Language Investment in the Trajectories of Mobile, Multilingual Humanitarian

Workers

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Abstract: This article analyzes the discursive construction of mobile, multilingual humanitarian workers at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from a critical sociolinguistic perspective. In the light of fluctuating linguistic requirements and needs, I focus on the trajectories of ICRC delegates as a window onto the different values attributed to language resources and investments before and during humanitarian work. The data analyzed include interviews with three (former) delegates complemented by institutional documents. The ICRC requirement for major languages including English and French goes hand in hand with recent personality profiling in relation to 'international experience' (understood as geographical mobility), which is closely connected to cosmopolitan discourses of openness to other cultures and languages. The three delegates mobilize the trope of 'interest' in other cultures and languages anchored in their transnational families. Simultaneously, they have expanded their linguistic repertoires during their missions, often 'bits and pieces' of local languages, to respond to unplanned linguistic needs in the field and to manage interpreters in ways that reinforce power imbalances. I argue that linguistic investment in non-strategic languages like Kurdish during humanitarian missions seldom translates into economic capital, but it is converted into symbolic capital indexing their professional mobility and flexible, entrepreneurial speakerhood.

Keywords: international organizations, mobile workers, humanitarianism, linguistic investment, sociolinguistic trajectories, multilingualism

1. Introduction

This article investigates the discursive construction and negotiation of a 'global, mobile entrepreneurial citizenship' (Garrido & Sabaté-Dalmau, this issue) through discourses of multilingualism in an underexplored terrain, an international humanitarian organization. In particular, this article analyses the discursive construction of mobile, multilingual and highly-qualified humanitarian workers at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC henceforth) from a critical sociolinguistic and historicizing perspective. The biographical and work trajectories of ICRC mobile staff offer a window onto the different and unequal values attributed to language resources and investments before and during humanitarian work. The data used in this article comprise three in-depth interviews with (former) ICRC delegates from a larger dataset (see Section 3) complemented with institutional documents like job offers.

In line with the objectives of this Special Issue, I will explore how periodic mobility, language-intensive labor and sociolinguistic regimes shape the emergence of 'workers of the world' (Lorente, 2012) who comply with labor flexibility in a humanitarian market that competes for multilingual employees. International agencies and NGOs are lesser-studied institutions of linguistic regulation (Muehlmann & Duchêne, 2007) even though they are 'Trojan horses for global neoliberalism' (Harvey, 2005, p.177). In the past 20 years, humanitarian agencies have become 'multinationales du coeur' [multinationals of the heart] with the model 'of the private enterprise with nonprofit goals' (Pech & Padis, 2004, p.11). According to Allan and McElhinny,

> Neoliberalism has facilitated particular kinds of mobility and migration, particularly for entrepreneurial subjects willing to dedicate themselves to self-development through language learning. Temporary migration and mobility, in particular, is tied to aspirations to learn language skills valued in the global economy and competitive workplaces. (2017, p.93)

Based on Foucauldian governmentality (see Martín-Rojo, 2018), this article will investigate how a humanitarian agency extends market logics to other social domains, notably with the shaping of entrepreneurial selves who self-invest in language learning in the field and who package their past trajectories to be(come) competitive workers in the global humanitarian sector.

This article seeks to contribute a sociolinguistic account of labour migration in a major humanitarian agency. Language has traditionally been overlooked in studies of the humanitarian sector but this has started to shift in recent years with studies mainly based on interviews and institutional documents. Recent research on development and NGOs has pointed out that language has remained a blind spot in institutional policies of international organizations (Footitt, Crack & Tesseur, 2018), and has argued that more attention should be paid to the role of languages in (re)producing unequal power relationships in humanitarian aid, mainly through a post-colonial dominance of Western staff who rely on linguistic and cultural mediators in the field (Roth, 2019). Concerning international organizations like the ICRC, other scholars have investigated 'cosmopolitan identity' as symbolic capital in UN agencies (Mülli, 2017), conceived as openness to the other peoples and cultures (Jansson, 2016; Nowicka & Kaweh, 2009). Language skills, and notably English as a lingua franca, play a central role in this cosmopolitan construction mediating access to humanitarian work (Garrido, 2017).

This article will be organized as follows. In the next section, I will provide a theoretical framework and the third section will briefly introduce the methods in this study and the data collected. The fourth section will analyze the internationalization of ICRC delegate posts and its impact on linguistic policy and individual pathways. The fifth section is divided into two parts. The first one will look into the capitalization of personal trajectories and multilingual repertoires for humanitarian work. The second one will deal with humanitarians' language learning initiatives to fulfil unplanned linguistic needs in the field. The ensuing discussion will

summarize the findings and interpret the convertibility of different linguistic investments for a humanitarian career. The main finding is that linguistic investment in non-strategic languages like Kurdish during humanitarian missions seldom translates into economic capital, but it is converted into symbolic capital indexing their professional mobility and flexibility, epitomizing its linguistic correlate of the 'self-made speaker' (Martín-Rojo, 2019).

