

# Agents of Change: Interpreters as Witnesses of Transition

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## ABSTRACT

In this article we would like to share the preliminary results of our on-going research on the memories of interpreters. From 2011-2012 we have carried out in-depth interviews with representatives of two different samples: experienced dialogue interpreters a) in Estonia and b) in Sweden, most of whom have worked from the 1960s till today. This article sums up the preliminary results on the sample from Estonia. The focus is on the development of the interpreter's role as reflecting the changes in society, cultural and social practices. As for the theoretical background, we view the processes within the framework of Transition Studies (cf. Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010; Kennedy, 2002). The methodological framework is ethnographic research. More specifically: we combine narrative studies and memory research (Kõresaar & Kirss, 2004; Riessman, 1993; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Gilbert, 2008); method: semi-structured interviews (cf. Nunan, 1992; Van Maanen, 1983; Gilbert, 2008). The analysis of our on-going research also enables us to test and share with our readers the pros and cons of the chosen methodology and methods.

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## 1. Introduction

### Self-Descriptions as a Source for Understanding the Role

By way of introduction, allow us to revise that research on the interpreter's role has started to grow relatively recently. Some of the most important landmarks have been presented by Andersen (1976/2002), Wadensjö (1992, 1998), Pöchhacker (2004), Pöllabauer (2005) and Vik-Tuovinen (2006). In more recent research Wadensjö (2001), Tate and Turner (1997/2002), Jones (2004), Leanza (2005), Valero-Garcés (2005) and Bot (2005) focus on the interpreters' role, ethics and the constraints of the role demands. We find a welcome addition to these research results in Angelelli (2006), Pöchhacker (2006), Braun (2007), Lee (2007), Rudvin (2007). Also Lipkin (2008), Jacobsen (2008) as well as Apostolou (2009) have illustrated the multiplicity of the ethical dilemmas interpreters may face in different interpreting situations, in different societies and *translation cultures* (cf. Prunč, 1997). Important new vistas have been opened by e.g. Wadensjö, Englund-Dimitrova et al. (2007), Pöchhacker (2008), Angelelli (2008), Rudvin and Tomassini (2008). Relevant additions to understanding the role of interpreters have been made by the several descriptions of the interpreter's role in Valero, Garces, and Martin (2008). The development of the interpreting profession, with a special focus on the identity and role of interpreters, is paid due attention to in Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger (2009, 2010). Relevant recent contributions on interpreting research and some dilemmas faced are explored in Nicodemus and Laurie Swabey (2011). The insights from actual practices and research are more and more applied in training (cf. e.g. Angelelli, 2008) and professional codes.

The interpreters' professional development and the formation of the profession in society has been analysed by Gou Ting (2009). In Sweden, Eva Norström (2010) presents an analysis on how interpreters help society, and if and how the society (state) should guarantee their rights for professional development, as well as the rights of the citizens for the immaculate services. In Tryk (2007) and Baer (2011) long-awaited analyses of the specifics of translation and mediation in Eastern Europe are introduced.

In Estonia, the self-descriptions of dialogue interpreters (Mullamaa, 2006; 2008; 2009) have demonstrated the development of a specific *translation culture* (Prunč, 1997) and a professional role from the 1990s till today. Our 2006-2009 research offers insights into the ethical dilemmas entailed in cultural mediators' role in a post-soviet environment (cf. Mullamaa, 2006; 2008; 2009). Kääramees (2009) develops the study to

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include several in-house and freelance interpreters. Remme (2010) carries out an extensive study of public institutions in Estonia, including the Hospital Association, prisons, state institutions, schools, social aid offices, local governments and notary's offices.

The richness of the interpreters' self-descriptions in my earlier studies inspired me to develop the research with a slightly different focus. In 2010, with the kind support of the Swedish Institute Visby scholarship, and the kind support and remarkable competence of researchers and experts at the Institute for Translation and Interpreting (TÖI) at Stockholm University, I launched a new stage of research, where instead of focusing on how interpreters analyse their professional role in specific interpreting *situations*, we allow them to share their story of becoming the interpreter, and developing in the profession *through the different periods of time*. The work process is going on, but even in the current stage of the research interesting results have been revealed. The interview results from two different countries allow for interesting material for comparison as concerns the reflections of the society on one's professional role. At the same time also traits typical for the profession *per se* can be visualised.

In describing our history and defining our roles, the memories and self-descriptions of the representatives of different professions provide a rich source of information. Documenting the development of the practices and role of interpreters through the different periods in society serves as an important stepping stone for understanding their role. The role descriptions also give an exciting "insider view" of the society in a definite period (in our case, the 1960s till today), and in its different development stages. At the same time, the interpreter's role is a complicated construct where the rules of confidentiality, neutrality and professional conduct set a veil of secrecy on sharing some essential insights from their insider *cum* participant observer role.

Focusing on the diachronic aspect allows experienced interpreters to share their memories on the interpreting events they have worked in, people they worked with and for, and typical interpreting assignments. We are most grateful to our informants in both Estonia and Sweden. It is not easy to find participants who have been working in the 1960s and are still active in the field today. The more thankful are we for those who have agreed to share their memories, especially as there are areas that can be difficult both emotionally, or for other reasons. We also hope that the data gathered in one specific context can allow itself to be generalised – at least to some extent – to other regions with a similar socio-political background. Thus, we believe that the trends described in Estonia can be similar to other CEE countries with a similar history; and trends described in Sweden can possibly be similar in other "developed Western societies", and definitely Scandinavian countries with a similar welfare model.

The theoretical framework of the study entails recent developments in Cultural sociology, Transition Studies and Narrative/ Memory Research. The analysis also holds practical value, as in cooperation with Tartu University Interpreting Centre, we use the results in developing the training programme for dialogue interpreters.

This article sums up just some of the preliminary results of the longer project. In this text we focus on the results from Estonia. It is built up following a two-tiered approach. It means: both the theoretical development in the analyses of society and data received through field-work are relevant.

## **2. The Theoretical Background: Cultural Sociology as a Framework for the Research**

In much of recent research, the position of the individual *viz a viz* the society has become central. Traditional boundaries between disciplines and the personal-professional group, the society and global movements are often reviewed in the light of the quickly changing circumstances. According to Erik Allardt (2004, p. 229), the current period in the development of sociology could be described as "new theoretical orientations concerned with cultural constructions, globalisation, individualisation, and the cross-disciplinary approaches /which/ emerged towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century". In these trends, the individual and the global become conceptualised in a new way. As Allardt (2004, p. 241) points out:

The process of individualisation arises at least partly from the processes through which traditional social divisions such as those based on social class, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, regional background, and so on, have lost much of their binding force and thus explanatory power. One of the consequences of individualisation is that new approaches are implied in the study of relations between individuals and

groups. /.../ Special attention is given to the relationships between the networks on the micro level and the associations existing in society.

For many scientists, the clear-cut boundaries of disciplines no longer suffice to explain complex processes. Allardt (2004, p. 241) suggests:

The new tendencies, the increasing importance of cultural interpretations, individualisation and globalisation are all phenomena which are not the concern of sociology alone but also of adjacent fields. This contributes to the increase in disciplinary approaches used by sociologists. When studies are assumed to be of practical value it is natural to combine approaches and ideas from different social sciences.

In this spirit, our research tries to rely on relevant developments in closely related disciplines: Transition Studies, Narrative and memory studies, and our object of research – interpreters – is naturally related to Interpreting Studies. But before we introduce our results, a brief overview of the context of our research will be given.

### **2.1 The Context of Research 1: Estonia**

Much research has been carried out in the area of post-communism (cf. e.g. Kanet, 2008; Onken, 2009). In the Estonian context, the period of our research – the 1960s till today – could briefly be divided into the following sub-periods:

1. The 1960s are described by a relative “melt-down” of the earlier harsher politics. Intellectual life and creativity flourished. “The golden sixties” were described by recreating some contacts with the West. In 1965 a tangible contact- “Georg Ots” – a ship between Helsinki and Tallinn started its regular tours, in 1972 an iconic hotel Viru in Tallinn was built. Western radio stations (Voice of America and Radio Free Europe) brought ideas, Western music and clothes were started to be worn. The end of the 1970s was in sharp contrast to this, as Russification intensified. But the Olympic Regatta of the Moscow Olympic games in Tallinn in 1980 was a strong sign for the consciousness of people. For interpreters, this was a first major international event where interpreting was used, in the year leading to the summer Olympics interpreter training sessions were held for language teachers at universities deemed capable for the task.

2. The end of the 1980s-beginning of 1990s are described as being “characterised by the highest possible level of civic participation” (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 7). The sentiment and emotions were high, the changes at stake pivotal for the nation (as for example very well captured in the well-known film “the Singing Revolution” ([www.singingrevolution.com](http://www.singingrevolution.com))). The Western countries did not at once support the liberation of the former Eastern bloc. The first to finally recognise Estonian independence in 1991 was Iceland – far away from the power “fault lines” of Europe. At the same time, any contacts abroad were seen as a window to a better reality, opinions of foreign experts and specialists served as a justification for breaking loose from the previous system: “Foreign policy was aimed at international recognition and creating an attractive reputation for foreign investors, thus breaking economic and political dependence on Russia” (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 9). Quite obviously, in a country where foreign languages other than Russian were spoken only by 32-39% of the population (Vihalemm, Masso, & Vihalemm, 2004, p. 59), of which only 9% of the people in the active work-force in the 1980s-1990s were able to use it actively (ibid.: 63), also the help of interpreters and translators was needed to communicate. The ‘translation’ of Western values started at many different levels.

3. 1991-1994: Soon after the euphoric liberation period, reforms set in. The newly elected government applies “one of the most radical agendas for post-communism reform: liberal ‘shock therapy’” (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 8). Relevant processes, where it was necessary to interpret, included numerous assignments for international organisations, different institutions from the Nordic countries which provided their support: “/.../the know-how and resources provided by international organizations and cooperation with the Nordic countries was important in terms of sustaining the traditional will to overcome the difficulties associated with the reform process” (ibid. p. 9).

