

RUNNING HEAD: Translation Consequence

Translation Consequence:

The Crusade for Information in Wartime Communications

Abstract

Currently, there are between 2500 and 3000 Canadian troops stationed in Afghanistan fighting against insurgent groups and trying to establish a strong, self-sufficient Afghan government that can continue this United Nations sanctioned, NATO led mission. Based on data collected from interviews with former soldiers, this paper describes the modern information-based warfare exemplified in Afghanistan and other contemporary conflicts, and issues and implications surrounding Afghan interpreters' inclusion in Canadian units deployed in the Panjwaii district in Kandahar. The discussion uses a constructivist and postcolonial approach to consider interpreters' contribution to, and status in, the war for information, identifies several cultural causes of strain between interpreters and combatants, and reveals negative implications for military communications. This study concludes with a series of recommendations designed to improve the effective flow of communication and cultural understanding between interpreters and combatants.

Keywords: interpretation, wartime communication, post-colonialism, intercultural communication.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
Method	12
Results and Discussion of Analysis	14
Conclusion and Recommendations	19
Conclusion and Future Directions	21
References	22
Acknowledgements	24

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“Everybody knows that talking is better than fighting, and nobody knows that better than our soldiers on the front line. We support the concept of all parties involved in battle, if we are going to bring an end to the battle, we have somehow got to be engaged in conversations rather than violence.” - Jack Layton

Canadian soldiers in Kandahar face a foreign enemy and being unable to communicate in the local language leaves troops at a disadvantage. In older forms of warfare, there was little use for interpretation at war; warring nations did not seek to understand their foes, merely to destroy them. Also, it was less common for nations of vastly differing languages and cultures to have a reason to go to war in the first place. However, as land disputes have been increasingly replaced with conflicts over resources, and globalization and technology have facilitated international relations, information has gained critical importance in the execution of modern warfare. This paper will discuss interpreters’ inclusion in warfare, paying special attention to their contribution to, and status in, a new kind of warfare—the war for information. Recent warfare between nations that are worlds apart in language, ideology, and custom teaches us that the capability to communicate effectively in wartime is heavily impacted by the degree of intercultural competency—the awareness that cultural background impacts communication style (Rothman 2008).

In the Afghanistan conflict, assumptions about native interpreters—or “terps”—are easily and often unknowingly made by Canadian soldiers (Pigott 2007). By analyzing interviews given by

Canadian soldiers, this paper examines the repercussions of intercultural insensitivity. Analysis is generally grounded in postcolonial theory and the constructivist approach, and identifies cultural assumptions and their implications for Canada's communications protocol. This data provides the basis for recommendations intended to improve the process for gathering and relaying information between two cultures at war.

Literature review

For the purposes of this study, several topics were surveyed to discover useful terminology and frameworks for situating research. These topics were: qualitative approaches to interviews, culturally-relevant theories and approaches, and comparative case studies.

Qualitative approaches to interviews

Assertions made by Kvale (1996) were useful in legitimizing personal narratives as an appropriate source for the data required by this study. Kvale rejected the position that qualitative research is unscientific because it is influenced by the researcher; rather, he argues, it does not have to look objectively, since objectivity in itself is a rather subjective notion. Kvale concludes that the interview is neither an objective nor a subjective method since its essence is "intersubjective" (54). Kvale also makes the apt point that in the "linguistically constituted and interpersonally negotiated" social world we live in, the qualitative interview is a legitimate scientific tool (243).

Also focusing on the interview as a valid methodology, Fontana and Frey (1994) observe that the increased emphasis on interviews in social science has led to a shift in application; interviews

produce “negotiated, contextually based results”—a fact that has led researchers to focus on uncovering “the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life” (698). This trend guided the way that this study considered interviews. Rather than seeking to determine the *what*, analysis sought to identify the *how*; in other words, the contextual details of each narrative were taken into consideration when categorizing results.