2. Theoretical Framework

In the neoliberal economy, the paradigmatic worker is conceived as a bundle of modifiable and measurable skills (Urciuoli, 2008) among which we find communication and language. Every item of knowledge is prone to interpretation as a skill that is potentially productive to one's employer. Language skills emerge as a field for value assignment in/by institutions based on comparison, differentiation and measurement processes that hierarchize languages and their speakers (Heller, 2010). As Martín-Rojo argues (2018, p.555), the number of languages required are continuously expanding and so are the forms of gatekeeping such as certificates, tests and interviews to endorse normalized linguistic knowledge. The global economy provides new conditions for the valuation of language practices and resources since 'market mechanisms, as in other domains, have now come to some extent to organize speakers' trajectories and practices and to govern their conduct' (Martín-Rojo, 2018, p. 546). The flexibilization of labor in neoliberal regimes, whose hallmarks are temporality and uncertainty, entails self-regimentation to constantly actualize oneself with legitimate modes of work and communication, including personal narratives (Roberts, 2013). Personal narratives package one's life, work and linguistic trajectories experiences in ways that are 'sellable' in a highly competitive and changing market (see Flubacher, this issue).

The discourse of language as profit (Heller & Duchêne, 2012) has an impact on the speakers' desires and practices, especially regarding self-training and capitalization of one's repertoire. Capitalization refers to 'acts of conferring and withholding symbolic capital, such

as access to language learning, which can be converted into economic capital, for instance, within the labour market' (Martín-Rojo, 2018, p. 550). According to Duchêne (2016), the new discourses on multilingualism create an explicit connection between language learning and economic acquisition in ways that presuppose the convertibility of language resources into sources of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This logic of economic return on the time and financial investment is not always borne out, given that 'linguistic investment is also subject to processes of legitimation that allow and restrict the possibility and the recognition of this investment, according to who counts as a legitimate speaker in a given space'[i] (Duchêne, 2016, p.77). It does not suffice to look into individual motivations and we should thus investigate the material conditions and power structures that (de)capitalize a given linguistic investment for institutional purposes in a fluctuating market where values attributed to linguistic resources are difficult to predict (Duchêne & Daveluy, 2015).

Only those languages that are socially valued are perceived to be competitive on the global market. Although neoliberalism is generally against any form of regulation, including language policy, neoliberal restructuring has managed to impose English on many domains of global life in a covert promotion of a desire to learn this language due to the (expected) economic and social benefits (Piller & Cho, 2013). The legitimization and naturalization of English as a terrain for competition is discursively grounded in its place in global communication and internationalization. Being competent in a valuable language such as English is a powerful regulatory mechanism in the neoliberal economy, especially for the competition among prospective 'workers of the world'. Linguistic requirements for employment are used to select those who have been able to make a financial and time investment to learn valuable languages, notably English.

To make sense of their transnational lives, mobile people talk about the places they have been to throughout their cross-border trajectory. Their pathways are not linear trajectories of

past locations but involve ideological work that constructs the person's self-positioning in the here-and-now (Park, 2017). This ideological construction in narratives comprises interactional regimes, including typical patterns of multilingualism and normative expectations, and characterological figures in other contexts (ibid). The focus on trajectories allows us to trace at which moments or nodes language becomes prominent for these humanitarians in ways that (de)capitalize them professionally. Discourses of entrepreneurship and of multilingualism as profit develop over time and across space in ways that are empirically observable through interconnected sites marked by the trajectories of informants and of resources regulated there (Heller, 2011, p.11). Mobile workers often have truncated linguistic repertoires combining 'bits and pieces' of literacy and linguistic resources connected to different named languages in ways that reflect their transnational trajectories (Blommaert & Backus, 2011). Martín-Rojo (2018, p. 548) views speakers' trajectories as not only the effect of growing mobility in the new economy, but also a 'new mode of governing linguistic conduct and as a response to newly coined models of speakerness that celebrate multilingualism'.

3. Methods and Data

This paper is primarily based on three semi-structured interviews with ICRC delegates conducted in 2016. These form part of larger dataset of 9 individual interviews with delegates carried in the context of a larger study addressing the management of language resources at the ICRC, with a focus on the role of multilingualism in the institutional recruitment and pathways of 'delegates' or mobile staff. The interviews lasted between 54 and 133 minutes. Those analyzed in this paper were conducted in English, while some others were in French or in Spanish. The interview topics included their professional trajectory, from joining the ICRC to communicating in the field, and their personal perspective on the ICRC, dealing with issues of engagement, values and institutional transformations. I approached most informants through the *ICRC Alumni* association, which informed its members about my study online and allowed

me to participate in their events in Geneva. The rationale was to get in touch with delegates who had experienced the internationalization of delegate posts in the 1990s, who had been reserved for Swiss nationals until then. Therefore, most of my informants had Swiss nationality and ranged between their seventies and their late thirties at the time of our interview. Some were still active at the ICRC and some others were retired or had moved on to other organizations.

The three trajectories analyzed below are representative of a 'younger' generation of Swiss delegates who were recruited shortly after internationalization. I am aware that this paper focuses on expatriates from the Global North and does not include any national staff or expatriate staff from the Global South. In my second wave of data collection (2017-2018), I interviewed 10 mobile Arabic-speaking communicators in the Middle East and organized three focus groups with delegates working in the region.

In addition to these interviews, I also collected publicly-available job offers and recruitment materials in their webpage, in Career Fairs and in their Geneva library, as well as early training materials in their Public Archives. These allow me to historicize the delegates' pathways in the institutional transformations and to trace the changing definition of the 'ideal' ICRC delegate (see Mülli, 2017) possessing the adequate personal and professional competences, including languages. The institutional decision not to grant the researcher access to the internal recruitment and training activities, such as day assessments and initiation training courses, has precluded participant observation.

