increase in the demand for KMAG Advisors, it was rare for these cadets to finish the required four-week training period before being dispatched. When I joined, the third batch had been sent out, but considering that it had only been forty days since the war broke out, it was obvious they had only received a maximum of ten days of training before being sent out.

(Lee 1988: 211-12, my translation)

In June 1951, I received just two weeks of training and was commissioned as an Army first lieutenant and sent to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

(Ji 2006: 84, my translation)

The English Interpreter (UN Liaison) Officer Training School was only able to increase its period of training from three to six weeks in June 1953, a month before the signing of the armistice agreement. Thus, throughout the majority of the Korean War, UN Liaison Group officers had to manage their duties despite being undertrained for the tasks set before them.

The UN Liaison Group, despite rushing to churn out military interpreters, was never able to fully meet the demand for these military linguists. As a result, there was a tendency for combat units to recruit interpreters whenever the opportunity presented itself:

Because the number of Liaison officers who received regular training could not meet the exploding demand of the Army, a fair number were commissioned on the spot. Due to the needs on the battlefield, anyone who could say a few words on the frontlines was immediately ‘recruited’ and given a new insignia.

(Lee 1988, 213)

When we reached the northern outskirts of the city just after sunset, we ran into a roadblock manned by a squad of American GIs. I was overjoyed.

“Hey, you guys, what’s your outfit?” I asked.

“2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division,” one of the GIs manning a 75-mm recoilless gun replied, asking, “Would you like to work for us as interpreter?”

“Hell, yes,” I accepted the offer on the spot.

(Kim 2008, 26)

In this case, interpreters were put to work without having received even the most basic level of language training. However, as will be revealed later in this chapter, in some cases, U.S. military personnel preferred working with untrained civilian interpreters over UN Liaison Group officers due to issues related to loyalty.

### **3.3.2. U.S. Korean Military Assistance Group Officers**

Once their training was completed, UN Liaison Group officers reported to ROKA units to mediate communications between U.S. and ROK officers. Typically, these U.S. officers were members of the United States Korea Military Advisory Group (KMAG), a military unit originally deployed to South Korea to help train and provide logistic support to the ROKA, following its establishment on August 15, 1948 under the title Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG). PMAG was renamed KMAG on July 1, 1949 and tasked with advising and assisting the ROK to develop its army, coast guard, and national police. After the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, KMAG advisors faced the demanding task of providing their ROKA advisees with counsel during major combat operations against North Korean and Chinese forces while also performing the secondary mission of maintaining a liaison between the ROKA and the Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA), the U.S. field army with command over all U.S. armed forces in Korea.

The main challenge KMAGers faced in their interactions with ROK unit commanders and officers during the war was the language barrier. When first deployed to the peninsula, KMAG had no Americans who knew or understood the Korean language. Prewar attempts to induce KMAG advisors to learn Korean failed from a general lack of

interest. Even in 1953, after the war had waged on for almost three years, it was found that only one KMAG advisor could speak, read, and write Korean with any degree of fluency. The inability of KMAG personnel to understand the local language negatively affected their mission, as a study of KMAG advisors concluded:

From the circumstances there can be no question but that the utter dependence of KMAG advisors on Koreans for vital military information, and as a corollary the inability of KMAG advisors to obtain information directly through the use of the Korean language, hampered them in the accomplishment of their mission and resulted on numerous occasions in the unnecessary loss of territory and lives or wastage of ammunition.

(Hausrath 1957, 117)

Consequentially, the KMAGers were unreservedly dependent on the linguistic services of UN Liaison Group officers throughout the war, as is indicated by the following chart.

Table1: Methods of Communication with Counterparts

Method	Percent of 255 respondents
English (no interpreter)	59
Korean (no interpreter)	-
ROKA interpreter	79
Korean civilian interpreter	3
US Army interpreter	-
Pictures, writing, or gestures	26
Other	2
No answer	

\*Adds up to well over 100 percent because most advisors checked more than one method

(Hausrath 1957: 67)

One of the main complaints brought up by KMAG personnel about UN Liaison Group officers was their lack of knowledge regarding military terminology.

Language is probably our biggest problem. The ROKs...make a genuine effort to learn English. It's been suggested that we learn Korean, but that is difficult. Interpreters vary in quality. The one we use most of the time is excellent; he understands slang...The language barrier slows down the operation all the time. Interpreters are students who learned the English language. I recommend that they be given a course in military instruction and terminology. Now, they don't know what you mean by MSR, and so forth.

(Hausrath 1957, 69)

The interpreter should be given a basic course in the branch concerned. He doesn't have the vocabulary to put technical things over to his counterpart. (ibid.)

The language barrier is most serious. Interpreters are not familiar with technical terms...[They] are not trained in tactics, they need more training. (ibid.)

Our ROKA interpreters simply don't understand military terms until they've been out on the job for a minimum of two months, and that is the minimum." [ROKA GGSC Advisor] (Hausrath 1957, 120)

The interpreters we have secured from ROKA are not very good quality. Maybe mediocre is a better word. They aren't familiar with military terms either in Korean or English. [Div Senior Advisor] (ibid.)

The UN Liaison Group officer's unfamiliarity with military and technical terminology was in large part due to the inadequate training interpreters were provided with during their short stay at the English Interpreter (UN Liaison) Officer Training School. Less than four weeks of training was simply not long enough to properly arm interpreters with the linguistic and technical tools necessary to perform their duties immediately after being sent into the field. According to Lee (1998), however, the problem was not simply a symptom of the short duration of training, as he explains that training was insufficient in not only temporal terms but also sorely lacking in qualitative terms. While at the school, UN Liaison Group officers-in-training were "handed out the Glossary of U.S. Military Operation Terminology to memorize" but "it was impossible that we would be able to converse in English after only a week or two when we had previously only been trained to read" (Lee 1988, 212). It is important to note that the glossary, which was the main reference tool provided during training, was written in English and did not include the

Korean language equivalents for the military terms it listed. A major effort to translate the *Dictionary of United States Army Terms* into Korean was made before the outbreak of the war but the project was abandoned following the North Korean attack. The lack of a bilingual dictionary or glossary was the cause of much confusion regarding what military terms meant and how they should be rendered into Korean. In many cases, equivalents for military terms and equipment did not exist in the Korean language and the interpreter was forced to describe the item or concept as best they could. For example, “a machine gun, for which no word existed in Korean, became a gun that shoots very fast or a gun of many loud noises” (Hausrath 1957, 69) or any other way the interpreter chose to describe it. Another strategy used by officer-interpreters was to transliterate rather than translate military terms.

American terms, such as M1, OP, tank, etc., were adopted into the Korean language and were used with complete understanding in oral communication.  
(Hausrath 1957, 119)

Alternatively,

this shortcoming could frequently be overcome by the addition of Chinese characters (which are understood by most literate Koreans, chiefly officers) to express the desired thought.  
(Hausrath 1957, 117-18)

While the employment of Chinese characters allowed interpreters to assign concise signifiers to military terms, this did not guarantee that anyone else but the interpreter who coined the neologism would understand or employ the same terminology. It is hardly surprising, given the absence of officially prescribed equivalents for military terminology, that complications arose. For instance, “it was found in the course of manual preparation that different translators differed as to which terms were proper and accurate translations of the original language” (Hausrath 1957, 118). It is on these

grounds that both KMAGer and Korean interpreters pointed to the lack of translation equivalents for military terminology as the primary challenge when rendering English into Korean and vice versa.

I felt at the time that it was easier to translate Japanese into English than it was to translated Korean into English. This was because the Japanese language has been quite Westernized since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting in the 1860s, and thus changed, making it easy to express certain things in a Western way.

(Kim 2012, 1)

The Korea language is a nonmodern tongue in the sense that it often lacks terms for technical and modern colloquial words and phrases found in other languages. It was often impossible to find equivalents for American military terms.

(Hausrath 1957, 117)

The cumulative result of the cursory manner with which training was provided at the Interpreting School and the lack of reference materials and established interpreting norms meant that the UN Liaison Group officers were not provided with the tools to succeed as linguistic mediators within a highly contentious military field. The following excerpts show that KMAGers expressed mixed reactions when asked about their level of satisfaction with the interpreting services of UN Liaison Group officers (Hausrath 1957, 69):

They go from excellent to poor. It varies by the individual...I had an excellent interpreter who knew the job and helped me to do my job.

The battalion CO didn't speak English, but he had two interpreters who had been with the battalion for two years and knew their stuff. They could have been artillery officers, and they knew English well. I had the interpreters run missions like the S-3. They know all the artillery terms.

I had no trouble whatsoever...I had a good interpreter; he made polite but accurate translations. I could check on this through an American sergeant who spoke Korean.

I had three interpreters of whom two could not speak English. One of these would "translate" written English to Korean. One could speak a little. He would say he understood but experience showed that he didn't.

The mixed responses regarding interpreter quality suggests that even among official UN Liaison Group officers, the ability to render what was said in either English or Korean into the opposing language varied significantly. In their study of Korean War interpreters, Fishel and Hausrath (1958, 13-14) divide military linguists active during the Korean War into four general levels of competence:

Class A: international political (or negotiating) level<sup>25</sup>

Class B: advanced intelligence level<sup>26</sup>

Class C: routine language operations level<sup>27</sup>

Class D: minimum requirements level<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Personnel operating at this highest level must be completely fluent in an Asiatic language and in English as well. They should be capable of simultaneous translations (interpretation) to and from English. In addition to linguist fluency they must have a deep understanding of the appropriate Asiatic culture, area, and psychology. This is a “super” category, the personnel in which would be competent to handle interpretation, advising, and even negotiating at high-level meetings such as those in which US military representatives have been engaged in Kaesong and Panmunjom since 1951. At the time of this writing the Army has no career personnel in this category in either Korean or any Chinese dialect.

<sup>26</sup> Personnel in this category must be fluent in an Asiatic language and competent in English as well. They should have some understanding of the appropriate Asiatic culture, area, and psychology. Primary areas of employment for men of such qualifications are military intelligence (including counterintelligence), Army Security Agency, psywar, CA/MG, military advisory groups, attaché system, MP (including CID), POW handling, and CIE. Unlike the altogether fluent top-level linguists, men within this category might be capable of fluent performance in only one of the primary fields of military linguist endeavor: interpretation, interrogation, or translation. This is a small group from the standpoint of available linguist manpower.

<sup>27</sup> Its members possess a lower degree of fluency than either higher classification, and might be “fairly competent” in only one of the three types of linguist work. This, it has been found, is the largest group from the standpoint of available linguist manpower. Because of the scarcity of the more highly qualified Class B linguists in Korea, many in this category were working in military jobs that, in the opinion of their responsible language supervisors, called for language specialists of Class B qualifications. Normally these persons of Class C language competence would be expected to be used in those activities of intelligence, CA/MG, advisory groups, MP, etc., where less time pressure or less critical preciseness are required.

<sup>28</sup> Its members constitute a substantial group of personnel with some language knowledge, but whose competence in any linguist activity field is not sufficient to enable them to perform high- or even medium-level linguist functions. There is, however, a demonstrated need for these less-qualified language men, particularly in the technical



The study concludes that “as of July 1953 the numbers of men in all four of the above categories present in the ranks of the Army in Korea were grossly insufficient to meet the operation needs of the Army” (ibid.). They found that there was a total lack of Class A interpreters and an extremely limited number of class B interpreters in Korea during the war. The majority of military interpreters working for the ROKA-U.S. alliance fell under Class C or D. As a result of the shortage of high-level interpreters, “linguists were frequently assigned to duties beyond their levels of training and consequently were deficient in their performance of those higher levels” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 3).

The shortage of available linguistic assets meant that the more competent interpreters were assigned in higher echelons of the military institute while the less adept were sent to lower units (Hausrath 1957, 69):

We’re hindered by an insufficient number of good interpreters. Interpreters are assigned from ROK headquarters as first lieutenants. The pay is very low and they draw low caliber people. There are good interpreters at high echelons. We could not operate without them.

There are four [interpreters] at the division. They tend not to be the best. The best seem to be at headquarters; they get worse as you go down the line.

There were four principal spheres of KMAG operations: (a) headquarters (i.e., administrative and housekeeping), (b) combat and security units, (c) replacement training centers and ROKA schools, and (d) technical service and support units. The language problem existed to some degree in each one of these areas, but it was more serious in

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services and in the enlisted ranks such as in signal work, some MP tasks, medical corps (combat medics and for assistance in hospitals), and for routine operations in ordnance, transportation, some advisory group assignments, QM activities, POW-handling operations, labor supervision, TIE work in joint operations with non-American units, etc. The characteristic of the Class D linguist is that they can translate ideas back and forth between the two languages with the aid of a bilingual dictionary if needed but at a relatively low level of skill.

lower levels. Within KMAG Headquarters, Taegu, “the language problem here was not ordinarily a serious barrier” (Hausrath 1957, 117).

Sure, there’s a language problem, but not so much at this level. My contacts are principally with KMAG people, and I’d say I don’t need an interpreter more than a few times a week, at most. [Lt Col. G3]

For the few occasions on which I come up against a Korean who doesn’t understand English or doesn’t have a competent interpreter with him I can always find one of our ROK interpreters handy. It might help if I could speak some Korean, but if I did there’d be many other spots in this operation where I’d be badly needed. The real language problem exists outside this headquarters. [Major, G1]

With a good interpreter, an honest desire to be of assistance, and a patient attitude, there is no particular problem caused by a language barrier. [Finance Advisor]

Opinions of interpreters were much more negative in lower units, such as Service Schools and Support Units (Hausrath 1957, 120):

I have 23 interpreters here who theoretically can be used. One I would rate “fairly satisfactory” and a second one is “barely satisfactory.” The rest of the lot are mediocre—you just have to draw pictures for them. [ROKA Inf School Advisor]

The regiment has two interpreters: one is raw—he doesn’t speak much English and he’s virtually useless. The other one is only slightly better. As you can imagine I have some real problems getting information and thoughts across and back. [ROKA Inf Regt Advisor]

While KMAGers expressed discontent about the linguistic abilities (or lack thereof) of some UN Liaison Group officers, particularly in the lower echelons of the military, the following table indicates that neither the interpreter’s lack of language skills nor deficient knowledge of military terminology was the main complaint or concern of KMAG officers during the war.

Table 2: KMAGers Response to Questions about Interpreters

Questions and responses	Percent of 204 respondents
a. Do you trust your interpreter from the standpoint of security?	69

Yes	21
No	10
No response	100
Total	
b. Do you trust his accuracy in interpretation?	63
Yes	29
No	8
No response	100
Total	
c. Do you trust his honesty?	77
Yes	12
No	11
No response	100
Total	
d. What are your interpreter's weak points?	25
English generally poor	29
Doesn't understand military terms or situations	35
Afraid of ROKA officers	20
Other	24
No response	133
Total	
e. Rate your interpreter's ability	31
Excellent	34
Good	23
Fair	6
Poor	6
No response	100
Total	

(Hausrath 1957: 121)

The table seems to indicate that despite the many challenges UN Liaison Group officers faced, only 6 percent of KMAGers responded that they believed their interpreter's abilities to be poor. Furthermore, most responded positively with regard to the matter of trust. Elsewhere, based on comments made in reference to the same questionnaire,

Hausrath makes the following comment:

[t]he most frequent complaint received from advisors was that their interpreters were not *trustworthy* (i.e., on security grounds). The second most frequent complaint was that they were poorly trained and consequently not competent to perform their duties satisfactorily.

