

**From Cold War Miscommunication to Modern Language Mediation: The Role of Translators  
and Interpreters in High-Stakes Diplomacy**

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Diplomatic communication has always been crucial for maintaining international relations, peace and promoting security. Over the course of history, mistranslations and misinterpretations influenced political decisions, escalated conflicts and shaped international relations (Beard, 2022); and the Cold War, a period that is characterized by the ideological rivalry and fragile diplomacy between two opposing parties – The United States and the Soviet Union, showed that stakes of accurate communication were particularly high (Costigliola, F., 2020). Language professionals were at the frontlines of the negotiation processes; they had to ensure effective cultural exchange, engage in sensitive topics, maintain linguistic accuracy under immense pressure (Rogatchevski, 2019).

This Introduction chapter presents the central issue of the research, how language professionals (translators and interpreters) experience, understand and respond to the risk and consequences of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomatic contexts. Through the prism of qualitative inquiry, the study explores historical cases of miscommunication during the Cold War and modern strategies used by language professionals to ensure clarity and accuracy in politically sensitive environments. The chapter provides detailed background of the study, outlines research problem, purpose of the study, presents research questions, states significance of the study and provides the structure of research.

### 1.1 Background of the study

The Cold War spanning from 1947 to 1991, was not merely a military or political confrontation, it was a battleground of narratives, ideologies and perceptions (Costigliola, 2000). Language served as a weapon and shield at the same time, language professionals had difficult tasks in transferring across sensitive political discourse and ideological divides. As Footitt, H., & Kelly, M. (Eds.). (2012) and Rider (2016) state, even minor errors in diplomatic communication during the Cold War resulted in global repercussions. Take for example, the infamous mistranslation of the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's statement "We will bury you" (Tucker,

1967), misinterpreted as a direct nuclear threat, while intended meaning behind the phrase stated prediction of communism's triumph over capitalism; this case remains a vivid demonstration that misinterpretation can inflame international fear and mistrust that fueled nuclear war paranoia.

Cultural differences, different rhetorical traditions, ideologies – amplified the risks of errors; Costigliola (2000) and Rosoux (2022) argue that diplomatic language is rarely straightforward, as it is layered in euphemisms, symbolism and coded messages. Language professionals have to navigate through these obstacles and serve as critical actors, mediating intent, emotion and political agenda.

Despite the historical and modern significance, the role of the translators and interpreters in high-stakes diplomacy remain undeveloped, in particular, from the perspective of language professionals themselves. Much of the existing research is focused on the political, historical or strategic analysis, with no mention of the experience and cognitive challenges faced by the language professionals, working under extreme pressure.

## 1.2 Research Problem

As mentioned, translation and interpretation play a crucial role in international relations and modern language mediation, including translation experience during the Cold War. The accuracy of language mediation is significant even today. Global tensions between major powers like the US and China, Russia and NATO, ongoing military conflict in Ukraine might be an example of miscommunication (Messmer, M., et al. (2023); Rankin, J., 2024). It means that understanding the consequences of translation and interpretation errors both throughout history and today should be under the scope of research. The perception of language professionals responsible for the mediation in high-stakes diplomacy is under-researched. Much of the existing literature is focused on political and historical analysis, often overlooking cognitive, ethical and cultural challenges that language professionals encounter during negotiations (Tyulenev, 2021). There is a significant gap in understanding language professionals' perceptions of the causes and consequences of translation and interpretation errors. The study addresses this gap by focusing

on exploring language professionals' attitudes towards their practices related with the risks of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomacy.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore how language professionals perceive, experience and respond to translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomacy through their reflections on examples of cold-war diplomatic translations and interpretations. The study examines both historical and contemporary practices, aiming to identify patterns, challenges and mitigation strategies for language professionals. It contributes to deeper understanding of the human factors that influence diplomatic communication and offer implications to improve modern language mediation.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The research is guided by two central research questions:

1. How do professional interpreters and translators perceive and experience the causes, manifestations, and consequences of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes settings such as Cold War diplomacy?
2. How do experienced language professionals describe and navigate the risks of translation and interpretation errors in politically sensitive or intercultural communication today?

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

Studying the attitudes of modern translators and interpreters on the experiences of their colleagues based on cold-war communications might shed light on the common ideas on causes and consequences of translators' high-stakes diplomacy practice in general. The study employed several theoretical frameworks in the given topic, which allows both practitioners and researchers to reflect on the challenges in translation and interpretation studies and experiences. The study might be also useful for translation department learners to raise their awareness of the complex nature of language professionals' agency in high-stakes diplomacy negotiations.

## 1.6 Summary

The research is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 – the Introduction, outlines research background, research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and academic significance. Chapter 2 – Literature review presents examination of cases of translation and interpretation errors, and suggests the theoretical framework for further discussions of data. Chapter 3 – Methodology, presents semi-structured interview qualitative design, participant selection, data collection and analysis methods and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 – Findings, presents results of the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with participating language professionals. Chapter 5 – Discussion, provides interpretation of Findings, compares them with existing literature and explores implications for theory and practice. Chapter 6 – Conclusion, summarizes key results and insights, addresses research limitations, offers recommendations for future research. The study presents the final reflections of the researcher.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Translation and Interpretation has played critical roles throughout history in international relations. The Cold War era is a vivid example of how language mediation can influence geopolitics. During this period of ideological confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union, a need for accurate, precise and clear communication was highly significant, since even minor errors in diplomatic communication during the Cold War resulted in global repercussions (Footitt, H., & Kelly, M. (Eds.), 2012; Rider, 2016). This chapter explores the historical background of the Cold War, cases of translation and interpretation errors. The selected theoretical framework of the study is presented in this chapter.

### 2.1 Historical Background: Cold War

To fully understand the cases of translation and interpretation errors and theoretical frameworks that explain them, we must first provide an overview of the Cold War era; understanding its political and ideological environment is essential to comprehend the challenges language professionals faced working during that time.

The Cold War spanned from 1947 to 1991, was an ideological rivalry between two parties – the United States and the Soviet Union; unlike traditional wars, it was a battle of worldviews, proxy conflicts, diplomatic confrontations and arms race for nuclear dominance. Language played a critical role, each party not only advanced its narrative, but made efforts to frame the other negatively, both domestically and internationally (Costigliola, 2000; Baker, 2006).

The linguistic landscape of the US and Soviet communication was challenging – English and Russian, structurally and culturally different and distinct languages, posed significant struggles for the language professionals. Russian's flexible syntax and inflectional system contrasted vividly with English's rigid word order – which complicated direct translation (Lukes, 2014). Additionally, the cultural norms underpinning communication – as American emphasis on directness versus Soviet preference for oblique and coded language – further complicated the diplomatic exchange (Costigliola, 2000).

The concepts of “freedom”, “democracy” and “peace”, carried fundamentally different connotation in two blocks, making seemingly simple terms complicated (Mitrokhin, V., 2001; Aronova, 2012). Translation was not merely a linguistic task, it was an ideological negotiation where language professionals were direct participants in shaping international perceptions (Wodak, R., 2001; Rogatchevski, 2019)

## 2.2 Cases of Miscommunication, Translation and Interpretation Errors

Before exploring theoretical framework it is crucial to investigate historical cases of translation and interpretation errors that provide concrete examples of how linguistic and cultural misunderstandings, ideological pressures shaped global perceptions. Later sections will apply theoretical frameworks to analyze these cases more deeply.

### 2.2.1 Khrushchev’s “We Will Bury You” (1956)

One of the most infamous Cold War mistranslation involved Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s statement “My vas pokhoronim!” («Мы вас похороним!»), which was literally translated as “We will bury you!”, the phrase was interpreted in the West as a direct nuclear threat (Tucker, 1967; Dobrenko & Naiman, 2011). But in reality, Soviet Premier simply intended to say that communism would historically outlast capitalism (Aronova, 2012).

The political situation of that time was highly volatile, Khrushchev pursued a policy of “peaceful coexistence” with the US and the West, at the same time, he did not forget to remind his colleagues of Soviet’s ideological superiority (Garthoff, 1994). The translator’s failure to adapt the statement intensified fears in the US and the West, fueled aggressive containment strategies and increase of military spending, among the nuclear stockpiling (Costigliola, 2000).

Media in the US amplified the mistranslation, showcasing the Soviet Premier as aggressive and irrational (Dobrynin, 1995). The phrase quickly entered American political rhetoric and was cited repeatedly by policymakers and journalists to justify the headlines of the Cold War. Soviet efforts to clarify the situation were ignored, since mistranslation was stuck in public imagination.

Lygo (2018) highlights the strategic role of metaphor in Cold War rhetoric, arguing that figurative expressions were often deployed as ideological weapons. This perspective helps explain why Khrushchev's "We will bury you" provoked such intense backlash—it wasn't just a linguistic misfire, but a metaphor laden with political symbolism that Western audiences interpreted through the lens of nuclear anxiety.

Sperber & Wilson (1986), as well as Gutt (1991) present their insights on Relevance Theory, drawing on their inquiry, it can be argued that the failure to consider the target audience's cognitive environment might have contributed to mistranslation. The result – escalation of international tensions, showcase of fragile international relations.

### *2.2.2 Reagan's Hot-Mic Joke (1984)*

Another communication incident occurred on August 11, 1984, when the US President Ronald Reagan during his sound-check before weekly radio address quipped off-microphone: "My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." Although, it was intended as a joke for the crew and it was never meant for public dissemination, the leaked recording alarmed the Soviets and highly escalated Intelligence services (Shultz, 1993).

The Soviet party interpreted Reagan's joke through a prism of profound mistrust, some reports indicate that Soviet military forces were raised in alert to the response (Garthoff, 1994). While Reagan was understood at home, the absence of pragmatic contextualization turned into a perceived threat. Media coverage in both block again further amplified the misunderstanding, reinforcing the existing nuclear anxieties (Costigliola, 2000).

From pragmatic point of view, the case demonstrates that cultural assumptions and prior background knowledge are critical in shaping the interpretation of utterances. Again, Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Gutt, 1991) states that without contextual cues to signal humor or irony, hearers are likely to default to literal, potentially hostile interpretations; in high-

stakes diplomacy and tense international relations, even simple humorous remarks require careful management, since their interpretation can carry serious consequences,

### ***2.2.3 SALT I Negotiations (1970s)***

Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I) were held between 1969 and 1972, they presented various diplomatic challenges and many linguistic and interpretive difficulties.

One persistent issue during talks was translation and negotiation on terms such as “verification”, “restriction”, and “limitation”. These terms, central to arms control discourse, carried subtly different connotations in Russian and English, for example, “verification” in the US usage implied specific technical means – including satellite surveillance and radar – while Soviet counterparts tended to interpret it more broadly or diplomatically, avoiding intrusive connotations (Woolf, 2010). Similarly, terms like “freeze” and “limit” were understood on varying degrees, leading to confusion over whether proposals were maximum thresholds, temporary holds, or flexible caps (Garthoff, 1994).

Diplomatic language carries heavy pragmatic and ideological load, demonstrating that it was not mere grammar or vocabulary mistakes – in Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2001) it is argued that diplomatic language is developed through power and politics; it means that language professionals had to maintain flexible negotiations, while also providing accurate translation and interpretation. This challenge is supported by Gile’s Effort Models (2009), it is stated that immense mental load that experienced by language professionals require cognitive and subject-matter control. SALT I talks clearly demonstrate the dimensions of high-stakes diplomacy and issues of national security, where language professionals had to not only be technically skilled, but skilled in meaning understanding.