Culturally-relevant theories and approaches

Since translation looks to *decide* what is conveyed through word and meaning (Robinson 1997), interpretation necessarily mediates the significance of a familiar language between a set of speakers (Pochhacker and Shlesinger 2001). Therefore, translation—particularly the critically important and often stressful kind that takes place in wartime—is a site in which the cultural perspectives of interpreters are magnified and can have significant consequences. Yet, there is a shortage of literature that discusses Canada’s relationship with Afghan interpreters as translators in wartime. Translation Studies, which seeks to explore particular language combinations and deal with the broader field of translation, is still a very new discipline (Shafaeffner 2003). This study made use of theory that quantifies relationships between Westerners and “Others” (Delisle and Woodsworth 1995) in order to contextualize findings as a matrix of cultural relationships.

This investigation into the repercussions of the status and treatment of interpreters primarily made use of the constructivist approach. In the context of International Relations theory, constructivism considers the ways that the mechanisms and processes of international relations are socially constructed. In other words, a nation’s relationships with other nations are shaped by its ideology and practices. Constructivist pioneer Alexander Wendt (1999) identifies two central arguments of this approach:

...Students of international politics have increasingly accepted two basic tenets of “constructivism:” (1) that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and (2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature. (p. 1)

The constructivist approach is commonly applied to analysis of issues of military security, as it considers the ways that goals, threats, fears, cultures, identities and beliefs influence the actions and decisions of states in conflict. Using this concept to frame my research, I approached my analysis with the assumption that Canadians’ cultural views of Afghans had a direct causal relationship with communications practices in Afghanistan.

I found it useful to partner constructivism with post-colonialism, which provided terms to express cultural relationships between the colonizing West—Canada—and the colonized East—Afghanistan. A fundamental text of post-colonialism, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) views the world as being divided “into two unequal parts, the larger and ‘different’ one called the Orient, the other, also known as *our* world, called the Occident or the West. Such divisions always take place when one society or culture thinks about another one, different from it” (Said, 1980, 1). In this model, Said (1978) argues, there is a subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture. This leads to stereotypes designed to “dehumanize” the region, thus preventing the need for an equal relationship (291):

So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered

the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression. (Said 1980, 1)

As this passage asserts, the negative stereotypes connected to Orientalism have large-scale implications for international relations and the relationship between Canadian troops and Afghan interpreters, as Westerners fill the traditional role of the colonizer that seeks to bring enlightenment or civilization to an unfamiliar land. This understanding of the relationship between Canada and Afghanistan assumes that the Western culture will always be dominant—an assumption that is an important influence on the Canadian approach to communications in Afghanistan, as there is too little effort to train combatants in Afghan dialects.

My understanding of the communications relationship between Canada and Afghanistan in terms of a cultural hierarchy also owes much to the ideas of post-colonial theorist H. K. Bhabha. Much like Said, Bhabha (1994) charges the West with a compulsion to colonize. He argues that this is primarily a product of traditional Western representations of foreign cultures—and, as constructivism has it, a nation's social ideologies determine its foreign policies. Specifically, Bhabha decries the Western production and implementation of binary oppositions, such as center/margin, civilized/savage, and First/Third world. In this study, Bhabha's and Said's ideas provided the basis for characterizing the social construct of Canadian troops and the limitations on the soldier-interpreter relationship.

Not only is the West prejudiced to approach Arabo-Islamic nations with aggression or lower tolerance, but they are less able to value perfect understanding of the Other's culture, rendering the communication between the East and the West "profoundly one-sided" (Said 1980, 1). In this hierarchical context, language is irrevocably associated with its culture and Eastern dialects are made subservient to Anglo-American English, suggesting that intercultural wars are fought between languages as well as people. This built-in devaluation necessarily has repercussions for translators, as they are forced to adapt Eastern forms of communication to a staunchly Western mindset. Bhabha quotes Derrida's assertion that translation is a form of "linguistic imperialism" and a bid for "impossible univocality" (1994, 193-194). Traditionally, translation appraisals "tend to assume the existence of *the* perfect, ideal translation or interpretation, which complies with general norms and codes" (Grbić 2008, 232). As Bhabha explains, "it is a performance of truth or the lack of it that, in translation, impedes the dialectical process of cultural generality and communicability" (1994, 194). In other words, Bhabha holds that no equitable and mutual communication can exist between cultures as long as translation is strictly regulated by one of the parties because this necessarily subordinates the other. This means that current communications practices by the Canadian military are intrinsically flawed, leading to the cultural inequality and misunderstandings that this study seeks to identify.

