

Multilingualism in Wartime: the Arctic Convoys

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Abstract. *The paper presents an overview of how cross-cultural communication was carried out during the Lend-Lease supplies via the Arctic convoys. Special attention is paid to multilingualism in wartime Arkhangelsk. The paper considers the importance of non-professional translation and cross-cultural mediation during the Arctic convoys. The analysis of fictional literature and archival documents allowed to conclude that memory of cross-cultural mediation during the period of the Lend-Lease deliveries is a universal value that brings countries and peoples together.*

Keywords – *Arctic convoys, multilingualism, cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural mediation, translation, wartime Arkhangelsk.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Studying cross-cultural mediation during the Arctic convoys special attention is paid to multilingualism. This concept has been the object of scientific study for many decades. Multilingualism is considered to be a sociocultural phenomenon when two (or more) languages are used in communication. Bilinguals are known to be people who acquired the second language (L2) after the first language (L1) was acquired. During WWII, it was clear that strong foreign language skills were great advantage for defeating a common enemy. In the paper, the L2 was English for the Russian, and the L2 was Russian for the allies of World War II. Multilingualism in wartime starts to pave the way into the study of the Arctic convoys. Most participants of these convoys had to acquire the second language for a short time to avoid miscommunication.

This paper presents the results of the study involving interdisciplinary approach. In WWII, English was not considered to be Lingua Franca. It was not a language spoken throughout the entire world. Multilingualism and translation are intertwined concepts. It is impossible to separate them from one another. The professional and non-professional translators had difficulty in wartime cross-cultural communication.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study of the Arctic convoys has been numerous and focused on various aspects (economic, historical, social ones, etc.). The Lend-Lease data have mostly focused on the advantage and disadvantage of this economic notion for the USSR and the allies in the WWII [9, 16, 21, 23, 25, 26].

The Arctic convoys were considered to be a period of unique collaboration between the Soviet, British and American people. It is important not to forget the role of

experience and memory of positive, crucial cooperation experienced among hundreds if not thousands of American, British, Russian and Norwegian sailors, their families, thousands of officials on both sides [8, p. 133]. In wartime, it was necessary not only to know foreign languages but also to know the cultures of the corresponding countries. It should be noted that everyone who remained in wartime Arkhangelsk tried to be polite and tactful towards foreigners. The British were struck by the fact that the English tank was boarded up to prevent them from being offended. Perhaps just as important although it was difficult for the Russians to be supported by the British Allies. Though this idea was difficult to accept for the Soviet Government, it was important for the population to understand that they were no longer alone to fight against Nazi Germany [14, p. 85-86].

It is crucial to emphasise that culture, like any war, is the basis for the division into “friends” and “aliens”. Despite the fact that the USSR and the allies fought with a common enemy, Nazi Germany, sometimes there was discomfort, one of the reasons for which was poor English language proficiency, especially during the first Lend-Lease deliveries by the Arctic allied convoys. In Alfred G. Mason’s memoir about the events of PQ18 in mid-1942 there is a humorous story about a Russian pilot who turned out to understand the English speech as soon as hot soup was announced by the steward though he had hardly understood English before: “With two huge strides he beats us all to the wheelhouse door, his sense of direction impeccable, as he has been nowhere else on the ship but the bridge since coming aboard, but even so he makes his way unhindered *directly to the saloon* and is soon on his second bowl of soup long before we have even managed to dispose of our first!” [13, p. 130]. Presumably, that pilot could speak English at the end of WWII.

In the world of socialism and capitalism, it was necessary to master a “foreign” culture by assimilating certain patterns of behaviour, practice, often using the “do as I do” principles. Unfortunately, the parties of the Arctic convoys did not know much about each other. Art helped to know each other better. Arkhangelsk became the place where the Russian people could listen to American jazz. During the wartime period, Soviet people discovered different aspects of Western culture. Red Army soldiers became more and more curious about America as financial and technological aid of the Allies became vital [19, p. 191].

Non-professional translators in the WWII faced the challenges of complex international relations. How could people born in different cultural traditions, speaking different languages and having completely different ideas

about the world exchange various information without creating conflicts and misunderstandings in wartime?

In the memoirs, the researchers can find evidence that the participants of the Arctic convoys did their best to speak a foreign language to communicate and understand each other. M. G. Walling describes the experience of one of the Arctic Convoys participants, Douglas-Hiley who asked a Soviet soldier what he thought of communism. The answer was:

“You must be joking, Ivan, [...] Don’t you know that Communism is only for export?”

“What are you fighting for then, Sergei?”

“Two things – Rodina (the Motherland) and the hope that, maybe, my grandchildren will have a better life,” he replied.” [24, p. 44].

Though we can conclude that Douglas-Hiley could speak Russian quite fluently, he describes his communication skills in the following way: *“I learned to speak some Russian and was able to exchange our cigarettes for their awful papirossi, those smoke sticks with cardboard tube at one end and tobacco at the other. The brand was called Nasha Marka [Our Brand].”* [24, p. 44].