### ***2.2.4 Carter’s Lust for Poland Incident (1977)***

During a 1977 Goodwill tour of Eastern Europe, the US President Jimmy Carter experiences a significant diplomatic embarrassment due to misinterpretation during his visit to Poland. Carter’s intention was to express his emotional solidarity with the Polish people,

emphasizing shared values and aspirations. However, the interpreter, a freelance linguist not formally employed by the State Department, mistranslated Carter's phrase "I have come to learn your opinions and understand your desires for the future" into language that suggested Carter had sexual desires for the Polish People (Alvord & Parent, 2024). Additionally, another line implying that Carter simply "left the United States" was rendered as if he had "abandoned" his country – a politically loaded and diplomatically inappropriate nuance.

The resulting miscommunication caused confusion and mockery in Polish media and was quickly picked up by international outlets, Soviet propaganda seized the opportunity to depict American diplomacy as clumsy, culturally insensitive and morally questionable (Costigliola, 2000). Although the interpreter was immediately replaced, the incident damaged Carter's message of Goodwill and reinforced Cold War narratives portraying Western leaders as arrogant and detached from cultural nuance (Alvord & Parent, 2024; Costigliola, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, this incident shows key concepts from Narrative Theory (Baker, 2006), emphasizing that language professionals contribute to the construction of political narratives through their linguistic choices. It also reflects some insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2001), showcasing that minor shifts in translation can disrupt dominant meaning and serve for opposition's agendas, reshaping international relations.

Jimmy Carter's case clearly demonstrates how minor interpretation error may lead to collapse of global image and public mockery that is deeply settled in history; that understanding culture, being aware of the context and adapt pragmatically is essential for high-stakes diplomacy.

### ***2.2.5 Kasenkina Case (1948)***

Oksana Kasenkina was a Soviet schoolteacher, working in Soviet Consulate in New York in 1948. She attempted to defect the building by jumping from the third floor window. American media described the incident as an act of heroism and example of bravery in front of communist

opposition, while the Soviets framed this event as a tragic exploitation of mentally vulnerable individual (Aronova, 2012; American Journal of International Law, 1949). This selective translation and interpretation was a main tool of constructing narrative of the two blocs; American party relied on the official translations of the Soviet statements, deliberately setting a blind eye on the Kasenkina's reported mental health struggles. On the other hand, Soviets interpreted the US' commentaries as manipulative and coercive, promoting anti-Western propaganda (Aronova, 2012; American Journal of International Law, 1949).

The Kasenkina Case demonstrates how language was used as a tool, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001), for maintaining or challenging power structures; moreover, as Baker (2006) suggests in Narrative Theory, translators often contribute to the shaping of collective memory, framing individuals and events in ways that align with dominant political narratives.

### *2.2.6 The White Paper on El Salvador (1981)*

In 1981, the US State Department released a "White Paper" suggesting to demonstrate extensive Soviet and Cuban support for leftist insurgent in El Salvador; the document was based largely on captured guerilla communications that were translated from Spanish, it played crucial role in shaping US foreign policy in Central America. The following investigation by scholars and journalists proved that many translations were selective and contextually exaggerated, amplifying ambiguous phrases into definitive claims of Soviet military involvement (Onate A., 2011; Chomsky & Herman, 1988).

Translation choices in "White Paper" transformed uncertain language into categorical statements that contributed to a narrative that justified the US military intervention. Translation is a practice heavily influenced by power relations, it is not a mere process of transferring meaning, as Fairclough, (1995) and Wodak (2001) depict in Critical Discourse Analysis. Furthermore, Baker (2006) states that in Narrative Theory deletions, accents, changes in modality also work under specific political goals, they point out that language professionals

often may not be simply neutral language transmitters, rather, they are crisis managers who promote balance in tense negotiations.

### 2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

These cases of miscommunication clearly demonstrate deep systematic errors that are followed by complex cognitive processing and reasoning under immense pressure, cultural assumptions and ideological pressure. In order to represent these cases more effectively we will address to theoretical lenses – Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986), Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2001), Interpretive Theory by Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) and Narrative Theory by Baker (2006) - each theoretical framework will provide deep analytical insight, explaining the cases of miscommunication and the work of language professionals in high-stakes diplomacy.

#### 2.3.1 *Relevance Theory*

Relevance Theory was developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and later was adapted by Gutt (1991) to translation studies – provides a rich understanding of communication failures in high-stakes diplomacy, the central idea behind the Relevance Theory is that human communication is managed by the search for optimal relevance – speakers aim to provide just enough information to guide their audience toward intended interpretations with least cognitive effort. **Effective communication depends not only on linguistic accuracy, but aligning the speakers intentions and context with the audience.**

In translation and interpretation practices this model illustrates that transferring words between languages is not enough for achieving effective communication, rather, language professionals must reconstruct meaning in way that matches cognitive senses, assumptions, knowledge of the targeted audience (Gutt, 1991) – if this adaptation is not achieved, even grammatically correct transfer of language might lead to misunderstandings.

“We will bury you!” case demonstrates the failure to adapt ideological nuance to the Western audience’s cognitive expectations – leading to tension in global dynamics (Tucker,

1967; Dobrynin, 1995). In a similar way, Reagan's joke demonstrated how humor, absent of pragmatic context could lead to hostilities when crossing linguistic boundaries Shultz, 1993).

Relevance Theory highlights the critical role of pragmatic competence in diplomacy, language professionals have to carefully manage context assumptions, cultural differences and ideological nuances – if this task is not achieved, there is a great chance for global misunderstandings and collapse of negotiations.

### *2.3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2001), presents a theory that reinforces power relations in communication. CDA views discourse not as a neutral agent of communication, but as a social practice that shapes ideological, political and institutional practices. The way language used reflect power dynamics, and translation and interpretation is one place where these dynamics are either reinforced or challenged.

During the Cold War diplomacy CDA demonstrates how errors in communication, translation and interpretation are used in framing of messages and reinforcing the ideological divide between two blocks. Translators and interpreters were not just language specialists – they also worked within, and sometimes supported, the political systems of their countries (Johnston, 2013).

Several cases of miscommunication illustrate the application of CDA – The Kasenkina defection, shows selective translation from the US and the Soviets, shaping narratives and public perceptions of ideological superiority and victimization (Aronova, 2012); the “White Paper” on El Salvador demonstrates that translated guerilla documents were distorted in meaning, selective strategic framing was applied that legitimized the US intervention policies (Onate A., 2011; Chomsky & Herman, 1988).

CDA vividly demonstrates that translation and interpretation errors are not just random technical failures, but rather, structured usages of power (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough (1995) argues that the way texts and translations are created and understood is shaped by political

institutions and social power structures; during the Cold War this practice played crucial role on promoting political agendas. At the same time, Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical approach reaffirms this idea, that understanding language in diplomacy requires prior historical knowledge and that translation decision, deliberate or accidental, are shaped by the past events and national identity.

Rogatchevski (2019) states that the visibility and agency of language professionals is an often underestimated fact of Cold War diplomacy, where they operated as they called them "semi-visible", who had to follow strict rules appointed by the authorities, while having no mention in the official records. This is a demonstration of being influential but not mentioned, which challenges the idea of neutrality of language professionals. Tuylenev (2021) states that language professionals operated in ideologically charged environment, where terms like "sovereignty" and "democracy" carried different meaning – language professionals were not merely translating and interpreting, they were the bridge between different worldviews, they were shaping political message and diplomacy.

### *2.3.3 Interpretive Theory*

Interpretive Theory explores interpretation as a cognitive process, where central idea lies in "deverbalization" – capturing the speaker's intended meaning, separating it from the original and reforming it for the targeted audience (Seleskovitch and Lederer, 1989; Gile, 2009). As Gile's Effort Model (2009) shows, this process requires heavy cognitive abilities during simultaneous interpretation, involving listening, analyzing, remembering, hearing and speaking – all at once and within limited time frames. When the pressure is too much for the language professionals, occurrence of mistakes like omissions, distortions or shifts in meaning is not rare.

SALT I negotiations is a vivid example of cognitive challenges that language professionals faced. The "verification" or "limitation" terms serve as an example of cognitive effort thresholds (Garthoff, 1994). As Gile (2009) argues, even highly skilled interpreters are prone to occasional errors when cognitive demands of the task surpass available resources.

Interpretive theory serves as precaution for language professionals operating in high-stakes diplomacy, it calls for attention to the need for realistic expectations about the performance of the language professionals, underscores the importance of preparation, support and stress management strategies for maintaining accuracy in communication.

#### *2.3.4 Narrative Theory*

Narrative Theory presented by Baker (2006), presents idea that language professionals are not just neutral transmitters of information, but active agents who shape narratives through their linguistic and discursive choices; Baker (2006) believes that translation involves selection, framing and transformation of meaning.

In the Cold War diplomacy Narrative Theory (Baker, 2006) reinforces ideas how translation and interpretation reinforced ideologies; the US and the Soviet Union constructed narratives that positioned them morally superior, rational and just, while framing opposite party as aggressive, duplicitous and oppressive.

Kasenkina's case demonstrate such dynamic, the US media presented her as a hero, defector escaping Soviet oppression while Soviet narrative depicted her as a victim that was manipulated by American Intelligence. Both sides used selective translation and framing to set ideological worldviews.

Baker (2006) emphasizes that narratives are not static, they are constantly reconstructed through selective representation of events, and thus, recognizing Narrative theory is crucial for understanding how translation and interpretation served as tools for ideological contestation during the Cold War

This is further supported by Tyulenev's (2021) argument that interpreters in ideological conflicts are tasked with translating not only language, but entire systems of belief—a challenge that shaped both the micro-level of interaction and the macro-level of Cold War diplomatic narratives.

## 2.4 Summary

Historical cases and theoretical frameworks demonstrated in this chapter show that translation and interpretation during the Cold War diplomacy were far from neutral or mechanical actions, rather, language mediation was deeply embedded in ideological narratives, cultural assumptions, and complex negotiations. Khrushchev's statement, Reagan's joke, SALT I negotiations, J.Carter's speech misinterpretation, Kasenkina and "White Paper" cases – demonstrated diplomatic consequences for miscommunication.

While existing literature offers valuable insight on the political and historical views of these events, several critical gaps remain: works on the Cold War by Garthoff (1994), Dobrynin (1995), and Costigliola (2000) provide retrospective diplomatic analysis, but does not present the experience of language professionals. Translation studies scholars such as Fairclough (1995), Baker (2006), and Wodak (2001) highlight the discursive power of language, yet their analyses often remain theoretical, with limited attention to language professionals' cognitive challenges and strategic decision-making under pressure.

Frameworks like Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Gutt, 1991), Interpretive Theory (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989; Gile, 2009), Critical Discourse Analysis, and Narrative Theory offer understanding and explanation for the cases of miscommunication, however, these theories are mostly applied in classroom settings, rather than tested in real-time.