This is the period when interpreters and translators could work over night, hand in hand with the representatives of the intelligentsia and executive power, who worked for the idea of change. Documents had to be translated, contacts developed and the agenda for the development of the country justified for the new leaders themselves as well as for the society and international community. Lauristin and Vihalemm (2010, p. 9, emphasis mine) point out: “Western countries and international agencies provided significant

material resources and the technical assistance that were needed to cope with the severe problems emerging after the break – *political, social and cultural/symbolic* – with the previous system”.

Another area where interpreter mediation would occur was during mediating the different support and aid programmes typical of the period, as well as the knowledge transfer in more concrete areas necessary for rebuilding a state:

It was during this period – when the vast majority of important decisions had to be made despite a deficit of money, information, know-how and human resources – that the role of external aid and technical assistance was most significant. Knowledge transfer (supplemented by financial resources for implementation from the EBRD, World Bank, IMF and the EU) was especially fruitful in those areas where remnants of the Soviet system needed to be replaced as quickly as possible with new structures: *inter alia* taxation, customs, banking, social insurance, public health, labour market, etc. (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, pp. 9-10).

This supports the results of our 2006 study (cf. Mullamaa, 2006; 2008; 2009) where a number of interpreters identified as one of their main fields of activity mediating for the different training sessions and further education seminars. A parallel activity was different study trips and cooperation between the representatives of different state institutions (local governments, state hospitals, heads of institutions responsible for different communal services, etc.), and businessmen for cooperation and intensive exchange of know-how with their foreign counterparts.

In Translation Studies, the translation processes have been seen as export-import (cf. Lambert, 1991; cf. Mullamaa, 2006; 2008), and important cultural processes as a result of such export-import. Sociologists (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 7) present the idea according to which *the whole transition process* of the Central and East European (CEE) countries could be interpreted as a process of mediating between external and internal factors (cf. also Kasekamp & Pääbo, 2006; Lahvinets, 2006; Stewart, 2006). Importation is seen as a phenomenon setting the scene for the major changes in the society to happen:

It is sometimes argued that external factors played the decisive role in the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe from the communist regime (and the Baltic countries from Soviet occupation)/.../. In this context, we can interpret the whole phenomenon of ‘transition culture’ as a field of mediation, in which external demands from powerful international agencies are turned through a specific ‘learning process’ into value preferences and codes of behavior of internal actors. (ibid.).

Thus, we suggest, in its essence, transition could be seen a process of *Translation* from existing Western values or institutional regulations. (This is especially notable in the demands to conform to the explicit EU norms set for candidates in the past as well currently in order to gain right to accession (observable even today, e.g. in the case of Turkey)). This also concerns how a number of soft values and other “co-products” of conforming to Western lifestyles have become integrated with people’s essential identity and beliefs. But conforming to the mainstream also functions as a major “symbolic power” to justify the course taken:

The international media and transnational professional, political, economic and civic networks and associations played an important role in the mediation process between East and West which helped in the formation of Estonia’s international credibility, and *vice versa*, as well as serving as a source of legitimation and *symbolic power* for the domestic policy makers (presidents, leading politicians, new financial institutions, etc.) (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 8).

We want to find out if and in which way the interpreters and translators working in these periods recall the changes and their role in it.

5. By the mid-1990s, in a country overtaken by “technocratic perfectionism” (ibid.), Western influence still affected the democratic, citizen-friendly developments. This, again, in cooperation with interpreters and translators (cf. Mullamaa, 2006, pp. 124-142):

The high bureaucratic pressure supported technocratic elitism, and weakened even further the democratic mechanisms of social accountability. At the same time, advances were started to be made in the minority integration programme (lead by UNDP specialists and financially supported by the Nordic countries) /.../ International NGOs and foundations, most notably the Soros foundation and different Nordic networks, including trade unions, also had strong effects on the revitalization of civic society (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 12; emphasis mine).

At the same time, the local processes and values were shaping in parallel to the “importation process”. Also sociologists point out that the input and output are often difficult to tell between: “/.. / external factors were often mediated by the domestic environment, and the divide between external and internal was often blurred” (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 21).

6. By 2010, as Lauristin and Vihalemm (p. 1) put it, “ /... / the mood of optimism and appraisal of post-communist achievements prevalent in the 1990s has turned into caution and criticism during the post-accession years”. This has had an impact on the development of the “citizen-society”: “Partly as a consequence of normative politics and partly as a prerequisite for its continuation, individuals have disentangled themselves from established social structures” (Vihalemm, 2008, p. 75, emphasis mine).

Similar trends are illustrated and analysed also in Howard, Marc Morje’ (2003) *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. The ordinary “man in the street” may be taken aback of the sweep of makeover and often considerable relocation of resources as well as an organisation of life. Anne Narusk (in Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, p. 11) states: “for most of the population the reforms have meant the end of customary way of life”. Runnel et al. (2010, p. 44) state:

Alienation and institutional development in the public sector, which brought along the consumerist approach of handling citizens as clients, supported the development of consumerist democracy (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998; Ridell, 2002). At the same time, these developments hindered the participatory democracy, based on real mutual communication.

As Triin Vihalemm describes it in 2008 (p. 74), “ /... / risks and contradictions continue to be socially produced but the duty and the need to cope with them is individualized”. We are curious about what the role of the interpreter who has to immaculately convey the message of importance of swift reforms, at the same time being knowledgeable of the severe consequences some of these may have on ordinary people is.

Viive-Riina Ruus (2009) describes the dominant traits of the currently prevalent model by economic neo-liberalism in society (ideology much developed and reinforced by Thatcher, 1979-1990; Reagan, 1981-89). This (ibid.) entails focusing on efficiency, „grids“ to measure progress, economic viability, standardisation – experts to control (and define) criteria; It is hierarchical (money-experts-leadership-boss-worker). Ruus (ibid.) believes that this ideology is still to be seen behind the work principles of many international (especially EU) organisations, and also CEE countries and Estonia as a „diligent disciple“.

Ruus (2009), however, points out that problems which such ideologies can cause may include: fragmentation, loss of meaning and importance; shortage of inner motivation, and as a result of this: less creativity, innovation and democracy. In the longer run this can lead to the de-professionalization of professionals. The problems she points out have often – albeit at a less deep-going level - been discussed in the analyses of society in the media. Let us remember this background for our analysis below, both as concerns the research context and the professionalization processes.

## 2.2 Estonia and Transition Studies

For understanding societies in transition in general and post-soviet societies in particular, the concept of ‘transition culture’ may prove useful. Kalmus et al. (2010, p. 51) describe the notion ‘transition culture’ - as “meaning a framework of values, beliefs, symbols, etc. through which actors interpret the transformation of political and economic systems and undertake actions under new circumstances”.

But to help us envision the current stage that the modern narratives of the CEE countries’ transition cultures are a part of, we should consider that – as in all research – not only the periods and discourses, but also *the ways of interpreting these* – are relative and should be taken “with a pinch of salt”. Kennedy (ibid.) states:

Cultures are bound in time. That is not always apparent, or emphasised, in a good deal of social science. In more “stable” societies, one can focus on the structure of a particular culture or set of social relations and assume its endurance or track its evolution over time. If the broader sensibility that informed originating questions does not change significantly, the historicity of social relations or cultures can remain unstated. It is far more difficult to overlook that historicity in Eastern Europe.

Runnel et al. (2010, p. 29) point out that participants in these processes have been seen rather as passive objects than “active agents”:

Recent analyses of changing Eastern European societies have for the most part been concerned with institutional and structural change: the effects of economic and political reforms and their social environment. The focus has been on the 'space of possibilities' rather than on individuals as active agents within these environments.

Their role and activity of individuals has been poorly documented (cf. *ibid.*, emphasis mine): Transition studies have generally followed people in order to estimate the ability and readiness of the population to go along with change, including the study of change by means of the public opinion poll, i.e. from the perspective of agreeing or not agreeing and coping or not coping with ongoing changes. *The role of people as interpreters or co-producers of the meaning of change has often been underestimated in such studies.*

To find out more about how people feel and behave, their memories can be gathered. Homogeneous groups (similar educational, social, cultural background) can be most useful here. Thus, we hope that our decision to give interpreters – a clearly defined professional group – a chance to share with us their memories can also contribute to building up more knowledge about the period and processes. Special attention will be paid to the transition years.

Interpreters were working closely with the actors in the limelight, as well as participating directly in the processes evolving in this period. Participant-observers *cum* mediums in these processes, they even have first-hand experience with transforming and forwarding the ideas of the emerging and newly emergent ruling classes, cf.:

The leading role in the formation of the 'transition culture' has been performed by political, economic and cultural elites, who participate in the construction of the new social order, producing and institutionalizing their 'ontological visions' of society (Eisenstadt, 1992, p. 412). These visions of political elites have been verbalized in concepts such as 'Westernization', 'marketization', but also 'social justice', 'sustainable development', etc. These concepts have not been produced in isolation, but have mostly been a product of 'discursive learning' in the process of interaction between domestic elites and their international partners (Raik, 2003; Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010, pp. 4-5).

While mediating these processes the interpreters also witnessed the formation of the new agenda and discourse, the new political culture of the whole "new Europe". Intertwined with the issues of power (cf. Pym, 2004) is the omnipresent issue of experts (cf. *ibid.*). It is the "experts" who decide on what is important, and basically through this, shape the development of Europe:

Although each area of transition has its principal experts – from human resource management to marketing to constitution writing to local government – transition culture writ has its core in financial expertise and the organisations that allocate funds within nations and across them. /.../ *With their power to name opportunities and problems, to identify preferred strategies and dangerous paths, to fund research, and to provide fellowships, this core helps to establish the structure within which transition, as a global culture, operates* (Kennedy, 2002, p. 11; emphasis mine).

