First Secretary Gierek, President Carter, and the president's Polish interpreter

An analysis of an awkward diplomatic encounter based on new archival evidence

Leonid S. Chekin
UiT The Arctic University of Norway

During President Carter's visit to Warsaw in 1977, his interpreter into Polish, Steven Seymour, allegedly made major mistakes. American journalists learned of these mistakes from their Polish colleagues and gloated over what they considered erotic overtones in Seymour's interpretation. There is much literature on this episode, but no author has yet consulted the actual interpretation. I was able to obtain an archived audio recording of the entire episode from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. In this article, I discuss Seymour's choice of a sentence-by-sentence mode of interpretation and the problems inherent in that mode, classify his errors and inaccuracies, and attempt to uncover the reasons for the exaggerated criticism from the media and the interpreting community. Characteristically, the media paid no attention to the solemn, confident performance of Seymour's Polish colleague, who interpreted Edward Gierek's speech into English. The episode is a good testimony to the role of diplomatic interpreters, whose moment of glory only comes when they make a factual or imaginary mistake.

Keywords: interpreter invisibility, consecutive interpreting, sentence-by-sentence interpreting, sight translation, diplomatic interpreting, linguistic interference

1. Introduction

President Jimmy Carter's visit to Poland (29–31 December 1977) was the first stop on a nine-day long foreign trip that also took Carter to Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and Belgium. This was Carter's first and only presidential visit to a nation in the Soviet bloc and his first personal encounter with a leader of a

https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00344.che | Published online: 5 October 2023
Babel 69:6 (2023), pp. 725–748. ISSN 0521-9744 | E-ISSN 1569-9668

Communist government. His host, Edward Gierek, first secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in 1970–1980, was a more experienced statesman who had already received the first sitting U.S. President to come to Poland, Richard Nixon (1972), and Nixon's successor Gerald Ford (1975). But this was the last highlight of Gierek's détente with the U.S. At the time of Carter's visit, Poland was facing serious economic problems. In a couple of years, the Solidarity labor union would be born, and Gierek would be removed from power. The next U.S. President would arrive in July 1989 to face a completely different nation.

By all accounts, this was an important visit. It also stands out among other diplomatic encounters of the time because of the media focus on Carter's Polish interpreter, who allegedly made embarrassing mistakes at the welcoming ceremony at the airport on the evening of 29 December 1977. American journalists, who did not know Polish, learned about those errors from hearsay and provided their readers with a variety of outrageous versions, which have survived to this day and are taken for granted by historians of the Carter presidency (Eizenstat 2018, 604). Generations of professional interpreters have turned the episode into a cautionary tale, sometimes embellishing it with their own biases and Schadenfreude. The president himself was more forgiving than many of Seymour's colleagues, putting in his diary: "In my arrival ceremony statement, we discovered later that we had an interpreter who used outmoded Polish words and phrases and something of a Russian syntax. We changed the interpreter after that." In his opinion, this was not detrimental to Carter's mission: "The entire visit was delightful" (Carter 2010, 155).

I was recently able to obtain an archival audio file of the whole episode (Remarks of the President at Arrival 1977) and a separate silent video file with its partial footage (President Jimmy Carter European Summit Meetings 1977–1978) from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. The Appendix to this article includes both original and translated versions of Carter's remarks, which I transcribed from the audio file. Seymour's version of Carter's remarks has never been published before. The official translation of Carter's remarks offered by the Polish press (Gierek and Carter 1977–1978, 2) did not use Seymour's version. Although some fragments appeared in a Radio Free Europe broadcast (Orzeł Biały – Na Antenie 1978, 18), other existing Polish accounts of the episode rely solely on a reverse translation of Seymour's alleged mistakes from English (Gostkiewicz 2017; Szulc 2017).

The silent video file, although it focuses on interpreters only on rare occasions, provides glimpses into Seymour's work style and positioning. Another major source of my study that was almost untapped before (apart from Teschner 1978) is the U.S. newspapers of the period, which I identified with the help of the Library of Congress E-Resources Online Catalog.

These materials show that a lot of the media criticism was unfair towards the interpreter and ought to be explained by purely political factors. My analysis contains some lessons for diplomatic interpreters and contributes an interesting case study to recent theoretical discussions about various modes of interpreting (consecutive and sentence-by-sentence interpreting and sight translation). At the same time, it draws attention to the diplomatic interpreter's vulnerable position. In some memoirs of high-level interpreters, they always come across as incredibly resourceful and utterly competent. Their efforts at self-aggrandizement, as one student of such texts has suggested, may be a coping mechanism to deal with the unfortunate fact that they tend to have a lower status in the hierarchy and are invisible (or "semi-visible") to the public (Rogatchevski 2019, 459–461; see also Anders 2002, 50–55). They can still achieve true global visibility and international fame – but only when things go hopelessly wrong.

The paper consists of three main sections: first, I describe the welcoming ceremony, discuss Seymour's choice of interpreting mode and the problems inherent to this mode, and provide information on his preparation and training; second, I analyze my transcript of Seymour's Polish phrases and classify his errors and inaccuracies; third, I discuss the exaggerated claims by the media and interpreting community and try to reveal the reasons for those exaggerations. The "epilogue" outlines Seymour's interpreting career after the Warsaw episode, and the Appendix contains my transcription of Carter's remarks at the airport, both in their original and interpreted versions.

2. The two interpreters and their interpreting modes

2.1 The long consecutive mode

On 29 December 1977, First Secretary Gierek welcomed President Carter at his late evening arrival at Warsaw Okęcie Airport (presently Warsaw Chopin Airport). Carter deplaned at 10:25 p.m., received bouquets of flowers from Polish children, and reviewed the troops. Between 10:40 and 10:56 p.m., the leaders exchanged remarks (White House 1977, 1–2).

First, Mr. Gierek spoke for three minutes 27 seconds, then his interpreter immediately took over and spoke for three minutes 10 seconds. This way of interpreting when the speaker can develop their ideas for several minutes or more without interruption, and the interpreter accurately renders a lengthy speech with the help of memory, general erudition, and a system of notetaking is known as the "long consecutive," "true consecutive," or "classic consecutive" form. The performance of Gierek's interpreter was almost flawless. He made an unwarranted pause

only once, otherwise allowing himself no significant errors, omissions, false starts, filler words, or hesitations. Quite probably, he was reading a translated text which he may have rehearsed beforehand. This translation was delivered to the U.S. side and became part of the official record of Carter's visit (Carter and Gierek 1978, 2203–2204).

At one point in the silent video file, when the leaders were reviewing the troops, Gierek's interpreter was caught on camera getting some pages out of his coat side pocket, making sure that he had the correct item, and then fishing in his pocket for something else, probably his pen. The video file shows only one minute out of Gierek's speech, but it again focuses on the interpreter who was busy writing, perhaps correcting the translated text or notating where to pause, add emphasis, etc. In any event, the interpreter's notetaking suggests that he was actively involved in the output, trying hard to minimize the risk of error.

The name of this excellent professional was never mentioned in the press. According to the program of the visit in the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs archives, the assignment to interpret for Gierek at the airport was given to Henryk Sokalski (Program organizacyjny 1977, 6, 10). The video file confirms that this was indeed Henryk Jerzy Sokalski (1936–2021), who had a reputation as "the best interpreter in the entire Ministry" (Noworyta 2008, 151). A career diplomat educated both at the University of Warsaw and at Dartmouth College, Sokalski, at the time of Carter's visit, was Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations; later, he achieved the ranks of U.N. Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP). He was originally scheduled by the Ministry to interpret both for First Secretary Gierek and President Carter, but the U.S. side brought their own interpreter in accordance with the existing practice.

