*Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 59 (2024): 291–323*
*doi: 10.14746/stap.2025.59.17*

# LINGUISTIC HETEROGENEITY AS A MEANS TO COMMUNICATE WAR EXPERIENCE IN PHILIP CAPUTO'S *A RUMOR OF WAR*

EWA KUJAWSKA-LIS[1]

ABSTRACT

Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* is a fictionalised autobiographical story that presents war from the perspective of one of its participants. In order to suffuse his text with verisimilitude, Caputo introduces various languages and their varieties, ranging from dialectal variations of American English and the professional jargon of the US marines to inclusion of other languages, such as French and Vietnamese, as well as Japanese and American pidgin English. This linguistic heterogeneity, quite different from Bakhtin's polyphony, as the different languages do not have the same status in the memoir, serves to authenticate the story, to reflect the realities of this particular war, and to personalise characters, indicating their social and ethnic backgrounds. It also affects the reception of the text depending on the experience of the readers (the knowing and unknowing audience). Language in this case creates a bond of war experience with some readers (those who are/were familiar with the realities of Vietnam) while, paradoxically, generating some emotional distance for others. Additionally, the author provides each chapter with an epigraph, mostly quotes from English-language literature, and in particular the Great War poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, thus further diversifying the linguistic landscape of the text and universalising war. The purpose of this analysis is to explore linguistic heterogeneity (understood as the employment of different languages and their varieties) in Caputo's memoir to pinpoint the aforementioned functions. Methodologically, the analysis is primarily based on the close reading of selected passages that include linguistic varieties to indicate their effects. It looks at how Caputo operationalises language varieties to achieve specific outcomes in his work treated as a linguistically heterogenous text, whereby the employment of particular varieties does not equal the empowerment of characters or minority groups they represent and does not necessarily provide their perspectives on that war.

Keywords: Philip Caputo; Vietnam War; *A Rumor of War*; linguistic heterogeneity; war experience.

*A Rumor of War* written by Philip Caputo, the Vietnam War veteran, originally published in 1977, is a fictionalised memoir that presents this war from the

[1] University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. E-mail: ewa.kujawska-lis@uwm.edu.pl.

viewpoint of one of its participants. This analysis examines how Caputo creates a double perspective (that of the combat soldier and of the voice controlling the narrative) via the carefully shaped linguistic layer of the memoir. The aim is to indicate the functions of introduced linguistic heterogeneity and its effects, including the readers' potentially different engagement with the text depending on their experiences. Numerous critical studies have been written both about the Vietnam War itself and the cultural narratives of that conflict. The diachronic distance allows presently for more revisionist analyses to appear, representing diverse ideological approaches and exploring the areas that were previously unlikely to be discussed, such as nationalist militarism, mythologisation of that war from the American perspective, as well as racism, sexism, genocide and many other "absent contents".[2] These new investigations look at the war from the perspective of gender inequality, bringing to light sexual violence,[3] from the angle of the imperial exceptional discourse,[4] and from the position of ethnocentrism,[5] to name just a few. While many recent authors adopt broad historical, cultural, and ideological perspectives, this paper has a humbler scope and aim, yet it fills in a certain analytical gap. It considers only one aspect of language – its heterogeneity – as exploited by Caputo. Language is obviously a constitutive element in communicating any experience. But the Vietnam War seems to have required a special way of communicating. As Peter McInerney (1981: 190) claims, "writers about the American experience must 'search for the language' that can bring Vietnam into our consciousness". The veteran-cum-writer

---

2 I am using inverted commas here as some of these topics are (to various extent) present in the narratives but were often purposefully ignored or overlooked by critics.

3 For instance, Gina Marie Weaver's *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War*, of 2010, the first book tackling the sexual abuse of American soldiers against Vietnamese women. As she states, rape was not entirely absent from Vietnam War fiction and memoirs, yet it was not the subject that critics and the public wished to acknowledge for various ideological reasons (Weaver 2010: xii).

4 This is represented by William V. Spanos's *American Exceptionalism in the Age of Globalization. The Specter of Vietnam* of 2008 in which he argues that "the violence, bordering on genocide, America perpetrated against an 'other' that refused to accommodate itself to its mission in the wilderness of Vietnam came to haunt America as a contradiction that menaced the legitimacy of its perennial self-representation as the exceptionalist and 'redeemer nation'" (Spanos 2008: ix).

5 Renny Christopher's 1995 *The Viet Nam War/the American War. Images and Representations in Euro-American and Vietnamese Exile Narratives* focuses on the stereotypical image of the Vietnamese created by American authors and their inability (or reluctance) to create a fair portrayal of the victims. The very notion of victimhood is problematic as Americans for a long time refused to admit the victimisation of the Vietnamese people. In another recent revisionist book, *Victimhood in American Narratives of the War in Vietnam* of 2020, Aleksandra Musiał claims that the Vietnam War was removed from history (purposefully mythologised) in various narratives in order not to smash the sense of mainstream American identity. These narratives, penned by Americans, turned the aggressors into victims.

who is credited with having invented a new language for that new experience was Michael Herr. David Rabe, himself a veteran and writer, observed that the author of *Dispatches* "has written in the mad-pop-poetic/bureaucratically camouflaged language in which Vietnam was lived" (qtd. in McInerney 1981: 190). While others have examined some aspects of language in the narratives about the Vietnam War, including Caputo's account, especially his ironic comparisons,[6] but also his "language of spectral invisibility" (Spanos 2008: 165),[7] the linguistic varieties woven into his story have not been given much attention.

Caputo's memoir is only one text in a countless body of works that have emerged as a direct and indirect result of the Vietnam War. The status of this war in American history and culture is unique as is evidenced by the fact that it has generated more books than any other military conflict that America has been involved in thus far (Beidler 2009: 15). As summarised by Philip Beidler, these works represent all major genres: history, biography, memoir, novels, poems, and plays. But they can be also subcategorised into more specific types: policy literature and psychological literature; travel books and detective books; in country-books and back-in-the world books; army, navy, marine, and air force books; grunt books and REMF[8] books; nurse books, USO entertainer books, and Red Cross Volunteer books. Ethnic perspectives are offered by African-American, Native-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American books, but also – ever more often – by Vietnamese authored stories. Additionally, there are works written in specific styles, mirroring prominent texts and authors: guts and glory books, Catch-22 books, Nelson De Mille books, and Daniele Steele books. Finally, Viet Pulp contains LRRP[9] books, SEAL books, Green Beret books, Marine Recon books, and sniper books (Beidler 2009: 15). Nevertheless, the distinctive status of the Vietnam War is problematic and ambiguous. As Donald Ringnalda (1994: viii) argues, "[t]the uniqueness of the

---

6 McInerney stresses that the incongruity emerging from Caputo's text, often achieved via ironic comparison, is linked to the "impossibility of creating any 'absolute truth' about Vietnam" (McInerney 1981: 203).

7 Spanos directs attention to such words as "phantoms", "chimera", "mysterious wraiths", "djinns", and "shadows" that Caputo selects to indicate the "spectral invisibility of the enemy and his loss of the sense of control and directionality" (Spanos 2008: 121). The representation of the enemy as spectral and invisible creates the image of the Other that haunts the American exceptionalist standing, but it also evokes the sense of alienation of the soldiers.

8 This acronym stands for "rear echelon mother-fucker" and in US military slang refers to a non-combat soldier, i.e. serving in a supportive or administrative role. It originated during the Vietnam War era and was first used in the 1970s in *Newsweek* (https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1175109647). The acronym has subsequently entered the military lexicon in the UK, but illustrates well one point that this paper seeks to make: the rift between the knowing and unknowing audience.

9 Acronym standing for "long-range reconnaissance patrol".

war is one of the most powerful myths concocted by a national psychosis that seduces citizens into denying history or recalling it sentimentally. According to that myth, Vietnam was the one rotten apple in American history; the toxicity of the barrel itself goes undetected". Though veterans are most susceptible to this pathology, "the best Vietnam writers transcend the psychology of uniqueness" (Ringnalda 1994: viii), Caputo being one of them. His voice is dissenting. His rhetoric communicates "negation, disappointment, and disillusionment" (Gaspar 1983: 190).

Charles J. Gaspar Jr. categorises writing about the American experience in Vietnam into three types. First, there are works that tend to romanticise the war-hero and "intend to convey a sense of combat as a proving ground for the participant, as an event which, having been completed, infuses an additional worth upon the warrior" (Gaspar 1983: 4). The second type includes anti-war works; and the third those that explore the psychological conditions while demonstrating "the very profound need to extrapolate the soldier's experience to a larger, national context" (Gaspar 1983: 7). In this vast literary landscape, *A Rumor of War*, representing the last type, is already a classic text, despite Beidler's claim that as regards Vietnam War literature "[a]ll efforts at envisioning a canon here, even something like a core list, must be ultimately futile" (Beidler 2009: 15).[10] It is described as a "standard American personal narrative" (Beidler 2009: 26), "wrenching personal memoir" (O'Brien 2009: 3), "self-conscious classical memoir" (Myers 1988: 143), or "an admixture of confessional autobiography and personal and national history" (Gaspar 1983: 8). Caputo himself is generally bracketed together with such writers as Tim O'Brien, James Webb, Larry Heinemann, and Michael Herr, who are considered the core Anglo Vietnam War literature writers that most critical studies focus on (Calloway 2009: 143).

Published two years after the conflict ended,[11] *A Rumor of War* is one of the five key texts that appeared almost immediately after the war and articulated

---

10 Paradoxically, Beidler himself provides what he terms "reading suggestions" that contain "core texts" and embrace: "five classic general-interest texts on the American War in Vietnam", "Four works on the Indochinese contexts of the American War", "Standard American personal narrative" (this category includes *A Rumor of War*), "Major poetic responses to the war", "Three classics of Vietnam War drama", and a list of essential novels (Beidler 2009: 26–27); thus in fact he compiles a set of canonical texts.