Multilingualism became strategically important due to the Lend-Lease supplies via the Arctic convoys. During the WWII, cross-cultural mediation implied the ability to establish contacts, carry out translation activities, negotiate, plan international activities, and create a positive emotional atmosphere among the participants of the Arctic convoys [11]. There should be special attention to unprofessional interpreters: customs officers, pilots, nurses, students, foreign language teachers, Interclub (International Club) workers, and so on.

III. METHOD

A great number of documents were lost or destroyed. The memories of the Arctic convoys were overshadowed by the other World War II events.

The research is based on historical sources, sources of personal origin (memoirs as well as interviews with eyewitnesses of war and their relatives), fiction and non-fiction. These sources provide a complete picture of cross-cultural communication in wartime Arkhangelsk. As noted in the archival data, the first time the work of the Soviet Purchasing Commission (SZK) was *deplorable*. The entire personnel of the air group in New York did not know English and they were not good at air supplies, so there was almost no connection with the US Air Force [17].

Unfortunately, memories are fading as many participants and veterans of the Arctic convoys died. It is important for later generations to remember their sacrifices, to remember the names who participated in the Arctic convoys.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During WWII there was a great need for specialists in military cross-cultural communication. In March 1940, a

new faculty opened in Moscow Pedagogical Institute with the aim to train teachers in three foreign languages for military educational institutions. During the Great Patriotic War, the Faculty opened short-term courses for military translators. They studied hard in three shifts, for 10 hours a day each shift. The first course graduates were ready for the front in December 1941. The requirements for a military translator were overwhelming and included translating written documents and interpreting meetings, talks and interrogations. All in all, the short-term courses prepared more than 2.5 thousand translators in three years, many of them with German as their L2. This means that the number of skilled translation professionals was not enough to provide all the spheres of communication during the Lend-Lease supplies [1]. Interestingly, a military interpreter on deck is described as a British officer’s shadow in Alfred G. Mason’s memoir:

“Turning to watch how the work is proceeding in another part of the ship, I can’t help but notice that I am not being cast about the bridge as I move. A second shadowy form has joined mine. Looking around, to investigate the appearance of my new inseparable companion, I find that I am face to face with the Russian interpreter who had been assigned to me” [13, p. 142].

Did the short-term military language courses provide any information on the behavioural standards and value systems characteristic of Russian and translation languages, English cultures and translation languages? Unconditionally, yes.

For example, the English military translators who worked in Arkhangelsk spoke excellent Russian (for many, the Russian language was native (they were early bilinguals), as they had a Russian mother or came from a family that was engaged in timber trade until 1917), understood the Arkhangelsk humor about *board, melancholy and cod* (doska, toska, treska in Russian) [12, p. 41-42]. Obviously, while working in the ports in the North of Russia they went through inculturation quite successfully.

As noted, the English naval translator R. Kindersley recalls attending a “solemn mourning rally”, which was dedicated to the anniversary of V.I. Lenin’s death. He draws a parallel between communism and religion (Anglican service) in the years when the USSR did not talk about religion [10, p. 127-128].

Professional cross-cultural communication in wartime Arkhangelsk was complicated by the shortage of qualified professionals. The lack of professional interpreters and translators did not prevent successful communication between all the sides of the Lend-Lease supplies via Arkhangelsk due to several factors. First, the necessity to continue war operations made Soviet pilots operate British aircraft without extensive training. As noted in historian Michael G. Walling’s book, Soviet pilots did not know English but they were very bright:

“In the first meeting of allies, the commander of a squadron, Captain B.F. Safonov with the pilots has come on landing the Hurricanes. They were met by the commander of English squadron A.T. Miller. Safonov has asked Miller to

show the aircraft/ Miller answered that the Hurricane [was] difficult to handle and only skilled pilots could tame it. But Safonov repeated the request. Miller gave in. After Safonov was seated in the cockpit, Miller stood with the translator on a wing and explained [the] appointment of devices, action with the basic panels and sequence of inclusion of toggle-switches for motor start. Safonov listened attentively. When Miller [had] finished explanations, Safonov addressed to the translator: "Tell the major that I ask it to check up, whether I have correctly understood all". Miller lifted his hands and has told to the translator: "Tell to Mr. Safonov I'm impressed." [24, p. 41-42].

Secondly, many injured allied seamen had to be in Russian hospitals. Often doctors and nurses could only use broken English. There were translators in hospitals. But not many of them. In the memoirs researchers can find evidence about Soviet hospitals where few nurses took care of numerous patients, and the translator, Natasha Mamonova, did not only do her main job but also entertained the patients and organised competitions; *"Then she discovered that some of us [could] sing and play musical instruments, and began holding concerts to support us."* [24, p. 84].