We are curious about what is the role of the interpreter who has to immaculately convey the message of importance of swift reforms, at the same time being knowledgeable of the severe consequences some of these may have on ordinary people. Is there a disparity? How is it perceived? Kalmus et al. (2010, p. 52) also bring out a slightly different approach to the notion of 'transition' which illustrates how multilayered the self-perceptions in a swift transition can be:

/.../ the cultural context of transition is ambivalent: the symbols, values and identities brought about by new cultural flows exist in parallel with old traditions, narratives and values. Members of society who are faced with the challenge of coping with the ambivalence of a new situation may refer both to old and new cultural resources (Sztompka, 2004, pp. 176-7). Furthermore, Sztompka notes that different social groups may 'pick up' diverse symbols and narratives.

Thus, it becomes essential to take into account the opinions and experience of people living in the midst of the transformation:

But to understand transition culture *as a lived practice beyond the sites of its design*, one should explore its application, interpretation, and transformation beyond its core. In that process, one might even *understand better those emergent formations that the core is unable, or unwilling, to see*, and to move beyond the culture that bestows hidden power on transition's categories (Kennedy, 2002, p. 11; emphasis mine).

One could see the whole evolving process as a narrative, as an evolving tale:

*Transition culture relies on a dynamic but directed tale /.../ Its identity is based on a history of contingencies rooted in narratives of tragedy and triumph. Transition's mobilizing tales are also told in languages other than English, and in those expressions they carry other plots that convey more, and less, than what those in the core of transition culture might recognize (ibid., emphasis mine).*

The protagonists of this piece of research – the interpreters – were present during many of these processes, performing their tasks and thus *volens-nolens* assisting to the developments. Nevertheless, we do not wish to view their role in a merely instrumentalist way as “providers of a service”. Rather, we are going to record and analyse their memories as those of “participant observers”, participants in the cultural and societal processes of a changing country, where – we hope – against the background of societal changes and makeover, also different new angles of the interpreter's role could be exposed. After all, as experts in at least two languages and cultures, they are expert witnesses on many of the changes with a unique position of being simultaneously an insider and outsider – a participant observer, and the tool of instituting change. In tune with the modern principles of life-story and narrative research (cf. Riessman, 1997; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Kirss & Kõresaar, 2004; Earthy & Cronin, 2008), every memory is of a value.

### 3. The Methodological Framework

The methodological framework of this study is ethnography. As pointed out by Gilbert (2008, pp. 268-269), “ethnography is often path-breaking /.../, exploring a hitherto obscure niche of social life”. Gilbert (ibid.) adds that ethnographic methods are often applied to study ‘the unofficial’ reality: “things could well be otherwise than they appear on paper: there must be an ‘unofficial’ reality too”. Furthermore: /.../ ethnography always involves studying behaviour in ‘natural settings’, as opposed to the experimental settings of clinical psychology. Further is the idea that an adequate knowledge of social behaviour cannot be grasped until the researcher has understood the symbolic world in which people live. By ‘symbolic world’ we refer to the meanings people apply to their own experiences, meanings developed through patterns of behaviour which are in some way distinctive (ibid.).

#### 3.1. Narrative Analysis

By telling a story, people conceptualise, re- or deconceptualise their roles and their self: “Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned” (Rosenweld & Ochburg, 1992, p. 1; in Gilbert, 2008b, p. 269)”. After encounters with respondents have taken place, the recorded material is transcribed. Field notes are analysed and categorised, they are added to the recordings and transcripts. The background information about the participant, the circumstances and atmosphere of the interview, the tonality of the encounter and self-presentation of the participant, the cooperation of the narrator and researcher is documented (cf. also Hodkinson, 2008; Gilbert, 2008a).

In the next stage the rich data obtained will be carefully analysed and reviewed. It is time to decide which “red line” to choose. We chose the method of thematic patterning (cf. Gilbert, 2008b; cf. e.g. also <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.>).

Riessman (1993) differentiates between five stages of collecting and analysing data: attending, telling, transcribing, analysing and reading. At all these stages, “the researcher is engaged in a process of interpretation of a life to which they have no access” (cf. Earthy & Cronin, 2008; in Gilbert, 2008b, p. 427). Riessman (1993, p. 15) points out:

Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst and reader. Although the goal may be to tell the whole truth, our narratives about others' narratives are our world creations...Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly.

Therefore, we have tried to rather focus on the *emic* perspective (the insider's understanding of a social situation or experience; cf. Earthy and Cronin, (2008; in Gilbert, 2008, p. 429; cf. also Gribaudo, 2004)). The participant quotes are given as authentically as possible, and it is our hope that with the help of these, readers may construct their own interpretation, in parallel, in addition to, or instead of those of the researcher.

### **3.2. Interpreting Memories and Narrative Data**

In modern Narrative Studies there is a perceived shift towards focusing on the individual, their experience and context. Hinrikus and Kõresaar (2004, p. 26; emphasis mine) point to the following trends in foci:

*/.../ a switch from discipline-centredness to problem- and context-centredness, from individual cultural phenomena to a holistic treatment of culture, from the external reality of the producer of culture to a reality centred in the group and (particularly) individual experience (Vunder, 1999).*

This is in tune with the biographical method, which is also the method of our approach:

Consequently, methods of culture studies began to be submitted to critical analysis, with the result of favouring *soft* or qualitative methods. Biographical method, which is one of them, is directly connected with the concept of an active subject, who interprets social reality from an individual perspective (Hinrikus & Kõresaar, 2004, p. 26).

Although the autobiographical method may-be criticised for analysing "just the memories of different people", this may be much more authentic source of real perception and documentation of processes than the "main-stream", media reinforced discourse that typically is created in every society:

In keeping with biographical method, one can discern the multivocality of history, the recognition of both private and public, as well as generational diversity and self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Hinrikus & Kõresaar, 2004, p. 29).

As pointed out by Marcus (1992, pp. 316-317) (*ibid.*):

Collective representations are most effectively filtered through personal representations; thus autobiography is the most valuable source for the evaluation of the kind of historical experience which is handed on in memory, and which shapes social movements.

But our choice to use memories and descriptions of how the role has evolved and what the expectations to interpreters have been and are for the designing of the training programme makes sense, as memory creates identity. Kõresaar (2004, pp. 36-37) states:

*/.../ memory is a crucial factor in the consciousness and recognition of identity, and inversely, identity with history. /.../Memory takes the present as its point of departure and is selective: it is also creative of identity.*

A clearly defined self-picture, in its turn, is a motivator for behaviour. Berg, Ehin (2009, p. 7) point out: „*/.../articulated self descriptions also serve as motivations of behaviour /.../*”. Juri Lotman defined self-modelling relating it to the culture as a whole:

Self-modelling is a powerful means for the 'end-regulation' of a culture, attributing to it a systematic unity and largely defining its quality as a reservoir of information (Lotman, 1970, p. 420; in Torop, 2008, p. 392).

Interpreting narratives is a challenging process. Tiina Kirss (2004, p. 13) points out how important it is not to forget the multifaceted nature of any memory, the narrative about each memory, and the researcher's role in the analysis. I suggest that the role of each receiver (interviewer, recorder, analyst or reader of texts) becomes multifaceted because the texts inevitably position the data in the framework of the receiver. The implications in narrative texts or context descriptions may be go unnoticed when framed by completely different contexts and background knowledge. Different or "common" history or media-created interpretations dominate the perception, and hinder the evaluation process of a presumed *tabula rasa*. This is so in the case of narrators and researchers, readers and reviewers.

At the same time, once having admitted the potential researcher bias, their being well versed with the context they analyse is important for understanding the context and participant input. The more so in relatively less known and smaller cultures – as is ours. As pointed out by Kirss (2004, p. 13):

“Though the scholarship on life writing continues to ramify and expand in its theoretical sophistication, language barriers and lack of cultural knowledge often leaves the space between theoretical frameworks and close readings too wide open. The omission of such historically 'thick description' and close analysis is

especially hazardous when studying lesser-known cultures, about which extensive or deep historical knowledge cannot be assumed in the larger world”.

### 3.3. The Relevance of Chosen Methodology

#### 3.3.1. Estonian Life-Story Writing

Although just a fragment of the multifaceted whole, our research features the life-stories of the representatives of a definite professional group in Estonia. Standing out in their quality of being oral, not written at the point of recording (cf. e.g. Cronin, 2002, on orality), they form a special part a larger corpus of Estonian life stories.

What do we have in this area already? Life-story gathering in Estonia has recently witnessed an influx of different perspectives: the Soviet child, the Soviet man, numerous autobiographies of cultural and other celebrities witness that people are reworking their memories of the Soviet era. Most of these are written sources. A number of the above-mentioned, rather fictional or popular science, books and collections of memories have been supplemented by an impressive scientifically initiated and coordinated collection of people's life stories launched by the Estonian Literary Museum. Their grand project resulted in the publication of three volumes of *“Estonian Life Histories”* (*“Eesti elulood”* I-III; Hinrikus, 2000; 2003; cf. <http://www2.kirmus.ee/elulood/en/books.html>). The Siberian survivors have been given a chance to tell their story in *“We came back”* (Hinrikus, 1999). The volume *“She who remembers survives”* (Kirss et al., 2004) aims to interpret Estonian women's post-soviet life stories. Mainly, the data gathered hitherto focuses on the individual. Recently, two editions that are based on oral interviews have been published (Korb, 2010; Jürgenstein & Rootalu, 2011) – the former analysing the life of Estonians, and the other one of these in St. Petersburg. Yet, with some exceptions (e.g. research on journalists during the Soviet period), there is very little data and there are even less analyses of different professional groups.