11 The Vietnam War lasted from 1961 till 1975 (Lawrence 2008: 1), though specific dates vary from author to author, especially concerning its beginning. Often, the official date is 1965 when American Marines stormed the shores of Da Nang (Boyle 2015: 1). Nevertheless, 1975 is universally considered as the conclusion of American involvement. It was then that the People's Army of Viet Nam and Viet Cong troops entered Saigon and the Americans and Vietnamese allies were evacuated; Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Ming City and the country was reunited as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. All ties to Viet Nam were cut off by the United States.

its trauma.[12] Tobey C. Herzog (2017: 74) refers to Caputo's narrative as confession and analyses it with the application of Paul Fussell's tripatriate paradigm of the combat soldier's "coming of age" (Herzog 2017: 59). In other words, *A Rumor of War* illustrates the three-stage process of transition from initial innocence to gained experience and, finally, to post-conflict considerations. It therefore complies with the definition of a literary war memoir formulated by Fussell that comprises three elements: "first, the sinister or absurd or even farcical preparation … ; second, the unmanning experience of battle; and third, the retirement from the line to a contrasting (usually pastoral) scene, where there is time and quiet for consideration, mediation, and reconstruction" (Fussell 2000 [1975]: 130). For Herzog, *A Rumor of War*, despite being a record of Caputo's experiences and detailing a specific conflict, complemented with social-political comments concerning it, tackles "the timeless theme of innocence savaged and destroyed on the battlefield" (Herzog 2017: 67). Consequently, it is not merely a personal account, but "a story of an individual's loss of innocence as well as a country's loss of innocence and coming of age in a war that politically was America's first defeat and left the country scarred" (Herzog 2017: 67). This approach universalises the experience, transferring it from a personal to national trauma.

Analogously, Beidler (2007: 162) argues that the most recent works have a similar structure that allows their authors to make sense of the Vietnam experience: "All of them start out ostensibly as rather conventional narratives of initiation, of the passage from innocence to experience, with the war itself frequently becoming, as has often been the case in our literature, some ultimate crucible of the American soul". The critic, himself a Vietnam veteran, sees this, as well as discovering the "dirty secret" about the war (most revisionist studies), as an echo of Caputo's experience voiced in *A Rumor of War*. As he notices, the type of personal memoir as exemplified by Caputo's work, which mingles an experiential narrative and the literary version of events, aspires "to some larger aesthetic sense of representative truth-telling" (Beidler 2007: 153). This is one of the aspects that differentiate war memoirs from diaries: the former attempt to structure and interpret the experience post-factum in order to deal with trauma, both individual and collective, while the latter more immediately record the reality with limited or no capacity to make sense of it. As Fussell (2000 [1975]: 310) indicates: "The further personal written materials move from the form of the

[12] The other texts included: Ron Kovic's memoir *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976), Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), James Webb's *Fields of Fire* and Tim O'Brien's *Going after Cacciato* both published in 1978. Although sections of journalistic *Dispatches* appeared during the war, only when the conflict became history was it possible to process its trauma, rather than merely register what had happened.

daily diary, the closer they approach to the figurative and the fictional. The significances belonging to fiction are attainable only as 'diary' or annals move toward the mode of memoir, for it is only the ex post facto view of an action that generates coherence or makes irony possible".

This is specifically the case with *A Rumor of War* whose literariness is evident in epigraphs that precede each section and chapter, in the often figurative language employed to narrate the story, and the bitterly ironic assessments. Additionally, the process of narration involves complex experimentation, for instance, when "narration at large breaks itself down into freezeframe stills, visions of war literally flashing by, their passage punctuated only by a series of photographic clicks" (Beidler 2007: 154). Caputo reveals his experience filtered by the consciousness and knowledge of the results of his and not only his actions in an attempt to comprehend and interpret the forces behind the transformation from a novice in the war to its active participant. This is only possible when the war is over, and the events can be cognitively processed.

This personal perspective as well as transformation are stressed by Thomas Myers who views Caputo as "the custodian of his own memoir and chronicler of his own evil and penance" (Myers 1988: 91). This, however, does not mean that no larger processes apply here. On the contrary, any text dealing with traumatic events such as war, attempts to structure not only personal but also collective memory in order to avoid "collective amnesia", as Caputo terms the tendency "to look away, to search for images that would not subvert the national belief system" (Myers 1988: 141). The very process of writing about war makes it impossible to forget about it. But the form of a memoir strongly foregrounds the private dimension (which can, nevertheless, be universalised), whereby the structuring of experience occurs via the confrontation of the pre-war ignorance with the combat reality. Consequently, "Caputo consistently presents two figures in the memoir: the warrior in the process of historical transformation and the finished product, a carefully controlled narrative voice that presents evidence and finally passes judgment on his former persona" (Myers 1988: 92). This doubling can be extended to encompass those who are uninitiated (innocent in the sense that they have not experienced the war first-hand) and the transformed ones (other fellow veterans).

The dual perspective in Caputo's work, with him being at the periphery of the action, while consciously shaping the narrative has yet another function. On the one hand, the protagonist attempts to understand himself as part of the war. In this sense, *A Rumor of War* exemplifies the "literature of witness", both in epistemological and ethical dimensions. The former involves "the writer's commitment to depicting war events and violence in detail" (Martins 2012: 6) and has a didactic slant. This is linked with accounting for the experience as lived there. On the other hand, the narrative, with the narrator existing in various

temporal dimensions, demonstrates "a need to understand the significance of the Vietnam experience from a broader, more encompassing experience than simply the personal" (Gaspar 1983: 9). Caputo presents the Vietnam War as distorting both for the individual and the entire nation (Gaspar 1983: 10). Thus, his memoir aims to evoke the sense of "the way it was" and this is partly achieved via verisimilitude obtained, inter alia, through language varieties. At the same time, Caputo intends to make sense of Vietnam in a larger historical context (Gaspar 1983: 193). Consequently, he "recognizes the fictive character of his historical reconstruction and exploits it" (McInerney 1981: 200). This is evident in his extensive use of intertextuality, in the structure of the text, and the rhetoric that seeks to universalise the experience.

Before proceeding to the analysis proper, some terminological issues need to be clarified. The term *linguistically heterogeneous text* is employed here as an umbrella term to refer to a text that incorporates ethnic languages and their variants. Although it may seem too broad and inclusive, it is purposely so, especially as regards inclusiveness. This term is introduced to differentiate such texts from the notion of a polyphonic novel and heteroglossia as well as from the idea of diglossia and plurilingualism that refer to different literary and linguistic phenomena.

As argued by Mikhail Bakhtin, linguistic stratification, or – more broadly – linguistic heterogeneity that also encompasses various ethnic languages, is a specific feature of the novel as a genre:

> The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic language: languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour … this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite of the novel as a genre.
>
> (Bakhtin 1981: 262)

Nevertheless, such stratification does not need to be overtly evident in each novel, and even if it is apparently absent, heteroglossia may still be observed. Elżbieta Tabakowska (1990: 71–78), focusing on heteroglossia, or various voices, within the speech of one literary character, evidences the internal dialogism of such character. She introduces the term *linguistic polyphony* and stresses that it "has an important part to play in fictional narrative, where Bakhtin first discovered its presence. The duet inevitably following from the non-identity of author and narrator turns into a trio whenever the author resorts to celebrated *style indirect libre*, and into a quartet when what the narrator is made to say itself becomes a composition for two voices" (Tabakowska 1990:

74). Linguistic polyphony understood as this musically-inspired duet, trio, and quartet of voices is not always identical with the concept of linguistic heterogeneity, i.e. the stratification of language into dialects, sociolects, jargons, idiolects, and the presence of ethnic languages in one text.

Voices in literature model the fictional reality and confront different visions of the world, but they do not necessarily need to be expressed by distinct linguistic codes. Bakhtin, noticing various functions and modes of existence of voices in literary works, in which they may be of equal importance, or one voice may be superior, authoritative and evaluative, distinguishes between dialogic (polyphonic) and monologic novels. In the former, characters speak in "[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin 2003 [1984]: 6) that are not subject to the authoritative control, as exemplified by Dostoevsky's works. In the latter, characters' voices are subject to such control, as in Tolstoy's novels. Polyphony in literature then concerns power relationships (or rather the lack of power dominance thereof) within the text and may, but does not need to, involve linguistic differentiation. As indicated by J. A. Cuddon (1991: 239), the distinction into dialogic (polyphonic) and monologic novels "does not imply that characters are necessarily differentiated by an idiosyncratic style of speech or by their idiolect". In Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (monologic) characters are more recognizable by their individualised speech (idiolects characterised by geographical, social, professional, or idiosyncratic varieties) than in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (dialogic/polyphonic). Thus, a monologic novel (with one dominating voice) may include linguistic varieties, whereas a dialogic (polyphonic) novel (with a plurality of equally important voices) does not need to contain different linguistic codes. Bakhtin actually stresses that his approach is translinguistic rather than linguistic (Cuddon 1991: 239). His idea of *polyphony* foregrounds the expression of different points of views and communication/the clash of dissimilar attitudes and ideologies, yet this communication does not need to occur through overt linguistic differentiation. Thus, in order to prevent confusion between literary (Bakhtinian) and linguistic approaches, it appears to be safer to adopt the umbrella term *linguistically heterogeneous text* for works that intermingle varieties of one ethnic language and also contain other languages, irrespective of the dialogic (polyphonic) or monologic nature of such a text (Kujawska-Lis 2017a: 25).

The descriptive notion of a *linguistically heterogeneous text* is also more inclusive than the term *plurilingual text* that draws on the relatively contemporary concept of plurilingualism. As opposed to multilingualism (the knowledge of more than one language, or the coexistence of different languages in a given society), plurilingualism emphasizes the individual's experience of language as it expands from the language heard at home, to that of society and further to that

of other nations and peoples. Such an approach "leads to the distinction between plurilingualism as a speaker's competence (being able to use more than one language) and multilingualism as the presence of languages in a given geographical area: there is a shift, therefore, from a perspective focusing on languages (a state may be referred to as monolingual or multilingual) to one that focuses on speakers" (Council of Europe 2007: 10). What follows, a plurilingual text would imply a text that focuses on a person's use of languages and, in fact, on that person's capacity and competence to learn more than one language.

