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Interpreter-mediated Discourse as a Vital Source of Meaning Potential in Intercultural Communication: The Case of the Interpreted Premier-Meets-the-Press Conferences in China

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Abstract

Looking beyond a micro lexicogrammatical perspective, this article takes a broader discursive and sociopolitical view of meaning potential, arguing that interpreting in various political and institutional contexts creates new meaning potentials, with interpreters serving as agents and intercultural connecting points between discourses. This often engenders additional meaning potentials for further mediation in our increasingly (re)mediat(is)ed world. Using examples of CDA analysis, this study illustrates how the already interpreter-mediated discourse at China's Premier-Meets-the-Press conferences is further quoted and (re)contextualised by media outlets, thus highlighting interpreting's role in (re)enacting and (re)instantiating meaning and contributing to the international news production and global knowledge dissemination processes. Therefore, the interpreter-mediated discourse constitutes a crucial starting point for further (ideological) manipulations globally in the form of a discursive chain across languages, cultures and media platforms.

与传统的系统功能语言学词汇语法等微观视角路径不同，本文从更宏观的话语和政治视角来探讨口译这一跨语言和跨文化沟通活动中的"意义潜势"。文章认为，在各种政治和机构话语语境中，口译员扮演着代理的角色，是源语话语和目标语话语之间的"跨文化连接点"。口译员可能对口译内容进行不同程度的(意识形态)操控，因此同源语话语相比，口译后的话语会产生新的"意义潜势"。同时，经过(意识形态)操控的译文，在媒体高度发达的今天，可能会被其它诸多国内外媒体引用，并嵌入新的语境之中。因此，在跨文化传播中，不同媒体根据其立场，可能会对口译话语进行进一步操纵。从这个角度来看，口译这一行为客观上可以创造无限的"意义潜势"。本文分析了近年中国总理记者招待会的口译话语，通过批判性话语分析，展现口译员对源语话语的操控，并呈现口译话语如何被其它国家媒体平台援引，并纳入新的语境解读。该研究表明，口译往往是整个国际新闻产生与传播链条的起点，在整个跨语言、跨文化、跨平台交流过程中扮演着至关重要的角色。

Keywords: (re)contextualisation; discursive chain; political press conferences; CDA; meaning potential; interlingual and intercultural communication;

Introduction

Traditionally, Interpreting Studies (IS) has focused on the various cognitive issues, working memory, note-taking, interpreting training, interpreting quality, levels of 'equivalence', universalist features in interpreting, interpreting strategies and norms, etc. Such traditional preoccupations, without doubt, have tended to perceive interpreting as a seemingly closed and self-contained system, relatively independent of the broader social and cultural contexts. In other words, interpreting was by and large looked at in an inward-looking way. Only very recently, drawing, for example, on Descriptive Translation Studies (e.g., Wang, 2012), (critical) discourse analysis (e.g., Beaton-Thome, 2013; Gu, 2018; Gu and Tipton, 2020; Schäffner, 2012), sociological theories (e.g., Inghilleri, 2006), and a socio-narrative approach (e.g., Baker, 2006), IS has started to look at interpreting from an ideological, discursive and socio-political perspective, where interpreting is viewed as a mediated activity that is situated within certain sociocultural contexts and subject to ideological manipulations (e.g., Angelelli, 2014). Despite the recognition of such discursive and ideological dimensions, interpreting is still more or less conceptualised in an inward-looking way, without due attention to the potentially active and transformative role of interpreting in shaping discoursal reality and effecting change on a broader and macro level beyond the immediate setting where interpreting takes place.

This article aims to address two underexplored yet interconnected aspects relating to (political) interpreting, that is, (1) the interpreters' (ideological) mediation in the interpreting process and, more importantly, (2) how the interpreter-mediated discourse might be further (re)contextualised and (re)enacted interculturally into new discourses on different platforms (e.g. BBC headlines, news reports on CNN and Reuters, and Telegraph's videos uploaded onto YouTube) and in various multimodal and multisemiotic forms to create new meanings.

To better explain the point, the concept of 'meaning potential' is discussed here. The term 'meaning potential' was first coined by Halliday in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which takes a more dynamic and functional view of language and focuses on language use in action. According to Halliday (1985, p. 192), language can be seen as a 'systemic resource for meaning', thus possessing great 'meaning potential' to be activated and deployed. The idea of 'meaning potential' was also invoked by other scholars. For example, CDA scholar Fairclough (1992) looks at how multiple meanings can be activated in various means in discourse in contributing to social change. Also, on a related note, multimodal discourse analysts Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 20) see semiotic resources and modes as items that have a meaning potential which can be activated through choice systems.

