

A Functional Approach to
the Patterns of Interpreting Shifts

口译移位模式的功能分析研究

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Dedication

To my wife, Shi Minzi, my lovely daughter, Guo Shiqi, and also to my mother, Mrs. Ji Zengming. Without their unfailing understanding, support and inspiration, I would not have this book. I am sincerely grateful to them for their forgiveness and tolerance of my inappropriate absence at weekends and on holidays.

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Preface

As translation involves the transfer of certain values of expression or content across any two different language systems, shifts are concomitant with this transfer. This is also true to interpreting as a translation activity. Although the research on translation shifts is widely made, to date, there has been little comprehensive and systematic study of interpreting shifts in interpreting in general and in political consecutive interpreting in particular. That's the main reason to carry out the present study.

This study takes a cross-disciplinary approach. It is located within the framework of descriptive translation studies and systemic functional linguistics respectively proposed by Toury (1995) and Halliday (1994, 2004). It qualitatively describes the interpreting shifts in four interpreting cases selected from Chinese premiers' press conferences as high-level political interviews. The object of the analysis is the authentic interpreting data collected from these press conference interpretations. All of them are made by four prominent staff interpreters with the Department of Translation and Interpretation affiliated to Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry. The analytical model that is proposed goes beyond earlier static linguistic models of interpreting by incorporating the socio-cultural framework of interpreting and bringing together ideas from Halliday's systemic functional linguistics with its focus on language in use. The functional theory is applied to account for four representative prominent interpreters' interpreting data and relevant interpreting situational context and socio-cultural context. On the basis of the research findings, the researcher induces the patterns of interpreting shifts and infers their possible motivations.

This study sets out to make theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it seeks to contribute to the development of a systematic approach to the analysis of interpreting changes or "shifts" that occur in a source text-target text pair, in order to induce the interpreting shift patterns that have been in operation in Chinese high-level political interpreting. The research carried out in this regard meets the urgent need for a model to analyse and identify these shifts. The proposed analytical model is one that is replicable and can be applied to other interpreting texts. Practically, the

study has applications in the practice and training of consecutive interpreting through the identified meaning-based interpreting shift patterns, which change the “pure” person intuition-based interpreting practice and teaching.

Abbreviations

CI	consecutive interpreting
C-E	Chinese into English
CPC	the National People's Congress
CPPCC	the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
SI	simultaneous interpreting
E-C	English into Chinese
SFL	systemic functional linguistics
SFG	systemic functional grammar
ST	source text
TT	target text
SL	source language
TL	target language

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Introduction*

Just like translation, owing to the existence of uncircumventable linguistic differences between SL and TL, the occurrence of interpreting shifts is unavoidable if an interpreter wants its interpretation to be communicative. The discussion of translation shifts has long been a critical issue in translation studies (Wang 2009). However, to date systematic and comprehensive studies of interpreting shifts have been very rare in interpreting practice in general and in political consecutive interpreting in particular.

In view of the complications of political interpreting, the present study only focuses on interpreting shifts in consecutive interpreting, drawing on descriptive translation theories and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as its theoretical framework.

This chapter will discuss the research background, present the scope, aims and questions of this study, the theoretical framework and research method, and outline the significance of the research and organization of the book.

1.2 *Research Background*

The following section gives a general description and explanation about consecutive interpreting, translation shifts, and discusses why interpreting shifts in political interpreting have been selected as our central research objects.

1.2.1 *Consecutive Interpreting*

There are two major work modes in conference interpreting: SI and CI. In SI, “interpreters in a sound-proof booth with headsets, control consoles and microphones, and a direct view on the meeting room, deliver versions of the discourse in different languages ‘on line’ with a lag of a few seconds, alternating every 20–30 minutes or as speakers take turns on the conference floor” (Setton, 1999: 1). This indicates that as a complicated language transferring process, SI involves a series of interrelated operations at the same time. As simultaneous interpreters represent the meaning of a SL (source language) section into the TL (target language), they

pay concurrent attention to the following section of SL, understand it and put it into short term memory while keeping on with the interpretation of SL, and undertaking simultaneous monitoring over the output of the TL so that they can provide an accurate and fluent interpretation of the speaker's message. In essence, SI imposes more cognitive demands on the interpreter.

In CI, “the interpreter listens to a speech segment of a few minutes or so, takes notes, and then delivers the whole segment in the target language; then the speaker resumes for a few minutes, the interpreter delivers the next segment, and the process continues until the end of the speech” (Gile, 2009: 52). Since CI does not have any particular technical prerequisites, such as sound-proof booths and microphones, it can be widely used on occasions when simultaneous interpreting is not available. Before simultaneous interpreting came into being, CI was regarded as the main interpreting mode in both the League of Nations (the ancestor of the United Nations) and the International Labour Union.