From another perspective, plurilingualism also highlights the value of linguistic tolerance within individuals and countries. The term *plurilingual text* would then indicate a text written by a plurilingual writer, whose personal experience is rendered naturally via various languages, rather than a text which incorporates language varieties for such purposes as verisimilitude or character individualisation. In other words, a *plurilingual text* would be a narrower category than that of a *linguistically heterogeneous text*. Samia Mehres (1992: 122), for instance, thus addresses the issue of the subversiveness of postcolonial texts: "in many ways these postcolonial plurilingual texts in their own right resist and ultimately exclude the monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: 'in-between' at once capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the reading experience". She refers, in particular, to the experience of Third World postcolonial plurilingual writers, such as the Moroccan sociologist, novelist and poet, Abdelkebir Khatibi, who writes in the language of the ex-colonisers, intermingling various languages, or the Tunisian writer Abdelwahab Meddeb, in whose works, exemplifying plurilingual texts, Arabic and French rework and rewrite each other.

Analogously, a *linguistically heterogeneous text* would be a broader category than a *diglossic text* that is a double-voiced text in which two languages or dialects used by a single language community appear. Ever since Charles A. Ferguson defined diglossia as "a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation" (Ferguson 1959: 336), there has emerged an extensive body of literature discussing its various aspects, including actual and potential persistence worldwide (Gvozdanović 2014: 4).

Although functionally differentiated as a coexistence of formal (high variety, H) and informal (low variety, L), Ferguson does not rule out the diglossic situation when the standard variety (or varieties) of a language is used vis-á-vis

regional or social dialects, claiming that "some instances of this relation may be close to diglossia or perhaps even better considered as diglossia" (Ferguson 1959: 336). The non-diglossic situation would involve the standard language being based on "an indigenous variety primarily acquired and spoken in that region" (Gvozdanović 2014: 5), or, in other words, the H variety being regularly used as a medium of ordinary conversation (Ferguson 1959: 337). Thus, considering characteristic features of diglossia,[13] it may be assumed that diglossic texts might encompass not only those that exploit the H and L varieties, represented by Arab writers, for instance Yuusif al-Sibaa'i, who employ Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic (Abdel-Malek 1972: 132–141), but also contemporary Scottish writers, such as James Kelman (whose novels are written in Glaswegian) and Irvine Welsh (who introduces Edinburgh vernacular contrasted with Standard English).[14]

A *linguistically heterogeneous text* would then incorporate all the above enumerated situations, though not necessarily simultaneously. In other words, it would contain linguistic stratification (geographical dialects, sociolects, professional jargons, idiolects), irrespective of the relationship of voices in such a text indicative of its polyphonic or monologic status. It might include different ethnic languages, as in the case of plurilingual texts, yet it would not need to be written by a plurilingual artist and be influenced by the ideological, historical, and cultural determinants. It might exploit the High and Low varieties as well as standard versus dialects differentiation, as in the case of diglossic texts. Hence linguistic heterogeneity refers to a number of linguistic situations. The notion, as an umbrella term, may be then, depending on the fictional reality in a particular text and the modes of language employment, subdivided into those enumerated categories: a polyphonic novel (with or without linguistic differentiation), a monologic novel (with or without linguistic differentiation), a plurilingual novel, or a diglossic novel. But it can be also applied to non-fictional texts, or fictionalised ones, such as memoirs.

*A Rumor of War* is written in the first-person narration, with the author maintaining two roles simultaneously: that of narrator and of a participant in the

---

13 These include function (the H variety in formal and the L variety in informal situations), prestige (superiority of the H variety), literary heritage in the H variety, acquisition (primary acquisition of the L variety and the acquisition of the H variety in formal education circumstances), standardisation of the H variety, stability, grammar, lexicon, and phonology (Ferguson 1959: 328–336).

14 The clash between Edinburgh vernacular and Standard English is most evident in *Trainspotting* in the character of Renton; however, the case of *Trainspotting* is complicated, as this novel might be classified as a linguistically heterogeneous text rather than a purely diglossic text. It features Scots, English, Standard Scottish English, Edinburgh and Glasgow vernaculars, Asian English, Cockney, Brummie, stylisation into French and Sean Connery's speech, and third languages: French and Spanish (Kujawska-Lis 2017b: 101).

described events. The perspective is highly personalised. The work offers an eyewitness account, though filtered through memory (Herzog 2017: 5). Since the memoir is representative of autobiographical writing, the category of truth is far from a neutral notion in such a text. As Paul John Eakin (2001: 115) indicates, "[t]elling the truth is the most familiar of the rules we associate with autobiographical discourse". This truth-telling is, however, a complicated issue and the expectation of truth-telling is that of the reader. Timothy Dow Adams (1990: 8), commenting on the confusion regarding the genre of autobiography, observes that "critics of autobiography must also distinguish between historical truth, propositional truth, personal truth, psychological truth, narrative truth, and conditional truth". Given that any act of writing is always filtered through the writing consciousness, truth is virtually impossible to test objectively. Consequently, "[a]utobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and … the self that is the center of autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (Eakin 1985: 3). Modern autobiography is perceived as a text in which memory and imagination are complementary and "autobiographers … no longer believe that autobiography can offer a faithful and unmediated reconstruction of a historically verifiable past; instead it expresses the play of the autobiographical act itself, in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness" (Eakin 1985: 5).

Caputo stresses in the Prologue that an attempt is made not to filter the experiences selectively but rather to provide a true-to-life account as far as possible: "This book is not a work of the imagination. The events related are true, the characters real, though I have used fictitious names in some places. I have tried to describe accurately what the dominant event in the life of my generation, the Vietnam War, was like for the men who fought in it. Toward that end, I have made a great effort to resist the veteran's inclination to remember things the way he would like them to have been rather than the way they were" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: xx–xxi). This introductory note suggests that Caputo is neither concerned with exaggerating the horror of combat to make an anti-war statement (though any text documenting war may be to some extent regarded as such) nor diminishing the atrocities to ease his conscience, but is rather interested in the presentation of what he endured and how it affected him personally. This impact may, however, be representative for other fellow soldiers, though, obviously, not all of them as individual reactions to traumatic events vary.

As another Vietnam War veteran and celebrated writer, Tim O'Brien (2009: 5) observes: "To participate in warfare, no matter how heroically, is to participate in evil. … [T]he best literature about the American War in Vietnam, or about any other war, is that which is ruthlessly faithful to the moral stresses and ambiguities of sanctioned murder". He further comments: "Any war story, if it is to be a true

war story, must take account of its context, and that context is one of overwhelming misery and horror and terror and grief and despair" (O'Brien 2009: 6). For him, the realism of the story does not lie in its absolute verisimilitude: "verisimilitude or historical accuracy is not the province of art" (O'Brien 2009: 7), but in reactions it evokes in readers since an emotional response is more important than the "true-to-reality" approach. Caputo, writing a memoir rather than a fictional story that O'Brien alludes to, in a highly compelling manner achieves what the latter postulates, while not compromising on verisimilitude. One of its facets is linguistic heterogeneity.[15]

During the Vietnam War, American military forces were ethnically diversified, more so than during any previous conflicts. Given the draft, African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic-Americas, and Asian-Americans fought side by side with whites. For ethnic minorities, participation in the war was often motivated economically rather than primarily enforced by conscription, as exemplified by African-Americans. In the early years of the war, "[m]ilitary service was viewed not as an undue burden but as an opportunity, a chance for both social and economic advancement. Consequently, blacks joined the service in great numbers and reenlisted at over twice the rate of whites" (Westheider 1997: 2). Caputo is less concerned with the ethnic mix than with the general social, economic, and educational background of the soldiers. When recollecting his first command, "a partial roster of 2d platoon, C Company, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 24), he explicitly identifies only one black man, Corporal Banks, "a soft-spoken black who had fought in Korea" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 24), who is actually not given his voice in the narrative. The remaining marines under his command seem to be white, like PFC Devlin, "an all-American-boy, nineteen, with blond hair, blue eyes" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 25). As if not wishing to typify black speakers by their language, Caputo does not attribute non-standard varieties to them, as can be seen in the dialogue further in the story between him and Smith: "'You guys all right?' 'Outside of being cold, wet, miserable, hungry, and scared shitless, we're just fine, sir.' 'No casualties?' 'No, sir. Because I'm black, the shells couldn't see me'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 258–259). What is stressed is the soldier's ironic distance to the situation rather than his ethnicity. This indicates Caputo's deliberate choice to avoid stereotyping black soldiers via their speech that might indicate a racist attitude.

Although Wallace Terry (a black journalist for "Time" magazine who spent time with black soldiers) reported that Vietnam was a place of discrimination with "another war being fought … between black and white Americans" (qtd. in Goodwin 2017), this is not the picture given by Caputo. Rather,

[15] Some examples discussed here were previously analysed from the point of view of a translator of Vietnam War stories (see Kujawska-Lis 2017a and 2017c).

he articulates the positive race relations as evidenced by Frank McGee (a white NBC journalist who also spent time in Vietnam) who concluded: "Nowhere in America have I seen Negroes and whites as free, open and uninhibited with their associations. I saw no eyes clouded with resentment" (qtd. in Goodwin 2017). Eventually, racial discrimination turned out to be well-documented. Still many testimonies of African-American soldiers confirmed McGee's observations. This is also the image evoked by Caputo's memoir in which the presentation of the blacks is not racially underscored, also via the language. When the black soldier is explicitly given his voice, he speaks standard language, except for the profanity.

