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## **A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of the Representation of Conference Interpreters in Chinese Media**

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**Abstract:** Though interpreters' professionalism has been discussed in interpreting studies, there have been few studies on how the general public see the image of interpreters. The present study is a multi-dimensional analysis of the image of conference interpreters as represented by the media, which is based on a corpus of 60 news reports about interpreting and interpreters in the Chinese media in the past 10 years. It explores the research question: How are conference interpreters represented in the Chinese media? Through thematic and rhetorical analysis of the headlines and body texts as well as multimodal analysis of the photos in the news reports, it is found that conference interpreters are represented by institutional conference and diplomatic interpreters, who are in turn represented as "stars" or public celebrities of the profession; they are frequently presented along with big events and big names, and portrayed as affiliating to power and as distant from the public. Images of female beauties among them are also selected and "consumed" as in popular culture. This implies a discrepancy between the self-perception of the interpreting profession and their representation by the media.

**Key words:** Image of conference interpreters; Representation in Chinese Media; Multimodal analysis; Thematic and rhetorical analysis

### **1. Introduction**

While most previous research efforts in interpreting studies focused on cognitive processing, the past decade has witnessed a growing interest in other aspects, such as the interpreter's role in shaping the interpreting product (e.g., Angelelli 2004), norms of interpreting (e.g., Wang 2012) and the sociology of the interpreting profession (e.g., Dam and Zethsen 2013). Such developments reflect the general trend in Translation Studies (understood here to include translation and interpreting studies) towards the conceptualization of translation and interpreting as socially situated activities and of translators and interpreters not only as agents of linguistic and communicative mediation but also as agents of cultural and ideological mediation (e.g., Inghilleri 2007; Munday 2012). In the past decade the discipline has shown increasing awareness of the relationship between discursive practices of translation and interpreting and their social embedding and of the roles and functions of translation and interpreting activities in society,

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exploration of which is labelled by some scholars as the “social turn” or “sociological turn” (e.g., Wolf 2006; Pöchhacker 2009; Angelelli 2012).

The sociological turn in Translation Studies has stimulated growing research interest in the occupational status and professional image of translators and interpreters. Sela-Sheffy (2005) finds that in Israel a restricted circle of literary translators are crowned as the “stars” of translation, their fame extending “beyond the limits of their profession as public celebrities”. Setton and Guo (2009) provide data on interpreters’ occupational status based on a survey conducted in Shanghai and Taipei of translators’ and interpreters’ attitudes about their role, status and professional identity. According to their survey, interpreters are addressed with the Chinese honorific title of “teacher” (口译老师, interpreting teacher), which is typically used to show respect to people with high professional skills, and find themselves enjoying social status equivalent to other types of professionals such as journalists, lawyers and management consultants (Setton and Guo, 2009). Dam and Zethsen (2013) investigate the self-perceived occupational status of a group of Danish staff interpreters at the European Union and examine to what extent the prestigious ‘star’ image of conference interpreters is reflected in their occupational status. However, there have been few studies about how interpreters are perceived outside the profession, as articulated, for example, in the public media. Of the few studies, a survey conducted by Diriker (2009) showed that the representation of conference interpreting in the Turkish media nowadays is closely connected with “big events”, “big money”, “big careers”, and “big names” (though also with “big mistakes”).

More recent efforts are the papers collected in a volume about framing interpreters from a visual perspective across four historical periods: the colonial period (prior to the 1930s), the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War (Fernandez-Ocampo and Wolf 2014), in which the scholars not only explored the methodology of the visual approach to interpreters’ roles and image but also made extensive application of visual ethnography and visual grammar in their analyses of photography.

The present study is an analysis of the image of conference interpreters as represented by the media in China. “Image” can be defined as an intangible, invisible, spiritual, and verbal experience of understanding which derives not necessarily from the “visual image”, or “picture”, but also from the text (Manghani 2013, 59-60). Based on analysis of a collection of news reports over 10 years about interpreting and interpreters in the Chinese media, it intends to answer the research question: How are conference interpreters represented in the Chinese media?

## **2. Data Collection**

A search for news reports about interpreting and interpreters was conducted through the search engine of Google and the news section of the biggest Chinese search engine *Baidu* ([www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com)). The list of search words included “口译” (interpreting), “翻译” (translation, translator, and translating), “两会” (the two sessions of National People’s Congress and Chinese

People's Political Consultative Conference, the annual parliamentary gathering of the Chinese government), “记者会” (press conference), “会议” (conference), “同传” (simultaneous interpreting), “交传” (consecutive interpreting), “联络” (liaison). The keyword “翻译” in combination with “两会” or “记者会” generated most search results. Over 100 news reports were collected through the searches and those about events within the decade from 2005 to 2015 were selected. The collected news reports were published on the major online news portals in China including Sina, Sohu, Netease, and government websites such as Youth.cn, Chinadaily.com.cn and people.com.cn, as well as social media that are accessible through the search engines. After manual screening-out of repeated web pages, 60 news reports remained for the present analysis.