4. The 'Internationalization' of the ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the oldest existing humanitarian agency, founded by Henri Dunant in 1863, and it currently recruits, trains and coordinates humanitarian workers working in over 80 countries worldwide from its headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland). It has an international mandate based on the Geneva Conventions since 1864. Its

tripartite mission includes protection activities such as confidential visits to detainees, assistance to the affected populations with a focus on healthcare and prevention through the diffusion of International Humanitarian Law in emergencies and armed conflicts. Language practices are appropriated as resources to fulfil aims beyond the strictly linguistic, such as to enable confidential detention visits to prisoners of war, to manage a multilingual ICRC delegation, or to inform civilians about International Humanitarian Law.

4.1. *The Impact of Institutional Transformations on Language Policy*

The focus of my research is on 'delegates', now called 'mobile staff', who are expatriate workers on fixed-term missions in different delegations. Their main tasks include contacting government and armed group authorities for ICRC activities, finding missing persons and reuniting them with their families and conducting 'interviews without witnesses' with prisoners to make sure that detention conditions are acceptable. In 2017, the ICRC employed over 14,339 workers across the globe and only 2,822 (around 19%) are mobile staff, i.e. expatriates (ICRC webpage, 2018). This organization initially recruited only Swiss nationals for delegate positions, with a predominance of Francophones and a minority of German and Italian speakers who spoke French. The ICRC has undergone a process of 'internationalization' of its workforce since the opening of delegate positions to non-Swiss nationalities in 1992. Some of the reasons for this internationalization were the saturation of the Swiss national market for specialists, the geographical expansion of the ICRC in new regions owing to new conflicts like the Balkans war, and the increasing competition in the humanitarian sector with the booming of the sector.

The post-1992 recruitment of delegates from other nationalities (over 100) reinforced English alongside French as a lingua franca in Geneva (Mercier, 2004). Today, the ICRC designates English and French as administrative languages. Besides, there are less widely used 'working languages' for operations, which can be 'regional languages with an international dimension (Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese) and national languages with a regional or sub-regional

dimension (Russian, Chinese)' (Krimitsas, 2012, p.2-3). Following Tesseur (2014), 'strategic multilingualism' is designed to increase the organization's impact and growth in ways that adapt to the changing organizational structure, which has entailed an internationalization process at the ICRC. The 'strategic' languages for operations fluctuate over time and cannot be predicted, as they depend on emergencies and wars. In the 1980s and 1990s, Spanish was an important lingua franca for operations in Latin America. Given that the major operations are currently located in the Near and Middle East, Arabic is a much sought-after working language for humanitarian work today.

Delegates are not required to speak local languages (see Roth, 2019, p.40) and often have an (expatriate) interpreter into the main regional language or local language if available. Since 2003, more importance was given to English while French requirements were relaxed for mobile staff. The 2004 brochure 'ICRC is recruiting: delegates, communication delegates and interpreters/translators' required 'Excellent command of English (and good command of French for delegates)'. In 2012, the 'profile of candidate for delegate positions' (*Working for the ICRC brochure*) included 'Excellent command of English, good grasp of French and other useful languages indicated on the ICRC's website'.

English has become a taken-for-granted requirement at the ICRC and other dominant linguas francas serve as markers of distinction on this competitive market. In 2016, the requirements for French as the administrative language resulted in an ideal profile of a trilingual delegate. In May 2016, new 'delegate' positions to work in the field were opened after a long period. Contrary to the requirements of English-French bilingualism for all the delegates that I interviewed, the new job offer required candidates to be 'fluent in English and French, with a knowledge of a 3rd language' (see Excerpt 1) with a preference for Arabic, Russian and Spanish as strategic languages for operations. Both administrative languages, French and English, appear in the video with non-native accents and standard subtitles. In Excerpt 1 below, the

requirement to have 'international and/or humanitarian voluntary background' necessarily outside one's own country connects to the job condition to leave for unaccompanied missions anywhere in the world. This international, humanitarian background connects to cosmopolitan stances linked to elite transnational mobility (see section 5 below) and to the international dimension of English. In reference to mobile staff, a Geneva-based recruiter that I interviewed that 'we are talking about international, those who move. So for those people English is now a, a must. They must have a good English level' (interview, 18-03-2016) ideally complemented with French, Arabic or Spanish.

Excerpt 1. Excerpt from job offer on ICRC website, *Working for the ICRC: delegate* (published 17-05-2016).

Your profile:
- 25 years old minimum
- Fluent in English and French, with a knowledge of 3rd language
- Arabic, Spanish and Russian- speaking delegates are of particular interest to the ICRC
- Bachelor degree level or equivalent
- At least two years of professional experience, with an international and/or a humanitarian voluntary background
- Available to leave without family members for at least 24 months

During my fieldwork, I encountered different profiles of (former) delegates who all spoke French and English as required languages. Before 1992, the requirement for Swiss nationality translated into two main delegate profiles: a majority of Francophone Swiss who would speak English and a minority of Swiss Alemannic delegates who would have to improve and use their school French alongside their English, without a role for (Swiss) German. In this paper, I will focus on the narrated trajectories of three Swiss (former) delegates who worked at the ICRC after internationalization: Karl, Xavier and Carolyn[ii].

