The positionality of interpreters in peacekeeping operations: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

PANACCIONE, Miriam

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the positionality of interpreters in peacekeeping operations carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992. The concept of positionality is analyzed through the contextualization of the figure of the interpreter in time and space, and through the identification of recurrent elements which traditionally shape it. In Interpreting Studies, the role of languages in the history of conflicts has been neglected for a long time. Only recently has it drawn the attention of an increasing number of scholars. In this context, the essential role played by interpreters in conflict zones, including peacekeeping operations, is explored. The thesis also investigates the impact of positionality on interpreters’ neutrality and on users’ trust towards them. A classification of these elements is suggested in order to identify a link between the positionality and ethical issues in interpretation, with a focus on neutrality and trust.

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The positionality of interpreters in peacekeeping operations:
The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the positionality of interpreters in peacekeeping operations carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992. The concept of positionality is analyzed through the contextualization of the figure of the interpreter in time and space, and through the identification of recurrent elements which traditionally shape it. In Interpreting Studies, the role of languages in the history of conflicts has been neglected for a long time. Only recently has it drawn the attention of an increasing number of scholars. In this context, the essential role played by interpreters in conflict zones, including peacekeeping operations, is explored. The thesis also investigates the impact of positionality on interpreters’ neutrality and on users’ trust towards them. A classification of these elements is suggested in order to identify a link between the positionality and ethical issues in interpretation, with a focus on neutrality and trust.

Keywords: peacekeeping operations, Bosnia and Herzegovina, interpreters, positionality, neutrality, trust
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BiH</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
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<td>EUFOR</td>
<td>European Union Force Operation BiH ALTHEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDZ</td>
<td>Croatian Democratic Union (<em>Hrvatska demokratska zajednica</em>)</td>
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<td>ICTFY</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia</td>
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<td>IFOR</td>
<td>NATO Implementation Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>JNA</td>
<td>Yugoslav People’s Army (<em>Jugoslovenska narodna armija</em>)</td>
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<td>LOT</td>
<td>Liaison and Observatory Teams</td>
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<td>LSB</td>
<td>Linguistic Services Branch</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPTAG</td>
<td>Operational Training Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKO</td>
<td>Peacekeeping operation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Republika Srpska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDA</td>
<td>Party of Democratic Action (<em>Stranka demokratske akcije</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>Serb Democratic Party (<em>Srpska Demokratska Stranka</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFOR</td>
<td>NATO Stabilization Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHAPE</td>
<td>Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNPROFOR</td>
<td>United Nations Protection Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRS</td>
<td>Army of Republika Srpska (<em>Vojska Republike Srpske</em>)</td>
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1. Introduction

This master thesis will focus on the study of interpreters' positionality in peacekeeping operations (PKOs) carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Moreover, it will explore the impact of the interpreter's positionality on neutrality and trust. I have chosen this topic for both personal and academic interest in the subject matter. The Yugoslav Wars, and in particular the Bosnian War, have always been in the media spotlight for their controversial development and outcome. International forces have been criticized by the Western media during and after the conflict for their inappropriate timing and unproportionate intervention in the war, which failed to avert one of the worst crimes in Europe after WWII, the Srebrenica massacre. As an aspiring interpreter, I am especially interested in the role of interpreters in this context as well as the possible impact of their positionality on the ethics of the profession. Furthermore, I was interested in undertaking research on a topic which has been neglected previously but is increasingly attracting more scholars. In the field of interpreting in conflict zones, the literature shows a gap especially in the study of the interpreters’ role in PKOs.

This research study consists of an analytical study of existing literature in order to answer the following research questions:

What are the elements that affected interpreters’ positionality in PKOs in BiH? Did interpreters’ positionality affect trust towards interpreters? Did positionality also have an effect on their neutrality?

This research has three objectives. Firstly, to delineate the context where interpreters worked during PKOs in Bosnia, through the identification of all relevant features concerning the profession. Secondly, to infer how these variables affect the interpreter’s positionality. Thirdly, to understand what is the possible impact of positionality on the interpreter’s trust and neutrality.

Structure

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 describes the historical framework of the Bosnian War with a focus on the context of the Yugoslav Wars and their causes. Moreover, I will provide an account of the deployment of peacekeeping forces and the intervention of the international community. A detailed insight into the work of all different PKOs will be provided, including the purpose of their missions, the tasks they
accomplished, the duration of their operations and the actors and the organizations who stepped in. Chapter 3 introduces the role of languages in the Bosnian context highlighting the need for linguists (i.e. interpreters, translators, language mediators) in the development of PKOs and the resulting creation of linguistic units within the military headquarters. Furthermore, it provides the contextualization of the role of interpreters, describing practical elements concerning their profession. Tasks, safety, welfare conditions and interpreters' profiles for each single peacekeeping mission will be taken into account. In Chapter 4, the analysis of these elements is carried out in order to define the positionality of interpreters. Finally, the elements which shape the interpreter's positionality are analyzed to explore their possible impact on trust and neutrality. Chapter 5 sets out the conclusions suggesting a possible link between interpreters' positionality and their approach to ethical issues.
2. Historical Context

2.1 Tito’s Yugoslavia

Many accounts of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s (Baker, 2015; Burg & Shoup, 1999; Feron, 1993; Magaš & Žanić, 2001; Meier, 1999) provide an overview of the history of the Balkans, focusing mainly on the past for all the different ethnic communities. Their objective is twofold: firstly, to understand the emergence of nationalistic movements within former Yugoslavia (Baker, 2015) and secondly to identify the roots of ethnic clashes and rivalry from which the wars of the 1990s originated.

Yugoslavia during the period 1941-1945 had three parties who claimed control over its territory: the “Independent State of Croatia”, which aimed to create a separate State with an entirely Croatian population; the “Četniks” who fought for a Serbian-centered Yugoslavia; and the army of the Yugoslav Communist Party (Bennett, 1995). In 1943, Josip Broz “Tito”, a fervent Serb nationalist, became Prime Minister of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, then renamed “Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia” in 1946 (Hinerfeld, 2013). As indicated by its name, the newly proclaimed State was a Republic and was federalized. This represented an innovation when compared to pre-1941 Yugoslavia. Then, it consisted of six Republics and two autonomous provinces adopting Communist state structures (Baker, 2015) together with a “polycentric” government, which unified people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Hinerfeld, ibid.). Under Tito’s rule, the Yugoslav people developed an identity based on the concept of a “multinational working class” (Baker, ibid., p. 21), which combined the idea of the Socialist working class and the creation of a national identity based on ideology rather than ethnicity or religion.

On May 4 1980, Josip Broz “Tito” died. During his rule, Yugoslavia’s stability had totally depended on its leader’s reputation and charisma on the national and international level. Therefore, his death left a vacuum of authority in the central power structure which could not be replaced (Bokovoy, Irvine & Lilly, 1997). The lack of a charismatic and unifying political authority was worsened by a serious economic crisis due to a trade deficit, a deficit in the balance of payments together with a fast-growing foreign debt (Meier, 1999). This situation led to the rise of nationalistic movements for independence within Yugoslavia and the collapse of its federal structure over the course of the 1980s.
Gaping economic disparities within Yugoslavia (Baker, 2015) triggered riots in Kosovo held by ethnic Albanians, mainly students, who demonstrated for Kosovo independence from the Yugoslav rule (Baker, ibid.; Hinerfeld, 2013). In addition to that, Slobodan Milošević, elected President of Serbia in 1987, fueled nationalistic tendencies among Serbian communities scattered in the Yugoslav Republics (Hinerfeld, ibid.). Meier (1999, p. 153) argues that Serbian rebellions in Croatia were "incited and even organized by Milošević". At the same time, cultural and intellectual movements in Slovenia, and later in Croatia, encouraged the spread of pro-democratization ideas (Mastnak, 1993 in Baker, ibid.) leading to the election of two anti-Milošević leaders in Slovenia and Croatia during the elections of April-May 1990. The movement of Slovenia and Croatia towards independence from Federal Yugoslavia escalated into conflict in 1991. These events had great influence on neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina after the national elections held in November-December 1990 (Baker, ibid.).

