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Reconceptualising Interpreter's Role

– A perspective from social identity theories

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Abstract

The interpreter's role and performance in interpreting-facilitated interactions have attracted considerable scholarly attention since the 1970s. Seminal field research on interpreting in courtrooms, in hospitals, and in war zones describe interpreters as active participants. Nevertheless, Hale (2006) and Pöchhacker (2006) critique that much data-driven research in the area suffers from a lack of theoretical conceptualisations, and is short of diversified sociocultural and linguistic contexts for investigation. To strengthen the theoretical background to research on interpreters' role, this study draws on social psychology theories of social identity and optimal distinctiveness, and the sociolinguistic notion of face, to develop an interdisciplinary framework for conceptualising how identity claims may influence interpreters' choice of linguistic strategies in delivery. The English-Mandarin political press conference interpreting context is examined to illustrate how the proposed framework may shed light on our understanding of interpreters' behaviour in action.

Keywords: social identity, optimal distinctiveness, face, interpreter's role

1 Introduction

Wadensjö (2002) posits that interpreting can be broadly taxonomised into conference interpreting and dialogue interpreting, where research in the former is mainly focused on cognitive aspects of individual interpreters' performance; while studies in the latter, on the other hand, are more preoccupied with "a communicative *pas de trois*" (Wadensjö 1998:12) with a primary concern of interpreters' role.

On the topic of interpreters' pragmatic role, there has been a considerable increase of models theorising interpreters as actively participating third parties (Knapp-Potthoff & Knapp 1986), such as advocates and bi-cultural experts (Roy 1993/2002), culture brokers (Kaufert & Koolage 1984), and intercultural agents (Barsky 1996), to name but a few. The interpreting contexts under investigation have also expanded from the conference setting to courtrooms (e.g., Berk-Seligson 1990, Shlesinger 1991, Angermeyer 2005), hospitals (e.g., Wadensjö 1998, Bolden 2000, Angelelli 2004), police interviews (e.g., Nakane 2008), asylum interviews (e.g., Mason 2009b, Pöllabauer 2004), and very recently in conflict zones (e.g., Baker 2006, Footitt & Kelly 2012). At the conceptual level, frameworks underpinning interpreters' role have evolved from prototypical interaction constellations such as Pöchhacker's (1992) interactant model to more contextualized studies adopting sociological and ethnographic approaches, for example, Tipton's (2008) social construction perspective on interpreter agency drawing from Giddens's (1984) structuration theory and Inghilleri's (2003) focus on interpreter habitus based on Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus and field.

Following such a development, and with an aim to strengthen the theoretical background underlining interpreters' role, this study will delve into social psychology theories of identity, particularly those of social identity and optimal distinctiveness, and the sociolinguistic notion of face, in search for a theoretical conceptualisation that offers the capacity of explaining the social and psychological factors influencing interpreter's role management and choice of

linguistic strategies in interpretation. It constitutes a new interdisciplinary approach to understanding interpreter's role using a case study of political press conference interpreting between Mandarin and English languages.

The various propositions on the taxonomy of dialogue interpreting (e.g., Mason 1999a, Ozolins 2004, Brown 2008, Pöchhacker 2011c) are featured by the defining characteristic of dialogic nature of bi-directional interpreter-facilitated encounters in diverse face-to-face interactions. This study adopts Brown's postulation that is based on Alexieva's (1997) parameters of categorisation of interpreter-facilitated events with a focus on political interpreting. Brown (2008) defines political interpreting as any interpreting activities where either the primary participants or the topic under discussion is political. Interpreter-facilitated political communication may cover political interviews (e.g., Baker 1997), diplomatic negotiations (e.g., Thiéry 2015) and political press conferences (e.g., Wang & Mu 2009, Wang 2012, Hu & Tao 2012, Pan 2020). Social identity theories can be useful to elucidate an interpreter's behaviour in the political contexts, where at least one of the primary participants usually constitutes a representative from the government of a nation, and the interpreter may assume multiple identities and may also need to interpret for both speakers.

2 Social identity, optimal distinctiveness and interpreters' role

The core notion of social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1978a, p. 63). Departing from this definition, two related theories were born one after the other to conceptualise firstly intergroup behaviour – the social identity theory (SIT), and secondly both intergroup and interpersonal behaviour – the self-categorisation theory (SCT). SCT is an extension of SIT and constitutes a more comprehensive framework for the conceptualisation and analysis of identity and social behaviour.