The interpreter is often the only force preventing critical misunderstandings between cultures from taking place, and is therefore integral to the success—and failure—of any contemporary military unit. Bhabha conceives of the possibility of a "cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (5). The interpreter is this figure that

exists in the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (5). Interpreters are simultaneously powerful, as intercultural mediums, and powerless, as they are constantly pulled between two divergent social constructs—Van Dijk and Soeters (2008) use the apt metaphor of the “tightrope walker” (320). It is necessary to appreciate the ways that ethnic and ideological differences influence the contexts of messages and how language and translation are negotiated in order to facilitate a true mutual understanding. To situate interpretation as a charged form of communication—and language as a potential weapon—is to consider how optimal translation competence (Shafaeffner 2003) can be achieved. Therefore, the recommendations of this study were designed to increase the powers of the interpreter.

Comparative case studies: the American war in Iraq

The strengths and weaknesses of Canadian troops’ communications practices can be easily seen when compared to the communications techniques employed in the ongoing conflict between America and Iraq. The dynamics of interpreters’ inclusion in Western detachments are very different in American combat units. Based on first-hand observation and interviews, V.L. Rafeal (2007) has found that interpreters are vulnerable to alienation from other combatants and to suspicion about their link to the enemy; indeed, interpreters often consider distrust to be an inevitable part of their profession (Moskos 2007, 7). Rafael identifies the Iraqi terps as a focal point of fear. The American troops see them as a vulnerable step in the information sharing processes—almost a necessary evil. For this reason, terps are often viewed with suspicion and severely limited in their behavior and activities, in the hopes of preventing the betrayal of key information to the enemy. In general, American attitudes towards Afghans are negative and based on cultural assumptions.

Likewise, David Common (2006) has found that interpreters are susceptible to alienation from Western combatants. After observing the dynamics of a Western detachment as a CBC correspondent, Common identifies the Afghan terps who translate Dari or Pashtu—the principal dialects of insurgent groups—as particularly vulnerable to this exclusion, as troops often associate them with the enemy. This perception has the potential to create a context in which the interpreter is excluded from the status of combatant.

Rafael's and Common's studies reveal that cultural mistrust has heavy implications for international relations practices (Basil and Manson 1997). As Van Dijk and Soeters (2008) and McFate (2005) note, the partial failures of American operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to a critical evaluation of their military doctrine: “the US Department of Defense recently has learned that the traditional methods of war-fighting are not suitable for ‘low-intensity counterinsurgency operations where civilians mingle freely with combatants in complex urban terrain’” (314-15; 24). Language learning and cultural awareness have since become qualified as priority matters that need to be taken up in future policies of military effectiveness (Van Dijk and Soeters 2008, 315; Moskos 2007, 3-13; McFate and Jackson 2006, 14).

Canadian troops have witnessed very positive outcomes from soldiers' training to express empathy and help Afghan terps negotiate threats and abuse (Pigott 2007). Soldiers are taught to understand that cultural anxieties and the very real threats of death, combat, and torture have significant implications for interpretive decisions and practices (Rafeal 2007). Canadian

combatants realize that this necessarily has consequences for international relations (Basil and Manson 1997).