### **3. Methodology**

As the news reports collected typically comprise a headline, one or several photos and a body text, a multi-dimensional analysis was conducted into these three components. We conducted a thematic and rhetorical analysis of the headlines and the body texts of the new reports, and a multimodal analysis of the photos. The analysis of the photographs of interpreters is particularly meaningful because it allows us not only to gauge the visibility of interpreters but also to uncover how they are represented in images. In translation and interpreting studies, the visual as an object of research and as a conceptual dimension has just begun to attract attention. A typical example is the volume edited by Fernandez-Ocampo and Wolf (2014), in which the contributors explore how interpreters are represented through the manipulation of their visual images in different historical periods. Such a visual perspective in translation and interpreting studies can “open up new avenues beyond the centrality of the written text”, “especially at the points where written texts reach their limits” (Wolf and Fernández-Ocampo 2014, 1-2). In the news reports collected in the current study photos have become the main medium for portraying interpreters at work. The analysis using visual grammar of representation, interaction, and composition in these photos (Fernández-Ocampo 2014, 34) can yield much more information than simply textual analysis of news reports.

### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

Typically, the news reports collected in the current study have three components: the headline, photos and the body text, but these components are distributed unevenly in different news reports. All the news reports have headlines, most have photos (53 out of 60), and 27 have long body texts (See Figure 1).

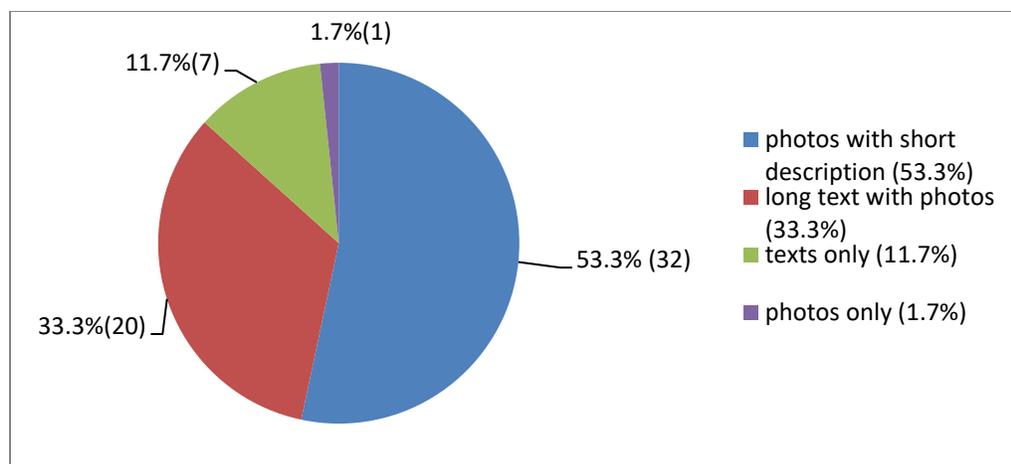


Figure 1. Distribution of different components in the news reports (n=60)

According to the model of scale of presence proposed by Norman Fairclough (1995, 106), what is included in and what is excluded from the content are important indicators of news value. What is not mentioned in a news report can be seen as presupposed, given, or unimportant. In terms of presence there are four levels of prominence: “absent – presupposed – backgrounded – foregrounded” (Fairclough 1995, 106). Content that is “absent” means such content is not important and thus not provided. “Presupposed” content is not written in words but can be inferred from what is written. Unimportant content is put in the “background” and that of real news value is put in the “foreground.” Such a model was originally developed for analyzing textual content but it can also be applied in determining the highlighted and downplayed components in the news reports in the current study. News reports with only photos suggest that other types of information, e.g., body text, are presupposed as “given” or are insignificant in terms of news value. The hierarchy of news value is also observable from the sequence of the three components – all the news reports begin with the headline, followed by the photos, and the body text appears last. In the following sections, the three components of the news reports will be analyzed using different approaches.

#### 4.1 The Image Framed by the Headlines

According to Dor (2003, 708-716), “appropriate headlines” should have 10 properties, namely they should: 1) be as short as possible 2) be clear, easy to understand, and unambiguous 3) be interesting 4) contain new information 5) not presuppose information not known to readers 6) include names and concepts with high “news value” for the readers 7) not contain names and concepts with low “news value” for the readers 8) “connect the story” to previously known facts and events 9) “connect the story” to prior expectations and assumptions 10) “frame” the story in an appropriate fashion. However, some empirical studies have found that headlines may not necessarily follow these guidelines. They are not necessarily a summary of the content (Althaus et al. 2001; Andrew 2007) and do not always offer substantial information (Smith 1999). News headline writers may “disregard standard norms such as length, clarity, and information as long

as headlines rivet their attention in terms of creative style regardless of underdetermined semantic meaning” (Ifantidou 2008, 699). Therefore, in order to see how the image of conference interpreters is presented in the headlines, a descriptive analysis is conducted from two perspectives: 1) a thematic analysis of their content, and 2) a stylistic analysis of their rhetorical features and structural features.