SIT postulates that humans are an obligatorily group-living species and individuals cannot survive outside of the context of cooperative and interdependent groups. When acting as group members, people have a need for distinct social identity and are therefore motivated to positively differentiate their in-group from relevant out-groups. The perspective provides social psychological answers to the question of why members of different groups discriminate against each other by postulating the phenomenon of intergroup discrimination as a means to establish positive in-group distinctiveness. However, the theory has a major limitation. It solely focuses on social identity which involves only limited aspects of the self and is relevant to certain limited aspects of social behaviour (Brown 2000). It does not constitute an overarching theory of identity that attends to possible variants of identity, such as personal versus social identity. To address this major limitation, SCT proposes the distinction between personal identity and social identity to encompass both intragroup and intergroup differentiations.

SCT focuses on the explanation of both intragroup interpersonal behaviour and intergroup behaviour as well as the transition from one form of behaviour to the other. In particular, SCT posits three levels of abstraction of self-categorisation significant in the social self-concept: firstly, the super-ordinate level of the self as a human being in contrast to other forms of life; secondly, the intermediate level of in-group vis-à-vis out-group categorisations based on social similarities and differences that define one as a member of certain social groups and not others, i.e., one's social identity; and thirdly, the subordinate level of personal self-categorisation based on differentiations between oneself as a unique individual and other

in-group members, i.e., one's personal identity. Identities are relative social constructs that are compared with and evaluated relative to contrasting identities at the same level of abstraction. Although people usually belong to many different groups underlying their diversified social identities, not all group memberships are salient at the same time. Identity salience is activated by people's readiness to adopt a particular identity which, for example, depends on people's value beliefs, changing motives, current goals and prior experiences, and the extent to which that identity fits as a meaningful self-categorisation in the given social context (Simon 2004).

The importance of introducing SIT and SCT is that they serve as the foundation theories for the ensuing optimal distinctiveness model which is highly relevant to explaining interpreters' behaviour in an institutional context. Optimal distinctiveness contends that although SIT and SCT "postulated that social identity salience had motivational consequences in the form of a striving for positive distinctiveness of the in-group", neither SIT nor SCT specifies "a driver (antecedents) for the process of identification with in-groups, particularly for chronic, long-term identification ... and why individuals are more chronically identified with some in-groups rather than others" (Leonardelli et al., 2010, p. 66).

The optimal distinctiveness model departs from the assumption that if intergroup differentiation and boundaries are fundamental for social cooperation which is in turn essential for human survival, then psychological mechanisms at the individual level are necessary to motivate and sustain in-group identification and intergroup differentiation. In view of this, the model posits that human beings have two opposing needs that govern the tension between personal identity and social identity. The first is a need for assimilation and inclusion, a desire that motivates immersion in social groups. The second is a need for differentiation from others that operates in opposition to the need for immersion. These two competing motives "produce an emergent characteristic – the capacity for social identification with distinctive groups that satisfy both needs simultaneously" (ibid, p. 66). In other words, optimal social identities relate to shared distinctiveness (Brewer & Silver 2000, Stapel & Marx 2007) and "equilibrium or optimal distinctiveness, is achieved through identification with categories at that level of inclusiveness where the degrees of activation of the need for differentiation and of the need for assimilation are exactly equal" (Brewer 1991, p. 478).

An interpreter, as any other competent members of a society, assumes multiple identities simultaneously in line with the types of social groups that they belong to or identify with. For example, an interpreter may be a parent actively involved with a children's charity, an athlete affiliated to a sports club, a political party member passionate about some political mission, a patriotic citizen, and so on. However, all of their social identities are not salient at the same time, and at a particular communicative event facilitated by interpreting, only those identities of the interpreter that are most salient to the communicative event will be drawn upon, inter alia, their identity as a linguist bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps between interlocutors and their identity(s) derived from their membership(s) of the social group(s) that is(are) pertinent to the communicative event. These salient social identities compete against each other in the background, and thanks to the characteristics of the interactional context, the identity that can satisfy the interpreter's opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation at the optimal distinctive level will be activated, producing a substantive impact on the interpreter's behaviour and decision-making. Therefore, drawing from the social identity theories, I propose that an interpreter's role can be conceptualised in the following figure.

