The Routledge Handbook of Conference Interpreting

Michaela Albl-Mikasa, Elisabet Tiselius

Discourse analysis in conference interpreting

Publication details
Alicja M. Okoniewska, Binhua Wang
Published online on: 30 Nov 2021

Accessed on: 19 Jul 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Discourse analysis in conference interpreting

Alicja M. Okoniewska and Binhua Wang

Introduction

Conference interpreting is a complex form of interlingual and cross-cultural reproduction of discourse, which presents a fertile research area for discourse analysis. Whether in the examination of interpreting as a textual product or in the analysis of interpreting as communicative and social interaction, discourse analysis not only offers “conceptual tools for the analysis of the interpreter’s product” (Pöchhacker 2004: 137) but is also useful in providing insight into the mechanisms of the interpreting process.

Comprehending the state of the art and the research output concerning the intersection of discourse and interpreting studies requires defining discourse and placing developmental perspectives on interpreting in the context of that definition. Thus, many approaches and topics that form part of interpreting studies stem from such an engagement with the existing research. Discourse as a conceptual tool relevant to interpreting studies can be defined in two ways, as discussed by Mason (2006: 116):

The first sense of the term (D1) is the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation in communication, based on (but by no means reduced to) what is said. Discourse (D2) on the other hand as ‘socially constituted … conventions of belief, established values which constrain the way people think and use their language to achieve meaning’ echoes Foucault’s sense of the term and is the sense widely used in Critical Discourse Analysis and Cultural Studies.

Drawing on van Dijk’s (2014: 394) socio-cognitive approach, discourse analysis can be defined as the disentanglement of the meaning of what is said (or believed to be said) according to the understandings, contexts, interactions, interpretations and intentions of language users. In the following sections, we adopt this broad definition and provide an overview of the ways in which discourse studies have been applied to conference interpreting. Next, we examine particular approaches and topics that have benefited interpreting research in greater depth.

We note that the scope of this chapter might be limited and should be viewed as a reflection on the intersections between discourse and interpreting studies, rather than a rigid or exhaustive
description of the existing literature. As attractive as compiling all the discursive approaches applied to quantitative and qualitative interpreting research might sound, the vast interdisciplinary range of both fields, influenced by linguistics (and sub-fields such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and pragmatics), sociology, psychology, neuroscience, ethnography, political science and other disciplines, makes such a task impossible.

Evolution of discourse-analytical approaches in interpreting studies

This section offers an overview of the evolution of discourse-analytical approaches in interpreting studies since the 1990s.

An early discourse-analytical approach emerged in interpreting studies in the 1990s, when the focus of researchers’ interest shifted from conference interpreting to dialogue interpreting. The “DI (dialogic interactionist, or discourse-in-interaction) paradigm”, as Pöchhacker labelled it, “gathered considerable momentum in the course of the 1990s, at a time when community interpreting was becoming increasingly recognized as a significant field of professional practice and a fruitful area of research” (2016: 71). Roy (2000) explored interactive discourse, turn-taking, and conversation and discourse analysis in a qualitative investigation of sign-language interpreting (Pöchhacker 2016: 71). She drew on interactional sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication to contribute to a new paradigm and methodology in interpreting studies. Wadensjö (1998), drawing on Goffman’s notion of participation framework, proposed a discourse-based framework in her study of legal and medical interpreting (Pöchhacker 2016: 71). The DI paradigm developed into a new conceptual approach to dialogue interpreting, with a methodological framework embedded in discourse analysis, and influenced research concerning community and non-professional interpreting.

Another early discourse-analytical approach was represented by Hatim and Mason (1997). Drawing on text linguistics, they proposed a discourse processing model for interpreting with three strands of textuality (Hatim & Mason 1997: 31): (1) texture (providing continuity of sense); (2) structure (providing a compositional plan); and (3) context (encompassing factors that determine rhetorical purpose; the text producer steers the receiver towards discursive goals, attitudinal meanings, genre and intention). Hatim and Mason examined interpreting through the lens of these three strands and identified several weaknesses, including the fact that implicit connectivity in some languages must be made explicit and, thus, might not enable an adequate comparison.