(Hausrath 1957: 122)

Similar concerns regarding the trustworthiness of Korean civilian interpreters was voiced by member of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) during the U.S. occupation. However, the later might have been caused by the fact that, during the occupation, many Koreans viewed the U.S. as a pseudo-colonial force that had unlawfully invaded their country, the situation during the Korean War was quite different as the ROK and U.S. were allied against a mutual enemy. Considering the context under which interpreting took place, what reason might the U.S. military have had to question the loyalty of the UN Liaison Group officer? When asked “What are your interpreter’s weak points?” why did KMAGers answer that officer-interpreters being “afraid of ROKA officers” was more problematic than the linguistic difficulties of interlingual communication such as “English generally poor” or “Doesn’t understand military terms or situations”? This question will be answered in the following section.

### **3.4. Zones of Uncertainty within the UNC/ROK Alliance**

Morris Janowitz and Roger Little (1965, 27) define the military establishment as “a comprehensive and all-embracing hierarchy” and claim that “the career soldier is assumed to be an ideal example of the professional operating under bureaucratic authority.” Within the military bureaucracy, personnel are categorized and positioned based on their rank, and, “uniforms and insignia, by ‘telegraphing’ the wearer’s status in the hierarchy of authority and his job in the division of labor, facilitate communication, coordination and impersonality” (Davis 1948, 145). Persons of higher rank are entitled to command nearly absolute obedience from those of lower rank. While it is largely thanks to the organization’s bureaucratic structure that militaries can coordinate the activities of

large groups of people, the institution's dependency on a rank-based chain of command limits the organization's ability to adapt to change as the top-down system of communication leaves few channels for feedback. It was for this reason that Robert Merton (1965, 53-62) criticized the ideal bureaucracy for its tendency to be rigid and over time resistant to change.

The creation of the U.S.-ROK military alliance saw the convergence of two hierarchical structures, the U.S. and South Korean militaries, each with their own systems of operation and regulations. This multilingual army might therefore be defined as a “zone of uncertainty” within social space in which social agents from disparate backgrounds, in this case the U.S. and Korean militaries, who possessed different views about what constituted legitimate activity were suddenly required to occupy a single social space together. Because a defining characteristic of the military field is its bureaucratic structure, military personnel are accustomed to inhabiting clearly designated positions within the organization. Within the U.S.-ROK multilingual army confusion emerged for the members of both groups because neither was sure as to how they should occupy and operate in this newly formed social space. While trying to bring order to the confusion, U.S. and ROK military personnel competed for the authority to reproduce and distribute what each felt were legitimate values and regulative principles. Interpreted events, in particular, were a crucial site for the convergence of the two military fields and their respective habitus. During the Korean War, the three groups of interlocutors—U.S. KMAGers, ROK commanding officers, and UN Liaison Group officer—given their uncertainty about how to position themselves and operate in this space, sought to assert their dominance over the form interlingual communication should take. While “zones of

uncertainty” are often short-lived because some form of traditional hierarchy is ultimately reestablished amongst the agents, the unique structure of the U.S.-ROK military alliance prevented any one group from asserting their dominance over the interpreting habitus. Thus, a sustained uncertainty was the defining characteristic of the interpreting habitus during the Korean War. Hierarchy could not be established because uncertainty lingered in regards to whether the ROK commanding officer or the U.S. KMAGer held authority over the other, and thus the two military organizations competed to secure the loyalty of the UN Liaison Group officer and establish dominance during interpreted events.

### **3.4.1. Conflict between ROK Officers and U.S. KMAGers**

During the Korean War, the mission of the KMAG was to advise and assist the commanders of South Korea military units. KMAG advisors did not hold the authority to issue direct orders to the ROK military unit to which they were assigned. Rather, KMAGers were expected to control training or operations by influence, suggestion, and guidance. What they accomplished depended largely upon their powers of persuasion and on the esteem in which they were held by their Korean counterparts. Had the U.S. military desired the KMAGers to possess operational authority over the Korean military unit, it could have sent American officers who were ranked higher the South Korean unit commanders, thus positioning a U.S. officer atop the chain of command. The U.S. military, however, chose not to pursue this approach and strictly limited the KMAGer to an advisory role and required that they be “one or two ranks lower than their counterpart” (Hausrath 1957, 51). The U.S. did not seek to place the ROK military under the KMAGer’s direct control because the U.S. government hoped to avoid being overly

invested in peninsular affairs. The U.S., at least ostensibly, had intervened in the war at the urging of the United Nations Security Council, and thus assigning American officers to command Korean field units ran the risk of aligning U.S. interests too closely with South Korea's, which would limit the U.S.'s ability to maneuver the diplomatic field in Northeast Asia. The country's direct involvement in the Korean War ran the risk of the limited conflict developing into a direct conflict with China and/or the Soviet Union, potentially sparking a third world war and the first international conflict involving two states that possessed nuclear weapons. The deployment of KMAGers in an advisory role was an alternative to such a move. The Soviet Union and China, likewise, took measures to avoid a face-to-face confrontation with the United States. The Soviet Union did not officially participate in the war, opting rather to provide diplomatic support, strategic and tactical planning, and logistic support to North Korea and China. The Chinese, rather than deploying the country's official military, the People's Liberation Army, created and dispatched the People's Volunteer Army, to avoid officially declaring war against the United States and the United Nations.

The U.S. military hoped that the deployment of KMAGer as advisors to South Korean units would allow it to exercise sufficient control over the ROK military to maintain operational control over South Korean forces while maintaining that it had not infringed upon the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea. When asked the question "How much difference in rank can there be between a KMAG advisor and his counterpart without creating difficulties?" (Hausrath 1957, 52) it is noteworthy that over 70 percent of KMAGers, after having engaged with Korean counterparts, claimed that being one or two ranks lower than their advisees would not seriously impede working relations. In

other words, they believed they could work on more-or-less equal terms even if they were of slightly lower rank. On the other hand, only 11 percent believed advisors needed to be of equal rank in order to perform their duties. This would imply that factors outside of military rank offset the difference.

While the ROK Army unit commander may have held a higher rank than their U.S. KMAG counterpart, the playing field was leveled out by the inverted hierarchical relationship which existed between the U.S. and ROK militaries. It was due to the lopsided power relation between the U.S. and ROK militaries that “at the time it was widely believed that colonel-level officers had to be close to their KMAG advisor if they were to be promoted to general” (Ji 2006, 168). In other words, a higher-ranking ROK Army advisee could not blatantly disregard a lower-ranking U.S. KMAG adviser, regardless of military rank. It was against this backdrop that one Chief of KMAG argued,

Advisors have ample authority. While they had no command over their ROK counterpart or ROK Army units, they were directed to report to next higher commanders, US or ROK, any dereliction or serious departure from advised procedures. Eighth Army commanders were prepared to back up the advisory function when needed, by issuing orders through command channels to insure appropriate military performance. Advisors were cautioned, however, against referring trivial matters, and were urged to work out satisfactory procedures directly with their counterpart.

(Hausrath 1957, 20-21)

This statement suggests that although KMAGers did not have direct control over the ROK units they were assigned to, their association with the U.S. military ensured they possessed a level of authority that approximated the position of power accorded to the ROK Army unit commander.

But while the U.S. military decision-makers argued KMAGers had the necessary tools to successfully cooperate with their Korean counterparts on equal footing,



uncertainty regarding their positioning within the organization meant that ROK commanders and KMAG officers were constantly engaged in competition over authority within the military unit. The animosity felt between the two sides was made most palpable when one side unilaterally asserted authority over the chain of command, such as during combat situations. For example, the following quote by a South Korean general reveals that when tensions did arise, relations between the ROK unit commander and the KMAGer could swiftly break down when either the ROK Army commander would bypass the KMAGer in issuing orders or the KMAGer would place the ROK unit under his command.

General Chung observed that during the retreat in the winter of 1950-51 a number of KMAG officers were left behind and either were killed, fell into the hands of the Communists, or made their way out without assistance from their counterparts or the units to which they were attached. He said that this had not been an accidental occurrence; whereas to some ROKA officers and units their KMAG advisor was “their most prized possession” and was therefore shepherded back to safety when the Communist attack came, others were so poorly regarded by their ROK associates that no effort was made to save them. General Chung continued with the comment that he was sure an investigation would confirm his conviction that those officers who were in rapport with their counterparts, interpreters, and subordinates were those who had been brought out. The reverse was also verifiable, according to General Chung.

(Hausrath 1957, 116)

Such attempts by the two sides to dominate the military field were made most evident during interpreted events; both the ROK Army officer and the U.S. KMAGer sought to dictate the norms of interlingual communication by subjecting the interpreter to the particular command structures of their respective fields. The UN Liaison Group officer, however, was able to resist pressure from both parties and assume a position of relative empowerment during interpreted events because the U.S.-ROK rivalry prevented either military institution from exerting unhindered pressure on the interpreter. The following

sections will examine the dynamics between these military interpreters and U.S./ROK officers.

### **3.4.2. Conflict between ROK Officers and UN Liaison Group Officers**

Because UN Liaison Group officers were members of the ROK military, one might expect that they would display unconditional loyalty to their national military, and by extension their military superiors. The following statement by former military interpreter Lee Yeong-hui (1988), however, demonstrates that this was not necessarily the case and suggests that some UN Liaison Group officers and ROK Army officers maintained a highly confrontational relationship during the war.

Although the name “UN Liaison Officer Group” was impressive enough, in reality, we had nothing to do with the United Nations Command. We were “interpreting officers” trainees, the most scorned upon group in the ROKA.  
(Lee 1988, 214; my translation)

Throughout the Korean War, interpreter officers were put in an awkward position. Our official title was “UN Liaison Officer (Group),” but we belonged to neither the UN or the US. Because the US made up the majority of the so-called UN forces, a large number of interpreter officers were assigned to US units, but they were still under the authority of the ROKA. The main role played by interpreters was interpreting between KMAGers sent to Korean units and ROKA Commanders. When I was sent to my first post during the early stages of the Korean War, it was still unclear if the Korean unit or the US KMAGer was supposed to provide the interpreter with supplies. As officers of the ROKA, interpreters were under the command of the ROKA senior officer, but because of the ambiguity of our positioning and duties, interpreters were always treated as the sons of concubines.

(Lee 1988, 216-17; my translation)

The cause for the discord between the two groups can be accredited to a number of factors, the most prominent being the fact that military interpreters were ambiguously positioned within the strictly hierarchical Korean military institution. As Huntington suggests, the officer corps can be categorized into two groups,

between officers who wish to become specialists and those who wish to prepare themselves for top command positions. The former sacrifices the opportunity for high command but develops a specialty which, in many cases, will be transferable to civilian life upon retirement.

(Huntington 1963, 788)

Huntington also points out that “commissioned officers,” such as the ROK unit commanders, are “generalists,” while “direct commission officers,” such as UN Liaison Group officers, are “specialists.” While the generalist is committed to “the management of violence as a career” (ibid., 785), specialization “takes place in areas not directly related to combat” (ibid., 786). The following list of duties, obligations, and benefits enjoyed by UN Liaison Group officer during the Korean War demonstrates that this classification can be applied to the situation in the South Korean military:

Art. 11: Interpreter officers cannot assume any responsibility except interpreting and translating.

Art. 14: Interpreter officers will have the same obligation as other branch officers to observe all army regulations.

Art. 19: Interpreter officers will be excepted from draft call only during their service in the army.

Art. 20: Officers of the interpreter branch will receive the same pay and allowance as other branch officers.

(Hausrath 1957, 119)

The fact that their duties were limited to interpreting and translating meant that UN Liaison Group officers were not engaged in the “management of violence,” which is accomplished by ordering enlisted soldiers to engage in battle; as a result, they were excluded entirely from the ROK military’s chain of command. A further consequence was that in the eyes of the ROK unit commanders, these linguistic specialists, despite their rank as first lieutenants, could not be perceived as their peers. And indeed, the interpreters themselves did not see themselves as fully affiliated with their own military institution. The following excerpt, taken from the memoir of former military interpreter

Ji Myeong-gwan reveals that, even during the height of the Korean War, UN Liaison Group officers saw themselves as non-professional military men.

Interpreting officers wore officer uniforms but could not be called true soldiers. Unless under special circumstances, they were not provided neither gun nor sword, all they did was accompany the U.S. KMAG Advisor and take charge of interpreting. All they did in the battle tents was translate official documents written in English or type their contents. I hope to tell you about the war in the eyes of these amateur soldiers.

(Ji 2006, 85; my translation)

The reason interpreters were “the most scorned upon group in the ROKA” and “could not be called true soldiers” can be understood using sociologist Erving Goffman’s concept of “total institution,” as explained in his work *Asylum*. Goffman defines a total institution as “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1961, 11). Military barracks, incarceration facilities, and asylums are often cited as examples of “total institution.” There are typically two sets of groups within a total institution: staff and inmates. In the military, commissioned officers might be seen as management staff while enlisted soldiers occupy a position in many ways akin to that which is occupied by inmates. These two groups inhabit two different social and cultural worlds, and there is considerable social distance between the two, a schism that cannot easily be breached. A clear indication of this divide is the fact that enlisted personnel cannot be promoted to the ranks of officer. In the military, commissioned officers enforce restrictions on enlisted soldiers’ self-determination, autonomy, and freedom of action while excluding them from the decisions taken concerning them. UN Liaison Group officers existed outside this strict officer/soldier dichotomy. Though they were officers in the ROK Army and enjoyed

many of the benefits that accompanied the position, their authority and duties were limited to issues related to interlingual communication and did not extend to the command and control of the military unit and its personnel. In other words, while other officers in the South Korean military could be clearly categorized as members of the management staff, the officer-interpreter was ambiguously positioned within the total institution.

The commanding officers in the South Korean military sought to exert control over the interpreting habitus by subordinating the interpreter to their command. This effort took the shape of employing measures to reposition the interpreter firmly within the hierarchical structure of the military institution. Rather than acknowledging UN Liaison Group officers as first lieutenants in the officer corps, unit commanders often treated them as enlisted soldiers. As a U.S. KMAG advisor pointed out,

the relationship between the ROK officer and the interpreter is also important. The interpreters are often considered schoolboys and the officers expect the interpreters to protect them, not to tell the truth of their boss, the advisor.

(Hausrath 1957, 77)

One of the central features of total institutions are the measures taken to manipulate the personalities of residents so that their behavior fits the expectations of the larger group. Ceremonial degradation, for instance, is carried out in an attempt to remake the self by stripping away the individual's current identity and stamping a new one in its place. As can be seen in Lee's following evaluation, commissioned officers sought to discredit the interpreter by refusing to acknowledge them as part of management, as well as diminishing the value of the linguistic services they provided.

Although they assigned me the rank of "ROKA first lieutenant," in reality, I was only half a first lieutenant. I wore the insignia of first lieutenant on one of my collars, but unlike the other branches of service, I did not have a badge to indicate

my area of service. Interpreter officers were half-civilian, half-military personnel. It was more than a year later that we were assigned badges, which were parrots sitting atop rifles. The “parrot sitting on a rifle” was truly symbolic. It seems that an ignorant group of combat officer in the Army HQ had out of spite come up with the idea. It was perhaps an attempt to cunningly insult the group of frail intellectuals in the military.

(Lee 1988, 215-16; my translation)

The strategy utilized by the ROK military can be interpreted as an overt attempt to mortify the interpreter by labelling their linguistic services as little more than parroting what was being said by commissioned officers. This is an extreme example of a dominant institution seeking to assert control over the interpreting habitus by denying the interpreter’s autonomy and agency. The ordering of interpreters to wear this military badge can likewise be examined and explained using Goffman’s theoretical lens:

The individual finds that his protective response to an assault upon self is collapsed into the situation; he cannot defend himself in the usual way by establishing distance between the mortifying situation and himself.