2.2 The Bosnian War (1992-1995)

At the elections in November-December 1990, three parties were elected to form the Bosnian coalition government: the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), whose Bosniak leader Izetbegović was the President of Bosnia; the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) headed by Karadžić, and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) led by Kljuić (Baker, 2015). They represented the three main ethnic and cultural communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bosnian Croats (Catholics), Bosnian Serbs (Orthodox) and the Bosnian Muslims (also referred as Bosniaks) (Baker, 2010a). The three parties were nationalist and their campaigns often fueled antagonistic relations between communities and secessionist ideas, making reference to the independentist movements outside Bosnia (Baker, 2015). At the same time, the escalation of the Croatian conflict increased the rivalry between the communities. SDS and HDZ especially expressed their desire to detach Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat territories from the Sarajevo government. In September 1991, the SDS declared four "Serb Autonomous Regions", relying on the military support of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). They left the Bosnian Parliament to proclaim a few months later the new-born sovereign "Republika Srpska" (RS). Fighting commenced to consolidate the self-proclaimed RS, with the JNA persecuting and expelling Bosniaks and Croats from RS territories (Baker, 2015). During April 1992, the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) started firing on Sarajevo and, after the declaration of
independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its international recognition by the United States and the European Community, VRS, JNA and other paramilitary units also attacked eastern towns with large Bosniak populations, operating what was later defined as “ethnic cleansing” (Lampe, 1999). Within six weeks, Bosnian Serb forces put two-thirds of BiH territory under Serb control, whose military units were placed under the command of General Ratko Mladić.

2.3 UNPROFOR (1992-1995)

Despite the repeated requests for foreign military intervention by the BiH government (Feron, 1993), the international community was very reluctant to intervene in the Bosnian War (Harsch, 2015).

In February 1992, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 743 (Ruiz & Persaud, 2018) to establish a peacekeeping mission to Bosnia, known as United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). In the view of the UNSC, the peacekeeping mission had three main objectives: relieve human sufferings among the local population, localize the conflict and prevent its spread across and beyond former Yugoslavia’s borders, and to facilitate negotiations among warring parties through the settling of their “political grievances” (Berdal, 2008, p. 194). Thus, it is possible to assert that international organizations were engaged in both political and humanitarian efforts (Burg & Shoup, 1999). The mission was gradually expanded from September 1992 when, under resolution 776, the UNSC mandated UNPROFOR to assist the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in delivering humanitarian aid around Bosnia (Baker, 2015). UNPROFOR set up its headquarters in Sarajevo, their first mission was to assume control of Sarajevo airport to receive relief goods as well as to provide protection for humanitarian convoys throughout former Yugoslavia (Berdal, 2008). The expansion of the UNPROFOR mandate also included the creation of UN-designated “safe-areas”. These “safe-areas” were zones put under the protection of UNPROFOR by Security Council resolutions 819 and 824 between April and May 1993 (Feron, 1993). They included the enclave of Srebrenica together with Sarajevo, Žepa, Goražde, Tuzla and Bihać (Baker, 2015).

1 See section “From peacekeeping to peacebuilding” for the features of these two kinds of missions.
Britain, France and the Netherlands were the main UNPROFOR contributors of troops. With the expansion of its mandate, the number of troops grew from the initial 10,000 troops to more than 38,000 by March 1995 (Harsch, 2015). Along with the sending of more troops, the objectives of UNPROFOR also increased, including the creation and the protection of six UN safe areas and the monitoring of no-fly zones. It is worth noting that despite the extension of its mandate, UNPROFOR kept its peacekeeping features, in that it remained lightly equipped, widely dispersed, vulnerable in logistics support and, above all, troop-contributing countries were reluctant to let their contingents be involved in fighting (Berdal, 2008).

2.3.1 Cooperation with NATO

The role of NATO in Bosnia was very limited in the first stage of the war. NATO maritime and air forces were first deployed to monitor the arms embargo imposed on Bosnia by UN resolution 757 on May 30 1992 (Feron, 1993; Harsch, 2015). In July 1992, NATO launched a maritime operation in the Adriatic Sea. Its objective was to monitor the UN embargo against all states of former Yugoslavia and the economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro (Harsch, 2015). However, NATO significantly increased its involvement in the Bosnian conflict in October 1992, with two UNSC-authorized air operations. The first operation, called Operation Sky Monitor, consisted of the passive monitoring of no-fly zones. It was revealed to be ineffective as the flight ban was repeatedly violated. The situation convinced the UNSC to give NATO a more active role under Operation Deny Flight in March-April 1993. Two particular circumstances triggered a more active involvement of NATO in the Bosnian conflict: firstly, the repeated attacks on UN safe areas (five Muslim enclaves plus the area of Sarajevo) and secondly, the increased attacks against UN peacekeepers, which compromised the security and survival of the organization. The repeated violations of UN safe-areas by the Bosnian Serb Army culminated into the fall of Srebrenica on July 11 1995, and the execution of approximately 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys by Mladić’s forces (Harsch, ibid.).

UNPROFOR had failed in defending Srebrenica and averting the worst war crime in Europe since WWII. Then, a Bosnian Serb mortar attack on a marketplace in Sarajevo followed on August 28 1995. In response to these events, NATO launched Operation Deliberate Force, after the evacuation of all UN forces from the Bosnian Serbs territories
(Harsch, 2015). It consisted of an eleven-day air campaign against Bosnian Serb targets from September 5 to 14 (NATO Regional Headquarters Allied Forces Southern Europe, 2002 in Harsch 2015). There was also a parallel Croatian-Muslim offensive in central and western Bosnia, supported by US forces. Finally, Operation Deliberate Force managed to bring the disputing parties to the negotiating table (Berdal, 2008).

2.4 Dayton Peace Agreement (December 1995)

The Dayton Peace Agreement put an end to the Bosnian War (Baker, 2015). It was negotiated in November 1995 at Wright Patterson US Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, and signed in Paris on December 14 of the same year (Jones & Askew, 2014). It involved the disputing parties, namely Slobodan Milošević, President of the Republic of Serbia, representing the community of Bosnian Serbs; the President of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, and the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović, together with the Bosniak Foreign Minister Muhamed "Mo" Sacirbey. The Peace Conference was mediated by Richard Holbrooke, from the US, and co-chaired by the EU Special Representative Carl Bildt and the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Igor Ivanov (Clinton, 2009).

The agreement included three main provisions: 1) consolidating the cease-fire in Bosnia and Herzegovina; 2) establishing provisions to protect human rights such as the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes, and the right of free movement within the Republic (Listhaug & Ramet, 2013); and 3) redefining “the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina” as a State composed of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (“the Bosnian [Muslim-Croat] -Federation”) and the Republika Srpska (“the [Bosnian] Serb Republic”) (Burg & Shoup, 1999).

In order to implement the agreement, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1031 and authorized NATO to deploy its forces (Burg & Shoup, 1999). The NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) was created on 20 December 1995 with a one-year mandate (Ruiz & Persaud, 2018) and it deployed a 60,000-member international force (Lampe, 1999). The implementation of the second provision of the agreement, i.e. the supervision of civilian aspects, was assigned to organizations such as the UNHCR, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) among others (Jones & Askew, 2014).
2.5 IFOR (December 1995 - December 1996)

The change from UNPROFOR to the IFOR mission marked the shift from a peacekeeping to a peacebuilding mandate. IFOR’s initial mandate consisted of ensuring an enduring cease-fire and the withdrawal and separation of all local military forces. They were also required to relocate heavy weapons and military forces to cantonment areas, demobilize military forces, and control Bosnian airspace (Burg & Shoup, 1999). By early 1996, their support was also demanded in the monitoring of territorial and prisoner exchanges, implementing the Dayton Agreement’s arms reduction provisions (Baker, 2015), and monitoring the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (Jones & Askew, 2014).

IFOR forces were drawn from 31 different nations and were initially separated into three Multinational Divisions (MNDs). Each division was headed by one nation: Britain in MND-South West, France in MND-South East and the United States in MND-North West (Jones & Askew, 2014). Furthermore, the Dayton Peace Agreement established a Joint Military Commission through which the integration of the three wartime armies into one Bosnian Force was accomplished (Baker, 2012).