Finally, the Cold War cases do not fully account for the current political, technological and intercultural challenges faced by the language professionals today; there is clear need to connect historical insights with modern practice to improve communication strategies for modern language mediation.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative semi-structured interview design approach to explore how professional interpreters and translators perceive, experience, and respond to translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes political and diplomatic contexts. According to Cohen et al (2018), clear and articulated research design is vital to fully grasp the research goal; specifically, to this study how language professionals understand the causes and consequences of translation and interpretation errors. The data was collected from semi-structured interviews, focusing particularly on the Cold War era translation and interpretation. The research investigated the awareness of causes, manifestations, and consequences of translation errors. In addition, the participants shared the strategies professionals employ to mitigate risks in sensitive international communication. The sampling includes professional translators, interpreters, former diplomats, and experts on Cold War diplomatic events, chosen and recruited for the purpose of this research. The interview data with six language professionals was analysed through a thematic analysis approach to respond to the research questions of the study.

### 3.2 Research Questions

#### **Research Question 1:**

*How do professional interpreters and translators perceive and experience the causes, manifestations, and consequences of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes settings such as Cold War diplomacy?*

#### **Research Question 2:**

*How do experienced language professionals describe and navigate the risks of translation and interpretation errors in politically sensitive or intercultural communication today?*

### 3.3 Sampling and Participants of The Research

To guarantee that all research participants are qualified experts in their respected fields a convenient purposive sampling strategy was chosen. As Bryman (2012), Cohen et al., (2018), Cresswell et al., (2012) state, purposive sampling is essential in qualitative research that seeks understanding of lived experiences of individuals with relevant backgrounds. The connections of the researcher with the professional made it more convenient to address the initial participants. To help with further recruiting of the target group of participants (i.e. professionals in translation field) the snowball sampling was also used, where the participants of the study shared with their professional networking. The information on research participants is provided in tables; all ethical considerations, including names, personal data remain confidential and anonymous.

The participants are representatives of various backgrounds which enriches the study with different specialization areas for exploring the challenges in high-stakes diplomacy translation and interpretations. The participants are coded as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.

All the participants practice English and Russian translation, while some other additional languages also exist in their professional practices. In general, the participants have more than 10 years of experience as translators and interpreters in Kazakhstan and beyond. At the moment, two participants are full-time practitioners, while the other four participants are also teaching translation studies in higher education institutions.

**Table 1 (Background Information on the Participants)**

Participant Code	Years of Experience	Language Direction	Specialization Fields
Participant 1	40+ years	ENG–RUS–KZ	Multilingual (Teaching Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpretation);

			Politics, Law, Medicine, Economics, Technology
Participant 2	26+ years	ENG–RUS	Multilingual (Teaching Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpretation); Politics, Law, Medicine, Economics, Technology
Participant 3	10+ years	ENG–RUS–FR	Simultaneous Interpretation; Politics, Technology, Economics
Participant 4	12+ years	ENG–RUS–KZ	Diplomatic Interpretation; Politics, International Relations, Crisis Management
Participant 5	15+ years	ENG–RUS–UKR	Translation and Interpretation; Political Negotiations, International Law
Participant 6	20+ years	ENG–RUS–FR– ITL	Multilingual Translation (Written and Oral); Political Communications, Journalism, International Organizations

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The sections below present information on the data collection and data analysis approaches employed in this study. The study is based on six semi-structured interviews, analysed with a thematic analysis approach.

### 3.5 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews serve as the main data collection tool that allows for flexibility to deeper understand the experience of participants (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). The interviews are structured in a way to conduct the talks in a friendly manner, starting with ice-breaking questions, leading to main thematic questions, elaboration questions if needed and conclusion. The main part of the semi-structured interview questions addresses two research questions of this study (see Table 2). Table 2 illustrates this alignment of how the research questions correspond with each other and to explore the general practices and the particular issues of translation and interpretation in relation to Cold War diplomacy.

Prior to the semi-structured interview data was collected, I piloted the interview questions with my peers to test the interview protocol. It further helped to guarantee that the questions were clear, relevant and aligned with the study's research goals and aims. With the help and guidance of my peers there were some adjustments made to the interview protocol.

**Table 2** (*The alignment of IQs with RQs, the excerpts from the interview protocol*)

Interview Question	Research Question 1	Research Question 2
1. What are the most common challenges when translating or interpreting political or diplomatic texts?	+	

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Share an instance where a translation or interpretation error had significant consequences, and how it was resolved. | + |   |
| 3. How do you ensure cultural and linguistic accuracy when working with politically sensitive materials?                |   | + |
| 4. How do you manage the pressure of interpreting in real-time during diplomatic negotiations?                          | + | + |
| 5. Describe a time when a misunderstanding or error during live interpretation affected a discussion outcome.           | + | + |
| 6. How do you think translation and interpretation errors influenced Cold War diplomacy?                                | + |   |
| 7. Have you encountered ideological or political pressures when interpreting for governments?                           | + |   |

### 3.6 Data Collection Procedures

All the participants were introduced with the relevant information to this research, which was stated in the information sheet. The participants received the sheets through e-mails. Upon the agreement, and decision to participate, the participant signed the Informed Consent Forms and were invited to the interview.

All the interviews were conducted online through Google Meets. The interviews were scheduled with regard to the convenience of the participants' time-tables. The interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and further transcribed with the help of audio recognition tools. The researcher checked and revised

the transcribed data manually to prepare for further analysis. The participants chose their preferred language for the interview (e.g. English or Russian). The interviews collected in Russian were translated by the researcher.

**Table 3 (The stages of data collection and analysis)**

Method	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Length
Interview	Semi-structured (Pilot Draft)	Full interview conducted	Transcription, coding, thematic analysis	45-60 minutes

### 3.7 Data Analysis Approach

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the transcribed interviews. This approach enables the identification, organization, and interpretation of recurring patterns and themes (Cohen et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2013; Tracy, 2013).

The analysis followed several steps: open coding for breaking data into meaningful parts; axial coding for connection of the codes to broader categories; theme development for combining the categories into the main themes that critically reflect research questions and theoretical framework. As a result, five themes emerged in this study - causes of diplomatic interpretation errors, manifestations of translation and interpretation errors, consequences of miscommunication in Cold War diplomacy and beyond, mitigation strategies for avoiding translation and interpretation errors, interpreter agency and ideological mediation. The findings were further discussed against the two main research questions in the scope of the empirical and theoretical research in this field.

### 3.8 Limitations

Despite careful planning, the study still faces limitations. First, the small sample size is limiting the generalization of the results. Second, the snowball sampling method allowed recruiting professionals from close fields of work and networks, which led to occasional monotony in their answers. Thirdly, the expertise of the participants in the diplomacy translation

and interpretation field was wide; however, there was a lack of specificity in Cold War translation and interpretation experience of the participants. Thus, they shared their perceptions, attitudes, perspectives towards high-stakes diplomacy experience as language professionals with not enough practical data sharing on the target field. Additionally, time constraints, conflicting schedules of the participants affected the overall research data collections and analysis process.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

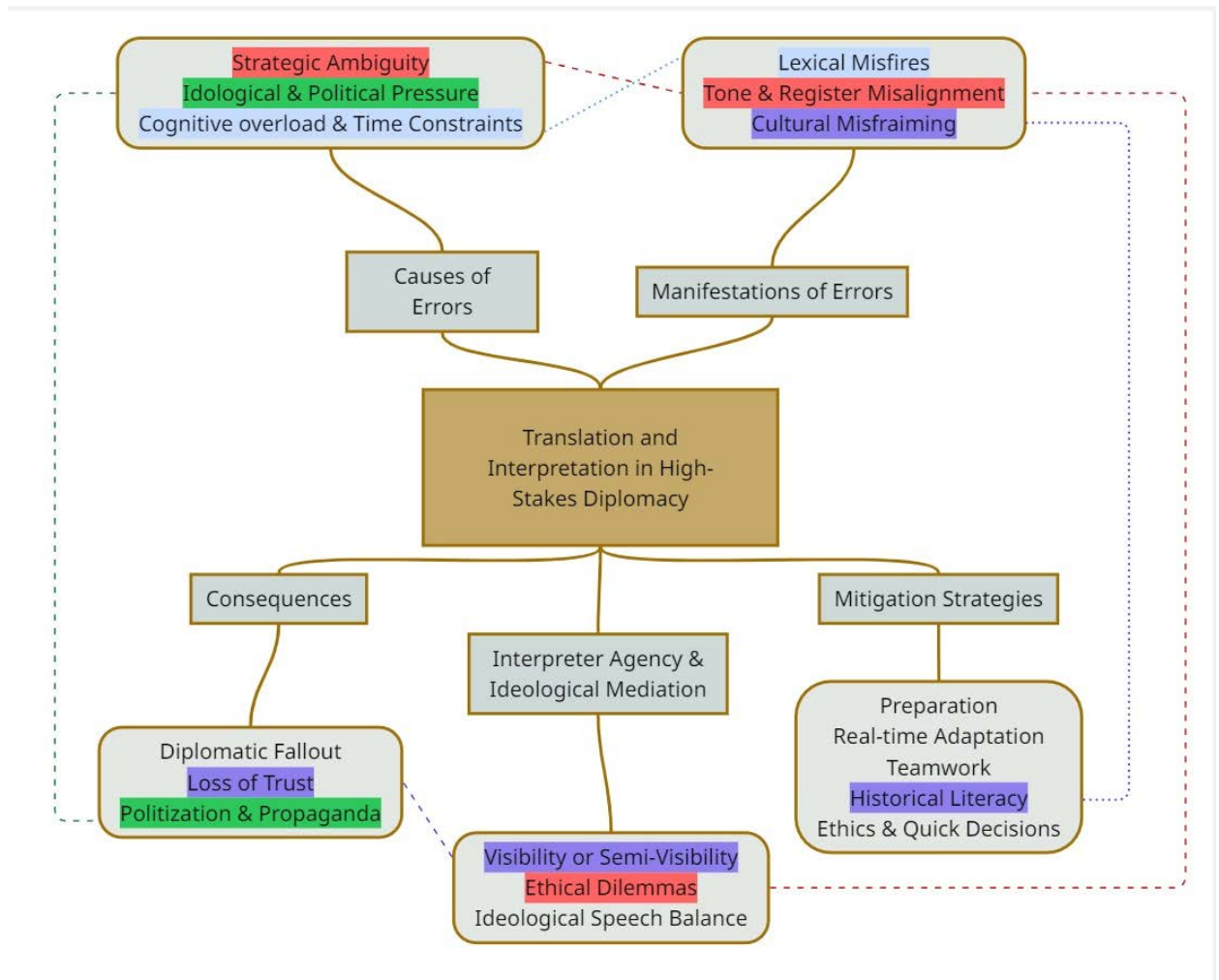
Ethical integrity is a central part to the research in several principals and areas, conforming with norms and regulations. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, procedures, and potential risks. They were given the option to withdraw from the interview at any moment. Written consent forms were collected prior to the interview, upholding the practices mentioned by Cohen et al. (2018). Confidentiality and anonymity are respected and ensured throughout the whole process of research with removal of all personal data from transcripts and publications (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). All data of interview recordings and transcripts is stored externally under passwords and are accessible only to researchers. All the collected primary data is sought to be deleted after the research is done and the data is analysed.