Furthermore, the Estonian perspective in life story research during the Soviet era (cf. Kirss, 2004, pp. 13-14) is traditionally divided into the following categories: a) Estonians living in their homeland, b) those deported to Siberia, and c) those who escaped and spent their lives abroad – the Western diaspora. Kirss (2004, p. 14) points out: “Paradoxically, those Estonians who remained in the homeland throughout the Soviet era, the least coherent of the three in terms of perceived group identity, have been understudied, even silenced /.../”. Our respondents belong to this group. Thus, in addition to finding out information about representatives of a profession – dialogue interpreters – in a period and country that has not too often been described in interpreting research, we hope to find out, through our participants, about the country and period itself.

#### 3.3.2. The Intellectuals' Role in Transition

Interpreters definitely belonged to the intellectuals, and the intelligentsia. Interpreters had to have higher education in philology. This – on average – took 5 years to complete in the Soviet Union. Education was of a high, elitist level. Even today, the Soviet BA education is officially and legally considered as equal to current European Union MA level (<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/116052012002.txt>). Levels of education and artistic mastery were high, world literature was sold at symbolic prices in huge print numbers, books for study literature were mainly free. Also high-culture: concerts, exhibitions, theatrical performances could be visited at symbolic prices. In the Soviet period, it was a norm for educated people and intellectuals – the so called intelligentsia – to participate in cultural events, to very closely follow the cultural developments. As shown in Lõhmus et al. (2010, p. 74):

The notion of ‘culture’ in Soviet ideology had the connotation of a ‘high spiritual value’, ‘classical tradition’ and a ‘well educated personality’, whereas ‘entertainment’ was considered to characterize ‘lower’, ‘less educated’ and ‘Western’ cultural attitudes. /.../ Cultural activities, such as reading books and journals, and visiting theatres, concerts and art exhibitions, were positively correlated with the higher self-esteem and better social and economic position of individuals. The group of the culturally most active people also had a higher social position and was more satisfied with their lives (Hion et al., 1988, p. 118).

The special, almost holy, attitude to culture was fuelled and supported by the feeling of resistance. As Lõhmus (2010, p. 75) points out: “The mission of cultural resistance and preservation of national identity contributed to the ‘seriousness’ of cultural beliefs”. In many ways, the intricated metaphor system became also relevant to the interpreter's job – how much to translate, and to which extent, cf. *ibid*:

In the case of the totalitarian regime, normative symbols, as well as textual symbols and especially ambivalent humor, have more interpretations than in a democratic open system, for the reason that having been closed and silent has provided an especially dense area of possibilities for different meanings.

According to Kennedy (2002, p. 58), however, the whole process of developing of the intelligentsia could even be seen as a project designed by Soviet authorities to support the ruling communist class that simply “got out of hand”.

“The principal agent articulating civil society as opposition was intellectuals – critical intellectuals. Their position, and their power, were themselves a kind of product of the Soviet-type system itself, however.

The Soviet-type system reinforced the prominence, already considerable before World War II, of the intelligentsia in Eastern Europe. As it enlarged the ranks of the intelligentsia with the expansion of higher education, it simultaneously made the *autonomous* intellectual scarce. As this kind of independence became a rarity, even an expression of bravery or cleverness, the value of the autonomous intellectual could be elevated in cultural politics. /.../ Intellectuals, and their cultural products, became even more consequential under communist rule than they were in precommunist times. Revisionism – the promise that the system could be reformed from within by working through the Communist Party – offered a marvellous strategy for the intellectual to redefine the communist project, and to elevate the intellectual’s role in political authority. Although the revisionist hope was relatively universal across the soviet world until the mid-1960s, two critical developments severely undermined it.”

These were the repression of protests by students and intelligentsia in Poland in, and the Soviet invasion to Czechoslovakia in 1968 (ibid.). Thus, in Kennedy’s interpretation (above), the representatives of the intelligentsia, with their unique access to elitist education, high-culture and novel ideas, became “too smart” and powerful. And eventually toppled the ruling classes from their throne, usurping the whole empire.

Similarly to other CEE countries, in Estonia, the role of intellectuals and high culture has been pivotal. And the interpreters have definitely been a part of this socio-cultural group: all of them have a higher education, many of them also work as translators – translating fiction, creating text-books and dictionaries, a number of them also teaching at high-schools and universities. In this special symbolic and cultural power (Bourdieu) position that intellectuals had, they could be the heart and consciousness of the new statehoods. Due to their competence and activity, emotional weight and ethos (cf. Vaclav Havel’s famous sign – the heart), it is them who formed the avantgarde of reforms and the new leadership in the new (post-soviet area of) Europe. The new times have been ambivalent for the whole intelligentsia and their cultural practices. As Löhmus et al. (2010, p. 75) point out:

“During the ‘Singing Revolution’ at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, freedom of political expression in Estonia was fully restored, and the need for politically ambivalent entertainment decreased (Löhmus, 2002, pp. 78-9). In the course of economic liberalization, both the production and consumption of culture were more and more commercialised. The normative meaning of culture and the high prestige of cultural activities started to dissolve under the pressure of rising consumerism. The ‘spiritual value’ of culture was, for many people, replaced by an understanding of culture as a commodity. The value of arts was merchandized. The functions of culture were reconsidered: the ‘spiritual’, aesthetic and ethical values ascribed to cultural consumption by a majority of respondents in surveys from the 1970s and 1980s were replaced by ‘commodity values’, which included practical knowledge, social recognition, prestige, and the needs of individuals to adjust to the new environment of a consumer society and to form their new group identity”.

This change corresponds to the general changes in society and, we suggest, in the interpreter’s role. As sociologists (Löhmus et al., 2010, p. 75) confirm, the changes in values can be clearly perceived along the “division” between the age groups:

The age gap between individuals under 30 and over 45 is an essential cultural differentiator. While among people over 45 an orientation towards the realistic and traditional ‘classic’ culture prevails, and they tend to combine cultural activities with an active interest in politics and in social matters, among young people, active participation in entertainment culture is combined with relatively little interest in political and social activities. /.../ The rising prestige of entertainment, *vis-à-vis* ‘classical culture’, among wealthy and technically innovative people who have little interest in the humanities and social matters may reveal a more general change in cultural orientations in present-day Estonia.

But as the reforms went on, demanding also technical skills and experience in materialist and practical matters, the soviet era specialists in many specialist areas were brought back to their offices. Today, in many places, the intelligentsia have resigned, leaving the floor to a combination of the technocrats and a new generation of “career politicians”. Thus – we set out on our research hoping that the “insider” view (cf. Gofman, 1959) of the power elites, and also of their contacts with representatives of the foreign expert cohorts (cf. Lauristin, 2010, on the importation of knowledge) will give us more information about both the interpreter’s role and their “scene of action” during this period in society. What has their role been, and what has it ensued into.

### 3.4 Methodology

The work process is going on. Up to today, 21 informants have been interviewed in Estonia and Sweden. This entails 14 experienced interpreters (14 in Estonia, 4 in Sweden) and 3 organisers of interpreter training programmes at national and university level (1 in Estonia, 2 in Sweden).

All interviews took place in the mother tongue of the speakers (respectively Estonian and Swedish). The duration of the recording time was on average 40 minutes. The average length of the interview meeting was 1,5 hours. This includes the introduction, welcome, small-talk at the beginning and end of the meeting etc. All interviewees were informed of the focus on the study when the first contact took place (usually by phone or “live”). The participants could ask their questions about the purpose of the research, their expected input, etc. Around one week before the interview took place, the more specified semi-structured interview questions were sent to the e-mail address of each participant. (Please see the questionnaires in the Appendix).

The interviews were recorded with double dictaphones: a Panasonic sound recorder with microcassettes and a digital TrekStor voice recorder. The recordings were then transcribed. The transcripts were mapped based on questions and topic areas (thematic patterning (cf. Gilbert, 2008)).

## 4. The Results of the Interviews

The meetings took place in a public place chosen by the interviewee – a library, café, etc. The interviews progressed along the “red thread” of the semi-structured interview questions, and most interviewees used the questionnaire as a visual support for organising their memories to share. Some had even taken notes in shorthand on phenomena they definitely wanted to share.

To protect the anonymity of my respondents, data that might potentially reveal the identity of informants has been codified or deleted from the publishable material. We use the following abbreviations: I: Interviewer; P: Participant. The descriptions of Participant behaviour (gestures, expressive facial expressions, laughs, as well as the explanatory notes by the interviewer (me)) are given in italicised brackets (//). Inside participant quotes, the words they stressed are given in italics. Places *we* wish to stress are given in bold.

The constraints of memory and narrative based research have been discussed above. We present here the results as mapped through topic-based analysis, thematic patterning. For the purposes of the article, choices among the “rich and thick descriptions” in our database had to be made. Even if there are more quotes from different interviews that support the prevalence of a certain attitude, the scope of the present article does not allow us to present all of these here. We have tried to opt for the quotes which best illustrate the phenomena and tonality of accounts to our readers. For the complete results and analysis, the reader is referred to Mullamaa (2015), forthcoming.

The accounts of participants are subjective personal descriptions of how they have perceived the reality, their role and the changing environment. Neither we nor they claim that this is the absolute truth or the only way of seeing things. The hedging that memory and memories can be elusive was at different times also made by participants themselves. This is illustrated in the quote below, which we have chosen to use as our introduction to the results:

P1: First I want to say that I don’t remember everything. Some things are there, but some just...I don’t know. You just can’t remember everything.

I: But this is normal, don’t worry. May-be we just focus on what you remember then...?

In the summary of results which follows here, we have tried to group some major topic areas together with the results. Excerpts from the memories will be shared as divided by recurrent topics (thematic patterning). First the results will be presented, then the analysis. A summary of the analysis is given in the Discussion and Conclusion.

#### **4.1. Interview Results: Estonia**

The first questions are designed to map the first interpreting events: the clients, how the interpreters were contacted, the atmosphere.

