

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Languages in war and conflict
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research led by Professor Hilary Footitt at the University of Reading acted as a catalyst to stimulate interest in languages in conflict situations among language practitioners, the country's principal museum of war, the Ministry of Defence, the International Association of Conference Interpreters, and NGOs. The role of languages in war and conflict had received surprisingly little previous attention and this ground-breaking research gave confidence to the Imperial War Museum to exploit the languages dimension of its collections, contributed to the Ministry of Defence's internal discussions and to its first Joint Doctrine Note on linguistic support for operations, and supported the development of the professional interpreters' Code of Conduct for the employment of interpreters in war.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Much of this research was stimulated by the AHRC project, <i>Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict</i> (2008-2011, PI Professor Hilary Footitt, RA Dr. Simona Tobia). In the project, led by Reading, with the University of Southampton, and the Imperial War Museum, London, Reading and Southampton were responsible for separate case studies, the Second World War (Reading), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Southampton), working closely together in an agreed research framework to arrive at a joint understanding of lessons learned across the two investigations. Reading took overall responsibility for convening meetings with the Imperial War Museum and the Ministry of Defence, commenting on the MOD's Joint Doctrine note, and liaising with the professional interpreters association.</p> <p>The role of languages in war and conflict had received very little attention from academics, military authorities, or the general public. The tacit assumption seemed to be that most international wars are fought with allies, and against enemies, who obligingly speak our own language. The research used archives, and interviews with participants in war, both military and civilian, to uncover and explore the role of foreign languages at each stage of military conflict, examining the ways in which perceptions of foreign languages frame our pre-conflict understanding of enemies/allies; the role of languages in intelligence gathering and assessment, in military preparations for deployment, in military/civilian meetings 'on the ground', in the aftermath of war, and in refugee relief and peace building.</p> <p>The research revealed the key role which foreign languages play in each of these stages of war, a role which had been largely invisible up to this point. In specific terms, the research pointed to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need to recognise and problematise the role of translation in intelligence gathering and assessment; - The importance of languages in developing satisfactory relationships between military interveners and civilian populations; - Weaknesses in the language policies which military authorities typically make for war, particularly in their plans to recruit and deploy language/cultural mediators; - The vulnerabilities of locally recruited interpreters in war and the relative lack of professional and welfare structures to protect them during and after the particular conflict; - The role which languages play in post-conflict peace building and refugee relief. <p>This latter point was further developed through the establishment of a network to explore the role of languages for humanitarian organisations operating in conflict areas, <i>Languages and International NGOs: Cultural Knowledge in Communities in Crisis</i> (supported by an AHRC Translating Cultures Development Grant, 2012; PI Footitt, CI Dr. Vanessa Pupavac, Nottingham). This network, bringing together language and international relations researchers, professional interpreters and NGOs, is seeking to raise awareness of issues related to foreign languages in NGO operations, and to develop an interdisciplinary research agenda of specific relevance to the</p>

language-related challenges which NGOs face in conflict situations.

Professor Hillary Footitt is a Senior Research Fellow and joined the University of Reading in 2006. Simona Tobia is a research assistant and joined the University in 2008.

3. References to the research

The *Languages at War* project, with Southampton and the Imperial War Museum, London, has had a broad range of outputs including two workshops, an international conference, four published books, and eleven published articles. All these publications have been internally assessed as of at least 2* quality. Key publications include:

(i) H. Footitt and S. Tobia, *WarTalk: Foreign Languages and the British War Effort in Europe, 1940-47*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

(ii) H. Footitt, 'The Underside of "Occupation" ' in eds. A. Knapp, H. Footitt, *Liberal Democracies at War: Conflict and Representation*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 157-178

(iii) H. Footitt and M. Kelly: *Languages at War. Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

(iv) H. Footitt, 'Another Missing Dimension? Foreign Languages in World War II Intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security*, 25 (3), 2010, 271-289; DOI: 10.1080/02684527.2010.489779

(v) H. Footitt, 'Languages at War: Cultural Preparations for the Liberation of Western Europe', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 3 (1), 2010, 109-121; DOI: 10.1386/jwcs.3.1. 109 1-

(vi) S. Tobia, 'Crime and Judgement: Interpreters/Translators in British War Crime Trials, 1945-49', *The Translator*, 16 (2), 2010, 275-293; URL: [http://www.stjerome.co.uk/tsa/abstract/12242/-](http://www.stjerome.co.uk/tsa/abstract/12242/)

Relevant Grants awarded:

Footitt PI (with Kelly, Southampton, and the Imperial War Museum) *Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict*, AHRC (2008-2011) AH/F009968/1, £513,839.

Footitt, *Conference Support Grant*, British Academy (2011), £1,604.

Footitt PI (with Pupavac, Nottingham) *Languages and International NGOs: Cultural Knowledge in Communities in Crisis*, AHRC Development Grant (2012), £14,586.

4. Details of the impact

As a research project, *Languages at War* was structured from the outset to bring together non-academic partners with academic researchers. Two colleagues from the Imperial War Museum, London, attended research team meetings every three months. The project's Advisory Group (meeting termly) included two representatives from the Ministry of Defence, and one from the Royal Military College, Shrivenham. A range of non-academic partners was invited to contribute to Workshops (May 2009, May 2010), and to the final conference (April 2011) which included papers from the head of the MOD's inter-services languages unit, the President of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), and the Head of Research and Information at the Imperial War Museum (published in *Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). As a result of the structures which had been set in place, researchers received invitations to discuss their ongoing work in the MOD's Upavon Barracks (March 2009), the Defence Academy's Culture in Conflict Symposium (June 2009) and Imperial War Museum staff seminars (June 2009, March 2010).