IFOR initial activities were similar to UNPROFOR’s tasks as they performed military inspections, liaison visits, mine clearance, civilian-military relations and patrols (Baker, 2012). The contact between the local parties and the international communities was assured by IFOR HQ liaison offices located in Banja Luka and Pale for the Bosnian Serb side and in Zagreb to maintain contacts with the Croatian authorities (Jones & Askew, 2014).

2.6 SFOR (December 1996 – December 2004)

In December 1996, despite the consolidation of the cease-fire, the situation was still unstable. NATO extended its mission for an additional 18 months and renamed it as “Stabilization Force” (SFOR). International forces were reduced to about 31,000 troops (Burg & Shoup, 1999) sent by 27 NATO nations and 11 non-NATO states. The SFOR mandate consisted of assuring a safe and secure environment as well as supporting civil and political reconstruction (Jones & Askew, 2014). Their forces numbered only 7,000
troops by the end of 2004, the year in which their mission was declared complete (Listhaug & Ramet, 2013).

2.7 EUFOR (December 2004)

By the end of 2004, SFOR was replaced by the smaller European Union Force Operation ALTHEA, also known as EUFOR Althea (Listhaug & Ramet, 2013). Its deployment was announced in NATO’s Istanbul Summit in June 2004 and the operation was launched on December 2 2004. (Başar, Siğri & Caforio, 2014). It initially numbered 7,000 troops which were gradually reduced until 2012, when they were just 600 (Jones & Askew, 2014). EUFOR consisted of three main components: 1) three Multi National Task Forces 2) the Integrated Police Unit and, 3) 44 Liaison and Observation Teams (Juhász, 2013).

EUFOR expanded SFOR’s mandate in law enforcement, trying to fill the gap in public security that had been ignored immediately after Dayton. Traditional SFOR activities such as demining, weapons collection and searches and patrolling were conducted in parallel with counter-crime efforts. The latter included the training of and support to BiH police forces as well as on-the-ground operations addressing corruption, organized crime, and deficiencies in the rule of law. Moreover, EUFOR provided material and training to local police forces in the use of technological devices (GPS and positioning grids) and carried out intelligence activities gathering information in LOTs (Liaison and Observatory Teams) (Friesendorf & Penksa, 2008).

2.8 From peacekeeping to peacebuilding

Many scholars agree in defining operations in Bosnia as Peacekeeping Operations (Berdal, 2008, Harsch, 2015, Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). In fact, UNPROFOR’s action was premised on core traditional peacekeeping principles: consent of the conflicting parties to the UN presence in the country, UN impartiality in the conflict, and the use of UN forces only in self-defense (UN Security Council, 1995 in Harsch, 2015).

According to the document of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Principles and Guidelines (2008, pp.17-18): “Peacekeeping is a technique designed to preserve the peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted, and to assist in implementing
agreements achieved by the peacemakers”. However, UNPROFOR forces deployed in Bosnia remarked since the beginning that “In Bosnia and Herzegovina there was no peace to keep” (Magaš & Žanić, 2001, p.167) and that fighting had not been halted because cease-fires were repeatedly broken and reestablished (Greig & Diehl, 2005). The fact that UNPROFOR had been given an exclusively humanitarian mandate in a context where warring parties were active, put its mandate in a state of great contradiction (Berdal, 2008). This contradiction led to an evolution of the status of PKOs in Bosnia, demonstrated by the gradual expansion of UNPROFOR mandate by the UN Security Council. It is worth noting that although its mandate was expanded, UNPROFOR troops remained lightly equipped and extremely vulnerable in logistics support (Berdal, ibid.).

About one year after the deployment of PKOs in Bosnia, Goulding (1993) specified that peacekeeping could itself be categorized under different types according to the specific context. He classified the case of Bosnia under type four and type six, namely introducing the concept of “cease-fire enforcement”, occurring when “peacekeeping's evolution is taking it across the threshold into peace-enforcement” (p.459).

There is another argument to support the claim that peacekeeping evolved over the course of the Bosnian War. UNSC Resolution 743, the first to establish the deployment of peacekeeping forces, was not adopted under Chapter VII (United Nations Department of Public Information, 1996) while Resolution 776, establishing the first expansion of UNPROFOR’s mandate did (Berdal, 2008; Harsch, 2015). As Boothby (n.d.) points out, peacekeeping comes under Chapter VI, while peace enforcement under Chapter VII and the choice to invoke the second procedural device is irreversible and it cannot be revoked during the conflict. Goulding (1993) also acknowledges the shift from Chapter VI to Chapter VII but he encompasses the use of force only for the protection of UN civil and military personnel. The UN intervention in Bosnia was described as hesitant and ineffective because the troops found themselves in a hostile environment where the actual fighting was still in progress, but they were not equipped for a warfare context and they were not entrusted for the use of force (Harsch, 2015). In the end, UNPROFOR had to carry out activities and tasks which were not consistent with its mandate. This put the military and civilian personnel in very risky situations. The military were not prepared to respond to the attacks.

The last shift in the status of PKOs in Bosnia was registered in the final stage of the conflict, when the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. Baker (2015) considers the
agreement as the first peacebuilding initiative heavily involving the UN and NATO in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this case, there is no doubt that operations deployed after December 1995 can be labelled “peacebuilding operations”, firstly because they followed a peace agreement between disputing parties (Greig & Diehl, 2005) and secondly because they met the two peacebuilding conditions stated in the UN PKOs Document (2008) – i.e. “strengthening national capacities and laying foundation for sustainable peace and development”- also known as “reconciliation” and “reconstruction” (Eastmond, 2010).

2.9 Conclusions

As described in this chapter, the operations deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be classified as ‘traditional peacekeeping operations’, which normally occur after a cease-fire and before a peace agreement (Greig & Diehl, 2005). As a matter of fact, the initial mandate of UNPROFOR, initially consisting of humanitarian assistance, was later expanded to mandate, through the support of NATO, the institution of safe areas and no-fly zones and their protection (Diehl, Druckman & Wall, 1998).

After the Dayton Agreement, the shift from the status of peacekeeping to peacebuilding brought about a further evolution in the practical tasks accomplished by international forces. Furthermore, this shift raised major issues about safety and security of military and civilian stakeholders involved in PKOs.
3. Interpreters in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia

3.1 The role of interpreters

Conflicts have always been endemic in human history and the intervention of a language intermediary has always been essential whenever hostilities involved people or communities speaking different languages (Ruiz & Persaud, 2016). Although the presence of the interpreters was crucial to assure communication between parties, Ruiz and Persaud (ibid.) point out that they were rarely mentioned in historical records and their role was usually neglected. This legacy is partially reflected in the contemporary period for interpreters working in conflict zones. In fact, their specific role is not fully recognized, and their profession lacks formal regulation and training (Ruiz & Persaud, 2018).

Footitt (2012) argues that linguists and translation scholars have recently shown increasing interest for the role of language intermediaries in conflict zones. In particular, their research aims to highlight the importance of the role of interpreters in conflict zones in order to give them their due recognition. Many authors (Baker C., 2010a, 2012; Baker M., 2006; Dragović-Drouet, 2007, Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018) have highlighted the importance of language issues in military operations, claiming the active role of interpreters in determining the unfolding of the conflict (Baigorri, 2011; Baker M., 2006). As Moser-Mercer (2015, p. 302) argues, interpreters can be described as “co-constructor(s) of meaning”, who give shape to the development of the conflict. This is even more true in PKOs, where communication is more important than shooting (Bos & Soeters, 2006), and interaction is a means to exercise power (Baker, 2012).

PKOs, as explained in Chapter 2, involve the deployment of foreign military forces in territories where English or French are not spoken by most part of the population (Bos & Soeters, ibid.). Therefore, language intermediaries are required to assure a constant flow of information between military forces and the locals living in the region. In addition, the mandate of peacekeeping missions includes confidence-building, collective security enhancement and reconstruction. Therefore, most interactions between the military and the locals are acts of mediation between different positions and also different cultures. In this context, interpreters play the role of mediators because they deal with rivalries and confrontational situations between parties; and additionally, they are cultural
mediators because the parties have different cultural background. It means that languages intermediaries require “soft skills” and cross-cultural competence in mediation to fill cultural gaps and moderate heated debates in order to smooth mutual comprehension (Baker, 2010a; Bos & Soeters, 2006; Todorova 2016). For example, some interpreters have declared that they often had to soften harsh words in meetings between international forces and local communities in order to enable communication and allow the dialogue to continue (Footitt & Kelly, 2012). Moreover, interpreters were often expected to act as facilitators or unofficial cultural and political advisors for military personnel on local issues, even concerning the military division (Baker, 2010a; Bos & Soeters, 2006). This was due to the rotation of members of the military, which happened typically every six months, leaving linguists as the only personnel who could provide continuity despite rotations and change of missions (Bos & Soeters, ibid.; Jones & Askew, 2014).