##### **4.1.1 The General Atmosphere in the Country**

*Q1: Do you remember the time when you started interpreting? What was the atmosphere like, the society around us?*

The descriptions of “what first met the eye” in the Soviet period by P1 and P2 do not illustrate the past times as something one would wish oneself back to. P1 focuses on the first impressions or visual images she has of the cities. It is interesting to observe that she gives her own memories in parallel to what she remembers the first foreigners had shared on their visits. The two descriptions merge, and suddenly the description becomes as one given by an outsider, someone standing by and observing:

P1: The angry, gloomy faces...This is what the foreigners pointed out in the end of the 80s...That people would walk around in the streets looking gloomy./.../ Everyone was wearing a mask when they went outdoors. But many don't get it up to now, as if /thinking/ “Why smile? There's no reason.”...Cars... ugly, dark clothes worn by everyone and gloomy faces. This is what the foreigners also pointed out, when they came...

P2 moved into Estonia in the beginning of the 1990s from a Western European country. She remembers the general atmosphere as being different from that in her home country:

I: When you came to Estonia in the beginning of the 1990s, was there something different here that you noticed?

P2: Definitely so! Yes!

I: Really? What would you bring out?

P2: This was the first experience for me /when I felt/: “ I am living in the ex-soviet union”.

I: Where did you see this?

P2: Well, /.../ it was obvious that I had come to a post-Soviet country. It immediately struck the eye. /.../ People were anguished. They were all like ../*crouches herself imitating being intimidated*/. I had to “tear” the words out of their mouths.

Differently from P1, P2 also focuses on the atmosphere in everyday communication:

P2: ...People were modest.... They did not speak about their stories...It took several years...In 2003 – 2004 people started talking, like: “You know, I also had relatives who were taken to Siberia”. And...and...slowly photos started to appear on people's shelves – what was not there /before/...That people would trust you “she is not here to spy on us”.

I: This took time?

P2: Yes, this took years, *several* years.

##### **4.1.2 How were the Interpreters Contacted?**

*Q2: Do you remember how you were first contacted? By whom? How did it occur?*

Next, we wanted to find out - once there were events calling for interpreter assistance, how were the interpreters contacted? Again, the period described covers the 1960s -1980s. The answers illustrate some scenarios that are different from what many professional interpreters today would consider common practice.

In the Soviet Union a telephone was a privilege. Thus, contacting the interpreter could take place in the following way:

P1: They stood there behind my door. Yes, they just came there. What else would you think! In our apartment-house, there was only one phone. The police-chief had it. But I was an honest person, with no “merits” /for the system/, do you think I would have a phone! No, they just turned up and told me: “now we need interpreting.”

The interpreter had thus to be ready to adapt her plans so as to enable her to book into her calendar a meeting at a rather short notice. There was a need to react quickly, be mentally attuned to just go and perform the task, and the need to be ready to interpret on virtually any topic without prior preparation (cf. below). In addition to this, we get a glimpse of the society: huge apartment houses, only one phone per blocks of flats – and even that one belonged to the police chief.

But even other, relatively dramatic ways of employment, could occur. As the visits by foreigners were always – for some reasons – a big secret for ordinary people, also the interpreters were considered to be the ones not worthy of being informed beforehand. Thus, P3 recalls how she was just interrupted in the middle of the university lecture she was giving, and “taken along”:

P3: I was just taken from in front of the audience in the lecture room at the university. XXX himself told me “Y, come now! The foreigners are here!” And I was pushed into the taxi and taken to XXX / a place 40 km from the city/ where the delegates had already gathered and the conference was about to begin. And as soon as I entered, the conference began.

Again, preparation on the subject matter, or getting mentally attuned to this, were clearly not an issue (except for the 40-kilometre ride from the university to the conference venue). Does the incident described above tell us something about the society? Probably quite a bit. Mistrust, distrust, secrets and information blockade, information being controlled by just a few, and the obligation of any specialist in their field to act upon first order – are probably some of the keywords elicited by the account.

Also in P4’s case the way of contacting the interpreter was conditioned by the Soviet reality, and again a mention of the lack of the phone-line is made. (This phenomenon is itself a clear illustration of the outside control of the mental and physical world of people in this time). Similarly to P1, the representative of the authority needing interpreting just turned up at her doorstep:

P4: The contact was made by an official working at the xxx, as there was no telephone line installed /into our residential area/ - we were 27 years in the queue for the phone to be installed.

P5’s first interpreting situation is a classic example of cooperation between educational institutions and kolchoses. All senior classes and university courses normally had to work a few days or weeks at a collective farm. But in P5’s case, they could contribute not just with physical labour (which was the norm), but with their exquisite knowledge of a foreign language.

P5: When I was in my third year at the university, we had the first chance to practice. The kolchos in xxx had bought from France special technology and machinery for the factory of producing protein concentrate from leaves. And we went there to do our field work in two-three months long periods. We were in pairs or groups of four. There were 9 people.

Only in P6’s case, the contact was made through the work place, and it was also made a few days before the assignment. But her description of how the interpreting assignments for a certain client begin and develop throughout time is rather typical:

P6: I do remember. It means - I began in the Russian time. And I must say at once that my experience is very interesting./.../ And well – thanks to a coincidence, there was an interpreting assignment – because in the 1980s – this was a time of stand-still, a time of stagnation. Well, then, when a faculty at the university, or someone else at the university needed something to be interpreted, or – say – they couldn’t find anyone /else/ - they invited me. Invited once, for the second time, and then so on – so that practically this was from the leadership of the university.

#### **4.1.3 “Men in Black”**

Not all topic areas could be introduced or foreseen by the interviewer, and participants have introduced thematic areas by themselves. A rather unexpected turn in the interview takes place when P1 describes some of her first assignments that took place during the Soviet time. From the neutral description of the settings and circumstances, we suddenly detect the comment “and there was one”, which in its being elliptic and yet mentioned, reminds us of times when conversations used to be like this, and urges us to ask for explication:

P1: When we went to Leningrad then *there was at once one* who came to check who was the other person staying in the hotel room – *who has been informed /.../*.

I: Really, so there was some control?

P1: Yes, yes.

And apparently, this was not the only incident of special agents being present:

P1: And before that I had a visit from my friends from Finland. But there was no chance to visit Tartu, this was a closed town then /there was the biggest military airport in the Baltic countries in Tartu, due to which Tartu was a “closed town” for foreigners /. So the only way was – the city excursion. So I had to make them a city excursion, and later they even got a chance to step by and visit my home. Then *there was also one* sitting in the bus. A Russian old man “accompanying” ...

The explanation to why there needed a person to be “accompanying”, however takes us even further into the cold-war era jargon that needs to be explained. So we elicit P1 to become more explicit:

I: So someone was “accompanying”?

P1: Yes. Because in the group there was also an exile Estonian from Australia, who – through Finland – could in this way come to see his homeland. *Sure, they were spying, this was common!*

I: So you mean that it’s true. That it’s not just stories, that there was actually someone keeping an eye on it?

P1: But how else in those times?

We thus first gain the information on the habit of having a KGB agent present at meeting with foreigners (= in these days, the interpreting encounters). Second, we see reflections of a “closed town” – restricted areas of the Soviet Union. Last but not least, we even get a hint at how people tried to “overplay” the situation, resorting to “allowed” activities (a formal guided tour of the city) instead of “not allowed” ones (visiting one’s former hometown for a foreigner on one’s own).

But even in the perception of the “outsider” to the society, the shadow of the existence of the “men in black” can be detected.

P2: In 1995 when I came, /people would think that/ “well, Ok, a cool Finn. Well, she is extremely talkative and all – but – *is she from the KGB?*” Well – I can’t tell you what people thought exactly – but this feeling /for me/was like this....sceptical...sceptical /as if thinking/: “Who is she? And why has she got such a character?” There must be something wrong. She must be a bit....Not only this that I was indeed different. There was also this political and ...there was still this, like *anguish* and...

This is a rather surprising fact, as foreigners were mostly met with great affection and support in this period. Be it then the modesty of the people “in anguish” as P2 expresses it, or indeed some suspicion, is hard to know. But the documentation of that even *a foreigner* was aware of the shadows of the KGB, and to the extent that she felt herself being distrusted in connection with this is rather telling.

Also P3 mentions the presence of the controlling institutions – the *stasi* during her interpreting assignment at the Hermitage in the then Leningrad. The fleeting and elliptical mention of this is all we gain (notes):

P3: “don’t you think, two from *stasi* and -...”

Nevertheless, this account still adds to the information of such agencies being present when foreigners were hosted (and thus interpreters’ services were needed). It is also notable, that in the case of P3 there is a conscious decision to share the more “sensitive” information only with the recorder switched off. Thus, some of the most valuable “insider views” from the earlier periods of interpreting from her come in the form of field notes. The moment we start recording, there is a switch into an official immaculate account of the list of conferences interpreted at, expressing thanks to heads of department, “on-stage” (cf. Goffman, 1959) review of events already documented in official soviet history. We take this discrepancy as a result of its own. (Illustration of those times, and the influence they still have on people).

It is also worth noticing that the events in both P1 and P3’s memories take place in Leningrad (today’s St. Petersburg). Thus, interpreting assignments in that period occurred in a geographically rather wide area, and were not limited to one’s home country, but extended across the whole Soviet Union. P3, furthermore, explicitly mentions that she interpreted between German and Russian (not her mother tongue, Estonian) there. Thus, the smaller Soviet Socialist republics were expected to know the official language of the state well enough to function even at that high level of linguistic competence, if need be.

The omissions, emissions and hesitations in P6 are – for anyone familiar with the context to the slightest degree – telling in themselves:

P6: Yes, as I interpreted usually when there were guests from Russia, right? But what kind of guests were these? Some kind of delegations, from the ministry of education, or ministry of culture, or then...inspectors ...well, you....Yes, well, the big brother had to....kind of check how the situation here...was. And...then....I ..it means, yes...I had to interpret for them then...And...khhm...And what can I say then, they were such...