2.2 The sentence-by-sentence mode combined with sight translation

Next was Carter's turn to speak, at which point the president's Polish interpreter, Steven Seymour, first appeared in the picture. According to the audio file, Seymour was interpreting consecutively sentence by sentence. After each sentence, Carter paused and let Seymour give his rendering. This way of interpreting is discouraged and looked upon by many professional trainers (Gile 2009, 6, 175, 259–260; Obst 2010, 39–42; Ünal 2013, 2, 11–17). "The more of a speech the interpreter hears in one go, the better they are able to interpret logical links, tone, and style" (Gillies 2019, 8). When there are bilingual members of the audience, the sentence-by-sentence mode inevitably exposes its practitioner to both fair and unfair criticism, as the audience can hear and easily compare the original and the interpreted versions of the text.

Although sentence-by-sentence mode does not require a notetaking system, it may still be helpful to jot down some "problem triggers," which are the hardest to commit to working memory, like numbers or proper names. Carter's interpreter holds a text, but the video does not show him taking any notes. Instead, Seymour is clutching the paper with both hands. From the subsequent interviews, we know that the text was in the original English and that Seymour did not have enough time to familiarize himself with the text. Looking at the paper intensely, he is sight-translating from the English text into Polish.

The sight translation mode consists of an oral rendering in a target language of a text written in a source language (Agrifoglio 2004; Gile 2009, 179–181). Students of this mode identify several forms, which include sight translation without preparation ("translation from the first sight"), sight translation with preparation, and sight translation combined with simultaneous or consecutive interpretation (Jiménez Ivars and Hurtado Albir 2003, 49–51). The combined forms (often referred to as "simultaneous interpreting with text" and "consecutive interpreting with text") may significantly increase the cognitive load when the interpreter processes both visual and auditory input. Such increase in cognitive load has been studied for simultaneous with text, which is becoming more and more important in international meetings (Gile 2009, 181–182; Cammoun-Claveria, Davies, Ivanov, and Naimushin 2009, 23–26, 95–97; Seeber 2018; Chmiel, Janikowski, and Lijewska 2020). Having a text in front of the interpreter's eyes can be more of a hindrance than a help if a speaker deviates from the paper version (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 331–332).

2.3 Seymour's training and preparation

Extensive training and practice in various modes of interpreting can help internalize multiple skills and partially automate the effort involved in interpreting. Nevertheless, professional interpreter education has been an optional requirement for obtaining a contract as an interpreter with the U.S. Department of State. Despite growing professionalism and enhanced competition in the U.S. job market for language services, this market remains relatively unregulated. According to a former director of the U.S. Department of State Office of Language Services (Obst 2010, xi),

> There are more high-quality interpreting schools at the academic institutions of tiny Finland than in all of the universities of the United States combined. Our ignorance and neglect of the professions of interpretation and translation [are] costing the United States hundreds of billions of lost export earnings each year and thousands of American and foreign lives lost in the wars that we are drawn into.

Steven Seymour (1946–2014) had excellent memory, broad erudition, and intellectual charisma. He did not have any formal degree in interpreting, and by the time we met in February 2002, he had learned on the job to surpass most of his colleagues. This was obviously not the case at the beginning of his diplomatic career.

His life story prior to the Carter episode was recorded in his interviews that appeared in major national newspapers in the U.S. (Cohen 1978; Drummond 1978; Gwertzman 1978). Steve Seymour's father was a Pole who had been displaced from Eastern Poland when it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1939. Steve was born in the Ural Mountains. From his personal communication, I remember that he went to school in Ekaterinburg, at that time named Sverdlovsk.

After his family was repatriated to Poland in the late 1950s, Steve attended a Polish high school for four years and then the University of Warsaw for one year. The family emigrated to the United States in 1965, after which Seymour served in Europe for two years as an enlisted man interpreting Russian and Polish for the U.S. Army. In 1975, he passed State Department exams in both Russian and Polish and started receiving free-lance interpreting assignments. Gwertzman (1977), referring to "State Department officials," reported that Seymour had had only one Polish-language job, interpreting trade talks at the Department of Commerce in Washington in 1975. Since there was not much need for Polish, his subsequent assignments were only Russian. He obviously created an excellent reputation for himself, which is why the State Department selected him for his first highest-level assignment as the interpreter during President Carter's visit to Poland.

A lack of formal training would explain how Seymour approached his first highest-level assignment without a pen in hand. More importantly, the relatively easy entry into the profession and the absence of an advanced degree reflected poorly on the status of an interpreter. Neither the interpreter nor his job was important enough to occupy the busy minds of President Carter's entourage and the staff at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw.

As he later explained to his interviewers, Seymour spent almost three hours on the tarmac with no shelter in freezing rain waiting for the president's flight. He received the president's remarks only 15 minutes before the president started speaking, but even then, he was pushed around and could not familiarize himself with the text: "I kept being moved. I was either on the line of the camera or something" (Cohen 1978, C5); "I had a chance to scan only the first page" (Gwertzman 1978, 3). When it came time for him to interpret, he might have been better off not looking at an unfamiliar text, as he chose to do, but listening and concentrating on the message (compare Cammoun-Claveria, Davies, Ivanov, and Naimushin 2009, 112–114).

With no umbrella, Seymour was frozen and soaked. "My face was cold, my hands were numb [...]. What did me in was the lack of text, and the absolutely dismal conditions" (Gwertzman 1978, 3). The rain stopped by the time of the speech, but the strong wind is both audible in the audio file and visible in the video. Here is how a member of the president's entourage who spent much less time on the tarmac described the scene (Brzezinski 1985, 298):

> It was bitter cold. I asked the Secret Service to line up behind Mrs. Carter so that she wouldn't freeze to death. A cold Siberian wind was blowing across our backs when we stood on the wet tarmac listening to the welcoming speeches.

Seymour's delivery style was heavily influenced by his physical suffering. This had an impact on the judgment of his listeners. Overwhelming evidence shows that "dynamic delivery, fast speech rate, relative lack of nonfluencies such as pauses and repetitions and 'normal' voice quality are positively correlated with higher ratings on attributes such as competence, dominance, and dynamism, and are related, although not as consistently or strongly, to ratings of trustworthiness, likability, and benevolence" (Berk-Seligson 2017, 144). Seymour's hesitant voice, with frequent pauses and an occasional sniffle, could not appear trustworthy. Seymour understood that he was not in his best possible form. However, his lack of preparation and the unfortunate weather were not the only reasons he unwittingly made headlines throughout the United States and other nations that received their news from the Associated Press and United Press International.

3. Seymour's version of Carter's remarks

The problems of Seymour's version can be subdivided into several groups. In this section, I will be referring to Carter's (JC) and Seymour's (SS) texts in accordance with the Appendix to this article. For comparison, I used Polish translations of Carter's remarks carried by the Polish official press (Gierek and Carter 1977–1978, hereafter referred to as TU), which did not rely on Seymour's version and were made from Carter's original speech.