Hatim and Mason (1997: 34–44) posited that different domains of textuality are prominent in simultaneous, consecutive and liaison interpreting: simultaneous interpreting relies more strongly on texture, since access to structure and context is partial, whereas consecutive interpreting focuses more on structure and liaison interpreting draws mostly on context. However, texture is a privileged category, present for all modes of interpreting. In the case of simultaneous interpreting, interpreters rely heavily on textual cues, i.e. cohesive devices, (e.g. anaphoric or cataphoric reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion) (Hatim & Mason 1997: 39). In the case of consecutive interpreting, texture and context cues give greater access to structure, enabling the interpreter to construct a ‘compositional plan’ (Hatim & Mason 1997: 41). In the case of liaison interpreting, various contextual sources enable interpreters to make sense of coherent, ‘self-contained units’ and negotiate a text design with an interlocutor (Hatim & Mason 1997: 44). “It is essential that specialized training modules be developed to focus our efforts on the discourse mechanics of a particular skill” (Hatim & Mason 1997: 46), such as the identification and reproduction of cohesive devices,
theme-rheme organization in simultaneous interpreting, structure in consecutive interpreting and layers of context in liaison interpreting (Hatim & Mason 1997: 46).

In the past two decades, discourse analysis has been applied more widely in interpreting studies. As noted by Mason (2015: 112), three methodological approaches to discourse analysis in interpreting studies can be identified: (1) mainstream discourse analysis; (2) conversation analysis; and (3) critical discourse analysis.


Conversation analysis examines descriptively features in conversation and dialogue real-time activities by exploring projected, received and negotiated meaning, as well as considering how interpreter-mediated conversations are organized (including, in particular, turn-taking, sequence organization, pauses and problem management; Mason 2015: 113). Various authors have used this approach to examine interpreters’ coordination, goal-setting, role distribution and turn-taking, including Russel (2002), Bolden (2000) and Valero-Garcés (2005). Finally, Gavioli and Baraldi (2011) combined conversation analysis with an intercultural mediation approach in their study on legal and healthcare interpreting (all also mentioned in Mason 2015: 114).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) goes beyond these descriptive approaches and uses social critique to reveal power differentials, hidden agendas and the uneven distribution of communicative rights (Mason 2015: 114). Within community interpreting studies, Barsky (1994) applied CDA to reveal ‘constructed otherness’ as a cultural, discursive and register compensation or deficiency produced by the interpreter in immigration settings. Pöllabauer also explored the asymmetrical distribution of power and the blurred role of the interpreter in asylum settings (2004), whereas Angelelli (2011) explored how power differentials can be mitigated or renegotiated in healthcare interpreting.

While the early discourse-analytical approaches to interpreting have focused mainly on community interpreting or dialogue interpreting, research efforts have been expanded to conference interpreting especially in the past two decades, which will be elaborated in the next section.

Research on discourse analysis in conference interpreting: topics and approaches

In this section, we will examine some key discourse-analytical approaches and topics applied to (conference) interpreting studies. Guided by the definition given in the previous section, we will foreground studies drawing on cognitive, pragmatic, interactional and critical analyses of discourse. These reflect four aspects of the negotiation of the meaning of what is said or believed that is said: (1) comprehension; (2) context; (3) interaction; and (4) intention. Finally, special attention will also be given to interpreting strategies and pedagogical applications of discourse analysis.
Cognitive processing of discourse: knowledge-based comprehension and mental models

Cognitive processing of discourse in interpreting is a topic that has been addressed since the mid-1990s by Kohn and Kalina (1996) and Setton (1998), among others. Language users’ ‘understandings’ of discourse (van Dijk 2014: 394) depend on their interpretation, framing, attention and interest (Kress 2012: 43). Such understandings also depend on users’ knowledge and, in particular, their ability to relate the representation of text to knowledge elements already integrated into situational models (van Dijk et al. 1983: 336–342; van Dijk 2014, 2018). Van Dijk and Kintsch postulated that language users construct models about the situations denoted by texts and that such models provide them with crucial information:

to understand the text, we have to represent what it is about. If we are unable to imagine a situation in which certain individuals have the proprieties or relations indicated by the text, we fail to understand the text itself. If we do not understand the relations between the local facts and global facts to which the text refers, we do not understand the text.

(Van Dijk et al. 1983: 337)

This similarity of experience enables comprehension because many of the elements of discourse are already part of the language users’ subjective experiences or their knowledge of such experiences (van Dijk et al. 1983).