Karl worked as a delegate specializing in Communication for 10 years right after internationalization. Born to a German-speaking family, his childhood was marked by mobility due to his father's position at a multinational until the family moved back to Geneva when he was eight. His repertoire of English, French and German was sufficient for meeting ICRC requirements, but he learned other non-required languages throughout his career, as we shall see. After his university studies in political science and foreign language teaching, his humanitarian career started in Sri Lanka, then took him to the Balkans, Southern and Eastern Africa and Geneva headquarters. After his engagement at the ICRC, he moved back to Geneva with his second wife (whom he met on a mission) and worked for a UN office and then for the cantonal government.

Xavier was born in the early 1970s and has been working as a delegate for 16 years. He was born to a Swiss-German mother and a Catalan father. He attended a German-language school and had pursued a career as a German-speaking journalist in Switzerland before joining the ICRC. At the time, he spoke English, German, Swiss German, Catalan and Spanish and had learned some French as an adult. Spanish skills were key for his first mission assignment to Latin America, where he met his Spanish-speaking wife. Afterwards, Xavier was a delegate in the Middle East, Horn of Africa, South Asia, the headquarters in Switzerland and finally North Africa before going back to Geneva. During his career, he has learned other languages such as Kurdish (in Northern Iraq), Arabic (in Geneva and Northern Africa), and Bahasa (in Indonesia) as we shall see below.

Carolyn was born in the early 1960s and worked as a delegate for nine years at the turn of the century. She was born to a Swiss-German father and Dutch mother in German-speaking Switzerland. She was working as a jurist in Switzerland when she decided to apply for the ICRC. In preparation for ICRC work, Carolyn decided to improve her French through an immersion stay in French-speaking Switzerland. In addition to French, she spoke English,

Dutch and (Swiss) German. She was a delegate in South and Central Africa and Tajikistan before working at the headquarters in Geneva. During her career, she mostly used English for humanitarian work and she decided to learn Russian for her mission in Tajikistan, as we shall analyze below. She got married to a fellow French-speaking delegate. At the time of fieldwork, she worked at a higher education institution in Switzerland.

5. Delegates' Multilingual Selves: Intersecting Biographical and Work Trajectories

In order to answer the research question of the discursive construction of mobile, multilingual workers at the ICRC, the analysis of the three delegates' narratives will be divided into two different sections. First, I will look into the capitalization of their personal trajectories and linguistic repertoires for humanitarian work at the ICRC, with a focus on the construction of cosmopolitan selves. This will impact their language investments for and during ICRC missions. Second, I will look at how their professional trajectories as humanitarians have led them to learning languages to fulfil unplanned linguistic needs in the field. Their pragmatic decision to learn local languages during a mission is often connected to the (un)availability and management of interpreters for communication. These two axes will bring to the fore the intersection of their biographical and labor trajectories in the constitution of their multilingual repertoires, which they can use in their humanitarian missions.

5.1. Cosmopolitanism and Multilingualism in a Globalized Workplace

The ICRC requirement for (highly selective) multilingualism and 'international experience' for delegate positions constructs a cosmopolitan outlook, defined as a form of sociability that entails forms of competence and communication skills for an 'orientation to openness to foreign others and cultures which emerges in practices and institutions in a global world' (Igarashi & Saito 2014, p. 224, based on Hannerz, 1990). At the ICRC, the delegates' cosmopolitan perspective is linked to the Red Cross principles of impartiality and universality, both based on

ideals of solidarity among all human beings as equals without discrimination (ICRC, 2015). Hannerz (1996) claims that 'the willingness to become involved with the Other, and the concern with achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien, relate to considerations of self as well' (p.103). In the case of international organizations, this cosmopolitan construction emerges as 'a strategy for making sense of everyday life tensions in unfamiliar environments and as a moral horizon lending value to the experience abroad' (Nowicka & Kaweh, 2009, p.54). My three informants are representative of international aid workers from the Global North who acquired this kind of 'cosmopolitan capital' in childhood and youth as a result of their upbringing in transnational families and/or family migration (Roth, 2019).

When I asked Karl what attracted him to becoming an ICRC delegate, he went back to his childhood and explained that travelling with his parents had made him appreciate discovering cultures as a resident of the country, which he contraposed to being a tourist. The construction of a cosmopolitan self out of the experiences during stays in different countries is linked to cultural immersion in contraposition to the tourist who are 'mere spectators' and lack the same set of skills (Hannerz, 1990, p. 242). Karl wanted to re-live this way of 'discovering cultures' (line 6) by working for the ICRC, which was his vocation and goal since his last year in high school. As part of cultural discovery, he emphasized language as a way to 'integrate' with people (line 15) and have a more interesting experience in the country. Openness to new experiences is generally presented as a vocation (Hannerz, 1996) and often linked to career pathways. In most cases, geographical mobility is made possible by institutional frameworks in certain transnational networks and in the case of these humanitarians, the ICRC network in over 80 countries.

Excerpt 2. Lifelong interest in learning languages for discovering the culture and integrating with people. Interview with Karl, 13-01-2016.

1	*MRG:	what was what # <actually>[!] attracted you # to being a delegate?

