

# ***An Analysis of the Interpretation of the “Two Sessions” 2022 Press Conference from the Perspective of the Interpretive Theory***

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**Abstract:** Conference interpretation places high demands on the interpreter's translation and information processing skills. The core of interpretation is to sort out and re-express the content of the original text. This paper takes the “Two Sessions”2022 Foreign Ministers' Press Conference as an example from the perspective of Interpretive Theory, and analyses the strategies of interpreters in handling the speeches at the conference from different aspects. It is found that at the lexical and phraseological level, the interpreter has translated the text by choosing expressions that are closest to what the original text attempts to communicate; at the syntactic level, the interpreter will transform the source language to the target language by changing the sentence structure or combining and splitting the clauses. The adjustments found in the interpretation is well captured by the Interpretive Theory, suggesting that the theory provides a good insight into the nature of interpretation.

**Keywords:** Interpretive Theory, conference interpretation, Two Sessions

## **1. Introduction**

In formal conference settings, speakers are often affected by unforeseeable factors and frequently face unpredictable reactions. Moreover, their language often features complex structures and unique expressions, making it difficult for interpreters to produce impeccable translations within a short period of time. [1]Instead, interpreters must break down and reconstruct the original text based on their own comprehension before expressing it in the target language. Conference interpretation is thus a topic that is intriguing and worth researching, but it has not received the same level of attention and in-depth exploration as literary translation has, considering the recent academic researches in translation studies. Few scholars have focused on the on-site interpretation strategies of interpreters, with only a small number of researchers among them concentrating on English-to-Chinese interpretation. Given the differences between translation and interpretation, the mainstream translation methods currently used are not suitable enough for simultaneous interpretation during conferences. Therefore, this study proposes to use the Interpretive Theory as a research foundation. The interpretive school of thought maintains that "translation is interpretation; it is an explanation of the original text's meaning that the translator supplements with linguistic symbols and their own cognition".[1] This is precisely the process that interpreters undergo during interpretation in conferences.

On March 7, 2022, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a press conference during the "Two Sessions" answering questions from domestic and foreign journalists regarding China's diplomatic policy and external relations. As the largest annual political event in China, the "Two Sessions" plays an important role in determining the country's future direction in politics, economy, and society, and therefore serves as an object of global interest. As the conference is conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the interpretation plays a vital role in ensuring that a clear and accurate understanding of the proceedings is conveyed to the international audience. The work has selected the 2022 "Two Sessions" press conference with foreign minister Wang Yi's responses to journalists (excerpted) and the translations by onsite interpreters, intending to investigate the application of the Interpretive Theory in conference interpretation through case study analysis of interpreter translations. This topic has gained significant attention from various sectors of society.

## 2. The Interpretive Theory

The interpretative approach (la théorie de l'interprétation), also known as "the theory of meaning", arose in France in the 1960s. It was born in France in the 1960s and its cradle was the École Supérieure de Traducteurs de Paris. In 1968, the leading French translator Céleskovitch published *L'interprète dans les conférences internationales* (Paris: Minard Letters Modernes, 1968). This was the first time that the Interpretive Theory was proposed. The school of Interpretive Theory was formalized with the publication of *Speech, Language and Memory - A Notational Study of Consecutive Interpretation*, [2] and *Simultaneous Interpretation - Experience and Theory*. [3] A more complete Interpretive Theory was gradually refined and summarized by several of the founders. Interpretive paradigm regards the translator or interpreter as an "active participator in the communication process", [4] whose mindset, experience, and perspective all influence his/her understanding of the source language and message. Hence, it is essential for interpreters to take into consideration their own cognitive and cultural frameworks when interpreting, and the audience's requirements while transferring the source language message to the target language with equivalent meaning.

