



Julia Kölbl, Iryna Orlova and Michaela Wolf (eds.), *¿Pasarán? – Kommunikation im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg. Interacting in the Spanish Civil War*, Wien, Hamburg, New Academic Press, 2020, 224 pp.

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As the editors of this book, Julia Kölbl, Iryna Orlova and Michaela Wolf, express in its introduction, it aims to provide a “multi-perspective view” of the rather complicated communicative, interpretation and translation activities performed on daily bases during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The international volunteers who supported the Republicans mostly served in the International Brigades, organised by the Communist International (Comintern) by nationalities and language groups. People from many different countries had to live and fight together, and this is where the role of interpreters became crucial for the communication between the members of the brigades and interaction with the local population. They were mainly volunteers and amateurs, though some of them became professional translators, and some were linguists or polyglots who spoke, above all, Russian, Spanish, German or French. The communication strategies used in the brigades, which are analysed in these contributions, have barely been explored until now.

This publication and a project of the University of Graz follows the current trends of research in the field of translation and interpreting in warfare, which draw attention to the role of interpreters and underline the importance of their work in conflict zones and scenarios. The articles also survey the lives and professional experience of interpreters and translators in the International Brigades in order to thread the story which lies behind their job and learn about their versions of past events, combat, life and daily struggle in the brigades. Not only is this important for the history and the history of translation, but it is also a way to pay tribute to the translators and interpreters who had a crucial role in the Spanish Civil War but are almost or completely unknown.

The book contains papers written in German, English and Spanish, and arranged in three sections: *Strategien der Kommunikation*, which talks about the strategies and ways of communication in the above conflict, *Kommunikation im Bürgerkriegsalltag* about lives and interaction of translators and interpreters responsible for establishing the communication

between volunteers and other soldiers, or between them and their commanders and the Comintern, and the section *Institutionalisierte Kommunikation* on the process of institutionalisation of communication and interpreters and translators.

The first contribution by Ursula Stachl-Peier, “*Skandinavernas kynne låg inte för preussisk disciplin och drill* – The Swedish Character is not Suited to Prussian Discipline and Drill” (pp. 15-31), explores the Swedish volunteers’ participation in the Spanish Civil War, underlining the communication problems and intercultural differences they confronted while forming part of the German-led Thälmann Battalion, where they needed to adapt to the so called ‘Prussian cadaver discipline’. The paper is based on articles, interviews and (auto-)biographical texts published between 1937 and 2016, and therefore reveals very interesting and valuable testimonies regarding the social issues, combat, daily challenges and difficult communication between Swedish volunteers and other soldiers from their battalion in the Spanish Civil War. In spite of the biased nature of the texts this article is grounded on, it provides us with unique information concerning the life in the International Brigades and the way the communication problems between speakers of many different languages were tackled.

The paper “*I Wish I Could Speak Spanish* – The Memoirs of Boruch Nysenbaum” by Małgorzata Tryuk (pp. 32-48) describes the ways and characteristics of multilingual communication in the 13<sup>th</sup> Jarosław Dąbrowski Brigade. It is based on the memoirs of Boruch Nysenbaum, a communist from Warsaw who worked as a translator and interpreter in the above brigade. This paper reveals that interpreting and translation in the International Brigades included propaganda activities, speech drafting and delivering. Very often, Soviet ‘advisors’ were sent to perform such work. Moreover, the article emphasises the role of Polish volunteers and interpreters, such as Nysenbaum, who performed important linguistic mediations and propaganda translations during this conflict.

The first section ends with the study “Una nueva torre de Babel. El aprendizaje de lenguas en las Brigadas Internacionales” by Ramón Naya-Ortega and M. Lourdes Prades-Artigas (pp. 49-63), which examines a community of volunteers in the International Brigades and problems of illiteracy among soldiers, language learning and other communication challenges in an endeavour to portray everyday aspects of their lives and show how the Brigades managed to live with the local people, understand their customs and cause despite all language difficulties. The article also depicts spoken language diversity among the volunteers, the initiatives which were

undertaken to achieve their comprehension, such as multilingual publications that included daily press, leaflets, billboards, as well as radio transmissions and other communication channels.

The next section is opened by an article about the fall of the city of Malaga, one of the first serious defeats of the Loyalist government in the Spanish Civil War, which resulted in many silenced deaths during the flight of a round 300,000 civilians who ran away from the Moroccan troops and the fascist air and naval attacks along the road from Malaga to Almeria. In this paper called “Undigging the past: The Lost Memory of Interpreters at the Battle for Málaga 1936-1937” (pp. 67-81), Marcos Rodríguez Espinosa, from the University of Malaga employs oral and written testimonies of Soviet military interpreters and translators Mariya Levina and Elizaveta Parshina, and Luis Abollado Vargas, Spanish interpreter and political activist at the time, to describe the events related to the above battle and discuss their long-neglected ideological, academic and professional profiles and performance, their assistance to the civilian population and defeated military units during the withdrawal, the importance of their testimonies, and the exile of some Spanish interpreters once the Civil War was won by general Franco’s troops, along with their activities in World War II.

In the article written by Cynthia Gabbay, “Babilonia y Revolución en España: prácticas de escritura cosmopolita de una miliciana – Mika Feldman Etchebehere” (pp. 82-99), we learn about the life of a Jewish-Argentinian polyglot, intellectual and a POUM militia’s captain, Mika Feldman, during the Spanish Civil War. Her bilingual text and self-translation *Ma guerre d’Espagne à moi / Mi guerra de España* (1976), where she narrates her involvement in the war and the cultural changes the world was going through, has been used to show evidence of the *invisible* translator and explore Mika’s unique experience in Spain and her role as a linguistic and cultural mediator.