Method

Very little is known about interpretation and translation in Afghanistan, as details relating to ongoing Canadian military efforts are restricted, despite Canada's *Access to Information Act* (1985). This greatly limits academic study of the Afghan combat and past conflicts (*The Current* 2008). Strict secrecy is anachronistic in an age of information-based warfare. The Canadian military can only benefit from increased understanding of translation issues. With this in mind, my project aimed to contribute materials that may influence how Canada goes to war. Ultimately, this investigation is a call for accountability in translation consequence by emphasizing the degree to and ways in which misinterpretation contributes to conflict and impacts international relationships.

This study considered translation consequence in the Afghan conflict by examining the breakdown in communication between the Canadian troops and the local interpreters, or 'terps', stationed in the Panjwaii district, as recounted in interviews with former soldiers. The Panjwaii district boasts a large population of Canadian soldiers who are engaged in combat with Taliban insurgents. Issues of translation and intercultural sensitivity are intimately familiar to these troops, who rely on interpreters to facilitate communications for Canadian combatants, and interpret the plans and perspectives of insurgents. This study surveyed firsthand accounts about difficulties collaborating with Afghan terps that were given in audio and print interviews with soldiers who served in Afghanistan over the period 2006-2007. The primary source for

interviews was the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC). The CBC's journalistic endeavors to look past stereotypes and actively promote new ideas toward the valuation of Afghan identity and culture are aligned with this study's intentions, making them an ideal source.

Analysis focused on identifying patterns in soldiers' interactions with terps, communication barriers, and the translation judgment of interpreters. Specifically, the study focused on discovering whether an increase in cultural misunderstanding caused a correlating increase in communications difficulties. Communications interactions were captured according to: the content and context of messages, cultural relationships between communicators, and the resulting communications barriers. First, the content of the intended message was compared to the content of the received message. The context was evaluated for any environmental factors which could confuse communications. Then, the cultural affiliations of all involved parties, as well as their perceived relationships to one another, were identified. This step made use of the post-colonial framework by considering the ways that language may have been altered for the purpose of adapting the norms of a non-western context. Culture was also considered for the ways it shapes the identity of communicators. The personal experiences of Canadian soldiers, when amalgamated and interpreted, depicted an identity process that was constantly being negotiated in order to promote effective communication. Soldiers often spoke of their efforts to adapt their communications styles in order to achieve better results when contacting locals. Finally, I considered how translation may be rendered ineffective due to differences in time orientation, cultural norms, culture-based insecurities, reputation and protection. Using Kvale's (1996) categorization methodology, the study rated the effectiveness of each communication on a 5-point scale—5 being completely effective, 3 being somewhat effective and 1 being

completely ineffective. Any consequences of misunderstood content mentioned in interviews were documented to reinforce the severity of ineffective communication. These findings were then compared to similar case studies on the interpreters in the Iraq conflict, as a way of highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the Canadian approach.

Results and discussion of analysis

Findings indicated that translation is receptive and thus it incorporates terps' lived experiences within their culture, and the execution of their military duty. For instance, witnessing traumatic events—like combat and torture—has significant implications for interpretive decisions and practice, as terps have to work through stresses such as mental anxiety and death threats. This necessarily has consequences for accuracy and the frequency of misunderstandings between receiver and sender (Basil and Manson 1997) since interpretation is subjective. The implications of cultural relationships and interpreters' experiences are reflected in four major findings: interpreters facilitate critical cultural understanding; communication can fail completely when no interpreter is present to aid intercultural cooperation; communications failure can have deadly consequences; and Canadian practices are more effective than those employed by American troops, providing a positive model.

Interpreters facilitate critical cultural understanding

Cultural understanding is essential to facilitating helpful communication. For instance, in the Panjwail district, village elders are at the centre of the movement to resist extremist activities. In local communities, tribal influence is a much more influential than the Afghan government. The elders' authority is of great use to Canadian troops in acquiring information against the insurgents. Platoon combatant Nicola, a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT),

describes initiatives for “getting the trust of the population” (2007); reaching out to village elders with food rations is a notable advancement in communicative efforts. Nicola further expresses the dire need for the elders to trust Canadian troops enough to inform them about Taliban activity in the area. Since information-sharers are not found easily, information must often be gathered from Taliban informants (Lynch 2007). For this to be an option, troops must enhance relationships with local community members through interpreters. A 2006 article by Sergeant Russel Storing (2006) indicates the importance of interpreters to understanding the actions of the Afghan locals:

One of my interpreters on Roto 4 told me of a professor he knew who had ripped a number of valuable paintings to pieces hid them to keep them from being burned. Once the Taliban were overthrown, the pieces were then put back together. Had the professor been caught, he would have been executed on the spot for defying a Taliban edict.