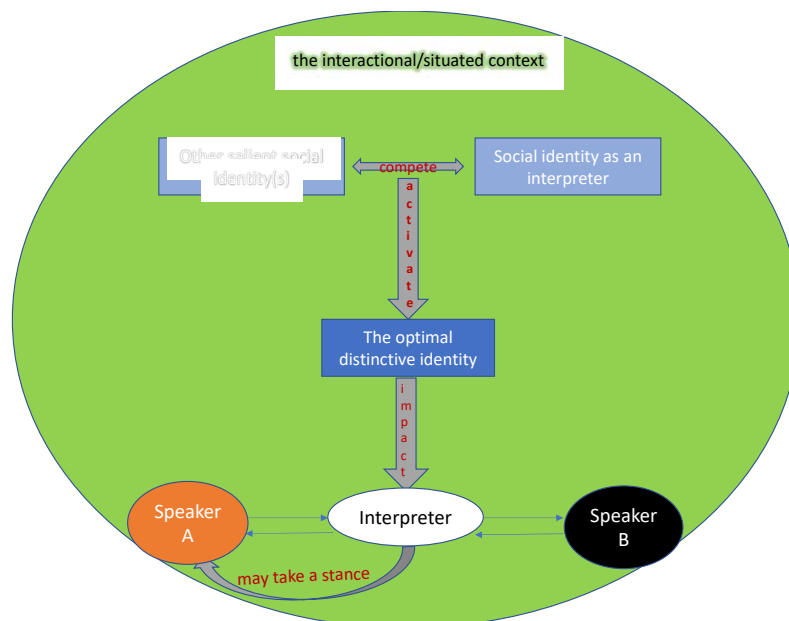


Figure 1 Conceptualising interpreter's role in interpreting-facilitated events

It can be seen from the model that to understand an interpreter's behaviour and choice of linguistic strategies, it is of crucial importance to identify their optimal distinctive identity at play in a particular communicative context. To achieve this, we must orient interpreting in the framework of social interactions and unpackage an interpreter's multiple social identities associated with the diversified social roles they assume in society. Then we need to zoom in our analysis on those salient social identities pertinent to the particular interpreting-facilitated interactional context and to examine which identity will be able to satisfy the interpreter's assimilation and differentiation needs at the optimal distinctive level that regulates, in line with the theories from social psychology, the interpreter's identity alignment and their behaviour in the process of facilitating communication.

The optimal distinctiveness theory from social psychology is particularly useful shedding light on understanding an interpreter's behaviour in the political contexts. It offers possible explanations of why interpreters cannot and should not be expected to behave like an invisible and transparent conduit-type of machine. Interpreters are humans with various social identities, and an interpreter's optimally distinctive social identity is informed and activated by their needs of belonging to a social group that can provide intragroup inclusion and intergroup differentiation simultaneously at the optimal level. The primary implication is that distinctiveness per se is an extremely important characteristic determining the level/type of social identity that is dominant and salient. In the political contexts, an interpreter may also assume the identity of a member belonging to a political or institutional group. In such cases, the interpreter's optimal distinctiveness may be achieved at the political or institutional level rather than at the professional level because the social group of interpreting profession may be excessively inclusive and lack of optimally distinctive characteristics, leaving residual motivation for greater differentiation of the self from the group. In contrast, the political or institutional group may be considered both sufficiently inclusive and differentiating in political communication.

3 Political press conference interpreting as a case study

To illustrate this, examples of how interpersonal linguistic features of face¹ are represented in the interpretation for the latest Chinese Premier's press conference in 2019 will be investigated. In the area of face representation in interpreting, studies have been undertaken in court interpreting (Jacobsen 2008a, Mason & Stewart 2001), in media political setting (Savvalidou 2011), and in European parliament conference interpreting (Magnifico & Defrancq 2016), where attentions are focussed on how face-threatening or face-damaging acts are interpreted. They conclude that face-threatening or face-damaging acts are often modified in the course of interpreting which may impact on hearers' impression of speakers' attitude and credibility. But few studies have examined the representation of redressive face management strategies, *inter alia*, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-recordness, in the political press conference interpreting, and certainly none has delved into the possible influence from underlying social psychological factors such as the impact of optimal distinctiveness on an interpreter's choice of strategy and role management.

The data in this research constitutes the Chinese Premier's latest press conference held in March 2019, and its consecutive interpretation into Mandarin and English languages. The Premier's press conferences usually take place after the closing ceremony of the annual sessions of the National People's Congress. At the press conferences, invited journalists and media outlets from home and abroad have the opportunity to ask the Premier questions on the government's policies and practices. The conferences provide effective platforms for the Chinese government to communicate its' official policies and positions to the world, which are in turn closely analysed by experts and media around the globe. This conference is 150 minutes in length where 18 questions are addressed to the Premier by Chinese and foreign journalists, with 11 questions initiated in Mandarin language, and 7 questions in English language. The Premier responds in Mandarin language throughout the conference.