#### **4.1.4 The Organisation of Work (and the interpreter's role) During the First Assignments**

*Q4: What were the typical assignments like? What was your role like? What did you have to do?*

The accounts indicate that interpreter's role was to be present during the whole period the foreign guests were present, and their tasks thus included interpreting all the different encounters the guests had. Thus, as evidenced e.g. by the account by P3, the assignments in the Soviet period in the 1960s-70s could be rather lengthy, and cover a wide range of activities including different official meetings, seminars, factory visits, the educational and entertainment programme.

For example, P3 (field notes) tells us about the conference in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), where the interpreter had to work from the beginning of the day when the conference took place, the excursion programme (including a bus tour of the town that had to be interpreted), and ended with a festive reception at the Hermitage, where again, official speeches, as well as the conversation of participants had to be interpreted.

P3: ...and don't you say, all this – long day, a great effort to be... put forth during the tour-guiding in the bus, the cultural locations, the history...Then, change of dress. All this, very formal, black suit, cocktail dress – you know...And official speeches. Don't you say, and you are not allowed to make a mistake...

In the beginning of the 1990s the number of assignments intensifies. The assignments nevertheless occur *ad hoc*, and in the beginning of the interpreting assignments there are no routines or regulations for such a brand new activity:

*P2: Then you would do this from early morning till late in the evening, including the discussions during the meals. May-be even finish only by 12 at night at the night-club. But of course my age was different too then, then this was not a problem. But one made more use of you. Now I would not let myself be taken advantage of like this. But I simply wouldn't have the energy either.*

Also in the 1990s, the topic areas the interpreter was supposed to render could be rather different. As there were very few interpreters, the range of topics was extremely broad.

P2: Sure! There was one interpreter and this a foreign language then one would have to be present throughout the days, not just a specific meeting. Yes, and in the beginning of the day you were given one person had to be present in medicine, in the police, when companies were founded, all things had to be done by this interpreter. And there was no-one else to help.

Basically, the two-three interpreters working with one specific language pair would interpret for all possible different areas in the region where contacts with foreign colleagues, businessmen, companies or experts had been established. As there were very few interpreters, the range of topics was extremely broad. Basically, the two-three interpreters working with one specific language pair would interpret for all possible different areas in the region where contacts with foreign colleagues, businessmen, companies or experts had been established. And their role and profession was respected and honoured:

P1: One thing that was definitely there was that everyone would take good care of you. Most of the participants were men, and of course one was younger and looking better too, but everyone would take a good care of you, be considerate. Except for the meals when there was never a break and everything had to be interpreted. Estonians don't pay attention to the interpreter here, Finns usually did.

P6 points out that the unexceptionally formal speeches and behaviour during the day gave way to a rather informal and casual communication style as the day progressed, and the informal meetings:

P6: Well, it was so: *First*, well, as always with Russians, right, the Russian mentality – first such a very *serious attitude*, very official, black suit, *ties* and so on. And then a little later, when one was already

communicating, then it all went *already completely in a free manner*. And I *have to* mention here that they all came *very* willingly and gladly here, to Estonia. Because this was a little bit of a such a – so to say – “island of freedom”, where one could – so to say – *be in the West*.

However, even today interpreters may be needed at short notice, and the topic range continues to be broad: P3: *The police* got me out of bed! Called me and asked me how much time do I need to get dressed. First I thought that this was a stupid joke by somebody. And there have been MC-men, and a rowing club – everything. /.../ We do what we are invited to do – and this is rather...broad.

#### **4.1.5 The Interpreters' Role as Cultural Advisors**

*Q5: Were there cases where you also had to perform as a cultural advisor?*

While in the 1960-1980s the interpreter's role was regulated by the strict protocol, by the beginning of the 1990s the role seems to have changed. It becomes evident from P1's account that the interpreter's role was considered to be more than just preparing for an immaculate oral translation session. P1 shares with us her memories from a visit paid to her by a foreign investor in the 1990s:

P1: I also remember once when a company owner came to my place with his brand new mobile phone. This was like a huge box. And there was no network in Tartu. So he sat down in an armchair, put this next to him, and we sat down and we started going through the papers together.

P1's account illustrates that the interpreter was considered to be and resorted to as an advisor concerning the local circumstances, the appropriate level of wages, the image (or stereotypes) of a foreign company in the society here, etc:

P1: The company's materials and... the documents for founding the company and...Of course I was quite a source of information. Concerning how the circumstances are here...I even remember such a question: “may-be I pay my employees too much?”

We can see how the interpreters are turned to as cultural advisors as concerns concrete guidelines on how to organise events, how to make these comfortable and welcoming for the guests also by foreign partners:

P2: I also remember, sometimes I was called from Finland: “Hear, we have the Estonians guests coming – should we also put on a black suit and..all this – how should we do this?”. And then I told them “use the vouz-form, not the touz-form! Don't use the touz-form with Estonians. This is not customary here”. I still say this to my groups – “Don't use the touz-form, use the vouz-form!”.

On the other hand, P2 reports that the modesty and being afraid of the foreign immediately after the Soviet period in this country even lead people to reject communication, or possibilities for cooperation all together:

P2: I remember when for example I called some agricultural institution, saying: “Now there are guests coming over, and they would like to see you”. /They answered:/ “No, no – I don't speak foreign languages. I am not good at those things. Let these foreigners go somewhere else. I don't know what to speak about” - and....

P2 tells us that in such cases she would try to encourage the person, point out what would be the valuable in their experience, and what would be the aspects of their everyday life that would be interesting for foreign visitors:

P2: Then one would need to support this Estonian so much more, like: “But well, speak about *this*, and maybe also *this*, and *this*. And *this* is what is interesting /for them/.” ....

In addition to giving advice when explicitly asked for, P2 reports of herself directing the communication in the course of the interpreting events:

P2: I had to “tear” the words out of their mouths. It was more difficult to get the answers. For example, when there were questions, the Estonian would simply give one-word answers, like “Yes”, “No”, “Since last year”. I had to constantly be there between them, telling them “but explain a little bit more about this, they want to find out how things work here, please tell us about it”. So this was my role then...

The interpreter's role appears to have included “making the way” for the conversation, assuring people that they should answer more than just direct answers to the immediate questions. But beyond these immediate communicative situations, the interpreter was considered to be an expert in the culture and customs of the

respective countries. The comment by P4 illustrates that the role of a cultural advisor was consciously expected by the clients:

P4: The interpreter was often called the guide by our side – “what’s the difference”, they would say. But using this word is in fact rather telling – the interpreter did not only interpret the language, but - knowing the external culture – sometimes also directed the action a little – when to give a thanks speech, shake hands, stand up. As an interpreter I only interpreted, without any comments.

P4 tells us that also advice on how to act appropriately in a given situation was asked for and respected. We can also observe that she differentiates between the role of the enculturator and interpreter – the former being an active role, allowing for some intervention or guiding the primary parties, the latter being neutral (cf. our discussion on *personal* and *professional self* in Mullamaa, 2006).

#### 4.1.6. The General Atmosphere of the Interpreting Situations

*Q6: What was the attitude towards the foreign guests like? How did our hosts behave, what was the role of the interpreter like?*

The descriptions of the general atmosphere and attitudes of primary parties shown towards each other are rather similar among our informants. Already from the 1960s (cf. P3 about the Hermitage reception above), the Soviet reception styles had been festive and luxurious. The traditions seem to continue well into the 1990s:

P1: Well, one would take indeed good care of them /the foreign guests/. This was certain. This was how we were used to accept guests. Because when you communicate with Russians – they received them *even* better. Thus, compared to Russians, Estonians did not show any excessive respect at all. But one couldn’t go abroad oneself in those days, therefore I can’t compare. But the foreigners were rather surprised at that there was so much /food, delicacies/ of what was offered. We used to have it so that when somebody came to visit you, one would offer everything.

What mainly has struck the eye of our participants has been the dressing style, the level of formality, the patterns of communication, and it appears – also the rather lavish style of reception that had been prevalent in both Soviet Estonia and in the beginning of the 1990s. First, some comments on the dressing style were made:

P2: People had really taken a good care of themselves. It really struck the eye. People had been to the hair-dresser especially for the event, had wonderful hairdos, beautiful and stylish costumes... It was touching.

P2 points out that the standards for receiving guests were high. As she came from a western country, the lavish (post)-Soviet style was rather marked and different from her. Probably similarly to the customs in many other post-soviet countries, the guests were welcomed with a festive and respectful atmosphere. The row of dignified persons present, dress-code, room-decorations and receptions left no doubt in that the foreign guests were most welcome and honoured:

*P2:* The foreigners felt themselves as royalties. Like kings and queens. People would offer the best they had. The tables were set – velvet, pearls,... all kinds of different dishes. Well, may-be the choice in actual fact wasn’t as big as it is today, but the receiving part would definitely offer their best, and this was different from what we were used to. And this is what the foreign guests remember even up to today. When we meet – or when they call me, they would say: “I remember what a royal welcome we were given”.

P2 points out that for her, as a representative of a foreign culture, it was also noticeable that representatives of very high positions in the hierarchy of local government (or the like) were present to welcome the guests. And that the welcome was made in a well-prepared way indicative of respect and readiness for cooperation:

P2: I remember when we had this xxx meeting. They would all come! Yes, the whole row was present, standing there! /draws an imaginary line in front of her with her hand/. The school director, the mayor himself, the county elder! Just because of us, they all had come. They did not consider this too much or anything like this...And they would make a speech, and shake our hands. It was truly beautiful!

Restaurant visits were part of the routine when receiving foreign guests:

P3: I don’t want to see these restaurants any more. Tartu was a closed town, and often there was nothing else to do in the evenings than take the guests out to the restaurants. And I had to interpret all the time. I have been to all of these so many times that .../laughing/ I already have an overdose of all this.

