Between ideology and ethnicity: Soviet interpreters in military conflicts between the Soviet Union and Finland

Abstract

This paper is a part of a research project called In Search of Military Translation Cultures conducted at the University of Eastern Finland. My research subject is Soviet interpreters serving in the army during military conflicts between the Soviet Union and Finland from 1939 to 1944. During the Second World War, Finland allied itself with Germany against the Soviet Union. Military conflicts between the Soviet Union and Finland took place mainly in Karelia, a territory situated in the northwest of Russia and extended to Finland. There are many Finnish-related, i.e. Finnic, peoples living traditionally in the northwest of Russia, including Finns, Karelians, Ingrians, Izhorians, Vepsians, among others. This led to the situation where ethnically related peoples were fighting on ideologically different sides of the war – those of the Soviet Union and Finland.

The fact that Soviet interpreters of Finnish had mainly Finnish roots placed them in a position of conflict where they might ethnically be loyal to the Finns, i.e. the enemy, but ideologically loyal to the Soviet Union. The aim of this paper is to consider interpreters’ position between ideology and ethnicity with respect to loyalty and trust. Theoretical framework of this paper is based on translators’/interpreters’ agency studies with the focus on interpreter’s acting in prevailed circumstances. The data consist of memories, autobiographical writings, historical research and archive records.

The position of being between ideology and ethnicity was not unique to Soviet interpreters of Finnish. For example, about 6–8% of those who served in the German armed forces during the war were Soviet Citizens (Aleksandrov 2008: 44). The Second World War has been namely defined as the war of ideologies between Nazism, Imperialism and Communism (Lagrou 2005: 3–4). In this sense, case of Soviet interpreters of Finnish may have compelling, comparable examples in translation practices of the Third Reich.

References
