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EDITED BY

Chonglong Gu,
Hong Kong Polytechnic University,
Hong Kong SAR, China

REVIEWED BY

Guiqing Zheng,
Hong Kong Polytechnic University,
Hong Kong SAR, China

*CORRESPONDENCE

Fei Gao
fei_gao1@hotmail.com

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A brief review of studies on interpreters' ideological mediation/intervention at international conferences

Fei Gao*

School of Foreign Languages, Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Chongqing, China

In interpreter-mediated international conferences, it is the interpreters' "voice" rather than the speaker's "voice" that is heard by world leaders. With a focus on the political discourse (re)produced at international conferences, this paper presents a brief review of relevant studies on interpreters' ideological mediation/intervention. The review starts with an introduction of related terminologies for ideological intervention in conference interpreting research (CIR). The review paper examines relevant studies in terms of (1) the international conferences as discursive events, (2) meeting/panel/speech topics as discourse topoi, and (3) interpreters' use of linguistic means to realize ideological shifts in the reconstructed discourse. The review concludes with a summary and gaps paralleled by future directions for CIR.

KEYWORDS

international conferences, interpreters' ideological intervention/mediation, political discourse, CDA, linguistic means

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, interpreting activities are increasingly playing a vital and indispensable role in inter/transnational communication (e.g., Schäffner, 2004, 2012; Perez-Gonzalez, 2012; Cronin, 2013). Such cross-language/cultural communication often happens in international conferences, whereby world leaders rely on the interpreted speeches to understand and communicate with one another, subsequently making decisions that potentially influence a country/region, even the entire world. The discourse reproduced from the source texts (STs) into the target texts (TTs) by conference interpreters, in fact, constitutes "part of the development" of the speaker discourse (Schäffner, 2004, p. 120), and the reproduced part in interpretations will be discursively "consumed" by world leaders.

Despite that political leaders in international conferences may tacitly assume that the interpreted speech "functions seamlessly as part of the discourse" of the source speech (Kang, 2009, p. 144), the interpreted speech does not often "mirror" the source speech due to the interpreter's agency. In the words of Hatim and Mason (1997, p. 147), conference interpreters may ideologically mediate/intervene and "[feed] their own knowledge and beliefs into a text." Therefore, interpreters' ideological beliefs play a role in "editing" the source texts (STs) that may become a "different version" discursively in the resultant target texts (TTs) (Gao and Munday, 2022). In other words, it is the interpreters' "voice"

rather than the speaker's "voice" that is heard by world leaders. The interpreting "shifts"¹ made "surreptitiously," as it were, through the interpreter "voice" can reach afar, passing onto world leaders *in situ* the conference sites and feeding into a chain of media circulation in the world.

In conference interpreting research (CIR), there have been growing scholarly interests in interpreter ideological intervention with different terminologies, *inter alia*, stance-taking (Munday, 2012; Wang and Feng, 2017), mediation (Fu and Chen, 2019), agency (Gu, 2018; Gu and Tipton, 2020), and ideological positioning (e.g., Gao, 2021a,b; Gao and Wang, 2021; Gao and Munday, 2022), which more or less point to the same thing—interpreters' socio-cognition that shapes, conditions, and alters the ST discourse in the interpreting products. Pöchhacker (2006) discusses in-depth the role of the interpreters' socio-cognition, connecting it with the interpreters' "within-one-side" position rather than the "between-two-sides" position. In other words, the "super-norm" of impartiality and loyalty to the speaker (Zwischenberger, 2015), promoted by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), is challenged; interpreters introduce ideological shifts to the discourse (re)produced in international conferences.

A review of studies on conference interpreters' ideological intervention

The review primarily presents relevant studies in CIR from two perspectives: a macro-level perspective alongside a meso/micro-level perspective. The review with macro-level perspective looks at (a) international conferences (as the discursive events) and meeting/panel topics (as discourse *topoi*) that are considered as key contextual factors (cf., van Dijk, 1998) in discourse (re)production. Then, the review with meso/micro-level perspective covers the group of the interpreters' use of linguistic means that realizes discourse reconstruction in conference interpreting.

International conferences as discursive events and meeting/panel topics as discourse *topoi*

According to discourse scholars, event backgrounds and topics are deemed as key contextual factors in the macro-analysis of discourse production given that they are intrinsically

1 The notion of shifts was originally defined in translation studies on the lexicogrammatical level as "departures from formal correspondence when going from ST to TT" (Catford, 2000/1965). It is now used changes or alternations made on the discourse-semantic level (as discourse shifts) or ideological level (as ideological shifts) in translation and interpreting studies.

discourse-relevant properties (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). They constitute crucial factors in analyzing the ideological aspects in the interpreters' reconstruction of the ST discourse (Gao and Munday, 2022).

Relevant studies in CIR focus on international/transnational conferences in which importance issues of regional/global concerned are discussed and deliberated. These conferences often offer a multi-voiced platform for world political leaders to air and exchange their views, and reach collective decisions. Among others in CIR, scholarly attention has been drawn to the European Parliament meeting, which is uncontroversially a most studied discursive event by European interpreting researchers (e.g., Beaton, 2007; Beaton-Thome, 2010, 2013; Bartłomiejczyk, 2020, 2022), thanks to the data availability of the European Parliament interpreting corpus. China's political press conferences with foreign media is a discursive site that Chinese interpreters' ideological intervention is systematically investigated (Wang and Feng, 2017; Gu, 2018; Fu and Chen, 2019; Gu and Tipton, 2020). Some other studies incipiently begin to look into supra-national conferences, such as the World Economic Forum's annual meetings (Gao, 2021a,b; Gao and Munday, 2022). In these studies, discourse-relevant ideological factors are discussed from a macro-level perspective, which establishes these events as ideologically contested or charged.