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	*KAR:	um mainly ## it was my experience as a chil-d. travelling # with my parents +... what always attracts me is not to be a tourist somewhere-? but # to be <more> [!] than a tourist you know to be # actually< involved> [!] and and to have to <live> [!] in a country with the people-. so that's always been something that that e:r # I I appreciate ## discover <cultures> [!] discover um # the the: ## yeah the: the societies. and # I think the Japanese culture has has um ## er I mean I: I'm very interested in Japanese culture and and Japanese society is very complex and and very structured and ## and so I think # yeah ## this is something that's always # interested me.
10	*MRG:	yeah that's always been a part of you.
11	*KAR:	exactly.- so: I wanted to # see that again # by by working for the ICRC.
12	*MRG:	hm! very interesting.
13 14 15 16	*KAR:	yeah that that was really something that er +... yeah and that's what I – <why> [!] also I think languages are # are interesting because it's one way of # you know # integrating meeting people ## and having more interesting life # or more ex +//. interesting experience when you are in a country.

Excerpt 2 illustrates a recurrent trope of 'interest' (lines 7, 9 and 14) in connection to this experience of openness to other cultures. Despite his 'interest' in learning new cultural and linguistic practices, Karl pointed out that the ICRC did not require such an 'interest' back in the early nineties. Karl constructed himself as a multilingual and cosmopolitan humanitarian during a transitional period (1990s) when delegates were expected to be bilingual in French and English.

As part of this cosmopolitan orientation, Karl learned some local languages out of his personal initiative and not required for humanitarian work during his missions in the Balkans and in Kenya. During his one-year mission in the Balkans, he was waiting to enter Goražde (besieged city in present-day Bosnia and Hercegovina) for two months in the Belgrade office and he decided to learn 'Serbo-Croatian' with a private teacher because he had picked up some words from the translator that he had previously had in Banja Luka. For him, 'we did courses so it was very interesting, I like that very much'. In Nairobi, he decided to learn Kiswahili because 'everybody said Swahili is an easy language, it is a very important language in Africa'. In fact, he could later use it in Kenya and Congo and even in Zambia at a hotel. At that time, he

was a communications officer working in English and French so he had no need to learn other languages, but he learnt so that he could 'order food […] ask questions and understand the response' even though he found it difficult to have a conversation.

Xavier also constructed a cosmopolitan identity linked to intense exposure to new environments, humanitarian vocation and multilingualism when he told me about his motivations to join the ICRC (see Excerpt 3 below). He explained that he applied to the ICRC in response to his 'mid-life crisis', as he puts it, when he turned 30 years old and wanted a *life* change. Going out of Switzerland, which he describes as a 'golden cage' right before the excerpt below, to visit unusual destinations was linked to a professional project. Like Karl (line 3 in Excerpt 2), Xavier also referred to the trope of the tourist as the antithesis of a serious, safe humanitarian *worker*. He wanted to find work abroad 'for a good cause' (line 11) to use his capacities as professional, about which he only mentions 'language skills' (line 12) in connection to using two languages as a journalist. The ICRC allows him to visit 'crazy places' (line 6) safely and to improve his French (line 15), as well as using two more languages in his repertoire: English and Spanish (line 16). In this case, this delegate has capitalized on ICRC work to fulfil his professional, linguistic and mobility desires.

Excerpt 3. Valorizing multilingual skills for humanitarian work. Interview with Xavier, 18-03-2016.

1	*XAV:	yeah # everything was too perfect I had er my perfect li:fe # you know but it was
2		getting er I will need # I thought okay I'm 30 I'm still young-? I cannot imagine
3		staying here like thi:s # I need a real change-! I want to go out of Switzerland-? but
4		working on a: serious project # I don't want just to do a world trip # you kno:w +… I
5		want to work # I want to work abroad-? with a: humani- I thought humanitarian
6		organization I was # interested in it ## so to: to: go to crazy places where I cannot go
7		as a tourist-? like Iraq-? where I can be with somebody like ICRC who is serious #
8		who has a safety ear no # safety procedures so I will still feel safe enough-? but still be
9		exposed to a special place-? and do something good also I mean the: vocation of doing
10		a humanitarian thing was interesting to me ## to also use my: capacities as a
11		professional-? for a good cause ## so that was another motivation # basically ## and
12		yeah # use my language skills too because # in the Swiss news agency what I was
13		doing # I was translating news from French into German sometimes-? […] so that
14		was already something I enjoyed doing-? working with two languages # but I wa:s of
15		course only writing in German-? and then I wanted to: really improve my French # I

16		wanted to: er use also my English and my Spanish-? and there was no er no space in
17		my job # to use Spanish or English-? er only German ## so I: thought with the ICRC I
18		will improve my French which was at the time not # not very solid-?

Excerpt 3 merges personal and professional goals in Xavier's decision to join the ICRC at the turn of the century. By so doing, he re-valorized his linguistic repertoire in a globalized work environment, since he had been restricted to (Swiss) German and translations from French at the Swiss news agency. Despite his (reportedly) poor competences in French and the fact that German was 'useless' at the ICRC, Xavier was recruited for a first mission in Latin America probably because of his native language skills in Spanish, which set him apart from other candidates. In his own words, 'And I think because of my Spanish skills, because they sent me to [an officially Spanish-speaking country]. So I think that was I think my selling point, without knowing was my, was my Spanish.' These linguistic skills were, for him, an employability asset for this humanitarian agency.