Without this interpretation, the Sergeant would have been very likely to misunderstand this act as destructive instead of patriotic. Likewise, a Canadian soldier could very easily misidentify an innocent civilian as a malicious enemy without the aid of an interpreter familiar with local practices. Certainly, troops depend on terps’ experience to navigate an alien society.

Communications failure due to lack of interpreter

Many Canadian efforts in the Panjwahi district have met with frustration without an effective interpreter. Captain Jon Baker, who commands the co-ordination centre in the Panjwahi district, describes dialogue with local elders during “Shuras,” or meetings, as necessary to monitor mobility and track insurgent positions. The difficulty with this process is that Canadian soldiers are still learning cultural nuances (Brewster 2009). In one incident, Canadian troops threatened

the elders' system of law enforcement when they tried to issue an ultimatum that they cut all ties to the Taliban (Al Jazeera 2007). Frustrated with the arguments of the Afghan government, Canadian troops addressed themselves directly to the people. The elders reacted with anger, saying that this was a "blow to their credibility." This severely strained relations between combatants and locals, effectively paralyzing military activity for a time as debate raged. In this case, cultural understanding could have saved a great deal of frustration and waste.

Acting as the sole intermediary between Canadian troops and native Afghans, the work of interpreters often determines whether Canadian initiatives will be successful. Effective communication is of paramount importance in international military actions, where the results of dangerous missions entirely depend on messages that must be understood "loud and clear" (Crossey 2005, 351). When cultural context is not understood, communication proves ineffective.

It is important to note that interpreters are affected by *intercultural competency*, the awareness that cultural background impacts communication style (Rothman 2008). As Pigott's (2007) study finds, soldiers can easily and often unknowingly make cultural assumptions about terps that have a negative impact on communication. With village elders and interpreters often the linchpin to military operations, there are dangerous repercussions of intercultural insensitivity. In the Afghanistan action, one likely reason for miscommunication and cultural misunderstanding is the fact that Western, "low-context" countries value openness and directness in communication, while non-Western countries often employ a more subtle and indirect approach (Van Dijk and Soeters 2008, 316). Needless to say, this critical difference

can lead to miscommunication, and often escalate disagreements. Translation also may be rendered ineffective due to differences in time orientation, cultural norms, and culture-based insecurities.

The consequences of miscommunication

When terms cannot translate a message completely, there are often deadly consequences. The battlefield in Kandahar is a dangerous place where communication during conflicts can make the difference between life and death. The immense noise of weaponry, extreme temperatures, dust, debris, and physical injury, fear, and panic are common elements of the battle environment that can hinder the transmission or reception of intelligence and orders, leaving combatants vulnerable to attack. On one occasion, the interpreter could not interpret everything he heard, and assumed that the Canadian forces understood his full meaning. Unfortunately, this misunderstanding meant that Canadian troops walked into an ambush (In the line of duty 2009). Perfect translation is also essential when treating injuries. Individuals who work in military medicine or 'medics' not only assist in Canadian traumas, but also work on the injuries of the local Afghan population. Major Terry Ratkowski, a maxillofacial surgeon in the military trauma unit, describes that the medics stationed in the trauma unit utilize interpreters to communicate instructions to family members caring for recovering patients (Life and death in Kandahar: Izatullah's story 2008). In such cases, complete understanding is essential to ensure the survival of injured patients. During a video-taped interview, released captive CBC journalist Melissa Fung remembers that her gunmen captives could not determine nor confirm her identity during the excitement of her kidnapping. Later, when interpretation became a bargaining tool for ransom demands, miscommunication between Fung and her captors'

interpreter hindered efforts which worked toward her release (Melissa Fung Interview).