#### 4.1.1 Thematic analysis of the headlines

Of the themes identified in the headlines, it is found that the interpreters’ appearance is the most highlighted aspect. The expression “beautiful woman” (美女) appears in 42 headlines out of the 60 news reports. Some headlines even contain descriptive words about hairstyles, make-up, and accessories that the female interpreters were wearing. Only 24 headlines include professional information about the interpreters’ skills, their training background, or their interpreting performance, for example. Among the 19 headlines that contain both types of information, 17 put appearance before professional information. Such a proportion and the order of presentation of information point to a clear preference in news value for appearance, especially of the female interpreters, over profession-related topics. While the eye-catching news headlines boost the visibility of the interpreters and the interpreting profession, they might actually create a misconception among the public that the profession is fit only for “beautiful women” and even that beauty comes before professional competence. This could lead to interpreting being perceived by lay people as somehow functional and decorative, which would be a supremely demeaning proposition about the profession.

Another typical feature of the headlines is the connection between interpreting/interpreters and big events and big names, e.g., “The Premier’s Interpreter Zhang Lu Wins Popularity, the Academic Super Star in School at the Press Conference Six Times in a Row.” Out of the 60 headlines 58 include such words as “the Two Sessions (of the Chinese parliament)”, “press conference”, or “the Premier”. Although it can be explained by the fact that most of the news reports appeared shortly after the Two Sessions or after the Premier Press Conference, such a connection implies the interpreters’ affiliation to (political) power. Also worth noting is that almost all 60 news reports are about institutional conference interpreters from the Translation and Interpreting Office of the Chinese government. In this sense, although the news reports may help to boost the reputation of the profession, such boosted visibility and fame may be for the “wrong” reasons – the interpreters are highlighted not so much for their professional competence but for their beauty and connection with power – and might turn out to be detrimental for the professionalization of interpreting.

#### 4.1.2 Rhetorical features of the headlines

Along with the thematic features, salient rhetorical features are also identified in the headlines, namely the use of presuppositions and internet buzzwords.

An examination of presuppositions in the headlines reveals some hidden aspects of the interpreters' image as represented by the Chinese media, the first of which is subordination. As Conboy (2013, 69-70) points out, "Nominalization and noun phrases comprise condensed, existing views of relationships and causation which match the tacitly agreed preferences of both reader and the newspaper". Accordingly, the frequent co-occurrence of "beautiful woman", "interpreters" and "the Two Sessions" in the headlines can be seen as indicating a presupposition of the connection among the three, representing the interpreters as beautiful women on important occasions at the service of powerful political leaders. For example, the metaphor of "御用" (a word in Classical Chinese which literally means "exclusively at the service of the emperor") as seen in a number of headlines presupposes the power relationship between the president and the premier and their institutional interpreters by comparing the professional skills of the interpreters to the fine craftsmanship exclusively enjoyed by the emperor.

Also, other frequently used expressions such as "美貌智慧并重" and the more idiomatic four-character Chinese structure "才貌双全" (both meaning "beautiful and intelligent") presuppose that a woman's beauty does not usually come with an intelligent mind, which is a typical biased view of women implying that there is no need for a beautiful woman to be intelligent, to work hard, or to be professional.

There are also presuppositions about the interpreting competence of the interpreters. For example, in "反应机智、颜值高还会译古诗" (quick-minded, witty, beautiful, and unexpectedly able to interpret classical poems), a presupposition is made with the word "还", which means "and" in an unexpected way. While it points out the difficulty of interpreting classical poems, it presupposes that for beautiful women being able to interpret classical poems is an unexpected quality. In another headline which used a rhetorical question "这些中文你会翻译么?" (Can you translate these Chinese sentences?), it is presupposed that some Chinese phrases and sentences are difficult to interpret, so the interpreters should be admired.

The use of internet buzzwords in the headlines suggests that the news reports target mainly young people as their readers. Internet buzzwords such as "习大大" (Uncle Xi, a nickname for President Xi), "女神" (goddess), "大咖" (big shot), "机智" (big wit), "高颜值" (high level of appearance), "颜值爆表" (good-looking beyond measure index), "气场" (aura), "小清新" (like a breath of fresh air), "学霸" (academic overlord; straight-A student), "高冷" (cool and aloof), "樱桃小丸子" (Chibi Maruko, a cute teenage girl character in Japanese manga) are used in 24 headlines, which reinforces the power-affiliating, gender-biased, and distant professional image of the interpreters.

#### **4.2 The Image Represented by the Photos: A Multimodal Analysis**

88% of the news reports include photos of the interpreters, which are usually placed in a prominent position – right below the headlines. As in the headlines, the image of beautiful

women is the most highlighted theme in the photos, while male interpreters are seen in the photos in only five news reports.