It is the general demographics rather than race specifically that Caputo emphasizes. In generalising about his men, he comments:

> Most of them came from the ragged fringes of the Great American Dream, from city slums and dirt farms and Appalachian mining towns. With depressing frequency, the words 2 *yrs. high school* appeared in the square labeled EDUCATION in their service record books, and, under FATHER'S ADDRESS, a number had written *Unknown*. They were volunteers, but I wondered for how many enlisting had been truly voluntary. … [T]he Marines provided them with a guaranteed annual income, free medical care, free clothing, and something else, less tangible but just as valuable – self-respect.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 26; original italics and capital letters)

Consistently with this focus, characters are presented via their speech as not very well educated, as in the following dialogue:

> 'Seventeen **cotton-pickin' years** I **been doin'** this,' he said as we sloshed in the rain across a silty, salmon-colored stream. 'Too old for this boy-scout **bullshit**, lieutenant. I'd like to get back to Parris Island, get my **twenty in** and get the **fuck out**. Spend some time with my old lady and my kids for a change.'
> 'Hell, this **ain't nothing** but red clay, Sergeant Campbell,' said Bradley, who was behind us. 'Me and old Deane here **usta** walk through stuff like this just coming home from school.'
> 'I was **talkin'** to the lieutenant, **turdbird**.'
> 'Yes, sir, Sergeant Campbell.'
> 'Like I was **sayin'**, lieutenant, get my twenty in and get out. You know, there's eighty acres I bought in South Carolina and I figure to retire on that.'
> I laughed, 'Wild Bill Campbell, the gentleman farmer.'
> 'Well, sir, go ahead and laugh. But I'm **gonna** get on the State Troopers when I get out and with that and my retirement, I figure old Wild Bill's **gonna** have it **number fuckin' one** while the rest of these **turdbirds'll** still be **walkin'** in this **shit**.'
> 'Shee-hit,' someone said. 'I ain't gonna be walkin' in this any longer'n I have to. I ain't no friggin' lifer.'
> 'That's because you **ain't** good enough, you silly little **shit**'.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 35–36; bold font added)

This excerpt demonstrates the difference between the first-person narration, the controlling voice written in standard educated English, and non-standard variants that characterise many soldiers. Additionally, the controlling voice is often explicitly literary and figurative. As Stefano Rosso (2012: 168) notices, Caputo "is an anomaly in the Vietnam Generation: most of his fellow writers are in the first instance witnesses and only in the second instance writers". Caputo not only creates spectral metaphors to communicate a variety of feelings, but also exploits the poetic function of language as here in the onomatopoeic "sloshed" combined with the alliterative "silty, salmon-colored stream". Such narrator's comments evoke images that resonate with readers as they can easily visualise the conditions. The aesthetic experience is perhaps less significant in such cases, yet the literary value of such passages cannot be denied.

Importantly, however, verisimilitude is achieved here via dialogues that give an air of reality. Ungrammatical forms with a double negative, as used by Bradley, and dropping auxiliary verbs by Campbell, are typical of spoken language, but also imply limited education. Bradley and Deane are "North Carolinians who, like their rebel ancestors, were natural infantrymen" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 25), which does not explicitly pinpoint their ethnicity. Campbell, the platoon sergeant, though not identified as white, with his red hair, may be assumed to be so since: "He fit the Hollywood image of a Marine sergeant so perfectly that he seemed a case of life imitating art" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 26). Their non-standard English allows neither identifying any specific regional variety, though Campbell's "cotton-picking" may indicate that he is from the South,[16] nor their ethnic origin. The ungrammatical forms are rather meant to suggest their social background. The primary function, however, seems to be the wish to achieve natural-sounding dialogues to obtain the sense of realism. The shortened forms, informal contractions (ain't) and non-standard modal verbs (gonna) in written language serve to approximate speech. Via such orality, Caputo strives to authenticate the story and to provide readers with the sound of Vietnam conversations. Many more examples of this type of oral stylisation can be provided, most of them reproduce the idiosyncratic speech of particular characters, for instance: "'Good evenin', majuh,' one of these creatures said in her honey-soft, flirtatious-but-chaste, Tidewater-aristocracy accent. 'It's sooo nahce to see you again, suh. It cuhtainly is a luhvly pahty…'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 22); "Yeah, watchya gonna do to em?" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 47); "Mah fust patrol, an' boom" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 265); "Bunch of cotton-pickin' girls" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 87), the last example is Campbell's utterance that instantly identifies him.

[16] Cotton-picking is used as "damn", as a more socially acceptable form, but is presently considered racist (https://www.bustle.com/articles/118386-5-racist-english-phrases-with-a-seriously-awful-history).

Another function of non-standard varieties evident in the dialogue is character differentiation and indirect characterisation. Campbell "was reputed to be one of the toughest in the division" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 27), and this feature is expressed via his speech. His language is insulting, interspersed with f-words even during casual conversations, and he offensively addresses his subordinates. "Turdbird" constitutes part of his idiolect and distinguishes him linguistically from others, as no one else uses this word, and characterises his attitude. As Beidler (2004: 30) comments upon the relationships during the war, "scorn was generic and pithy: Dufus, Dipstick, Numbnuts, Hand Job, Shithead, Turdbird". "Turdbird", popularised in the 1970s, is emblematic of Campbell's conduct specifically as someone who employs violent methods in managing his people, and of the Vietnam War in general as one of its numerous jargon terms. Caputo does not mask power relationships between soldiers but brings them to light and this is one of the means to build the experience of that war.

If the previously discussed appellation is relatively easy to decode, at least considering its expressiveness, the quoted dialogue also contains expressions that may be challenging for readers who are unfamiliar with military jargon. Campbell's wish to "get my twenty in and get the fuck out" may be confusing for those with no knowledge of the military service in the US. Campbell desires to retire and qualify for the lifetime monthly annuity, which is possible after twenty years of service. This may be concluded based on the context, but the full comprehension requires extratextual and extralinguistic knowledge. The understanding of Campbell's utterances depends on readers' knowledge and professional background. For military-related readers, the dialogue is coherent; for non-military ones, it may, at least potentially, be cryptic. Another source of confusion may be the word "lifer" whose primary meaning refers to prisoners with a life-sentence. In the military context, the word, very popular during the war, denotes a professional soldier to stress the difference from volunteers and draftees: "A model soldier of any complexion was put down as a lifer, an RA – regular army – as opposed to an EM, a draftee or straight enlisted" (Beidler 2004: 29). The Vietnam War developed its own variety of jargon that mixed typical military terms with new linguistic inventions and Caputo, in his linguistic representation of the conflict, intersperses the text, both in the narrative and dialogue parts, with such items.

The very nature and thematic scope of any war story necessitates the introduction of appropriate military jargon to be plausible and Caputo's text complies with this necessity. Professional jargon fulfils an important role since it gives credibility to the text as a record of authentic events (irrespective of the fictionalised form). Military jargon comprises the entire spectrum of linguistic units such as, inter alia, terminology, acronyms, and proper names. Both formal and informal expressions are employed. As already established by sociolinguists,

language is a social fact, hence the language used by soldiers defines them as members of a particular communication community and differentiates them from other professional groups, thus providing them with the sense of community and mutual understanding. Caputo effectively exploits this language variety to authenticate his story, but also to achieve some other aims.

One of the frequent markers of military jargon in *A Rumor of War* is acronyms. These lexical units, as well as other forms of abbreviations, are particularly popular because not only are they economic in terms of usage, but also contribute to emphasizing the otherness (and sometimes the hermetic nature) of a given social or professional group (Młodyński 1981: 180). In military jargon, acronyms are created both on the basis of expressions commonly used by soldiers, and those formed momentarily as a reaction to the current situation. The Vietnam War was particularly fruitful as regards the latter type, and many such acronyms have subsequently entered the American language. As Beidler (2004: 21) recalls: "In the field, and then radiating backward through the system, everything tended toward a tactical shorthand. Operations jargon became the official language of the country that was the war, at once strangely hermetic and spilling out into everyday expression. Experience reduced itself to short words, one or two syllables, or sometimes just phonetic letter combinations. … One lived and died in the empire of the acronym". Caputo intersperses his memoir with acronyms but introduces them differently depending on their decipherability and part of the text (Kujawska-Lis 2017c: 83).

Many of the acronyms and abbreviations are explained within the text, either before or after they appear for the first time, or within their close proximity, usually in the preceding paragraph. This implies that Caputo intends his text for both military and non-military readers and the explications are meant to facilitate understanding for the latter group. To exemplify: "There were other, more serious indications that the South Vietnamese Army, the ARVN, was nearing collapse" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 37); "'He's from MACV'. Military Assistance Command Vietnam" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 163); "The MLR, or main line of resistance, was opposite the dirt road to our front" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 50); "A more common affliction, one which I caught that spring, was called FUO – fever unknown origin" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 61). This manner of telling might seem artificial for veterans who communed with acronyms daily. Yet it demonstrates Caputo's wish to address a larger audience who might be put off by too many cryptic units. This is particularly evident in the case of momentarily created acronyms that might not be easily found in external sources. Given that the book was published shortly after the conclusion of the war, hardly any sources were available at that time, with online Vietnam War terminology lexicons and texts analysing "The Language of the Nam", to use Beidler's chapter title from his 2004 book, appearing much later. Such momentarily created inventions included SLJO: "We were therefore

known as SLJOs: shitty little jobs officers" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 156) and RF: "The relaxed behavior of the RFs – Ruff-Puffs they were called" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 52). Without explication, the text would lose its communicative function, despite representing the language of the "here and now".

Even when the term is clarified, the reader still needs to connect the information provided in a given paragraph in order to make sense of it, as is the case with RF:

> The Beau Geste watchtowers on the MLR contributed to the atmosphere of make-believe. If this was a real war zone, what were those anachronisms doing here? Their only conceivable use would be as registration points for VC mortar batteries. Their occupants were another source of bewilderment. The relaxed behavior of the RFs – Ruff-Puffs they were called – indicated one of three possibilities: no one had warned them that an enemy attack was imminent; they had been told, but were such experienced veterans that mere warnings did not alarm them; or they were the worst soldiers in the world.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 52)

RF-PF stood for "the Regional Force–Popular Force militia" (Beidler 2004: 12), part of the South Vietnamese local militia and territorial forces, and the unknowing reader might deduce that the RF denotes some sort of soldiers. Nevertheless, grasping the expressive function of the Ruff-Puff seems to be the privilege of those who actually used the expression. As Beidler (2004: 12) comments on the Vietnam War language: "Never has a military force had so many names of contempt for the people they were supposed to be trying to help". The extent of condescension and ridicule is fully communicated to those who are insiders – who felt it first-hand and codified it via language. This type of language is simultaneously evocative of American ethnocentrism and nationalist militarism as it communicates American soldiers' superiority over "the worst soldiers in the world". Both the description and the jargon create the frontier mythology according to which Americans were unsurpassed. This, however, is undermined by the end of the memoir.