Jesús Baigorri-Jalón contributes to the belief that interpreting in the Spanish Civil War was a rather peculiar task with his study about another polyglot figure: “The Interpreter who Wanted to be a Rank-and-File Soldier: John Victor Murra” (pp. 100-113). This paper’s sources are fragmentary records and direct testimonies from published, but also unpublished interviews and other similar texts. John V. Murra, a Romanian who lived in Chicago, joined the International Brigades in order to fight against fascism, and became an interpreter (a job he continued doing after the war) and a secretary at the base in Albacete. However, this soldier was afraid he was missing the real action and he escaped to the front. Varied aspects of his life

and his performance as a translator and interpreter, included ethical issues, are examined in this paper.

Julia Kölbl, a research assistant in the research project “Interpreting and Translating in the Spanish Civil War”, explores the life of Aileen Palmer, an Australian volunteer who was active during this war, in her article “*Mädchen für alles? – Aileen Palmer als Übersetzerin und Dolmetscherin in den medizinischen Einheiten des Spanischen Bürgerkrieges*” (pp. 114-129), which is based on memoirs, biographies, letters, diary and similar texts. Besides her involvement in the British Medical Aid Unit, the paper also reveals her political and social background and her multiple roles in the civil war and everyday life during the conflict, underlining her administrative, translation and communication skills.

The next paper completes the second section. It is Franziska Duckstein’s contribution “*Le boucher d’Albacète: André Marty und seine Translator\_innen im politischen Feld*” (pp. 130-145) about a Frenchman who was in charge of organising the International Brigades and one of the most important figures in the war in question. The paper draws on Bourdieu’s field theory with the aim of exploring the figure of André Marty and his translators through social positions, power struggles and relationships among agents, as well as the idea of capital and loyalty. It also demonstrates how those translators who accumulated more varied forms of capital also obtained a stronger position in the field.

The section about the institutionalised communication starts with the Werner Abel’s contribution, “*Die Vielfalt der Sprachen und die Militärzensur der Internationalen Brigaden*” (pp. 149-165) which deals with the military censorship in the International Brigades, a very complicated process due to the large number of languages spoken in the units. Censorship was meant to keep military secrets safe, and guarantee that the Popular Front’s policies were followed and used properly. The article shows the ways that received information was filtered and reported to the responsible parties.

In “*Mittendrin. Ilsa Barea-Kulcsar als Übersetzerin und Kulturmittlerin – eine biografische Spurensuche*”, Georg Pichler (pp. 166-179) relates the life of the translator Ilsa Barea-Kulcsar, who was in anti-fascist exile after being a political activist in Austria in the 1920s and 1930s. She wrote articles about the Spanish Civil War, and thanks to her language skills, became the head of the Press and Censorship Office, where she worked with Arturo Barea, her future husband. Her work in the BBC’s Monitoring Service, as well as her plentiful translating and interpreting activities are also surveyed by drawing

mainly on Ilsa and Arturo Barea's nearly unknown literary and personal estate.

The Iryna Orlova's contribution, which is, as most of her research, focused on the sociology and the history of translation, draws upon the constructivist sociological theory of Berger and Luckmann (2003 / 1968) and is titled "Las etapas de la institucionalización de los / las intérpretes en la guerra civil" (pp. 180-193). This study revolves around the stages in the institutionalisation process of interpreting in the Spanish Civil War. For that purpose, the author exploits volunteers' memoirs, and documents from the RGASPI files (The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). The article discloses plenty of useful and rather interesting testimonies from interpreters who came to volunteer from Bulgaria, Hungary and former republics of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, which bring light to the above process and describe with details the interpreter's job and responsibilities in the brigades. These volunteers were mostly young communists who abandoned their countries for ideological reasons and came to Spain to participate in the confrontation.

The last chapter of this book was written by Michaela Wolf, well-known academic and author of many important studies in the field of translation, whose latest research involves interpreting and translating in Nazi concentration camps and during the Spanish Civil War. This paper, "Sprachmittlung unter Spaniens Himmel: Fotografische Inszenierungen von Translation" (pp. 194-211), analyses photos of interpreters in the Spanish Civil War and the ways they are represented in them: the situations they are in, how they are pictured, the phrases which were used to identify them or to describe the circumstances in which the photos were taken. The aim of the study is to suggest this medium as a source of a historical research in translation and a new approach to finding out more about the interpreting activity in the Spanish Civil war, as well as to detecting some social and ideological constrains it was submitted to. Issues such as propaganda, female interpreters' activity, attitudes and relationships among the soldiers in the brigades and their solidarity are the objects of this study, in which Wolf analyses four photographs of women interpreters by drawing on Erving Goffman's model of social interaction.

Each of the papers that compose this publication is a result of thorough research from social perspective and by examining translators' individual points of view. They are, especially, based on testimonies, published or unpublished documents and interviews, registers and biographies or autobiographies, which lead to the disclosure of new information regarding the

interpreters and translators of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, this publication successfully depicts a rather unique communication setting, a sort of Tower of Babel, which existed among the volunteers who belonged to different cultures and backgrounds but somehow succeeded in communicating among themselves and conveys updated information about the life and work of some of the translators and interpreters who enabled this communication.

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