All the photos extracted from the news reports are analyzed using the theory of visual grammar in terms of representation, interaction, and composition (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). Representation is about the subjects and their acts in the photos. Interaction describes the relationship between subjects in the photos and the viewer, and is analyzed using distance, angle, and gaze. Composition includes placement of elements and sharpness of focus, which are two other ways of observing how the image of interpreters is presented (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 45, 114, 175).

#### 4.2.1 Narrative representation in the photos

Narrative representation is about how participants in the photo are connected by identifiable vectors and represented as “doing something to or for each other” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 59). In other words, when one participant is doing something to or for another, a vector can be drawn from the “Actor” to the “Goal”.

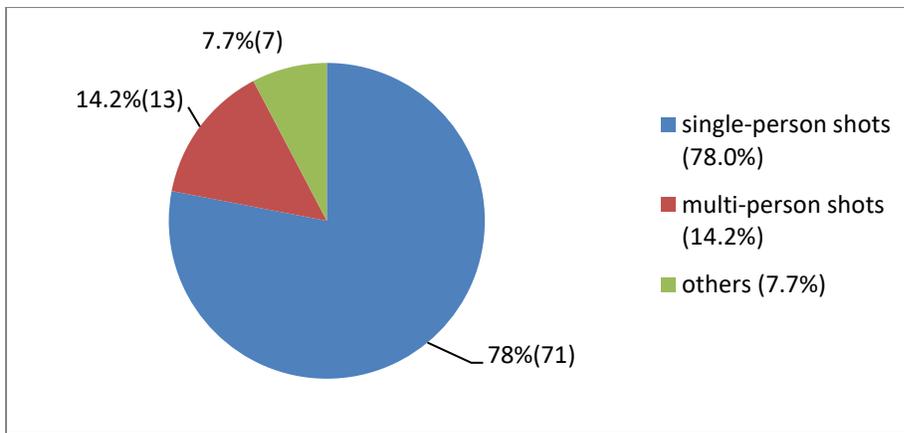


Figure 2: Percentage of the photos in terms of representation (n=91)

As Figure 2 indicates, 78% of the photos in the news reports are single-person shots of the interpreters in their work. “When images have only one participant, this participant is usually an Actor. The resulting structure we call non-transactional. The action in a non-transactional process has no ‘Goal’, is not ‘done to’ or ‘aimed at’ anyone or anything” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 63). As their actions focusing on their work in the photos do not point at any “Goal”, these photos represent “non-transactional action” which is “analogous to the intransitive verbs in language” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 63). The objects of the actions are not important, while presenting the interpreter herself/himself is the most important function of the photos.

It is more interesting to look at the photos featuring both the interpreter and the speaker, in which the interpreter is presented as being affiliated to the speaker in terms of power relations.



Figure 3: Photos with both the interpreter and the speaker<sup>1</sup>

The two photos in Figure 3 are similar in composition: the speaker is on the left and the interpreter on the right. The name of the speaker is marked on the nameplate while the interpreter either has a nameplate only marked with “interpreter” (in the first photo) or has no nameplate at all (in the second photo). Therefore, although the news reports are about the interpreters, their representation clearly shows that they play a secondary role in the events.

In the first photo, the speaker has finished his statement as his poise and facial expression point vector 1 at the interpreter while vector 2 can be drawn from the interpreter’s face downward to the table, indicating that she is delivering her interpretation based on her notes. In the second photo the interpreter points vector 3 at the speaker, while the speaker points perpendicular vector 4 by smiling at the audience under the podium. The photo was probably taken when the speaker was interacting with the audience and the interpreter was listening to him. In both photos, the interpreters and the speakers are presented separately rather than as a unit since there is only one-way interaction between them. The interpreter is either under the supervision of or ignored by the speaker.

In the first photo, the speaker is the ‘actor’ of vector 1 with the interpreter as the ‘goal’. Since neither of them is interacting with the viewer, this vector is the major theme of the photo as it crosses the whole photo while vector 2 only takes up one fourth of the photo. This is like a representation of the foreman-worker relationship in which the foreman is watching and supervising the worker.

In the second photo, though vector 3 takes up most of the area of the photo while vector 4 only occupies the left half, the speaker on the left is interacting the viewer. He is smiling broadly while the interpreter is only smiling moderately and politely, which is more like a face-saving strategy. In addition, although the interpreter is the actor of vector 3 and the speaker is the goal,

<sup>1</sup> Sources: [http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2015lh/2015-03/14/c\\_127581147\\_6.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2015lh/2015-03/14/c_127581147_6.htm);  
<http://edu.sina.com.cn/en/2013-03-18/164672956.shtml>.

the action is a rather passive one – involving listening to and understanding what the speaker says.

#### 4.2.2 Interaction between the photos and their viewers

Interaction between the photo and viewers of the photo is another way in which photos make sense because “interactive participants are real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be ‘said’ with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 114). Three aspects of interaction are analyzed here: distance, angle, and gaze.