(Goffman 1961, 36)

By forcing interpreters to adopt an official symbol which devalued their services, the ROK Army attempted to strip the interpreter of any authority they possessed during interpreted events. By stripping these specialized officers of their authority over their area of specialty, the officers were attempting to demote these military interpreters to sub-officer status.

UN Liaison Group officers, were, nevertheless, able to, at times, resist the institutionalized pressure applied on them by the ROKA; they did not always conform to the description of their job as limited to merely mimicking words. The following excerpts show interpreters themselves played a critical role in fostering amicable U.S.-ROK military relations. These citations also reveal the interpreters’ view of the job of interpreting as one that required creative problem-solving skills.

many Korean interpreters viewed their job as more than just work. The comment was made...time and time again by interpreters that the difficulties of their position were more than compensated for by the knowledge that they were contributing to the betterment of Korean-American relations by overcoming the language barrier.

(Hausrath 1957, 131)

As I have said earlier, translating from English to Korean and interpreting the words spoken by an American into Korean is no different from creative writing. I realized the difficulty of the task of translating and interpreting while carefully interpreting the lectures given at the U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> Corps into Korean. It was then that I realized how difficult interpreting is.

(Kim 2012, 2; my translation)

These statements show that, thus, despite attempts by the ROKA leadership to devalue their services, interpreters recognized the value of their work and were able to resist this institutionalized narrative.

The presence of the U.S. KMAG advisor created an additional buffer between the interpreter and any pressure ROK commanders could apply on them. The fact that the interpreter was often the only member of a ROKA unit capable of communicating with the U.S. officer, with whom they worked in close quarters meant that there was always the possibility they could use their position to their advantage by discrediting their military superiors. Although interpreters were lower in rank than the unit commander, his advisors, and the KMAGer, they took part in all activities in the unit outside of combat. They participated in operation planning, the monitoring of unit supplies, and knew of private purchases made by the commanding officer using military funds. As Lee writes,

regardless of how we felt about the war or the military, because we were Koreans, we had to do our best to prevent the KMAGer from seeing or hearing about the various delicate situations happening in the unit, which was always a source of agony for us. The interpreting officer was placed in a position where he had to “pretend not to have seen” what was going on. But we never received thanks from the commander of his staff. We were the odd man out.

(Lee 1988, 218-19; my translation)

As this excerpt suggests, despite the lack of clear boundaries regarding their roles, interpreters were able to maintain a higher level of autonomy than either institution would have preferred.

Perhaps most central to this issue was the fact that, often times, interpreters did not acknowledge the superiority of commissioned officers in the ROKA. In the eyes of UN Liaison Group interpreters, their military superiors lacked the symbolic or cultural capital one would expect of an individual assigned to their position. The ROK military had only been officially launched in 1948, after the USAMGIK handed over power to the Korean Government. Many of the senior staff in the ROKA had limited military experience when the war broke out and had since been rapidly promoted due to the lack of available leadership in the face of a rapidly growing military. In fact, in many cases, interpreters felt that they were superior to their commanders. The following passage has been taken from the memoir of former UN Liaison Group officer Kim Il-pyong.

There were even ROKA officers and generals who hadn't graduated from middle school before joining the Japanese military as soldiers during the "Greater East Asia War" (1941-45). Some of them had been drafted as soldiers and transferred to the National Defense Guard after the country's liberation. These simple men were made officers and generals. Some were promoted rapidly during the Korean War. Generals were awarded a new star every 3 to 6 months...some officers claimed that being a commissioned officer meant you had the same level as a college graduate. Some of these officers were insolent and incredibly ignorant.

(Kim 2012, 1; my translation)

During the Korean War there was a popular joke in Japan: if you were a private in the Army during World War II (which the Japanese call the Greater East Asia War), you would be made an officer if you went to Korea, and if you were a sailor in the Navy you would be made the Navy Chief of Staff.

(Kim 2012, 3; my translation)

Perhaps it was because they felt inferior to us who had done well in school and entered university after liberation and before the outbreak of the war, but when



interacting with us ROKA officers tended to act pompously and talk exaggeratedly, and always try to show off.

(Kim 2012, 3; my translation)

Former UN Liaison Group officer-interpreter Ji Myeong Gwan echoes Kim's sentiment, as he criticizes the fact that

The ROK military was hastily built up. Even people who had joined the Japanese military during the Japanese colonial era as enlisted men became generals.

(Ji 2006, 86; my translation)

Goffman mentions that within a total institution, management is able to assert their dominance not only because they possess the power to do so but also because members of the lower rungs of the organization feel a sense of moral inferiority to their superiors. This element of respect for one's superiors was missing in the ROKA officer/UN Liaison Group officer relationship. Instead of accepting the pressure applied on them by ROKA officers, the following excerpt suggests that these military interpreters may often have been indignant that they did not receive the recognition they believed they were owed.

We officer-interpreters generously lent our services to the establishment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps and served with distinction during the Korean War. Many of us were killed in action during the war. However, in his memoir, General Paik Sun-yup does not even mention the role of the officer-interpreter. There is no question that he relied on the interpretations of the officer-interpreter and received plenty of aid through their services but in his memoir "The Military and I" he puts on "camouflage" to make it appear as if he could understand English and could converse with KMAG advisors well. Can this be called respectable behavior from a ROKA general? There is not a single mention of officer-interpreters in his memoir.

(Kim 2012: 2; my translation)

It is noteworthy that General Paik Sun-yup, who was the first South Korean officer to be promoted to the rank of four star general, was only 29 years old when the war broke out.

The dissonance between the views of the ROKA commissioned officer and UN Liaison Group officer over the positionality of the military interpreter was the cause of continued friction between the two groups; “interpreter officers’ treated ROKA officers with disdain, and ROKA officers treated interpreters with contempt” (Lee 1988: 217; my translation).

### **3.4.3. Shifting Relations between KMAGers and UN Liaison Group Officers**

During the Korean War, U.S. KMAG personnel were thoroughly reliant on the services of UN Liaison Group officers when communicating with their South Korean counterparts. Although these U.S. officers raised issue with the linguistic abilities of these military interpreters, with particular frustration expressed over their lack of knowledge regarding military terminology, ultimately, it was the “trustworthiness” of UN Liaison Group officers that was the most significant concern of U.S. military personnel. Questions regarding the honesty of these military interpreters stemmed from the fact that UN Liaison Group officers were first lieutenants in the South Korean military. U.S. military advisors concluded that they could not fully trust these interpreters because “the primary loyalty of a Korean—civilian or military—is to the Republic of Korea rather than to the U.S. Government” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 62). The fact that a first lieutenant in the ROK military held a monopoly over the channels of interlingual communication presented a problem for the U.S. officer because, when a conflict of interests emerged between the two groups, the UN Liaison Group officer could easily manipulate what was said by either interlocutor to benefit the South Korean military.

When asked about the “seriousness of problems of distortion by interpreters,” 13 percent of KMAG respondents answered that it was “very serious,” 21 percent responded that the issue was “serious,” and 50 percent stated it was “not too serious.” On the other hand, only 12 percent thought the issue was “not serious at all.” In other words, approximately 84 percent of KMAG staff believed UN Liaison Group officers used their position of power, to varying extents, to manipulate what was said between U.S. and ROK military personnel (Hausrath 1957, 71).

In response to requests that they provide further comment on the topic of distortions made by UN Liaison Group officers, one KMAGer pointed out that the officer-interpreter was often “torn between the devil and the deep” (Hausrath 1957, 70). In other words, it was nearly impossible for interpreters to satisfy both U.S. and ROK personnel because KMAGers demanded that the interpreter produce a target text that closely mirrored the meaning and tone of the source text, while ROK officers expected the interpreter to actively moderate exchanges between the two parties. The following is a list of discontents expressed by KMAG staff with regards to the interpreting practices of UN Liaison Group officers.

- (1) Interpreters sometimes distorted or modified advice or colored or completely held back information the advisor should have had to interpret strongly worded advice or corrections accurately for fear of offending their superiors.
- (2) Interpreters pull the same old stunt, they misinterpret in order to keep from offending.
- (3) all ROKs [interpreters] have a tendency to lie—to save face” or “cover for their ROK superiors.

(Hausrath 1957, 70)

These excerpts show that KMAGers believed any discrepancies between the source text and the target text were an indication that the South Korean military interpreters had distorted the message to favor the interests of the ROK military. They assumed that

interpreters “distorted” or “modified” what was said by the KMAG advisor to avoid insulting their Korean superiors, because “the interpreters figure that when we [the Americans] go, they’ve ‘had it’ if they alienate their ROK commander” (ibid., 70). As one ROK Army interpreter stated, “The interpreter is always in the middle. If things don’t go the way my commander wants, he blames me for not getting the right advice from [the KMAG advisor]” (ibid., 126). The following chart shows that KMAGers believed the majority of UN Liaison Group officers did not pass on information because they feared recriminations by their commanding officer.

Table 3: KMAGers Response to Question about Withholding of Information

Questions and Responses	Percent of 204 respondents
Does your ROKA interpreter tell you things your counterpart does not wish you to know?	
Yes, always	2
Yes, frequently	8
Yes, from time to time	24
No	52
No response	14
Total	100

(Hausrath 1957, 126)

Such practices were thought to be a threat, given that their implied message that advice issued by KMAG personnel was not being conveyed in its entirety, which could stymie the U.S. military’s ability to maintain control over their Korean counterparts.

As an alternative to interpreter-mediated communication, “most advisors considered speaking directly to their counterparts in English,” and if the other party understood at least some English; this approach was considered “the most effective means of communication and advisors used this method extensively” (Hausrath 1957, 67). In some extreme cases, KMAG advisors even demanded that their Korean

counterparts learn English, which would enable them to communicate, while circumventing the seemingly biased interpreter.

The Korean commander with whom I worked was 28 years old, a general. I tried to teach him English and he proved an eager and apt pupil. Advisors look for cooperative attitude on the part of the ROK officers and their willingness to learn English is an indication of it. I had one ranking Korean officer removed from his job because he was uncooperative and would not try to learn English.

(ibid., 68)

The U.S. military, however, was unable to implement this approach on a wide scale because only a limited number of Korean officers were capable of communicating in English. Furthermore, while the U.S. officer might have felt better able to express themselves in English, there was no guarantee that the ROK officers with whom they worked could understand what was being said to them, although, as the following excerpt demonstrate, some KMAGers believed themselves capable of judging whether or not ROK officers understood English based solely on their facial expressions:

I spoke directly to my counterpart and no serious situation resulted. If I tell them something and they don't get it, I know it. When I see that smile come on their faces, I know they got it.

(Hausrath 1957, 68)

Counter to what this KMAG officer might have believed, in the absence of an interpreter, U.S. military officers had no way of verifying if their counterparts understood what they had said.

An alternative solution to surmounting the linguistic barrier between the U.S. and ROK officers without involving an interpreter was to require fluency in Korean as a qualification for KMAG advisory posts. It was believed this would allow KMAG advisors to “communicate directly and easily with his counterpart and enhance his (and the US Army’s) prestige and standing among Korean military men” (Hausrath 1957, 127-

128). When asked “Should someone doing your present work be given instruction in the Korean language before starting the job?” (ibid., 128) over 90 percent of KMAG respondents conceded that knowledge of the Korean language would help or improve their relations with their Korean counterparts. However, it was also noted that training KMAGers to speak and understand Korean would be “expensive and time-consuming.” Thus, although they recognized the value of learning Korean, only 55 percent of KMAGers thought they should receive some form of language training. Furthermore, only 10 percent responded positively to the prospect of undergoing intensive language training.

This approach, despite its obvious merits, however, was never included as part of KMAG training. Before the war, a new advisor received a short orientation, met the KMAG chief, visited with the staff, attended a weekly staff meeting, and received an advisor handbook and a procedure guide for his reading before being assigned to his post. During the war, a new advisor received, at most, a brief KMAG orientation and/or a short briefing by his immediate superior before going directly to his unit at the front. Chronic shortages and frequent turnover of personnel, combined with the chaotic tempo of back-and-forth combat operations and the expanding KMAG operational duties meant that many unit advisors received little information on their missions or duties, much less the conditions under which they worked. One advisor commented,

My mission was not clearly specified at the time of my assignment. I came as a replacement and was given a two-hour briefing about the position of the outfit to which I was assigned. I was given no instructions on how to work with the ROKA. I was left on my own. I definitely had the feeling that my missions were undefined and that I was on my own.

(Hausrath 1957, 37)

Such a lack of clear instructions was largely due to the fact that there was a shortage of KMAG personnel throughout the war in the face of urgent demands for advisors. While the original plan was for all division, regimental, and battalion commanders in the Republic of Korea Army to have an American officer at his side, aiding in the execution of military duties, in practice, the U.S. Military Advisory Group “never attained such a comprehensive coverage of the Korean Army. Moreover, though the advisory group reached its full, authorized strength by the end of 1949, KMAG never was able to assign advisors to all Korean battalions—infantry and otherwise—at any one time” (Sawyer 1988, 58). Much like UN Liaison Group officers, U.S. military advisors were often thrown into a make-it-happen situation with little guidance and limited support.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. military did not have the time or resources to train members of the under staffed advisory group to speak and understand Korean.

The last option available to the U.S. military in the fight to gain the loyalty of the interpreter was to align the UN Liaison Group officer more closely with the interests of the U.S. military than their position as South Korean officers would normally allow. The most common suggestion made was to assign interpreters to the staff of the U.S. KMAG advisor rather than to the ROK Army counterpart. Advisors who favored this shift in affiliation believe the change would have the effect of,

protecting interpreters from possible reprisals or disciplinary action by their ROKA superiors, and would also structure the situation so that the interpreter’s

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<sup>29</sup> A better organized system was erected in the summer of 1953 as KMAG conducted regular orientations, provided advisors with an Advisor’s Procedure Guide that emphasized the twin duties of advising their counterparts and of providing accurate and timely reports to US commanders, and ensured each advisor received the “Ten Commandments” for KMAG advisors. Given that the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in July 1953, however, these measures could hardly have improved the situation during the war.

primary duty clearly would be to further the advisory mission by seeing that the advisor received complete and accurate information and by interpreting for him in the same spirit.

(Hausrath 1957, 71)

As one KMAGer put it, “If interpreters are given some sort of immunity from domination by their ROK superiors, they can do their job” (ibid.) The following chart demonstrates that this approach was supported by the majority of KMAG staff members.

Table 4: Suggested Assignment of Interpreters

Suggested assignment	Percent of 255 respondents
Should be assigned to the KMAG advisor’s staff	58
Should not be assigned to advisor’s staff	22
Doesn’t make any difference	16
No answer	4
Total	100

(Hausrath 1957, 72)

Advisors also favored the attachment of interpreters to the KMAG staff because such assignment would make the interpreter constantly available to the advisor.

Such an attempt was made in June 1953 in the 8th ROK Division when General Song “ordered control of the ROKA interpreters in the division shifted from his own G1 to the KMAG G1 advisor in the division” (Hausrath 1957, 130). KMAG advisors reported that UN Liaison Group officers reacted enthusiastically to the move and that this change resulted in a “100 percent improvement in morals and effectiveness of the interpreters.” One military interpreter informed the Senior KMAG advisor that he was happy the change had been made; he noted that “the majority of the interpreters in ROKA are better educated than most Koreans,” but they “are used like dogs” by South Korean officers (Hausrath 1957, 131). The same interpreter explained that in addition to, and at times instead of, the duties for which they had been trained, “ROKA interpreters were



assigned duties as orderlies, strikers, etc. Under KMAG control their work was confined to interpreting” (ibid.) After the UN Liaison Group officer had been transferred, one KMAG officer expressed his satisfaction with the change and remarked that “the interpreter should be assigned to the KMAG officer, and if satisfactory, always remain with him” (ibid.) Such measures, however, were rarely employed during the war and throughout the conflict the shortage of capable interpreters, the ambiguity of the interpreter’s affiliation, and the indefinite hierarchical relations between the ROKA advisee and the KMAG advisor created the conditions for a high level of uncertainty during interpreted events.