Comparing the two interpreting modes, the main distinction between SI and CI is the gap between listening and translation. In the process of CI, an interpreter has sufficient time to analyse and understand the message content as a complete text entity without continuous incoming interference from source language. Likewise, consecutive interpreters are not faced with the cognitive pressure of concurrent listening and speaking. Thus they are able to control their own speaking speed, reorganize the SL speech into the TT, ask the speaker when problems of understanding occur, and even correct a mistake immediately after it is made. Although there is no strict requirement for the length of ST, the “classic” CI is usually done with the assistance of note-taking. This makes it differ from dialogue interpreting or liaison interpreting.

Liu (1993) (cf. Kade, 1963:, cited in Pochhacker, 2011, p.297) divides the process of CI into the following five stages: 1) hearing, including listening; 2) analysing and comprehension; 3) memorizing and/or note-taking; 4) remembering and note-reading; 5) interpreting. In this five-stage-process, consecutive interpreters must abide by the following principles: they are required to actively listen to and at the same time analyse the content of the ST, so as to grasp its essence and logical structure; while taking notes and concurrently listening to the ST, they need to coordinate their attention well between listening and comprehension and note-taking; the latter must not be detrimental to the attention needed for listening and comprehension processes. In the interpreting phase, unlike written translation with its stringent requirements for style, the interpreter only needs to faithfully, completely and accu-

rately reproduce the idea or message content from the ST into the TT. Some deviation from the words or phrases of the ST is permissible if this can enhance the audience's understanding. For example, if in the process of interpreting, consecutive interpreters come across cultural or technical concepts which could be hard to understand for the TL audience if they were translated directly, the interpreters should add an explanation about these concepts to the TT. But the rule is that they are not allowed to put their own points of views into the TT.

After this brief introduction, the following section will discuss interpreting shifts in consecutive interpreting, which are the central research objects of the present study.

1. 2. 2 Interpreting Shifts as Translation Shifts

As translation involves the transfer of certain values of expression or content across any two different language systems, shifts are concomitant with this transfer. This is also true to interpreting as a translation activity. As the research on translation shifts is widely made, and however, to date, there has been little comprehensive and systematic study of interpreting shifts, it is worthwhile to have an overview of studies on translation shifts which can shed light on the present study.

Translation shifts have long been a core issue in translation studies (Wang 2009). Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) used the term “transposition” to refer to the phenomenon whereby a word from a given word class shifts to another class in the process of translation. Catford (1965) conducted a more systematic study of translation shifts, and proposed two types of shift — level and category shifts. Catford's approach is based on Hallidayan systemic-functional grammar, and is intrinsically linguistics-oriented. He defines translation shifts as “departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to the TL”, and claims that formal equivalence is achievable only in rare cases, since “every language is formally sui generis and formal correspondence is, at best, a rough approximation” (1965: 36). The Catford's whole approach has been heavily criticized by, amongst others, Delisle (1982: 54) and Henry (1984). The main criticism, however, is that, although Catford purports to follow a Firthian approach to language, his examples are invariably idealized and decontextualized. Levy's still widely-read work on literary translation (Levy, 1969), looks more closely at the translation shifts of the surface structure of the ST and TT and sees literary translation as both a reproductive and a creative labour with the goal of equivalent aesthetic effect.

Miko (1970), in a paper published in French in the influential volume “The

Nature of Translation” concentrated on discussing different theoretical areas of shifts of expression. In the same volume, Popovic (1970) recognized the problems of the past studies on translation shifts and broadened the concept of the shift so as to account for the wider nature in its distribution. He defined shifts more generally as “all that appears as new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected” (1970: 79) and also commented that shifts represented “the relationship between the wording of the original work and that of the translation” (1970: 85). In this way, he included not only linguistic phenomena, but also replacements arising from textual, literary or cultural considerations. In particular, he (1970: 85) also underlined the importance of the shift of expression concept:

The shift of expression is as a rule the basic principle governing the changes that occur in a translation. An analysis of the shifts of expression, applied to all levels on the text, will bring to light the general system of the translation, with its dominant and subordinate elements.

This is an important development. It begins to see shift analysis as a way of getting at the system of norms which govern the translation process.

Inspired by Popovic’s view that translation shifts would shed light on the search of translation norms, Toury (1995) began to address the issues of translation norms and translation shifts in the context of descriptive translation studies. Norms refer to values and ideas shared by a community that govern the ways in which language is used. For Toury, even the notion of equivalence was closely related to norms: “it is norms that determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual translations” (1995: 61). Since the norms operating in the source-language (SL) and target-language (TL) communities do not coincide, a translator needs to negotiate the differences between these two distinct systems of norms and conventions — in other words, between two cultures (Pym, 2004). The translator can either attach importance to source-language norms, which leads to an adequate translation; or follow target-language norms, which facilitate acceptability in the target culture (Toury, 1995: 57). The latter strategy tends to lead to translation shifts. Toury (1995) distinguished between obligatory and non-obligatory shifts, and points out that non-obligatory (eg. motivated by literary or cultural considerations) shifts constitute the majority of shifts in human translation. The extent of a TT containing non-obligatory shifts will determine whether its initial norm is acceptability or adequacy.