The next chapter presents the research findings, highlighting key themes that emerged from the data and offering empirical insights into the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies associated with translation and interpretation errors.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents the results of six semi-structured interviews that were conducted with language professionals. The participants work across different language combinations (ENG–RUS, ENG–KAZ, ENG–FR, and others), and represent diverse fields such as political, legal, editorial, and conference interpretation. Drawing on their experience, this analysis explores both Cold War-era diplomatic communication and modern high-stakes language mediation. The findings are organized thematically. Five major themes emerged during analysis: 1) causes of diplomatic interpretation errors, 2) manifestations of errors, 3) consequences of miscommunication, 4) risk mitigation strategies, 5) interpreter agency and ideological mediation. Quotes and insights are compared across participants to reveal areas of convergence and divergence in their views.

**Table 4 (Mindmap of Thematic Analysis)**



## 4.1 Causes of Diplomatic Interpretation Errors

This section explores the causes of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomatic contexts, as identified by all six participants. The results from the interview provide valuable data on recurring challenges in high-stakes diplomacy translation and interpretation, which include: ambiguity and diplomatic indirectness, ideological and political pressures, cognitive and temporal loads. Having compared the participants' responses and collected data from the interviews the section presents the emerged themes accordingly.

### 4.1.1. Ambiguity and Diplomatic Indirectness

Deliberate diplomatic vagueness and ambiguity is presented as a dominant theme that all participants have mentioned across the interviews. Euphemism, meanings under layers and deliberate indirectness were described as core challenges of translating and interpreting in high-stakes diplomatic negotiations. Multiple participants have stated that this indirectness is indeed intentional, and utilized as a central tool during negotiations; as Participant 5, specializing in political and technological conference interpreting, stated: *“Diplomatic language has these different layers... you're supposed to guess the exact meaning.”*, while Participant 3, specializing in simultaneous interpretation with experience in ENG-RUS-KAZ languages, stated: *“What is said is not always what is meant. You listen for what's behind the words.”*, similarly, Participant 1, with experience in history and military translation, highlighted “strategic ambiguity”, where vague terminology is intentionally used to preserve flexibility: *“Terms were intentionally vague to keep options open. But that also meant that even accurate translations could trigger escalation.”*, these statements demonstrate that vague diplomatic elusive language is presented as core challenges of high-stakes diplomatic interpretations.

However, some answers on ambiguity were interestingly diverse, Participant 6 with experience in conference interpreting, stated: *“In diplomatic contexts, we sometimes have to smooth the edges and avoid absolute precision if we aren't sure about the tone or wording.”*, a

clear showcase that sometimes even the language professionals have to utilize methods of maintaining pragmatic flexibility, while others preferred semantic precision.

It is clear that different professionals adopt different approaches in relation to the context and stakes; some go for semantic accuracy, preserving exact information; others go for a more diplomatic approach, adjusting tone and preventing escalation where possible. This is a showcase of a strategic tool that language professionals apply differently, the tension between fidelity and diplomacy remains evident as a complexity of translators and interpreter's line of work.

#### ***4.1.2 Ideological and Political Pressures***

The ideology and influence of client's politics is presented as another cause of errors among five participants. Some participants experienced this pressure directly, on the other hand, some emphasized the obligation to follow strict rules, even if they conflicted with linguistic accuracy.

Participant 2, who served in diplomatic delegations, explained that sometimes, interpreter's task is to serve as an intermediary between the message and its delivery: *"There were times when I knew exactly what the delegation wanted to hear in English, even if the Russian phrasing was different. You weren't there to be honest—you were there to keep the message in line with official policy."*, while Participant 4, editorial and audiovisual translator, stated: *"We're often told to refer to the conflict in Ukraine as a 'special military operation' instead of 'war.' It's not optional—if you call it a war in official texts, you can lose the contract or even your job."*

Participant 1, with historical experience, expressed the ideological functions interpreters performed: *"You weren't just translating. You were helping craft the version of reality your side wanted to be heard."* This aligns with Rogatchevski's (2019) concept of interpreters as "semi-visible people" – when language professionals were expected to maintain neutrality, while still shaping meaning through special linguistic choices.

This demonstrates how client's politics and ideology can shape choices in translation and interpretation, either through direct orders or through unspoken expectation, both of which are possible causes of errors in high-stakes diplomacy translation and interpretation practice.

Interestingly, some participants have not encountered any ideological pressure, for example, Participant 6 stated "*I never encountered any ideological or political pressure from governments or international organizations, even though I worked for both.*", this statement demonstrates that while ideological and client-based pressure may be causes of errors, it depends on the situation, organization and the interpreter's role.

#### ***4.1.3 Cognitive Overload and Temporal Constraints***

Translation and Interpretation in high-stakes diplomacy requires more than basic knowledge of language, it demands an ability to endure immense mental pressure under limited time – a challenge mentioned by all six participants. During rapid negotiations, full of complex, technical and political language, language professionals have to quickly adapt on the spot and make constant decision under tight time limits. These pressures often result in what Gile (2009) terms "cognitive overload," where the interpreter's processing capacity is exceeded, raising the likelihood of omissions, approximations, or meaning distortions.

Participant 6 recalled an early high-level interpreting experience that required immediate preparation for a sensitive topic – drug trafficking in Central Asia – without access to prior materials: "*It was out of the blue – 30 minutes to prepare for something I'd never done in my life. I knew some of the terminology from training, but not the specifics. It was pure survival mode.*"

This lack of preparation time, especially in political contexts, heightens stress and diminishes cognitive bandwidth. Yet, as Participant 6 added: "*The success of your interpreting is based 90%, even 99%, on your preparation.*"

Participant 5, drawing from frequent assignments in political and economic forums, framed the experience of simultaneous interpretation itself as inherently stressful: "*Simultaneous*

*interpretation is generally a stress. The work is quite hectic and stressful... Preparation and practice are the two things that make it easier.”*

Participant 3, who frequently interprets across English, Russian, and Kazakh, noted that switching among structurally distinct languages increases the risk of interference or semantic shortcuts: *“Fatigue builds fast in high-stakes settings. You start to lose grip on nuance and rely more on general terms. It’s not always inaccuracy – it’s a way to keep going under pressure.”*

These lived experiences are reflected in the Effort Model’s prediction that when cognitive load exceeds the interpreter’s capacity, omissions or simplifications are not signs of incompetence but necessary adaptations to preserve communicative flow (Gile, 2009).

Participant 2, recalling Cold War-era negotiations, noted that interpreters often employed “controlled undertranslation” – deliberate content reduction in real time: *“The risk wasn’t always mistranslation – it was undertranslation. Things got trimmed to save seconds. You weighed what could be sacrificed without changing the core message.”*

Similarly, Participant 1 emphasized the strategic decisions interpreters were forced to make: *“At summits, speed was everything. You had half a second to decide: do I render it fully and risk lagging behind, or do I condense and stay with the speaker? We called it triage.”*

These pressures are not only cognitive, but institutional. Several participants described working under surveillance – literal or psychological. Participant 5 noted: *“You’d have security people watching from the booth. You know your words are being tracked, so even routine interpretation feels like a test.”*

Beyond individual stress, cognitive strain also impacts diplomatic outcomes. Participant 2 recalled a case where, during an arms control negotiation, speed prevented full expression: *“Sometimes your brain registers the idea, but there’s no time to express it fully. So you default to the nearest equivalent and move on.”*

Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud (2016) affirm that interpreters in diplomatic and conflict-related contexts are often forced into such decisions, where perfection is sacrificed for clarity or pace, particularly when under institutional constraints.

These reflections underscore that cognitive overload is not an occasional hazard – it is a built-in feature of high-level diplomatic interpretation. Language professionals must constantly triage, sort and organize meaning under extreme conditions, weighing not only fidelity and clarity but also time, fatigue, and audience expectations. As Beard (2022) emphasizes, translation and interpretation in diplomatic contexts are never purely linguistic – they are forms of crisis management under semantic and psychological pressure.

#### 4.2 Manifestations of Translation and Interpretation Errors

While the causes of diplomatic interpretation errors often stem from structural, political, or cognitive pressures, their manifestations appear in recurring and recognizable forms. The common issues that interview participants mentioned were lexical mistakes, changes in tone, and culturally inappropriate translations; additionally, all participant mentioned that poor language skills were not reasons for these issues, but the pressure of making rapid decisions under limited time.

##### 4.2.1 Lexical Misfires and Idiomatic Pitfalls

Translation and Interpretation of idioms or metaphors in high-stakes diplomacy was depicted by Participants as one the most common manifestations of errors; phrases that are complex to carry over to another language and culture. Beard (2022) mentions that diplomatic language is tricky in terms of culture-specific styles and expressions. All six participants stated that idioms are risky to translate and interpret, often leading to miscommunications. For example, Participant 1, reflecting on summit interpreting, highlighted translation of figurative language: *“Phrases like ‘walking a nuclear tightrope’ came up often, and they weren’t just colorful language—they carried deep political signals. If you translated them too literally, it could sound like a threat. But if you toned them down, you risked missing the urgency or*

*intent.*”, this is reflected in Lygo’s (2018) strategic use of metaphors during the Cold War, vague diplomatic language hinting to political tensions.

Participant 5, working in simultaneous interpretation for political and economic forums, described difficulties when interpreting American idioms rooted in business or sports culture: *“Once, a speaker said, ‘We need to get all our ducks in a row before the summit.’ I froze for a second—because if you translate that literally, it just sounds absurd. But if you drop the idiom entirely, you lose the speaker’s tone of urgency and preparation. It’s a constant balancing act.”*

Participant 3 confirms this concern, noting the difficulty of conveying culturally embedded expressions in multilingual settings: *“When switching across English, Russian, and Kazakh, idioms don’t travel cleanly. A proverb in one language might become moral preaching in another. You have to think fast about tone, culture, and purpose.”* Participant 4 reflected on the issue from a translation rather than interpretation perspective, particularly in audiovisual and editorial contexts: *“Sometimes, especially with state media content, we’re expected to preserve the surface of the idiom, but the political climate demands we adjust the meaning. A direct translation can trigger the censors – or worse, the audience’s outrage.”*

Historical mistranslations continue to haunt interpreter practice today. The most frequently referenced case was Khrushchev’s infamous phrase *“We will bury you,”* which nearly all participants interpreted as an idiomatic failure. Participant 2, with decades of experience in diplomatic interpretation, noted: *“It wasn’t an actual threat – it meant ‘we will outlast you.’ But no one in the room translated it that way, and the fallout was quite big. It’s a textbook example of why idioms must be filtered through historical and political context.”* These observations align with Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud’s (2016) analysis of conflict zone interpreting, which emphasizes that idiomatic fidelity must often be subordinated to communicative function, especially when cultural resonance is at stake.

In total, the findings confirm that idioms and metaphors present one of the greatest challenges in diplomatic interpretation. Even when interpreters succeed in grasping the intended

meaning, rendering it effectively in the target language requires not only linguistic dexterity but also cultural calibration and political judgment.

#### *4.2.2 Tonal Misalignment and Register Shifts*

Choosing the right tone or register formality in diplomatic interpretation is another challenge presented by the participants, formality matters as much; participants stated that if the tone is off the change in message delivery is evident, leading to loss of trust, offensive or even damaging and disruption of negotiation process as a whole, even when from the technical standpoint everything is followed.

Beard's (2002) reflection on the view that language professionals during Cold War interpretation had to deliver the tone, formality and style is supported by the Participant 1's highlight: *"A sarcastic joke can sound like a threat. A firm line can feel aggressive. You don't just translate words – you adjust the delivery."*, this demonstrates how dangerous a mismatch could be.