Additionally, PKOs are “cosmopolitan” by definition (Blocq, 2010) because their deployment is the result of the joint effort of different countries belonging to international organizations. It implies that interpreters have to deal with stakeholders of different nationalities, sometimes having great cultural distance between them (Baker, 2012).² In the case of Bosnia, Bos and Soeters (2006) report that local interpreters considered Dutch oral expression too direct and impolite for local standards. Consequently, interpreters had to rephrase their statements and questions when addressing locals. This example highlights the importance of the interpreter’s intervention when the military’s lack of knowledge in intercultural communication could jeopardize confidence-building.

In terms of a multicultural environment, the context of Bosnia is even more complex when considering the fact that the local community was multiethnic and multilingual, composed of three main communities. Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages had the status of the official local languages (Jones & Askew, 2014) and even if they were mutually intelligible, supervisors had to choose interpreters carefully according to their ethnic background for security reasons. For example, the linguistic supervisor for British troops, Louise Robbins, interviewed by Baker (2010a), points out that Bosniak interpreters could not be sent with military troops to negotiate with the Serb army, otherwise they would be shot.

² It particularly concerned locally hired interpreters who were employed by battalions of different nationalities.
One can argue that interpreters’ roles as cultural and diplomatic mediators cannot be overlooked in the context of peacekeeping because they participate actively and they influence the outcome of the mission.

3.2 Positionality

Positionality is traditionally regarded as a person’s perspective which is the result of a combination of his/her race, class, gender and, nationality (Haraway, 1991; Mullings, 1999; Rose, 1997), together with other less visible identifiers such as political orientation, position in power hierarchies and status as an insider or outsider (Ficklin & Jones, 2009). All the above-mentioned authors claim that these elements shape the way people perceive reality and therefore form the basis of their knowledge. According to Haraway (ibid.) and Rose (ibid.), when knowledge is positioned (i.e. influenced by these elements), it cannot be considered neither universal nor neutral.

Ruiz and Persaud (2018) argue that positionality has a role in the way interpreters perceive and transmit reality. Therefore, interpreters cannot be considered neutral because their background influences the interpreting process. They have an active role in the construction of meaning (Moser-Mercer, 2015) and in the positioning within relations of power (Ficklin & Jones, 2009). It is therefore necessary to take into account their personal profile, power relations and the status as insider/outsider of the interpreters in order to understand their positioning in the communication process. In the case of interpreters in conflict zones, Ruiz and Persaud (2018) have also identified other elements that shape the interpreter’s positionality: personal background, working conditions, motivation, access to documents, users’ concerns and training received. Interpreters’ status as insiders or outsiders is considered in relation to their employers. In PKOs in Bosnia, it was the military who hired interpreters. Therefore, locally recruited interpreters were considered outsiders to the military forces and insiders to the local communities. In Bosnia, interpreters belonged to three different ethnic groups and their positionality changed in relation to the actors who took part to the communicative exchange. On the other hand, military linguists were insiders for their employers and outsiders for the local communities. Their status had an impact on how they were perceived by the stakeholders involved.
Being an insider to the local community has advantages such as easy access, the ability to speak in a more effective and purposeful way, the capacity to read non-verbal cues and a full understanding of the local language and customs (Merriam et al., 2001). On the other hand, insiders are often accused of being biased and they are often distrusted by the military. By contrast, outsiders to local communities are generally regarded as more objective observers and they are obviously trusted by the military but their understanding of the culture is often limited to language rather than customs (Mullings, 1999).

It is worth noting that these definitions assume the immutability of the insider/outsider status. However, positionality changes in time and through space (Merriam et al., ibid.; Mullings, ibid.). For example, Askew (Askew and Carr, 2011) points out that local interpreters who worked for SFOR were considered representative of the international organization where they worked despite their local origin.

### 3.3 Categories of interpreters

The categorization of conflict zones interpreters has been investigated by few scholars, namely Allen (2012) and Ruiz and Barea (2017). The former identifies three categories of interpreters in conflict zones – military linguists, contract interpreters and humanitarian interpreters - while the latter list military linguists, locally recruited interpreters, UN language assistants and staff, and freelance conference interpreters working for international organizations.

According to Cronin (2002), when foreign military forces are deployed in a territory where the local language(s) is not intelligible to them, they have the choice between training their own personnel or relying on locally recruited interpreters. In the case of PKOs deployed in Bosnia, authors have usually regarded military linguists and locally hired interpreters as the two main categories (Baker 2010a, 2012; Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). However, in Bosnia locally recruited interpreters outnumbered by far military linguists as it usually happens in conflict zones (Dragović-Drouet, 2007; Footitt, 2012, Kelly, 2011). In fact, hiring interpreters locally has three main advantages: local interpreters are “on the ground”, therefore their cultural background allows them to understand nuances in the local language, they are easily available, and cheaper to hire (Jones & Askew, 2014; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). By contrast, training the
military personnel for linguistic purposes is generally expensive and time-consuming (Kelly, 2011).

### 3.3.1 Military linguists

Military personnel deal with classified information and are entrusted with sensitive intelligence tasks (Baker, 2012). In fact, these kinds of tasks usually require security clearance which can only be provided by the country of the individual’s nationality. At that time, locally recruited interpreters did not hold security clearances (Jones & Askew, 2014). During the UNPROFOR mission, military linguists dealing with sensitive information were mainly heritage-speaking members of the military. Nevertheless, they were too few in number to cover the demand for linguists (Ruiz & Persaud, 2018), creating the need for more security-cleared interpreters (Baker, 2010a). Military personnel were thus given intensive language courses of three to five months and they were then deployed as colloquial speakers/interpreters (Baker, 2010a; Footitt & Kelly, 2012). This happened during the UNPROFOR mission as well as during NATO-led missions, as prescribed by the “NATO Ad Hoc Group on Cooperation in Peacekeeping” (Baker, 2010a). The course design and material, and therefore also the competence it created, improved gradually and became more and more specialized, targeting specific military issues (Footitt & Kelly, 2012). It is worth noting that military linguists were usually trained and employed for intelligence work while other tasks in language support, were appointed to local interpreters (Baker, 2010a). No evidence was found about linguistic training for EUFOR troops. One reason could be that since 2004 peacekeeping forces in BiH have been gradually downsized and demand for linguists has therefore decreased. Heritage speakers from the military and local interpreters who had served international forces for years may have been enough in number to cover the need for security-cleared interpreters.

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3 A heritage language is a minority language learnt by its speakers at home as children. It is never fully developed because its speakers grow up with a dominant language in which they become more competent (Elabbas, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013).
3.3.1.1 The US exception

During the NATO missions (IFOR and the beginning of SFOR), linguists were directly hired by each military division, therefore hiring procedures were very diverse (Baker, 2010a). The US Army was the exception in this context because it relied on a private contractor (Jones & Askew, 2014).

The US Army was deployed in Bosnia in December 1995, at the beginning of the IFOR mission (Baker, 2010). Like other military forces, they used military interpreters to deal with sensitive intelligence information. For this purpose, military interpreters were introduced to the learning of the local language(s) with so-called “Turbo Serbo” courses (Quinn-Judge, 1995 in Kelly, 2011), which were mainly given to military personnel with previous knowledge of Russian, and who therefore progressed more rapidly (Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Kelly, 2011).

For all kinds of tasks other than intelligence, civilian interpreters were recruited by TRW Incorporated (later Northrop Grumman) and divided into three categories according to their security clearance level (Baker, 2010a): Category I (locals with no security clearance), Category II (secret clearance), and Category III (top secret clearance). Linguists belonging to categories II and III were recruited in the United States and were usually bilinguals coming from diaspora communities. It is worth noting that all interpreters were usually given a neutral uniform that had no insignia (Jones & Askew, 2014) but in this case Category II and Category III interpreters wore a US flag on their uniform (Rovegno, Hajdari & Perezic, 2003). This difference, and the fact that interpreters could not share the same accommodation according to their security clearance status, may affect positionality and have an impact on trust and neutrality.