The sense of the military uniqueness is achieved also via the accumulation of other, rather well-known, acronyms that are not explicated within the text. These are, generally, not difficult to decipher by readers, irrespective of their professional background, and significantly contribute to the realism of the linguistic layer. For instance, HQ (headquarters), VC (Viet Cong), GI (Government Issue, in this case American Soldier), PFC (private first class), NCO (noncommissioned officer), KIA (killed in action), WIA (wounded in action). These are accompanied by abbreviated forms referring to various spheres of military life. In American military jargon, the process of contraction is often employed for the sake of brevity and mostly vowels are omitted, or the word is

abbreviated to its first and last letter. Caputo introduces such forms mostly to illustrate the laconic and fast communication, especially as regards orders (Kujawska-Lis 2017c: 90). Some of these forms are transparent in context, for instance, bn (battalion), cos (companies), tgt (target), air spt callsign (Air Support Call Sign). Others may pose more difficulty and, consequently, more strongly mark the demarcation line between the knowing and unknowing readers. For instance: bn tacnet freq. (Battalion Tactical Network Frequency), div. tacair dir. (Division Tactical Air Director), w/WP (with white phosphorous). As Beidler (2004: 163) recalls, any combat action in Vietnam could quickly turn "into a command and communications nightmare both on the ground and above", hence the language had to be precise and unambiguous, while economic, but – most importantly – understandable for those who communicated with it. That language had to be acquired by those who were new to the profession. This is how Beidler recollects his first orders: "Meanwhile, my orders to report arrived. In a military code unknown to me, they already specified what the army called an MOS – a military occupational specialty. If you knew how to read the administrative cipher, my working destiny was identifiable as 1204 – armored cavalry reconnaissance platoon leader" (Beidler 2004: 181). The code and the cipher are the key notions that describe the military language: it separates laymen from combat soldiers, perhaps implying that the former cannot understand the latter, not only linguistically, but also – in more general terms – because of their dissimilar experience. The understanding is only possible, it seems, when people share the same code. Caputo makes this point when he unveils the clash between his romantic visions of battle and the reality of a military academy, followed by the actual war.

Caputo captures the true sensations of combat and the Vietnam War by tracing his own evolution. He enters Officers' Basic School with idealised visions of heroic deeds and is immediately confronted with the alien world: "For me, the classroom work was mind-numbing. I wanted the romance of war, bayonet charges, and desperate battles against impossible odds" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 14). Instead of the images he watched in war films, he is provided with "the methodology of war" in a language that changes and shapes reality, including "abstract jargon, and a number of bewildering acronyms and abbreviations. To be in battle was to be 'in a combat situation'; a helicopter assault was a 'vertical development'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 14). His confusion is best exemplified by the battle orders that he had to study:

> *Enemy shit.* Aggressor forces in div strength holding MLR Hill 820 complex gc AT 940713-951716 w/fwd elements est. bn strength junction at gc AT 948715 (See Annex A, COMPHIBPAC intel. summary period ending 25 June)…*Mission*: BLT 1/7 seize, hold and defend obj. A gc 948715…*Execution*: BLT 1/7 land LZ X-RAY AT 946710 at H-Hour 310600… A co. GSF estab. LZ security LZ X-RAY H

> minus 10…B co. advance axis BLUE H plus 5 estab. blocking pos. vic gs AT 948710…A, C, D cos. maneuver element commence advance axis BROWN H plus 10…Bn tacnet freq. 52.9…shackle code HAZTRCEGBD… div. tacair dir. air spt callsign PLAYBOY…Mark friendly pos w/air panels or green smoke. Mark tgt. w/WP.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 14–15)

This is the essence of both the military jargon and Caputo's initiation. By the end of the war, this is his everyday language as he has become part of the war. The internalisation of the code represents his transformation. The further he goes in the narrative, the more easily and naturally Caputo-the narrator operates with this code, and the less frequently he explicates the unknown elements, partly because some of them have been already explained, partly because the code is now his own. The cryptic nature of jargon underlines the double image of the narrator: since the memoir is written in retrospection, Caputo-the veteran looks back at himself as the uninitiated one. The language then indicates the abyss between the two personas.

When recollecting the cipher-like order, Caputo consciously does not provide any explications since its function is specifically to indicate the rift between the military and non-military. This rift is strengthened when the narrator employs other jargon words, some of them explained, others left with little elucidation. As Caputo (1988 [1977]: 10) recalls: "That awful word – *unsat* – haunted me". Context allows readers to decode this as a clipped form of unsatisfactory, though it is explained nevertheless: "the weak, who were collectively known as 'unsats,' for unsatisfactory" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 10). Further he observes retrospectively, "I was so terrified of being found wanting that I even avoided getting near the candidates who were borderline cases – the 'marginals,' as they were known in the lexicon of that strange world" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 10–11). As this world embraces him, he feels less urge to explain in detail such expressions. Hence later in the text readers occasionally stumble over some phrases, for instance: "The old salts used to tell us that the most memorable experience in an officer's life is his first command" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 23). Although the co-text clarifies the alienating word: "They claimed, these veteran majors and colonels, to remember almost everything about the first platoons they led" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 23), the entire scope of the meaning is not easy to capture. As Beidler (2004: 14) asserts, "[n]o matter what, from day one, in this particular dimension of the war, the magic word was 'short'", indicating the time to elapse before the conclusion of service. This was related to another "magic word" – DEROS (Date Eligible for Return from Overseas) – that was most desirable and the owner of this appellation "could even be a guy with months left to serve, a pretender trying to act hard-core, what the marines would have called salty" (Beidler 2004: 15). For unknowing readers, "old salts" would

most likely stand for those with a long service; but for the veterans the additional dimension related to DEROS might be more meaningful. Ironically, not so far into the war (Section One "Splendid Little War", chapter 3), Caputo sees himself as a serviceman of long standing: "I flipped off some old-salt comment about a miss being as good as a mile" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 55), as if unconsciously he already wished to be away from Vietnam.

Part of the military jargon, and of the linguistic layer of *A Rumor of War*, were profanities. Since soldiers, given the level of stress, but also their social and educational backgrounds, were "notoriously foul-mouthed", protocols existed on the employment of language, including swear words (Beidler 2004: 20). "Shit" and "fuck" were among the most ubiquitous words during the war (Beidler 2004: 10), which is reflected in Caputo's memoir, examples being plentiful. But the expressiveness of slangish profanities and swear words differed and also represented the transformation of the uninitiated young men into full time combat soldiers, as is perfectly captured by Caputo. Just as reality was denoted by different appellations than in civilian life, so were the people: "We were no longer known by our names, but called 'shitbird,' 'scumbag,' or 'numbnuts' by the DIs" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 8). This manner of addressing the recruits, combined with mental and physical abuse, was motivated by several objectives. One was to transform each platoon from a group of individuals into "a machine of which we were merely parts" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 10); another "to destroy each man's sense of self-worth, to make him feel worthless until he proved himself equal to the Corps' exacting standards" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 10). This was transferred from the language of the drill to that of casual conversation, as indicated earlier with reference to Campbell's idiolect. Though obviously containing some level of scorn, such appellations were simply part of the field language, as can be illustrated by the following excerpt: "There was the usual bitching and horse trading that attends a meal of Cees. 'Aw, sheehit, I got ham and limas… hey, tradeja ham and limas for a canna peaches….' 'Yeah, okay I'll take 'em….' 'You *like* ham and limas, man you gotta be a fucking' idiot….' 'All right, then keep 'em maggot….' 'Hey, man, I was only shitinyuh'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 53). Caputo reflects the atmosphere of the field life, with the profanities that communicate a sort of friendliness.

The expressive level of swearwords, however, changes radically depending on the situation. In combat situations, they are no longer scornful or friendly, but express the whole range of feelings towards the enemy, from hatred to a wish to destroy: "'See you now, you cocksucker,' one of the riflemen said, pumping rapid fire at the sniper's muzzle-flash" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 226). The most expressive cases of profanities mark the most dramatic moments, and this is how Caputo communicates his war experience. Swear words, although the same, vary in intensity depending on the context and circumstances. The f-word reappears in

the text, but it is most powerful when indicating Caputo's breakdown: "I stopped walking and, facing the tree line, waved my arms. 'C'mon, Charlie, hit me, you son of the bitch,' I yelled at the top of my lungs. 'HO CHI MINH SUCKS. FUCK COMMUNISM. HIT ME, CHARLIE'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 254–255; original capital letters). As he comments: "I was crazy. I was soaring high, very high in a delirium of violence" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 255). Beidler (2007: 156) sums up this episode in the following way: "The lieutenant has gone out and claimed the insanity that has been waiting for him. In body and mind, he becomes the war". From the linguistic point of view, this insanity is foregrounded via the expressiveness of profanities contrasted with a self-conscious comment made post-factum by Caputo-the narrator looking back at his conduct: "'C'mon and hit me, Charlie,' I yelled again, firing a burst into the tree line with my carabine. 'YOU SON OF A BITCH, TRY AND HIT ME. FUCK UNCLE HO. HANOI BY CHRISTMAS.' … The sniper declined my offer, and I gradually calmed down" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 255; original capital letters).