From a situation in 2008 in which languages were largely absent from accounts of war, the research has acted as a catalyst to stimulate interest in languages in conflict situations amongst language practitioners, the country's principal museum of war, the Ministry of Defence, the

professional interpreters association, and NGOs.

- **Language practitioners/academics**

In response to the interest generated by the project, the publisher Palgrave Macmillan set up a series (2011), *Palgrave Studies in Languages at War* (co-edited by Footitt), which has signed contracts for books from practitioners in SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe), and the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, as well as from scholars in France, Macedonia, and Israel. A Facebook site (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/languagesatwar>) (2011) now brings together practitioners and academics from across the world interested in the role of foreign languages in conflict, including international interpreters, NGOs (International Red Cross, Terre Solidaire), lobbying groups for Interpreter protection in war (Red T) and members of the US Army.

- **Imperial War Museum (IWM), London**

Besides adding the project's 60 oral history interviews on languages to its Sound Archives Collection (2012), the Imperial War Museum is now proposing to develop a languages-related theme in the next stages of its review of collections (which would result in more specific documentation and cataloguing terms to enable related items to be easily located by researchers), and is planning its new visitor wayfinding in the redeveloped London site (January 2013-June 2014) with greater awareness of languages. The Head of Research and Information at the IWM said, '*Languages at War* has placed firmly on the IWM's agenda new ways of exploring and thinking its collections from new perspectives. It has added to our collections, it has added new interpretations to our collections and it has made us think about how we work towards our gallery redevelopment...*Languages at War* has been groundbreaking for the Imperial War Museum...And, ultimately, the IWM's public will benefit as well' (2012) [*Exhibiting the "Foreign" in a National Museum: Imperial War Museum Languages at War*, in eds. H.Footitt and M. Kelly, *Languages and the Military. Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 227-235]. In October 2013, the IWM asked Footitt to support them in a new Museum development, exploiting the languages dimension of their vast resources of BBC monitoring reports (World War II to 1980) by leading a 'Translation and Intelligence' group in an IWM networking bid.

- **The Ministry of Defence**

The Ministry of Defence used the research within its internal debates on language policy, especially in relation to the role of locally recruited language intermediaries. The Head of the MOD's Operational Languages Support Unit reported that, 'From a MOD point of view, the project has been a valuable contribution to the current internal consideration of what our future military language capability needs to be...This is particularly relevant in considering the use of contracted linguists and bi-lingual, locally-employed civilians, whose backgrounds, strengths, weaknesses and aspirations require careful consideration in the context of military operations' (March 2012) [*Languages at War: a UK Ministry of Defence perspective*, in eds. H.Footitt and M. Kelly, *Languages and the Military. Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 58-69.]

Subsequently (April 2013), the MOD published its first specifically language-related Joint Doctrine Note (JDN), *Linguistic Support to Joint Operations*, which Reading researchers were asked to comment on before publication: ' Thank you for your valued comments on the draft of the JDN; I think I have addressed them all in the final draft' (February 2013).

- **Professional Interpreters Association**

The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) used the research in its efforts to

improve the conditions of interpreters ‘on the ground’ in war which resulted in AIIC’s Code of Practice document, *Conflict Zone Field Guide for Civilian Translators/Interpreters and Users of their Services* (2012). The now President of AIIC notes that, ‘allowing for its emphasis on language policy rather than protection of practitioners, [the research] can be linked in many ways to our own project *Interpreters in Conflict*’ [<http://aiic.net/page/3499/languages-at-war-2010/lang/1>]. As a result of the cooperation established, AIIC became an active partner in the subsequent *Languages and International NGOs* network, ‘...the *Languages at War* project has encouraged us to seek a closer relationship with the academic community whose research can be invaluable as a basis for our own practical steps’ (AIIC President, November 2011).

- **NGOs**

The methodologies and insights developed in the research led to the formation of the *Languages and International NGOs* network (2012, PI Footitt) to examine the role that languages play in NGO activity in conflict areas. The new grouping currently includes the International Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Concordis International, and has disseminated its initial concerns to DFID (September 2012), and to members of the European Parliament’s Development Committee (October 2012).

By bringing together language practitioners, museum curators, MOD personnel, and NGOs in an ongoing dialogue with academics, this research has raised the profile of foreign languages in these areas, and encouraged a positive attitude towards the role which languages research can play in matters of public concern.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Impact on language academics/language practitioners:

- Palgrave Macmillan commissioning editor of *Languages at War* series (*)
- *Languages at War* Facebook site: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/languagesatwar>

Impact on the Imperial War Museum:

- Email from Director Public Programmes at Imperial War Museum (†).

Impact on Ministry of Defence:

- *Linguistic Support to Joint Operations*, Joint Doctrine note 1/13, MOD, Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre, April 2013, <http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jdn-1-13-linguistic-support-to-joint-operations>
- Letter from Defence Operational Language Support Unit (30 March 2012), and email on contribution to the Joint Doctrine note (18 February 2013). (†)
- *Times* Defence correspondent article, ‘Brave men and women who put war into words’, *The Times*, 30 April 2011.

Impact on Professional Interpreters:

- Letter from former President of AIIC (15 November 2011). (†)
- *Conflict Zone Field Guide for Civilian Translators/Interpreters and Users of their Services* <http://aiic.net/page/3853>

Impact on NGOs

- Reports on meetings at blogs.reading.ac.uk/languages-and-international-ngos/

(*) Contact details provided separately

(†) Letter available upon request