3.3.2 Locally recruited interpreters

The majority of locally recruited interpreters were young women (Baker 2010a; Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018) although the number of male interpreters gradually increased from the UNPROFOR mission when compared to IFOR, where it reached a 60/40 female/male ratio (Footitt & Kelly, 2012) and to EUFOR (Bos & Soetens, 2006; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, fewer men were available because they were liable to be conscripted (Baker, 2010a) and secondly, many of them were language teachers, a mainly feminine profession at
that time in former Yugoslavia (Dragović-Drouet, 2007; Footitt & Kelly, 2012). Other interpreters were students from very different backgrounds such as foreign languages, law, engineering and medicine (Baker, 2012; Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014). The interpreters’ educational background evolved over the years: some EUFOR interpreters had obtained a university qualification (Ruiz & Persaud, 2018) whilst previous interpreters had in most cases quit university or high school because of the outbreak of war (Baker, 2012). There were very few professional interpreters or translators (Dragović-Drouet, 2007). Therefore, most of them had no previous experience or training in the interpreting field (Baker 2010a, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014; Moser-Mercer, 2015; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). Furthermore, in the early stage of PKOs no kind of training was provided to inexperienced interpreters (Baker, 2010a, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018), with interpretation being a matter of improvisation at the beginning (Baker, 2012), and performed by “accidental linguists” (Baigorri, 2011). Most of them had no choice but to acquire their interpreting skills through experience (Moser-Mercer, 2015), mainly due to the support of their supervisors, military linguists and more experienced colleagues (Baker, 2012). Most local interpreters had applied for the position of linguists for economic reasons because they had to support their families through difficult times (Baker, 2010a; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). Employees of international forces had a higher income compared to the average Bosnian in the 1990s and they were paid in hard currency, usually Deutschmarks (Baker 2010a, 2012). More purchase power was a valued privilege immediately after the war but receiving money from foreign institutions may have had repercussions on the interpreters’ position as intermediaries between international forces and local communities.

3.4 Working conditions

As has already been argued in Chapter 2, peacekeeping operations can be conducted both before the cease-fire is established and fighting is still underway, and after the peace agreement, which was the case in the Bosnian War. Moser-Mercer (2015) points out that, during peacekeeping operations, the main tactical response consists in crisis management and containment before the cease-fire and in disarmament, confidence-building, and security-enhancing measures after it. It means that progress in the conflict stage deeply affects the kinds of tasks carried out by peacekeeping forces and therefore
by their interpreters. Moreover, Bosnia witnessed a further shift in the peace process after the Dayton Agreement, which involved new and different tasks for the stakeholders.

When UNPROFOR arrived in Bosnia, its main mandate was to secure the passage of aid convoys. Therefore, the military and the interpreters conducted intensive liaison with warring factions to negotiate cease-fires and let the convoys through (Baker, 2010a). With the start of the IFOR mission, many interpreters from UNPROFOR continued working with IFOR and many others were hired following the tremendous increase of deployed troops (Jones & Askew, 2014). At this stage, tasks were very similar to those carried out by UNPROFOR: interpreters facilitated communication during military inspections, patrols, liaison and civil-affairs visits. Furthermore, they provided translation to improve interfaith dialogue and spread peacebuilding publicity material (Baker, 2012).

Another task that interpreters had to accomplish was providing linguistic training to the military personnel during pre-deployment courses, which were held in Britain or in Germany. Interpreters were thus enrolled in OPTAG (Operational Training Group). They performed “role-play” activities aiming to reproduce situations likely to be encountered “in theatre” by the military working with interpreters (Baker, 2012; Footitt & Kelly, 2012).

Jones and Askew (2014) highlight the wide variety of activities carried out by interpreters, especially during the SFOR period. Interpreters were requested to provide interpretation in both directions in surprisingly diverse contexts: legal offices, trade with local suppliers, contacts with media, reconstruction of structures and facilities. It meant that their vocabulary had to be very rich and broad, ranging from the ordinary to highly specialized contexts without the support of any digital or paper source of reference (Edwards, 2002). Furthermore, they had to master both civilian vocabulary and military slang as well as different speech registers, military etiquette, ranks and rules (Baker, 2012; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). These specific skills required in a military context represented one of the main obstacles for untrained local interpreters, as most research shows (Baker, 2012; Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Jones & Askew 2014; Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). Untrained interpreters had to learn from experience, possibly relying on more experienced colleagues.

The status of interpreters was neither officially recognized according to the standards of the profession (Baker, 2010a) nor was their role acknowledged for its crucial importance (Ruiz & Persaud, 2018). Lack of recognition of their professional role by their users had an impact on interpreters’ working conditions. Translators and interpreters had no or limited access to linguistic resources, such as dictionaries, glossaries or terminology.
databases, which were not recorded to assure homogeneity in the use of specific terminology. Linguists daily working hours were not registered, and they had to be available 24/7. They had to provide translations into their mother tongue(s) as well as into English, often in a busy and noisy environment. Furthermore, their work was not supervised, nor translations revised (Jones & Askew, ibid.).

The situation improved considerably following the institution of a centralized linguistic unit known as the LSB (Linguistic Services Branch) run by native speakers who acted as supervisors and coordinators (Jones & Askew, 2014). The center was created on the proposal of a small number of linguistic experts from NATO linguistic services (SHAPE) who had carried out inspections and surveys in SFOR headquarters in Bosnia in order to improve the efficiency of language units on the ground. The institution of the LSB, which became effective in June 2001, professionalized the position of linguists, and interpreters among them. Apart from improving working conditions, it had a considerable impact on ethics issues with the adoption of the Standing Operating Procedures (Jones & Askew, ibid.). Moreover, they introduced new recruitment rules, evaluation standards and training arrangements which involved significant improvements in the quality of the interpretation service (Baker, 2010a).

3.4.1 Social welfare and safety

Since locally recruited interpreters were not recognized as professional interpreters, their security and safety were not regularly assured (Moser-Mercer, 2015). In fact, there was no homogeneity in the regulation of the profession and interpreters’ social welfare and pay rates depended on the “generosity” of the individual national divisions which hired them (Baker, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014). Their initial hiring conditions were often described as “flexible neo-liberal conditions” which were very far from communist Yugoslav guarantees to which locals were accustomed (Baker, 2012, p. 148).

UNPROFOR interpreters had the status of UNPROFOR employees, unlike other locally hired civilians employed such as cleaners, mechanics, laundry assistants or kitchen hands (Baker, 2010a). They received high wages in hard currency and had significant potential savings; these two advantages were supposed to compensate for the insecurity of long-term contracts and frequent workplaces transfers with little or no notice (Baker, 2012).
Social welfare conditions under IFOR were very similar to UNPROFOR, whilst they improved considerably under SFOR (Baker, 2012). Despite this, it is worth noting that during NATO missions interpreters were hired by national military divisions, but they were not given the same status as national employees (Baker 2012). Main complaints concerned maternity and sick leaves of only 14 days, lack of health insurance and social security, and little or no compensation in case of injury. In addition, interpreters often spent weeks away from home, working 12-hours shifts (Footitt & Kelly, 2012). Disparities of treatment between local civilians and foreign military members could threaten the relationship between interpreters and soldiers.

Interpreters’ security and safety were not always assured. As we have seen, their tasks could vary considerably from one day to the next, and so did the risks they ran. In the case of patrols or inspections, for example, interpreters were not always given flak jackets and helmets, which obviously represented the basic equipment for soldiers. (Baker, 2010a). Although interpreters were given the uniform of the army they worked for, an interpreter supervisor working in Banja Luka pointed out that they were easily recognizable to snipers. This was mainly due to the lack of insignia on their clothes and their general stride, especially if they were women (Baker, ibid.; Jones & Askew, 2014). Furthermore, other routine situations such as weapons inspections and transfer in military vehicles could turn out to be life-threatening experiences for interpreters because of young soldiers’ imprudence and inexperience in handling arms or driving (Baker, 2012; Footitt & Kelly, 2012).