#### **3.4.4. Local Civilian Interpreters**

Given the near impossibility of adequately training Korean officers to speak English or American officers to speak Korean to a level of fluency that would allow for meaningful exchange, coupled with the unfavorable position they occupied during interpreted events, some KMAGers suggested that the U.S. hire “Korean civilian interpreters (CMS), clothe them in U.S. uniforms and U.S. insignia, house them and feed them with KMAG detachments” (Hausrath 1957, 130) as an alternative to employing UN Liaison Group officers. The prospect of employing civilian interpreters was thought to be the best solution to the language barrier because “the civilian is at least two steps removed from subservience to and possible hostile action by a ROK counterpart officer” (ibid., 131). It was believed that “although the man would certainly remain a Korean, the experience of U.S. units that used Korean civilian interpreters was that a certain degree of loyalty was accrued to the American employer” (ibid.). The employment of Korean

civilian interpreters provides some insight into how the transfer of UN Liaison Group officers from ROKA to KMAG staff might have transformed the interpreting habitus during the war.

Records of a successful pairing between a U.S. military unit and a Korean civilian interpreter can be found in “Mister Pak Takes Over,” an article penned by the Korean War veteran, Captain Frederick Haight. Haight begins his story by highlighting the fact that many members of his military unit were initially suspicious about the Korean civilian interpreter Pak’s loyalty and doubtful about his abilities as an interpreter. Members of the unit considered Pak to be “servile and unintelligent” because his “English was not good” while disregarding the fact that he “spoke many Chinese dialects” (Haight 1953, 63). As a result, the American intelligence unit “refuse[d] to accept him as a full-fledged interpreter” (ibid., 64).

The relationship between the interpreter and the U.S. military staff members underwent a wholesale transition after Pak successfully interrogated two Chinese Communist prisoners who had defiantly refused to answer questions asked by American interrogators. Through this event Pak gained the trust of the U.S. military staff in his linguistic skills and political loyalty. The interrogation marked the beginning of a camaraderie or “fictive kin” relationship between Pak and the members of the U.S. military, made evident by the fact that the U.S. unit members thereafter referred to the interpreter as *Mister Pak*.

Once a “fictive kin” relationship was established between the two parties, the dynamics between the interpreter and the military agents during interpreting events underwent a substantial change. While the personnel of the U.S. intelligence unit had

previously forbade Pak for participating in meetings, they now not only relied on him to interpret during meetings but also entrusted him with liaison duties and intelligence analysis. The combination of interpreting and other roles was no doubt challenging for the individual interpreter, even if, at the same time, it provided him with more capital (e.g. status, authority, etc.), enhancing his position within the unit. The following event shows Pak performing such a task, one which lay beyond the normative linguistic obligations of an interpreter.

At the battalion command post Mr. Pak sat listening to a radio. We had tried again and again to monitor the Communists' network, but in issuing their orders they used a dialect and military slang which baffled our interpreters. Suddenly, Mr. Pak shouted for one of the regular interpreters. "Transmit what I say to the Captain," he snapped in Korean. "I cannot translate fast enough."

From midnight until seven in the morning, he was virtually in command of the battle of Nan Two. He translated the Chinese command's orders to its units so quickly that I could warn Able Company where and in what strength an attack was coming. Hunched over the radio, a map spread in front of him, Mr. Pak called every move. Our supporting artillery knew exactly where to place its fire; Able was prepared for every Chinese assault.

Suddenly Mr. Pak had another idea: "Set a transmitter to the Chinese frequency. I will give them orders." The effect was almost immediately apparent. Able Company called Battalion Observation Post. "What the hell's come over the Commies?" demanded an agitated voice. "They're all snafu'd!" I explained what Mr. Pak was doing. "Geeze," said the voice from Able with deep sincerity. "Well – thank him for us, will you?"

(Haight 1953, 65)

During this situation, Pak simultaneously played the role of linguistic mediator, intelligence analyst, and military commander. Pak was entrusted with these extralinguistic functions because his fluency in the enemy's language allowed him to understand, analyze, and respond to enemy tactics more quickly and accurately than channels of command would allow. The immediacy of Pak's response to new information enabled him to shift the tides of this battle in favor of the UN troops.

While the active role played by Pak during this event undoubtedly overstepped the limits of what is often considered the normative role of the interpreter, U.S. military personnel were appreciative of the service he provided. This was the case due to the particularities of war. Before Pak demonstrated his loyalty he was viewed as a potential enemy, either a North Korea spy or a Japanese sympathizer, but once it was ascertained that Pak was not an enemy colluder, he was accepted as an ally of the United States and entrusted with functions that far exceeded the boundaries of what is considered normative practice in a professional interpretive setting. The abrupt shift in the level of trust allotted to Pak can be explained by the extreme conditions of war; as Baker notes “there is no place in war for fluid, shifting identities, for split or even strained identities, nor for negotiated narratives of any kind” (Baker 2010, 200).

The U.S. military overwhelmingly favored the employment of civilian interpreters, based on the view that as “a Korean civilian his loyalty was fundamentally to his people rather than the ROKA, which meant that he probably would offer greater loyalty to his KMAG employer than a ROKA interpreter-officer could be expected to” (Hausrath 1957, 131). Utilization of such indigenous civilian linguists presented numerous problems to the Army, not the least of which was the fact that of the 228 working for Eighth Army on June 30, 1953, 100 were eligible for induction into ROKA at any time ROK decided to call them into its service.

The loss of these civilians would seriously cripple division, corps and Army POW interrogation, as well as counterintelligence and communication reconnaissance activities. The Department of the Army has been able to furnish only a small fraction of Korean-speaking intelligence personnel. It will be impossible for Eighth Army to fulfill AFFE post-hostilities intelligence requirements if CMS personnel are lost through induction.

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 62)

Furthermore, many of the men who were past the age of military service were already serving as interpreters for commercial houses, where the wage scale was higher than that of the U.S. military, and thus would not be easily lured into U.S. military employment (Hausrath 1957, 124).

Nonetheless, the fact that U.S. military personnel preferred the employment of civilian interpreters over trained UN Liaison Group officers demonstrates the falsity of any illusions about the interpreter's neutrality. While it has been revealed that interpreters are not neutral conduits of meaning, the findings of this chapter demonstrate that institutions of power, and by extension institutionalized norms of interpreting, do not guarantee the impartiality of the interpreter, either. Ironically, during the Korean War, it was precisely because the ROK and U.S. militaries were in competition against each other, each attempting to place the interpreter under their control and establish dominance over the interpreting habitus, the two cancelled out each other's influence over the interpreter, creating a layer of insulation, and room for maneuver, for the interpreter. In other words, UN Liaison Group officer-interpreters were empowered because interpreting events constituted a "zone of uncertainty," and they could use their position and expertise to contribute to their self-professed goal, which was for "the betterment of Korean-American relations by overcoming the language barrier."

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE KOREAN ARMISTICE NEGOTIATIONS (1951-1953):**

#### **A FAITHFUL ECHO**

The current chapter explains the conditions under which UNC military interpreters served during the Korean Armistice Negotiations (1951-1953) and analyzes the interpreting habitus that emerged within this diplomatic event, held during the conclusionary phase of the Korean conflict. It will first introduce the circumstances that implored both the UNC/ROK and the PRC/DPRK to seek to end the war at the negotiation table rather than on the battlefield, followed by an examination of the makeup of the negotiation teams and the topics that were discussed during the negotiations. After analyzing the sociopolitical conditions under which the talks were held, the study will discuss who was recruited to serve as an interpreter at Kaesong and Panmunjom, the sites of the negotiations, how their position as military personnel limited their ability to actively participate in the negotiation of meaning during interpreted events, and how the presence of the PRC/DPRK's multilingual negotiators and interpreters further constrained interpreters as the communist delegation constantly monitored the performance of UNC interpreters.

#### **4.1. History of the Korean Armistice Negotiations**

By the summer of 1951, it was apparent that neither the UNC/ROK alliance nor the PRC /DPRK coalition would be able to readily achieve victory on the battlefield. The U.S. government and its military officials concluded that it would take substantial additional forces and resources to make a meaningful push northward but public opinion

in the United States as well as other states that had committed forces to the UN cause, however, “overwhelmingly called for their soldiers return home” (Rollinson 1997, 7). Since the failure of its last major offensive in the spring of 1951, a communist victory appeared increasingly unlikely, and both the Chinese and North Korean leadership were burdened by the mounting cost of war. Thus, both sides sought to bring an end to the fighting via truce talks at the negotiation table rather than prolonging military engagement.

The ROK government, on the other hand, was adamantly opposed to the prospect of ending the war without having attained the goal of a unified Korean peninsula. President Syngman Rhee publicly rejected the idea of an armistice on multiple occasions and called upon the people of the ROK to “reassert our determination to [...] fight on to a decisive end in case the UN accepts the truce and stops fighting” (Allen 1960, 160). He repeatedly disparaged the idea of an armistice as communist appeasement, and brashly claimed that “the Republic of Korea Army will fight on, if it means a suicide, and I will lead them” (Clark 1954, 275). Despite his opposition to the armistice negotiations, Rhee could not prevent such talks from happening as the ROK military had been placed under the operational control of the commander of the UNC. Thus, discussions regarding a ceasefire fell under the authority of the UNC. However, his threats to continue the war even after a ceasefire was completed were made possible by the fact that although the ROK military had been placed under the UNC’s command for the extent of the war, no agreement on control in the post-truce period existed. As such, Rhee could pull ROK troops out of the UNC after the armistice was signed and potentially carry on with the fight after the ceasefire. The prospect of the ROKA making such a move as soon as the

armistice was signed was highly problematic as it would likely force the UNC back into the fighting. This difference in opinion caused severe friction to arise between the ROK and the U.S. throughout the period of armistice negotiations which Rhee used to negotiate a U.S.-ROK mutual defense treaty, long-term economic assistance, and a pledge by the U.S. that it would provide cooperation during the post-armistice political conference.<sup>30</sup> Only after these terms were met did Rhee give his assurances that he would “not obstruct in any way the implementation of the terms of the armistice” despite “his misgivings over the long-term results” (Clark 1954, 287-88).

On June 23, 1951, after holding preliminary discussions with U.S. State Department representative George Kennan, Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations Jacob Malik publicly suggested in a UN radio broadcast that “as a first step discussions should be started between the belligerents for a cease-fire and an armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the 38th parallel” (Acheson 1969, 532-533).<sup>31</sup> A few days later, on June 30, 1951, General Matthew B. Ridgeway, Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, made the following announcement:

I am informed that you may wish a meeting to discuss an armistice providing for the cessation of hostilities and all acts of armed force in Korea, with adequate guarantees for the maintenance of such armistice.

Upon the receipt of word from you that such a meeting is desired I shall be prepared to name my representative. I would also at that time suggest a date at which he could meet with your representative. I propose that such a meeting could take place aboard a Danish hospital ship in Wonsan Harbor.

(Vatcher 1958, 24)

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<sup>30</sup> The Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea was signed on October 1, 1953, two months after the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement. For full text see [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kor001.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp)

<sup>31</sup> UN radio was established at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on February 13, 1946 to ensure that “the peoples of the world are fully informed of its aims and activities/”



In response to Ridgway's comments, on July 1, 1951, the Chinese Communist Party's official newspaper, *Remin Ribao*, declared that the Chinese people had always wanted a peaceful settlement in Korea, but "it was not until recently...[that]...severe blows to the American army...[and]...the general demands for peace of the people of the world" compelled the U.S. government to consider accepting the Soviet Union's proposal for peace (Stueck 1995, 216). The following day, Kim Il-sung, Supreme Commander of the North Korean military, likewise made known that North Korea would participate in discussions regarding an armistice deal. The communist side suggested that the meetings convene at the city of Kaesong, which was located just below the 38th parallel, as an alternative to the Danish hospital ship as Denmark was associated with the United Nations. The Truman administration found Kaesong an acceptable location, as it was located midway between the front lines of the two forces but was unoccupied by either army. The U.S. leadership, anticipating that the talks would bring a speedy end to the war and seeing no disadvantage in the proposed location accepted the proposal.

Talks between the negotiation teams of the UNC/ROK and DPRK/PRC began on July 10, 1951. Both delegations were comprised of five principal delegates. On the UN side, U.S. Navy Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy served as the UNC's main negotiator from the start of the negotiations until May 1952, after which he was replaced by Lieutenant General William K. Harrison. Assisting him were Major General Lawrence C. Craigie, Major General Henry I. Hodes, Rear Admiral Arliegh A. Burke, and ROK Army Major General Paik Sun Yup, the single ROK representative at the negotiation table (Vatcher 1958, 30). At the head of the communist delegation was Lieutenant General Nam Il, Chief of Staff of the North Korean Army, and the Vice Premier of North Korea. Assisting

General Nam at the conference table were two representatives from North Korea: Major General Lee Sang-cho and Major General Chang Pyeong-san. There were also two delegates at the table from China: General Teng Hua and Major General Hsieh Fang (Zhang 1995, 218-219).

The first issue that needed to be settled before talks could begin in earnest was the matter of what topics were “on the table” for discussion during the negotiations. A major point of disagreement between the two groups was the issue of where to establish a military demarcation line. The communists believed that the UNC would accept the 38th parallel as the line based on statements made by U.S. Secretary of State Acheson in early March in which he stated that a settlement at or near the parallel “would accomplish the military purposes in Korea” (Acheson 1969, 531) as well as comments by Ridgeway who declared that “it would be a tremendous victory for the United Nations if the war ended with our forces in control up to the 38th parallel” (Pearlman 2008, 163). UN Secretary General Trygve Lie likewise announced on June 1, 1951 that a ceasefire along the parallel “would fulfil the main purpose of the United Nations” (Foot 1990, 45). However, for a combination of political and military motivations, which will be discussed further on in this chapter, the Truman administration chose to reject the communist proposal regarding the placement of the line of ceasefire. The U.S. was also unwilling to commit to the withdrawal of its troops, partially due to the violent reaction of the ROK government to such a move, and the difficulty that reengaging recently withdrawn U.S. forces would entail should peninsular hostilities break out once more.

On July 16, 1950 the communist delegation agreed to eliminate the reference to the 38th parallel as the demarcation line and on July 25, 1950 the two sides agreed to

remove direct reference to the withdrawal of foreign troops, choosing to discuss it at a later date. Sixteen days following the start of the talks, on July 26, 1951, the following agenda was agreed to by both parties:

1. adoption of agenda;
2. fixing a military demarcation line between both sides so as to establish a demilitarized zone as a basic condition for a cessation of hostilities in Korea;
3. concrete arrangements for the realization of a ceasefire and an armistice in Korea, including the composition, authority, and functions of a supervising organization for carrying out the terms of a ceasefire and armistice;
4. arrangements relating to prisoners of war;
5. recommendations to the governments of the countries concerned on both sides.

(Bailey 1992, 76)

Once the agenda was set, the two sides were able to proceed with negotiations on the four remaining agenda points.