Euphemisms occupy the opposite spectrum of the military jargon to profanities but can be equally expressive. The standard definition as formulated by H. W. Fowler, subsequently developed by lexicologists, is that euphemism "means (the use of a) mild or vague or periphrastic expression as a substitute for blunt precision or disagreeable truth" (Fowler 2010 [1926]: 152). Euphemisms are used particularly for taboo and sensitive subjects and therefore represent "the language of evasion, hypocrisy, prudery, and deceit" (Holder 2008: vii). Although the basic function of euphemistic language is that of subduing unpleasant and brutal expressions, other motives, especially social ones, are also significant. For instance, Katsev indicates that "euphemisms are indirect names aimed at mitigating the meaning of what is unacceptable from the point of view of socially accepted norms of morality", while Partridge stresses that these are "expressions intended to minimize the unpleasant impression on the listener or the possible unpleasant consequences for the speaker if the latter wants to make a good impression" (qtd. in Malyuga & Orlova 2018: 80).[17]

Caputo, who profusely punctuates the text with profanities, does not equally intersperse his narrative with euphemisms. Yet he makes a very strong point in the chapter in which he describes his job as "a casualty reporting officer" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 161) in Part Two entitled "The Officer in Charge of the Dead". This new occupation, as Myers observes, "has given him a close-up view of the discrepancy between official versions of the war and the reality behind statistics and euphemism" (Myers 1988: 101). The unimaginable numbers of the dead and

[17] Elena N. Malyuga and Svetlana N. Orlova provide an extensive overview of research devoted to euphemisms, including lexical, sociolinguistic, grammatical, semantic, and functional approaches, as well as classifications of euphemisms (Malyuga & Orlova 2018: 79–87).

injured are foreshadowed by the epigraph to that section – the excerpt from Siegfried Sassoon's "The Effect": "How many dead? As many as ever you wish./ Don't count 'em: they're too many./ Who'll buy my nice fresh corpses, two a penny" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 143). This indicates the ironic situation in which Caputo finds himself when he needs to keep records of the dead (too many to be envisaged) and follow elaborate procedures: "The reports were written on mimeographed forms, one for KIAs, one for WIAs, and a third for nonhostile casualties" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 157). It is here when the ironic clash occurs between Sassoon's direct language and the military euphemisms:

> All reports had to be written in that clinical, euphemistic language the military prefers to simple English. If, say, a marine had been shot through the guts, I could not write 'shot through the guts' or 'shot through the stomach'; no, I had to say 'GSW' (gunshot wound) 'through and through, abdomen.' Shrapnel wounds were called 'multiple fragment lacerations,' and the phrase for dismemberment, one of my very favorite phrases, was 'traumatic amputation'.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 157–158)

Caputo learns the military language, in both its extremes, and comments sarcastically upon the wish to mitigate linguistically the horrible reality of the war: "The shattering or fragmenting effect of high explosive occasionally caused semantic difficulties in reporting injuries of men who had undergone extreme mutilation" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 158). The discrepancy between the facts and how they are reported is veiled via language that is, inter alia, meant not to disgust the civilians who might receive the report after the relative's death:

> Lieutenant Colonel Meyers … stepped on a booby-trapped 155-mm shell. They did not find enough of him to fill a willy-peter bag, a waterproof sack a little larger than a shopping bag. In effect Colonel Meyers had been disintegrated, but the official report read something like 'traumatic amputation, both feet; traumatic amputation, both legs and arms; multiple lacerations to abdomen; through and through fragment wounds, head and chest.' Then came the notation 'killed in action'.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 158–159)

The explanation of the real meaning of the euphemistic expressions to civilian readers has an educative function: it presents the truth behind figures and official jargon. The semantic "disassembly" of the expressions destroys the mitigating function of euphemisms. Once thoroughly explained, they no longer serve to obscure the blatant truth about the manner of dying during war. The safe distance between words and what is communicated via them is shattered, the masking of the reality no longer possible.

Obviously military jargon involves emotional and psychological distance both as regards the insiders and outsiders, for different reasons. For the insiders,

such distance helps in dealing with what they actually do (killing the enemy, or rather – eliminating the target) and the effects of their actions as well as those of the enemy. In this sense, such language, free of the emotional load, is helpful in processing (and so justifying) war crimes, including genocide. For the outsiders, military euphemisms diminish the extent of horror. As stressed by linguists, "[e]uphemisms occur in situations where the speaker is aware of some communicative tension when transmitting the message to the recipient" (Malyuga & Orlova 2018: 109). Thus, the psychological relevance of euphemism during war is undeniable. But, as Sassoon's epigraph indicates, dealing with trauma means to strip the language of its subtle niceties. This is what Caputo does when he uncovers the reality of Vietnam communicated with euphemisms.

In exposing the truth, Caputo is quite ironic about the language he was forced to employ, as is consistent with Fussell's analysis of war memoirs. In reporting the death of an unnamed grenadier, he comments: "'Sympathetic detonation' was the phrase I used in the casualty report. It was another one of those dry, inaccurate military euphemisms. It meant that the explosion of the mine had caused his grenades to go off at the same time, and I could see nothing sympathetic about that" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 183). Here the reference is made to the double meaning of the adjective "sympathetic". His bitter comment, easily comprehensible for non-military readers, refers to the typical meaning, denoting the understanding of and caring about someone else's suffering. In the military jargon and in technology, however, "sympathetic detonation" is "a detonation of an explosive charge by a nearby explosion" (Yang, Wang & Li 2022: 1382). This clash of meanings represents the clash between the truth and its codified linguistic representation, as well as between the narrator's pre-war naivety and experience gained during the war. Images of the casualties may be masked by euphemistic expressions, but they will not be erased from memory in their terrifying authenticity.

The linguistic heterogeneity of *A Rumor of War* is enriched by expressions from languages other than American English and by pidgin forms. One of such languages is French that represents years of French control of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in what was called French Indochina, following the victory over China in the Sino-French War (1884–1885). French expressions are not numerous, but allude to the complicated history of the region. One of them, thoroughly explained in the text, denotes the peculiar nature of military actions in these regions: "Ten days passed, ten days of total idleness. The novelty of our surroundings wore off and the battalion began to suffer from a spiritual disease called *la cafard* by the French soldiers when they were in Indochina. Its symptoms were occasional fits of depression combined with an inconquerable fatigue that made the simplest tasks, like shaving or cleaning a rifle, seem enormous" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 65). This reference to *la cafard* links American

soldiers' experience to that of the previous colonisers, though no explicit hints to colonisation are provided and the notion primarily demonstrates the specificity of the mundane field life, with the cure for *la cafard* being active combat involvement ("aggressive defense") rather than "static defense". This excitement about combat that might cure depression applies to the initial stages of the war. The longer it lasted, the more nightmarish it became for Americans who, rather than being cured from depression, developed full symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.[18] Beidler quotes a Vietnamese veteran reflecting on the war that from his perspective was victorious: "We fought the Chinese for a thousand years. … We fought the French for a hundred years. You were here for ten years. You are a blip in this history of a proud nation" (Beidler 2004: 193). This "blip" produced unimaginable trauma both on the personal and national levels that far surpassed *la cafard*.

Another significant instance of the employment of the French language magnifies the contrast between being in the field and the normality of life away from the combat zone. As Caputo (1988 [1977]: 232) recalls: "I was very tired and wanted to get some sleep. Neal said he had been looking at my service record and noticed that I had been in Vietnam for nine months without an R-and-R. … Would I like to go to Saigon for three days' R-and-R? Yes, I said without hesitating".[19] While there, he dines in an old French hotel, the Continental Palace Hotel, in which the mentioned contrast is evoked, inter alia, via the conversation with the waiter:

> A waiter came up and asked for my order.
> 'Chateaubriand avec pommes frites, s'il vous plaît.'
> The waiter, an old Vietnamese man with the bearing of a village elder, winced at my accent. 'Pardonnez-moi monsieur. Le chateaubriand est pour deux.'
> 'I know, I want it anyway.' I said switching back to English.
> 'Bien. Vin Rouge?'
> 'Oui, rouge. A bottle'.
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 234)

On the one hand, the conversation in French, together with the description of the French colonists in the hotel, emphasizes the historical context. On the other, the exchange epitomises normality: the prosaic activity of ordering food and

---

18 PTSD was established as a medical diagnosis after the Vietnam War, whereas "[t]he inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the official diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 was partly the result of psychiatric advocacy on behalf of Vietnam War Veterans" (Luckhurst 2014: 158).

19 R-and-R in military jargon stands for rest and recuperation (alternatively rest and relaxation, rest and recreation or rest and rehabilitation), i.e. free time allowed during active service. By this time in his memoir, Caputo no longer deciphers each military-related term.

drink in the language of cuisine and culture, quite distinct from the language of war, be it military jargon or other vernacular and pidgin forms heard inland, brings relief and allows Caputo to join the world of the living. French is the language of life, dignity, and civility: "The Frenchmen across from me were living, not just surviving. And for the time being, I was a part of their world. I had temporarily renewed my citizenship in the human race" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 234). Yet, though not explicitly commented on, French is the language of colonialism. The old Vietnamese man speaking perfect French demonstrates a total cultural subordination. Hence colonisation is inscribed in the scene, though it is not its primary focus from the perspective of Caputo's "here and now" as he recalls his desire to get away from the combat zone.

The Vietnam War produced its own language in which vernacular expressions were prominent, defined generally as "Viet-speak": "a mixture of standard English, slang, and Vietnamese or other Asian languages" (Beidler 2004: 35), which Caputo presents in various contexts. As Beidler (2004: 33) notices, "[i]n its multifarious crossings of language, the war seemed somehow to levitate above its own horror in some vast, unreal polyphony". This "polyphony" is profuse in *A Rumor of War* that is interspersed with foreign vocabulary. Some of these words are either well-known from previous war-related works (books and films) or comprehensible in the context and grammatical structures in which they appear. These would include, for instance, Japanese *sayonara* (goodbye), *skoshi-skoshi* (soon, fast): "You from One-Three Battalion, go Vietnam skoshi-skoshi. I tell you true. Maybe sayonara all Third Marine" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 36), *hayako* (go): "I told him to hayako his ass back to Schwab" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 39), and Vietnamese *ao-dais* (Vietnamese female tunic): "Her ao-dais was folded neatly on a chair" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 136). Other expressions, "the distinctive pidgin of the era" (Beidler 2004: 32), are explained within the text, mostly for the sake of non-veteran readers. For American soldiers, such words would be immediately comprehensible, for instance: "I want to challenge him, to shout 'Dung lai' (halt), but the words catch in my throat" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 95), "He no sooner said 'Cam Ong' (thank you) than a mob of small boys with very old eyes accosted us" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 131), "'Di-di mau.' (Get out of here and quickly.)" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 132). But there are also those words left unexplained as if the knowledge of them was a secret code reserved for the veterans, like *poontang*, decoded by Beidler (2004: 32) as: "Women in general", but in fact more often denoting a prostitute: "I asked where the hell he had been all day. 'Just gettin' me a little poontang, lieutenant'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 45).