3.1 Numbers

Numbers are a notorious "problem trigger," which is one of the classes of words that are the hardest to commit to working memory. Interpreters are taught to immediately note them down (Setton and Dawrant 2016, 165, 178; Gillies 2019, 155). Seymour did not have a pen in his hand, and he might have either lost the relevant phrases in the text or just relied on his memory. As a result, he, early

in his interpreting, substituted Carter's "more than six million Americans" with "ten million Americans" (JC5 – SS5). Another similar but perhaps more negligible error is Seymour's omission of the number "third" in relation to President Thomas Jefferson. His vocalized pause before the word "president" indicates that he had forgotten the number but wisely decided not to guess (JC9 – SS9). Such mistakes are easy to make, but the audience can easily detect them and lose confidence in the interpreter.

3.2 Interferences from the source text

The risk of interference from the original language can be higher in sight translation than in other interpreting modes (Gile 2009, 181; Setton and Dawrant 2016, 128; Chmiel, Janikowski, and Cieślewicz 2020, 18).

At the very beginning of his presentation, Seymour's false starts included a calque from the original ("delighted to be" – *bardzo radzi być*); his self-correction *bardzo radzi przebywać* did not significantly improve on the quality of the translated text but lowered the audience's trust in his interpretation especially since he also forgot to translate the adjective "great" in Carter's reference to the Nation of Poland (JC1 – SS1). The TU renders the phrase as *Jesteśmy bardzo radzi, że mamy okazję przebywać w Waszym wielkim kraju*. Another example of Seymour's self-corrected calque is "vitality" – *wit[alność]* (JC16 – SS16).

Carter, two times, referred to the United States as "my/our Nation." Both times, Seymour made false starts, trying to translate it with the word *stan*, one of the archaic meanings of which is indeed "a sovereign state, a polity" and another, modern meaning, is "a state as an administrative subdivision within some of the federal countries, mainly in the United States." On the second occasion, one of his false starts, the feminine form of the possessive pronoun *nasza*, "our," indicated that he was probably also considering the feminine noun *nacja*. Both times, he finally corrected himself using the most appropriate word, *państwo* (JC2 – SS2, JC4 – SS4).

3.3 Interferences from Russian

In at least seven cases, Seymour's output suffered from interference from the Russian language, of which he was a native speaker.

When he rendered "our Nation was founded" as *nasze państwo było osnute* (JC4 – SS4) and selected the Polish verb *osnuć*, he probably had in mind the Russian verb *основать*, "to found." According to the Associated Press (1977a, 1), his rendering was perceived as "our nation was woven" in accordance with the principal connotation of the verb. He used the same verb in the form of a

reflexive adverbial participle to translate Carter's "building on the historical ties" as *osnując się na historycznych więzach* (JC19 – SS19). While a Russian equivalent, *основываясь на исторических связях* would sound appropriate, a better Polish version in TU was *w oparciu o historyczne więzy*.

To render Carter's "great patriot," Seymour initially used the typically East Slavic pleophonic form *wieliki patriota* (compare Russian *великий*), but immediately corrected himself, *wielki patriota* (JC7 – SS7).

Two examples of Russian-influenced prepositions are "in the struggle for human rights," *w walce za prawa człowieka* (JC10 – SS10; compare TU: *w walce o prawa człowieka*, Russian: *в борьбе за права человека*) and "at the end of World War I," *w końcu pierwszej wojny światowej* (JC15 – SS15; compare TU: *z końcem pierwszej wojny światowej*, Russian: *в конце первой мировой войны*). To be fair, the first example could also be interpreted as an archaism, as in the famous motto "for our freedom and yours," *za naszą i waszą wolność*.

In one case, interference both from English and Russian could be suggested: "brought devastation," *naniosła taką klęskę* (JC14 – SS14; compare TU: *spustosziła*, Russian: *нанесла опустошение*).

Finally, an example of interference from Russian is Seymour's rendering of "reestablishment" as *ponownego ustanowlienia* (JC15 – SS15; compare TU: *powstania*, Russian: *нового установления* or *восстановления*).

3.4 Unfortunate lexical choices

Several erroneous or clumsy renditions do not seem to result from any linguistic interferences but are indications of Seymour's less-than-perfect command of Polish or fatigue or both.

At the beginning of his presentation, he unfortunately set the tone, rendering Carter's "when I left the United States this morning" as *kiedy ja porzuciłem Stany Zjednoczone dziś rano* (JC2 – SS2). As the verb *porzucić* has a connotation of abandonment, it may not sound appropriate for a brief trip. The TU used the verb *opuszczać (opuszczałem)*.

Next, Seymour rendered "Pulaski County, Georgia" as *księstwo Pułaski w stanie Georgia* (JC8 – SS8). There are different ways of translating the word *county*, the designation for administrative subdivision of a state in the United States, into languages that do not allow a simple calque (as German or Swedish do, for example). One etymologizing option would be to render a county as "a domain of a count." This would give the Polish translation of *hrabstwo*. The TU chose a different option, *okręg*. This word has the disadvantage of having a very broad meaning, as it is appropriate for translating such terms as "district," "ward," and "circuit." Yet another option would be a second-level unit of the Polish

government, which is *powiat*. Unfortunately, *powiat* did not exist as an administrative subdivision between 1975 and 1999, and the term could have appeared as an unnecessary archaism. Seymour's version, *księstwo* ("duchy"), is much worse than the other three, as he appears to have mistaken a count for a duke.

The same fragment contains a phrase with awkward grammar: "named for this hero from Poland," *które było nazwane właśnie wedle tego bohatera z Polski*. The pause before *właśnie wedle* placed emphasis on this labored construction (JC8 – SS8, compare TU: *nazwanym tak ku czci tego bohatera*).

At one point, Seymour toned down Carter's rhetoric, interpreting "admiration" as *poszanowanie* (that is, "respect," JC9 – SS9). TU's version *uznanie*, "recognition, appreciation," is not much better.

Finally, in the phrase that would appear the most heavily ridiculed and distorted throughout the years, Seymour used the words *wasze pożądania* to translate Carter's "your desires for the future" (JC18 – SS18). The official Polish translation said *wasze pragnienia dotyczące przyszłości*. The word *pożądania* indeed has a sensual erotic connotation of "lust;" the original English "desires" could have a similar connotation, but there was no ambiguity in Carter's speech as he added the clarification, "desires for the future." Seymore omitted "for the future" and unwittingly exposed himself and his patron to disproportionate ridicule.

4. Reaction by the U.S. and Canadian press

News of the alleged mistakes was reported by both the Associated Press and United Press International and printed in newspapers across the United States and Canada. A claim by Kelly and Zetzsch (2012, 58) that "the Polish press had a field day with the comments" is not entirely correct. The official Polish press was silent on the matter, but the source for the North American media appears to be word of mouth from their Polish colleagues. James Wooten (1977, A3) referred to "Polish journalists," stating that "the translator used several Russian words and made other errors." Wooten further elaborated that "At the Interpress Club, where a group of Polish journalists was listening to the welcoming ceremonies on a closed-circuit hookup, the translator's remarks prompted gales of laughter."

The Associated Press (1977b, 2) referred to a variety of opinions among Polish journalists:

> "It looks as if Seymour learned his Polish from a grandfather or somebody who must have emigrated from some backwoods of eastern Poland decades ago," said one Polish journalist. "He used antiquated words and strange grammar, just like

> uneducated Polish peasants still do." Others said he sounded as though his Polish had been influenced by a study of Russian and that, at one point, he used a Russian word instead of a Polish one.