Also P4 gives account of lavish hosting styles. We can witness that the attentive and caring attitude towards the guests extended far beyond the immediate interpreting situation, starting from the moment the guests set their foot on Estonian ground. The interpreter, as well as the high members of the receiving delegation would undertake an even 2,5-3 hour drive to meet the foreign guests at the harbour or the airport of another town. The interpreter's presence entailed that the mediation started from the very first meeting:

P4: The hosts on our side offered the best reception programme one could think of. For the very first welcome a limousine was taken to the port to receive the guests. There were also a few stops on the road to stretch the legs, to have some coffee.

Once back in the main hosting location, the receptions and first meetings were of a superior quality also according to P4's memories. The reception style followed the diplomatic protocol for foreign visits, the expectations were high:

P4: The level of the meetings was high, probably the best thinkable and achievable in those days. The communication was friendly, but extremely formal.

On the one hand, we participate in a flashback into a Soviet and post-soviet higher *nomenclatura* official procedural practices. On the other hand, the looming changes in the behavioural patterns, and the personal attitudes shining through the professional "protocol-game" can already be perceived. P4 also adds that the mutual respect and reverence between the visitors and local hosts was enormous:

P4: It was really to be felt what kind of respect they /the foreign visitors/ had for us all – to have come through all those difficult years, and nevertheless maintain the dignity.

Similarly to P4's account above, the insights of the warm attitude of foreigners towards our people are shared by P5 describing their French hosts receiving the Estonian counterparts:

P5: And there the reception, or how we were received...What I remember...I have the impression that...we were given a...kind of a ...well very *warm* reception. Because ....saw and valued this ... - and it seems to me that more than with other participants from Europe....they tried to show us and offer us more, because they knew that...people thought that... *"when would it happen next time that we /laughing/...we would get out from ...behind this iron curtain.*

*I: so that they would give their best?...*

P5: exactly! So this was, indeed, to be felt...So indeed they took such good care of us.

#### **4.1.7 Glimpses of Absurdities of Soviet Life**

However, the luxury of festive receptions was not necessarily the everyday reality of ordinary people. Indeed, most of the things seen during such festive receptions were not available. P3 remembers a funny incident when the contrast between the "Potjomkin" and reality became obvious when a group of foreigners naively assumed that the same things they were offered at the reception would be available in an ordinary shop:

P3: The conference would "knock you off your feet" – supreme organisation, dress code, the delicacies offered at the conference dinner...And then the ladies took me by the hand and took me into the shop – an ordinary shop of ours – think of my horror! And told me "we want to buy the same delicacy chocolates we were offered there!!"

Not all references back to the Soviet time entail "men in black" being present, nevertheless the hints to what was the power centre back in those days can be found. Sometimes so in rather unexpected places, like for example illogical and extremely time consuming itineraries, where – in order to visit some Western European place, Estonians first had to drive a nearly 13-hour train trip to the east:

P5: ...then this was a judo-club in xxx, the chief trainer then was well known in Estonia, he decided to go to France – he was invited to competitions there. /.../. So that he would go and participate in the international competitions over there, with the young sportsmen, and at the same time be able to develop the friendship relations. *So so we went to Paris via Moscow /laughing/ with our judo-kids!*

*I: Through Moscow?!...By train?*

It proves that this was not just a one-off trip, and the visits to Paris from Estonia via Moscow were commonplace, while the vehicles differed:

P5: By train, or plane. First /travelling/ back....and then forward. / laughing/ by train... or plane...Well, then there were not too many planes, by train normally, yes. So first back – and then forward /laughing/. This was the way we did the trips the first time – through Moscow both on our way to Paris and back. ...

The Soviet information gap is illustrated in P1’s description:

P1: What else could they ask about? Actually the foreigners knew much more. They knew very well where the airport in Tartu was and... It wasn’t on the map then. On that place it was written “*Karta*” / “a map” in Russian/, and the legend of the map and what not...Because it is in such a location /in the North-East, thus the upper right hand corner of the map/. But the foreigners knew exactly from where all the aerial photos had been taken and everything. So some would even speak about all such things as well. I would just listen: “Wow! What all they *know*. And what all *I* got to know from them!”.

A good illustration of how the interpreter with humour got out of a difficult situation where a foreign journalist asked a direct question about an obvious truth – a major military airport in the city. While the military planes kept zooming above their heads, the following discussion took place:

P3: And the German boy then asked me... He was indeed just a kid – so surprised – a closed town and every minute a fighter plane takes off buzzing above our heads: “What is going on here?” So I answered: “It is a student town – lots of young people. What else than - love letters!”

#### 4.1.8 Changes in the Role Throughout the Times

*Q7: Has your role changed throughout times? Have you changed? Why? How?*

An interesting perspective was opened by our respondents when they discussed how they believed their role had changed during the whole period studied (i.e. the 1960s till today, 2012). Although the interpreting task *per se* seems not to have changed, the role of the interpreter is reported to have become less active. P1 refers to that earlier her responsibility, and possibility to support and help was bigger:

P1: No, everything was the same. Equal to the guests. One would make use of you more. *And more depended on you may-be.*

Compared to the advisor’s role which P1 describes above, there is according to her now a clear “employed to offer the interpreting service” role division, especially so from the organisers’ side.

P2 points out that in communication she does not need to support the communication taking place that much any more, as people have learned to manage this on their own:

P2: What I don’t need to do any more is to push people to communicate more, to be more open and responsive when answering the questions. I would like to praise the Estonians so much on this – how they have acquired the easy-going and free communication style, how the discussion flows...there is definitely a big change to be felt here!

Also, the interpreters are more aware of their rights:

P1: But now I know on which terms to accept assignments. I don’t accept assignments like this any longer – long days from early morning up to late in the evening.

There is confidence in one’s work and role:

P3: Let’s put it so that the days when I was afraid of the mike or a minister have become the past long ago.

At the same time, some participants point out that they somewhat regret the loss of the communicative function, the role of the intermediary that they often had to play in the 1990s:

P5: No, I don’t..no, no, no..I want / to interpret/ where there is *communication!* The most everyday-like, free... *communication!*

“The service provider” is a notion that has received a somewhat negative connotation in Estonia, as it is often perceived as being on a-par with service personnel in cafeterias and restaurants. In contrast to this, in the Soviet and transition period, interpreters and translators were definitely considered to be representatives of the intelligentsia. P5 is not happy with the change:

P5: It seems to me, unfortunately, that the interpreter is a service provider. It unfortunately seems to me so. Earlier one was not! I have personally felt myself like some service personnel....say, when I went there with the sportsmen, or with my students...and may be this is why I work as a *teacher* – OK, at home, written one

/translation/ I would do. /.../ But it seems to me yes...that...especially in that booth, unfortunately it is /just a service provider/. ...

She points out that in the earlier role interpreters were expected to do more of the actual socio-cultural advising and support, which also gave her a feeling of being needed, being “a human being”, “like a friend”:

P5: Well, remember we went to this South-Estonia together, and they said that I smiled a lot – and I started to *feel* that I am also a *human being* there, next to them, that I am also...I am the representative of the country, and in a word – I could feel I was like a friend, I didn’t have to feel that I am *somebody one buys a service from*. ...Well – from this point I really start liking it.

This is seen to be in contrast to “just some dry interpreting”:

P5: But when it’s just some dry interpreting and ...- *unfortunately* – there is a barrier which remains then, it seems to me...Yes.

P5 points to the attitude “nothing extra is needed” by clients, and regrets the relationship between the communication parties is rather regulated by the “hourly fee” than a mutually enriching communication and support that might extend beyond the actual translation situation:

P5: “Nothing extra is needed”. And the contact ends with a good-bye, and when the hour they pay for has been covered, and that is it. But I would may-be like to ask – who needs some help. Or – may-be – we go together to the shop, I help them to buy some things, or...

The absence of the advisor *cum* supporter role today, as in contrast to the earlier periods, is pointed out also by P2:

P2: There isn’t so much of this any more. Most of those who come, take over a subsidiary of a bigger company. There is not so much of founding new companies on such a scale going on.

At the same time, the job continues to entice and inspire our participants. The pleasure of being a “benevolent supporter in the new environment” is as strongly to be perceived as ever:

P4: The job of the interpreter is multifaceted, varied and exiting. It broadens the horizons, gives new knowledge, develops communication skills. The interpreter as a “guide” could be a good example of how one can – with the endeavour dedicated to one’s work – remain an honest mediator and benevolent supporter in an unusual situation where people have to “read” both other persons and the new environment.

#### **4.1.9 Changes in Society**

*Q8: Is Estonia today a well-developed Western European country? Who forms the elite?*

*Have the changes developed in the direction you wished they would?*

P4 is even more radical in her evaluation of the current situation. She focuses on the country as a whole:

P4: It is a pity that when Estonia became free the power was ceased by the former nomenclature. People strive for power and retain their position in personal interests. Also the funding of legislation is carried out following wrong principles, thus making it impossible for a man in the street to feel that one is living in a developed West-European state. It is going to take a very long time before one will understand that money is not priority number one.

We can spot a disappointment with the organisation of rebuilding the state, and in many ways her conclusions can be read as in tune with the viewpoints of Lauristin and Vihalemm (2010) and Kennedy (2002) above:

P4: This is not the Estonia people who expected democracy, a breakthrough of the somewhat “old-fashioned”, Scandinavian-type honesty and hoped for legality, expected. Many had to be disappointed already in the results and way of carrying out of the privatisation and real-estate “acquisitions”.

Indeed, as pointed out by Akos Roña Tas in Kennedy (2002, pp. 21-22): “Social transformations are made not only by the making of a private economy per se, but also by who gets that private economy and why”. Kennedy: (ibid. emphasis mine) stresses:

/.../ the debate between institutionalists and transitologists focuses on the principal agents enacting capitalism and democracy *rather than on their relations with those for whom, perhaps over whom, postcommunist institutions are designed*.