##### 1) Distance

The distance between those in the photos and the viewer of photos can be seen as the social distance intended by the photographer. Distance of photos can be classified into close, medium close, medium long, and long shots according to the different distances between the object and the viewer of the photos. “The close shot (or ‘close-up’) shows head and shoulders of the subject, and the very close shot (‘extreme close-up’, ‘big close-up’) anything less than that. The medium close shot cuts off the subject approximately at the waist and the medium shot approximately at the knees. The medium long shot shows the full figure. In the long shot the human figure occupies about half the height of the frame, and the very long shot is anything ‘wider’ than that.” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 124). All these different distances can be converted to different social distances (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 125).

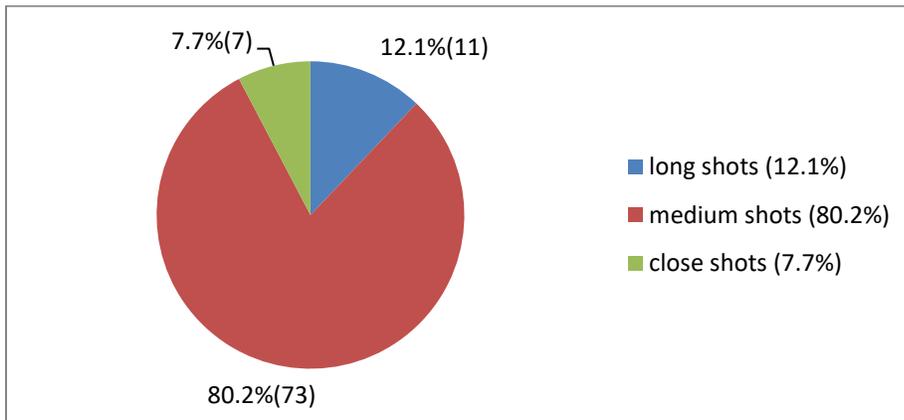


Figure 4: Percentage of the photos in terms of distance (n=91)

As shown in Figure 4, 80% of the photos are of medium close shot, which means the interpreters are represented as neither approachable nor too far from the viewer. This strategy of distancing is similar to the widely used strategy in presenting pop stars – making them appear to be reachable although they are actually out of reach. Presented as experts using the “breast pocket shot” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 126), the interpreters are kept at a certain distance from the

public and are thus seen as professionals. It is presumed that being too close or within touchable distance would demystify the interpreters' job, while being too far away would render the interpreters irrelevant to the audience.

Although seven out of the 91 photos use close shots, they are actually cut-outs from the medium close shots. Therefore, they are not intended to create intimacy between the interpreters and the viewers. Likewise, the long-shot photos (11 out of 91), show interpreters from a distant point of view.

## 2) Angle

Camera angle of the photos is another aspect of interaction, which can be divided horizontally into frontal and oblique, and vertically into high and low.

In the horizontal category of angles, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, 135-136) put it:

the difference between the oblique and the frontal angles is the difference between detachment and involvement. The frontal angle means 'what you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with.' The oblique angle means 'what you see here is not part of our world; it is their world, something we are not involved with.' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 135-136).

As shown in Figure 5, 70% of the photos (51 out of 73) using a medium close shot are taken from a clearly oblique angle, while the rest are frontal or very slightly oblique, which means that, for most of the photos, the readers of the news are not intended to get involved with the interpreters in the same way as the conference audiences do, and can only observe the interpreters from the side.

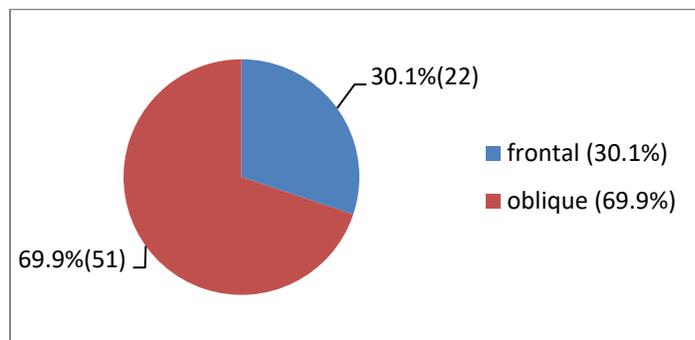


Figure 5: Percentage of the photos in terms of angles (n=73)

Vertically, a low angle is usually used to depict participants with high power while a high angle depicts participants with low power (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 140-142). Nearly 70% or 51 of the 73 photos are low-angle, which indicates that interpreters are usually seen as more powerful than the viewer. Maybe that is because what they do is regarded as a high-end professional job, they work for highly formal occasions, and they are close to the highest power.

In summary, the most frequently used angle of the photos in the present study is oblique and low, which presents the interpreters as distant high-end professionals who are doing a highly demanding job that has nothing to do with the viewer.