Contemporary professionals reported facing similar dilemmas. Participant 2, who has interpreted high-level defense and economic negotiations, shared a case where the intended conciliatory tone of a Russian delegate came off as patronizing in English due to a literal rendering of hierarchical phrasing: *"We had a case where something meant to sound conciliatory came off as condescending. The whole mood of the room shifted."* This example highlights what Fairclough (1995) describes as **register collision** – when language suited to one discursive culture is interpreted within the norms of another, triggering dissonance or misreading.

Several participants described this tonal challenge as one of **the most difficult to manage in real time**, particularly under cognitive stress. Participant 5 noted: *"If the tone is serious but your rendering sounds disrespectful or exaggerated, you lose credibility immediately – even if the vocabulary is correct."*

Others expressed different strategies. Participant 6 explained that **tone fidelity is often negotiable**, depending on client expectations: *"If I have to choose between tone and meaning, I*

*go with meaning. Some clients prefer clarity over elegance.*” This reflects a broader divergence in interpreter ideology – between those who prioritize **discursive mirroring** and those who emphasize **semantic precision**, especially when time pressure forces choices.

This issue becomes more evident and supported by Participant 3’s statement: *“The speaker was talking about conflict resolution, but the interpretation made it sound routine, bureaucratic. The emotion was gone – and with it, the impact.”*; in it self, Rosendo and Persaud’ (2016) view on conveying the emotion of the discourse aligns with a vital but often overlooked role of language professionals in high-stakes interpretation of diplomatic language. Such tonal misalignment may also be weaponized, when even a slight shift in intonation is not observed accordingly; Participant 1 illustrated that ideological fragility in communication: *“We didn’t just interpret words. We weighed how they might land in D.C. or Moscow. A polite phrase said too sternly could be read as a threat.”*

These examples demonstrate that choosing the right tone and register are deep contextual skills that should be learned and studied, this knowledge provides cultural fluency and discursive intuition to sensitivity of language.

#### **4.2.3 Cultural Misframings and Contextual Collapse**

Failure to understand cultural nuances and settings may be as challenging and devastating as tone misalignment in high-stakes diplomatic interpretation, commentaries of participants support this idea, highlighting that interpretation is not simply rendering of words but a navigation through deep cultural instances. For example, Participant 3 illustrated their remark on a moment when an sudden anecdote shifted the tone of negotiation: *“The speaker suddenly told a local anecdote meant to ease the tension—but it relied on cultural humor that didn’t translate. I had to decide in seconds whether to explain it, skip it, or adapt it. I went for a soft adaptation, but the room didn’t react. The moment was lost, and so was the speaker’s strategy.”*; it shows the difficulty in handling culturally specific content, which plates strategic role and pursuits full engagement.

Another example of this is demonstrated by Participant 6's statement that emphasizes the risk of assuming cultural equivalence for political terminology: "*Some words – like 'freedom,' 'sovereignty,' or 'aggression' – carry very different weights in different political cultures. A literal translation doesn't always convey the ideological baggage.*"; Beard (2022) supports this observation by stating that language professionals during Cold War negotiations often operated under situations where terminology had very different meanings depending on the audience's nationality and views on ideology.

Participant 1's historical knowledge further reinforces this: "*In East-West exchanges, even basic concepts like 'democracy' or 'human rights' weren't neutral. They were contested. So the interpreter had to decide: Do you translate the surface, or the worldview behind it?*"; which is also reflected by Tyulenev's (2021) observations on the ideological conflict that interpreters endured in conflict zones, mediating not only language, but clashing worldviews.

The adaptive strategy of invisible intervention is also underscored by Participant 4's statement, working in state media: "*You can translate word for word, but the audience won't get it. I often have to reframe things – especially when the topic touches military, religion, or social order. You have to explain without explaining.*", this is an example of alignment not simply meaning, but meaning in context.

Cold War precedents continue to inform this practice. As Ruiz Rosendo and Persaud (2016) point out, interpreters operating in conflict or post-conflict environments often act as cultural negotiators, implicitly adjusting discourse to prevent communicative failure. Participant 2 confirmed this by describing how, during sensitive negotiations, they would sometimes paraphrase or clarify mid-interpretation to avoid cultural misunderstandings: "*If I knew the audience wouldn't get the subtext, I'd insert a brief clarification. It's not ideal, but neither is letting them misread the whole message.*"

What emerges from these testimonies is that – linguistic equivalence is insufficient when cultures do not align. Even a perfectly accurate rendering can misfire if the audience interprets it

through a radically different ideological lens. The result is not always outright misunderstanding – but can be loss of trust, confusion, or unintended provocation.

In summary, high-stakes interpretation is performed by balancing between semantic fidelity and cultural coherence, success depends not on what is said but on what might be prevented from misreading; both historically and today, the role of language professionals as keepers of mutual understanding is essential.

### 4.3 Consequences of Miscommunication in Cold War Diplomacy and Beyond

If slight translation and interpretation errors may be set aside in everyday situations, in high-stakes diplomacy such consequences can be worsened by ideology, global tensions and inappropriate media coverage; all six participants stated that mistrust or misstatements of propaganda can have great repercussions, they are not just language mistakes, they carry real political, diplomatic and psychological weight.

#### 4.3.1 Escalation of Tension and Diplomatic Fallout

Half of the participants stated that interpretation and translation errors in diplomatic settings may lead to geopolitical tensions, describing instances of badly phrased sentences during meetings. Participant 2 stated: “*A badly phrased sentence at a press conference could turn into a front-page crisis. I’ve seen that happen – more than once.*”, Costigliola (2000) and Garthoff’s (1994) views on historical studies support the idea that language was not a neutral conduit but a strategic tool that can be framed and monitored accordingly.

Participant 4 reflected on the thought that interpreters' wording could trigger unnecessary provocations: “*We learned the hard way that language is never neutral. The smallest error becomes a political asset.*”, which resonated with Fairlough’s (1995) concept of language power, suggesting that words can shape political outcomes, constructing certain views as legitimate or threatening. Participant 6 described a way for preventing such outcomes: “*Your job isn’t to escalate – it’s to keep the bridge open. I’ll sometimes neutralize a phrase if I know it will explode in the target culture.*”

In high-stakes diplomacy and during Cold War interpretation, language professionals had to stay constantly alert for hidden meanings, like Rogatchevski (2019) commented on the memoirs of the interpreters describing them as “semi-visible agents”, whose decisions in translation can affect the course of negotiation. The interview’s findings support the statement that interpreters do not simply transfer messages but also mediate ideology and navigate the environment of possible escalation and accidental misframings that may be irreversible.

#### ***4.3.2 Loss of Trust, Credibility, and Diplomatic Momentum***

It should be noted that not all errors result in crises of diplomacy, participants also commented on the trust issues that result in inaccuracies between speakers and language professionals. Participants stressed that it is all about consistency and mutual understanding, not to mention the professional credibility that is critical for high-stake diplomacy, where reliability is a backbone of successful negotiations.

Participant 5 shared a cautionary example from a high-stakes negotiation: *“It’s not the one mistake – it’s the pattern. Clients start second-guessing you. Delegates feel misunderstood. Trust fades.”* This erosion of trust reflects the concerns raised by **Baker (2006)** and **Wodak (2001)**, who argue that interpretation failures, even when unintentional, can activate narratives of unreliability or partiality – particularly when they confirm preexisting ideological suspicions. In diplomatic settings, where so much depends on tone, timing, and the precise delivery of nuance, such lapses can stall or derail negotiations.

Participant 6 described how misrendered nuance in an economic negotiation triggered a chain reaction of clarification and damage control: *“Three days of clarification emails, a backup interpreter being brought in, and a delayed press release.”* This kind of fallout illustrates **Fairclough’s (1995)** theory of language as social action: a single instance of miscommunication can generate ripple effects, shifting the discourse and altering institutional relationships. As **Garthoff (1994)** notes in his account of Cold War diplomacy, mutual confidence in the fidelity

of interpretation was essential for continuity in dialogues such as SALT I and other arms control talks.

Participant 3 affirmed this, noting that the audience – not just the interlocutors – can lose confidence: *“Sometimes it’s not the speaker who notices – it’s the audience. They hear a wrong nuance and suddenly think, ‘So that’s what they really mean?’”*; this shows that interpretation is an act followed by complex political and social expectations. As **Sperber and Wilson (1986)** argue in Relevance Theory, listeners construct meaning based on cognitive and contextual cues. If language professionals fail to follow these cues because of great cognitive load or fatigue, the audience will be stripped of key meaning behind the speaker’s intentions, which weakens the diplomacy and transition of intended message.

This breakdown in interpretive alignment often requires additional clarification and can cause delays or suspicion. In Cold War diplomacy, such incidents were particularly sensitive, given the hyper-surveillance of every communicative act. Even today, as Participant 4 observed, *“the damage isn’t always immediate, but the doubts linger.”*

These findings support the conclusion that trust is fragile and cumulative in diplomatic interpretation. Once disrupted, it is difficult to restore – and in contexts marked by ideological rigidity or political rivalry, the consequences of that disruption may outlast the original error.

#### ***4.3.3 Politicization and Propaganda Use of Interpreter Errors***

In both Cold War and modern contexts, several participants noted that interpretation errors are not just mistakes – they are used for political purposes. Rather than being quietly corrected, errors may be reframed, amplified, and instrumentalized as strategic tools by state actors, media outlets, or ideological institutions. This aligns closely with the views of Lygo (2018), who asserts that mistranslations frequently entered public discourse not as accidents, but as ideologically useful distortions of truth.

Participant 1, recalling press briefings during US – Soviet negotiations, noted: “Reporters didn’t quote the speaker – they quoted the interpreter. And if the phrasing was strong, it made

headlines. Sometimes, that phrasing was inaccurate.” This highlights the interpreter’s double vulnerability: not only must they work under intense cognitive and temporal constraints, but their words may be excerpted and recontextualized in highly politicized narratives. **Fairclough’s (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis** supports this view, emphasizing that every linguistic choice in public discourse is susceptible to re-framing within power-loaded ideological systems.

Participant 4, who works in editorial and audiovisual translation, offered a contemporary parallel: “*Sometimes, mistakes aren’t corrected – they’re used. Governments would replay a mistranslation if it served the narrative.*” This reflects Tyulenev’s (2021) argument that translators and interpreters in ideological states are often involved in what he calls the “discursive infrastructure” – where state narratives exploit linguistic mediation to reinforce political legitimacy or demonize opponents.

Participant 5 also referenced the Khrushchev “*We will bury you*” incident, pointing out how the error was “*not just misunderstood, it was repeated – as a symbol of Soviet aggression.*” This suggests that the most enduring interpretation errors are not those with the greatest deviation from source text, but those that resonate ideologically in the receiving culture – a process Beard (2022) refers to as “discursive weaponization.”

The findings show that language professionals are not just neutral messengers, their work may be twisted into hostility and framed as ideological threats, especially in biased media. The impact of these errors depends less on accuracy but in how useful the mistake for political purposes.