Similarly to Karl, and in consonance with this cosmopolitan self, Xavier decided to learn Arabic for three years at the UN language center 'just out of a hobby' while he worked at the headquarters. He could capitalize on this new linguistic skill since this was one of the reasons why he was promoted to a managerial post in Northern Africa. In our interview, he stated that 'because of what I learned on a freelance basis? They said ah you know a little bit of Arabic, we can go and send you to [Northern Africa]'. Personal entrepreneurship (note the use of 'freelance') is the rationale for his linguistic investment in a highly-demanded language. Later on, the institution officially recognized this type of investment and Xavier was rewarded professionally, hence converting his linguistic capital into employability/economic capital.

Speaking an additional language apart from English and French could be not only an institutionally-recognized asset, but also an unrecognized skill in the field. For example, Carolyn used her native competences in Dutch in order to communicate in Afrikaans with prisoners in post-Apartheid South Africa who could not or would not use English, the

designated ICRC working language in this country. Therefore, she partly circumvented the ICRC institutional expectation to speak English in these interviews without witnesses since she could understand Afrikaans speakers but they could not understand her Dutch. In our interview, Carolyn tellingly said that 'I didn't go there as a you know it was not an official thing like here you have this Dutch-speaker to come to talk to, but it was just something I had which I could use'. In the next sub-section, we will look into these unplanned, bottom-up linguistic needs (and solutions) that emerge out of humanitarian work at the ICRC.

In sum, Karl, Xavier and Carolyn drew on their life trajectories marked by transnational families to construct a professional identity and sense of the self, based on dispositions and competences (including language skills and ability to deal with cultural differences) that (re)produce the idea of cosmopolitanism as an ethical outlook (see Jansson 2016).

5.2. Language Learning for Unplanned Linguistic Needs in the Field

After looking into the capitalization of transnational life trajectories to shape cosmopolitan and multilingual selves for humanitarian work, this second section looks into delegates' linguistic investments shaped by work-related unplanned or 'random' communicative needs (Duchêne, 2011) particularly linked to interpreters. This will show that flexible, entrepreneurial selves translate into (limited) linguistic investments in the field, which symbolically strengthen their cosmopolitan ethos and accentuate power dynamics with other employees.

The main unplanned linguistic need was linked to the unavailability of interpreters. Xavier's decision to learn Kurdish during his mission to Northern Iraq is illustrative. He was promised an Arabic interpreter (a problematic choice in Kurdistan) but it took seven months for an interpreter to arrive. As a delegate, he had to do interviews with Kurdish-speaking prisoners so he had to rely on an English-speaking prisoner as ad-hoc interpreter. This was identified as problematic to the delegate as this particular prisoner would get a powerful role as 'gatekeeper' and could potentially mistranslate as he pleased. By involving a third party, the delegate would

also go against the ICRC working modality of interviewing prisoners without witnesses. Therefore, Xavier decided to learn Kurdish with a private teacher for basic communication with the detainees and also with their families (even though local Kurdish staff would unofficially act as translators into English at the delegation premises). In his words, he learned the 'basic vocabulary' for prison visits, which are the typical questions asked to obtain personal information and ascertain the conditions of imprisonment. Then, he did not know what they were saying back to him but he still felt that 'it was the best solution because it allowed me to have private visits' (interview, 18-03-2016) and hence keep registers, follow up cases and deliver family correspondence. Xavier concluded that 'So I learned some basic Kurdish. And it was very er useful for me. But I nowadays I forgot most of it'.

Karl's work trajectory also presents local language learning due to the impossibility to recruit expatriate Tamil-English interpreters for detention work during his early 1990s mission in Sri Lanka. In the face of this unexpected turn, the organization took over individual initiatives to address unplanned linguistic needs. The ICRC organized a three-month intensive language course in the Eastern Tamil-speaking area for incoming delegates following the bottom-up initiative of a delegate's wife who learned Tamil with a school teacher. Karl was among the first delegates to be sent directly to the East to learn the language instead of staying in Colombo where Sinhala is the dominant language. Like Xavier above, Karl also learned 'very basic words and very basic vocabulary about all the detention matters all the, beating matters all the, many things related really to ICRC work, and especially detention work. But I could not go to the market and buy a tomato, you know' (interview, 13-01-2016). None of them has used the language again and they claim to have forgotten most of it after their mission, since they have not been able to use it. This might explain the ICRC's preference for regional and international linguas francas among expatriate workers and the relegation of 'smaller' languages to interpreters and local staff. However, we have seen that institutional linguistic planning does

not always fulfil the needs on the ground, especially in the absence of expatriate interpreters for detention visits. Dominant lingua franca frameworks tend to be insufficient for communication with beneficiaries in war situations, hence the importance of local languages and, for the ICRC delegate, interpreters (or failing this, language learning). This echoes findings in international NGOs which work in a handful of European linguas francas and generally do not plan for local language needs (Footitt et al., 2018). The ICRC, however, planned for interpreters in confidential detention visits but it was sometimes difficult to recruit expatriate interpreters into non-strategic languages like Kurdish or Tamil.