The first item the delegations moved to discuss was the fixing of the location and deciding on the nature of the military demarcation line and the demilitarized zone (DMZ). In the following statement made at the opening of discussions, the KPA/PVA reiterated their dedication to the idea of the 38th parallel being reinstated as the border between the two sides:

We hold firmly that the 38th Parallel should be made the military demarcation line between both sides and that both sides withdraw ten kilometers from the 38th Parallel in order to establish a demilitarized zone.

(Vatcher 1958, 46)

The UNC countered with a line running through Pyongyang and Wonsan, well north of the current line of contact, which had formed more or less along the 38th parallel. To support its argument for a line that was so favorable for the UNC, Joy presented the notion of three zones of military significance: air, sea, and ground. He argued that since the UNC maintained air superiority over the entirety of the Korean peninsula and held

control over the seas that surrounded it, it should be awarded additional territory on the ground. This argument for more territory was unconvincing, and Nam countered this rather weak line of reasoning with the statement, “your battle lines on the ground are the concentrated expression of the military effectiveness of your land, air and seas forces” (Foot 1990, 47).

The UNC could not condone acceptance of the 38th parallel as the military demarcation line due to an assortment of political and strategic reasons. While the armistice talks were underway, the two sides were fighting along a line of contact positioned slightly north of the 38th parallel except for a small section in the west. As Paul Nitze, the head of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff wrote, a settlement at the 38th parallel “would give the impression that the Chinese and the North Korean communists had been able to achieve somewhat more than an even military result against sixteen [United Nations member] nations” (Foot 1990, 45-46). This would strike a blow against the legitimacy of the United Nations, as it would indicate that during the organization’s first collective military effort it was only able to fight two newly established states, the DPRK and the PRC, to a draw.

Furthermore, there was the issue of the indefensibility of the 38th parallel. This line, which was drawn across the Korean peninsula in 1945 for the purpose of demilitarizing Japanese forces, was not meant to function as a permanent border between two belligerent countries. Most problematic was the fact that the 38th parallel was entirely lacking in natural geographical barriers, such as oceans, rivers, or mountain ranges, which usually run along national borders. A good indicator of the border’s impracticality as a wall dividing the two armies was the fact that the UNC/ROK and the

KPA/PVA were able to breach the line for a total of four times during the short span of one year at war. The UNC regarded the new battle line north of the 38th parallel as far more defensible than the former border created during the U.S./U.S.S.R. occupation.

With neither side willing to relent on this issue, and with the talks deadlocked, on August 22, 1951, the Chinese-North Korean delegation declared a recess claiming that air bombing conducted by the UNC had made the negotiation site unsafe. The UNC used the break as an opportunity to move the talks to a more neutral location, as it was dissatisfied by the fact that Kaesong was now located within territory controlled by the communist forces. On October 22, 1951, the two sides agreed to relocate the venue of the talks to the village of Panmunjom, located several miles to the east of Kaesong, which would thereafter serve as the site of negotiations.

Negotiations were reinitiated at the new site on October 25, 1951 and the two sides continued to debate the location of the military demarcation line. The UNC argued that the border should be drawn based on the line of ground contact at the time that the armistice was signed. It favored this approach because, at the time, UN forces were on the offensive, and Ridgway believed this fact, coupled with the UNC's air and naval superiority, would continue to provide the negotiation team with leverage during the remainder of the talks. The KPA/PVA, on the other hand, insisted on an immediate agreement regarding the location of the military demarcation line. Discussions dragged on until November 27, 1951, when the two sides agreed that the line of contact at the time of the signing of the armistice would form the demarcation line, which would be surrounded by a four-kilometer-wide Demilitarized Zone (Hermes 1966, 114).

Discussions between the two delegations regarding item 3—arrangements for a ceasefire—began on November 27, 1951 with the two sides quickly agreeing to a Military Armistice Commission with equal representation for both camps. On December 3, 1951, the KPA/PVA suggested that the armistice be supervised by nations “neutral to the Korean War” and by March 1952, the two sides had more-or-less completed discussion on this issue by agreeing to include Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland as the members of a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) (Hermes 1966, 173).

Formal talks regarding item number 5—recommendations to the governments of the countries—began on February 7, 1952 and progressed quickly largely due to the fact that both sides hoped to avoid precise phrasing on the matter. The negotiators were only making recommendations to their governments about post-armistice political action, and thus the contents of item 5 were not regarded as binding. Joy proposed that after the signing of the armistice, the relevant country’s governments consider convening a conference between the political representatives of both sides “to discuss appropriate matters arising from but not resolved by the armistice agreement” (Posen 1986, 75). The communist delegation advocated that a conference to discuss the signing of a peace treaty be held ninety days after the conclusion of the armistice between a group of five delegates from each side. It was their intention that the conference discuss the withdrawal of foreign troops from the peninsula and other questions related to the peace in Korea. The UNC negotiation team quickly agreed to these recommendations regarding the holding a post-truce conference, on the condition that the Republic of Korea was one of

the participants. This agenda point was agreed on February 18, 1952, only eleven days after it was formally introduced into the negotiations.

The most problematic item discussed during the armistice talks was number 4, prisoner of war (POW) repatriation. Heated discussions, and the substantial elongation of the talks, were caused because the UNC delegation proposed the idea of non-enforceable repatriation for Korean War POWs, which the KPA/PVA team immediately rejected. It had, up to this point, been assumed by both sides that all POWs would be exchanged at the conclusion of the armistice, as was customary. The UNC noted, however, that among the prisoners held by the UN forces were many former residents of the ROK who had been inducted into the KPA following the North Korean attack. The UNC argued that these people should be allowed to return to their homes in the south. Furthermore, it was also discovered that many of the Chinese soldiers were former members of the Nationalist Chinese Army who did not support the communist government. The UN delegation argued that these troops might prefer and should be allowed to go to Taiwan rather than be forced to return to mainland China.

While the U.S. negotiators emphasized the value of individual human rights and insisted on the principle of voluntary repatriation, the communist delegation argued that “the United Nations Command had no right to withhold repatriation of certain prisoners merely because those prisoners expressed opposition to being repatriated” (Joy 1952, 146-147). The UNC responded that “it had the right and the duty to refuse to repatriate those prisoners who could not be returned to the side of their origin without the use of force” (ibid.).

Both sides were adamant that they would not concede on this matter, and from May to December 1952, no progress was made on the POW issue. Once committed publicly to non-enforceable repatriation, the officials in Washington stubbornly insisted upon “a clear-cut victory” (Foot 1990, 217). Truman thoroughly embraced the principle of nonforcible repatriation because he wanted “a decisive victory...that embodied the essence of the difference between the two sides in the Cold War” (ibid., 158). He insisted that this was the best way for the United States “to maintain its hegemonic position in the international system” (ibid., 151). The North Korea/Chinese side, on the other hand, could not afford to allow many of their soldiers to refuse repatriation as both were still in the early stages of constructing new regimes and the refusal by large numbers of communist troops to return home would undermine the legitimacy of these newly instated governments.

In March 1952, the communist delegation indicated that they were willing to show some flexibility on the matter, but only if the majority of Chinese and North Korean prisoners intended to return. In response, on April 19, 1952 the UNC conducted an initial screening process to determine the repatriation desires of prisoners and reported that among the over 170,000 North Korean and Chinese prisoners, only 70,000 desired repatriation. The KPA/PVA negotiators flatly stated that such low figures could not be true and would not serve as the basis for further discussion on the matter (Hermes 1966, 144-149). Neither side was prepared to compromise on this issue and on October 8, 1952, with no progress in sight, the UNC unilaterally declared a recess.

During the adjournment of talks, both sides believed that they could apply pressure on their opponents by increasing military activity. In May 1952, General Mark



W. Clark replaced Ridgway as Commander-in-Chief UN Command, and ordered the largest air attacks of the war against the North Korean capital of Pyongyang and the bombing of the hydroelectric dams on the Yalu River (Berstein 1983, 288-296). The Chinese leadership, convinced that war would continue for some time, started to build up its forces and by early 1953, Chinese troops in Korea reached 1.53 million, the highest in the war (Zhang 1995, 225-227). Despite these efforts, neither the UNC's aerial attacks, nor the Chinese ground attacks were threatening enough to cause either side to compromise on the issue. Thus, although the level of violence on the peninsula increased substantially in 1952, these actions had no discernible effect on the negotiations and served only to push up the number of casualties.

In early 1953, the political situation of both sides also began to shift. In the U.S., Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had strongly criticized Truman's handling of the war and armistice negotiations, came into office in January. Keenly aware that neither the American people nor its UN allies would support a major offensive to reunify Korea, Eisenhower made it known that, as long as there were no major compromises made on the issue of voluntary repatriation, he would authorize the Armistice as it had been negotiated at that point. By this time, the communist forces were also eager for the war to end as both China and North Korea were eager to begin reconstructing their economies. The biggest turning point, nonetheless, was the death of Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1953. The Soviet leader's successors, facing unrest in the European satellites, encouraged the Chinese and North Koreans to conclude the armistice (Weathersby 2012, 108-109). In light of this situation, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai made a speech in which he proposed that those prisoners not desiring repatriation be transferred to a neutral state and

Nam Il agreed to this proposition “out of need to consolidate the Communist bloc after Stalin’s death” (ibid., 183).

By July 27, 1953 all of the details had been worked out and preparations were complete for the signing of the document. The final armistice was signed at 10 o’clock on July 27, 1953 by U.S. Army Lieutenant General William Harrison, Jr. representing the United Nations Command (UNC) and North Korean General Nam Il representing the Korean People’s Army (KPA) and the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (PVA). Within a few hours, General Mark W. Clark, Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, Marshall Kim Il-sung, Supreme Commander Korean People’s Army, and Peng Dehuai, Chinese People’s Volunteer, also signed the document for their military forces. The representatives affixed their signatures to eighteen copies of the armistice, six in English, six in Chinese, and six in Korean, thus ending the longest truce talks in history.<sup>32</sup>

#### **4.2. UNC Military Interpreters at the Armistice Negotiations**

The Korean Armistice Negotiations was the longest and one of the most complex negotiated armistices in history, involving “159 plenary sessions and some 500 hundred meetings at a subsidiary level” (Bailey 1992, 70), all of which required the mediatory presence of interpreters who worked between the three official working languages: Korean, English, and Chinese (Ekvall 1960, 20). As the working language of the UNC,

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<sup>32</sup> Both sides accumulated tremendous casualties during the war. Approximately two to three million civilians were killed in North and South Korea. There were 33,629 U.S. soldiers killed on the battlefield, plus 20,617 from other causes, and an estimated 400,000 South Korean military fatalities. One to two million communist troops are believed to have perished. U.S. statistics show that 45 percent of its casualties occurred while the negotiations were underway (Foot 1990, 208).

which was represented by four U.S. military officers and one ROK officer, was English, it officially only required the services of English-Korean interpreters and English-Chinese interpreters (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 57). The UNC's English-Korean and English-Chinese interpreters rendered what was said by any of the representatives at the negotiation table in English into Korean and Chinese. They did not interpret what was said by the representatives of the PRC or DPRK in Chinese or Korean. That was the responsibility of the communist interpreters.

The number of interpreters needed at Kaesong and later Panmunjom was, naturally, much smaller when compared to the needs of the USAGMIK during the occupation of southern Korea following the Japanese surrender or the UNC forces in the battlefields during the Korean War. The U.S. military estimated that, in total, it would require the assistance of approximately 140 military interpreters and translators at Kaesong and Panmunjom (Ekvall 1960, 46). While the quantity of interpreters needed at the armistice was far lower than the numbers needed during the occupation or the war, the fact that these interpreters had to participate in a diplomatic conference setting meant that they had to be highly proficient in the language pairs they were working with.

During both the U.S. occupation of southern Korea and the Korean War, the United States military had steadfastly refused to recruit and train its own Korean linguists, despite the negative effects it had on the institution's ability to communicate with the local populace, its allies, and enemies, choosing rather to rely on Korean civilian interpreters during the occupation and the ROKA's UN Liaison Group officers during the war, as was discussed in the previous two chapters. The interpreters working at the Korean Armistice Negotiation table, however, had to be U.S. military personnel, as the

UNC's negotiation team was being led by an American officer, and the entire operation was under the management and control of the UNC in the face of opposition by the ROK government. Thus, the U.S. military could not employ the services of UN Liaison Group officers at the negotiation table because, as was discussed in chapter three, the loyalty of these interpreters did not belong to the UNC but to the Republic of Korea Army.

Before the negotiations began, the U.S. military issued a call for "Grade A linguists" to serve as interpreters at the armistice talks. These interpreters were required to be on,

the "international political" (or negotiating) level. Personnel operating at this highest level must be completely fluent in an Asiatic language and in English as well. They should be capable of simultaneous translations (interpretation) to and from English. In addition to linguistic fluency they must have a deep understanding of the appropriate Asiatic culture, area, and psychology. This is a "super" category, the personnel in which would be competent to handle interpretation, advising, and even negotiating at high-level meetings such as those which US military representatives have been engaged at Kaesong and Panmunjom since 1951.

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 13)

Unfortunately, it was soon revealed that despite the fact that it had actively intervened in Korean affairs since 1945, "the U.S. Army had no competent career-service language personnel available to handle the 2-yr truce negotiations at Kaesong and Panmunjom" (ibid., 8).<sup>33</sup> Thus, the U.S. was forced to recall a number of its reserve officers to active duty to serve as interpreters at the negotiation table.

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<sup>33</sup> During the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in post-war Japan (1946-1948), which is examined by Kayoko Takeda (2010) in *Interpreting the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal: A Sociopolitical Analysis*, the U.S. military had likewise faced an urgent need for high-level interpreters. The U.S. military was unable to supply interpreters from within its ranks to serve as the primary interpreters, opting instead to employ Japanese nationals with bilingual backgrounds with no formal training to serve as the interpreters at the Tokyo trials. Nonetheless, because the U.S. military had recruited and trained *Nisei* (second generation Japanese-Americans) interpreters and translators during World War II,

The primary English-Korean interpreter to serve at the negotiation site was Horace G. Underwood, a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Horace's brother, Richard F. Underwood, was a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve, who had been assigned as an English-Korean interpreter for the initial liaison team of UN command officers who flew into Kaesong to do the groundwork prior to the truce talks. Horace Underwood, Richard's older brother by ten years, had served in the military during World War II as a U.S. Navy officer, and had since been teaching English at the Chosen Christian College in South Korea when the Korean War broke out. Horace joined the armistice delegation "at Richard's urging" (Li, Millet and Yu 2001, 260) and became the Chief Official Interpreter for the UNC at Panmunjom.

The top English-Chinese interpreter for the first two years of the negotiations was First Lieutenant Kenneth Wu, who was later replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Ekvall. Like the Underwoods, neither of the English-Chinese interpreters was still active in the military during the Korean War. Kenneth Wu was an ethnic Chinese born in Burma who joined the U.S. Army in Kunming, China, in 1943 and was naturalized as an American citizen in 1947. Before joining the negotiation team at Kaesong, he was the chief of the Chinese POW interrogation team in Pusan. When the armistice talks began, he was subsequently commissioned as second lieutenant, U.S. Army Reserve, to serve at Kaesong and, in 1953, Wu was promoted to first lieutenant. As was the case with the

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these *Nisei* linguists, who had worked for the U.S. Army as military intelligence staff during World War II, were able to monitor the linguistic production of these interpreters. The *Nisei* were charged with correcting interpreting errors and tasked with reading all the prepared translations simultaneously as they were delivered by the different participants in the courtroom. When linguistic disputes broke out between the Japanese interpreters and the *Nisei* monitors they were resolved by two bilingual U.S. military officers.