#### 4.4 Mitigation Strategies for Avoiding Translation and Interpretation Errors

##### 4.4.1 In-Depth Background Preparation

The most common strategy that is presented by the Participants is careful, context-aware preparation, which is reflected in insight of Gile’s Effort Models (2009), Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory (1986), and Gutt’s relevance-based approach to translation (1991), who underscore the cognitive implications that language professionals experience and the necessity

for alignment of this context to achieve successful communication. For example, Participant 6 stated that: *“The success of your interpreting is based 90%, even 99%, on your preparation.”*, Gile’s Effort Model (2009) supports this by commenting that listening skills, speech recognition and short-term memory are essential for successful translation and interpretation - if one of those lack during the process, performance deteriorates, leading to omissions, simplifications and even distortion of intended meaning.

Participant 3, who regularly works in ENG–RUS–KAZ political settings, noted: *“If you don’t know what the speaker is trying to signal politically, your perfect grammar won’t matter.”* This remark underscores a critical component of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), namely that communication depends not only on linguistic form, but on shared assumptions. The interpreter’s role becomes one of bridging not just languages, but **inferential gaps** – reading between the lines of both source and target culture to ensure the intended message reaches the listener with minimal inferential loss. In high-stakes diplomacy, those gaps are often filled with ideology, coded references, and culturally specific framing devices. Without preparation, the risk of misfiring increases exponentially.

Participant 2 elaborated on the interpretive demands during Cold War arms negotiations: *“You had to read Pravda, the Wall Street Journal, and the mood of the delegation. Otherwise, you missed the meaning behind the words.”* This quote affirms what Tyulenev (2021) describes in his study of Cold War translation regimes: interpreters operated in highly surveilled, ideologically saturated environments where **context was not optional but integral** to the message. The discursive environment – who was speaking, to whom, and under what political conditions – shaped not only the choice of words but also how those words would be perceived. Preparation, then, had to include a “reading of the room,” as well as the press, the geopolitics, and the mood of the delegations.

Participant 4, whose work spans editorial and audiovisual translation in Russian media, reflected the importance of audience-specific framing: *“You don’t just translate a sentence – you*

*translate the risk attached to it. If I don't know who's going to read it, I don't know how to shape it.*" Such insights reveal that preparation is not merely about collecting terminologies or reviewing subject matter, but about **tuning into the interpretive frameworks of both source and target audiences**. Gutt (1991) explains that relevance-based translation in high-stakes diplomacy is structured in a way to help the audience make the most sense of the content; word-for-word accuracy is not the essential goal, transmission of speaker's intent is, when it is clear and appropriate.

Findings demonstrate that in-depth preparation is the key to successful mediation strategy of avoiding mistakes in high-stakes interpretation, as well as geopolitical awareness of ideologies and literacy; theoretical frameworks also support this notions adding that without clear background, professionals will not be as effective in mediation of diplomatic language and speaker's intend. Cold War also serves as a historical example of how accuracy is dependant on thorough preparation.

#### ***4.4.2 Real-Time Management: Reformulation and Clarification***

Participants of the study have also expressed the need to adapt in real-time for politically sensitive communication, while preparation is evident, the time limits that should be followed also underscore the problem of keeping the message as clear as possible. The strategies mentioned: quick rephrasing, clarification and softening of sensitive expressions in order to stay true to the original meaning.

Participant 5 expressed: *"If I hear a dangerous metaphor, I sometimes switch to a safer comparison. I preserve intent but protect both parties from fallout."*, while Participant 6 commented that: *"Your job isn't to escalate – it's to keep the bridge open. I'll sometimes neutralize a phrase if I know it will explode in the target culture."*, this shows the balance language professionals have to follow to avoid conflicting situations. This finds reflection again in Gile's Effort Model (2009) where interpreters under pressure have to prioritize meaning over the form, making quick decisions on the go, these are the tools for avoiding harm during talks. In

a way, this also aligns with Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Gutt (1991) that interpreters serve dual role - staying true to the speaker's intent while ensuring that message is delivered accordingly; language professionals have to consider both language and situation.

At the end, all participants agreed that strict literalism does not always work in high-stakes diplomacy, Participant 3 stated: "*Literal translation is the fastest way to cause a misunderstanding. In diplomacy, it's not about exact words—it's about the message landing the right way.*", reformulation is not failure, it is a critical skill that helps to deliver meaning across the language, culture and politics.

#### ***4.4.3 Collaborative Support: The Interpreter's Partner***

One of the mitigation strategies of errors mentioned during the interview process was having a skilled partner, it is not just helpful, but essential. For example, both Participant 3 and Participant 6 highlighted this notion that working closely with a partner helped manage cognitive load and reduce possible errors under stress. Participant 3 recalled their work during the major summit: "*We split the speeches between us and reviewed everything together. We ran the drafts through machine tools and cross-checked terminology.*", while Participant 6 stressed the value of support in the interpreting box: "*You need to have a good partner who supports you in stressful moments. We write down numbers and data for each other—it makes your life easier.*". This is supported for the umpteenth time by the Gile's Effort Models (2009), that teamwork helps ease the loads and improve the performance. The Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986) also underscores that working with a partner improves communication by relying on shared preparation and knowledge.

Findings illustrate that language professional partnership is essential and vital part of making sense in high-stakes diplomacy.

#### ***4.4.4 Learning from Historical Precedent***

Learning from history and past mistakes is essential for avoiding these mistakes today, it helps understand the critical insight into the politics, ideology, global views and communicative

pressures that shaped these moments (Baker, 2006; Tyulenev, 2021); and many research participants stated that history provides valuable lessons that shape their work today. For example, Participant 1 referred to the cases of SALT I negotiations and statement “We will bury you!”: “*Every Cold War interpreter today has studied that ‘Bury you’ case. It taught us that accuracy isn’t just grammar – it’s ideology, context, tone.*”, while Participant 4 stated that: “*The past gave us rules – when to clarify, when to follow tone, when to ask for repetition even if it breaks the flow.*” These instances are supported by Tyulenev’s (2021) and Baker’s (2006) ideas that language professionals' norms are shaped by historical experience; infamous cases serve as a reference for what to avoid in high-stakes diplomacy.

Findings illustrate that history and previous knowledge continue to guide language professionals today helping them to make better decisions and elevate their knowledge and skills to avoid errors that can potentially spark diplomatic problems.

#### ***4.4.5 Personal Ethics and Decision-Making Under Pressure***

Staying true to the speaker's intent or adjusting the message to avoid diplomatic fallout is another politically sensitive situation where language professionals face moral dilemmas. Several participants state that their decision has to be made in a split second and can affect both clarity of message and the outcome of negotiations. For example, Participant 1 said: “*Sometimes the ethics of diplomacy override the ethics of translation. You’re not lying – but you are choosing peace over provocation.*”, it shows that prioritizing diplomacy over accuracy is one of the choices when tensions are high, the role of language professional transforms into a mediator in diplomatic relations,

However, not every participant can agree with this statement, for example, Participant 6 argued: “*My job is not to fix diplomacy. It’s to reflect it. If someone says something dangerous, it’s on them – not me.*”, this is supported by the Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) statements that interpreters duty does not include managing consequences of the negotiations.

Participant 2 stated that subtle adjustments are expected to avoid escalation: “*be faithful, but not foolish,*”, finding reflection in Fairclough (1995) and Wodak’s comments that language professionals are not always neutral, since their art is shaped by the political rules and pressures.

This dilemma becomes even more evident when the time limits are strict and decisions have to be made quick, Baker (2006) again notes that these seconds to reflect can carry heavy diplomatic weight.

Findings show that there is a clear range of differing ethical views, from the standpoint of practitioners and theories. Some follow full transparency while others lean towards diplomatic regulations, in both cases language professionals carry the burden of transmitting not only what is stated, but what is meant.

#### 4.5 Interpreter Agency and Ideological Mediation

This final section is centered on the deeper issue, the language professionals’ role and agency in political communication; in Cold War diplomacy in contemporary settings language professionals are not just neutral messengers, they often find themselves in power relations, politics, diplomatic dynamics. This section highlights participants’ view on ethical and political pressures language professionals face navigating between languages and ideologies.

##### 4.5.1 Visibility and the “*In-Between*” Role

The duality in the role of language professionals is presented as a common theme among participants' views - essential but often invisible in official records. For example, Participant 4 stated: “*Sometimes your words shift history – but your name is not in the history books.*”, while Participant 5 called language professionals as “shadow figures” in high-stakes negotiations: “*You’re right there, closer to power than most people ever get. But you’re supposed to act like you’re not even in the room.*”; this finds support in Rogatchevski’s (2019) idea that interpreters are “semi-visible” actors that are absent from history – the influence of language professionals is expected to stay silent and unseen. Additionally, Fairclough (1995) explains that translators and

interpreters may sometimes play key roles in political negotiations, and this “invisibility” clashes with the impact that they have while shaping meaning.

Participants heavily noted that this “invisibility” is not neutral, hiding the decisions language participants make under pressure; Participant 3 stated: “*Sometimes the most visible thing in the room is what isn’t said,*”, the choices may be left unnoticed by the outside eyes and ears, but everyone present in the room feel the weight of what was left unsaid.

Moreover, Participant 6 shared an example of navigating between ethics and client’s preferences: “*Yes, I did ask my supervisor actually whether I can correct the mistakes, and I’ve been granted such kind of power... But I do not change the intention.*”; this is another example of how language professionals have to balance the ethics, while still influencing the outcome of discussion.

This shows that power in diplomacy can be executed subtly, how language professionals manage the tension and intent through what they strategically do not say.

#### ***4.5.2 Ethical Dilemmas and Self-Censorship***

Balancing accuracy and responsibility of the outcome is another challenging part of the diplomatic translation and interpretation, many participants shared instances when they made choices based on not what they said but on political sensitivity and emotional tone or the risk of causing tension. For example, Participant 1 said: “*There were times I changed phrasing not because I misunderstood – but because I knew the literal version would derail the meeting.*”, similarly, Participant 2 commented: “*You had to read the room, read the mood.*”; both examples show that they interpreted the intent, and reception of the speakers. Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough (1995) supports this, demonstrating that language professionals contribute to how message is communicated, and true objectivity is often toned down in high-stakes negotiations.

However, not all participants agreed on this view, Participant 6 followed and supported strict accuracy, and Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) also note that language professionals should stay true to the message regardless of content. In contrast, Participant 5 proposed a middle

ground: *“I try to remain neutral and handle politically loaded phrases with care.”*, it illustrates an example of a flexibility - keeping the neutrality, while still analyzing and taking action in difficult situations.

Beard (2022) notes that language professionals throughout the Cold War were expected to “say everything, but not say too much” - a nearly impossible task to achieve that required careful evaluation and cognitive abilities.

In summary, the balancing of neutrality is constant, while some language professionals see this as part of their duty, others resist changing the message; translators and interpreters work not just between the language but consequences.

#### ***4.5.3 Navigating Ideological Speech***

The clash of two opposing ideologies, capitalism and communism, two powers, The US and The Soviet Union, individualism and collectivism - fueled the diplomatic language with strategic meaning, where language professionals had to transfer not just message, but navigate the opposing worldviews. Several participants described how even neutral terminology may carry different meanings depending on the audience and political agendas. For example, Participant 3 stated: *“American rhetoric was full of moral appeals—freedom, democracy. Soviet discourse was coded, collectivist. You had to adjust not just words, but ideological tone.”*; which is supported by Tyulenev's (2021) argument that Cold War interpreters carried the meaning of heavily controlled environments and situations. Furthermore, Participant 4 highlighted the challenge of transferring political terminology like “sovereignty”, “aggression”, and “liberation” in different cultures: *“They weren’t just words—they were policies.”*; this comment resonates with Fairclough's (1995) idea again, which is that language is shaped by political systems.