Since local interpreters were very exposed in their work, they were often vulnerable to intimidation from local authorities. For this reason, they were usually given accommodation by the international forces. In the case of UNPROFOR, accommodation for interpreters was the same as for officers (Baker, 2010a), while with NATO forces they had shared bedrooms like soldiers (Jones & Askew, 2014). It was common for interpreters to be harassed by local authorities gathering intelligence sources (Suljagić, 2005 in Baker, 2010a). This framework inspires two considerations. On the one hand, it highlights the fact that suspicion and doubts of interpreters’ loyalty were always present and on the other hand, it suggests that cohabitation could strengthen camaraderie and cooperation between troops and interpreters.

Rules for security-cleared interpreters were stricter as they were not allowed to share accommodation with non-cleared interpreters in order to prevent information exchange or excessive camaraderie. Furthermore, since they were entrusted with tasks involving
sensitive information – such as the interrogations of prisoners – they were not allowed to go on liaison visits aimed to build trust and confidence among the population (Rovegno et al., 2003).

In addition to the peculiarities of PKOs, where the role of confidence- and trust- building is crucial, it is important to remember that the Bosnian ethnic context represented a further threat for interpreters cooperating with international forces. Baker (2010a) reported several episodes in which interpreters were not allowed to take part in bilateral meetings between international forces and one former warring faction - sometimes they were even threatened with death - because they were identified as members of a rival community. Moreover, there were cases, though isolated, of interpreters being severely insulted by local people accusing them of collaborating with foreign ‘invading’ forces (Baker, ibid.). These elements may have heavily affected interpreters’ positionality, as we will see in Chapter 4.

Against this background, the research questions for this project are the following:

What are the elements that affected interpreters’ positionality in PKOs in BiH? Did interpreters’ positionality affect trust towards interpreters? Did positionality also have an effect on their neutrality?
4. Analysis

4.1 Methodology

Several kinds of methodologies, for example analytical studies, empirical studies, field studies and survey-based studies, are suitable to carry out projects of this kind. However, given the researcher’s status as an investigator and an outsider to both the Bosnian context and interpreters’ in conflict zones, it was decided that an analytical study would be the most appropriate strategy. A structured analytical study in the form of a literature review using critical appraisal, could be useful to fill a gap in the field and to assist other researchers in their projects. The literature review also aims to provide a general overview of the subject for those who may wish to gain an insight into this topic or have a general knowledge of it.

Footitt (2012) describes two approaches that can be integrated to obtain the most complete methodology to explore the role of language in war. The first approach, usually adopted in the study of the role of interpreters in war contexts, assumes that interpreters’ position is somewhat similar in all wars; the second approach, generally adopted by historians, associates every activity to the very specific historical context where it is carried out and does not leave the door open to possible generalizations. Footitt (ibid.) identifies three steps resulting from the union of the above-mentioned approaches: 1) the adoption of an historical framework; 2) The study of the role of language in war situations, and 3) the contextualization of the figure of the interpreter. I decided to adopt approach number three, as explained below.

The object of study of this research (i.e. the positionality of interpreters and its impact on trust and neutrality) led me to choose the contextualization of the figure of the interpreter for two main reasons. First, positionality is mutable and changes in time and through space (Merriam et al., 2001). Therefore, it was necessary to contextualize the figure of the interpreter in the framework of the Bosnian War. The description of prior events, evolution, conclusion and consequences of the war lead to the identification of the elements which shaped the interpreters’ perspective. Secondly, trust and neutrality are regarded as situated concepts related to specific circumstances rather than to the role of the interpreter per se (Footitt, 2012). For this reason, the social and cultural context of the Bosnian War was an essential prerequisite in order to identify the situations where trust and neutrality were concerned. This is even more true in an ethnic conflict where
the notions of ethnic belonging and political and religious orientation play an important role in the relationships between the local actors. Moreover, the intervention of peacekeeping forces is described because their presence shaped both interpreters’ perspective and the circumstances they performed in.

4.2 Results and discussion

It is now possible to position the figure of interpreters in the situational context under analysis. The aim is to explore the specific elements which shaped their positionality in PKOs in Bosnia, by choosing among all the elements that traditionally shape it. Given the mutability of positionality in time and through space noted by Merriam et al. (2001), I will describe the specific circumstance where the interpretation is performed. Furthermore, I will speculate on possible transformation of interpreters’ positionality when the context changes. Finally, the role of relations of power shaped by positionality will be highlighted in relation to ethical issues.

When taking into account the interpreters’ profiles, Ruiz and Persaud (2018) have identified two main categories: interpreters from the UN and NATO peacekeeping missions (UNPROFOR, IFOR, SFOR) and those from the EU mission (EUFOR Althea). In the former case, interpreters were mainly young women, who had either just finished high school or were enrolled in university, and were motivated by high pay rates in hard currency. In the latter case, most interpreters were middle-aged relatively highly educated men, often motivated by vocation. Furthermore, the first group was provided with no or weak training in interpreting (it only started in the last part of SFOR mission) while EUFOR interpreters received some kind of training in interpreting. Despite differences in their profile, most interpreters were locally recruited, therefore they were outsiders to the military forces and insiders to at least one local community.

It is worth analyzing the single elements of an interpreters’ profile in order to verify their connection with power relations in shaping positionality.

Gender as an element which affects positionality has not been deeply analyzed in literature. Footitt and Kelly (2012) have reported that women often found it difficult to interpret during arms inspections or reconstruction of structures because very technical terminology was required and, according to them, they lacked this knowledge because they were activities generally carried out by men. Furthermore, women interpreters were
spared long on-the-field assignments by their male colleagues, whenever it was possible, because men were judged more resourceful, resilient and having a better orientation and adaptability (Baker, 2010b). Lack of specific knowledge in technical aspects and less adaptability to tough circumstances put women interpreters in a disadvantageous position in power relations with members of the military and other local stakeholders, mainly because they had the knowledge that interpreters lacked. When stakeholders are not trained to work with interpreters, they may mistake the interpreter’s hesitation and approximation for one of dishonesty, and therefore mistrust their work.

I would like to point out that gender, as all the other elements which shape positionality, should not be considered per se, it has to be contextualized in order to understand its implications. It means that in these specific circumstances, women interpreters’ disadvantageous position was due to the cultural environment where they had been raised, which made a clear distinction between male and female activities, and not to their inherent nature.

Another element to be analyzed is the educational background which had to include a solid grasp of the local language(s) and a good mastery of English, since interpreters were mainly asked to interpret in both directions. Furthermore, since interpreters’ educational background was varied (many were students in engineering, law or medicine), also other kinds of knowledge could be useful on the ground. In the case of Bosnia, a good knowledge of English was not a widespread skill among interpreters due to the fact that until the reform by SHAPE at the end of SFOR, admissions exams did not test properly the candidates’ level of English and never took into account interpretation skills. A clumsy understanding and insufficient mastery of what was supposed to be a B language could give way to misunderstandings with the military personnel. Therefore, lack of clarity and exactitude in delivery could feed the military force’s mistrust towards the interpreters’ accuracy in delivery.

This phenomenon was visibly reduced with EUFOR interpreters, who had higher degrees in education and had experience with previous missions. For this reason, I would say that the age of interpreters, which increased considerably in EUFOR and most of the time implied more experience, is synonymous with increased competence and skills and could therefore be considered an advantage in the context of power relations with the military. In addition to that, EUFOR interpreters also took advantage of training courses, whose purpose was not improving English skills but preparing them to deal with the difficulties encountered in peacekeeping contexts.
In fact, it is worth highlighting that linguistic difficulties were not always ascribable to the interpreter’s lack of competence but also to hurdles mainly encountered in an international peacekeeping context, such as different accents and approaches in communication. English, which was generally considered as the lingua franca, was not the mother tongue of all the forces deployed in BiH and even English-speaking military forces (e.g. the British troops) could number members of very diverse origin. The presence of Gurkha forces from Nepal among the British troops is one example. They challenged the vision that local interpreters had of British people, for both their peculiar (and sometimes obscure) accents. In addition to this, multiculturality in peacekeeping forces implied the use of different approaches to communication. For example, the approach of Dutch soldiers was considered too direct by local interpreters, who felt the need to rephrase the questions in a more polite way (Bos & Soeters, 2006).