These foreign expressions have different functions, but always contribute to the verisimilitude as they communicate the cultural reality of this particular war. When uttered by local people, they simply reflect their national background.

When spoken by Americans, they often indicate some form of communication with the locals. But the last example also implicitly indicates omnipresent sexism and racism. Vietnamese women were used and abused sexually. Prostitution was commonplace, and the use of the foreign *poontang* symbolically communicates "sexual colonisation". Though Caputo does not recount cases of the sexual victimisation of women in his memoir, echoes of sexism can be traced in such comments.

In his retrospective narration, Caputo is oscillating between his role as the teller of the war story, being his own, and its explicator for those readers unfamiliar with the mixture of languages American soldiers adopted in Vietnam as well as the pidgin forms they heard. He recalls local children speaking their version of English: "'GI gimme one cig'rette you.' … 'Hey gimme candy you.' … 'Hey booshit. Fuck you GI this no candy. Numbah ten' … 'Mahreene numbah one. Kill buku VC'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 101). The pidgin is quite self-explanatory, except, perhaps, for the numbers contained. And this seems to be the code to be shared mostly with veteran readers, where "[n]umber one was the best; number ten was the worst; number ten thou was the absolute worst" (Beidler 2004: 33).[20]

The initial alienating sound of vernacular is communicated by not providing readers with explanations of the Japanese pidgin: "Once, an angry woman appeared in a doorway and yelled something. We did not understand the words, but her meaning was clear. A rifleman responded in pidgin Japanese, 'Hey, mamasan, GI okay, joto okay. Number-one skivvy honcho, tachsameo'" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 46). Readers are supposed to feel just as the American soldiers did when they were still new into the war and left in a linguistic void. This is the manner of creating the sense of reality. For civilian readers, the Japanese pidgin employed by Americans is as alien as the Vietnamese language was for the newcomers. This is yet another way of evoking a sense of the initial alienation of the soldiers in the war.

However, when it is crucial for readers to understand the circumstances, Caputo provides translation to avoid any confusion, though he still leaves those phrases that can be deduced from the context unaccompanied by explanations:

> 'Chao-Ba,' I said to one of the women.
> She smiled, baring her red teeth. 'Chao-anh.'
> 'Manh gioi khoung?'

[20] The expression number one reappears in the text. For instance: "Hey, naisson, number one. Joto itchiban" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 51). It is always left unexplained, but its meaning may be deduced since number ten is explicated as the worst (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 36–37). The comprehension, however, demands engaged reading on the part of non-military readers and remembering the meaning of the opposite phrase.

> ‘Toi manh.’ (I am well.)
> ‘Ba gap Viet Cong khoung?’ (Woman, have you seen the Viet Cong?) …
> I gestured toward the clearing and, not knowing the Vietnamese word for sniper, said in English, ‘VC.VC. Ten minutes ago. Bang. Bang.’
> ‘Toi khoung hieu.’ (I don’t understand). …
> ‘VC. Bang. Bang. At me. Toi. Ten minutes ago.’
> ‘Ah, toi hieu.’
> ‘Where are the Viet Cong?’
> ‘Toi khoung biet.’ (I don’t know).
>
> (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 241)

The longer this exchange lasts, the more exasperated and infuriated Caputo becomes, and imagines himself physically abusing the woman in order to obtain from her the information he needs. To fully communicate his hopelessness and rage to readers, he translates “her litany of ‘no’ and ‘I don’t know’” (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 242). This is the moment when he comes closest to transgression, to beating “the truth out of her” since “[t]here was no one out there to stop me from actually doing it, no one and nothing except that inner system of moral checks called conscience. That was still operating” (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 242). Thus, instead of fulfilling his bloody fantasy, he continues the questioning. The introduction of the vernacular emphasizes the difficulties in communicating with local people who supposedly should be helpful, not necessarily because of the linguistic barrier, but often because of their unwillingness, which cumulatively added to the frustration experienced by American soldiers. Linguistic alienation symbolises the general condition of Americans in the foreign land.

Caputo’s role of the translator and explicator of the war experience indicates his self-consciousness in writing a post-factum memoir to be read by various readers. This self-consciousness is further enhanced by paratexts. Each section and chapter is preceded by epigraphs that range from excerpts from the Bible, or English-language literature: William Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling, Ernest Hemingway, but in particular the Great War poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, to philosophers, like Thomas Hobbes. These quotations enrich the text’s linguistic heterogeneity with various literary styles and create an intertextual network, linking Caputo’s memoir to other works depicting war, but also his personal experiences to those of other war veterans, thus transferring the memoir to a more universal level. Although *A Rumor of War* primarily structures the memory of one historical event, with all its specificity, it also tackles larger themes related to military conflicts and the confrontation of youthful dreams of heroic deeds with the reality and brutality of actual combat. The epigraphs function as signposts directing the interpretation of particular chapters, for instance, the quotation preceding Chapter Seven in Section One: “And you’ve lost your youth and come to manhood, all in a few hours… Oh, that’s painful.

That is indeed – Howard Fast, *April Morning*" (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 104). Each epigraph is carefully selected to be linked thematically with the reported events: Chapter Ten in Section Two, in which Caputo depicts his job as casualties reporting officer is preceded by another excerpt from Siegfried Sassoon's "The Effect": "'He'd never seen so many dead before.'/ The lilting words danced up and down his brain,/ While corpses jumped and capered in the rain./ No, no; he wouldn't count them anymore..." (Caputo 1988 [1977]: 155). These paratexts reinforce the double perspective created by Caputo: they are selected by the post-war persona, shaped, and transformed by Vietnam. The immediate perceptions of the war as experienced by Caputo-the soldier are already processed, perhaps rationalised, as is evidenced by in-text irony and paratextual links.

In cultural memory, literature is a powerful medium of representation and remembering. As Astrid Erll (2016: 79) argues, "[t]he possibilities and limits of literary representation are gauged when it comes to the memories of violent history, such as war, terror, and genocide". In the case of such traumatic memories, literature fulfils a significant task, i.e. the structuring of what has been remembered so that the process of working through trauma might begin (Tabaszewska 2013: 68). Many Vietnam War veterans turned to writing – both fiction and non-fiction – as part of their healing process. As O'Brien, implicitly addressing his Vietnam War experience and subsequent writing career, stresses: "Stories heal. Stories console. Stories inspire. Stories encourage and embolden. Stories offer us access to the human consequences of global events. … Stories give a face to suffering and joy", whereas "the best war stories will endure in our collective memory" (O'Brien 2009: 9). However, this is conditioned by the representation of truth:

> A piece of literature, in my opinion, must be rich enough in detail, broad enough in moral scope, and true enough in purpose to incorporate not just the individual good deed but the overall environment of 'obscenity and evil' – free fire zones, battered detainees, devalued human life, unprosecuted rapes and assaults, burned houses, burned villages, a poisoned landscape, vicious racism, uncounted amputations, and three million dead or missing Vietnamese.
>
> (O'Brien 2009: 6)

This is specifically what Caputo is attempting to represent in his memoir, though not each element mentioned by O'Brien is evidenced in *A Rumor of War*. In so doing, its author narrates war experiences with language that is appropriate to them: demonstrating the sound of war in its linguistic heterogeneity.

In his introduction to *A Rumor of War*, Kevin Powers (2020: n.p.) asserts that the book "shatters the illusions about war that we allow ourselves to be fooled by. It unravels war's alienating jargon and casts aside all of our comforting platitudes. It lets you in, whoever you might be, wherever you might be, and

whenever you might be". This comment captures the effects of the linguistic landscape and the manner in which Caputo creates it. The memoir is controlled by one voice – that of the author himself – and the white American perspective. But in quoting other participants of the war, this voice combines standard English, non-standard stylisations and pidgin forms with the military jargon, which, as Beidler (2004: 34) observes, can be quite alienating for non-military readers: "Even today I remember Vietnam in language as intensely, almost imprisoningly, hermetic". The principal function of linguistic differentiation in *A Rumor of War* is the wish to authenticate that war and to create its linguistic representation. Explications provided throughout the text allow non-military readers a glimpse into an unknown world and experience. But, despite the explanations, this glimpse is to some degree superficial. As Beidler (2004: 35) redefines the notion of Viet-Speak, he underscores the post-war period: "Viet-speak: The in-country language adopted and developed by American soldiers in the Vietnamese war to communicate with each other during the war and afterward about their experience". The language of Vietnam is so specific that numerous cultural narratives of that war contain glossaries, for instance, James Webb's *Fields of Fire* (2000 [1978]). Caputo prefers different tactics. However, in-text explanations are not offered for each potentially problematic phrase. Many expressions need to be deciphered based on the context, and sometimes even that does not guarantee their full comprehension if one is not intimately familiar with Viet-Speak. As the narrative develops, the accumulation of military jargon creates a somewhat alienating reading experience for those readers who have not internalised this particular code. Hence, in terms of reception, readers appear to be divided into those who are offered an account of the war and those who can identify with it because they have been part of it themselves: "Whatever the language of your war, you never forget it; instead, you continue to live in it in ways that never stop surprising you" (Beidler 2004: 35).

