"And then the Germans came to town": The lived experiences of an interpreter in Finland during the Second World War

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Abstract

During World War II, both the Finnish Army and its ally Germany were dependent on mediation practices provided by military personnel or civilians in the linguistic, cultural and ideological intersections of the given conflicts. By drawing on two autobiographical manuscripts – one written immediately after the war and the other later in the 1990s – this article examines the experiences of a female civilian interpreter engaged by the German Army from 1942 to 1945. In addition to directing attention to ordinary people in wartime translational tasks, this article contrasts the value of such post-hoc accounts in the historical translation analysis against the constraints imposed on them through their embeddedness in a certain communicative situation. It shows, furthermore, how the change in this communicative situation imposes changes on the writer’s emotional involvement and how this change mirrors her own stance towards the given narrative framework.

Keywords

interpreting; World War II; Finland; autobiography; memory; framing; narratives

By the end of the Second World War around 3.5 million people, mainly children had experienced evacuation. No one was forced to go but parents were encouraged by posters and told that their children would be safer from German bombs if they moved to the country. What was it like for a child to be evacuated? Being an evacuee must have been scary and exciting at the same time. The children had to leave their families and homes behind and try to fit in with host families in the country. At the station. Children had labels attached to them, as though they were
parcels. They stood at railway stations. This article focuses on Finnish children during the Second World War, looking at children from two different points of view. First, it provides information on around 70,000 children who were transferred to Sweden and Denmark; so-called “war children”. During the war, when Finland fought beside the Germans, some 13 Minutes of the meeting of Committee of Evacuation of Children to Sweden, March 18, 1946, National Archives of Finland Sg Ca 1. 14 Kavén 1985, 136. 15 Kavén 1985, 101. 450. After the war, the strongest criticism came from Communist members of parliament, while right-wing politicians remained quiet, as they feared that Finland might face the same fate as many Eastern European countries, namely being forced behind the Communist Iron Curtain. The second world war 949. Negro, the progressive liberal intellectual – which then attracted further support as it seemed to deliver results. There was some degree of illusion in this. The ‘New Deal’ on which the Roosevelt administration embarked was still not grappling satisfactorily with the economy by 1939. None the less it changed the emphasis of the working of American capitalism and its relations with government. Certainly the emergence of a much more radical and ferociously opportunistic regime in Germany was the major turning point. But the depression had preceded this and made it possible. Economic collapse also had another important effect. It made plausible an ideological interpretation of events in the 1930s and thus further embittered them.