The competence in mediating between high and low context cultures is an important cultural mediation skill and implies the active role of the interpreter in the communication process. Professional interpreters and language mediators generally acquire awareness in cultural differences with training, but local interpreters had to develop this ability from their experience. One may infer that local interpreters are the most suitable mediators for this aspect because they can rely on their direct knowledge of their home culture. By contrast, military linguists without any cultural competence and a limited knowledge of local languages could overview cultural differences; thus, they jeopardized the creation of a trust-based exchange with local people. The intervention of interpreters as real mediators is also visible in their attempt to attenuate harsh or offensive words from the original discourse in order to smooth the communicative situation and let the dialogue continue.

In this multilingual context, we can consider that relations of power between the military forces and interpreters was slightly more favorable to the latter because most of the military had no competence in the local languages, whilst interpreters, despite their possible weak English, could speak and understand both English and local language(s). On the other hand, local stakeholders were also in the same position as the military if they had no competence in English. Therefore, the entire responsibility of the communication process fell on the interpreters, whose task was to gain the stakeholders' trust from both sides. When this condition is not fulfilled, the communication is not effective because the parties involved do not show the will to listen and understand each other's arguments and the mediation process cannot be triggered.
Another difficulty related to the peacekeeping context was represented by the use of military slang and the need to respect military etiquette when addressing the members of the military. Most local interpreters working with UN and NATO did not have any competence in this field and learnt it on the ground and with the help of more experienced colleagues. In the EUFOR period, some of this knowledge was provided with training. The respect for the military code, namely the military etiquette and ranks, and the knowledge of the military environment, is a strategy to reduce the disadvantageous position of the interpreters and therefore to gain the trust of the military in order to maximize cooperation.

The status as an insider or an outsider is generally considered essential when addressing ethical issues. Along these lines, neutrality is generally attributed to outsiders because their objectivity is assured by their lack of involvement; whilst people tend to trust insiders to their groups because they share culture, status, beliefs, background, etc. In the case of PKOs in Bosnia, local interpreters were outsiders to the military forces and insiders to their own community. In the military environment trust is of crucial value generally granted only to insiders, therefore interpreters were disadvantaged but they could rebalance power relations because they understood both English and local language(s). Unintelligibility of local language(s) for most of the military could explain their mistrust towards local interpreters. However, this problem is encountered in every interpretation act, not only in conflict zones. Trust towards the interpreter is a crucial prerequisite in order to let the communication take place, and therefore training on this topic should be always provided to interpreters’ users. Training of this kind usually make the users aware of cultural gaps, linguistic differences and communication issues that the linguistic intermediary may encounter when interpreting. For instance, comparing the length of the speech in the source and in the target language may not be a matter of concern for the user because cultural and linguistic issues may require the interpreter to overexplain (or censor, less frequently) some topics. Bos & Soeters (2006) report that veteran members of the Dutch troops were more likely to allow the interpreters to rephrase their statements or questions in order to adapt them to the target context because they were more aware of culture differences and of their importance.

As outsiders to the military, interpreters were not allowed access to classified material because they feared interpreters could have a hidden agenda and reveal important intelligence information to the local authorities. Therefore, even informal conversations between the soldiers were self-censored in the presence of local interpreters (Baker,
However, very few cases of suspect behavior from interpreters were reported and since interpreters were mainly motivated by financial reasons, they were unlikely to be intelligence sources for the local authorities (Fitchett, 2012).

Since the population in Bosnia was divided into three communities (Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs), local interpreters were insiders to one local community and outsiders to the other two. Therefore, their ethnicity shaped their positionality. However, I would infer that their positionality was not only affected by their ethnicity per se, i.e. on their status as insider or outsider of one community, but by the relations of power between the communities. These relations changed frequently before the Dayton Agreement according to the evolution of the war, the occupation of territories and the military operations carried out by the three different armies. The Dayton Agreement contributed to establishing more stable power relations between the parties, therefore positionality was now affected only by relations of power shaped in a specific communicative context. In particular, power relations were shaped by the ethnicity of the interpreter and that of the local stakeholder in relation to the environment where the encounter took place. For instance, when a Bosniak interpreter was asked to interpret a liaison visit between the international forces and the Serb Army, his positionality was affected differently if s/he was in a Serb enclave rather than a Bosniak one or in a neutral territory (e.g. international headquarters).

Once again, we can claim that contextualized relations of power have to be analyzed in order to understand the impact of the different elements, in this case ethnicity, on the interpreters’ positionality. Liaison visits which involved the presence of different communities could represent a real danger for interpreters when one side openly showed hostility. According to the interpreter’s positionality, their interpretation will change. Some cases were registered where the interpreters were so scared by the open intimidations of one communicating party that they lost necessary concentration for interpreting (Baker, 2010a). One could also infer that interpreters who feel threatened would rather attenuate and nuance direct questions or strong statements in order to reduce risks for a dispute. Encounters with local people belonging to the interpreter’s community also represented a challenge for language intermediaries. In the case of the Serb community, for instance, Serb interpreters working for the international forces were often regarded as traitors because the Serb perception of the international intervention was heavily influenced by their mass media, which depicted foreign forces as occupying forces (Baker, 2012). On the other hand, even when hostility was not evident, the interpreter
always had to gain and keep their fellow citizens’ trust in the communication. Footitt and Kelly (2012) report the case of a Sarajevan interpreter who decided not to wear her flak jacket during a liaison visit with other Sarajevan citizens to show that she trusted them. Relations of power, in the absence of ethnic rivalry, may be shaped by economic relations as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Users’ perception of the interpreter is another element which shapes positionality and that is deeply influenced by a multicultural context. International forces in Bosnia had a stereotyped and fixed vision of the different communities and they put the Serb interpreters under strong pressure because of the involvement of their faction in the conflict. The Serbs were generally perceived as “the bad guys” by the foreign military (Footitt & Kelly, 2012), therefore they were more likely to be mistrusted than their colleagues and they had more problems in identifying themselves with their own community. Also, the Communist past of the Bosnian society affected the military’s vision of interpreters. Military forces often showed their surprise for the presence of technological advancement in Bosnia and this outraged local interpreters, who felt that their standard of living was widely underestimated in Western countries. The military’s prejudices about BiH could have been influenced by the Western vision of (former) Communist countries as underdeveloped and untouched by progress. This behavior made the interpreters skeptical of the military’s open-mindedness and understanding of cultural complexity, jeopardizing a cooperation based on trust. On the one hand, it is possible to observe a lack of intercultural communications training on the interpreters’ side, which would have helped them to overcome the military’s misconceptions and possibly led to mutual understanding. On the other hand, it highlights the lack of specific training for military personnel in working with the interpreters. Ruiz and Persaud (2018) suggest the use of specific guidelines for the military on cross-cultural competence in order to improve their understanding of cultural difference and the development of strategies to deal with it.

Motivation, as a factor that shapes positionality, changed over the missions and influenced interpreters’ relations of power with other stakeholders. During the UN and NATO missions, interpreters were mainly motivated by financial reasons, which implies that they were not pushed by advocacy or ideology when working for international forces, unlike Croatian volunteer advocate interpreters described by Stahuljak (1999). Local interpreters in Bosnia received high salaries in hard currency from the international forces. Their purchasing power made them more powerful than other local people but,
on the other hand, local salespeople and local authorities charged the interpreters with higher prices and taxes (Bos & Soeters, 2006). The impact of international forces' intervention on local economy and society was huge because they contributed to unbalance class gaps in the disoriented post-war Bosnian society (Jansen, 2006). Beyond increasing wealth inequality between their employees and other Bosnian workers, international forces employed overqualified workers, depriving the recovering Bosnian society of precious contributors to a new start. Apart from this medium and long-term impact, disparities in power relations (even of economic nature) between the interpreters and the local communities often had ethical implications. In fact, local interpreters working for international forces were often depicted as traitors by local communities and were sometimes victims of verbal abuses. Resentment and disparities fed mistrust of local stakeholders towards interpreters and this hindered a constructive and cooperative relationship between international forces and locals. Therefore, one could infer that the main objective of the peacekeeping mission, that is confidence- and trust- building for long-term civil and political reconstruction, was jeopardized by the international forces themselves, which unconsciously widened the gap between local workers and exacerbated their relations.