Looking beyond a micro lexicogrammatical perspective, this article approaches the concept 'meaning potential' from a broader and macro discourse perspective with regard to interpreting. This article firstly argues that (political) interpreting[1] can be conceptualised as essentially a **(re)contextualisation process at a macro level,** with

the interpreter serving as the **agent and interlingual and intercultural connecting point** between the source and target discourses. This macro-level conceptualisation highlights the numerous instances of strategies, decision-making, stance-taking and possibly shifts and transformations at a micro level. Also, looking beyond the interpreting practice *per se*, attention is focused on the close intertextual relationship between the interpreter-mediated discourse and other discourses (e.g. on various media outlets and platforms). As such, it is also argued that, in an increasingly globalised and mediat(is)ed world, the interpreter-mediated discourse (interpreting product) often constitutes a vital source of meaning potential which can be **further unleashed and activated** multimodally and multisemiotically when further (re)contextualised and (re)enacted into various other channels and platforms (e.g. on CNN, BBC, New York Times, TikTok and Twitter). This results in the interpreted discourse being further (re)mediated in various ideological ways in the process. As such, the interpreted discourse serves as the 'fodder' for new discourses, potentially giving rise to a discursive chain to come.

To illustrate these points, China's Premier-Meets-the-Press Conferences will be used as a case in point. The premier's press conference is an annual interpreter-mediated discursive event, where the Chinese premier answers a wide range of questions from domestic and international journalists after the annual 'Two Sessions' of the national congress. This discursive event enables the Chinese government to articulate its official opinions and positions on various topics, hence a typical site of interlingual and intercultural communication. Further details about the press conference data can be found in the Approach, Methodology and Data section below. Drawing on 20 years of China's Premier-Meets-the-Press conference data (1998-2017), examples of critical discourse analysis are provided to show how the already interpreter-mediated discourse (from Chinese into English) at the press conferences is further picked up, (re)contextualised, (re)enacted and quoted *verbatim* by international media outlets on a wide range of news platforms. This study highlights the vital role of interpreting as a crucial source in (re)enacting and (re)instantiating meaning and in contributing to the entire international news production and dissemination processes in multimodal ways (e.g. written news articles, video subtitles, and voice-overs). The (re)contextualisation of the interpreted discourse points to the creation of further meaning potentials and possibility for further manipulation and mediation on a global scale in the form of a continuous 'discursive chain' beyond the immediate situational setting where interpreting originally takes place.

It is hoped that this article will contribute to a better understanding of the essentially mediated and also powerful nature of interpreting at various levels (both internally by the interpreter and externally by other agents) in the international news and global knowledge production, dissemination and circulation processes. This highlights the necessity to look at interpreting **in a more critical, macro, outward-looking, holistic, and dynamic way** (potentially with far-reaching impact on a global scale discursively), beyond the traditional preoccupations with interpreting being a

seemingly closed and self-contained system.

Conceptualising Interpreting as a dynamic (re)contextualisation process and an important source of meaning potential in interlingual and intercultural communication: a theoretical framework

While a lot has been made of the ideological and potentially manipulative use of language in monolingual discursive communication, relatively limited attention has focused on bilingual and multilingual intercultural communication characterised notably by translation and interpreting. Despite this comparatively limited attention, there has been a growing corpus of research exploring the link between translation (written bilingual discursive communication), power, ideology and discourse. This might involve taking a CDA approach (Hatim and Mason, 1990; Kang, 2007; Kim, 2017; Li and Li, 2015; Munday, 2007; Pan, 2014; Spiessens and Van Poucke, 2016; Valdeón, 2007; Wu, 2018; Zhang, 2013) or more recently a socio-narrative approach (Baker, 2006; 2010; Harding, 2011; Kim, 2018).

In stark contrast, beyond the traditionally inward-looking view of interpreting as being situated within a seemingly closed and self-contained system (focusing, for example, on various cognitive issues, memory training, note-taking, interpreting norms and strategies, etc.), scholars have only recently started to investigate the close nexus between interpreting (spoken bilingual discursive communication), power, ideology and discourse. Through looking at various lexical items and linguistic features, now a few studies have begun to challenge the long-held view of interpreting merely as a transference of meaning between the ST and TT, thus calling into question the commonplace assumption of interpreters as agentless conduits or voice machines (Sun, 2012; Wadensjö, 1998). Relatively more recently, a number of studies have taken into account issues of ideology, power, discourse and interpreting in various settings and contexts (Beaton-Thome, 2013; Wang, 2020; Wang and Feng, 2018) and examined how interpreters might mediate in the process and even help (re)construct the image of certain sociopolitical actors (Gu, 2018; Gu & Tipton, 2020) and (re)frame versions of truth, fact and reality (Gu, 2020a).