Such subjective representations that refer to events and situations that were observed or participated in by language users and are enacted by discourse in their episodic memory are ‘mental models’ (van Dijk 2014: 390). The implicit parts of the mental models communicated through discourse must be inferred by language users or interpreters based on their contextual knowledge or the previous sentences (Setton 1998). Mental models seem to be a useful concept for understanding the cognitive processing of discourse in interpreting. Kohn and Kalina (1996: 120) drew on van Dijk and Kintsch’s strategic processing perspective, describing simultaneous interpreting as a strategic process of meaning formation, and proposing a ‘discourse-based mental modelling’ for interpreting (Pöchhacker 2016: 87–88). The authors argued that in the process of comprehension the interpreters construct ‘mental models’ of a source text’s content referring to ‘diversified knowledge’ that includes linguistic, content and world-related knowledge (Braun et al. 2012). In Kohn and Kalina’s model, such references are also vital to construct meaning later expressed in a target text by the means of linguistic representations. The target discourse is oriented to implicate the same beliefs, goals, wishes and conventions (i.e. has the same illocutionary orientation) as in a source text. Finally, the target text should produce the same expected reactions of the listeners (i.e. possess equal perlocutionary force). The discursive means expressing such mentally modelled meanings are regulated by set of strategies that condition efficient interpreting (see section on discourse analysis and interpreting strategies below) and norms that frame effective communication, such as, for example, clarity, relevance or truthfulness (see Grice’s cooperative principle, 1989).

In summary, mental models of events, situations and experiences are rendered through linguistic representations in the source and target discourses (Kohn et al. 1996). The interpreter’s role, according to Kohn and Kalina, is to maintain the mental models in the target discourse. Rendering mental models in the target language requires not only applying the norms of efficient communication but also following cultural conventions of linguistic expression and
rules of politeness to make the intention of the speaker accessible to the target audience (Bartłomiejczyk 2016; Monacelli 2009). Consequently, discourse analysis enables interpreting studies to exploit comprehension and mental models in interpreting (Kohn et al. 1996).

**The pragmatic perspective of discourse analysis: context, agency and facework**

In terms of the practical application of discourse analysis to interpreting, context has been investigated as a key concept in several studies. ‘Context models’ are mental models of a certain communicative event that adapt discourse processing to social norms in a particular situation (van Dijk 2014: 391). In other words, a context model is a mental definition of a situation that controls the adaptation of discourse production to the social environment (van Dijk 1997; 2014: 392). Therefore, context models are dynamic and do not reflect specific social structures. Context grounds the meanings of linguistic representations, turning them into ‘situated’ meanings that are context-dependent (Gee et al. 2012: 2).

Setton’s cognitive-pragmatic model of interpreting included the concept of ‘ongoing contextualisation’ (Setton 1998: 21; 2003: 19). Simultaneous interpreters resort to the construction of a cognitive dimension based on their comprehension of the world, the documentation received before the meeting, the conference setting and previous discourse (Setton 1998: 21). Following Chernov (2004), Setton posited that contextualization is, to some extent, unconsciously shaped by the relevance of the available cues (Setton 2003: 20); it draws on a set of assumptions based on interpreters’ general knowledge, previous utterances and discourse, and illocutionary and modal cues (Setton 1998: 21).

Sociocultural and interactional context were also discussed by Diriker (2004), who investigated the output of two simultaneous English-Turkish conference interpreters working at a philosophy conference held at Boğaziçi University and contrasted it with a metadiscursive account. Diriker asserted that the interactional context is “more and more conceived as a socially constituted, interactively sustained, time-bound phenomenon” that organizes an interpreting event (Duranti & Goodwin 1992, cited in Diriker 2004: 5). Thus, the context frames the mediated event but, at the same time, is shaped by it: “the social and the physical settings and constraints they bring are considered to be constituted by the activities of the participants, and are seen as standing in a mutually reflexive relationship” (Diriker 2004: 13). Interpreters are constrained by context, but also participate actively in its construction. Broad, macro-contexts frame interpreting activity, whereas local, micro-contexts are constituted by negotiated interaction (Diriker 2004: 14). Diriker, in her findings, foregrounded interpreters’ active role as participants in the interaction and devised three different kinds of context in an interpreter-mediated event:

conference interpreters are constrained by but also constitutive of a multitude of intertwined and mutually reflexive context(s) such as the most immediate discursive context(s) during interpreting that are invoked by previous utterances and implied by potential utterances; the conditions and demands of the particular conference context where they work in a given instance, and the conditions and demands of the larger socio-cultural context(s) in which they operate and survive as professionals.