According to the Interpretive Theory, translation is not merely exchange of words or phrases from one language to another but it should accurately and effectively convey the speaker's intended meanings. [5] In interpreting, the interpreter first listens or reads the message in the source language and then interprets it into the target language, based on their interpretation of the message's meaning. Interpretation is, therefore, an act of insight, which primarily depends on the interpreters' interpretive competencies such as knowledge of the field, language proficiency, cultural awareness, and psychological abilities. The Interpretive Theory emphasizes the role of context, which refers to the factors beyond the content of the message, including communicative and socio-cultural dimensions. In interpreting, the contexts play an essential role in shaping the meaning of the message. The interpreter should not only consider the message's content but should also consider context, such as the speaker's tone of voice, the physical environment, and the shared knowledge between the speaker and audience.

In conference interpreting, the application of the Interpretive Theory can assist interpreters in handling more complex communicative situations. The interpreters must be attentive to the contextual factors and consider the diverse backgrounds of the speaker and the audience [5]. They must also demonstrate good cognitive and communicative abilities to transfer meaning between the source and target language effectively. The Interpretive Theory emphasizes that interpreters should focus on the meaning, rather than the form, of the message during the interpreting process [6]. Interpretation is an act of insight, not a mechanical process, and the interpreter should convey the intended meaning by reorganizing, adapting, or even paraphrasing the message in the target

language. Respecting the context, the interpreter should evoke the same emotions or reactions from the target audience that the speaker sought to elicit from the source audience. In the Interpretive Theory, the interpreter has to go through three stages to change from one language to another through conversion, namely understanding, meaning and expression[7], which is also known as the "interpretive triangle model"[8]. Firstly, one has to understand the linguistic symbols as the content of the expression and, through the interpreter's analysis, understand the meaning behind them. Afterwards, the original structure of the symbols is forgotten and only the meaning of the ideas expressed, that is, the emotional meaning behind the symbols, is remembered, a stage also known as "deverbalization"[1], which is also the most important stage. The final stage is expression, where new sentences are created using the linguistic symbols of the target language, but in accordance with the emotional meaning of the source language, and this is the reformulation stage. To use a figure of speech from Celescovitch, the process of translating from French into English is like taking a French-style jumper apart, washing and sorting the threads, and then knitting it into a new jumper according to the English pattern[7]. In conference interpreting, the speaker's verbal and non-verbal communication is considered critical. The interpreter should consider speaker's facial expressions, tone of voice, and other non-verbal cues to ensure the accurate interpretation of subtle nuances of meaning. For example, when interpreting sarcasm, the interpreter should use an appropriate register in the target language to convey this meaning[9]. Similarly, the interpreter should choose words and phrases that match the speaker's tone and intent during the interpreting process.

In summary, interpreting is a dynamic and challenging process that requires the interpreter to construct meaning based on their interpretation of the message's content and context. The Interpretive Theory highlights the active participation of the interpreters and their role in constructing meaning beyond the mere linguistic content of the message. In conferences, the interpreter must be attentive to the speaker's verbal and non-verbal cues while considering audience expectations and cultural differences[10]. These considerations enable interpreters to accurately convey the intended meaning of the message in the target language and improve the effectiveness of international communication.

### 3. Analysis

The following text provides representative examples excerpted from the original press conference transcript and its corresponding translation. From the lexical and syntactic perspectives, this paper analyzes how the translation of the interpretation text employs interpretive theories to facilitate the translation process.

#### 3.1. On the Word/Phrase Level

Analysis and research will be conducted from three aspects: lexical application, culturally loaded words, and special forms, respectively.

##### 3.1.1. The Level of Lexical Application

In interpreting activities, interpreters usually encounter many differences in expression modes or do not have enough time to explain unfamiliar words. From the perspective of Interpretive Theory, they can convert the parts of speech of words from the perspective of morphology, or select more accurate words for correspondence, so as to improve the efficiency and accuracy of translation. Here're some examples.

1. ST: 请...发言

TT: give the floor to someone.

In the opening segment of the host speech, after the introduction of the speaker, the common cliché: 'Now let's give the floor to someone' 'Give the floor' means 'to speak'. What the interpreter used here is a common conventional rhetoric. Based on the theory of interpretation, it reflects the respect for the foreign minister on formal occasions.