The interpreter for the press conference is one of the top government interpreters and has been the appointed interpreter for the Premier's press conferences each year since 2010. Therefore, she has ample experience with this type of interpreting. She is widely praised in the media² for her calm composure, high quality interpretation and outstanding interpreting skills tackling linguistic challenges, such as interpreting ancient Chinese poems present in the speakers' elaborations. She is even named 'the Goddess of interpreting' in the Chinese media and examples of her interpreting are frequently used in interpreting training in China. Her substantial relevant experience and acclaimed skills mitigate any potential cognitive overload and interpreting errors from which a less seasoned interpreter would suffer. The entire press conference is interpreted in the consecutive mode which also reduces the possibility of cognitive overload compared to the simultaneous mode. The interaction is very well-structured and is moderated by a Chinese official. The interpreter does not participate in

¹ Research on linguistic politeness or face has been going through three waves since Brown and Levinson's (1987) ground-breaking facework model. It is beyond the scope of this paper to expound the evolution of the three waves in detail (c.f. Granger 2011, Haugh 2007, Kádár 2017). The approach to face in this paper joins the third wave of grounding face in social interaction (Haugh 2009) and acknowledges that Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness offers a "culture-neutral, empirical tool for examining interaction 'on the ground' with pan-cultural applicability" (O'Driscoll 2007, p. 486). Therefore, the three types of linguistic politeness strategies developed by Brown and Levinson to unpackage how people manage facework in interaction, i.e., positive politeness, negative politeness and off recordness, are adopted in the analysis in this research.

² See <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/feature/2019/03/15/556475.html> and http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/201003/0316_17_1576978.shtml

distributing turns of talking. Nor is she seen to have any kind of interactions with speakers such as double-checking utterances at the press conference. Therefore, the interpreter and her personal attributes, such as her age and gender, do not seem to have any observable effect on the group dynamics of the press conference.

According to the optimal distinctiveness model, “individuals prefer to identify with groups that are positively valued or occupy high social status relative to other groups” (Leonardelli et al., 2010, p. 100). In this context, the interpreter’s social identity as an official for the Chinese government (Director of the Translation Department of the Foreign Ministry) and a member of the Communist Party³, is likely to be activated and become her dominant distinctive identity influencing her behaviour. To explore the interpreter’s role management and the possible effect of optimal distinctiveness, the analysis will be focused on the representation of redressive face strategies and bold-on-record face markers in the interpretation for three types of utterances: 1) statements and questions from Chinese journalists, 2) those from non-Chinese journalists, and 3) responses from the Premier. In the analysis, five categories of interpreting strategies (Magnifico & Defrancq 2016⁴), *inter alia*, omission, downtoning, translation, strengthening and addition, are studied to illustrate how interpersonal features manifested in the use of various politeness markers are represented in the interpretation.

3.1 Interpretation for Chinese journalists

It is well known that in China the state controls journalism and media (Tong 2017). It produces a salient power difference between the Premier and the Chinese journalists. This influences the journalists’ choice of topics to broach upon, i.e., focusing on economic and social development rather than controversial issues such as human rights. It also impacts on the journalists’ interactional style with the Premier, as they are seen to mainly adopt various positive politeness strategies to communicate their acknowledgment of power imbalance and their respect for the Premier.

Example 1:

Original remarks by the journalist from ETV : 总理您好, 非常感谢给台湾最具代表性的新闻媒体东森新闻云一个提问的机会。我想请教的是今年年初习近平总书记在《告台湾同胞书》40 周年纪念活动上有重大的讲话, 在两岸也引起非常大的关注。那外界非常好奇说, 大陆今年会具体怎么去贯彻和落实。举例来说像是在促进两岸共同发展以及两岸人民的福祉上面。谢谢。

Gloss in English⁵: *How do you do, Premier. Thank you very much for giving ETV Today of Taiwan – the most recognisable news media in Taiwan – an opportunity to ask a question. The question I would like to invite (you) to enlighten on is that early this year, President Xi Jinping gave an important speech at the meeting commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan. It received close attention from people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. There is a great deal of interest in how the mainland will*

³ Becoming a member of the Communist Party is a prerequisite to take up any official roles within the Chinese government.

⁴ Magnifico and Defrancq (2016) only focused on the interpretation of face-threatening/damaging acts. While this study investigates the application of these strategies in interpreting for both face-enhancing acts, i.e., redressive face strategies, and face-threatening acts, i.e., bold-on-record markers.

⁵ Glosses in English are provided by the author.

implement and fulfil it. Examples include promoting the common development of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and improve the well-being of people on both sides. Thank you.