United Press International (1977b, 10A) identified its Polish source more exactly: "Gornicki Wieslaw, a columnist for Polish Interpress, said Poles were insulted because the State Department translator used a mixture of Russian and archaic Polish syntax in translating Carter's remarks." Moreover, Bill Neikirk (1977) quoted him as taking the offense personally: "As a Pole, I was offended." The reference is to Wiesław Górnicki, a famous reporter who, due to his good knowledge of English, had the trust of his American colleagues. A senior U.S. diplomat remembered the person who "began playing up the interpreting as a terrible gaffe" as Jerzy Urban, but most probably he confused the two talented journalists whom the State Department regarded as "bad guys in the Solidarity period" and whose ideas and careers had somewhat similar trajectories (Seymour 2016, 50). Contrary to what Górnicki alleged, not all Poles had their feelings hurt. Mirosław Jan Wojciechowski, the Intepress director and chief editor, denied taking any offense: "It was funny, and we had a good laugh. But why should we feel offended?" (Steele 1977). The First Secretary himself might have taken it lightly; Gierek allegedly told U.S. reporters that "No Pole would say a bad word about a lady or an interpreter even when we have to grit our teeth" (United Press International 1977d). His musing on gender and interpreting would become one of the recurrent themes of our story.

It is important to note that all reports cited interference from the Russian language as a major offense. This should be understood as an indication of the widespread anti-Soviet sentiments in Polish society and the hopes of liberal journalists (to whose ranks Górnicki belonged then) to reduce Poland's dependence on the USSR. Moreover, the journal notes of Zbigniew Brzezinski, an ethnic Pole, and Carter's National Security Advisor, indicate that the distaste for Russification was shared by some Communist leaders. Brzezinski (1985, 297–298) noted that Carter's "excellent speech" was "unfortunately marred by a ridiculous translator who somewhat Russified his presentation. Even members of the Politburo objected to the fact that his translation was so Russified." Ironically, Seymour confessed "how he hated the Russians" around the same time, in the fall of 1977, when he was assigned to a NASA delegation on their visit to Moscow (Bostick 2016, 200–201, 210–211).

The alternative criticism of Seymour's language as that of an "uneducated Polish peasant" or someone from the "backwoods of eastern Poland" reminds us of the importance of an interpreter's accent in establishing trust with the audience. "Many studies have found that listeners react subjectively to speakers according to

the dialect that they use" and that persons with more prestigious accents are evaluated more positively in the United States, United Kingdom, and Francophone Canada (Berk-Seligson 2017, 143–144).

A *Washington Post* journalist who discussed Seymour's performance with the U.S. interpreters during the American Translators Association national convention in 1982 heard that "Seymour had mixed Russian, Polish, Jewish. So he was using archaic words" (Trescott 1982, C2). The audio file contains no detectable interference from Hebrew or Yiddish, nor are there indications that Seymour was familiar with these languages. Perhaps one could suspect an ethnic stereotype behind the appearance of "Jewish" on the list of languages that the hapless interpreter allegedly "mixed" during his tragicomical performance.

The Polish journalists who served as informants for the Associated Press provided a fair list of Seymour's inaccuracies (Associated Press 1977a, 1, 4), although they were also nit-picking when they included Seymour's translation of "and his prediction came true" as *i tak właśnie się stało*, that is "and that's exactly what happened" (JC19–SS19, compare TU: *jego słowa sprawdziły*) and of "realities of life" as *warunki życia*, that is "conditions of life' (JC19–SS19, compare TU: *realia codziennego życia*). In both cases, the message was conveyed accurately enough, even if not literally.

The list of mistakes by United Press International (1977a, 1; Sinclair 1977, A1) was more biased. Contrary to the newspaper reports, Seymour did not have Carter say "that the Polish constitution was a subject of ridicule." It is hard to find anything facetious either in the substance of Seymour's translation or his presentation of Carter's praise for the Constitution of 3 May 1791 (JC13–SS13).

In subsequent reports, all real and imagined inaccuracies just provided the background for the unfortunate interpretation of one phrase: "Mr Seymour was reported to have translated a reference by President Carter to the Polish people's 'desires for the future' as 'your lusts for the future'" (Gwertzman 1977). For the U.S. journalists and their audience, the memory of Carter's presidential campaign was still fresh. Then, Carter agreed to an ill-advised interview with *Playboy* magazine, which, in November 1976, published his famous confession: "I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times." Carter added that he did not consider himself superior to "the other guy" who may be more sinful; moreover, he used a rather vulgar, or at least "not a good Baptist" language when describing the nature of that other guy's sin (Ribuffo 1992, 220–222; Balmer 2008, 89–92). The interview generated some unwanted controversy, although it did not prevent Carter from being elected. That is why one newspaper chose the following headline for the United Press International (1977c) report about the Warsaw speech: "Carter Desires Run into Trouble Again."

The Polish columnist Wiesław Górnicki (or the journalists transmitting his words) further distorted the context and the meaning of the unfortunate phrase: "At one point, Wieslaw said, Carter's remarks about a desire for peace were translated to mean he has an 'erotic desire' for Poles" (United Press International 1977b, 10A). There were other versions: Carter was allegedly "translated as saying that he 'loved' Poland in the carnal sense" (Wooten 1977) or that he "desired the Poles carnally" (Sinclair 1977; United Press International 1977a). With passing years, the episode has been gaining in absurdity: "Jimmy Carter went to Poland and told the Poles through an interpreter's error that he wanted to screw them" (Davies 2002, 193). The phantasy of an anonymous contributor to *Time* magazine ("Top 10" 2009) ran particularly wild:

> Are you from Poland? Then President Jimmy Carter wants to sleep with you. That's what his translator, Steven Seymour, told the then-Communist country during the U.S. President's 1977 visit. Carter said he wanted to learn about the Polish people's desires for the future; Seymour said that Carter desired the Poles. Carter said he was happy to be in Poland; Seymour said he was happy to grasp at Poland's private parts.

5. The Epilogue

Seymour continued working the next day until the press conference when he was replaced. The video file shows Seymour interpreting at a large meeting with Polish officials. He still did not have a pen and was holding what looked like a map or a program, but probably not a notepad to write on.

Seymour's replacement was Jerzy Krycki (1941–2010), a Polish citizen who worked for the U.S. Embassy and received his first high-level assignment on short notice. He frankly admitted, "I'm really scared" (Sinclair 1977, A9). At least at that event, Krycki's work was deemed to be "admirable," and only later at the banquet he unexpectedly stopped interpreting and had to give way to Gierek's interpreter, that is, Henryk Sokalski (Barkdoll and Drummond 1977). The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum has provided me with an audio recording of the press conference (Remarks of the President at Press Conference 1977), but the interpreter's voice was not recorded.

There was a much bigger issue with Seymour's short tenure with Carter. It was never made public until recently by Jack Seymour (2016, 51), who in 1977–1979 was the State Department Poland Desk Officer. Jack Seymour did not have any relation to Steven but ironically had to be closely involved in dealing with the consequences of Steven's mishap.

> Still worse, though: when we were putting together the reports of the official conversations in Warsaw, there was a gap. We were especially interested because of the Helsinki Agreement in the discussions that took place about divided families and the Polish reactions to particular cases that President Carter had agreed to raise with First Secretary Gierek. This he apparently did only during the 15 minutes of a tête-à-tête they had. The only other people present were Steven Seymour and a Polish interpreter. So I called Steven Seymour and asked if he had done his memo yet, where it was, and what happened. He replied that he had not done a memo: "Nobody told me to do a memo." So I asked what he could remember and probed him about it to construct a record. I got a bit from him about it. Yes, they raised divided families, but he didn't think by name, and yes, Gierek said he would "resolve" the issues satisfactorily or expeditiously or some such thing like that. But that's all we got from what we thought was a very important 15 minutes.