Although she was ultimately released even after ransom payments consistently failed, Fung easily could have been killed due to these problems. Regardless, her account dramatizes the frustration and ineffectiveness that results from faulty communication between cultures.

The benefits of Canadian communications practices

Translation consequence differs across the spectrum of interpretive practice and interpreter status—and the vast difference between Canadian and American communications proves the importance of a positive intercultural relationship between interpreters and combatants. As Rafael (2007) and Common (2006) find, mistrust of interpreters can lead to division, unfamiliarity, and fear—all factors which impede the efficacy of communication. In fact, the division between interpreters and combatants is a false one. Like Western soldiers, Afghan terps put their lives on the line daily and often die alongside troops. In fact, as recently as March 21, 2009, four Canadian soldiers and one interpreter were killed during an attack in Kandahar. With today's information-based warfare against enemies who are difficult to distinguish from civilians, this "us versus them" mentality is an anachronism. Rather, the interpreter fills a critically important role, and should be valued accordingly.

Canadian troops have made progress in this regard. While there are reports of Afghans who resent Canadian troops and reject communication with them, many have responded well to Canadian dialogue and welcomed Canada's efforts with open arms. For instance, the Afghan National Army (ANA) appreciates the support and training they receive and utilize evening pass-time to exchange cultural knowledge and experience with Canadian combatants,

cultivating a spirit of camaraderie (Fighting Ghosts 2009). Coming from a nation that emphasizes multiculturalism and intercultural competence, Canadian soldiers are trained to express empathy, and to help the Afghan terps negotiate the threats and abuse they may be subject to if they are identified as “betrayers” of their people (Pigott 2007). Trained to appreciate these stresses, Canadian troops seek to promote the best possible discourse with interpreters and those for whom they speak (Pigott 2007; Rafeal 2007; Basil and Manson 1997).

Conclusion and recommendations

Currently, Canada is deciding whether it will remain active in Afghanistan past 2011 along with the American forces. These recommendations will primarily be addressed to the Honorable Peter Gordon Mackay's administration in the Ministry of Defense; Canada's military National Investigation Service (NIS), who oversee the nation's military efforts; and United Nations special representatives, as Canada is on an UN-led sanctioned mission. Recommendations are made with the intent of improving the process for gathering and relaying information between two cultures at war by fostering a cultural dialectic; they generally focus on measures to increase Canada's influence on the United Nation's protocols, as well as strengthen trust between interpreters and combatants.

With their documented success in forging mutually-constructive relationships between troops and interpreters, Canada should have more decision-making power in Afghanistan. Speaking to *The Current's* Anna Maria Tremonti, former Canadian soldier turned defense and security analyst Sunil Ram articulates that the United States has more policy influence than Canada

(*The Current* April 15, 2008). American military policy also has the greatest influence with the United Nations. This state of affairs is problematic in the face of the superior communications practices produced by the more culturally sensitive Canadian protocols outlined in this study. Although Canadian policy still requires much improvement, the military should be recognized for its comparative success in this field. Therefore, my first recommendation is that the Canadian detachment be granted increased authority in the Afghanistan effort.

That being said, Canadian practices are not without flaws. Information-based warfare calls for a new military doctrine wherein not technology and power, but cultural and linguistic understanding should form the cornerstones of military action (McFate 2005, 37; Moskos 2007, 3-5). Since warfare has taken a new form, combatants must consider strategic thinking over brute force. In other words, Canadian troops must adapt to changing threats in order to secure Afghanistan; this includes a closer cooperation effort with terps. The military's intention is to make the Afghan soldiers and military self-sufficient and able to withstand insurgents, yet remaining cultural barriers continue to frustrate this objective. Therefore, my second recommendation is to increase the number of troops who are trained in intercultural competency; this should decrease the perceived cultural hierarchy identified by Bhabha and therefore enhance the effectiveness of the information-sharing mission.