Interpretation into English: With ETV Today of Taiwan. Early this year, President Xi Jinping gave an important speech at the meeting commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, and that important speech received close attention from people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. My question is: how will the mainland implement the policies and propositions set out in that important speech, in particular, to promote the common development of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and improve the well-being of people on both sides?

In this example, the journalist adopts a series of positive politeness strategies to communicate his respect for and gratitude to the Premier, such as, the formal greeting 总理您好 ‘*How do you (the deferent form of the second person pronoun in Chinese) do, Premier*’; an explicit expression of gratitude to the Premier and an embedded self-positive politeness strategy (Mao 1994) of elevation 非常感谢给台湾最具代表性的新闻媒体东森新闻云一个提问的机会 ‘*Thank you very much for giving ETV Today of Taiwan – the most recognisable news media in Taiwan – an opportunity to ask a question*’; initiating the question with respect and humbleness 我想请教的是 ‘*I would like to invite(you) to enlighten*’; and a repeat expression of gratitude 谢谢 ‘*Thank you*’. All these four positive politeness strategies for enhancing rapport with and communicating respect for the Premier, and the self-positive politeness remark, are omitted in the interpretation. In contrast to the elaborate introduction made by the journalist, the interpreter simply tones it down to a mere mention of the media’s name to which the journalist is affiliated – ‘With ETV Today of Taiwan’ – in the interpretation. Moreover, another positive politeness strategy of showing interest 那外界非常好奇说 ‘*There is a great deal of interest in*’ is interpreted into a direct question without any face redressive strategy – ‘my question is’. Limited space here does not allow presentation of further similar examples. But such omission of positive politeness strategies in the interpretation for the Chinese journalists can be identified throughout the press conference, which tones down the interactive interpersonal feature characterising the Chinese journalists’ communicative style. It is important to highlight that in this context, the greetings, comments and questions initiated from the Chinese journalists are made in Mandarin language. This is also the Premier’s mother tongue. Therefore, the interpretation is provided for non-native Mandarin speakers present at the press conference and the audiences around the world who are watching via televised methods. In the interpretation, transmitting information in a direct, transactional and non-personal manner seems to take priority over the representation of the interpersonal features underlying the journalists’ attitude and intentions. Such omission and downtoning of interpersonal features and dynamics illustrate the interpreter’s possible move/behaviour to distance herself from the questions and the Chinese journalists.

3.2 Interpretation for non-Chinese journalists

Non-Chinese journalists, in contrast to their Chinese counterparts, seem to be more prepared to make bold-on-record critical comments prior to initiating their questions, whether it is in Mandarin or English language, as shown in the following two examples.

Example 2

Original remarks by the journalist from Reuters: 总理您好。Good morning. I am from Reuters. Last year China took a number of measures to ease monetary conditions, to encourage banks to lend more. China also cut taxes and fees. This year China is promising

more monetary easing, more tax cuts and more infrastructure spending. Are China's economic problems bigger than previously thought? And if the economic slowdown doesn't stop, would China consider taking more aggressive measures such as lifting property curbs or cutting benchmark interest rates? Thank you very much.

Interpretation into Chinese: 总理先生早上好。路透社记者提问。去年中国采取了一系列措施来放松货币条件，中国还加大了减税降费力度，今年中国表示将进一步放宽货币条件，将进一步减税降费，还要加大基础设施投资。请问，中国经济面临的问题是否比之前预想得更为严重？如果经济增速放缓继续持续下去，中国是否会考虑采取更加有力的举措，包括取消房地产限制和降低基准利率等？

Gloss of interpretation: Good morning, Mr. Premier. Reuters journalist is asking the question. Last year, China adopted a series of measures to ease monetary conditions. China also made more tax and fee cuts. This year, China expresses that it will further enhance the monetary easing, tax and fee cuts and that it will increase infrastructure spending. (May I) please ask, if the problems that China's economy is facing are bigger than previously thought? If the slowdown of China's economic growth continues, will China consider to adopt more aggressive measures including lifting property curbs and cutting benchmark interest rates?