The most detailed attempt to produce and apply a model of shift analysis has been made by van Leuven-Zwart (1989, 1990). Her approach, which does not

limit itself to stylistic shifts alone, is “intended for the description of integral translations of fictional texts” (1989: 154), and comprises (1) a comparative model and (2) a descriptive model. Like Popovic, van Leuven-Zwart considers that trends identified by these complementary models will provide indications of the translational norms adopted by the translator. The characteristics of each model are as follows: shift analysis is not directed at exposing translation errors or flaws, but is a means of getting at the norms which govern the translation process. However, there are serious drawbacks to van Leuven-Zwart’s model. The comparative model is “very complex and difficult” (Gentzler, 1993: 137), which van Leuven-Zwart herself partly recognizes (1989: 153–154). It is extremely difficult to keep track of all the different kinds of shift as there are 8 different categories and 37 subcategories, not all clearly differentiated. Moreover, it is against one of the main aims of descriptive translation studies which are to provide a replicable analytical process (Toury, 1995: 3).

Following these earlier work, research has continued on the theme of translation shifts in linguistic properties. Some recent studies include: Cosme (2006), which examines shifts from coordination to subordination structures in translations from English to French; Korzen (2005), which looks at shifts between endocentric and exocentric language features in Danish–Italian translation; and Puurtinen (2003), which focuses on the strategies of implicating and explicating via linguistic means in translation. There have also been studies of shifts in linguistic features in Chinese–English translation; Li (1998), for instance, observes that shifts between clauses and phrases frequently occur, since Chinese is mainly a topic–prominent language, while English is subject prominent. Translation shifts in terms of language–specific rhetorical features have attracted special attention. For example, Al-Khafaji (2006) finds that lexical repetitions in Arabic texts tend to become non–repetition in English translations. Other studies have focused on translation shifts at discourse level, including shifts in cohesion and cohesiveness (Blum-Kulka, 1986). Some researchers have examined translation shifts from the perspectives of contrastive stylistics, focusing on translators’ strategies for manoeuvring between styles, and have demonstrated that various types of shift are employed for the purposes of either retaining the original style or transmitting meaning effectively (Boase-Beier, 2004). This growing body of work on translation shifts has significantly broadened the scope of research on translation shifts compared to Catford’s (1965) original work (Hatim and Munday 2004).

1.2.3 Interpreting Shifts in Political Consecutive Interpreting: A SFL Approach

As discussed in Section 1.2.2, although translation shifts are widely discussed in translation studies, to date systematic and comprehensive studies of translation shifts have been rare in interpreting studies in general and in political consecutive interpreting in particular.

CI has been selected for the present study of meaning-based interpreting shifts for the following reasons: the necessity of consecutive interpreting as a critical interpreting skill in high-level political interviews and its prelude to simultaneous interpreting teaching and training; the insufficiency of consecutive interpreting research as such, particularly in terms of interpreting shifts in political interviews.

For a professional conference interpreter, CI is a work mode which must be mastered. Although SI is used in the majority of conference interpreting markets, it has not totally taken the place of CI, which continues to be widely used on occasions including high-level political dialogues and negotiations, press conferences, small bilingual meetings, ceremonial occasions, business meetings, court interpreting and lecture interpreting. Compared to SI, CI has its own advantages such as being less costly, less unwieldy in equipment and more flexible over time and space. These are the reasons why CI still exists in the current interpreting market. Moreover, in the course of the tests to enlist conference interpreters, such as the SCIC (Service Commun Interprétation-Conférences) and the UN, the candidates must first of all take CI exams. If they fail, they cannot take the test for SI. In other words, inadequate CI skills demonstrate that the candidates lack essential interpreting skills to become qualified conference interpreters. Skilful mastery of CI can pave a smooth pathway for prospective conference interpreters to effectively and efficiently learn SI. Setton (1994: 63) believes that it is essential to teach student interpreters this “hand-to-hand-combat” interpreting skill in the case of equipment break down and other emergencies. And more importantly, the development of consecutive interpreting skills can improve student interpreters’ skills in analysing and handling information. In a similar vein, Seleskovitch (1968/1978) postulates that interpreting students should completely master CI before starting their SI training and that the skills of CI can be transferred into SI if mastered adequately. CI can effectively help prospective interpreters learn how to appropriately analyse a ST in order to reproduce the meaning into the TT. In this way, they can avoid the interference and constraints of linguistic surface structures, and reduce the risk of “transcoding” in the process