Underwood brothers, “he [was] not a career service-language officer” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 14). Wu served as the senior Chinese language officer until he was replaced in the spring of 1953 by Lieutenant Colonel Robert B. Ekvall, “a Reserve officer who was recalled to active duty for the express purpose of handling interpretation chores at the negotiations” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 16). Ekvall had served as staff officer and translator with the military mission of General George Marshall in Beijing from 1946 to 1947.

Fernández Sánchez notes that, aside from Ekvall, all of the senior interpreters at Kaesong and Panmunjom were “untrained interpreters” (Fernández Sánchez 2012, 118-122). The task of interpreting during the armistice talks proved to be tremendously strenuous, and the interpreters felt themselves linguistically ill equipped to meet the challenges of serving as interlingual mediators in such a high-level diplomatic conference setting. For instance, Richard Underwood recalled that he “did have very great problems at the formal meetings because all of a sudden, we came up with all sorts of technical language that I had no competence to interpret, and it was a really, really, miserable time” (Underwood 2010). Horace Underwood likewise experienced “initial difficulty in meeting the requirements of his job satisfactorily” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 16), and even Ekvall, who was already a seasoned military interpreter at the time, “found his Chinese, fluent though it normally was, inadequate for the needs of the demanding task at Panmunjom for several weeks after he arrived” (ibid.). The military’s employment of untrained interpreters during military operations, however, has proven to be more the norm than the exception in many cases. While there are instances in which a military engages in warfare with a group of trained interpreters and translators, such as the *Nisei*

interpreters and translators who played an active role during World War II, “wars have been and—unfortunately—continue to be schools of interpreters” (Baigorri-Jalon 2010, 173).

Interpreters at the Korean Armistice Negotiations were required to participate in both the plenary sessions and the staff meetings. During the negotiations the representatives of both sides met in a tent set up on the 38th parallel where “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, 9). The center line of the table had to be set up in accordance with the actual boundary line of the two sides, so the placement of the negotiation table was constantly adjusted in accordance with the changes of the actual boundary line (Wang and Xu 2016, 191). Mirroring the circumstances on the battlefield, the communist representatives sat on the northern side of the negotiation table while the UNC delegation sat on the southern side. Such care was taken regarding the positioning of the table because both sides regarded the negotiation sites as part and parcel of the real theater of war.

Though Richard Underwood hints at the fact that the plenary sessions were more challenging than the staff meetings, both proved to be challenging for the interpreters, for different reasons. During the plenary sessions, the delegates of the two sides debated the five items of the armistice agreement, with the interpreters seated at a small table just behind the spokesman and the main conference table. This positioning allowed them to reference word lists and dictionaries, which were required because the language employed during the talks included a wide range of terminology, as pointed out by the English-Chinese interpreter, Kenneth Wu.

In the present armistice negotiations, the vocabulary involved is legion. Though strictly a military conference the words used cover every province of semantics—military science, political hocus-pocus, geographical jaw-breakers, political jargon, philosophical abracadabra, and torrential tirades of penetrating oral defamation couched in diplomatic sugarcoats. Here it is purposeful to point out that the interpreter, wagging his tongue rather than the pen as does the translator, has no time to seek refuge in a dictionary when he is ambushed by the lethal assault of an unexpected and unknown word. In short, the ideal interpreter is the one who can drive well on the thoroughfares of a two-lane lingual traffic, except that he is to be able to jump tracks and switch directions on split-second impulses far from being his own. He is to be able to juggle with words and put across the most fantastic show of verbal magic.

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 15)

The interpreter was aided by an assistant who sat next to the interpreter to look up words, check texts, and hand over documents with pertinent paragraphs marked for reading, in cases where the principal suddenly quotes a passage. While having their own space provided some advantages, sitting behind the main conference table also presented interpreters with some challenges:

the interpreter loses something of the close rapport with his principal; there is a diminution of the sense of immediacy; it is harder for the principal to consult with his interpreter; there is greater chance of the interpreter's not hearing correctly or not hearing all of what his principal says; and, if he needs to cross-check on what has been said or heard, he has to tip his hand and temporarily stop the meeting by getting up and going to the conference table.

(Ekvall 1960, 62-63)

In addition to the plenary sessions, the interpreter's presence was also required at the staff meetings, during which the specifics of items which had been agreed to during the plenary session was clarified and put into writing. During these talks, the interpreter sat at the conference table, just to the left of the spokesman, and thus did not have immediate access to an assistant, reference books, or any of the other props. All the interpreters were allowed to have on the table were prepared texts that were given to them and a pad of paper on which to make notes. During these meetings, interpreters no



longer had reference material to lean on, but, according to Ekvall, this setting could be preferable because “the stimulation of the front line permeates him and helps him dig deep for the things he knows below the level of conscious awareness” (Ekvall 1960, 63).

Certain measures were taken by interpreters to ensure that they would be able to best convey what was being said by the negotiators. The most commonly used tactic was for interpreters to prepare a written translation of a statement before the meeting rather than to interpret it on the spot.

Every statement had to be carefully and precisely formulated the evening before and then translated into Chinese and Korean. Since the Chinese and English languages are in no sense similar in structure, many hours had to be spent in making sure that what we wanted to be said could be said correctly and precisely in both the Chinese and Korean languages.

(Ekvall 1960, 9)

The downside of essentially reading prepared texts was that though they had a prim finished preciseness about them, such interpretations tended to be “pompous, and often oddly bombastic” (ibid., 67). Furthermore, excessive dependence on reading translations of a statement made before the meeting was held could become an impediment to smooth interlingual communication as “the interpreter tends to flounder somewhat wildly when ad lib exchanges follow use of, or are inserted into, the prepared text” (ibid.).

When a statement could not be translated in advance, measures were taken to provide the UNC interpreter some supplementary material which would help them accurately interpret what was said by the negotiation team. For instance, often the speaker at the conference table would write down what they were about to say on a piece of paper, read from the paper, and then pass it to the interpreter. The notes scribbled by the speaker provided the interpreter with a record of what has just been said. Though this strategy was developed in Panmunjom to aid the interpreters, it was soon discovered that

in addition to providing reference material for the linguistic mediators, it helped the negotiators better organize their thoughts and get their points across in a more succinct manner. Thus, interpreters urged that all members of the negotiation team employ this tactic, and even asked that the senior negotiator consider, “making it mandatory in preference to unlimited and uncontrolled adlibbing” (ibid., 68).

In addition to the Underwood brothers, Wu, and Ekvall, a team of linguists was organized to provide interpreting and translation services during the negotiations. The following chart indicates that there was a total of seventy-six UNC military linguists working for the language division at Panmunjom in July 1953.

Table 5: Number of Interpreters and Translators at Panmunjom

Interpreters, Korean	26
Interpreters, Chinese	11
Translators, Korean	7
Translation, Chinese	6
Interpreter-translators, Korean	14
Interpreter-translators, Chinese	12
Total	76

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 57)

However, the following comments made by Ekvall suggests that Fishel and Hausrath’s numbers were inflated and that the shortage of linguistic personnel at Panmunjom was much more severe than official records indicate.

I found myself chief of a would-be language division whose table of organization called for 140 linguists. Instead, we numbered twelve, including translators and Chinese and Korean typists.

(Ekvall 1960, 46)

Given the importance of interlingual communication at the negotiation table, it is hardly surprising that UNC linguist supervisors and intelligence division chiefs found their number to be “assertedly insufficient” (Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 57).

The disparity in the numbers presented in Fishel and Hausrath's study and the recollections of Ekvall in his memoir appear to have been caused by the fact that the criteria for calculating the number of linguists differed. According to Ekvall,

The Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, all suddenly pressured to produce linguists, poured personnel into the language division. They were men who on their records were rated as qualified linguists. We found most such ratings fictitious. Using practical rule-of-thumb tests, we sent them back—at least four out of every five—as fast as they came. The ones we did keep couldn't interpret as yet, but they showed promise. We set up training courses, rotated them as monitors in the meetings and let them get their feet wet in various interpreting assignments of an incidental nature.

(Ekvall 1960, 46)

In other words, the fourteen members of the language division appear to be the number of permanent personnel Ekvall deemed as competent interpreters and translators. So while Fishel and Hausrath's records include all of the personnel assigned to the language division, they fail to take into account whether all of its members could actually take on the roles they were called on to perform. Whether it be seventy-six or fourteen, both Fishel and Hausrath's report and Ekvall's autobiographical account indicate that there was a vast shortage of linguistic mediators at the Korean Armistice Negotiations.

The lack of personnel translated to an increased burden for the interpreters capable of performing their linguistic duties with any proficiency. Thus, the more competent interpreters "often interpreted for eight or more hours a day" (*ibid.*, 46), despite the fact that it is widely recognized that the quality of interpreting decreases when interpreters continuously interpret for long stretches of time (Moser-Mercer 2000). These long working hours proved to be taxing for the interpreters, who often began to "blackout" after about two hours without rest (Ekvall 1960, 48). Furthermore, because of the limited number of interpreters available at the negotiations, it became necessary to

stagger the schedule of those meetings so that “the interpreters, could go from one meeting to the next” (ibid., 46).

While the lack of personnel added to the already heavy burden of the UNC interpreters, as discussed in chapter two, interpreters can sometimes accrue significant power and authority within interpreted events when they hold a monopoly over the linguistic capital necessary for interlingual communication to take place. During the occupation, this led to interpreting norms which allowed the interpreter to actively intervene in interpreted events, during which they were not only allowed but often encouraged to take on roles that extended beyond those of a simple linguistic mediator, roles which included advisor, informer, and negotiator. The following section will examine the interpreting norms that emerged during the armistice talks and determine why, despite the shortage of capable interpreters, the military interpreters at Kaesong and Panmunjom were unable to command more authority during the negotiation talks.

### **4.3. The Interpreter as a Faithful Echo**

In his memoir “Faithful Echo,” Robert Ekvall (1960) provides the following detailed account about a particular interpreting assignment that he found particularly challenging and frustrating while serving as the UNC’s senior English-Chinese interpreter at Panmunjom.

The temptation to add, if not a sentence, just a phrase or even a word, can be very strong. The interpreter often feels as though he were the only one with hearing ears, listening to a dialogue of the deaf where just one more word—the right one, of course—would clear up all misunderstanding; he may even deceive himself into believing that such addition is the best and highest form of interpretation. In his inmost being he knows what his principal means: it is simply a matter of clarification. Yet clarification may, in fact, be something not desired.

And here I remember a staff meeting in Panmunjom in which I was most unhappy from beginning to end. What I was given to interpret seemed to be, as I worked through it stubborn sentence by sentence and refractory phrase by phrase, the most amazing jumble of contradictions ever muttered. I thought I knew what was intended. Again and again I was tempted to insert one or two explanatory phrases which would make everything clear. But against all reason I held true to the words of my principal and at the end wiped my sweating palms. The other side responded with the request that the interpretation be repeated. This implied that I was at fault, and I had to swallow the humiliation while at the same time feeling, with a mounting, helpless sort of fury, that it wasn't altogether my fault. But no matter whose fault, I was the one pilloried and shamed. Then they asked that the statement be repeated. It was no clearer than before, and I once more sweated through its interpretation, after which those on the other side of the table shook their heads in bewilderment. A long question-and-answer session followed until everyone seemed tired out. At last, in a state of mutual bafflement, we adjourned and I could take my shame outside.

Yet as we rode back to camp at Munsani, my principal remarked, "Ekvall, you did a good job today."

"But sir, they didn't understand. Nobody understood and we ended more confused than when we started." I was smarting with the hurt of a job bungled and yet still sensed bitterly, but silently, that it wasn't altogether my fault.

"That's it exactly. If they had understood I would have known you were misinterpreting. They weren't supposed to understand. I was purposely fuzzing it up. Good work."

(Ekvall 1960, 102-103)

The aggravation the interpreter felt during this meeting was due to a clash between his professional desire as a linguistic mediator to enable accurate interlingual communication and the established interpreting norms which prevented him from adding, omitting, simplifying or embellishing what was said by the original speaker. Unlike the civilian interpreters working for the USAMGIK, who were expected to serve as informants and negotiators during interpreted events, and UN Liaison Group officers, who were expected to manipulate an exchange between KMAGers and ROKA commanders to favor their Korean military superiors, "absolute faithfulness, or fidelity, was the norm that was strictly observed" (Wang and Xu 2016, 200) at the negotiation table. In Ekvall's own words "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” (ibid., 102).

Inghilleri notes that interpreters in conflict situations “continually consider disparate sets of rights and obligations and weigh one ethical obligation against another” (Inghilleri 2012, 100). The event outlined above and comments made by Ekvall reveal that when forced to choose between the ethical obligation to facilitate and mediate language communication or to function as a neutral conduit, the UNC interpreters were compelled to choose the later as their primary obligation, even when such practice came at the expense of the comprehensibility.

Furthermore, this episode demonstrates that the UNC negotiators could not monitor what was being said by the interpreter when their words were rendered into Chinese, as they based their assessment of the interpretation’s faithfulness to the original on the reaction of the Chinese negotiators. It also raises the question of why, given that no one on the UNC side of the negotiation table could monitor whether or not the interpreter was adhering to norms of interpreting that limited the interpreter to the somewhat mechanical role of faithfully rendering of what was said in the source language to its closest equivalent in the target language, the interpreter felt compelled to abide by these norms.

A key characteristic that distinguishes the UNC interpreters who participated in the truce talks from civilian interpreters working for the U.S. Military Government, who viewed the U.S. as a foreign occupational force, or UN Liaison Group officers, whose loyalties belonged to the ROK Army, was the fact that the interpreters at Kaesong and Panmunjom, though not active, still saw themselves as U.S. military personnel. The fact

that the UNC interpreters were members of the U.S. military had a clear influence on the positionality of the interpreters within the military field as they were firmly embedded within the military's hierarchical chain of command. At Kaesong and Panmunjom, the interpreters were unquestionably military men subordinate to the officers to whom they were providing their linguistic services. As a result, these interpreters conducted themselves in accordance with the norms of the military, and the power they exercised during interpreted events was in large part defined by their rank rather than their linguistic abilities.

As a result, interpreters at Kaesong and Panmunjom who were of low military rank experienced considerable difficulties while serving at the negotiation table:

On [Horace Underwood]'s retirement from active duty in July 1953 he was replaced as senior interpreter by an Army sergeant. The lack of senior status proved a handicap for this sergeant, even as it had for other interpreters working at Panmunjom. Because of the ticklish problems involved in phrasing documents intended to be translated, the interpreters at these negotiations had been consulted on all draft documents and had sat in on all staff meetings. Several of these linguists commented that their lack of rank frequently was embarrassing to them—not so much in dealing with the enemy across the table, but in dealing with US negotiators!

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 16-17)

The difficulties the sergeant who replaced Horace Underwood faced would have been particularly prominent as he was an enlisted soldier working with high-ranking officers.

This sentiment appears to have been widespread as one linguist suggested,

Perhaps we ought to be given field-officer rank for these negotiations so that we could deal with our own negotiators on relatively equal terms. As it is, generals and admirals often won't ask or take advice from a sergeant or a lieutenant regardless of his ability or his degree of experience.

(*ibid.*, 17)

And another interpreter at Panmunjom observed that it was because of his military rank that his superiors undervalued the worth of the cultural and linguistic expertise.

The Army's got to make up its mind what it wants from its language personnel. If it wants top-grade people for meetings such as this it ought to be prepared to "pay" for them. I mean simply that in my lowly rank I am constantly being embarrassed by having to offer advice to some general or colonel who resents hearing me talk because I'm just a \_\_\_\_\_. And frankly, if my future promotions are as slow in coming as this last one was I'll be damned if I'll stay in the Army much longer. I trained a long time to get to this point, and I don't much like being ordered around or scorned by some guy with a lot of rank who doesn't know anything about this work and looks down on me like some flunkey just because of my rank.

