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外交口译员的“面子协调者”角色  
——一项基于中外记者招待会的语料分析  
The Interpreter's Role as a Mediator of Face-Work in  
Government Press Conferences in Diplomatic Settings in  
China

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## Abstract

With the broadening scope of paradigms of interpreting studies, scholars are increasingly focusing on the interdisciplinary aspect of interpreting researches and there are more and more studies in light of sociological theories. Researchers no longer regard interpreting as a speech event happening in a “vacuum” regardless of social factors, but as an authentic social interaction. Accordingly, breakthroughs have been made in perspectives on the role of interpreters. Interpreters are perceived more as visible and active participants in communications instead of “machines” or “conduits”. As the interpreter’s role commands ever greater attention from researchers, it has become a major subject in interpreting studies.

This research focuses on the interpreter’s role as a mediator of face-work in government press conferences in diplomatic settings. Face-work is a concept put forward by American socialist Erving Goffman and it refers to the efforts made by a person to designate whatever he is doing consistent with face (1972:12). Previous studies have tested that face-work is in fact involved in interpreters’ performance, which is an essential premise for this study. Wadensjö (1998) is pioneering in applying Goffman’s concept of face to studies on dialogue interpreting and after that many scholars begin to pay attention to politeness strategies and face management in interpreting, primarily in community settings. Noticeably, Monacelli (2005) has diverted attention from less formal settings to a much formal one by examining face management in simultaneous-interpreting-mediated conferences. However, very little work has been done to look at interpreters’ role in mediating face-work in the Chinese context, where the value of face-saving is deeply rooted as part of the culture.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the interpreter’s role as a mediator of face-work in government press conferences by analyzing face-work strategies based on Goffman’s face-work theory and Brown and Levinson’s politeness model. Literature reviews on government press conferences and interpreters’ role are

given in Chapter 2. Goffman's face-work theory and key concepts of face and face-work are elaborated on in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 discusses various linguistic devices adopted in interpreters' mediation of face-work. Chapter 5 concludes three sub-roles played by interpreters in mediating face-work, i.e. the cross-cultural gatekeeper, the institutional insider and the image builder.

The present study enriches perspectives on studying interpreters' role by analyzing authentic speech events in press conferences in diplomatic settings with updated data.

**Key words:** the interpreter's role; face-work; government press conference; diplomatic interpreting

## 摘要

伴随着口译研究范式的多样化发展,基于社会学理论的研究也逐渐屡见不鲜。口译不再被看作是发生在社会“真空”环境下的单纯的语言类活动,而学者们更多地将其作为一种社会情境下的交际活动来研究。与此同时,学界对译员角色的看法也发生了本质性改变。译员不再被看做是透明的“机器”或“管道”,转而变成了显身并具有主体意识的交际参与者。随着学者们对译员角色的日益关注,它已然成为了口译研究中的重要课题。

本文的研究对象为外交场合下译员的“面子协调者”角色。“面子协调工作”这一概念最初由美国社会学家欧文·戈夫曼提出,它指的是个人为了维护自身面子而采取的一系列行动(1972:12)。已有的一些研究证明译员会在口译过程中进行面子协调工作,而这些研究结论为本文奠定了基础。瓦登斯约(1998)最先把戈夫曼的面子理论应用于对话口译的研究当中,其后便有许多学者开始关注口译中礼貌策略的运用以及面子协调工作,但大多局限在社区口译的场合下。值得一提的是,莫纳赛里(2005)首先开始关注较为正式场合下的译员的面子协调工作。然而,“面子”作为重要的中国文化概念,却鲜有学者关注在中国语境下译员的面子协调工作。

因此,本文以戈夫曼的面子理论以及布朗和列文森的礼貌原则作为理论框架,旨在通过分析译员所运用的面子协调策略,来发掘中外记者招待会中译员身负的面子协调者的角色。本文首先从口译研究中的记者招待会和译员角色进行文献综述。然后,介绍了戈夫曼的面子理论以及“面子”和“面子协调工作”等重要概念。接下来,本文考察了译员如何运用语言手段来进行面子协调,从而总结出译员作为跨文化守门人、局内人和形象构建者的三重角色。

本研究基于社会学理论的指导,对外交场合下记者招待会中的译员角色进行了再解读,丰富了该语域下译员角色的内涵。同时,本文采用时新的语料对译员的真实语言行为加以分析,补充了相关研究中的空白。

**关键词:** 译员角色 面子协调工作 记者招待会 外交口译

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale

Ever since the social turn of interpreting studies paradigms (Pöchhacker, 2004), scholars' perceptions of the interpreter's role have gone way beyond the boundaries of conventional notions. The interpreter is no longer perceived as a conduit-like figure, but an active participant in cross-cultural contacts. The complex nature of interpreters' role, now a dominant theme of interpreting studies, has commanded ever greater attention from researchers and practitioners.