Obviously, Steven Seymour did not have a lot of prior knowledge about what his duties entailed. The main blame should be placed on those who did not bother to prepare Seymour for the job. Nevertheless, one of the State Department staff interpreters at that time, Harry Obst, suggests in his memoirs (2010, 145) that there had been a Polish conspiracy behind the debacle:

> Polish officials wanted their own interpreters to do as much of the interpreting as possible because this would allow them to tone down remarks on freedom or human rights or maybe even drop a sentence or two. If the American interpreter could be made to look unreliable or run into problems, that could only help their cause. In addition, the officials probably had some friends in the Polish press corps.

The State Department could have legitimate concerns about using an interpreter from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where a large percentage of employees were PZRP members and "where one could not distance oneself from communism or question its principles" (Ceranka 2016, 283, 299). There was also another, probably separate, issue of the allegedly censored Carter's press-conference statements that appeared in the Polish press (Associated Press 1978a). Still, the hypothesis of the Polish conspiracy looks rather weak. After all, it was not the Polish Ministry that selected Steven Seymour and decided that he should go on a most important assignment with neither high-level interpreter training nor any idea about his duties, which, at a minimum, included carrying a notepad and a pen.

The big-hearted president sent Seymour a handwritten thank you note asking not to be disturbed by "exaggerated criticism." "Those who've analyzed your translation say that the errors were minor. You helped to make my visit to Poland very enjoyable and successful. Thanks!" The 31-word letter was signed "Your

friend, Jimmy Carter" (Wilkie 1978). For some reason, the original note did not reach Seymour, who received only a copy (Obst 2010, 148).

Despite a general feeling of sympathy in the White House and the State Department, the temptation to make fun of Seymour was sometimes irresistible. Vice President Walter F. Mondale was asked a question in French during a visit to Ottawa. Unable to turn on his translation device, he quipped: "Where's the Polish translator?" (Languages 1978). Thus, Seymour became fodder for one of the "stupidity jokes about Poles" that were common in the U.S. in the 1960s–1970s (Davies 2002, 151–199; compare Sinclair 1977; United Press International 1977a).

Perturbed by his notoriety, Steven gave several interviews presenting his side of the story, blaming weather and absence of a text in advance, but also referring to the mysterious and subconscious in the art of translation. One of his interviewers, Bill Drummond of *Los Angeles Times*, quoted him on the latter issue: "Translations are like women. When they are pretty, chances are they won't be very faithful" (1978, 10). Today, such witticism could hardly help someone gain a lot of empathy. The origin of Seymour's metaphor is in the formula of *les belles infidèles*, which arose in the seventeenth-century discussions of the proper way to translate Classical authors into a modern language (Zuber 1968). However, this old cliché, in Seymour's new revision, became one of the memorable quotes of the year. It ended up in "Loose Quote" (1978), a regular selection of three funny or provocative quotes published in *Rolling Stone* magazine, with the author identified as "Steven Seymour, interpreter for President Carter in Poland."

When I asked him about the Warsaw episode back in 2002, he declined to discuss it with me ("I'll tell you later") but was pleased to share the story about *les belles infidèles* witticism, not specifying the time and the context. The same narrative was recorded in the audio archives of Radio Liberty (Timasheva 2006):

> There was an unpleasant case when I once had to give an interview, and I jokingly told the journalist I was talking to that there is a saying: "Translations are like pretty women. When they are pretty, chances are they won't be very faithful." The journalist decided to put that joke in his report. And I got a call. I was told, "You shouldn't make jokes like that. We received a letter from the president of the National Organization for Women." She wrote this very indignant letter to the U.S. Secretary of State demanding that I be fired for my anti-feminist remarks. I didn't mean anything like that. But fortunately for me, the letter did not reach the Secretary of State.

It would be hard to find out whether Eleanor Smeal, the president of the National Organization for Women at that time, could have indeed written such a letter. Paradoxically, Seymour enjoyed not-so-negative popularity among feminist scholars of translation due to the brilliant commentary on his words by Susanne

de Lotbinière-Harwood (1991, 98), who saw the relations between author and translator as a metaphor of male-female hierarchies, talked about translations' subversive and rebellious aspects, and had a rather sizeable following (Wallmach 1998, 16; Dimitriu 2002, 37, Saint-Martin 2007, 41–42).

Seymour continued his career as a contract interpreter. By mid-February 1978, he was working on the arms control and disarmament negotiations with the Soviet Union in Geneva (Associated Press 1978b), where State Department Language Services maintained a branch office for that purpose (Obst 2010, 164). He interpreted talks on nuclear arms control for many years and "was really superb" at that job (Seymour 2016, 51). In the 1990s, he served in Moscow as the interpreter for the U.S. ambassador.

He stopped working on U.S. Government contracts in the early 2000s when he married a Russian poet, Vera Pavlova. At this stage of his life, he distinguished himself as a translator. Several essays by Russian journalists appeared in his translation in the *New York Times*, and he also translated for Russian literary magazines. His main achievement was the translation of his wife's poems into English when he was literally subverting hierarchies of desire, gender, and translation. Four of them, including the most famous "If There Is Something to Desire," were published in the *New Yorker* to national acclaim (Pavlova 2007, 2010, 2017).

6. Conclusion

Seymour's lack of preparedness, bad weather, and physical exhaustion contributed to his poor delivery style. His version of Carter's remarks suffered from several linguistic interferences, including Russicisms and some poor lexical choices that may reflect his inadequate level of Polish. Seymour looked especially miserable when compared to his extraordinary Polish counterpart, Henryk Sokalski, whose delivery of Gierek's remarks was impeccable. Still, Seymour's performance was not entirely outside the acceptable range. However, when he rendered the president's wish to understand the Polish people's desires for the future, a slight change of connotation was exploited by journalists eager to go after President Carter, who was the main target of the U.S. media's musings about presidential "lusts and desires."

The episode is a good testimony to the role of the diplomatic interpreter, who only achieves a moment of fame when he or she commits a real or imagined mistake. The best interpreters maintain their invisibility at historical events and often remain known only to their close colleagues. In dozens of newspaper reports in the winter of 1977–1978 discussing the Warsaw episode, Gierek's official interpreter, the only true professional diplomatic interpreter on the scene, was never

mentioned by name. Henryk Sokalski did not talk to journalists but did a flawless job and receded into the background.

Funding

Open Access publication of this article was funded through a Transformative Agreement with UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

Acknowledgments

I met Seymour only once when we worked together on a two-week interpreting assignment in February 2002. He was a charming person and an excellent interpreter. My fond memories of Seymour may have influenced my analysis and evaluation of his performance in Warsaw, which is why I am grateful to my friends and colleagues who provided their comments, especially to Zbigniew Ostrega, who alerted me to the fact that the depiction of this episode in the press was distorted and rather unfair to Seymour, to Andrei Rogatchevski who hosted *Translating and Interpreting from Russian: An International Knowledge Transfer Workshop* at UiT The Arctic University of Norway on 5 December 2016, when we first discussed this episode, to Elena S. Bell, who shared her memories of Seymour with me, and to an anonymous reviewer who asked for clarifications and suggested useful references. Elena Goldis, Steven H. Hochman, and Sara Mitchell helped me obtain the tapes from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum; Paweł Ceranka established the identity of First Secretary Gierek's interpreter; Krystyna Untersteiner and Jaroslaw Anders contributed to my assessment of Seymour's unfortunate lexical choices. A generous travel grant from the Jagiellonian University helped me to present the first version of this paper at the Fourth Congress of International Researchers of Polish History in Kraków in October 2022.