Indeed, (political) interpreting can be conceptualised as essentially a dynamic and negotiated (re)contextualisation[2] process at a macro level, which constitutes an act of (re)enacting of (ideological) meaning into the specific language, culture and sociopolitical background of the TT. As such, this highlights the agency and potential mediation role of interpreters as the vital discursive link and interlingual and intercultural connecting point between the ST and TT. The dynamic conceptualisation of interpreting as (re)contextualisation at a macro level (which necessarily features numerous micro-level instances of strategies, decision-making, stance-taking and possibly shifts and transformations) permits a fruitful critical analysis of the interpreters' agency and (ideological) mediation in the process through comparing the ST and TT, with a focus on shifts (Catford, 1965), particularly those ideologically

salient 'optional shifts' (Toury, 1995) and transformations.

Such a conceptualisation has the advantage of connecting interpreting process with products (ST and TT), thus conceptually and analytically bridging the traditional dichotomy between 'process' and 'product' in interpreting. Unlike the previous (more prescriptive) theorisations and concepts such as 'equivalence' or 'norm', this theorisation takes a more descriptive approach, permitting a detailed and systematic analysis of both the interpreting process and product at various micro levels and as having been realised in different discursive means. This makes it possible to combine the analysis with a range of theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches (e.g. conversation analysis, narrative theory, (critical) discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, participation framework, multimodal/multisemiotic discourse analysis) in order to gain a deeper understanding of interpreting. That is, rather than necessarily pointing out what interpreting is and should be in a reified and prescriptive sense, this conceptualisation provides useful insights to the critical exploration of interpreting regarding what really happens between the ST and TT in a descriptive manner (see data analysis section for the interpreters' mediation when (re)contextualising discourse into the TT).

In addition, interpreting is also a meaning making and meaning creating process. That is, once mediated by the interpreter, the interpreting product becomes a new starting point and a new powerful source of meaning potential, thus providing the **'fodder'** for further mediation. This new potentiality is likely to be unleashed and activated when it is further mediat(is)ed, (re)contextualised, (re)enacted, (re)perspectivised and becomes part of social media tweets, news reports, videos, TV programmes and even academic works multimodally and multisemiotically. In doing so, the interpreter-mediated discourse forms part of a new discourse or narrative, which might in turn be used to weaken and strengthen certain party/actors' position and legitimacy and to praise or defame the ideological other.

As such, beyond the original setting (e.g. press conference hall, European Union, United Nations), the interpreter-mediated discourse becomes the crucial starting point of an ongoing **discursive chain**, which potentially can have far-reaching ramifications on a global scale. Such conceptualisations point to the vital role of interpreter both 'within' as an intertextual and intercultural connecting point and 'externally' as a key agent beyond the interpreting activity itself. Using China's Premier-Meets-the-Press conferences as an example, the processes mentioned above are illustrated in Figure 1.
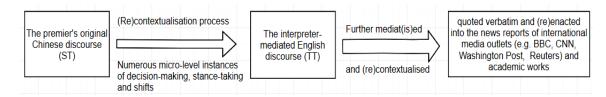

Figure 1: Interpreting as a (re)contextualisation process and a vital source of meaning potential

To give a fuller illustration of our point, examples are taken from a corpus consisting of twenty years' Premier-Meets-the-Press conference data (1998-2017) and critical discourse analysis is conducted on the selected examples. This study aims to (1) show how the original discourse is (re)constructed in English by the interpreter as an agent and then (2) to demonstrate how the interpreted discourse can be quoted, (re)enacted and (re)perspectivised in the discursive production of different genres by different agents (e.g. on newspapers or the websites of the CNN or BBC) and multimodally.

Approach, Methodology and Data

This section discusses the approach, data and methodology adopted in this study. Conceptualising discourse as essentially 'a form of social practice' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 20), critical discourse analysis (CDA) represents an interdisciplinary and problem-oriented approach to the study of discourse used in various sociopolitical and institutional settings. Unlike 'language' in a general sense, discourse here specifically refers to "what happens when language 'gets done'" (Simpson and Mayr, 2009, p. 5). As such, the key word 'discourse' here usefully captures 'both the meaning and effects of language usage' (ibid). Taking a constructionist view of language, CDA scholars tend to view discourse as performative and constitutive in nature, rather than being merely reflective and representative of the broader sociopolitical realities. The essentially mediated nature of discourse in a myriad of sociopolitical, cultural and institutional settings highlights the possibilities of transformative language use and the creation of various meaning potentials for ideological manipulations, capitalising on the potential affordances of a language and various multimodal and multisemiotic resources in place.

Drawing on various linguistic (e.g. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics) and social theories (e.g. the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault), the multifarious CDA features different trends, schools and approaches. These notably include Fairclough's three-dimensional approach (1989), Wodak's discourse-historical approach (2001), and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (1984). Despite such diversity, CDA is united by a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993). Underpinning all CDA analysis is the dialectical assumption that realities are both reflected in and constantly shaped by discourse.