At an age when interpreters were still perceived as invisible and machine-like, Anderson's paper (1976) is pioneering in its application of sociological theories and methods to investigate interpreters as power figures. From then on, various scholars have devoted attention to the visible aspect of interpreters' role in different settings.

In the domain of court interpreting, some researchers stress the importance of interpreters as intercultural agents who should empower their disadvantaged clients (Barsky, 1996; Mikkelsen, 1998; Berk-Seligson, 1990) to investigate the possible impact of interpreters' linguistic politeness strategies on trial results and concludes that an interpreter is a powerful filter.

In medical settings, Angelelli (2004) questions the long-standing invisible role of interpreters and proposes her visible model of interpreters by combining socio-cultural theories with empirical studies and proves that interpreters as co-constructors of conversation can propel the process of communication via linguistic and interactional strategies.

In sign language interpreting, Roy (1996) probes into turn-taking in interpreted interaction and reveals the active role of interpreters as cultural mediators. She (2000) also gives a historical account of metaphors of interpreters and questions these traditional perceptions and suggests the redefinition of the role of interpreters as bilingual and bicultural specialists.

One noticeable aspect of studies on interpreters' role is associated with face and face-work put forward by socialist Erving Goffman (1972). Wadensjö (1998) adapts Goffman's model of participation framework and applies it to discourse analysis of a corpus of interviews from community service. Her research shows that interpreters do more than mere "translating" and they also mediate the conversational process.

Apart from community settings, a few have examined face management in simultaneous interpreting. Monacelli (2005) has explored the influence of self-regulatory on the performance of simultaneous interpreters through a research of participation framework and politeness strategies. Her study concludes that the self-regulatory behavior of interpreters has the nature of distancing, depersonalization and the mitigation of illocutionary force, which suggests the aspect of face-work in interpreters' role.

However, very little work has been done to examine interpreters' role in face-work in the Chinese context. Therefore, the present study examines interpreters' face management in the Chinese context, with a focus on government press conferences in diplomatic settings.

## **1.2 Methodology**

This study is based on Goffman's concept of face-work and other scholars' work under his influence. For the purpose of convenience, the theoretical framework of this thesis is termed as face-work theory.

Many sociological scholars have been influenced and directed by Erving Goffman's theories. Face is one of the key notions proposed by Goffman and many scholars have sought to extend the meanings of it and examine it from various perspectives. Brown and Levinson's politeness model has been acknowledged to be dedicated to the memory of Goffman and is developed from Goffman's quite succinct clarification of face-work strategies. They (1987) propose two face desires: positive face and negative face, and further suggest two major types of face-saving strategies accordingly, namely positive politeness strategy and negative politeness strategy.

Spencer-Oatey's rapport management is perhaps one of the most remarkable attempts to go beyond the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson. Her model focuses on the language aspect of social relations management with face as the key concept. In light of the criticism of Brown and Levinson's framework, Spencer-Oatey (2008) puts forward a modified model of face and rapport management. A more detailed account will be given in Chapter 3.

As mentioned earlier, very little work has been done to examine interpreters' role in face-work in the Chinese context apart from two recent doctoral dissertations finished by Chinese scholars abroad. One is Sun's thesis (2012) on interpreters' mediation of government press conferences in China. Her study draws on the theory of Erving Goffman and deals with a series of issues related to interpreters' participation framework, footing and face-work based on a corpus of six SARS-related press conferences. Another is Liu (2010)'s dissertation which focuses on the impact of audience design on face and information management in Chinese press conferences. These two studies all shed light on interpreters' role in interpreted press conferences from a sociological perspective and have been a source of inspiration for this study.

Based on previous studies, the current thesis probes into interpreted press conferences in general and examines interpreters as mediators of face-work based on an updated data of interpreted government press conferences.

There are altogether ten government conferences in the data constructed for this study. Only the question and answer sessions of press conferences are selected for scrutiny as other parts are considered as irrelevant to this thesis. The total length of the data (only Q&A sessions) is 17.27 hours.

The original data selected for the thesis is in the form of footage and Chinese transcriptions online. Therefore, the interpretation has to be transcribed by the author for analysis. Although the Chinese version of the original utterances is provided by the website China Net, it is not the word-for-word transcription so it has to be checked against the footage to ensure the authenticity. A more detailed description of the data will be given at the beginning of Chapter 4.

As Stubbs (1996) argues, when the selected features of texts are put together with other features for examination, quantitative analysis can be combined with qualitative analysis to add to the strength. Thus, both qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis are adopted in investigating the data. To be more specific, qualitative analysis will be used throughout the section of data analysis while quantitative analysis will be applied where appropriate.