References

Agrifoglio, Marjorie. 2004. "Sight Translation and Interpreting: A Comparative Analysis of Constraints and Failures." *Interpreting* 6 (1): 43–67.

Andres, Dörte. 2002. *Konsekutivdolmetschen und Notation* [Consecutive interpreting and notetaking]. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Associated Press. 1977a. "Translation Angers Poles: A Bad Translation." *Chicago Tribune*, 30 December 1977, 1, 4.

Associated Press. 1977b. "'Very Rusty' Polish." *New York Times*, 31 December 1977, 2.

Associated Press. 1978a. "Polish and U.S. Translations Differ." *New York Times*, 1 January 1978, 10.

Associated Press. 1978b. "Warsaw Interpreter Still on Job." *Baltimore Sun*, 18 February 1978, A3.

Balmer, Randall. 2008. *God in the White House: A History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush*. New York: HarperOne.

Barkdoll, Robert, and Bill Drummond. 1977. "He's Burned on the Toast: Translator's Sub at a Loss for Words." *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1977, 1, 4.

Berk-Seligson, Susan. 2017. *The Bilingual Courtroom: Court Interpreters in the Judicial Process*, 2nd ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Bostick, Jerry. 2016. *The Kid from Golden: From the Cotton Fields of Mississippi to NASA Mission Control and Beyond*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.

Brzezinski, Zbigniew. 1985. *Power and Principle. Memoirs of the National Security Adviser. 1977–1981*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Cammoun-Claveria, Rawdha, Catherine Davies, Konstantin Ivanov, and Boris Naimushin. 2009. *Simultaneous Interpretation with Text. Is the Text 'Friend' or 'Foe'? Laying foundations for a Teaching Module*. Master of Advanced Studies in Interpreter Training Seminar Paper. Université de Genève.

Carter, Jimmy. 2010. *White House Diary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Carter, Jimmy, and Edward Gierek. 1978. "Warsaw, Poland. Remarks of the President and First Secretary Edward Gierek at the Welcoming Ceremony. 29 December 1977." In *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States. Jimmy Carter. 1977. Book II – 25 June to 31 December 1977*, 2203–2205. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Ceranka, Paweł. 2016. "Podstawowa Organizacja Partyjna PZPR w Ministerstwie Spraw Zagranicznych 1949–1989" [Local party organization of the PZPR in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1949–1989]. *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* [Memory and justice] 27: 247–307.

Chmiel, Agnieszka, Przemysław Janikowski, and Anna Cieślewicz. 2020. "The Eye or the Ear? Source Language Interference in Sight Translation and Simultaneous Interpreting." *Interpreting* 22 (2): 187–210.

Chmiel, Agnieszka, Przemysław Janikowski, and Agnieszka Lijewska. 2020. "Multimodal Processing in Simultaneous Interpreting with Text: Interpreters Focus More on the Visual Than the Auditory Modality." *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* 32 (1): 37–58.

Cohen, Richard. 1978. "Steven Seymour Tells How It Is to Be Famous: Interpreter Got Text 15 Minutes in Advance." *Washington Post*, 10 January 1978, C1, C5.

Davies, Christie. 2002. *The Mirth of Nations*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Dimitriu, Ileana. 2002. "Expanding English: The Case for Cultural and Linguistic Translation." *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies* 19 (1): 33–50.

Drummond, Bill. 1978. "Translator Who Tripped Lusts for His Vindication." *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1978, 1, 10.

Eizenstat, Stuart E. 2018. *President Carter: The White House Years*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Gierek, Edward, and Jimmy Carter. 1977–1978. "Przemówienia powitalne w Warszawie" [Welcome speeches in Warsaw]. *Trybuna Ludu* 308 (10394), 31 December 1977 – 1 January 1978, 2.

Gile, Daniel. 2009. *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, rev. ed. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gillies, Andrew. 2019. *Consecutive Interpreting: A Short Course*. London: Routledge.

Gostkiewicz, Michał. 2017. "Gafy, skandaliki i faux-pas. Wpadki ze światowych i polskich dyplomatycznych salonów, które przeszły do historii" [Gaffes, scandals, and faux-pas. Mistakes from world and Polish diplomatic salons that have gone down in history]. *weekend.gazeta.pl*, 28 February 2017. Accessed 2 September 2022. https://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/7,152121,21433024,gafy-skandaliki-i-faux-pas-wpadki-ze-swiatowych-i-polskich.html

Gwertzman, Bernard. 1977. "Interpreter's Gaffes Embarrass State Department." *New York Times*, 31 December 1977, 1, 2.

Gwertzman, Bernard. 1978. "Interpreter Explains Polish Slips." *New York Times*, 10 January 1978, 1, 3.

Jiménez Ivars, Amparo, and Amparo Hurtado Albir. 2003. "Variedades de traducción a la vista. Definición y clasificación" [Sight translation varieties. Definition and classification]. *TRANS. Revista de Traductología* 7: 47–57.

Kelly, Nataly, and Jost Zetzsch. 2012. *Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World*. New York: Penguin Group.

"Languages: Something Lost Again in Translation." 1978. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1978, 3-A.

"Loose Talk." 1978. *Rolling Stone* 260, 9 March 1978, 16.

Lotbinière-Harwood, Susanne de. 1991. *Re-belle et infidèle: La traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin. The Body Bilingual: Translation as a Rewriting in the Feminine*. Montréal and Toronto, Les éditions du remue-ménage / Women's Press.

Neikirk, Bill. 1977. "Translator Sticks His Foot Right into Carter's Mouth." *Chicago Tribune*, 31 December 1977, 8.

Noworyta, Eugeniusz. 2008. *Polityka i Dyplomacja: Wspomnienia ambasadora* [Politics and diplomacy: Memoirs of an ambassador]. Łódź: Społeczna Wyższa Szkoła Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania w Łodzi.

Obst, Harry. 2010. *White House Interpreter: The Art of Interpretation*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

Orzeł Biały – Na Antenie. 1978. "Niefortunny tłumacz Cartera" [Carter's unfortunate interpreter]. *Orzeł Biały – Na Antenie: Audycje Rozgłośni Polskiej Radia Wolna Europa* [White Eagle – On the air: Polish broadcasts of Radio Free Europe] 16 (178): 17–18.

Pavlova, Vera. 2007. "Four Poems," translated, from the Russian, by Steven Seymour. *New Yorker*, 30 July 2007, 56–57.

Pavlova, Vera. 2010. *If There Is Something to Desire: One Hundred Poems*, translated by Steven Seymour. New York: Knopf.

Pavlova, Vera. 2017. *Album for the Young (and Old)*, translated by Steven Seymour. New York: Knopf.

President Jimmy Carter European Summit Meetings, 12/29/1977–1/6/1978. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), NPC 8M-171, roll 16.