### 3) Gaze

Gaze is another key indicator in the interaction between the participant in the photos and the viewer. If the participant is looking at the camera, “it creates a visual form of direct address. It acknowledges the viewers explicitly, addressing them with a visual ‘you’” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 117). The function of gaze includes dialogic exchange and attitude. Only in ritualized gestures (reckoning or raising a hand for ‘halt’) does gaze play the role of dialogic exchange, while in most cases it acts as equivalent only to attitudinal resources of verbal language (Painter, Martin and Unsworth 2013, 19).



Figure 6: Gaze of the interpreter in the photos<sup>2</sup>

In the current study all but two photos show interpreters not looking at the viewer (see Figure 6), so they cannot be seen as dialogic. In some frontal-angle photos, the interpreters are looking roughly in the direction of the camera but not really at the camera. They might be too occupied with their job or the camera might have been quite far from them, and the photographer may have zoomed in on the interpreter. The viewer is intended to be ignored by such presentation of the interpreters. Of the 69 single-person medium close shot photos, 62% of the photos show the interpreter looking away from the podium. They might be listening to a journalist who is asking a question, or speaking to the audience. The message conveyed by such photos may be that the interpreter is “busy”, “thinking”, or “at work”. Whatever the reason, no gaze is pointed towards the viewer. This can be taken to mean that the interpreters in the photos are presented as professionals who are distant to the public.

#### 4.2.3 Composition of the photos

<sup>2</sup> Sources: [http://guoqing.china.com.cn/2016-03/08/content\\_37966239\\_11.htm](http://guoqing.china.com.cn/2016-03/08/content_37966239_11.htm);  
<http://www.chinanews.com/tp/hd2011/2012/03-14/92013.shtml#nextpage>.

In addition to representational and interactive meanings, composition is the third aspect of visual grammar in analyzing meaning in photos. It includes two points for analysis: information value and salience. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, 117), the placement of the elements in the photos endows them with different information values that are related to different ‘zones’ of the photo: left and right, top and bottom, center and margin. For salience, the elements are made to attract the viewer’s attention to different degrees, as realized by such factors as placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value (or color), differences in sharpness, etc.

In terms of information value, in most photos depicting both the speaker and the interpreter, seats are usually arranged in such a way that the speaker, who talks first, is on the left and the interpreter, who talks after the speaker, is on the right. In the photos including the speaker, the interpreter is never put at the center of the photo. As shown in Figure 7, although neither the speaker nor the interpreter is precisely at the center of the photo, the size of the margin on the sides still shows a clear preference when it comes to who is closer to the center and who is at the periphery.



Figure 7: Margins of the photo with both the speaker and the interpreter<sup>3</sup>

In Figure 8, the interpreter is of low sharpness of focus in the background while the speaker is foregrounded with high sharpness of focus. It must be pointed out again that all these photos are part of the news reports about the interpreters and their interpreting rather than about the speakers/politicians. The fact that photos of the interpreters included in these news reports are of low-level salience suggests that the interpreters are always represented by the media as being subordinate to their principals and powerful speakers.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://edu.sina.com.cn/en/2013-03-18/164672956.shtm>.



Figure 8: Sharpness of focus of the speaker and the interpreter<sup>4</sup>

### 4.3 The Image Represented by the Body Texts: A Textual Analysis

45% of the news reports (27 out of 60) contain long body texts. This section analyzes the distribution of thematic content and the textual features of the body texts. Statistics about distribution of thematic content in the news reports are shown in Table 1.

Thematic content	Percentage
Personal information and work experience	66.7%
Interpreters' training background	59.2%
Difficulties in interpreting	55.5%
Public perception about interpreting	51.8%
Appearance of the interpreters	51.8%
Authoritative comments on their interpreting	44.4%
Examples of their interpretations	44.4%
Introduction to the interpreting profession	25.9%
Gender ratio of interpreters	14.8%
Discussion on interpreting skills	14.8%
Workload of the interpreters	11.1%
Anecdotes in interpreting	7.4%
Information about the interpreters' institutions	7.4%

Table 1: Percentage of news reports containing different thematic content

The content of the body texts falls into 13 themes as listed in Table 1. Personal information and work experience include such content as the position that the interpreters hold and the VIPs they interpreted for. Training background includes information about the universities, high schools, or primary schools that they graduated from. Difficulties in interpreting often refer to those in interpreting Chinese classical poems. Excerpts of interpretation usually come after the accounts of the difficulties as the evidence of the interpreters' competence. Public perception includes short accounts of how the public view the interpreters, covering the nicknames that interpreters are given by netizens and whether their hairstyles are considered to be in fashion. Description of their appearance focuses purely on the look of female interpreters, as was the case with photos

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://www.chinanews.com/tp/hd2011/2012/03-14/92062.shtml#nextpage>.

and headlines. However, such description is usually very short, maybe because such information has been highlighted in the headlines and photos. Authoritative comments are made by the interpreters' superordinate, government officials, their previous teachers and classmates, or professors in the field of translation or other language-related disciplines.