Different from how positive politeness strategies are omitted in the interpretation for the Chinese journalist, the similar strategy of greeting 'Good morning, Mr. Premier' was translated in the interpretation for the non-Chinese journalist from Reuters. It is also interesting to note that a positive politeness marker, which is not present in the original utterance, is added in the interpretation to initiate the question in a polite manner 请问 '(May I) please ask...'. This positive politeness marker is added following a series of negative comments on China's economic problems to redress the face-threatening effect. Moreover, the journalist uses the expression that *China is promising...* to hold the government accountable in an on-record manner. In the English interpretation, the bold-on-recordness is toned down by an off-record statement that *China expresses (it) will....* The interpreter's linguistic intervention can also be noted in her effort of redressing *China's economic problems* as *the problems that China's economy is facing*, and of rephrasing *the economic slowdown* in the original remarks by the journalist as *the slowdown of China's economic growth* in the interpretation. Such redressive strategies downtoning the directness and the negativity in the journalist's remarks on China's economy are conducive to maintaining Chinese government's face and public image at the press conference. In this context, as the original remarks and questions are initiated in English, the Premier needs to rely on the interpretation to decipher the journalist's stance, attitude and intentions. The translation and addition of positive politeness markers and the downtoning of directness and negativity in the journalist's comments demonstrate the interpreter's concerns of the Premier's face needs and of the need to positively maintain the Chinese government's collective face in front of an international audience. It is noteworthy that a positive politeness marker at the end of the journalist's utterances – Thank you very much – is not translated in the interpretation. It could be attributed to the interpreter's observable efforts and preoccupation with downtoning the aforementioned series of negative comments in the journalist's monologue, and such a conventionalised use of the positive politeness expression at the end of the turn of talking may not warrant the interpreter's attention.

Example 3

Original remarks by the journalist from China News Asia of Singapore: 总理，您好。亚洲新闻台记者提问。总理，去年以来中国政府多次表示中国将越来越开放。但有些评论认为中方口惠而实不至，缺乏实际行动。那今天外商投资法已经全国人大表决通过，也有舆论表示担心或质疑，认为这部法律的特别加速通过，大部分只是对美国压力的回应，而且部分法律条款的模糊性也给了中国政府灵活掌握的空间，降低了投资者对实际效力的期望。请问李总理，您对此有何回应？中国政府将推出哪些具体、可落实的政策呢？谢谢。

Gloss in English: *How do you do, Mr. Premier. I am from China News Asia of Singapore. Mr Premier, from last year the Chinese government has repeatedly expressed that China will open up more and more. But some analyses argue that the Chinese government only makes promises in words without creating real benefits, lack of concrete actions. The Foreign Investment Law has been adopted today at the NPC Session. There are also concerns and doubts that the exceptional swift adoption of this piece of legislation is only in large measure a response to pressure from the United States. And the ambiguity of some legal provisions provide the Chinese government wiggle room for control and self-discretion, compromising the investors' expectation of the actual effects of the enforcement of this legislation. Please may I ask, Premier Li, what is your response to this? What specific and feasible measures will the government adopt? Thank you.*

Interpretation into English: China News Asia of Singapore. From last year the Chinese government has taken a series of steps to further open China up. However, there have also been analyses arguing that the Chinese government is actually somewhat short on concrete actions of opening up. We have seen that the Foreign Investment Law has just been adopted at this year's NPC Session. Yet there is also worry that the exceptional swift adoption of this piece of legislation is only in large measure a response to pressure from the United States. And that the ambiguity of some legal provisions will only provide the Chinese government further wiggle room for self-discretion and compromise the actual effects of the enforcement of this legislation. My question is what specific measures will the government adopt to ensure full enforcement of the law?

In this example, the journalist's comments and questions are composed in Mandarin and, therefore, the Premier does not need to rely on the interpretation. It is interesting to note that the positive politeness markers which underpin the journalist's interactive and respectful communicative style are omitted in the interpretation. Once again, transmitting information seems to surpass the representation of interpersonal interactivity in the interpretation as the priority, demonstrating the interpreter's behaviour of distancing herself from the journalist when the Premier does not actually rely on the interpretation during the communication. Meanwhile, in the reconstruction of the journalist's message in English, the accusation of the Chinese government is toned down significantly in the interpretation by omitting a markedly pejorative Chinese idiom 口惠而实不至 (transliteration: verbally promising benefits but real benefits not follow). The idiom is employed to accuse the Chinese government of making empty promises and failing to match them with concrete actions. Instead, a downtoned expression featured with 'somewhat' is adopted which considerably tones down the strong criticism in the journalist's original remarks. This demonstrates the interpreter's concerns of maintaining the Chinese government's collective face image in front of the international audience as her English interpretation provides the first point of reference for the non-Chinese media outlets.

Example 4

Original remarks by the journalist from Bloomberg News: I am with Bloomberg News. A lot has been written about US-China ties over the last couple of months. Most of it is either about trade, whether US and China can come to an agreement, or it's been about technology. And the US is saying that other countries should not use Chinese telecommunications equipment because it could be used to spy on them. There's probably not been as much suspicion and competition in the relationship since ties began some 40 years ago. I wanted to ask you Mr. Premier: how would you describe the current state of US-China ties? What's your outlook for the relationship? And also if you could address some specific issues on trade, what kind of deal would China accept, and what kind would China not accept? And on technology, would China force Chinese technology companies to help spy?