P4 is also critical of that, according to her, many of the people in power “represent the former nomenklatura”, and are in her view mainly interested in material wealth and power:

P4: This is the Estonia certainly representatives of the former nomenklatura, “communist building squat activists” and people with low moral values wanted, as they can see new opportunities in combining power with money.

Also Kennedy (2002, p. 25) has posed the question of who actually has formed the new elite in the post-soviet countries, and he suggests there is an “individual adaptation of elites with different forms of capital”: Action primarily takes place through individual adaptation of elites with different forms of capital – when, for example, socialist technocrats and anticommunist opposition from the days of communist rule ally to find a new place as the hegemonic managerial bloc presiding over postcommunist capitalism.

In P7’s case the evaluation of the situation has been transferred to her decision on who to work for:

P7: I don’t actually work for them any more. I am invited, but reject. I don’t respect them. I feel the interpreting which in the Singing Revolution days was importing change into the country has been replaced by ready-made junks of eurojargon or meaningless politeness phrases, and.... The money may be on “unlimited budget” there, but I rather work as a volunteer where it’s really needed...

Also the continuation of her account illustrates that there may be cases when the “official reality” and real circumstances do not match:

P7: Some years ago I did it for an old-people’s home and a mental asylum... Some help from Scandinavia was brought... Will never forget that day...They couldn’t get any local government support, as officially the country doesn’t need any support – we’re successful now. So we just went there as private persons, to donate. And guess what – they of course *did* need help, they needed it a lot...So this is real missionary work! Just as in the old days...

Critical of the official discourse, P7 is ready to step in where “real help” is needed. Idealistic and somewhat revolutionary – may-be this is a scent of the role the intelligentsia was once intended to play?

If this is indeed so, the interpreters – as representatives of the intelligentsia – have considerably more choices to make than these that pertain to a concrete interpreting situation. Allow us to end with Kennedy’s (2002, p. 25) words: “The civilizational project of the East Central European intelligentsia serves as the spirit that travels through history to provide different versions of the intellectuals’ mission”.

## 5. Discussion

The accounts by experienced interpreters, who have been working from the 1960s till today in Estonia, have been valuable in describing both the interpreter’s role and the society as seen through the interpreter’s eyes in these periods.

The changes in society and the interpreters’ role are clearly described in the reports and there is a correlation between these changes. Interpreters as witnesses in many pivotal situations have interesting memories, and special insider views on these events. Very often their analyses offer an interesting double-culture *cum* philosophical view of the events and of the evolvement of society (cf. also Cerutti, 2004). The memories of interpreters are definitely a valuable additional document on the development of the country – an additional source for our memory research. The memories of interpreters in a specific country are hopefully an interesting document for comparison with these in other context and situations. Comparing different contexts, and the interpreters’ role against these, we gain knowledge of the specifics of the role. The memories of our interpreters can also be viewed in the framework of theories on the role of the intelligentsia (cf. Kennedy, 2002) and Transition Studies (Kennedy, 2002; Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2010) throughout different periods of time.

### How Could We Summarise the Results?

We see that the role of interpreters has changed in tune with the changes in society.

**1. The 1960s till the 1980s.** In the Soviet period, the interpreters were considered representatives of the intelligentsia – their skills and qualifications were much respected. At the same time, the state had “the right” to use these skills – at any time, without prior notice (cf. P3 above).

**2. The end of the 1980s-beginning of the 1990s.** In the transition and Singing Revolution period the role changed: in addition to appreciating the linguistic skills and education of interpreters, their role as socio-cultural advisors increased. Foreign investors might consult the interpreters for some cultural-background information (cf. P1 above). Interpreters were sometimes explicitly given the role of an explainer, “guide” (cf. P4 above). Both foreign counterparts (cf. P2 above) and local institutions (cf. P6 above) have explicitly asked for their advice as concerns planning the meeting with their colleagues from abroad. The role as the interpreter as supporter of communication was explicit (cf. P2; P4 above).

**3. The end of the 1990s-2006.** From the end of the 1990s the role dimensions have changed again. Earlier “more depended on you” (P1). Today, one is more perceived as a “service personnel”, when the job is done and the hours you have been ordered for, “you’re asked for a bill and told good bye” (P5). Some respondents do not like this – “but I would like to help more” (P5). This could be them the feeling that they “as a human being, as a friend exist” (P5).

As concerns the changes in society, participants bring out many positive traits, including the general atmosphere and the skills of people to communicate more, to create an easy-going work environment for the meetings etc. (P1). At the same time, the service-provider – client relationship in the rigid meaning of “who pays and why” is criticised (P5). P4 is very critical of the broader developments in general, as the ruling elite is – as concerns their values – perceived as a prolongation of the soviet *nomenklatura* rule. The political power is seen to have been exchanged for the power of material wealth (P4; P3). “Real values” and the human side of the big societal upheaval is seen to have been neglected (P4, P7).

**4. 2008-2012.** Probably in connection to the global economic crises, some patterns of the transition period that only recently were seen as self-evident, are criticised. Old clients who by now have become good friends also return in 2012 to celebrate the 20-years anniversary of when the contacts first began (P4). Interpreters may have consciously chosen to rather work for the “ordinary people, not representatives of the “post-soviet technocrats in power”” (P7). While the mid-1990s till 2006 were rather viewed with indignant resignation, belief in one’s capacity and importance as “a benevolent supporter” (P4) has returned.

As we can see, against the theoretical analyses of the development of post-communist capitalism and transition societies (cf. above), the accounts by our participants allow for interesting parallels. Their profession has developed in tune with the major changes in the society. As mediators between the foreign and local, they have actively and intensively participated in the transition processes of the society. And if we choose to see the transition period as related to importation of Western values and principles (cf. Lauristin, 2010 above), they have been the direct “mediums” for this in rather many cases, beginning from political advisors, foreign investors and a plethora of experts in many different areas.

The role of interpreters as representatives of the intelligentsia also offers interesting perspectives. It seems that differently from many other representatives of the intelligentsia – like writers, artists, scientists – who relied on their main field of activity only, the interpreters have fared better as concerns their income and to some extent status on the social scale. Working in a close distance to representatives of power in the soviet period could have injected a sense of fear (P1, P2, P3) or dependence of a power you are not sure about (P5). You could be a part of bizarre situations (P3; P5) or – for one day or evening – “over-the-top” luxury (P1-P6) which accompanied our festive receptions.

At the same time, as the role of the “consumerist society” (cf. Runnel, 2010; Lauristin, 2010 above) increases, the interpreting service is becoming more like any other you can buy for money. “Old clients” and relationship to them is preserved in many cases (P1-P4; P6) and in these situations, one is still asked for advice, seen as a cultural advisor, also often paid for the efforts.

In contrast to this, there is the “service-personnel view”, where interpreters are chosen “based on the hourly rate” (P5, P1, P2). The clientism-society (cf. Runnel, 2010 above) has applied its rules on also the very persons who may have helped to mediate and enforce it. The translation of EU norms – also those in interpreting and interpreter training – has taken over the prevalent role and model of interpreters. The Soviet “intelligentsia model” is exchanged for the “rent and hire service-provider” one. As concerns the interpreters role as high level representatives of the intelligentsia, who now have become just “pawns” to hire or reject based on their hourly fee, we could even say that the translation killed its translator.

From the end of the 2008, the emerging trends of returning to the older specialists, continued interpreting triads, and the general context where there is an open intellectual discussion of the processes in society and profession, seem to allow for a sense of intellectual liberation and resurgence of social dignity among the representatives of this professional group we interviewed. Also this trend can be seen to relate to the growing citizen-awareness across the (“ready-translated”) world in general.

## 6. Conclusion

Several thematic areas have been identified in our corpus. In addition to the ones presented above, topics including: changes in values, the training of interpreters, unionisation of interpreters, professionalization, remuneration, personal socio-cultural webs of interaction, the interpreter’s educational-professional process, and the soviet-era educating of interpreters as representatives of the intelligentsia, etc. can clearly be identified and described with the help of our accounts. There were even more, but not everything was allowed to be published yet, and we respect the choices of our respondents.

It is clear that the space of the article does not allow to present all topic areas, and neither can we go into the depth we would wish with the ones we have decided to present. Even more quotes than presented here exist for each thematic area in our corpus. With each of these, one could go even deeper with comments, analysis and comparisons. Regrettably, there is no space for a deeper interweaving of the insights of participants and the theoretical analyses. For the purposes of this text we have, nevertheless, made our decisions. And we do hope that there were some insights for readers that allowed them to think along, possibly – recognise oneself a little, or see both similarities and differences in how the profession has been evolving in our context and theirs.

We hope that we were able to give the reader some glimpses of the memories of interpreters of the period, and to illustrate the method. This was also the goal of this article. We conclude that the method yields exceptionally rich data from the participants, and that narrative research holds strong potential for those interested in the history of the profession in a specific context. The problem of subjectivity has been discussed above. The problems of thick-description and patterning choices, issues relating to sensitive topics, and difficult memories, as well as the – often emotionally challenging, ultimate concentration and empathy demanding character of working with people and their special memories should definitely be added. The time-demands should be familiar to everyone who have worked with hours of recorded material, transcripts and field-notes, or patterning choices of thick description and emotional, sometimes politically challenging materials. Despite this, we believe that the method justifies itself as the insights have been revealing. Memories and analyses from specific context help to build up the adequate picture of the development of the profession as a whole.

It is sometimes believed that in IS the voices and practices from Eastern Europe may not have reached their full potential. We hope that this project can help by adding just a small step, through reminding us that there are several stories to be told by representatives of different niches in the profession. These stories definitely help to illustrate the bigger picture – both as concerns the developing of the profession, but also that of the society and culture. And possibly the power of translation as a medium used to export and import global transitions and ideologies.

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