Also, the operative word 'critical' here should not be simplistically equated with criticism or blaming in a 'negative' way (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 2). It instead concerns the critical attitude to take nothing at face value and take nothing for granted in revealing the (often subtle and non-obvious) enactment of power and ideologies in language at various levels. As such, a central preoccupation of CDA is the critical examination of discourse, which might potentially serve to reflect ideologies, construct realities and contribute to social inequality and changes in power relations. A critical discourse analytical approach is textually oriented and is often attentive to

the power and ideology enacted in language at a micro-level. According to CDA scholars (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1984), some of the common linguistic categories and discursive features that might be ideologically salient include naming/labelling/lexicalising, nominalisation, passivisation, transitivity, modality, use of metaphor, foregrounding/backgrounding, and the establishment of positive *us* versus negative *them* (e.g. *in-group* versus *out-group* identities).

The CDA approach will be applied on the China's premier's press conference data. Now an institutionalised annual tradition, the Premier-Meets-the-Press conferences are held around March each year towards the end of the 'Two Sessions' of China's national congress. The Chinese premier is generally considered to be China's No. 2 figure, immediately behind the Chinese president. A wide range of domestic and international topics are covered in these press conferences, ranging from GDP growth, China's economy and agriculture to other more sensitive topics such as Tibet, Taiwan, democratic reforms, China-Japan relations, Hong Kong, the Korean peninsula and the Syria crisis. Interpreting is provided in the consecutive mode and the Chinese premier's remarks are interpreted into the global *lingua franca*, that is, English. As such, the English interpretation represents the officially sanctioned version of China's global voice in the international arena. The live-televised press conferences permit China to articulate its official (and desired) version of truth, fact and reality and make it possible for the international journalists and audience to gain first-hand information about China. In this study, 20 recent press conferences (1998-2017) have been transcribed, forming the CE-PolitDisCorp (Chinese-English Political Discourses Corpus) established by the first author. For more details on the data (e.g. corpus size, each year's topics, interpreters and media outlets involved), please see Gu (2018).

Given the research questions and the bilingual, comparative and illustrative nature of this study, CDA analysis is carried out on the CE-PolitDisCorp data in a qualitative way without necessarily following any particular school or any pre-assigned categories. While following Fairclough or van Dijk's model and its corresponding toolkit might appear useful, the comparative nature of the study (between the ST and TT) means that it is best to adopt a more data-driven approach to identify various ideologically salient linguistic strategies and highlight different levels of mediation, rather than starting from certain pre-assigned categories. Attention is therefore focused on a critical comparison between the Chinese source text (ST) and the English target text (TT) to highlight ideologically salient 'optional shifts' (Toury, 1995) that are not triggered by the grammatical differences between the two languages but those that might indicate interpreters' potential mediation. Attention then is also focused on how the interpreted discourse might be further (re)mediated and (re)contextualised.

Data Analysis
Having discussed the approach, methodology and data used, critical discourse analysis is conducted on the empirical data to highlight (1) the interpreters' agency

and ideological mediation on the one hand and demonstrate (2) how the interpreted discourse is further (re)contextualised and (re)enacted intertextually on the other by various media outlets and multimodally. A detailed CDA analysis on the press conference data suggests that there are many such cases of mediation. Given the limited space, a range of linguistic and discursive strategies are discussed here with illustrative examples.

1) Linguistic and Discursive Mediation Strategies in Interpreting

(1) Use of Metadiscursive Framing in Interpreting

The first category concerns the interpreters' frequent use of **metadiscursive devices** (e.g. in fact, the fact that, as a matter of fact) in (re)framing the discourse in interpreting. Metadiscursive devices here can be understood to be those devices that do not necessarily add to the propositional or informational content but might serve certain interactive purposes and/or might indicate the text producer's evaluation of and position on certain events or issues (Gu, 2020a; Hyland, 2005). 'Framing' means an active process that involves selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient (Wu, 2018).

Example 1 extracted from the 2013 conference illustrates the interpreter's discursive mediation serving as the intertextual and intercultural connecting point between the ST and TT. When (re)contextualising the message into English, the **metadiscursive device** 'the fact that' has been used, which discursively (re)frames Hong Kong being full of vitality under 'One Country, Two Systems' and by extension the great leadership of the central government as an undeniable 'fact'. This, therefore, constitutes a case of positive *self*-representation (van Dijk, 1984), (re)constructing a more positive image of Beijing.

Example 1 (2013)
ST: 我访港的时候深感一国两制下的香港充满活力。
Gloss: I, when visiting Hong Kong, deeply felt that Hong Kong was full of vitality under One Country, Two Systems.
TT: During the trip in 2011, I was deeply impressed by <u>the fact that</u> Hong Kong was brimming with vitality under One Country, Two Systems.