(*Diriker 2004: 15, emphasis in original*)

Monacelli (2009: 22) drew on Diriker’s self-constrained and self-constituting context to explore professional self-preservation in simultaneous interpreting and the application of
critical discourse analysis to interpreter training (Boyd & Monacelli 2010: 58). These three perspectives coincide in an active role of conference interpreters in meaning negotiation in context. Context is defined as a “structured set of all properties of social situation that are possibly relevant for the production, structures, interpretation and functions of text and talk” (van Dijk 1998: 21). Monacelli drew on a participation framework, the interactional linguistics of politeness and interpreting studies to propose a model of context dependent on interpreters’ self-regulation of interpreted discourse (2009:1).

In English-to-Italian simultaneous interpreting, Monacelli (2009) examined the enhancement and suppression of agency as self-regulatory operations. She assessed shifts in agency, correlating them with the degree of ‘directness’ expressed in the corpus. She considered that agency indicates the extent to which actions and intentions are expressed through language—that is, the degree of direct interpreter involvement in a communicative interaction (e.g. a shift from active into passive voice) (Monacelli 2009: 102). This degree of involvement is directly related to face protection or enhancement through facework. Face enhancement and protection by both the speaker and interpreter may be denoted by a more or less direct stance being preserved in the target language rendering. Facework was also studied by Bartłomiejczyk (2016) in her pragmatic discourse analysis of face threats and impoliteness in English-to-Polish simultaneous interpreting in the European Parliament. She investigated facework performed by both speakers and by interpreters to identify the interpreting strategies employed to render such facework. For example, based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of her corpus, she identified a tendency to mitigate facework threats in interpreting (Bartłomiejczyk 2006: 244). Bartłomiejczyk asserted that independent of the strategies selected and the interpreter’s motivation for such a selection, in the target language rendering, “the level of face threat will change as compared with the source text” (2006: 244, see also Monacelli 2009: 159). The mitigation or reinforcement of the speaker’s discursive behaviour might affect power differentials in the mediated event (Bartłomiejczyk 2016; Diriker 2004; Monacelli 2009; Okoniewska 2019).

Agency may be also evidenced by an interpreter’s contribution to restructuring the target language product on the lexical, syntactic and semantic levels, creating a “novel product” (Riccardi 1998: 173). Concerning face-to-face interpreting, Monacelli asserted that “the interpreters were full participants in the events in which they acted, that they had their own goals and that their decision making could lead in a variety of different directions, influencing the outcome of the event” (2009: xii). She concluded that conference interpreters exert agency to, among others, improve discourse comprehension by providing, for example, additional explanations, that is, drawing on an interpreting strategy of explicitation further examined by Gumił (2017). Therefore, Monacelli shared Diriker’s view that local-level choices such as modality, pronominal references, additions and omissions made to, for example, distance the interpreter self from what is being talked about, are face-protective mechanisms, motivated by professional survival in online simultaneous interpreting process (Diriker 2004; Monacelli 2009; see also Bartłomiejczyk 2016).

The studies briefly mentioned here shed light on contextualized explorations of interpreters’ agency and executed facework, grounded in discourse analysis (see also Angelelli 2014: 1–7). One avenue of research worth pursuing would be to further explore the manifestation of agency through facework in meaning mediation and the alteration of power relations in interpreted discourse (Mason & Ren 2014: 119). This could identify the extent to which conference interpreters exercise goal-oriented, functional power and, thus, the extent to which they negotiate and coordinate communicative interaction using verbal and non-verbal strategies.
The socio-interactional perspective of discourse analysis

As discussed in the previous section, conference interpreters are language users in a particular context and, therefore, are involved in an interactive event speaking on behalf of those they translate but also on their own (Diriker 2004; Monacelli 2009). Interpreters are, thus, active agents in communication (Beaton-Thome 2013: 394). Such a socio-interactional discourse approach engages socio-cognitive context, non-verbal features of communication, intentionality and power relations (Angelelli 2000: 580). Consequently, it is much broader than lexico-semantic transcoding alone. To achieve a deeper understanding of interactional, goal-oriented communication, Angelelli grounded her analysis in the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1972; see also Roy 2000: 20), emphasizing the “primacy of speech to code, function to structure, and context to message” (Angelelli 2000: 581–583). She exploited the ethnography of speaking as an overarching model for the “whole communication” in a comparative qualitative study of conference and community interpreting events. Using the Hymesian framework, Angelelli applied a variant of ethnographical discourse analysis to the study of simultaneous interpreting. She identified a disconnect between the mediated negotiation of meaning by conference interpreters and the speech community and its expectations, which would have likely gone unnoticed in a purely lexico-semantic study. The comprehension of a speaker’s intention cannot be directly clarified between a conference interpreter and speaker in simultaneous interpreting, and the interpreter may not necessarily belong to the speaker’s or listeners’ speech community, which provides such knowledge (Angelelli 2000: 584). Disengagement from the direct debate between the speaker and the audience does not exclude an interpreter from meaning negotiation proper, since conference interpreters are “concerned to portray the speaker in the way that is acceptable to the interaction of the target audience” (Angelelli 2000: 584).