The Vietnam War continues to haunt its survivors. As Myra MacPherson (1985: 716) argues, "Vietnam was an ambiguous war that left us with ambiguous moral, political, and personal conclusions". This ambiguity also emerges from Caputo's memoir. His truth about Vietnam is just one of many, since "[t]here is no way to capsulize Vietnam. There are as many Vietnams as there are veterans" (MacPherson 1985: 14). The rich linguistic landscape of Caputo's memoir is obviously not all-encompassing because it cannot be. What emerges from it is the image of the American veteran. Though disillusioned and contesting the war, he remains an American who participated in its crimes. Thus, understandably, the perspectives of the Vietnamese, both soldiers and civilians, including men, women and children, and their victimisation, are omitted. Although foreign expressions are introduced, they only communicate one perspective: that of American soldiers' initial alienation in the foreign land, their attempt at

communication, and finally their habituation. Local people are not given their voice that would have an equal status to that of the American narrator. The linguistic heterogeneity also does not really provide the perspective of ethnic minorities fighting in Vietnam. It records their presence and undeniable involvement, but it fails to give them their own voice that would perhaps reflect the racism within the American army. Despite the richness, it is Caputo's perspective: that of a white, educated American who has survived and matured because of his traumatic experience. As Rosso (2012: 170) observes, "the narrator emphasizes the abysmal discrepancy between the myth of war heroism and the actual experience in Vietnam". This actual experience is partly communicated via the verisimilitude achieved through Viet-Speak, enriched with linguistic varieties heard in the field. But Caputo also communicates his war experience by exploiting the poetic function of language, with recurrent metaphors and detailed, often aestheticised descriptions of landscape that affect various senses (smell, touch, vision, hearing). This aspect of language use, however, has not been part of the present analysis.

Despite the personal angle, the creation of intertextual networks with other works by universalising the war experience generates another dimension of Caputo's memoir. It is no longer only a personal account, but an attempt to make a general statement about war. Yet, as argued by Spanos (2008: 156), "[t]his war, The Vietnam War, that is, cannot be generalized; as in the case of Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, it is too unique – too singular – to be accommodated to a universal frame". The wish to generalise and universalise in fact to some extent works as an attempt to de-historicise and depoliticise the Vietnam War perhaps not only to come to terms with personal trauma, but also to justify committed war crimes.

## REFERENCES

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Caputo, Philip. 1988 [1977]. *A rumor of war*. Ballantine Books.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

Abdel-Malek, Zaki N. 1972. The influence of diglossia on the novels of Yuusif al-Sibaaʿi. *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3. 132–141.

Adams, Timothy Dow. 1990. *Telling lies in modern American autobiography*. University of North Carolina Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. Discourse in the novel. In Michael Holquist (ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. (Transl. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson), University of Texas Press. 259–422.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 2003 [1984]. *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics.* (Ed. and transl. by Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne C. Booth). University of Minnesota Press.

Beidler, Philip D. 2004. *Late thoughts on an old war: The legacy of Vietnam*. University of Georgia Press.

Beidler, Philip D. 2007. *American literature and the experience of Vietnam*. University of Georgia Press.

Beidler, Philip. 2009. Thirty years after: The Archeologies. In Mark Heberle (ed.), *Thirty years after. New essays on Vietnam War literature, film, and art*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 10–27.

Boyle, Brenda M. 2015. Introduction: The war stories we tell. In Brenda M. Boyle (ed.), *The Vietnam War. Topics in contemporary North American literature*, Bloomsbury. 1–25.

Calloway, Catherine. 2009. In their own voices: The Chicano experience in Vietnam War literature. In Mark Heberle (ed.), *Thirty years after. New essays on Vietnam War literature, film, and art*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 142–158.

Christopher, Renny. 1995. *The Viet Nam War/the American War. Images and representations in Euro-American and Vietnamese exile narratives*. University of Massachusetts Press.

Council of Europe. 2007. *From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education: Guide for the development of educational policies in Europe*. https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1c4 (accessed 22/11/24).

Cuddon, John A. 1991. *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory*. Penguin Books.

Eakin, Paul John. 1985. *Fictions in autobiography: Studies in the art of self-invention*. Princeton University Press.

Eakin, Paul John. 2001. Breaking rules: The consequences of self-narration. *Biography* 24(1). 113–127.

Erll, Astrid. 2016. *Memory in culture*. Palgrave.

Ferguson, Charles A. 1959. Diglossia. *Word* 15(2). 325–340.

Fowler, Henry W. 2010 [1926]. *A dictionary of modern English usage: The classic first edition. With a new introduction and notes by David Crystal*. Oxford University Press.

Fussell, Paul. 2000 [1975]. *The Great War and modern memory*. Oxford University Press.

Gaspar, Charles Jamieson Jr. 1983. *Reconnecting: Time and history in the narratives of the Vietnam War*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Connecticut.

Goodwin, Gerald F. 2017. Black and white in Vietnam. The New York Times, July 18, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/opinion/racism-vietnam-war.html (accessed 21/11/2023).

Gvozdanović, Jadranka. 2014. Understanding the essence of diglossia. In Judit Árokay, Jadranka Gvozdanović & Darja Miyajima (eds.), *Divided languages? Diglossia, translation and the rise of modernity in Japan, China and the Slavic world*, Springer. 3–20.

Herr, Michael. 1977. *Dispatches*. Knopf.

Herzog, Tobey C. 2017. *Vietnam War stories. Innocence lost.* Routledge.

Holder, R. W. 2008. *A dictionary of euphemisms. How not to say what you mean*. Oxford University Press.

Kovic, Ron. 1976. *Born on the Fourth of July*. McGraw-Hill.

Kujawska-Lis, Ewa. 2017a. Delusions of authenticity in translating linguistically heterogeneous texts. In Agnieszka Pantuchowicz & Anna Warso (eds.), *Interpreting authenticity. Translation and its* others, Peter Lang. 23–36.

Kujawska-Lis, Ewa. 2017b. How Scottish is *Trainspotting* in Polish translation. In Aniela Korzeniowska & Izabela Szymańska (eds.), *Imaging Scottishness: European and domestic representations*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper. 100–116.

Kujawska-Lis, Ewa. 2017c. Czy ETA to zawsze ETA? O minach zastawionych na tłumacza tekstów o tematyce wojennej na przykładzie *A rumor of war* Philipa Caputo. In Ewa Kujawska-Lis & Iwona A. Ndiaye (eds.), *Komunikacja międzykulturowa w świetle współczesnej translatologii, tom 8: Literatura–Język–Kultura*, Instytut Słowiańszczyzny Wschodniej UWM. 79–96.

Lawrence, Mark Atwood. 2008. *The Vietnam War. A concise international history*. Oxford University Press.

Luckhurst, Roger. 2014. Future shock: Science fiction and the trauma paradigm. In Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant & Robert Eaglestone (eds.), *The future of Trauma Theory. Contemporary literary and cultural criticism*, Routledge. 157–168.

MacPherson, Myra. 1985. *Long time passing: Vietnam & the Haunted Generation*. New American Library.

Malyuga, Elena N. & Svetlana N. Orlova. 2018. *Linguistic pragmatics of intercultural professional and business communication*. Springer.

Martins, Adriana. 2012. Introduction: Plots of war. In Isabel Capeloa Gil & Adriana Martins (eds.), *Plots of war. Modern narratives of conflict*, Walter de Gruyter. 1–7.

McInerney, Peter. 1981. 'Straight' and 'secret'. History in Vietnam War literature. *Contemporary Literature* 22(2). 187–204.

Mehrez, Samia. 1992. Translation and the postcolonial experience: The Francophone North African text. In Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking translation: Discourse, subjectivity, ideology*, Routledge.120–137.

Młodyński, Józef. 1981. Skrótowce we współczesnym języku polskim. In Halina Kurkowska (ed.), *Współczesna polszczyzna*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe. 156–183.

Musiał, Aleksandra. 2020. *Victimhood in American narratives of the war in Vietnam*. Routledge.

Myers, Thomas. 1988. *Walking point. American narratives of Vietnam*. Oxford University Press.

O'Brien, Tim. 1978. *Going after Cacciatio.* Dell Publishing.

O'Brien, Tim. 2009. Keynote Address: Thirty years after. In Mark Heberle (ed.), *Thirty years after. New essays on Vietnam War literature, film, and art*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 3–9.

"REMF, *N.*". 2023. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1175109647 (accessed 30/09/2024).

Powers, Kevin. 2020. Introduction. In Philip Caputo, *A rumor of war*. Vintage.

Ringnalda, Donald. 1994. *Fighting and writing the Vietnam War*. University Press of Mississippi.

Rosso, Stefano. 2012. Making violence visible in Vietnam War narratives: The case of *A rumor of war*. In Isabel Capeloa Gil & Adriana Martins (eds.), *Plots of war. Modern narratives of conflict*, Walter de Gruyter. 168–176.

Spanos, William V. 2008. *American exceptionalism in the age of globalization. The specter of Vietnam*. State University of New York Press.

Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 1990. Linguistic polyphony as a problem in translation. In Susan Bassnett & André Lefevere (eds.), *Translation, history and culture*, Pinter Publishers. 71–78.

Tabaszewska, Justyna. 2013. Od literatury jako medium pamięci do poetyki pamięci. Kategoria pamięci kulturowej w badaniach nad literaturą. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 104(4). 53–72.

Thorpe, J. R. 2015, Oct. 21. 5 English phrases with seriously racist history. https://www.bustle.com/articles/118386-5-racist-english-phrases-with-a-seriously-awful-history (accessed 17/08/2022).

Weaver, Gina Marie. 2010. *Ideologies of forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War*. State University of New York Press.

Webb, James. 2000 [1978]. *Fields of fire*. Naval Institute Press.

Westheider, James E. 1997. *Fighting on two fronts. African Americans and the Vietnam War*. New York University Press.

Yang, Tong-Hiu, Cheng Wang & Tao Li. 2022. Numerical simulation study of sympathetic detonation in stages. *Defence Technology* 18. 1382–1393. DOI: 10.1016/j.dt.2021.08.009