Noticeably, the metadiscursively (re)framed discourse featuring 'the fact that' was later taken for granted and appeared on various websites such as C-SPAN (USA) as an official record of the premier's words. The same extract was also quoted *verbatim* and (re)contextualised in an article on the *China Daily* newspaper website (Figure 2). As such, the interpreter-mediated discourse creates new meaning potential and becomes the starting point of various new news stories as illustrated in Figure 1. More specifically, given the pro-government positioning of the *China Daily*, this interpreter-mediated sentence has been (re)contextualised into a new context in the

article that exhibits overwhelmingly positive semantic prosody (Gu, 2020b; Kim, 2013). This overall positive depiction has helped to highlight the central government's determination and willingness to further advance its close ties with the Hong Kong government on various fronts. This is seemingly in contrast to the scenario in example 2 and Figure 4 to be discussed later, where the interpreted discourse is (re)contextualised into an article that is more critical of China and the Chinese government.

Figure 2: Screenshot of the interpreted discourse (re)contextualised on the *China Daily* website

Similarly, in passing, another instance of the interpreters' additions of metadiscursive markers can be found below. In the Chinese ST, the premier says "这可以说是一个世界性的问题，中国本身就是主要的被黑客攻击的受害者" [literally: this (cyberattack) can be said to be a worldwide problem. China itself is the main victim attached by hackers]. However, this is interpreted as 'this is a worldwide problem and in fact China itself a main target' with the addition of the metadiscursive marker 'in fact' (untriggered by the Chinese original). The interpreter-mediated discourse relating to China 'in fact' being a main target of cyberattack has appeared on CNN website (Figure 3). Discursively, the interpreter's addition of the metadiscursive marker 'in fact' serves to further strengthen the original discourse, adding a great sense of conviction.
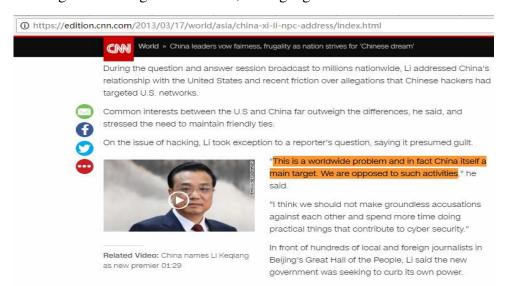
Figure 3: Screenshot of the interpreted discourse (re)contextualised on the CNN website

(2) Upgrading Modality Value in Interpreting

Modality has been extensively discussed in CDA for its ideological and discursive potentials in making certain claims (e.g. Fairclough, 1989). The second category focuses on how the interpreters tend to further mediate China's discourse by using modal verbs featuring higher modality values when (re)contextualising the message in English. As demonstrated in Example 2 taken from the 2012 press conference, the Chinese premier emphasises the crucial importance of reform. The Chinese original is already forceful and convincing and is peppered with modality (e.g. 不能). In the rendition into English, the already forceful discourse featuring 'cannot' is further strengthened by the interpreter through using 'must not', arguably featuring the highest modality value[3]. This therefore (re)constructs a greater sense of determination and resolve and a better image of the government in front of an international audience.

Example 2 (2012)
ST: 但是改革只能前进, 不能停滞, 更不能倒退。停滞和倒退都没有出路。
Gloss: But the reform can only go ahead and **cannot** stand still. Nor can it go backwards. Standing still and going backwards have no way out.
TT: The reform can only go forward. The reform **must not** stand still, still less go backward because that offers no way out.

Interestingly, the interpreted discourse featuring the high-modality '*must not*' as in 'the reform *must* not stand still' was further (re)contextualised and quoted word-by-word on the FRANCE 24 website as the premier's own words (Figure 4), thus making the article appear more authentic, trustworthy and authoritative. This once again highlights the interpreted discourse as a vital source of meaning potential. That is, once (re)contextualised, the interpreted discourse is (re)enacted into a new host media platform, which may aim to present its own institutional perspectives and ideological positions. In this particular case, the quoted sentences have been juxtaposed with other content that indicates FRANCE 24's critical institutional positions on and negative evaluations of the various aspects of China and the Chinese government (e.g. 'ruling communists', 'iron grip on political power', 'go to great lengths to crush challenges to their rule', 'China's state-run Xinhua news agency', 'turbulent period of the Cultural Revolution'). As such, the (re)contextualised interpreted discourse is embedded in a context that demonstrates negative semantic prosody (Gu, 2020b; Kim, 2013). These, taken together, serve to shape the readers' impression of China in a certain way. This is in contrast to the scenario discussed in Example 1.
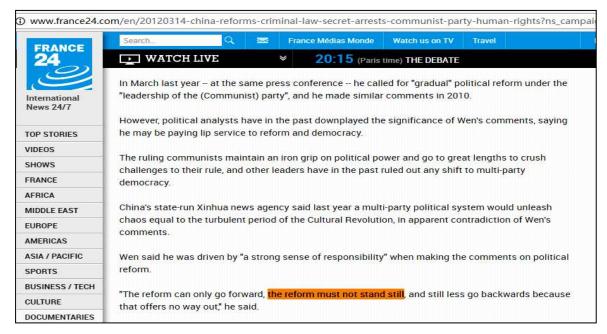
Figure 4: Screenshot of the interpreted discourse (re)contextualised on the FRANCE 24 website