Program organizacyjny wizyty oficjalnej w Polsce Prezydenta Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki pana Jimmy Cartera z małżonką, 29–31 grudnia 1977 roku [Schedule of the official visit to Poland of the President of the United States of America Mr. Jimmy Carter and his wife, 29–31 December 1977]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (Warsaw, Poland), Diplomatic Protocol, ref. number 20/80, United States of America, 1977.

Remarks of the President at Arrival in Warsaw, 12/29/1977. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), WHCA A 508.

Remarks of the President at Press Conference in Warsaw, 12/30/1977. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), WHCA A 509.

Ribuffo, Leo P. 1992. *Right Center Left: Essays in American History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Rogatchevski, Andrei. 2019. "Interpreting for Soviet Leaders: The Memoirs of Semi-visible Men." *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 14 (3): 442–463.

Saint-Martin, Lori. 2007. "Romans d'homme, voix de femme: « Marie Auger », Gilles Archambault, Jacques Poulin et Maxime Mongeon" [Men's novels, women's voices: "Marie Auger", Gilles Archambault, Jacques Poulin and Maxime Mongeon]. *Voix et Images* [Voices and images] 32 (2): 31–47.

Seeber, Kilian G. 2018. "Interpreting at the European Institutions: Faster, Higher, Stronger." *CLINA Revista Interdisciplinaria de Traducción Interpretación y Comunicación Intercultural* 3 (2): 73–90.

Setton, Robin, and Andrew Dawrant. 2016. *Conference Interpreting: A Complete Course*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Seymour, Jack. 2016. Interviewed by Raymond Ewing. Initial Interview Date: 20 November, 2003. *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*. Accessed 28 August 2022. https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Seymour-Jack.oh_.pdf

Sinclair, Ward. 1977. "A Semantic Snafu: Interpreter Puts His Foot in President Carter's Mouth." *Washington Post*. 31 December 1977, A1, A9.

Steele, Jonathan. 1977. "Carter's Speaker Lacked Polish." *Guardian*, 31 December 1977, 4.

Szulc, Paweł. 2017. "Jimmy Carter w Polsce – nadzieja dla władz, szansa dla opozycji" [Jimmy Carter in Poland – hope for authorities, opportunity for opposition]. *Portal Dzieje.pl*, 22 September 2017. Accessed 29 August 2022. https://dzieje.pl/artykuly-historyczne/jimmy-carter-w-polsce-nadzieja-dla-wladz-szansa-dla-opozycji

Teschner, Richard V. 1978. "Poland's 'American Joke' Raises Doubt about State Department's Appreciation of Translators' Problems (From Articles and Editorials Appearing in Detroit and El Paso Newspapers)." *Hispania* 61 (2): 330–331.

Timasheva, Marina. 2006. "Poverkh bar'erov – Rossiiskii chas" Поверх барьеров – Российский час [Above barriers – The Russian Hour]. *Radio Svoboda Радио Свобода* [Radio Liberty], 28 December 2006 (audiofile), 29 December 2006 (transcript). Accessed 23 February 2023. https://www.svoboda.org/a/25483288.html https://www.svoboda.org/a/369840.html

"Top 10 Embarrassing Diplomatic Moments." *Time*, 2 March 2009. Accessed 23 February 2023. https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1880208_1880218_1880227,00.html

Trescott, Jacqueline. 1982. "Words! Words! Words! Translators Meet & Speak Well to Each Other: It's All in Translation." *Washington Post*, 25 October 1982, C1, C2.

Ünal, Melis. 2013. "Coherence in Consecutive Interpreting. A Comparative Study of Short and Long Consecutive Interpretations of English Texts into Turkish." Ph.D. diss., University of Surrey.

United Press International. 1977a. "Some Polish Joke! Carter's Translator Turns Warsaw Greeting into Gaggle of Gaffes." *Citizen* (Ottawa), 30 December 1977, 1.

United Press International. 1977b. "Poles Insulted by Carter's Translator." *Columbia Missourian Newspaper*. 30 December 1977, 10A.

United Press International. 1977c. "Carter Desires Run into Trouble Again." *Daily Courier* (Connellsville) 42, 30 December 1977, 1.

United Press International. 1977d. "Polish Leader Grits Teeth over Mistranslation." *Freeport Journal-Standard*, 30 December 1977, 1.

Wallmach, Kim. 1998. "Translation and Gender: Interconnections." *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa* 29 (1): 5–25.

The White House. 1977. The Daily Diary of President Jimmy Carter, 29 December 1977. Accessed 25 August 2022. https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/diary/1977/d122977t.pdf

Wilkie, Curtis. 1978. "'I Understand', Carter Tells His Interpreter." *Boston Globe*, 12 January 1978, 1.

Wooten, James T. 1977. "Carter Arrives in Warsaw on Start of Six-Nation Tour." *New York Times*, 30 December 1977, A1, A3.

Zuber, Roger. 1968. *Les « Belles Infidèles » et la formation du goût classique: Perrot d'Ablancourt et Guez de Balzac* [Les "Belles Infidèles" and the formation of classical taste: Perrot d'Ablancourt and Guez de Balzac]. Paris: Armand Colin.

Appendix

Transcription of Carter's remarks at the welcoming ceremony on 29 December 1977[1]

JC1 [06:51] First Secretary Gierek, distinguished officials from Poland and from other nations, people of Poland: We are delighted to be in your great country. [07:04]
SS1 [07:05] Panie Sekretarzu Gierek, <PV> inne przedstawicieli oficjalne Polski i innych krajów, Panie i Panowie, my jesteśmy bardzo radzi -/być/- przebywać w Waszym Kraju <Sn>. [07:16]
JC2 [07:19] When I left the United States this morning, I told the people of my Nation that this journey reflects the diversity of a rapidly changing world. [07:30]
SS2 [07:32] Kiedy ja porzuciłem Stany Zjednoczone dziś rano, ja powiedziałem narodowi mojego -/st=/- państwa, że ta podróż odzwierciedla rozmaitość szybko zmieniającego się świata. [07:44]

1. Remarks of the President at Arrival 1977. Symbols and Abbreviations: [00:00] timestamps in the audio file; -/.../- false start, correction; …= truncated word; <P> unwarranted empty pause; <PV> vocalized pause ("ah," "um" etc.); <Sn> sniffle; JC1, JC2 etc. Carter's speech; SS1, SS2 etc. Seymour's version.