### 1.3 Study Scope

It has been stated that the research subject of this study is interpreters' role in government press conferences in diplomatic settings. Thus, it's necessary to present a clarification of the research focus. Diplomatic interpreting is sometimes conflated with foreign affairs interpreting but in fact they have many differences in terms of scope, participants and level. In order to have a precise understanding of these two types of interpreting, we only need to know the definitions of diplomacy and foreign affairs and their distinctions. In ancient China, 外事 foreign affairs referred to what we call 外交 diplomacy today, but now its meaning is wider than it used to be. Foreign affairs in modern times refer to external affairs in general (外交大辞典, 1937: 2055). In contrast, diplomacy has a much narrow scope and it refers to exchanges and interactions between sovereign countries involving high-level officials stationed home or abroad (ibid: 2057). From the definitions, it becomes clear that the notion of foreign affairs is more inclusive than that of diplomacy. Ren Wen (2010) also makes a distinction between these two concepts. She said that diplomacy must be conducted by sovereign countries and it is a state act, while the agent of foreign affairs can be some local governments or organizations with permission from the state government. In this light, foreign affairs have a wider scope of participants but the level of diplomacy is higher. As the definitions of diplomacy and foreign affairs have been made clear, the distinctions between diplomacy interpreting and foreign affairs interpreting are naturally apparent to see. In this context, government press conference is regarded as a subtype of diplomacy interpreting by some scholars such as Ren

Xiaoping (2000). Hence, this study sets its study sphere within the government press conferences subsumed under diplomacy interpreting.

As the research subject has been confirmed as government press conferences under diplomacy interpreting, it is also important to recognize more detailed aspects of press conference as a type of interpreting setting. Alexieva's (1997) multi-parameter typology of interpreting is adopted in this study as it is more suitable than those single-parameter approaches in analyzing such a setting which does not fit into a particular mode. According to the six parameters proposed by Alexieva, interpreter-mediated press conference falls under the mode of consecutive interpreting (1997:223). But there are also "peripheral types" (1997: 222) below each general type and press conference is more similar to dialogue interpreting as it is a face to face interaction. Mason (1999) suggests that dialogue interpreting may be the most suitable term to refer to face-to-face interpreting. At the same time, it is worth noting that interpreting in press conferences is slightly different from dialogue interpreting in that there is only one turn of question and answer between each journalist and the speaker and the answers are normally quite long. Therefore, perhaps it is more appropriate to suggest that the mode of press conference is somewhere between the typical consecutive interpreting and dialogue interpreting. Based on Alexieva's approach, there are some salient features of interpreter-mediated press conferences which are helpful in the following analysis, including (1) equipment-mediated interaction (microphones are used); (2) imbalance in power relations (between the participants); (3) formal setting; (4) short distance between the speaker and the interpreter (they sit next to each other most of the times). One feature that needs further explanation is the non-equality in power. As Alexieva states, the imbalance of power may result in varying degrees of tension and it is "highly relevant in face-work" (1997:225). Thus, in press conferences under study, face-work is an observable element.

## **1.4 Research Objective**

Accuracy and completeness are commonly regarded as basic requirements for

interpreters working for the government. However, there is always a discrepancy between the requirements and actual performance of interpreters, particularly when the interaction is difficult and confrontational to handle.

Data selected in this study shows that shifts between source texts (ST) and target texts (TT) are not simply resulted from heavy load of memory or carelessness. On the contrary, they are done on purpose. Thus, such shifts merit investigation.

The study that follows focuses on those shifts from the perspective of face-work in an attempt to reveal the actual role of interpreters in Chinese government press conferences in general and draws on the face-work theory of Erving Goffman as the primary theoretical insight.

Before setting out the research objective, some clarifications should be presented here. In this thesis, interpreting is seen as interactions happening in real-life circumstances and interpreters are proactive participants. In interactional situations, interlocutors including interpreters all exert influence on the tendency and results of the conversation in different ways. The proactive participant role of interpreters in discourse illustrates the subjectivity of interpreters as observed by scholars (Ren, 2010; Roy, 2000). According to Ren (2010), interpreters construct their subjectivity mainly through two ways. First, they use language itself (including body language and paralanguage) which means that they often omit or add information to the original utterances of speakers when faithful interpreting results in misunderstanding or confusion. Second, interpreters manage the process of discourse through the turn-taking system. Since journalists in Chinese press conferences can only raise one question each time, interpreters do not need to manage turn-taking like liaison interpreters do. Therefore, in this study, attention is only given to the linguistic shifts between original utterances and interpreters' renditions. In addition, those linguistic shifts are regarded as linguistic devices employed by interpreters to manage face-work between the main interlocutors based on previous studies on interpreted press conferences.

The goal of the present study is threefold: to analyze how interpreters use linguistic devices and overall strategies to avoid or remedy face-threatening acts; to



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