(3) Additions of First-person Plural Pronoun and the Concept of 'People' in Interpreting

Having discussed the interpreters' employment of metadiscursive devices and modal verbs, another two ideologically salient categories worth discussing are the interpreters' tendency to repeatedly add first-person plural pronoun as well as the concept of 'people', serving as the nexus between the ST and TT. In Example 3 extracted from the 2014 press conference, the Chinese premier sincerely acknowledges that air pollution has been a common concern for many in China. When (re)contextualised into English, the interpreter has repeatedly produced the pattern 'our people'. Repetition as a discursive strategy is ideologically salient (c.f. Fairclough, 1989). Through the repeated additions of the first-person plural pronoun 'our' and 'people', the Chinese original is further strengthened, (re)constructing a significantly more positive image of the government being highly caring and responsible and keen to respond to the concerns of its people. This also conveys a heightened sense of 'togetherness', indicating that the government is always with the people in the fight against air pollution. These, taken together, represent a case of positive *self*-representation (van Dijk, 1984).

Example 3 (2014)

ST: 我说要向雾霾等污染宣战，这是因为这是社会关注的焦点问题。许多人早晨起来，一打开手机就查看这个 PM2.5 的数值，这已经成为重大的民生问题了。

Gloss: I said (I) will declare war against pollution like smog. This is because this is a focal issue that the society focuses on. Many people wake up in the morning and check this PM2.5 index as soon as they turn on their mobile phones. This has already become a major livelihood problem.

TT: I said the government will declare a war against smog pollution as a whole,

because this has become a serious issue on the top of minds of <u>our people</u>. For many people, the first thing they do after getting up in the day is to check the PM2.5 figure. This has become a major issue that concerns <u>our people</u>'s lives.

As a vital source of meaning potential, the interpreter-mediated discourse featuring the pattern 'our people' has gained further international currency when it is (re)mediated on the website of Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). A screenshot of this can be found in Figure 5. In addition, the interpreted discourse has also appeared on the website of China's consulate-general in San Francisco as an official record in English. From this perspective, the interpreted discourse has provided the 'fodder' for a wide range of other texts on various platforms as illustrated in Figure 1 above.

Figure 5: Screenshot of interpreter's additions of 'our people' appearing on ABC website

(4) Additions of Intensifiers in Interpreting

Another linguistic category relating to the interpreters' discursive mediation involves the frequent additions of intensifiers (*very*, *quite*, *highly*, *fully*, *completely*, and *extremely* etc.) that are not triggered by the Chinese original. Discursively, these serve to further reinforce the Chinese original discourse, making the premier's utterances more emphatic and rhetorically powerful.

Below is an apposite example of this. In Example 4, the Chinese premier has made a case for the importance of stability for the country. When rendering the message into English, the interpreter has added the intensifier 'fully' (and this is not triggered by content in the ST). This serves to make the original message even more powerful and convincing. As a result, this constitutes another case of positive *self*-representation (van Dijk, 1984), (re)constructing an even more positive image of the government as the committed restorer of stability who is keen to maintain peace and stability in China.

Example 4 (2003)

ST: 我也深知中国的稳定和发展来之不易…13 年来，中国所取得的巨大成就说明稳定是至关重要的。

Gloss: I too deeply know that China's stability and development didn't come easy…13 years on, China's massive achievements indicate that stability is vital.

TT: I know so well the stability and development of this country have not come by easily…The tremendous achievements we have scored over the past 13 years have <u>fully</u> proven that stability is of vital importance.

Again, the interpreter-mediated discourse was later picked up and used on various websites, thus becoming the starting point of a discursive chain. Figure 6 illustrates how the interpreter's rendition appears on the website of the Chinese Embassy in Zimbabwe as an official record detailing Beijing's official stances and positions on various issues[4].

Figure 6: Screenshot of interpreter's addition of 'fully' appearing on Chinese Embassy's website

2) Further (Re)presentation of the Interpreter-mediated Discourse in Multimodal and Multisemiotic Means by Foreign Media

For Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), discourse as language in use also has a multimodal and multisemiotic element. Close analysis of the data shows that the interpreter-mediated discourses are not only (re)contextualised and invoked on various (written) news portals and websites; they are also further (re)presented in a variety of other forms (e.g. voice-over, dubbing and subtitles) on videos.