The challenges of history still exist in contemporary settings, Participant 1 stated the notion of small choices in transfer - *“a nuclear option”* or *“the nuclear option”* could affect how a message was interpreted, *“It wasn’t grammar—it was diplomacy.”*; this example aligns with

Beard's (2022) statement that leaving out a loaded wording may inevitably change the whole policy.

The findings illustrate that language professionals are not just experts in their fields, they are mediators whose decisions shape how messages are delivered and understood, and sometimes, how they are remembered in history.

*Table 5 (Data Coding System vs Themes)*

<b>№</b>	<b>Causes of Errors</b>	<b>Manifestations</b>	<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Mitigation Strategies</b>	<b>Agency &amp; Ideology</b>
P1	Strategic ambiguity, Cold War ideology, processing shortcuts	Lexical shifts, invented terms, Cold War misquotes	Escalation, media misuse	Cold War case awareness, reframing ideology	Adjusts for peace, ethical discretion
P2	Institutional expectations, ideological filtering	Tone distortion, framing mismatch	Loss of trust, diplomatic breakdown	Context immersion, strategic reformulation	Balances fidelity with caution, reads regimes
P3	Diplomatic vagueness, triadic pressure (ENG-RUS-KAZ)	Idiomatic confusion, tone misreading	Delays, misalignment, audience confusion	Pre-reading, clarity prioritization	Sensitive to bloc-based differences
P4	Censorship and political redirection in editorial contexts	Idioms, contextual collapse	Politicized reuse of translation	Historical referencing, tone management	Translates policy through words, ethical reflexivity
P5	Layered diplomatic speech, cognitive load	Tone misfires, sarcasm misread	Audience distrust, reputational damage	Real-time softening, pragmatic metaphors	Feels invisible yet impactful, adapts under pressure
P6	High-speed delivery, semantic approximation	Undertranslation, meaning over tone	Momentary confusion, emotional misinterpretation	Glossaries, booth teamwork, cushioning language	Strict fidelity, non-interventionist stance

## Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter is aimed to explore the language professionals' view on the causes, manifestations, and consequences of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomacy, with a focus on the Cold War era. The discussion paid special attention to how language professionals understand these challenges and how their experience contributes to our understanding of the language mediation in high-stakes contexts. Additionally, this chapter explored what strategies for contemporary language mediation are utilized by language professionals to mitigate the errors in translation and interpretation. The conclusions are developed through the scope of two research questions that guide the research.

### 5.1 Summary of RQ1: Interpreters' and Translators' Perceptions of the Causes, Manifestations, and Consequences of Errors in Cold War Diplomatic Communication

Having conducted the interviews with six participants, professionals in the translation in diplomacy, I have found about their perceptions and experience on the causes, manifestations, and consequences of translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes settings.

First of all, the most commonly identified cause of the translation and interpretation errors mentioned by the participants was euphemisms, ideological and political pressures. Cognitive overload as a result of time constraints and stress due to working in high-stakes environments was also mentioned by the majority of the participants. Language professionals often had to decode indirect diplomatic language and meaning hidden behind the idea of a speaker, or soften the direct, sometimes, risky phrasings to prevent the breakdown of the negotiations. The findings support the claims of Beard (2022) and Lygo (2018) stating that diplomatic discourse is labeled with hidden meanings and strategic vagueness that requires language professionals to balance between what is said and what is meant. The reasons for the mistakes in translation practice might be not directly related to professionalism of translators or interpreters but it might happen because of external factors leading to stressful working culture.

Secondly, the ideological and political pressures were highlighted as another major cause of errors. Research participants shared their experience with their clients. The tasks they mentioned related to following specific terminology and re-phrasing or omitting certain words to align with official agendas. In some cases these constraints led to reformulation and mistranslation of the intended message. These findings echo in Rogatcheviski's (2019) view of language professionals as "semi-visible agents" who worked in tightly controlled settings. In relation to the historical translations of cold war times, the cases of mistranslations described by Aronova 2012, the case of Oksana Kasenkina, confirm that interpreters' possessed agency beneficial for different parties. While in Cold war times, the practice of interpretation of actions presented in opposing language media (US and USSR) held contradictory ideologies, and thus, introduced the same situation differently. In modern times interpreters have varied agency (limited to full) in their professional practice to decide how to translate. However, not all research participants have encountered pressure from their clients, which leads to believe that it all depends on the situation, organization and the interpreter's role during the negotiation process.

Third, the cognitive strain that language professionals experience during high-stakes diplomatic interpretation is described by participants as high mental demands in limited time constraints during fast-paced technical negotiations rich in diverse terminology. Gile's Effort Model (2009) helps understand these experiences by showing how cognitive overload leads to adaptive strategies on the go, such as selective omission or simplification. These strategies were often necessary to keep pace with speakers, especially when interpreters had limited access to preparation materials or when unfamiliar terminology emerged unexpectedly.

Having established main causes, the participants have stressed that manifestations of errors may lead to miscommunication in tone and register (Beard, 2002) , and cultural misframings as an outcome of false translation and interpretation. Participants stated that linguistic equivalence is insufficient when cultures do not align. Even a perfectly accurate

translation can misfire if the audience interprets it through a radically different ideological lens (Alvord & Parent, 2024; Costigliola, 2020). The result can be loss of trust, confusion, or unintended provocation. As Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) explained, miscommunication can occur when cognitive environments are not aligned, a nuance which language professionals must take in consideration when engaged in diplomatic discourse.

In addition, the consequences of errors in high-stakes diplomatic translation and interpretation show that misunderstanding might lead to tensions during negotiations. The case of Khrushchev's speech analysed in the works of Dobrynin (1995) exemplifies how mistranslations in media impacted on international relations of US and USSR in the Cold War times. Several participants of this study stated that inaccurate translation and interpretation can be amplified by media, resulting in weaponization of errors by state actors, provoking diplomatic fallout and again, undermining trust between the parties and prolonged propaganda of framing these parties in the worst possible light. From the perspective of Critical Discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) language may be a site of ideological battles, pointing out the possibility of shaping language in accordance with political narrative.

Finally, the participants commented on their views of the Cold War era and contemporary translation and interpretation in high-stakes diplomacy as not just a technical challenge, but an act of navigation and balance between ideologically and politically charged environments. Their reflections reveal that language professionals often worked without proper guidelines and institutional support. These findings suggest that translation and interpretation throughout history and today serve great psychological demands, shaped by linguistic ambiguity and complexity of diplomatic language, with consequences that may extend beyond the communication.

## 5.2 Summary of RQ2: Contemporary Interpreter Strategies for Managing Risk in Politically Sensitive and Intercultural Communication

The findings on the strategies for managing risks in high-stakes diplomacy translation and interpretation provided by participants state that foreign policy, international summits and state sponsored media present complexity and recurring need of language professionals to be both politically, culturally and ethically aware. The findings show that a mix of preparatory strategies, real-time decision making skills, collaborative work and accurate ethical judgement are key to mitigate risks of miscommunication.

First, in-depth preparation, as stated by several participants, plays a crucial role in the outcome of their professional work. The need for political, historical and cultural understanding is vital for fluent and efficient interpretative success. The findings are supported by Gile's Effort Model (2009), highlighting that preparation serves as a tool for reducing cognitive pressure and increases the accuracy of translation and interpretation. Additionally, Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) further reflects this idea that contextual awareness and target language knowledge helps translators and interpreters to make better decisions about the speaker's intended meaning regarding diplomatic ideological nuances.

Secondly, real-time adaptive techniques like reformulation, pragmatic softening are widely used as stated by the participants. These strategies allow language professionals to keep the meaning while making certain corrections to avoid offensive transfer of messages and escalation. For example, several participants stressed the choice of using less acute equivalents is sometimes the best choice to keep the conversation's respected tone. Gutt (1991) refers to this as achieving optimal relevance rather than formal equivalence when moment asks for balancing between the accuracy and diplomacy. However, some participants stated that they do not see themselves as diplomats, suggesting that the role of language professional is not centered in managing consequences of negotiations. This led to another theme of moral and professional reflexivity, as stated, some participants viewed themselves as strictly neutral messengers,

committed to delivering exact words of speakers, while others saw themselves as diplomats who sometimes adjusted the tone and intended meaning to achieve the communicative goal.

Reflecting on historical events related to translations in Cold war times, the interpreters represent more biased and ideologically strong positions as professionals with selective and contextually exaggerated translations (Onate A., 2011; Chomsky & Herman, 1988). These diverging views echo ongoing debates within the Interpretive Theory of Translation (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989), which asks the question behind conveying intended meaning, and more literalist frameworks focused on accuracy. Therefore, the product of translations and interpretations might depend on the position of language professionals, either representing neutrality, or possessing strong beliefs in how to deliver the message properly for the negotiations' results.

Third, the support system of language professionals centered around their partners serves a critical role in reducing the cognitive stress during prolonged work of translation and interpretation of high-stakes diplomatic negotiations. Participants who work in simultaneous interpretation highlighted the importance of teamwork in the booth, including coordinated note-taking, distribution of labor, and mutual feedback. These peer-based strategies helped interpreters manage fatigue, maintain accuracy, and recover quickly from difficult work under continuous stress. Gile (2009) reaffirms that shared workload reduces cognitive overload, which improves resilience under pressure.

Finally, interview participants commented on the relevance of remembering history, which serves as lessons for modern practices by alleviating the historically recorded mistakes in translation practice. Participants cited infamous historical mistranslations like Khrushchev's "We will bury you" as cautionary lessons that show the importance of idiomatic and ideological sensitivity. These reflections align with Tyulenev's (2021) and Baker's (2006) argument that political translation is shaped not only by linguistic norms, but also by collective memory and institutional practice.

In summary, participants described modern diplomatic interpretation as a dynamic and ethically complex practice, one that demands not only linguistic skills but strategic awareness, cultural fluency, and emotional intelligence. While the risks of error still remain, contemporary professional interpreters and translators rely on cognitive, collaborative, and ethical strategies to promote mutual understanding and uphold the integrity of international communication.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

The Conclusion chapter presents major findings, implications, limitations and final reflections of the research on the complex role of language professionals in high-stakes diplomacy translation and interpretation.

### *6.1 Major Findings of the Research*

First, it was found that Cold War language and diplomatic language in general is layered in euphemisms, often deliberately vague and ambiguous. It presents challenges for language professionals with balancing and navigating diplomatic language. Decoding and rendering hidden messages of speakers under time limited pressures is a common practice of language professionals. They were expected to transmit the political agenda, cultural subtexts and institutional expectations. Diplomacy both in the Cold War period and today represent language ambiguity, which is a task of translators and interpreters to preserve flexibility and avoid tensions in negotiation processes in consecutive and simultaneous interpretations.

Secondly, the study has identified that translation and interpretation errors often manifest in forms of tone or register misalignments and cultural misframings, the reasons for this are due to complex pressure and ideologically charged expectations from the client's side. Moreover the consequences of these errors include rise in tension during the negotiations, media backlash, loss of trust among parties, and possible diplomatic repercussions.