While relevant CIR studies tend to focus the discourse reproduction regarding the overall discourse of a discursive event, some studies specifically focus on certain speech/discussion topics (or, discourse *foci*) that dominate conference sessions/panels. Relevant speeches and discussions discursively constitute a discourse with a certain *foci*. There are some studies that focus one particular discourse in the light of interpreters' ideological intervention, such as the refugee discourse (Beaton-Thome, 2013), the discourse of racism (Bartłomiejczyk, 2020), the Eurosceptic discourse (Bartłomiejczyk, 2022), the discourse of China's image (Gu, 2018), and the nationalist discourse (Gao, 2021b). These topics are not only relevant to the world/regional politics but are ideological-laden. Thus, the focus on one of these particular topics gives these studies a pivotal linchpin, with which the macro-level structure can be connected to the meso/micro-level structures of discourse and linguistic patterns.

Linguistic means that realizes discourse reconstruction

The analysis of discourse structures (at a meso-level) is connected with analysis of linguistic means (at a micro-level) in CDA. In relevant studies that examine interpreters' ideological intervention, how the discourse is reconstructed by conference interpreters is interrogated through a plethora of linguistic means, such as modality (Li, 2018; Fu and Chen, 2019; Gao,

2021a), the use of perfect tense (Gu, 2018), lexical labeling or terminologies (Beaton, 2007; Beaton-Thome, 2013), pronouns and self-referential nouns (Guo, 2018; Gu and Tipton, 2020), and evaluative language (Munday, 2012; Wang and Feng, 2017; Beaton-Thome, 2020; Gao, 2021b).

These studies uncover that the shift of these linguistic means serve to strengthen or weaken the speaker discourse, introducing ideological shifts and indexing interpreters' ideological stance-taking. For example, Gu and Tipton (2020, p. 420) reveal that Chinese interpreters strengthen the speaker discourse by frequently adding self-referential items (*we, our, China* or *government*), which is construed as their "active interpreter alignment" with Beijing. For another example, Beaton-Thome (2013) focuses on positive/negative lexical labels (comparably between the STs and the TTs) that reflect the ideological positions (e.g., *terrorists, criminals* as negative labels or, on the contrary, *innocents* as a positive label). Her study suggests that the interpreters tend neutralize positive/negative lexical labels to weaken the original ideological stance.

On the discourse level, van Dijk (1998, 2006) *Ideological Square* is usefully harnessed by CIR scholars. This conceptual framework accounts for, from a socio-cognitive perspective, the mental models reflected in discourse structure. It is an ideological polarization of "us"-vs.- "them," where positivity about "us" and negativity about "them" are emphasized while positivity about "them" and negativity about "us" are understated (ibid). Gu (2018) draws on this concept to examine interpreters' strengthening of the positive image of Beijing. Gao and Munday (2022) also employ this concept to examine the shifts of positive/negative evaluative expressions, revealing an accentuated discourse of positive-Self and Negative-Others.

Conclusion and future directions

This brief review has covered the ground of conference interpreters' ideological intervention/mediation at international conferences from the macro- and meso/micro perspectives. Despite that only a few studies in CIR has focused on the ideological shifts introduced by conference interpreters, these studies have investigated some influential international discursive events and vital political topics of regional/global concern. These studies have also effectively utilized linguistic tools and approaches in CDA to reveal the interpreters' use of linguistic means that serve to alter the discourse structure.

While the existing studies seem to map out a promising research avenue for CIR, this avenue needs to be widened in the three aspects.

Firstly, how the interpreters respond to ideological stimuli during the process of interpreting is currently overlooked. This oversight is entrenched in the paradigmatic "divide"

between the discursively reconstructed TT discourse (as the interpreted product) and cognitive processing operations (as the interpreting process) (Gao and Munday, 2022). It is possible to integrate the two sides by importing methods from the reference discipline of psychology. Future studies can benefit from collaborations between CIR researchers equipped with neuroscience methods such as ERP and fMRI and CIR researchers who are experienced with CDA approaches.

Secondly, paralinguistic elements (such as prosody) that bear ideological values in conference interpreting are little talked about. The sound of language is the main medium for conference interpreting, and prosody can convey the "attitudinal position" (Munday, 2012, p. 67). With importation of methods and theories from phonetics and phonology into CIS (Ahrens, 2005; Gao, 2022), future studies can profitably examine the paralinguistic data to explore patterns of ideological shifts.

Thirdly, current studies only focus on a limited number of interpreter-mediated conferences, as discussed in Section International conferences as discursive events and meeting/panel topics as discourse topoi, largely due to the difficulty in building the interpreting corpora that derived from audio/video data. The task of transcribing the textual data for a corpus from the audio/video data is highly labor-intensive and time-consuming. Nonetheless, with the increasing affordance of speech-recognition technology, CIR scholars are able to develop more interpreting corpora and explore more influential international conferences attended by political leaders. For example, the speech recognition programs (*Dragon Naturally Speaking* and *IBM Via Voice*) were used to develop EPIC (European Parliament Interpreting Corpus), for which the speech recognition programs were trained to recognize the speakers' voices and produce a draft transcript automatically (Bendazzoli and Sandrelli, 2005). The fast evolving speech-recognition programs will surely facilitate CIR scholars to develop interpreting corpora of their interests in a more efficient way.

Overall, conference interpreters' ideological intervention is a promising research avenue that awaits harmonized views, methods, and theoretical accounts from different disciplines in future studies.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

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