Figure 7 illustrates a video uploaded onto Youtube by AFP news agency, which is entitled "China's Wen calls for 'urgent' political reforms".[5] In this video, alongside the Chinese premier's original voice in Chinese, the following message based exclusively on the interpreter's rendition is narrated by a voice actor as the official 'translation'.

"Now reform in China has come to a critical stage. Without a successful political structural reform, it is impossible for us to fully institute economic structural reform, and the gains we have made in this area might be lost. New problems that have cropped up in China's society will not be fundamentally resolved and such historical tragedy…might happen again".

This *verbatim* dubbing shows the news agency's reliance on the interpreted version provided by the government interpreter. In other words, the interpreted discourse is often taken for granted as the unaltered version of China's discourse, often without acknowledging that what they are quoting is not the Chinese premier's original words but the English interpretation. Also, there is a tendency for the interpreted discourse to be invoked by various news outlets without problematising or questioning whether the interpreting is accurate in the first place. This is in line with Schaffner's (2012) observation that sometimes even an interpreter's slip of tongue is (re)presented exactly like the politician's own words. The journalists and news editors' preference for and reliance on the official interpretation is also evidenced in Tao (2013). During Tao's interview with Dayun Che, a Korean journalist affiliated with Yonhap News Agency, Dayun said that journalists sometimes would rather refer to the official interpreted version to 'avoid mistakes' even if they know the relevant languages. This is also echoed in Zheng and Ren's (2018) study, who observe that the interpreted version is often used as an authoritative and official version of certain political actor's voice in journalistic and media texts.

Figure 7: The interpreted discourse dubbed onto a Youtube video uploaded by AFP

Similar examples can also be found in videos from *The Telegraph* and ABC News (Australia), where subtitles and voice-over more or less based on the interpreter's rendition are provided as the 'translation' for the premier's words.

Interestingly, however, for the video from *The Telegraph*, it is clearly presented that Premier Wen is quoted as saying 'democracy is inevitable' as the video's title (Figure 8). While the overall message appearing in the subtitles has been more or less based on the interpreter's rendition, it is worth noting that the title 'democracy is inevitable'

is neither the Premier's own words in Chinese nor the exact wording of the English interpretation ('no force will be able to hold this process back'). This therefore represents a more explicit articulation that might appear eye-catching for the viewers.

Figure 8: Screenshot of The Telegraph video on YouTube

This highlights how the interpreted discourse might be (re)contextualised and (re)mediated in various multimodal ways. This also points to the latitude media outlets may potentially enjoy in rephrasing and (re)perspectivising the interpreted discourse for various ideological, institutional or other purposes (e.g. to make the title more eye-catching or to report news in a sensationalist manner). In so doing, the already ideologically mediated interpreted discourse can be further (re)mediated, where the media outlets might potentially add various spins to the interpreted discourse based on the outlets' institutional positions and ideological stances. This enables the media outlets to (re)frame and (re)construct versions of fact, truth and reality and possibly forge a particular narrative, whilst appearing to be objective and directly quoting the 'original' official source in a verbatim manner.

Conclusion

This article has investigated two important, related yet under-explored issues relating to the mediated nature of the interpreting process and product by different agents and at various levels. Firstly, as illustrated in Figure 1, interpreting was modelled as a dynamic process of (re)contextualisation and (re)enactment of meaning at a macro-level, with the interpreter serving as the intercultural connecting point and

discursive link between the source and target languages. This points to the numerous micro-level of strategies, decision-making, stance-taking and shifts that might occur in the interpreting process.

Secondly, the (already mediated) interpreting product was conceptualised as a vital resource of meaning potentials to be further activated and triggered by various external agents, hence the 'fodder' for other discourses to come and the starting point of a long discursive chain in the entire international news and knowledge production and dissemination processes. Such conceptualisations highlight the necessity for critical contrastive analysis of the ST and TT to explore the interpreters' mediation on the one hand and the need to look at how the interpreted product subsequently might be further (re)perspectivised, (re)contextualised and subject to further mediation and manipulation on the other. These conceptualisations promise to help us better understand the mediat(is)ed nature of interpreting both as a process and as a product.

These were explained and illustrated with detailed discussions using examples from China's premier's press conferences. CDA analysis shows how interpreters might mediate China's discourse using various discursive strategies (e.g. metadiscursive reframing, the additions of intensifiers, the additions of first-person plural pronoun, and the use of modal verbs with high modality value). The ongoing, high-profile and televised nature of the interpreter-mediated press conferences points to the role of interpreters in helping (re)create certain images and shaping global perception of China. These highlight the particularly crucial role of interpreters as important (re)tellers of the Chinese story in English amid a major push for Beijing to have its voice heard internationally and to counterbalance the dominant Western-centric ideological discourse.