Interpretation into Chinese: 彭博新闻社。过去几个月，多数关于美中两国关系的报道都是集中在贸易以及中美两国是否能达成有关协议上，或者是集中在关于技术问题。同时指出呢美国告诫其它国家不要使用中国的电信设备，因为这可能被用来对其进行监视。似乎自中美 40 年前建交以来，现在两国关系当中的猜疑和竞争比以往任何时候都更加严重。总理先生，我想问您的问题是，您如何看待现在的中美关系，您对中美关系未来的走向持何看法？您能否简单谈及目前中美面临的一些具体的冲突点？比如说贸易问题，什么样的贸易协议中方可以接受，什么样的不能接受？在技术问题上，中国政府是否会迫使中国的有关企业帮助其监视他国？

Gloss of interpretation: Bloomberg News. In the past few months, most reports about Sino-U.S. relations have centred on trade and whether the two countries can reach a deal, or on technology. They point out that the U.S. warns other countries not to use Chinese telecommunications equipment, as they could be used to spy. It seems, in the 40 years of Sino-U.S. relations, suspicion and competition between the two countries are more serious than before. Mr Premier, the question I wanted to ask you (deferent form of the second person pronoun) is how you (deferent form of the second person pronoun) see the current relationship between the two countries? What is your outlook for its development? Could you (deferent form of the second person pronoun) briefly mention some specific issues that the two countries are facing? For example, on trade, what kind of deal China would accept, and what kind China would not accept? On technology, would Chinese government force some related Chinese enterprises to help spy on other countries?

The journalist from Bloomberg News has broached upon a sensitive and unpleasant issue for the Chinese government⁶. In the interpretation, three important hedges are seen to be employed, which are not present in the original remarks, to tone down the face-threatening effects. Firstly, the hedge 似乎 (transliteration: it seems) is used in the interpretation to represent 'probably' in the original remark, considerably mitigating the certainty in the claim of the gravity in the Sino-U.S. relations. Secondly, the downtoner 简单 (transliteration: briefly) is added in the interpreting for the journalist's request that the Premier address some specific issues in the Sino-U.S. relations, alleviating the imposition on the Premier's negative face needs. This is further toned down by interpreting 'address' as 谈及 (transliteration: mention) which denotes a much lighter way of touching upon/discussing a topic. Thirdly, a highly vague pronoun reference 有关企业 (transliteration: some related enterprises) is adopted in the interpretation to represent "Chinese technology companies" in the last

⁶ The Premier can be seen on the video to take a deep breath and raise his shoulder after listening to the interpretation of the journalist's remarks and questions.

question in the original. Although the interpretation does not change the meaning communicated in the original, the use of the vague pronoun has the effect of ambiguating and even disguising the target in the journalist's question.

There are altogether seven non-Chinese journalists who have had the opportunity to address their questions to the Premier at the press conference. Besides the afore-mentioned three journalists, the comments and the questions from the rest four journalists⁷ do not contain any sensitive or face-threatening subjects or linguistic features. Therefore, no use of adding positive politeness markers or toning down criticisms/face-threats can be identified in the interpretation.

3.3 Interpretation for the Premier

The press conference constitutes one of the few key occasions where the Premier, on behalf of the Chinese government, communicates directly to the world the government's domestic and international policies. When responding to criticisms of the government, the Premier's linguistic style is characterised by bold-on-record statements demonstrating power and authority.

Example 5

Original remarks by the Premier: 这就使我联想到刚才彭博社记者提了一连串问题，其中有一个问题我还真得要明确得回答你。你说中国政府有没有要求自己的企业去监听他国的信息，我不知道是指的政府的还是公民个人的，反正有一条，这样做不符合中国法律，也不是中国行事的方法，现在不会有，将来也决不会有。

Gloss in English: *This makes me think of a series of questions posed by the journalist from Bloomsburg. I must explicitly respond to one of the questions. You said whether the Chinese government asked its companies to spy on other countries' information. I don't know if you referred to governments' information or individual's information. One thing is clear, such behaviour is not consistent with Chinese law, nor is it how China do things, not now, and it will never be in the future.*

Interpretation into English: That somewhat reminds me of one part of the question previously raised by the journalist from Bloomsburg. I would like to very explicitly respond to that particular part in his question here. That is he asked whether the Chinese government will ask Chinese companies to spy on other countries. I don't know if you are referring to the governments or individuals of other countries. But let me tell you explicitly that this is not consistent with Chinese law. This is not how China behaves. We did not do that, and will not do that in the future.