In interpreting, the mitigation and politeness principles applied to the output might indicate a constant, indirect (re)negotiation of the relationship of the interpreter with the speaker and the engagement of the former in communicative interaction (Bartłomiejczyk 2016; Monacelli 2009: 61). Therefore, conference interpreters perform a complex speaker-interpreter-listener interactional (re)negotiation (Diriker 2004: 147).

This complexity is grounded in power relations embedded in the definition, context and practice of interpreting (Cronin 2002: 387). On the system level, he noted that scarce attention was given by interpreting studies to the exploration of comparative geopolitical power and interest bias, due to an excessive focus on interpreting in developed countries and on modes of interpreting considered more prestigious, such as conference interpreting (Cronin 2002: 387–396). On the individual level, Monacelli examined the ways in which interpreters’ personal and professional interests modify their self-positioning within an interactional framework and motivate their lexical and structural choices (2009: 20). Furthermore, she analysed the existence and stability of interpreting norms as discourse conventions that modify such interests, in terms of both interpreting practice and the meta-language about such practice. Monacelli drew on Goffman’s notion of ‘footing’ that postulates an alignment in communication between speaker and listener and its role as a stance modifier (Goffman 1981). The results of Monacelli’s qualitative and quantitative study, which focused on directness and indirectness as expressed through personal references, transitivity, agency, mood, modality and facework, confirmed the self-regulatory nature of discursive behaviours of interpreters such as distancing, de-personalization and mitigation (2009: 158). This discursive self-regulation, evidenced by data, is inconsistent with interpreters’ meta-language about the interpreting process that foregrounds neutrality and an unbiased stance. Such a contrast between conduit-based interpreting and conference interpreters’ active participation in communicative acts through, for
example, mitigation or stance-taking has also been evidenced in other studies (Bartłomiejczyk 2016; Beaton-Thome 2013; Munday 2012; 2018; Okoniewska 2019; Wang & Feng. 2018).

The role of conference interpreters could be therefore perceived as dynamic, as Diriker suggested, drawing on her studies of the meta-discourse about interpreting (2004; 2011). She posits that conference interpreting is a dynamic, context-dependent activity, since interpreters are constantly (re)negotiating their relationship with the speaker and with the listener (Diriker 2004: 84–85). I-shifts (i.e. shifts in the speaking subject) in interpreter discourse, which reflect the position that the interpreter adopts towards a negotiated meaning, depend on comprehension, which, in turn, depends on social, interactional, cognitive factors in the macro and micro context. Accordingly, Diriker postulated that interpreters adopt one of four ‘speaker positions’, contrary to the norm of the invisible interpreter depicted in the meta-discourse on conference interpretation, which establishes only one, neutral, position (2004: 84; 2011). The four speaker positions proposed by Diriker (2004: 85) are: (1) the neutral interpreter’s ‘I’, which is identical to the speaker’s ‘I’; (2) the speaker’s ‘I’, which is shifted into third-person pronoun when the interpreter paraphrases or adds explanatory remarks and reports; (3) the implicit interpreter’s ‘I’, which is used when personal remarks are added indirectly to the speaker’s discourse; (4) and the explicit interpreter’s ‘I’, which is used when the interpreter adds personal remarks to the delivery. The dissonance between ensuring the direct transmission of meaning and involving oneself in shaping meaning (with variable results) was further explored by Diriker concerning the representation of the interpreting profession by the mass media (2011). She conducted a discourse analysis of news reporting in mainstream and social media and concluded that the discourse of the invisible interpreter that is foregrounded by the profession disempowers interpreters and should be revisited to highlight “interpreters’ strengths, constraints and responsibilities” (2011: 34).