Although interpreters were generally provided in institutionally-designated Arabic- and Russian-speaking regions, some delegates who could not speak these working languages opted to (minimally) learn them in order to make sense of their environment and to monitor local staff's and interpreters' (language) work. This was Carolyn's case during her mission in Takijistan, where the delegation dealt with Russian, Tajik and Uzbek speakers. Since Tajik is linguistically close to Farsi, the delegation counted on Farsi interpreters from Afghanistan (in addition to Russian interpreters) for detention work. Carolyn decided to learn Russian, the regional lingua franca in ex-Soviet republics, rather than the local languages in Takijistan. In Excerpt 4, Carolyn narrates her decision to learn Russian not to be fluent in order to do ICRC work in this language, but to be able to follow conversations and 'not to be too dependent on the translator' in an unknown linguistic landscape. Like Xavier and Karl above, her narrative foregrounds the basic level of language as 'a few simple things' and the result of being able to understand and produce 'bits and pieces' of Russian in a multilingual context (see Footit et al., 2018 about Takijistan). This corresponds to Nowicka and Kaweh's findings that some humanitarian aid workers learned 'the basics of the language' to minimally understand a simple conversation to 'manage the situation', since they are provided with translation and have relatively little contact with locals (2009, p.61).

Excerpt 4. Learning Russian for 'following'. Interview with Carolyn, 12-02-2016.

1	*MRG:	why did you decide to learn Russian?
2 3 4 5	*CAR:	well if I wanted to go there I thought I might as well start to learn Russian # because # I knew I couldn't be fluent and I couldn't # you know # learn so fast that I could ## do official talks # a:nd a:nd and write official documents in Russian # but at least I wanted to know a little bit # as not to be totally dependent on your translator.
		[…]
6 7 8 9 10 11	*CAR:	you can at least <follow> [!] # and you can say **a few simple things** # you can say hello goodbye # thank you excuse me # and you can understa:nd # I mean – of course you pick up lots of words # and and and I'd stayed for a year-? and it was complicated because of course you had Russian and you had Tajik # and and ## um… yes-? and – but in the end you # you # kind of… you know # **understand bits and pieces** and it helps! and you can say little bits of bits and pieces.
12	*MRG:	aham # that that's very [>] important.
13 14	*CAR:	and you can read. [<] which in # of course…. I mean at least you can read on a road sign!

In our interview, Carolyn later added that it was useful to understand some Russian for ICRC work in tandem with an interpreter. Her partial linguistic knowledge allowed her to monitor the work of local interpreters. According to her, this was important because the local interpreters shortened her explanations in a post-Soviet culture of mistrust with regard to expatriate humanitarians and international agencies[iii]. She stated that 'I always found it *extremely* helpful to speak a *bit*, or to understand a *bit*. Then at least I can follow er more or less if we're going the right way!' (interview, 12-02-2016). Therefore, knowing 'bits and pieces' of a working language used in the field was useful for the international delegate to keep tabs on the interpreting or translation process from English. Xavier, who had learned Arabic and was later posted in Northern Africa as an office manager, also highlighted this monitoring aspect. In his words, 'So Arabic er helped me sometimes to, to, spot little things but, it was not enough to really make a full control or checking of the translation' (interview, 18-03-2016).

To sum up, the three ICRC delegates narrate their entrepreneurial decision to fill in the linguistic gaps in the field, which illuminates their power relations vis-à-vis national staff and (expat) interpreters.

6. Final Discussion

The analysis has mainly looked into the discursive construction of ICRC delegate profiles as cosmopolitan, flexible and entrepreneurial workers through linguistic capitalization and investment under the conditions of late capitalism. The 'ideal' mobile humanitarian is a bundle of skills (Urciuoli, 2008) that include not only 2-3 dominant linguas francas for employment but also 'international experience', which post-internationalization Swiss delegates constructed as cosmopolitan orientations to other cultures and languages indexed by truncated repertoires of non-strategic languages like Kurdish.

The ICRC conforms to NGO models of 'strategic multilingualism' (Tesseur, 2014) reproducing dominant linguas franca frameworks with its recent linguistic requirements for mobile employees, namely, English and French as administrative languages as well as another 'strategic language' (be it Arabic, Spanish or Russian). Hence, it contributes to the hegemony of English in the humanitarian market and the maintenance of French as the parent language of the institution. Given their mobility from mission to mission, delegates are only required to speak major linguas francas and they do not stay in the field long enough to develop measurable linguistic competences in other non-strategic languages. This is possible because English tends to be the working language in many regions (with the exception of Latin America), which involves (institutionally invisible) linguistic mediation by national staff and institutionalized interpreting in confidential encounters conducted by expatriate specialists. Compared to NGOs, the ICRC seems to be increasingly aware of language issues in delegate recruitment since 'internationalization' in 1992.

According to my informants, the ICRC did not generally offer linguistic training in any working languages, but some delegates followed UN language courses in Geneva or with private teachers in the field at their own initiative. I argue that the humanitarians' flexible selves, expressed through their predisposition to language learning, are productive for the international agency. For example, a delegate's partner's initiative to learn Tamil was taken over by the ICRC to minimally train a new batch of delegates in Sri Lanka. Besides, the delegates' linguistic investments out of 'interest' were instrumental for the organization to address unplanned needs, such as conducting interviews without witnesses with Kurdish speakers in the absence of an interpreter. The delegates' linguistic investments all index their cosmopolitan openness as delegates (vs. tourists, Hannerz, 1996) while only some might be institutionally tested, recognized and considered for a post if they are deemed 'strategic', such as Xavier's Arabic. Besides, the ICRC indirectly takes advantage of the delegates' multilingual repertoires, which might include languages that were not required for employment but which were used in the field, such as Xavier's Spanish in Latin America or Carolyn's understanding of Afrikaans in South Africa.