The example constitutes the Premier's response to the question posed by the Bloomsburg journalist who broaches upon the controversial subject where the Chinese government is accused of asking Chinese companies to spy on other countries. In the response, the Premier emphatically communicates his bold-on-record manner by firstly highlighting his clear intention to directly address this issue 明确得回答你 (transliteration: explicitly answer you), and secondly making categorical denials of the accusation with reiteration and bold-on-record assertions. These salient bold-on-record features are faithfully translated in the interpretation, with the addition of a further bold-on-record performative 'let me tell you explicitly' which is

⁷ They are from the Dong-A Ilbo, the Spanish News Agency EFE, the Nikkei and TASS Russian News Agency.

not in the original remark. Such addition strengthens the Premier's claim of power and authority in his response, enhancing the representation of his communicative style in the interpretation.

4 Discussions and Conclusions

As shown in the analysis, face features are represented differently in the interpretation for the journalists' utterances vis-à-vis for the Premier's responses. In particular, when the Premier does not rely on the interpretation, various positive politeness strategies employed by the Mandarin-speaking journalists to show respect and to enhance rapport are repeatedly omitted. This tones down the representation of the interactive feature of the journalists' communicative style, which reveals the interpreter's possible move to distance herself from the journalists. However, when the Premier does rely on the interpretation into Mandarin language to comprehend the foreign journalist's comments and questions, where face-threats exist in the subject matter or use of language, positive politeness markers are added in the interpretation to protect the Premier's face, and bold-on-record criticisms are redressed and toned down in the interpretation to mitigate threatening effects to the Chinese government's collective face and image.

At the press conference, the Premier holds reward power and coercive power (French and Raven 1959) endowed by his institutional role in relation to the journalists. As the prominent figure holding the second highest position in the Chinese political rank, the Premier, in the context of the press conference, has the power to decide which journalists are allowed (or not) at the conference, and who are given the opportunity (or not) to ask questions. In contrast, the journalists hold no such institutional power per se, but they can attempt to use their power-in-exchange to challenge with criticisms and face-threatening comments. In this dynamics of power struggle, the interpreter has been seen to exercise her expert power (French and Raven 1959) by manipulating the representation of interpersonal linguistic features to undermine the journalists' power-in-exchange. This demonstrates her stance-taking. In contrast, bold-on-record face threats in the Premier's response to criticisms have been faithfully translated and strengthened in the interpretation, reaffirming the interpreter's identifying with the sociopolitical group headed by the Premier and the Chinese government.

The interpreter's social identity as a Chinese government official – Director of the Translation Department of the Foreign Ministry in China and a member of the ruling Communist Party – is seen activated as her dominant social identity in the context of the press conference because only the Chinese government as a group can satisfy the interpreter's need for differentiation and her need for assimilation simultaneously at an optimal equilibrium. The group of interpreting professionals, however, is not able to provide such shared optimal distinctiveness in the context of the press conference. Therefore, her identity as an interpreter in this context could be secondary to her identity as a Chinese official. This offers a possible explanation for how she interprets for the journalists vis-à-vis how she interprets for the Premier, which is in line with the optimal distinctiveness model in social psychology.

An interpreter, as any other competent members of a society, possesses multiple identities associated with the various social roles that they assume. These multiple identities are not salient all at the same time, and the activation of a particular identity for it to become dominant is determined by the interactional context at play. Therefore, interpreting scholars need to go beyond the field of linguistics and delve into social psychology of identity to search for the ultimate answer explaining why the expectation of an interpreter behaving like

a conduit machine is fundamentally unfounded. This study constitutes the first qualitative research drawing from the concept of social identity and optimal distinctiveness to theorise an interpreter's role in the political contexts. It aims to offer a stronger theoretical background to interpreting research by conceptualising an interpreter's role drawing from an interdisciplinary approach oriented in social psychology and identity studies.

It is important to acknowledge that interpreters' behaviour in interpreting-facilitated interactions could be affected by a multitude of sociocultural and political factors, under which the influence of social identity subsumes. There could be other factors at play. Moving forward, face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions with interpreters will be helpful to uncover and ascertain the influencing factors, and interpreters' perceptions and their decision-making process. Moreover, the generalizability and applicability of the model proposed in this study to explaining interpreters' behaviour in other forms of interpreting should be examined in future research. Last but not least, the possible impact of social identities and optimal distinctiveness on translators in the process of rewriting and recreating the original and the effects on the translation output could also prove to be a fruitful area for investigation.

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