In summary, interpreters shape meaning through discourse occurring in a socio-interactional framework conditioned by interpreters’, speakers’ and listeners’ social class, education, gender and age, as well as situational elements of the interaction (Beaton-Thome 2013: 394). Moreover, interpreters cross linguistic and cultural boundaries (Cronin 2002) and are sensitive to features such as levels of tension, the prestige of the groups involved and attitudes to language (Anderson 1994, cited in Monacelli 2009). Discourse-analytical approaches to speaker-interpreter-listener interaction, to the power relations and to the conventions and norms of discourse make a significant contribution to (conference) interpreting studies, as has been evidenced in research by Bartłomiejczyk (2016), Beaton-Thome (2013), Monacelli (2009), Munday (2012, 2018), Okoniewska (2019) and Wang and Feng (2018). This is further discussed in the next section.

Critical and systemic-functional analysis of interpreted discourse

From the perspective of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), discourse is the actualization of ‘meaning potential’ that, through its interpretations and intentions, expresses and constructs a certain view of reality. Interpreted discourse has been examined through critical and systemic-functional analysis, which links discourse analysis with socio-cultural interpretation. Munday (2015) applied appraisal theory, which is used to analyse the different components of a speaker’s attitude, the strength of that attitude (gradation) and the ways that the speaker aligns him/herself with the sources of attitude and with the receiver (engagement) (Munday 2012: 2), to the analysis of interpreted political discourse, with a focus on engagement and graduation resources as markers of interpreter positioning. Using a range of examples of discourses from international organizations, he discussed the interpretation of reporting verbs
and intensification as a signal of an interpreter’s degree of investment in a proposition and control over the discourse receiver’s response. Subsequently, Munday (2018) analysed US President Donald Trump’s inaugural speech (2017) from the point of view of appraisal theory. He compared the source text’s appraisal profile with that of six Spanish target texts, including five simultaneous interpretations, to identify critical points of interpreter intervention. This replicated his earlier analysis of former US President Barack Obama’s 2009 inaugural speech (Munday 2012: 42–83), enabling further generalization of the earlier findings and refinement of his methodology. The 2017 study aligned with the earlier one, revealing that expressions of attitude rarely shift; by contrast, shifts in graduation were less frequent in Trump’s speech, possibly because the reduced speed of delivery did not force the interpreters to make so many omissions. More sensitive are shifts in engagement, particularly counter-expectancy indicators and pronouns, which affect deictic positioning. Finally, Munday discussed his methodology and the role played by speech mode, since the interpreting problems were found more frequently in Trump’s impromptu or unscripted speeches than in the more formal scripted inauguration speech. As the author pointed out, the appraisal-based analytical model “provides a very focused and intricate tool for identifying the power behind evaluative words and expressions, and how this fits into an act of communication including … interpreter intervention” (Munday 2018: 192).

Wang and Feng (2018) applied systemic-functional linguistics to a corpus-based analysis of interpreted political discourse. To explore stance-taking in interpreted political discourse, they generated relatively large-scale data from the Corpus of CEIPPC (Chinese-English Interpreting for Premier Press Conferences), a parallel bilingual corpus comprising 15 transcribed press conferences by two Premiers of the Chinese government between 1998 and 2012 that were interpreted by seven institutional interpreters (see Bendazzoli, Chapter 32, in this volume). Corpus tools such as frequency analysis and clustering were employed to identify attitudinal and ideology-laden keywords in the corpus. The content keywords with highest frequency in the corpus, e.g. ‘问题’ (matter, problem or issue) was identified as a critical point in interpreting and regularity was revealed in lexical choices in interpreting the keywords. Drawing on an interpretive framework based on appraisal theory (gauging attitude, graduation and engagement), the authors found that the interpreters’ lexical choices reflected the Chinese government’s stance on various political and social issues. The investigation of critical points in interpreting can provide valuable insight into a nation’s stance that might not be achieved by looking at the monolingual discourse alone.