JC3 [07:45] It is a world in which old ideological labels have lost their meaning and in which the basic goals of friendship, world peace, justice, human rights, and individual freedom loom more important than ever. [08:03]
SS3 [08:04] To jest tego świata, w którym stare ideologiczne frazesy utraciły wiele ze swojego znaczenia i w którym zasadnicze cele przyjaźni, pokoju, sprawiedliwości, praw człowieka i osobistej swobody, zarysowują się dziś bardziej wyraźnej niż kiedykolwiek. [08:24]
JC4 [08:25] I am proud to begin this journey in Poland, friend of the United States since the time our Nation was founded. [08:34]
SS4 [08:35] Jestem dumny z tego, że zaczynam -/tę/- tą podróż w Polsce, która jest przyjacielem Stanów Zjednoczonych z tego czasu, kiedy -/stan= nasza/- nasze państwo było osnute. [08:46]
JC5 [08:47] Poland is the ancestral home of more than six million Americans, partner in a common effort against war and deprivation. [08:58]
SS5 [08:59] Państwo także które stanowi ojczyznę dziesięciu milionów Amerykanów i które jest partnerem naszym wspólnym wysiłków przeciwko wojnie i innym klęskom. [09:12]
JC6 [09:12] Relations are changing between North and South, between East and West. But the ties between Poland and the United States are ancient and strong. [09:24]
SS6 [09:25] Stosunki się zmieniają między Północą i Południem, między Wschodem i Zachodem. Ale więzi między naszymi krajami są bardzo stary i bardzo mocne. [09:37]
JC7 [09:38] Not far from our home in the State of Georgia, a great patriot of both our nations, Casimir Pulaski, was mortally wounded while leading a cavalry legion in the fight for American independence. [09:54]
SS7 [09:55] Niedaleko od mojego domu, w stanie Georgia, -/wieliki patriota/- wielki patriota obu naszych krajów, Kazimierz Pułaski był śmiertelnie zraniony, podczas gdy prowadził legion kawalerii w walce za amerykańską niepodległość. [10:12]
JC8 [10:13] The home of my son's wife is Pulaski County, Georgia, named for this hero from Poland. [10:20]
SS8 [10:21] Miejsce, gdzie się urodziła żona mojego syna nazywa się księstwo Pułaski w stanie Georgia które było nazwane <P> właśnie wedle tego bohatera z Polski. [10:33]
JC9 [10:34] Also, for his military skill and bravery, Thaddeus Kosciuszko won the respect of our first President, George Washington, during wartime. And for his commitment to freedom and justice, he won the admiration of our third President, Thomas Jefferson, in time of peace. [10:53]
SS9 [10:54] A także za jego wojskowe zdolności i za jego odwagę Tadeusz Kościuszko zasłużył <PV> poważanie Georga Washingtona -/nag=/- naszego pierwszego prezydenta w czasie wojny, a za jego poświęcenie w sprawie -/s/- swobody i niepodległości on zasłużył poszanowanie naszego <PV> prezydenta Thomasa Jeffersona w czasie pokoju. [11:19]
JC10 [11:20] These brave men fought alongside Americans in the era which produced three of the great documents in the struggle for human rights. [11:30]
SS10 [11:31] Ci odważni mężowie <P> walczyli razem z Amerykanami w epoce, która nam dała trzy wielki dokumenty w walce za -/pra=/- prawa człowieka. [11:44]
JC11 [11:45] One was the Declaration of Independence from America. [11:50]
SS11 [11:50] Jednym z takich dokumentów była Deklaracja Niepodległości -/z s=/- z Ameryki. [11:55]
JC12 [11:56] The second was the Declaration of the Rights of Man from France. [12:01]
SS12 [12:01] Drugim te była Deklaracja Praw <PV> Człowieka z Francji. [12:05]
JC13 [12:06] And the third was the Polish Constitution of May third, seventeen ninety-one. [12:12]

SS13 [12:12] A trzecim te była Polska Konstytucja trzeciego mają tysiąc siedemset dziewięćdziesiątego pierwszego roku. [12:18]
JC14 [12:19] Our shared experience in battle has also taught us the paramount importance of preventing war, which has brought devastation to Poland twice in this century. [12:32]
SS14 [12:33] Nasze wspólne doświadczenie w walce tak samo nauczyło nas <PV> -/tej ważnej/- ważnego znaczenia w <P> zapobieganiu <PV> wojnie, która dwukrotnie w ciągu tego stulecia <PV> naniosła taką klęskę Polsce. [12:49]
JC15 [12:50] At the end of World War I, a great American, Herbert Hoover, came to Poland to help you ease the suffering of war and to observe the reestablishment of an independent Poland. [13:03]
SS15 [13:05] W końcu pierwszej wojny światowej wielki Amerykanin Herbert Hoover <PV> przyjechał do Polski, z tym, żeby pomóc cierpieniu która wojna przyniosła Polsce i z tym, żeby być świadkiem ponownego ustanowlienia niezależnej Polski. [13:22]
JC16 [13:23] Circumstances were different, and the struggle was long, but Hoover said, and I quote, "If -/hi=/- history teaches us anything, it is that from the unquenchable vitality of the Polish race, Poland will rise again from these ashes." [13:40]
SS16 [13:41] To były trudne okoliczności i walka była długą, ale Hoover powiedział, i tu ja cytuję: „Jeżeli historia nas uczy czemukolwiek, -/to t=/- to temu, że -/z niezniszczalnego/- z -/nies=/- niezniszczalnej -/wit=/- żywotności polskiego ludu Polska znowu powstanie jak by z popiołów." [14:01]
JC17 [14:02] And his prediction came true. [14:04]
SS17 [14:05] I tak właśnie się stało. [14:06]
JC18 [14:08] I have come not only to express our own views to the people of Poland but also to learn your opinions and to understand your desires for the future. [14:19]
SS18 [14:20] Ja tu przybyłem nie tylko po to, żeby wyrazić nasze poglądy <PV> dla ludu Polski, ale także <P> dowiedzieć się, jakie są wasze <PV> poglądy i -/s=/- po to, by zrozumieć jakie są wasze pożądania. [14:36]
JC19 [14:37] Building on the historical ties between us, recognizing the new and changing realities of life, I look forward to strengthening the Polish-American friendship on my visit here in Warsaw. [14:50]
SS19 [14:51] <PV> Osnując się na historycznych więzach <PV> które istnieją między nami i przyjmując pod uwagę nowe i zmieniające się warunki życia, ja <P> spodziewam się, że <P> -/moj= mój/- moja wizyta tu w Warszawie -/wz=/- wzmocni polsko-amerykańską <P> przyjaźń. [15:12]
JC20 [15:14] We deeply appreciate the warm welcome extended to us tonight by First Secretary Gierek and by the Polish people. Thank you very much. [15:22]
SS20 [15:23] My jesteśmy głęboko <PV> zadowolenie i dziękujemy za <P> to <P> ciepło powitane które nam było dano Pierwszym sekretarzem Gierkem i polskimi ludźmi i dziękujemy państwo bardzo. [15:37]

Résumé

Lors de la visite du président Carter à Varsovie en 1977, son interprète en polonais, Steven Seymour, aurait commis des erreurs affreuses. Des journalistes américains ont appris ces erreurs de leurs collègues polonais et ont jubilé devant ce qu'ils pensaient être des connotations

érotiques dans l'interprétation de Seymour. Il existe une abondante littérature sur cet épisode, mais aucun auteur n'a encore consulté l'interprétation réelle. J'ai pu obtenir un enregistrement audio archivé de l'épisode entier auprès de la Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. Dans cet article, je traite du choix de Seymour d'un mode d'interprétation phrase par phrase et des problèmes inhérents à ce mode, je classe ses erreurs et ses inexactitudes, et je tente de découvrir les raisons des critiques exagérées des médias et de la communauté des interprètes. De manière caractéristique, les médias n'ont pas prêté attention à la performance solennelle et confiante du collègue polonais de Seymour, qui a interprété en anglais le discours d'Edward Gierek. L'épisode témoigne bien du rôle des interprètes diplomatiques, qui n'ont leur moment de gloire que lorsqu'ils commettent une erreur factuelle ou imaginaire.

Mots-clés : invisibilité de l'interprète, interprétation consécutive, interprétation phrase par phrase, traduction à vue, interprétation diplomatique, interférence linguistique

Address for correspondence

Leonid S. Chekin
chekinls@gmail.com

Publication history

Date received: 7 January 2023
Date accepted: 15 May 2023
Published online: 5 October 2023