Finally, it was found that there is no single method to fully prevent such errors. Instead, professionals use a range of strategies, including thorough preparation, collaborative teamwork, real-time adaptation, and historically informed ethical decision-making. Some participants viewed themselves not only as linguistic experts but as cultural mediators, navigating between conflicting worldviews, institutional demands, and personal values, while others presented themselves as strict neutral messengers, adhering to accurate representation of speakers' initial wordings. Their reflections confirm that language mediation in high-stakes diplomacy is not

simply a technical activity but a form of ideological and political negotiation facilitated by the agentive roles of language professionals.

## ***6.2 Research Implications and Recommendations***

The research built suggests knowledge for practicing language professionals, students, teachers in consecutive and simultaneous interpretation, policy makers and researchers interested in international relations. At a theoretical level, research supports the idea that diplomatic translation and interpretation should be studied through political, cultural and historical frameworks, on par with linguistic and cognitive scopes. Although the research is a small-scale, it might offer the ideas that theories like Gile (2009) Effort Model and Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986), Critical Discourse Analysis evaluation by Fairclough (1995) and Narrative theory by Baker (2006) may serve as explanations of language professionals' decision-making process during high-stakes diplomacy.

Practically, the findings of the research may be utilized for translation and interpretation training. Language professionals operating high-stakes diplomacy settings should be equipped with the skills to manage pressures from institutions, handle vague diplomatic language and be able to make rapid decisions and adjustments in a split second. Educational programs and curriculum could be developed to simulate an exposure to high-pressure scenarios under the attention of professionals, and collaborative exercise can be established to promote partnership work that mirror complex art of operating in tense diplomatic settings.

Institutions and clients should also recognize the mental load and ethical demands that language professionals undergo during their work, providing solid preparation time, broader access to materials and support to improve the performance and decrease the possibility of unsuccessful outcomes of negotiations and talks.

Further thorough research is recommended, which studies the strategies language professionals utilize across different geopolitical regions. Additionally, future studies may

explore how language professionals' agency has evolved throughout history in relation to global crises and shifts in media coverage.

### *6.3 Limitations of the Study*

First, the number of research participants is limited to six, although the background was diverse in experience, the findings can not be generalized across the entire profession. The study tried to focus on the language professionals who have experience in diplomatic ENG-RUS translation and interpretation settings. Nevertheless, only two of the research participants were equipped with historical theoretical knowledge specifically related to the Cold War era. As a result, while their contributions provided proper data for historical dimensions, other participants presented reflections on their grounded contemporary experience. This uneven distribution of expertise may have limited the depth of Cold War-specific insights, but introduced knowledge on mediation strategies for modern times.

Secondly, the reliance on semi-structured interviews introduces a degree of subjectivity, since participants may interpret past events or ethical dilemmas in different ways depending on memory, personal values, or professional identity. While linking the findings to theories helped reduce bias, the interview stories are still specific to each person's context and cannot be repeated or represented in the same way. In regard to the analysis part, I acknowledge that some interpretations of the findings might be in the scope of the research-shaped interpretations of the matter, which could be subjective at some point. I tried to avoid such biases by looking at the research problem and purpose from different theoretical frameworks.

Finally, the Cold War era, while rich in historical lessons, may not provide fully objective insights into twenty-first century geopolitical communication, given the development of new technologies, evolving practices in international relations, and significant changes in media representations and information flow. Future research may explore new dimensions for these implications in language professionals' practice.

#### *6.4 Final Reflections on the Study*

Having conducted this research, I can confidently state that my understanding of translation and interpretation practices in high-stakes diplomacy has evolved tremendously. As someone trained in diplomacy and international relations, with knowledge of two foreign languages in English and Spanish, I approached the study with deep academic curiosity, leaving appreciation and awareness of the emotional and ethical weight language professionals carry in their respective fields of operations.

Before the research I was concerned with the question whether language professionals are neutral messengers or real diplomats who make a profound impact on the process of talks and negotiations. I came to understand that language professionals are complex specialists who have to navigate through challenging tasks and make choices that can become politically significant with possibly far-reaching consequences.

The research reinforced my conceptualisation that the combination of theory and practice is highly valuable, engaging in discussions and interviews with language professionals gave me a fundamental sense of the challenges they face, that cannot be understood from the academic nature alone. Now I see the research as a bridge between practice and policy, which may contribute to the development of training programs and practices that provide support for language professionals and promotion of successful diplomatic communication.

Moreover, I remain committed to exploring the role of language in international relations. Whether as a researcher, teacher, diplomat or practitioner in translation and interpretation, I believe that examining how meaning is shaped and sometimes distorted across languages is essential to building more transparent, responsible, and peaceful global communication.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

**Duration:** 35-40 minutes

### Introduction

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my interview; your input is incredibly valuable to me, and I truly appreciate your time and insights.

Before we begin, I would like to briefly introduce my research. I am currently working on a dissertation titled "*From Cold War Miscommunication to Modern Language Mediation: the Role of Translators and Interpreters in High-Stakes Diplomacy*"

The purpose of the study is to explore how language professionals perceive, experience and respond to translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomacy through their reflections on examples of cold-war diplomatic translations and interpretations. And mitigation strategies to avoid these mistakes for modern language mediation.

I would like to remind you of the statements outlined in the Consent Form and inform you that this interview will be audio-recorded. Any information that could reveal your identity will remain confidential.

The interview is expected to last approximately 35-40 minutes. If you have no concerns and feel ready, we can begin.

### Interview Questions

1. In your experience, what are the most common challenges when translating or interpreting political or diplomatic texts?
2. Can you share an instance where a translation or interpretation error had significant consequences, and how was it resolved?
3. How do you ensure cultural and linguistic accuracy when working with politically sensitive materials?
4. How do you manage the pressure of interpreting in real-time during diplomatic negotiations or political events?

5. Can you describe a time when a misunderstanding or error during live interpretation affected the outcome of a discussion?
6. How do you think translation and interpretation errors influenced diplomatic relations during the Cold War?
7. Have you encountered similar ideological or political pressures when interpreting or translating for governments or international organizations?

## Appendix 2: Interview Sample

### **Participant 6: Interview Transcript**

**Q1: What are the most common challenges in political or diplomatic translation and interpretation?**

One of the most challenging tasks is interpreting jokes in political and diplomatic contexts. Humor, especially in high-stakes settings, is incredibly nuanced and difficult to translate effectively. However, I believe the most *common* challenge is dealing with precise information—names of politicians, countries, cities, institutions. When you're interpreting a speech or translating a document, missing even a minor detail can be significant. Often, background knowledge is lacking, especially in spontaneous situations, so preparation is key.

**Q2: Can you share an example where an interpretation error had serious consequences?**

Yes, I recall an incident during a UN Human Rights Council meeting. The discussion was on the rights of the Palestinian people and Israeli military actions. An interpreter forgot to turn off her microphone and shared a personal opinion—defending Israel. It caused a huge scandal. The international community criticized her for breaching neutrality, but interestingly, the Israeli government offered her a job. This incident highlights how personal expression, even accidental, can damage professional integrity and stir political controversy.

**Q3: How do you ensure cultural and linguistic accuracy in politically sensitive work?**

The key is preparation. You must study the topic in advance, understand the agenda, and know who the participants are. In written translation, understanding the target audience is just as important. Cultural and linguistic accuracy doesn't happen spontaneously—it comes from knowing the material and its context thoroughly.

**Follow-up: Have you ever had to interpret without preparation?**

Yes, I remember my very first high-level assignment. I had only 30 minutes' notice and no prior materials. The topic was drug trafficking in Central Asia, particularly through Kazakhstan. Fortunately, I had learned the terminology during training, but I lacked context for the specific project and participants. It was extremely difficult, but I managed to get through it.

**Q4: How do you manage the pressure of real-time interpretation during diplomatic events?**

Pressure comes with the territory. You learn to manage it with experience. Over time, you become more comfortable under stress. But again, preparation is 90–99% of success. Also, a good partner is crucial. In simultaneous interpretation, we work in pairs, switching every 20–30 minutes. We support each other by noting figures, names, and statistics—this teamwork is essential for reducing stress and avoiding errors.

**Q5: Can you recall a time when a live interpretation misunderstanding affected a discussion?**

Yes, during the drafting of a multilateral agreement. A particular term proposed by the Russian-speaking side was misunderstood by the English-speaking side. It created a roadblock. I later suggested adding a few explanatory words after the term, which clarified the meaning and resolved the issue. These things often get sorted informally, during breaks, but they can delay or even derail negotiations if not addressed.

**Q6: What impact did interpretation errors have during the Cold War?**

Personally, I don't believe most Cold War tensions were caused by interpretation errors—they were geopolitical in nature. But interpretation was a factor in how messages were received. For example, the infamous "We will bury you" phrase could have been softened. I would have chosen a less inflammatory alternative like "We will outlive you." Context is everything. Interpreters should smooth the edges when meaning is unclear. It's been understood since WWII that interpretation is not 100% accurate. Diplomats know this. But we still have a responsibility to convey messages carefully.

**Q7: Have you ever encountered ideological or political pressure while interpreting?**

No, I've never experienced direct ideological or political pressure, even though I've worked with governments and international organizations. Psychological pressure is constant, but we position ourselves as neutral, objective intermediaries.

**Follow-up: Do you see interpreters as neutral messengers or active participants in diplomacy?**

We are neutral, but we play a crucial role in building communication bridges. Even though we aim to stay in the background, we are the ones who make meaningful communication possible. Without us, the message doesn't flow.

## Appendix 3: Consent Form

### **Introduction**

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *"From Cold War Miscommunication to Modern Language Mediation: the Role of Translators and Interpreters in High-Stakes Diplomacy"*

### **Procedures**

The purpose of the study is to explore how language professionals perceive, experience and respond to translation and interpretation errors in high-stakes diplomacy through their reflections on examples of cold-war diplomatic translations and interpretations. And mitigation strategies to avoid these mistakes for modern language mediation. The research includes:

- A semi-structured online interview lasting approximately 40-60 minutes.
- Interviews and experimental tasks will be recorded, transcribed, and anonymized for analysis.

### **Risks**

This study poses minimal risks. The primary risk is potential discomfort in discussing translation challenges. You may skip any question or withdraw at any time without consequences.

### **Benefits**

Your participation will contribute to a deeper understanding of translation and interpretation challenges in diplomatic contexts. The research may help improve translation strategies for international relations.

### **Compensation**

No tangible compensation will be provided. However, participants may request a summary of the research findings upon completion of the study.

## Confidentiality & Privacy

All information obtained will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will replace real names in transcripts and reports. Data will be securely stored on an encrypted drive, accessible only to the researcher. Personal identifiers will be removed before analysis and publication.

## Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and this will not affect you in any way.

## Points of Contact

If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact:

- **Principal Researcher:** Damir Temirbayev (email: [damir\\_temirbayev@kazguu.kz](mailto:damir_temirbayev@kazguu.kz))
- **Thesis Supervisor:** Dinara Shaimakhanova
- **M.S. Narikbayev KAZGUU University Ethics Committee:** 8 (7172) 70 30 30

## Statement of Consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

The researcher clearly explained the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation involves.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the information collected will be treated confidentially.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:**

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_