Gu (2020) explored how China’s discourse is (re)configured by Chinese-to-English interpreters through metadiscursive resources semantically related to truth, fact and reality (e.g. expressions such as in fact, actually, indeed, and as a matter of fact). He found that the Chinese English-B interpreters tend to use these markers extensively in interpreted English discourse. This adds a layer of factualness and authority to the original Chinese discourse. Gu also focused on the structure the fact that, which has been underexplored in interpreter-mediated political encounters from the perspective of ideology and discourse. Gu’s comparative critical discourse analysis linking linguistic analysis to the socio-cultural context noted the interpreters’ increased use of this structure and argued that this led to further political legitimization of the Chinese government’s actions and the (re)creation of positive self-representation and negative other-representation in interpreting. To illustrate the potential global ramifications of such (re)construction, the study also presented examples of the interpreted discourse being accepted at face value and invoked, quoted or (re)contextualized verbatim by various media outlets and official sources. The study highlighted the interpreters’ role as active co-constructors of the ‘Chinese story’ and vital agents of knowledge for the Chinese government.
Gao’s (2020) case study of English-to-Chinese conference interpreting of panel discussions at the World Economic Forum held in China investigated how conference interpreters manipulate linguistic resources in source texts to reconstruct the discourse of target texts. The study revealed that the Chinese interpreters tended to strengthen positive evaluations of Chinese economic policies and mitigate negative evaluations and negative discourse. Both patterns of discursive reconstruction reveal interpreters’ linguistic manipulation of evaluative expressions via adding, omitting and changing positive or negative values. This study illustrates how interdisciplinary approaches that integrate critical discourse analysis with a pertinent linguistic theory (in this case, appraisal theory) can support the realization of research aims in interpreting studies.

**Discourse analysis as applied to interpreting strategies**

Discourse analysis has been applied in the (re)construction and analysis of interpreting strategies. In this section, we will briefly discuss interpreting strategies as a crosscutting point for the application of discourse analysis (see Riccardi, Chapter 27, in this volume).

To accomplish complex, mediated and plurilingual communication, conference interpreters must develop, execute and adequately manage strategies that involve discourse analysis, enabling them to process the source discourse and produce the target discourse. Interpreters use ‘self-imposed discourse requirements’ to regulate goal-oriented strategies (Kohn et al. 1996: 126). Riccardi (2005: 755) identified the following interpreting strategies: systemic (e.g. anticipation, segmentation, selection of information and stalling), production-oriented (e.g. compression, expansion, approximation, generalization, use of open-ended linguistic forms, morphosyntactic transformation and use of prosody), general (e.g. décalage and monitoring) and emergency-oriented (e.g. omission, paraphrasing and reordering). Interpreting strategies as dynamic, goal-oriented activities of comprehension can be classified as either skill-based (i.e. automatic responses to a well-known stimulus occurring in a communicative event) or knowledge-based (i.e. activated by a conscious analytical process) (Riccardi 2005: 754). Strategies applied to achieve a communicative goal in a particular context reveal the relationship between the source and target discourse (Riccardi 2005: 754). Thus, discourse analysis of real-time interpreting activity can enable the identification of interpreting strategies in knowledge, context, and ideological processing. Discourse analysis of interpreting between two or multiple languages can provide insight into both pair-specific and general strategies (Riccardi 2005: 755).

Interpreting strategies have been examined from a range of discourse-analytical perspectives. For example, Monacelli (2009) investigated self-regulation and found that interpreters use interpreting strategies to guarantee self-preservation by distancing themselves from the speaker’s discourse and mitigating illocutionary force. Bartłomiejczyk (2016: 146) foregrounded the universality of identified interpreting strategies, such as, omission, impersonalization, addition and others, that can be employed alone or in combination with different facework strategies. Riccardi (1998) underscored the creativity generated by the application of interpreting strategies. Gumul (2017) studied a particular interpreting strategy—explicitation—and concluded that it might be used to make a speaker’s implicit message accessible. Kohn and Kalina (1996: 128) suggested that mitigation could be employed to suppress culturally sensitive content and follow the politeness conventions of a target language; this was also asserted by Bartłomiejczyk (2016: 96). Finally, studies have also advanced the hypothesis that the mitigation strategies used by interpreters in response to a specific ideological stimulus expressed in the source discourse are salient in their lexical choices and are a
means of tackling problematic structures, face-threats and impoliteness encountered in political debates (Bartłomiejczyk 2016; Beaton-Thome 2013; Okoniewska 2019).

Further, a critical analysis of interpreted discourse enables the identification of interpreting strategies through context-embedded linguistic representations employed by interpreters to negotiate ideological meaning. For example, Beaton-Thome (2013) analysed the European Parliament’s plenary debate on Guantánamo Bay detainees’ potential resettlement in the European Union. She identified such interpreting strategies as generalization, intensification and omission, which modified the cohesive links of discourse and its contextualization (e.g. the omission of temporal markers such as ‘today’; 2013: 392). Beaton-Thome posited that the lexicalization of the detainees (i.e. how they were named) was an ideological choice. Therefore, she explored, in particular, how the contested lexical labels were conveyed in interpreting and concluded that the overlexicalization was contracted and corrected by the interpreter (Beaton-Thome 2013: 393).