Whenever I asked a humanitarian worker which languages s/he could speak, many used their geographical trajectory – with a focus on their humanitarian careers – to explain their linguistic repertoire as traces of their lived experiences. Similarly to Roth (2019), I claim that their linguistic investments are symbols of distinction in the competitive humanitarian workplace. These humanitarians capitalized their life-long 'interest' in discovering other cultures and their multilingual repertoires to construct professional selves who learn languages 'out of a hobby', as Karl's private Serbo-Croatian classes during the Goražde siege or Xavier's Arabic lessons at the UN language center show. Personal goals can be conflated with institutional ones in their narrated trajectories. Personal interest or vocation is seemingly at odds with economic gain and associated with altruism, but this is turned into a symbolic

employability asset in the humanitarian market. Martín-Rojo (2019) claims that these narratives that go beyond individual capital accumulation (e.g. learning languages to travel or to communicate with cultural others) foreground the role of leisure and pleasure within a neoliberal model of entrepreneurship that gives rise to the 'self-made speaker':

> To some extent, the contradiction between the hedonistic values of enjoying learning and the ascetic values of the entrepreneurial aim of accumulating languages seems to disappear when two kinds of social obligation are established as equivalents, namely, the duty of performing well and the duty of pleasure (p. 177)

These humanitarians construct language learning 'as a hobby' to brand themselves as cosmopolitan selves, epitomizing the required 'international experience' in their past trajectories and also present their linguistic repertoire as 'bits and pieces' of non-strategic languages indexing their humanitarian trajectory, in order to position themselves as efficient communicators who can tackle unexpected linguistic challenges in the field. Their legitimate and powerful stance as 'delegates' emanates from the combination of pleasure (and vocation) with performance.

This paper casts some light on the conditions for convertibility of linguistic capital into symbolic and economic capital by mobile workers in the humanitarian field. The three delegate trajectories show that linguistic investment does not always have an economic return owing to the definition of strategic multilingualism as a selection of measurable linguas francas for mobile humanitarian work. To my knowledge, learning non-strategic languages such as Serbo-Croatian, Kurdish or Russian did not translate into economic capital in the form of a promotion or higher remuneration. I argue that linguistic investment into these languages devoid of economic value still pays off for ICRC delegates, since they are convertible into symbolic capital that reinforces their cosmopolitan orientation and bears the traces of their mobile

trajectories as humanitarian delegates. In other words, some languages do not count as convertible skills for mobile staff in the competitive humanitarian market, but they serve the purpose of discursively (re)creating a flexible, entrepreneurial and mobile employee in a competitive international landscape comprising UN agencies and international NGOs. This study confirms Roth's findings that multilingual skills and cosmopolitan capital are convertible into a professional asset depending on one's positioning in the humanitarian sector (or 'aid industry', p. 43). While delegates can mobilize their investment into 'basic vocabulary' in local languages to craft a professional identity, national staff's competences in the local/regional languages, as well as their technical competences, are taken for granted (Roth, 2019). Besides, the ICRC's requirement that delegates speak a number of dominant linguas francas contrasts with, and is made possible by, the linguistic skills of institutional interpreters hired to do language work.

Methodologically, interviews pay attention to self-identifications and narrated experiences among these mobile humanitarians, especially those from the Global North (Janssen, 2016; Mülli, 2017; cf. Roth, 2019). Together with institutional documents, they contribute to historicizing analyses of institutional transformations through workers' trajectories. Future research into international organizations like the ICRC should turn towards ethnographic observations in the field to grasp the negotiation and the value of language as 'cosmopolitan capital' in unequal encounters involving national staff, interpreters, authorities and beneficiaries. Participant observations would provide in-depth accounts of the limits and affordances of certain dominant linguas francas, the role of humanitarian interpreters and the mobilization of cosmopolitan identities in contexts other than the research interview. Despite the difficult access to local offices and delegations owing to confidentiality issues, this would shift the focus away from headquarters and mobile workers in the Global North towards locations and different categories of employees in/from the Global South.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

The spoken data extracts have been transcribed following a slightly adapted version of LIDES (Language Interaction Data Exchange System) which was proposed by Codó (2008, p. xi-xiii).

Transcription conventions used

+. . .	trailing off
#	pause
[>]	overlap follows
[<]	overlap precedes
<>	scope symbols
:	lengthened vowel
::	longer lengthening of vowel
-	abrupt cutoff
[!]	stressing
+//.	self-interruption
.	end-of-turn falling contour
?	end-of-turn rising contour
!	end-of-turn exclamation contour
-.	intra-turn falling contour
-?	intra-turn rising contour
-!	intra-turn exclamation contour

Notes

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[i] My translation from: 'l'investissement langagier est également soumis à des processus de légitimation qui permettent et limitent la possibilité et la reconnaissance de cet investissement, ceci en fonction de ce qui compte comme locuteur légitime dans un espace donné'.

[ii] All the names in this article are pseudonyms and the informants' identities have been anonymized to the greatest extent possible in this article.

[iii] The ICRC could not enter the USSR until the fall of the Iron Curtain the 1990s.