As an addendum to this recommendation, additional research should be conducted to determine practices for ensuring the most effective communications with and for interpreters. A cross-national comparison of communications strategies, field studies, and long-term evaluations would be tremendously useful in sounding the depths of this yet undiscovered international

relations issue. As this study finds, it is critical to enhance equitable relationships with interpreters and eliminate mistrust wherever possible. Currently, interpreters are among the most vulnerable of all operatives, as Afghan war-lords seek to sabotage any forms of assistance toward the Canadian forces, leaving them isolated and at odds with their environment. Since interpreters are serving with Canadians, it is essential that the military consider interpreters as Canadian soldiers rather than employees. As the mission comes to its conclusion, interpreters must be assured that they will continue to be protected by the Canadian government.

With the very real possibility that Canadian troops will not be present past 2011 to protect interpreters, fear of reprisal has become a very sensitive issue for interpreters, causing dissension toward combatants. In order to safeguard their future, terps may feed information to war-lords and their accomplices. A large percentage of Afghan interpreters enlist with the hopes of immigrating to Canada when the troops depart (Panetta 2008). In order to discourage betrayal and do justice to these individuals who have selflessly served Canada's interests, Canada must welcome these individuals and their families. Recently, Ottawa has announced that Canada will extend sanctuary to these individuals, who may be political refugees upon the conclusion of the military action. This is a step in the right direction. It is essential that Canada follow through on these plans, and even look for ways to extend them. For instance, Canadian law only recognizes translation of English to French and vice versa, as well as Aboriginal dialects. An amendment to the *Interpreters Act* to extend provisions to translators beyond Canadian borders will benefit terps who participate in wars abroad; this would then act as a catalyst to expand section 15(2) of the *Official Languages Act* which accepts translation on request for court and hearing proceedings only.

Limitations and future directions

In the end, analyses of interviews with Canadian soldiers in or have returned from Afghanistan points to the undeniable fact that cultural relationships play a primary role in effective wartime communication. As this study argues, a re-conceptualization of the military interpreter, in combination with language and cultural awareness training for the troops, is the best plan for seeing progress in the Afghanistan arena.

There are several factors that limit this study. First, it is difficult to contextualize the Canadian experience in the broader spectrum of wartime communication, unless additional, comparable studies are conducted during another conflict. Also, since data was extrapolated from existing accounts, there was no means to fact-check and verify interpretations. A third limitation is the fact that many incidents and practices relating to sensitive information cannot be disclosed to the public. Similarly, in order to ensure their ongoing safety, it is impossible to interview the troops themselves; thus, all information will be provided from the perspective of Canadian combatants. Finally, as this research is based on analysis of transcripts of disparate interviews, responses will be given to a different set of questions, which will necessarily influence results. Further research should seek to address these shortcomings by conducting interviews specifically designed to produce data about intercultural communication, and including interviews with interpreters. If interviewees have consented to participate in such a study, they would be available to approve all qualitative interpretations of their personal accounts, leading to a higher degree of accuracy.

There are myriad applications for research in this field, such as determining methods for uncovering corruption in the Afghan government and improving the deployment of foreign aid. These areas are especially important considering the fact that Canada will seek a mutually respectful relationship with the autonomous Afghan government at the conclusion of its mission. Also, tactics and training methods to increase the efficacy of interpreters are greatly needed.

It is very ironic that the topic which, by all indications, will govern the evolution of warfare, is also one of the least studied and understood. The sole conference that discussed the response to terrorist events—the Canadian Conference on Counter-Terrorism and Public Health held in Toronto from October 29 to November 1, 2003—did not address the importance of interpretation, preferring to focus on the hot-button issue of terrorism. The fact that the importance of translation in modern warfare is not part of the public consciousness is very problematic, as Canada could very quickly find that its military is rendered powerless in a new kind of warfare.

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