In sum, discourse analysis enables the exploration of interpreting strategies used by interpreters to achieve discursive cohesion, organization (Setton 1998) and an adequate level of politeness (Bartłomiejczyk 2016; Chernov 2004: 71; Garzone 2000: 77) of the output in the target language.

**Discourse analysis applied in interpreter training pedagogy**

Finally, while interpreter training pedagogy is not a central theme of this chapter (see Kalina & Barranco-Droege, Chapter 24, in this volume), it is a domain that draws on the above-presented discourse-analytical approaches and topics. Accordingly, in this section, we will briefly give examples of interpreting pedagogy based on discourse analysis.

Boyd and Monacelli applied critical discourse analysis—in particular, a discourse-historical approach (Reisigl et al. 2009)—to construct an interdisciplinary, multi-layered context model for interpreter training (Boyd & Monacelli 2010). They argued that a simplified context model might enable interpreting students to identify discursive practices in source texts (Boyd & Monacelli 2010: 76). Such a model would consist of three layers: (1) internal (i.e. referring to inter-related co-text); (2) external (i.e. referring to intertextual and extralinguistic context); and (3) extra-situational (i.e. socio-political and historical context), together with ‘recontextualization’ (i.e. meaning shifts). They argued that better identification of discursive practices and, in particular, discursive strategies would enable improved comprehension of speakers’ messages, leading to more accurate and coherent interpreting (Boyd & Monacelli 2010; Okoniewska 2019). However, it was noted that further empirical research comprising the assessment of interpreting students’ performance and trainers’ adaptation of discursive practices identification in interpreter training is needed (Okoniewska 2019).

Clifford (2001: 335), in turn, suggested an assessment model for interpreter training based on three elements that shape meaning: (1) the features of utterance (deixis); (2) speaker’s intention (modality); and (3) listener’s interpretation (speech acts). Deixis is assessed from the perspective of the impact of the utterances on the target audience. Ideally, the listener should experience efficient ‘role shifting’ in multivocal communication (e.g. a debate). Modality is assessed based on the ideally recreated additions, oppositions and doubts modulating a discourse, whereas speech acts must be organized into a clear, argumentative structure of the target discourse that meets the cultural expectations of the listeners (Clifford 2001: 376). Clifford postulated that “in order to assess interpreter’s competences in context … we must learn to see interpreting as a form of discourse”, rather than applying exclusively lexico-syntactic assessments and training (Clifford 2001: 336).
Conclusion

As the various examples cited in this chapter have illustrated, from the discourse-interaction paradigm, conversation analysis and text-linguistic analysis of the 1990s to the diverse approaches to discourse analysis have developed over the past two decades, conference interpreting can be approached as an object of discourse analysis from a variety of angles. Such analysis can focus on, for example, the cognitive processing of discourse, pragmatic or socio-interactional perspectives of discourse analysis, critical and systemic-functional analyses of interpreted discourse, discourse analysis as applied to interpreting strategies, and discourse analysis in the context of interpreter training pedagogy. A range of different qualitative and quantitative research methods can also be used, including questionnaires, interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, tests, experiments and statistical calculations (Hale et al. 2018; Liu 2011; Wadensjö 1998). More and more models are being developed to explore the dynamics of interpreters’ communicative behaviour, as well as their interaction within the communicative act and its contextual features. The evolution, approaches and topics discussed in this chapter are by no means intended to be exhaustive, but merely serve to illustrate possible ways of conceptualizing conference interpreting at the crossroads of discursive and interpreting studies.

Moreover, discourse analysis in interpreting studies is largely developing in the direction of social critique, corroborating the prediction of Mason (2015: 115), who recently noted the openness of interpreting studies to sociological approaches. In mediated communicative events, the comprehension of power relations grounded in the intentions of the participants and expectations of the listeners is relevant to (conference) interpreting studies and accessible through discourse analysis. Interpreter-mediated negotiation of what is said and believed engages cognitive, contextual, interactional and critical perspectives. Further exploration of interpreted discourse from these perspectives would enable further development of discourse-analytical approaches to interpreting studies. This could include investigating interpreters’ communicative agency, facework and role, more closely examining the construction of mental and contextual models in interpreting, scrutinizing the use of strategies conveying power relations and ideological discourse and, last but not least, working towards realigning norms and pedagogy to more closely reflect professional practice.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express special thanks to Professor Ian Mason, who reviewed the manuscript and offered constructive suggestions.

Disclaimer

The views expressed by Alicja M. Okoniewska are purely her own and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

Further reading


References