Thirdly, the Seamen's International Clubs representatives also assisted communication between the foreigners and the local officials. The arrival of vessels in Arkhangelsk raised the question before the city authorities. Who would carry out mediation in such areas as customs, medical facilities, as well as in leisure facilities?

According to the archival documents, Arkhangelsk International Club was officially established on July 25, 1925. At that time the responsibilities of the Club workers included anti-capitalist propaganda among the foreign seamen. In the early months of the Great Patriotic War (1941) the Club was headed by Vasilii Kokorev, and in late autumn 1941, it was given a separate 3-storeyed stone building with steam heating which underwent some reconstruction and was ready to start its work by January 1, 1942. The Club was situated in the centre of the city on the bank of the Dvina River and included a restaurant for 100 seats, a gym for 60-70 people, a barber's, a big cinema-hall and even rooms for exhibitions. All in all, it could provide entertainment for up to 600 people. As some foreign seamen recollected, the Club looked better than some similar clubs in the USA and UK [2, 6]. It should be noted that the archival data indicate that the Interclub in the wartime Arkhangelsk was not provided with qualified personnel. In the reports, the director of the Interclub Gluzman wrote about the need to have one translator/interpreter who was fluent in English with a cultural English pronunciation [3].

Regarding the situation in the Arkhangelsk Interclub, there was great work with foreigners who liked to visit the Club. The English sailors left such words on the page of the Victory wall newspaper on July 1, 1943:

1. The hospitality and opportunities provided by the Interclub to all those whose official duties brought to Arkhangelsk make life here more interesting. The sincere and serious attitude of the Club employees to us deserves all attention.

2. If you want to laugh, you can take part in ski trips, and you are guaranteed a good mood V.V. (English sailor) [5].

The instructors of the Interclub made a positive atmosphere. For example, Tatyana Ruzskaya (1916-2006) had worked in the Arkhangelsk Interclub since June 1942. It was about her that the director of the Interclub Gluzman wrote in the report for October 1943: "T. Ruzskaya knows English satisfactorily, she is politically developed satisfactorily, but she needs to be consulted in English [4]."

Tatyana Ruzskaya remembered not only bad news of severe fights and heavy losses from the front but also famine that had started in the city: "Our institute's canteen served "empty" soup – water with a piece of cod and porridge without butter. I began to weaken; during the short path to the institute, I had a rest several times." [15].

The students had talented teachers. We list some of them. The head of the English language department of the faculty of foreign languages, which was created in 1941 on the basis of the Institute of Foreign Languages at the Pedagogical Institute, was assistant professor Igor Anichkov. Since childhood, he was fluent in English and French. He recommended his students to go to the Interclub in order to master English. I. Anichkov with colleagues compiled a bilingual marine dictionary [18]. At that time, there was a problem with military and naval dictionaries. There were good reviews about the dictionary. Unfortunately, the manuscript has not been found yet.

Olga Lukacher, a teacher of English and French (she spoke five languages fluently), taught English to a group of non-professional translators at the Interclub in wartime [22].

The professors, teachers and their students found the strength to study well, despite hunger, war, work in the port, etc.

According to official registrar data, 38,000 inhabitants died during the years 1941–1944 in Arkhangelsk: every fourth resident of Arkhangelsk died of starvation and diseases, every third (23,000) did not return from the front. Now no one knows how many deaths were unrecorded in the city during the war (refugees, persons without registration and identity documents, as well as citizens unaccounted for whatever reason and buried in mass graves). The mortality rate in the wartime Arkhangelsk was even higher because many citizens tried to hide the death of their relatives to get food for themselves using the cards of the dead. Many inhabitants also died after the official end of the war because of hunger and diseases which they acquired during the war [20, p. 3]. Drawing on the research into different archives, histories from eyewitnesses and veterans of the Arctic convoys, I can offer a fresh retelling of the multilingualism in wartime Arkhangelsk.

V. CONCLUSIONS

One can not disagree with the words of Rostislav V. Gorchakov, such a concept as "people's memory" exists independently of any propaganda efforts, possessing an amazing ability to select from the past everything that is eternal, which has creative value for the future. It is

impossible to kill people's memory completely [7, p. 7]. The memory of cross-cultural mediation during the period of the Lend-Lease deliveries via the Arctic allied convoys is regarded as a universal value that brings countries and peoples together. People should respect the value of human life. Thus, cross-cultural mediation during the years of Lend-Lease deliveries via the Arctic allied convoys made it possible to consider the relationship between the person, society, and the state during the war years.

Thus, the phenomenon of multilingualism is a phenomenon of the 20-th century. It is inherent in all regions of the world in different forms and different respects. Mastery of languages, which are means of communication and information exchange with the peoples of other countries, is becoming increasingly important in the 21-st century. Multilingualism fulfilled an international mission, spiritually and morally bringing people of different nationalities together. The new archival information about the Arctic convoys can provide further details of cross-cultural mediation in wartime Arkhangelsk.

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