(ibid.)

The laments of these interpreters stand in stark contrast with the situations seen during the occupation and the war, during which the interpreters' position was elevated due to the access they maintained over the channels of interlingual communication.

In addition to the difficulties low-ranking military interpreters faced, interpreters possessing high-rank were questioned on whether their job required such power within the military establishment: "one disgruntled officer, irked at my rank which he felt was too high for a mere interpreter, suggested that I be declared superfluous and sent away from Panmunjom" (Ekvall 1960, 45). The presence of a high-ranking interpreter was seen as a threat to the military institution because it implied that interpreters, whose functions were viewed as supplementary, could in fact take on leadership roles and potentially assume positions of power.

Ekvall provides details of several attempts made by members of the U.S. military to remind interpreters that they occupied a subservient position within the military. This was typically done by alleging that interpreters were not true soldiers as they lacked the characteristic of a military man. For instance, U.S. personnel at the negotiation talks claimed interpreters were "prima donnas" who were "too temperamental for any good use" (ibid., 70). Here, interpreters are denigrated for possessing characteristics that ran



counter to what was viewed as the central values of the military, namely, masculinity and strategic thinking. Another denunciation directed at interpreters was the clichéd assertion that the interpreter's job was to parrot what is said by their "principal," as exemplified in the following comments made by one of Ekvall's acquaintances at Panmunjom: "He [the speaker] says 'Squeak, squeak, squeak', and you say 'squawk, squawk, squawk'. A hell of a job!" (ibid.). The treatment of interpreters at the armistice talks mirrors the relationship seen between ROKA unit commanders and UN Liaison Group officers during the Korean War. In both cases, the mistreatment of the military interpreter by military staff might be interpreted as a conscious refusal to acknowledge the value of the linguistic capital that the interpreter possesses, and thus rejecting any authority the interpreter might hold in an interpreted event, while presenting military rank as the sole source of symbolic capital within the military organization.

While the treatment of UN Liaison Group officers and U.S. military interpreters paralleled each other, the interpreter's reaction to this treatment differed substantially. In the case of the UN Liaison Group officers, interpreters such as Kim Il Pyong (2012) and Ji Myeong-gwan (2006) expressed their disdain for their military superiors and criticized them for failing to recognize the value of the linguistic services they were providing. This group of interpreters were able to challenge the authority of ROK officers and refuse to be relegated to a position of subservience because they occupied an ambiguous position within the military's rank system. The UNC interpreters in Kaesong and Panmunjom, on the other hand, were squarely positioned within the U.S. military's chain of command and any attempt to devalue the authority of their superiors would come at the cost of diminishing their own worth and thus could not be attempted.

Further adding to the constraints placed on interpreters to “parrot” what was said by their military superiors was the fact that interpreters were constantly being monitored to ensure they did not diverge from statements made by their principals. Ironically, while the U.S. military staff serving as representatives of the UNC at the negotiation table could not monitor the linguistic output of their interpreters, the majority of communist negotiators knew not only their mother language but also one or two of the other languages spoken at the talks. For instance, the head of the communist delegation, Nam Il, “spoke fluent Russian—he had been a school teacher in the Soviet Union—and was reputed to be equally fluent in Chinese” (ibid., 58). One of the Chinese staff officers and Communist negotiators, Pu Shan, had received a doctoral degree at Harvard University and worked as a professor at a U.S. college in the mid-west. He spoke much better English than his interpreter. Nonetheless, he was barred from engaging with the UN’s negotiation team directly in English, as it had been agreed that the negotiators would be limited to speaking their own language, which would then be communicated to the other side via an interpreter. Another member of the communist negotiation who could speak perfect English was Huang Hua, the chief Chinese negotiator. Huang had previously served as a Chinese-English interpreter for the Chinese Communist commissioner in Beijing at the time of the Marshall mission. Nonetheless,

during six weeks of negotiating against Ambassador Dean he never uttered a word—in greeting, argument or even incidental half pleasantries—in English, nor did he correct his interpreter when the usual awkward mistakes were made.  
(ibid., 56-57)

Although Huang did not flaunt his knowledge of English, his proficiency in the language was a great asset to him, as he understood what was being said as it was being said, and

could “think out his answer and counterattack” (ibid., 57) while the interpreter was rendering the English message into Chinese.

Ekvall recalls that UNC interpreters were constantly reminded that the representatives of the communist forces as well as the PVA/KPA’s Korean and Chinese interpreters were constantly monitoring what they said. For instance, Pu Shan, who was a forceful and polished orator in Chinese, was often aggravated that all of his eloquence was lost on the American officers because the message had been rendered into English. He thus developed a habit of staring at Ekvall, the only member of the UNC negotiation team who could appreciate the merit of his words and elegant aphorisms, after making a speech. At times, this became too much to bear and

He would twist and fidget until he could stand it no longer—he had long ceased looking at me—and then 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.

(ibid., 54-55)

The other representative of the Chinese military, Huang Hua, likewise indirectly applied pressure on the interpreter by making it evident that he was monitoring what the interpreter said: “He listened to me, I knew, with amusement and a touch of malicious curiosity to learn how I would put into his mother tongue what he had already understood so well when it had been said in English” (Ekvall 1960, 48).

The fact that interpreters were constantly under surveillance was a source of emotional distress because the norms of word-for-word interpreting were so fiercely upheld at the negotiation table that divergence from the original could be interpreted as an indication of disobedience towards the senior officer who had made the statement, which, within a the context of a military at war, was a serious offense. This is best

represented in the example of Sul Jeong Shik, the Korean-English interpreter of the communist negotiation team. Underwood recalls that

He continually tried to “gild the lily” of [Chinese] Liaison Officer (Col. Chang)’s remarks. For example: Col. Chang said quite calmly on one inspection trip “Here are three of the Chinese People’s Volunteers [i.e. Chinese soldiers] killed by your soldiers,” but Sul [the interpreter] said words to the effect, “Here you see, in pools of their own blood these brave volunteers who left home and family to come to this foreign land in sacrifice for the noble cause of our side in this war.”

After he did this several times I turned to Col. Chang (against all protocol, for interpreters exist only to speak for their masters) and asked him if he indeed meant what Sul said, or what he himself said. Chang glared at a third officer (who had shown no evidence of speaking English) who gave him a quick nod, meaning I was telling the truth. At that Col. Chang blew up at Sul and ordered him to go – get out of my sight. My analysis of the situation is that Sul, who had been a “mole” HS [high school] teacher in Seoul before the war, was simply trying to be super patriotic to “prove” his loyalty to the North.

(Harris, 2010b)

The Korean War historian Allan Millet (2002, 260) writes that events such as those discussed above were the cause of Sul’s demise:

“a turncoat Seoul highschool teacher” who worked as an interpreter for the Communist delegation...He was executed at the end of the meeting because of his poor performance. In other words, it seems that interpreters without any proper training were only valuable according to their linguistic abilities, and, thus, they were highly vulnerable.

Both Underwood and Millet ’s comments about Sul, however, paint a distorted picture of this interpreter. First, while Millet claims that Sul was an unexperienced, untrained interpreter who performed poorly at the negotiation table, this could hardly have been the case. Sul had not only studied English Literature at Mount Union University, Ohio, and Columbia University, New York, he was also an accomplished interpreter and translator by the time the negotiations began. In fact, for several years during the U.S. military occupation of Korea, he had worked as an interpreter for the Public Information Bureau of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK). Sul’s name was

even listed as an interpreter in the meeting minutes of the Joint U.S.-Korea Conference (1946-47), which were discussed in detail in chapter two. The fact that he was chosen to work as a mediator at this high-level meeting attests to the fact that Sul was recognized as being a highly proficient interpreter whose skills were recognized by the USAMGIK. When the Korean War broke out, Sul, whose writings show he was at heart a socialist, joined the North Korean military but suffered a heart attack while in North Korea and was operated on at a Hungarian field hospital. After his recovery, he was chosen to serve as the KPA's Korean-English interpreter at the armistice negotiations held at Kaesong and Panmunjom.

Second, Millet claims that Sul was executed because of his poor performance as an interpreter. Having established that Sul was already an accomplished interpreter by the time the Korean Armistice Negotiation began, it is difficult to understand why he would have been executed during the armistice talks, when his linguistic skills were more valuable than ever. The truth of the matter was that Sul was not put on trial for being a bad interpreter but on charges that he was an American spy (Cho 2012, 8). This was most certainly not true, but these claims were made against him because the North Korean communist party had begun a purge of cadre members who had defected from South Korea. Sul's career at the USAMGIK provided convenient grounds to justify his elimination.

More important than the actual circumstances under which Sul was executed, however, is the reasoning that led to Underwood and Millet's assumption that he was killed for being an incompetent interpreter. Their interpretation of these events provides insight into the UNC interpreter's self-perception and their perception of the norms of

interpreting during the Korean Armistice Negotiations. In autobiographical material, an informants' over-emphasis of certain themes or their defensive stance on certain topic tend to reveal their values and indicate their awareness of potential conflicts (Watson 1976, 107). Thus, the connection made by Underwood and Millet between Sul's interventionist interpreting tendencies or refusal to subserviently act as a linguistic conduit, and his execution by the North Korean communist party suggests that UNC interpreters themselves viewed fidelity to the source text to be an indicator of the interpreter's loyalty to the military establishment. Interpreting strategies such as addition, clarification, subtraction, compression, omission, on the other hand, even when employed to facilitate communication, were viewed as signs of open defiance. Because both the negotiators and the interpreters saw the negotiation table as a battlefield, such insubordination was legitimately thought to be punishable by death, which is why Millet and Underwood arrived at the conclusion that Sul was executed for misinterpreting.

In sum, UNC's military interpreters were officers and soldiers in the U.S. army, working with their military superiors at the negotiation table. As members of the military, the authority they commanded during interpreted events was decided not by the level of linguistic and cultural expertise they possessed but by their military rank. As such, they were obligated to abide by the military's expectations regarding what constitutes legitimate interpreting practice. The word-for-word interpreting norms of the military, however, at times hampered interlingual/intercultural communication as it limited the tools at the interpreter's disposal which might be used to better convey the original message to the PVA/KPA's representatives. Despite the fact that the UNC lacked the means to monitor the activities of its interpreters to confirm that they were acting as

neutral conduits, the interpreters and representatives of the communist alliance provided this function, since they kept close track of what the interpreter said and were more than eager to point out discrepancies. Given that attempts to diverge from the original message would be quickly discovered and the consequences of such an act were believed to be severe, it is hardly surprising that UNC interpreters did not seek to challenge their superior's expectations regarding proper interpreting practices and abided by demands that they function as a "faithful echo" to their principals.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Despite the historical significance of the Korean War as the first major international clash to follow World War II, the first war in which member of the United Nations participated in military action under the UN flag, and the first “hot war” of the Cold War era, there have been very few studies conducted on the role interlingual communication and interlingual mediators played in this violent conflict. The limited number of studies that exist focus solely on the Korean Armistice Negotiations (1951-1953) but have thus far ignored the contributions made by interpreters during the U.S. military occupation of southern Korea (1945-48) as well as the Korean War (1950-1953), mostly likely due to the difficulty in locating historical records related to linguistic mediation during those periods.

The data for this study draws from a wide variety of historical documents collected from the Republic of Korea government’s online database, the Korean History Database, and the National Archives and Records Administration of the United States of America. A large body of newspaper and magazine articles published in both South Korea and the United States were consulted as well. Special attention was also paid to autobiographical material written by former interpreters as well as transfiction written during the period under analysis. This study is likewise indebted to the families of former interpreters, who shared insightful interviews, anecdotes, photographs, and military records relevant to the topic at hand.

The archival material was analyzed and interpreted using Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological notions of “field,” “capital,” “habitus,” and Moira Inghilleri’s



conceptualization of interpreting activity as a “zone of uncertainty.” This theoretical framework was used to analyze subtle shifts in the interpreting habitus that occurred as the Korean conflict proceeded from preparation to engagement to conclusion. The historical records, military documents and reports were used primarily to explore the networks of power within which interpreting took place, while the information gathered from interviews, autobiographical material, newspaper articles, and fictional works were used to portray and analyze how interlocutors, including but not limited to the interpreter, navigated and manipulated the structures of power that emerged during interpreted events, thus lending further nuance to the study.

### **5.1. Summary of Key Findings**

The current study views the U.S./U.S.S.R. occupation of the Korean peninsula, the Korean War, and the Korean Armistice Negotiations as the preparatory, engagement, and conclusionary phases of the Korean Conflict. Chapter two discussed the preparatory phase, or the U.S. occupation of southern Korea. Chapter three delved into the engagement phase, or the Korean War, and chapter four investigated the conclusionary phase, or the Korean Armistice Negotiations. All three chapters followed a similar structural format, as each introduced the socio-political circumstances of the military field in which interpreted events were situated, the relationship between social agents who engaged in interpreted events, and the distinct interpreting habitus that emerged during each phase of the conflict. This structural configuration is in line with Bourdieu’s recommendations for analyzing a field of power and its habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992a, 104-105).

Each of the three chapters began with a summary of the socio-political conditions surrounding the Korean peninsula. Chapter two provided a review of the socio-historical conditions and the decisions made by major players that led to the division of Korea along the 38th parallel and its occupation by the militaries of Soviet Union in the north and the United States in the south. Chapter three began with a brief account of the outbreak of the Korean War and provides a detailed explanation of how and why the United Nations and the People's Republic of China became involved in the conflict, despite the fact that the Republic of Korea was not a members of the United Nations when war broke out on the peninsula. Lastly, chapter four clarified why the two sides decided to bring the fighting to an end at the negotiation table rather than on the battlefield, the process of negotiations, and the contents of the final agreement.

Next, each chapter moved on to examine the intergenerational structures of power and relations within the military field during each period of the conflict. Chapter two focused on three primary players: U.S. military personnel, the Korean public, and Korean civilian interpreters working for the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK). During the period of military occupation, the southern half of Korea was dominated by the USAMGIK, which maintained administrative control over the country from 1945 to 1948. Despite arriving in Korea with the intention of establishing an occupational government, the United States military did not possess any trained Korean linguists within their ranks, as the country's military brass had unfoundedly assumed that Japanese Nisei interpreters could manage the task of mediating communications between the Korean people and U.S. military personnel. This proved to be an erroneous supposition, as fewer Koreans than initially thought could communicate through a

Japanese mediator, and many of those who could refused to do so due to the country's recent experience of colonial oppression under Japanese rule. Consequently, the USAMGIK was forced to employ Korean locals as Korean-English language brokers for the Military Government. Because the study of the English language was strongly discouraged during the last decade of Japanese rule, as Japan had engaged in open warfare with the United States, there was a short supply of Koreans capable of functioning as Korean-English linguistic go-betweens at the time. Despite the high demand and low supply of English speakers, the USAMGIK chose to grossly underpay interpreters, which might have led to some instances of corruption. The Korean public, with whom the USAMGIK had to establish channels of communication, viewed the foreign occupational force with great negativity because while the U.S. military claimed to have arrived in Korea to aid in its establishment a functioning indigenous government, it disbanded and oppressed the People's Republic of Korea, which had been recognized by the Japanese Governor-General and was widely popular and operational when the U.S. troops arrived. The Korean public regarded interpreters working for the USAMGIK as the second generation of foreign colluders, criticized the Military Government as an "interpreter's government" and claimed that USAMGIK interpreters were "malicious" individual who were to blame for many of the problems Korean society faced at the time.