Although more information is given in the body texts about their professional life than in the headlines, the feature of tabloidization is prominent in the body texts. Two thirds of the news reports include personal information and information about work experience. In introducing the interpreter, an overwhelming majority of reports covered the VIPs the interpreter has worked for, the major conferences he/she has worked for, and what title he/she holds now in the government, as illustrated by examples (1) and (2):

example (1)

总理记者会让全球的目光聚焦时，大家也注意到，在总理身边，今年肩负翻译重任的还是美女翻译张璐。此前，她曾在 2010、2011、2012、2014 年四次两会总理记者会上担当翻译。

[When the premier's press conference becomes the focus of global attention, it is noticed that, at the side of the premier, the one who shouldered the heavy task of interpreting was still the beautiful woman interpreter Zhang Lu. Before this, she had been the interpreter for the premier's press conference at the Two Sessions four times in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2014.]

example (2)

孙宁，习大大和奥巴马“庄园会晤”和“瀛台夜话”的贴身翻译，外交部翻译室培训处副处长

[Sun Ning, the personal (or stick-to-body) interpreter at the meeting between Uncle Xi (the nickname of president Xi Jinping) and Obama in Yingtai, is vice-director of the interpreter training office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.]

It is interesting to note that most of the news reports include the interpreters' names, e.g., Zhang Lu and Sun Ning in the above two excerpts, which departs from common practice in the profession, where interpreters are usually anonymous and invisible. Though it is not uncommon nowadays for "star" interpreters who have interpreted for superpower leaders to write and publish memoirs depicting themselves and recollecting anecdotes about important historical moments, such things are still rare for institutional interpreters in the Translation and Interpreting Office of the Chinese government, who are bound by strict discipline and the maintenance of secrecy. However, as revealed by Table 1, the Chinese media depict interpreters in the round, including not only their professional work but also their background and personal information. This is similar to news reports about celebrities such as movie stars.

Also, in the second excerpt, “贴身” (close, literally meaning “stick-to-body”) is a figure of speech which means one is so trusted that he can stick very close to the principal. It can be used to describe a personal bodyguard, a personal assistant or a personal secretary in Chinese. This adjective emphasizes how close to and trusted by the powerful politician the interpreter is, which highlights their connection to power.

Included in their reported personal and biographical information are the interpreters’ training background, the universities they went to, the professors who taught them, and anecdotes from their secondary school years. Even aspects of their private lives are covered: for example, photos from interpreters’ Facebook accounts are reposted and former classmates interviewed. It seems that “the media have had a major impact on the boundaries between public and private life and institutions, redrawing them in fundamental ways” (Fairclough 1995, 37). Though the conference interpreters become visible in the media for their professional interpreting activity, it seems that the media are more interested in their non-professional activities or qualities. There might be a downside to such media framing, however. As illustrated by example (4) below, in which unnecessary emphasis is put on “the white-dress beautiful woman interpreter”, or one of the snippets in section 4.1.2, where an interpreter is depicted as a popular Japanese manga character (“樱桃小丸子”), interpreters are presented more as pop culture “stars” than as professionals, which might have negative consequences for efforts to professionalize interpreting in China.

Descriptions of how the public perceive interpreting and interpreters are included in 51.8% of the news reports, most of which are about how netizens talk about interpreters, their appearance or competence, their internet nicknames and how they became popular on the internet. This part usually precedes other topics. Together with the photos, which are also often put at the top, these descriptions serve as eye-catching appetizers which lead the reader to more serious parts about interpreters as professionals.

When it comes to difficulties in interpreting, most news reports comment on the interpreters’ outstanding competence in rendering classical Chinese content. Their performance is referred to as “神翻译” which means “as if interpreted by god” or “surprisingly good interpreting”. In one case a report mentions that “大家议论最多的，正是她翻译古典文学的能力” (The topic that people talked most about is nothing other than her ability to interpret classical literature).

In addition, long scripts of source texts in Chinese and interpreted texts in English are given in some reports as evidence of interpreting competence. And this is usually put together with an account of the training and strict process of selection interpreters have been through before doing such a high-end job.

From the positive comments on the interpreting of classical Chinese poems, it can be seen that conference interpreters are still quite distant from the public. It is rarely made known to the reader that the lines from classical Chinese poems that the speakers planned to quote would

always be revealed to the interpreters before the meeting. They might not be a real test of the interpreter's on-the-spot interpreting skills or their knowledge of classical Chinese poetry.

Gender imbalance among interpreters is also commented upon in the body texts. As with the headlines and photos, an overwhelming majority of the texts are about female interpreters. In one news report, the gender issue is referred to using specific statistics (example 3).

example (3)

据不完全统计，从 2003 年以来，全国两会总理记者会上，为总理担任翻译的除了张建敏(2003 年)、费胜潮(2006-2009 年)和孙宁(2013 年)几位男士之外，其余戴庆利(2004 年)、雷宁(2005 年)、张璐(2010、2011、2012、2014 年)几位均为女翻译。

[According to statistics, since the year of 2003, in the premier press conference after the two sessions, the premier's interpreters, except for only a few male interpreters such as Zhang Jianmin (2003), Fei Shengchao (2006-2009), and Sun Ning (2013), all others – Dai Qingli (2004), Lei Ning (2005), and Zhang Lu (2010, 2011, 2012, 2014) – are all female interpreters.]