Meanwhile, the CDA analysis shows that the interpreted discourses, as an invaluable source of meaning potential, tend to be (re)contextualised on various new platforms, by different agents, for various purposes, and in myriad multisemiotic ways and modalities (e.g. in the form of written text, dubbing, voice-over, subtitles, etc.). Interestingly, presumably to lend credence to their reports or news stories, the interpreted discourse is often invoked in a verbatim manner, without necessarily acknowledging that it is the interpreted version of Beijing's official discourse. The act of (re)contextualising and (re)enacting the interpreted discourse is inevitably selective and subjective in nature, which might involve foregrounding and backgrounding (Fairclough, 1989) certain elements over others and the placement of certain interpreted discourse in a new context for certain effects (e.g. the CNN and FRANCE 24 examples). The involvement of various subjective actors highlights how the (re)packaged interpreted product might be used to serve the ideological goals and institutional agendas of certain media outlets. Possibly, the interpreted discourse might be (re)contextualised and quoted to weaken or strengthen certain party/actors' position and legitimacy and to defame or undermine the ideological other. At any rate, the further (re)contextualisation and (re)enactment of the interpreted discourse would

contribute to the creation of new narratives and discourses as part of a discursive chain.

Important sociopolitical actors and politicians are often believed to be the movers and shakers behind various sociopolitical and cultural changes. However, given the increasingly connected and mediat(is)ed world we live in, it stands to argue that interpreters and interpreting too can effect changes on a local and global scale and play an increasingly pivotal role in facilitating intercultural communication or causing (mis)communication.

Of course, this study only represents the case of the premier's press conferences in China. Nevertheless, stepping out of an inward-looking perception of interpreting as a semi-closed and self-contained system, this study as well as a few other recent studies (e.g., Zheng and Ren, 2018) point to the relatively new dimension and possibilities for future research in interpreting studies that focuses not just on interpreting itself but on its transformative and shaping role from a more macro perspective of intercultural (mis)communication and global news and knowledge production. As such, rather than a predominant focus on interpreting *per se*, this represents a call for interpreting studies to go from 'within' to 'beyond' as the discipline further develops.

As an avenue for future study, it would be interesting to see how interpreter-mediated discourses of various genres, in different settings, and from diverse geographical locales (bilateral press conferences between heads of state, EU and UN sessions, opening addresses of political leaders, national day speeches, etc.) might be variously (re)perspectivised and further mediated multilingually and multimodally. There needs to be more serious academic engagement with the dynamic and mediated nature of interpreting (e.g. by the interpreters and various other agents) and the far-reaching discursive effects, ramifications and reception of interpreting. This might involve studies that explore how one piece of interpreter-mediated discourse (e.g. from an influential or high-profile politician or diplomat) might be (re)contextualised and (re)enacted differently by agents from different media outlets with different ideological positions and institutional policies. With this in mind, various theoretical and methodological approaches such as (critical) discourse analysis, narrative theories, multimodal /multisemiotic discourse analysis might be adopted to this end.

In the final analysis, this article highlights the crucial need for translation and interpreting studies to improve communication with other disciplines, to move beyond binaries, and to engage with translation and interpreting as a global activity. Going forward, this, for example, might involve more win-win dialogues and collaborations with such areas and disciplines as media, journalism, communication, discourse studies, and the political sciences.

Notes

[1]There have been some brief comments in passing by scholars in SFL about how meanings might be created in translation. For example, Halliday (1992, 15) regards translation as 'a meaning-making activity', pointing out that 'we would not consider any activity to be translation if it did not result in the creation of meaning'. Likewise, Matthiessen (2001, p. 64) maintains that translation is 'not a passive reflection' of the source text, but rather 'a creative act of reconstruing the meanings of the original' in the target text. However, there have been no formal and systematic theorisations which look at translation and interpreting as a source of 'meaning potential'.

[2]The idea of (re)conceptualisation is not new in translation and interpreting studies. For example, drawing on CDA and using one-off interpreted meetings (Sarkozy and Merkel as well as Merkel and Obama) as small case studies, Schäffner (2012) investigates how the original interpretation is used and (re)contextualised in the production of texts in other genres (joint letters, official transcripts, and news stories) in her article entitled *Unknown agents in translated political discourse*. However, so far, most studies have focused on (re)contextualisation that occurs in individual instances without any macro-level theorisation and conceptualising.

[3]It is worth noting that modality is a complex category and "不能" in Chinese can be interpreted in different ways depending on the context. The authors of this article believe that the rendition "must not" represents an upgrade in modality value based on a close analysis of the specific context.

[4]The website can be found here http://www.chinaembassy.org.zw/eng/xwdt/t149302.htm (last access: August 2020)

[5]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pp1P4Qp5A4Y (last access: August 2020)

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