Chapter three reviewed the situation seen during the Korean War. Here, the study focused on three agents: UN Liaison Group officers, U.S. Korean Military Assistance Group officers and Republic of Korea Army officers. During the Korean War, the U.S. military once again opted against recruiting or training its own linguistic staff, deciding rather to rely on the services interpreters and translators provided by the Republic of

Korea Army (ROKA). These military linguists were lieutenants in the South Korean Army but worked under the misleading title—United Nations Liaison Group officers. This was a highly coveted position because serving as an officer/interpreter guaranteed better pay than enlisted soldiers, increased the person's chances of survival, and gifted the individual with the opportunity to study and practice English. Most UN Liaison Group officers were individuals who had received higher education and considered themselves members of the South Korea's social elite. Once selected, interpreters were required to receive three weeks of language and military training, but in reality, due to the urgent need for interpreters in the fields and headquarters, training was often cut short. Complaints regarding the linguistic capabilities of these interpreters can, in part, be accredited to this lack of training, and the absence of agreed upon translation equivalents for military terminology. A large number of UN Liaison Group officers were sent to ROKA units to serve as linguistic mediators between U.S. KMAG officers and ROKA unit commanders. KMAGers were U.S. officers sent to serve as advisors to the commanders of ROKA units. KMAG advisors were lower in rank than their Korean counterparts and did not hold official commanding power over the Korean units to which they were assigned. Nonetheless, the ROKA advisees could not disregard their presence because the UNC, which was headed by a U.S. general, maintained operational control over the ROKA. Thus, the KMAG advisor and the ROKA advisee were constantly contending for authority over the other. As the main channel through which the two could cooperate and compete, interpreting was made the site of this struggle. Because UN Liaison Group officers were members of the ROKA, and ROKA unit commanders were their superiors, these interpreters were compelled to abide by their military superior's

orders. However, many members of the UN Liaison Group questioned the authority of their unit commanders, as they viewed themselves to be socially and intellectually superior to their senior officers, causing tensions to arise between the two groups. Near the end of the war, the 8th ROKA Division reassigned their UN Liaison Group officers to the KMAG staff. Because this move came only one month before the signing of the armistice agreement, it is impossible to definitely confirm how such a move would have affected the social dynamics between agents during interpreted events, though records compiled by U.S. military personnel indicate that both UN Liaison Group officers and KMAGer responded positively to this move. The study infers how the relationship might have developed over time based on the relationship seen between a U.S. military unit and a Korean civilian interpreter. In this case, it was found that once a “fictive kin” relationship was established between the two parties, members of the U.S. military relied on the interpreter not only for linguistic mediation but additional services and functions that lay outside of what is typically thought of as being the domain of the interpreter, including intelligence gathering, analysis, and, when needed, operational control.

The subjects studied in chapter four, which focused on the Korean Armistice Negotiations, were the UNC delegates to the armistice talks, the North Korean/Chinese delegates, the communist interpreting staff, and the UNC interpreters. The Korean Armistice Negotiations were held between the delegations of the UNC and the representatives of the armies of North Korea and China. Consequentially, the languages of all three participants—Korean, English, and Chinese—were recognized as the official languages of the armistice talks. It was agreed that any comments made in one language were to be interpreted into the remaining two languages. Both delegations were

accompanied by interpreters who were tasked with rendering statements made by their representatives into the other official languages. Because the United States military had failed to train Korean linguists, despite its three year occupation of Korea and its participation in an international war fought on Korean soil, it was discovered that there were no linguists among active duty personnel who could reliably work as conference interpreters at the armistice talks. As a result, the UNC had to rely on U.S. military reserves, who had been raised as bilingual but had no formal training as interpreters, to play this vital role. The number of interpreters and translators at the negotiation site was constantly lower than the numbers recommended, forcing interpreters to work long hours under highly challenging conditions. The delegation of the UNC was made up of four officers from the U.S. military and one member of the ROKA while the KPA/PVA delegation was headed by North Korean general who was supported by two North Korean and two Chinese representatives. Both sides saw the negotiation table as an extension of the battleground and treated the other as an enemy.

The following chart provides an overview of the findings of this study.

Table 6: Military Interpreters During the Three Stages of the Korean Conflict

	U.S. Occupation	Korean War	Korean Armistice Negotiations
Year	1945-48	1950-53	1951-53
Military Organization	United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK)	Korean Military Assistance Group (KMAG)	United Nations Command (UNC)
Interpreter Supply/Demand	Low/High	Low/High	Low/High
Interpreter's Affiliation	USAMGIK Employee	Republic of Korea Army	United State Military
Interpreter's Rank	Civil Servant, Grade 7 to 10	First Lieutenant	Enlisted Soldiers and Officers

Level of Uncertainty	High	← →	Low
Interpreting Norms	Interventionist Model	← →	Conduit Model

A common factor found throughout the Korean conflict was the high demand and low supply of capable interpreters. These findings align with the following assessment made by Fishel and Hausrath (1958) with regards to the linguistic challenges the U.S. military faced in Korea during the Korean conflict:

The US Army has faced a serious language deficiency in Korea, not only since the start of the Korean War in June 1950, but since the initial US occupation of the peninsula in September 1945. Even as in 1945 when US forces landed in Korea without trained Korean language personnel in their ranks, 5 years later in the invasion of South Korea in 1950 found the US Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea (KMAG), the Eighth US Army, and other US units in Korea still without adequate supply of competent language specialists. The gravity of the language situation is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the US Army had no competent career-service language personnel available to handle the 2-yr truce negotiations at Kaesong and Panmunjom.

(Fishel and Hausrath 1958, 8)

Although the military field was characterized by a high demand and low supply of interpreters throughout the three phases of the Korean conflict, the reasons for the asymmetry between the two differed by period. During the U.S. occupation, the U.S. military misjudged the efficacy of using its readily available *Nisei* interpreters in Korea. This miscalculation was brought on by racist views of Asian countries and people, and an insensitivity towards Korea's colonial past and its identity as a sovereign nation. Consequently, the USAMGIK was forced to rely on local civilian interpreters, whose numbers were limited because the study of English in Korea had been restricted under the Japanese colonial authorities.

During the Korean War, the shortage of interpreters was in part caused by America's hubris following World War II. U.S. policymakers and military leaders believed that the U.S.'s intervention would bring the war to a swift termination, and thus the military decided against training its own Korean interpreters. Instead, the organization relied on interpreters supplied by the ROKA. This belief demonstrates the fact that the U.S. not only drastically underestimated its enemies but also undervalued the importance of interlingual communication within the field of military combat.

The demand for interpreters at the Korean Armistice Negotiations distinguished itself from the needs of the occupational government or the U.S. military during the war. During the negotiations the U.S. military required the services of Grade A military linguists, or "conference level" interpreters. Because the military had ignored the need to train its own interpreters during both the occupation and the war, it had no active duty personnel with the abilities to perform such a role. Due to the fact that the UNC negotiation team was led by the U.S. amid opposition from the ROK government, however, the U.S. could not rely on Korean interpreters. Because there were no active duty language specialists capable of fulfilling this role, the U.S. was forced to recruit a handful of bilingual personnel that were members of its Reserve Corps. Aside from Colonel Ekvall, these individuals had not been trained and lacked experience as interpreters, yet they were forced to learn on the job during this important event. While the negotiations were ongoing, the U.S. military continued to recruit and send candidates to the negotiation site to work as interpreters, translators, or typists, but most were sent back because they lacked the linguistic skills to carry out these roles.



Also worthy of note are changes to the interpreters' status, rank, and affiliation over the three phases of warfare under examination as changes to their positioning within the military field influenced their ability to dictate the terms under which interpreting took place. During the occupation, the USAMGIK recruited local Koreans to serve as interpreters at the Military Government. Their positions ranged from grade 7 to grade 10 government servants. As lower grade civil servants for an occupational government, who were being paid artificially low wages for their linguistic services, it would seem natural that these interpreters occupy a position of subservience within the institution of power. The findings of this study, however, reveal that contrary to expectations, the civilian status of these interpreters, which allowed them to exist outside the military hierarchy, provided them with a high level of freedom when compared to military interpreters. As a result, these interpreters functioned under less pressure to abide by the expectations of the institution. Furthermore, because the U.S. military had arrived in Korea without having made any preparations for the linguistic challenges it would face, the Military Government lacked the capabilities to recruit and test, train, and monitor the activities of its interpreters. In other words, this foreign institution was thoroughly reliant on the services of interpreters over whom it could exercise no oversight. Rather, the officials in the Military Government came to rely on interpreters to compensate for their lack of cultural, political, and linguistic knowledge, and as a result the USAMGIK was often referred to as the "interpreter's government." Under such conditions, the Military Government was unable to present both the material and linguistic capital needed to assume a position of power dominance during interpreted events, which prevented it from asserting with confidence the validity of its views on how interpreters such function

during interpreted events. Because of the lack of institutional control, there was a high level of uncertainty regarding how interpreting should be conducted, which offered interpreters the opportunity to actively intervene and in some cases dominate interpreted events.

During the Korean War, UN Liaison Group officers, who served as mediators between U.S. KMAG advisors and ROKA unit commanders. Despite the group's name, UN Liaison Group officers were first lieutenants in the ROK military, and as such, these interpreters appeared to be firmly situated within the hierarchical structure of the ROK military. However, because these officers were limited to performing tasks related to translation and interpreting and were not involved in "the management of violence," they were excluded from the ROK military's chain of command. Thus, these interpreters saw themselves as "amateur soldiers" and commissioned officers saw them as "frail intellectuals." Furthermore, UN Liaison Group officers worked primarily with KMAG officers, which added to the ambiguity of their positioning within the military field. They were thus viewed as outsiders and a potential threat to the Korean military institution by ROKA officers. While the Korean and U.S. militaries were allies, there was an ongoing rivalry between KMAGers and ROKA commanders over who possessed more authority because while the ROKA advisor held rank, the KMAGer was a member of the stronger military force. The UN Liaison Group officer was pressured to function as a gatekeeper, limiting the information the KMAGer had access to regarding the workings of the Korean military unit to which they were assigned. However, just as officers in the Korean military did not view these interpreters as regular members of the ROKA, the interpreters themselves saw themselves as positioned outside the military structure. Their position as

inbetweeners meant they could at time reject the premise that military rank equals superiority, as memoirs have revealed that they displayed disdain towards their military leaders. Due to these complications, some U.S. military units preferred to hire civilian interpreters, who were relatively free from pressures that Korean military personnel exerted upon UN Liaison Group officers. In this case, if the interpreter demonstrated their loyalty to the U.S. military, they were, in some cases, accepted as fictive kin and entrusted with a wide range of duties.

The situation seen during the Korean Armistice Talks differs from circumstances seen during the two previous phases of conflict significantly. The interpreters at the negotiation table were U.S. military personnel, the majority of whom were officers, conveying what the members of the UNC delegation, who were likewise U.S. military officers but of higher rank, said to the communist delegation. While in the case of the occupation and the war, the interpreters saw themselves as fully not situated within the hierarchical structure of the military organization for which they worked, there was little room left for such ambiguity at Kaesong and Panmunjom. As Wang and Xu (2016) observed, these interpreters were first and foremost loyal to the militaries that they served. The “role morality” of these interpreters was primarily defined by their status as military personnel rather than their function, which was to serve as linguistic mediators. Furthermore, while the U.S. military had outsourced responsibility over the recruitment, training, and monitoring of interpreters during the occupation and the war because it lacked the capabilities to carry out such functions, during the armistice talks, the U.S. military was forced to locate, recruit, test, train, manage and monitor its interpreting staff. An additional layer added to the constraints placed on interpreters to ensure that they

were accurately communicating what was said by their principals was the presence of “enemy” interpreters seated across the table, watching their every move and surveilling their every word. The example of Sul Jeong Shik stands as a reminder that stepping outside the bounds of verbatim interpreting could be equated to insubordination, which, within the context of war, might very likely lead to severe punishment. Thus, the level of uncertainty regarding the identity of the interpreter, the positionality of the linguistic mediator within interpreted events, and dominant views with regards to what constitutes proper practice was low during the armistice talks, which limited the tools available to the interpreter during interpreted events.

The findings of this study show that the interpreter’s status or rank within a military organization is not the primary source of the authority they might possess during interpreted events. It seems unlikely that military rank does not figure into the empowerment of the interpreter during interpreted events at all, based on the fact that lower ranking interpreters at the Korean Armistice Negotiations believed that their superiors disregarded their linguistic and cultural expertise because of their lower status. Nonetheless, it is readily evident that the civilian interpreters working for the USAMGIK occupied a position of greater authority than UN Liaison Group officers during the war, who, in turn, exercised greater freedom than the interpreters at the Korean Armistice Negotiations.

The results of this study also demonstrate that an institution’s ability to dictate the terms of interpreting are decided by how actively it is involved in,

- 1) the selection of the interpreter, from a pool of competent candidates who possess the requisite linguistic skills and are willing to align themselves with the goals of the institution,

- 2) the training of the interpreter, which helps students acquire relevant linguistic skills and impresses on them normative practices,
- 3) the monitoring of interpreters, to verify that they adhere to prescribed practices. The institution must be able to create incentives for interpreters to comply with the requirements of the institution.

During the U.S. occupation, the USAMGIK was unable to effectively fulfill any of these functions, which resulted in an interpreting habitus that allowed and, more importantly, required that the interpreter take on an active role during interpreted events. During the Korean War, the U.S. military was once again only marginally involved in the selection and training of interpreters and entirely lacked the ability to monitor interpreting practices. Furthermore, UN Liaison Group officers were members of the ROKA, and under no obligation to defer to the wishes of KMAG officers. Instead, these interpreters were liable, if grudgingly so, to manipulate an interlingual exchange to favor the ROKA. The circumstances seen during the armistice negotiations were different, as interpreters were selected from the military, received training at Kaesong and Panmunjom, and were constantly being monitored by other interpreters, both friendly and enemy, to ensure that they complied with interpreting norms which called for the interpreter to function as a conduit of meaning.

## **5.2. Implications and Future Research**

The findings of the present study, summarized above, have reinforced the view that interpreting is a social practice. The data analyzed in this study suggests that the interpreter's position within the network of power that emerged during interpreted events held during the Korean conflict affected their behavior as well as those of other social agents situated in the military field. The interpreting habitus that took form in each period

of the Korean conflict emerged based on the power dynamics between social agents, the interpreter's position within the institution of power, and the ability of the U.S. military to select, train, and monitor interpreters. At different times and locations during the conflict, radically different norms of interpreting, ranging from active intervention to nonintervention took form. All of these findings point back to the notion that interpreting does not occur in a vacuum, and that it is conditioned by the social, political and cultural context of the setting in which the interpreted event takes place.

The author hopes that this study represents a contribution to the field of Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS), mainly in the following two areas. One is the addition of new knowledge and information to the collective knowledge of this rapidly growing discipline. This study drew from a wide variety of materials, including previously classified military and governmental documents, provides a wealth of information on various aspects of interpreting during both the U.S. military occupation of southern Korea, the Korean War, and the Korean Armistice Negotiations, which had previously been largely ignored.

The other contribution of the present study may be the broadening of perspectives in TIS. Studies conducted within the discipline since the so-called "cultural turn" have focused much attention on the social factors in which interpreting takes place as well as the power dynamics seen between social agents. This study used Bourdieu's theoretical framework to examine the sociological nature of interpreting during the Korean conflict. It directly addressed social and political issues to describe the field in which interpreting took place, examined the social dynamics that arose within the military field between social agents engaged in interpreting events, and analyzed the

interpreting habitus that arose in zones of uncertainty. It is the author's hope that this research is seen contributing to the deepening and widening of sociological approaches to Translation and Interpreting Studies.

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