It should be highlighted that some interpreters who had started working in this capacity in previous missions for economic reasons, decided to continue on this path in the EUFOR mission not for a vocational choice but because they had spent most of their life in this field and it was too late to resume their old careers, and hence become integrated back into the labor market. Unfortunately, the demand for interpreters in EUFOR was not so high as in previous missions because of consistent progressive troop reductions over the years. Therefore, many interpreters had difficulties in finding new jobs and some had to move abroad (Baker, 2012). Unemployment is one of the drawbacks of international intervention in a territory after the withdrawal or the considerable reduction of deployed forces, which is the case with Bosnia. This aspect is widely underestimated, despite the fact that it is widespread and has a long-term impact on the local society. Insecure employment and lack of guarantees in working conditions put the interpreters in a disadvantageous position in relation to their military employers and this could worsen their relation and their mutual perception.

In contrast with the first part of the mission, more EUFOR interpreters considered this profession as a vocational choice. This could raise questions of ethical issues, such as the degree of affiliation to the international force, which is in contrast with the sense of
belonging to their own community. First, it is worth restating that all the interpreters were in a contradictory position as neutral intermediaries because they were employed by one side, i.e. the international forces. One could be led to think that the feeling of belonging to the international forces prevailed over their sense of belonging to their community, which is exactly what Askew claims when referring to her direct experience as an interpreter in SFOR forces (Askew & Carr, 2011). However, research on this topic (Baker, 2010a; Footitt & Kelly, 2012; Jones & Askew, 2014) demonstrates that it is not possible to generalize with the sense of belonging because it was mainly a private decision, and some interpreters have declared that they strongly felt as members of their communities.

Ruiz and Barea (2017) argue that interpreters who strongly felt their affiliation to the international forces were more likely to be neutral than the others because, despite their insider status, they were employed by outsider stakeholders who were supposed to have no personal interest in the accomplishment of their mission. This appears to be even more true if we consider that locally recruited interpreters had rarely received training on the ethical issues of the profession, therefore they were supposed to be unaware of them and rather rely on their personal beliefs and value system when interpreting. At this point, the issue of the need for an ethical code arises. Interpreters’ professional code of ethics prescribes the exercise of the profession as impartially as possible (Fitchett, 2012) but in the case of local interpreters working in conflict zones, impartiality/neutrality is not easy to achieve. Firstly, because the interpreters are insiders to one of the parties, therefore they are influenced by their political, religious and cultural orientation and secondly, because in a conflict scenario interpreters are asked to carry out varied tasks in different contexts where the application of a single ethical code is neither possible nor perhaps desirable.

In PKOs in Bosnia, the tasks, and therefore associated ethical issues, encountered by the interpreters changed considerably after the Dayton Agreement. In the peacekeeping phase, they were more likely to be exposed to extreme danger during the fighting and to the emotional toll of assisting refugees. By contrast, in the peacebuilding phase, their role as mediators came to light together with the imposing objective of the missions, which burdened them with the responsibility of assuring a trust-based communication between international forces and local populations. The great variety of tasks, not forcibly relevant to interpretation, implied that the interpreters performed in different circumstances which involved different ethical issues. For instance, interpreters reported
that they often performed as advisors for the military in off-duty circumstances (Baker, 2010a; Footit & Kelly, 2012; Stahuljak, 1999; Todorova, 2016). They were asked to comment or give informal opinions on what they had heard or seen, therefore their role shifted from neutral language intermediaries to counsellors expressing their personal opinion. This happened in a context (i.e. private conversations) where variables such as positionality and relations of power were different from the triadic context of interpreting but statements expressed could however influence and shape the military’s perception of the other side.

In order to deal with ethical issues in the interest of all the parties, interpreters had to be aware of their positionality in relation to the positionality of the stakeholders involved. It means that positionality, shaped by all the elements analyzed so far, defines the relations of power between the different stakeholders, the interpreter included, and that these relations have to be taken into account when dealing with ethical issues. Therefore, it is possible to state that, in conflict zones, immutable ethical codes are not suitable and interpreters can address ethical issues being aware of their role and of the variables of the communicative situation in which they perform.

In conclusion, interpreters in conflict zones should be made aware of their role as active participants in the communicative context and of the implications of their ethical choices when interpreting. Interpreters should be trained to identify their own positionality and the relations of power that it defines in order to address ethical issues in conflict scenarios.
5. Conclusion

This research has provided a general overview of positionality of interpreters involved in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it could represent a useful starting point for those interested in further research in this topic.

In order to draw my conclusions, I will answer the research questions which were stated in the introduction.

1) What are the elements that affected interpreters’ positionality in PKOs in BiH?

In my analytical study and critical appraisal of literature, I identified the following elements: gender, ethnicity, educational background, experience, status as an insider/outsider, training, technical knowledge, working and welfare conditions, users’ perception, motivation, tasks carried out, safety and security.

Analysis carried out in Chapter 4 revealed that these elements affect interpreters’ positionality shaping relations of power between the interpreter and the other stakeholders in the communicative context. Moreover, it was highlighted that positionality is deeply influenced by the specific circumstances where the communicative exchange takes place and therefore it can change rapidly in relation to the stakeholders on the stage.

2) Did interpreters’ positionality affect trust towards interpreters?

This research described the effect of positionality on trust towards interpreters by their users, both the military and local users. Among the elements which shape positionality, those that have an impact on trust were identified. It was found that the study of relations of power shaped by positionality is a useful approach when exploring trust. The elements identified are: status as an insider/outsider, users’ perception, working and welfare conditions and a series of skills and competences that the interpreters acquired through experience or training, depending on the phase of the peacekeeping process. These skills and competences are: cross-cultural knowledge and soft skills together with knowledge in technical and military fields. In the case of trust from military users, status as an insider/outsider, users’ perception and skills and competences appeared to be the most relevant in the creation of power relations with interpreters. On the other hand, power relations between interpreters and local users were mostly shaped by status as an insider/outsider, users’ perception and interpreters’ welfare conditions.
3) Did positionality also have an effect on their neutrality?

It was shown that positionality does affect interpreters’ neutrality. In particular, the link between some elements which shape positionality and neutrality was identified. The elements analyzed are motivation, status as an insider/outsider, tasks carried out and training received because they influence ethical choices made by the interpreters in a communicative context. It was therefore inferred the need for the interpreter to be aware of their positionality, of the users’ positionality and of relations of power with them in order to make the most suitable ethical decisions in a specific circumstance.

In conclusion, positionality can be defined as the guiding principle of this research. As a concept resulting from the union of outside and insider elements which influence one’s perspective, positionality is deeply affected by the context. In the Bosnian case study, firstly it was necessary to define the historical and cultural context of the war, the interpreters’ working environment in PKOs and their personal profile. This led to the identification of the elements which shaped interpreters’ positionality. Secondly, the impact of these elements on ethical issues was analyzed. It emerged that power relations created between the stakeholders in a communicative setting are a possible link between positionality and ethical issues. In fact, relations of power result from positionality and, at the same time, they influence interpreters’ neutrality and trust towards them. Since peacekeeping missions, and military operations in general, include a great variety of possible communicative settings, a single ethical code for the interpreters is not suitable. Therefore, raising interpreters’ awareness of positionality and relations of power can assist them in addressing ethical issues in changing circumstances typically encountered in conflict zones.

Limitations

It is necessary to highlight that existing literature written in English on interpreters in PKOs in Bosnia mainly deals with interpreters working for American, British and Dutch troops. The international forces deployed in BiH numbered 31 different nationalities and working conditions varied considerably from one army to another, depending on the troops’ nationality. Having said that, it should be considered that positionality of interpreters working for other troops could have been influenced by factors which were not analyzed in this study.
**Recommendations for further studies**

This research presents at least two potential avenues for further studies. Firstly, this study highlighted that the role of gender in shaping interpreters’ positionality in PKOs in Bosnia has been treated by very few scholars. If we consider the significant difference in interpreters’ gender-balance between the first and the second phase of the peacekeeping process, there may be enough prerequisites to explore this topic more in depth. Secondly, the analysis brought to light the centrality of power relations and its relationship with positionality when addressing ethical issues in interpreting. This may represent a starting point to predict the ethical issues that interpreters are more likely to encounter according to their positionality in the communicative context.
References