Actually, from 2003 to 2014, the premier press conferences in six out of the 12 years were interpreted by male interpreters. However, the use of expressions like “除了…之外” (except) and “均” (all others) gives a misleading impression that female interpreters outnumber male ones. Female interpreters are thus foregrounded while their male counterparts are backgrounded.

A textual feature of the body texts is over-lexicalization, or “a surfeit of repetitious, quasi-synonymous terms woven into the fabric of news discourse, giving rise to a sense of ‘over-completeness’” (Van Dijk, 1991, 178), as illustrated in example (4):

example (4)

大会新闻发言人吕新华回答香港卫视记者关于反腐问题时，答了一句“大家都很任性”，不少人为一袭白衣的美女翻译张蕾捏了把汗。

[When the spokesman at the press conference was answering a question about corruption from a correspondent with HKSTV, he said “everyone is very capricious (任性)”. A lot of people got worried for the white-dress beautiful woman interpreter Zhang Lei.]

The modifier “white-dress beautiful woman” is a redundant and “over-complete” addition to the message that “it was a difficult sentence to interpret, which worried people”. This “over-lexicalization” strategy is often used on powerless people, for example, a male lawyer may be called a “lawyer” and no more, but when the lawyer is female, the adjective “female” may be

added (Fowler et al. 1979; Van Dijk 1991; Teo 2000). Similar examples include “蘑菇头女神翻译” (the goddess interpreter with a mushroom hairstyle) and the pervasive “美女翻译” (beautiful woman interpreter).

In summary, similar to the headlines and photos, the body texts of the news reports show a tendency to depict conference interpreters in China as mostly women and as professional stars or celebrities affiliated to power, although they give more information about their work and their backgrounds than the headlines and photos do.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is found through the above analysis that interpreters represented by the Chinese media are mostly institutional conference and diplomatic interpreters, who are presented along with “big events” and “big names” as affiliating to power and distant from the public. They are portrayed as “stars” of the profession or public celebrities. Just like “pop stars”, the female beauty images among them are selected and “consumed” just like in popular culture.

The affiliation to power is the most prominent theme in all three parts of the analysis. Most headlines included mention of the level of the occasion on which the interpreter is performing as a form of indirect positive evaluation of their performance from an outsider’s perspective, rather than of their interpreting skills in the professional sense. Some presuppositions in the headlines show that interpreters are subordinate to the speakers like craftsmen are to emperors. In the photos, analysis of representational meaning shows that interpreters are sometimes observed and sometimes ignored by the speakers. And the analysis of compositional meaning shows that the speakers are closer to the center, and more to the fore even if the news is about their interpreters. In the accounts of the interpreters’ work experience, they are often introduced to readers as someone’s interpreter, the interpreter at a particular conference, or as a high-ranking government officer.

A clear gender bias is the second feature of the image of conference interpreters. Female interpreters receive a lot more attention than their male counterparts. Most headlines included the phrase “beautiful woman” and a description of the interpreter’s appearance, which is also a frequent topic in the news texts. An overwhelming majority of the photos included in the news reports are of female interpreters.

Conference interpreters are also represented by the Chinese media as professionals who are distant from the public. Though the internet buzzwords depicting interpreters in the above section seem to bring them closer to the public, they focus mainly on their appearance. The interactional meaning conveyed through the photos is quite clear in presenting them as unapproachable high-level professionals. Also, regarding their work as extremely high-end in the news reports suggests their distance from the public. It may be that the journalists do not have an insider’s view of professional interpreting and thus mystify it, but given that “media texts not

only mirror reality but also construct versions of it” (Gambier 2006, 9), their representations undoubtedly contribute to further mystification of the profession.

While conference interpreters would self-represent as “facilitator/enabler of communication”, “mediator/intermediary” and “conveyor of the message” (Zwischenberger 2009), as seen from the current study, the conference interpreters’ image is represented by the Chinese media more as a combination of “star” or public celebrity and distant professional, which reflects the fact that the professional reality is not fully understood by people outside the professional circle. It is notable that conference interpreters working in the private market in China do not enjoy the high status that comes with being connected with big names and big events; nor can they lay claim to the star image promulgated by the public media. Rather they perceive themselves as professionals and their social status as being comparable to other professionals such as journalists, lawyers, and management consultants (Setton and Guo 2009).

Though the current study involves innovation in the multi-dimensional, multi-modal approach it takes to the thematic and rhetorical analysis of headlines and body texts, and its visual-grammar inspired analysis of photos, finer-grained methods of analysis for each of the three components could be explored in future research. As a step further along the current line of research, another study comparing the professional image and the public image of conference interpreters would be meaningful.

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