2. ST:一场简约的奥运会

TT: a streamlined game

The adjective "streamline" is derived from the verb 'to streamline', which means to make things more efficient, and thus is perfectly appropriate considering the context.

3. ST:损害国际地位

TT: diminish the international standing

The word "standing" is worth noting here. Most people might normally use position or status to indicate “地位”, but a general reading reveals that standing is more commonly used to indicate fame or status.

4. ST: 重拾冷战思维

TT: resurrect the cold war mentality

When most people think of the word ‘重拾’ they probably think of ‘repick’ or ‘revisit’. Resurrecting something refers to the acts to cause it to exist again after it had disappeared or ended. This phrase refers to revival. Attempts to resurrect the ceasefire have already failed once. Therefore, the choice of “resurrect” implies the previous failure and thus has a better effect.

### 3.1.2. The Level of Cultural Background

During the "two sessions", the speakers usually use a lot of ancient Chinese words or words with distinct cultural characteristics when answering questions, such as four-character words, proverbs and so on. Due to limited time, translation standards and other conditions, translators usually do not translate these phrases literally, but directly convey the meaning behind the phrase after understanding the meaning expressed by the speaker. Such translation means are typical examples of Interpretive Theory. Here are some examples.

5. ST:客观公正

TT: based on the merits of the situation

The word ‘merit’ is worth discussing. As a countable noun, it commonly means merit and value, while as a plural noun, it usually means ‘内在的是非曲直’. In this situation, the use of ‘merits’ is more precise and vivid than other words, and visually conveys the meaning of 'justice', which is a reformulation by the translator through his or her own understanding and shift.

6. ST:画出同心圆

TT: pursue the convergence of interests

Concentric circles are essentially a metaphor, intended to express the pursuit of the same interests, a sort of 'seeking common ground.' The convergence of different ideas, groups, or societies is the process by which they stop being different and become more similar. The word used here conveys the meaning of convergence, depicting the solidarity among people of different countries where their interests align. The interpreter's implementation of interpretive theories facilitates linguistic transformation, which converts the term "同心圆", carrying a uniquely Chinese meaning, into a more precise expression.

7. ST:...确实远不太平

TT: indeed, far from being tranquil

In this phrase, "tranquil" is a better choice than other possible translations such as "peaceful", since it implies that the world still involves disturbances and thus is closer to the original meaning.

### 3.1.3. The Level of Special Form

8. ST: 同舟共济、共克时艰

TT: pull together in these trying times

These two phrases express the meaning of "overcoming difficulties together" in Chinese. The direct expression of the interpreter in translation is the vernacular version of the phrase, and if a direct translation is chosen for both sentences, it seems redundant in English, so that in this version, the listener can directly understand the meaning expressed by the speaker. This is an example which the interpreter understands the original text and then reformulated it.

9. ST:根基不牢，地动山摇

TT: If the foundation is shaken, whatever above it cannot stand.

Similar to ⑧, the meaning of this phrase is to lay a solid foundation for continuous development. The translation version uses the if conditional sentence, which is a supplementary translation method, adding the unexpressed correlation in the Chinese original, which is more in line with the English context.

10. ST: 昼夜运转，全力支持

TT: work around the clock and leave no stone unturned.

'Work around the clock' is an idiomatic English expression, which means to make every possible effort is to work day and night. This sentence accurately conveys the efforts made by the diplomatic staff in the evacuation action. Which means as long as there is a glimmer of hope, the country will absolutely try.

11. ST:以团结谋和平，以自强谋稳定，以合作谋发展

TT: promote peace through unity, pursue stability through self-reliance, and achieve development through cooperation

For the three parallel sentences with the same sentence pattern, the translated version is connected by the preposition through to ensure the similar form. In addition, the translation uses the method 'shift', changing the orders of the constituents to make the sentence more authentic.

### 3.2. On the Sentential Level

In addition to words and phrases, the handling of sentences, particularly complex and lengthy ones, poses a more challenging issue for translators. Therefore, they need to apply the three-stage interpretive model to carry out linguistic transformation[11]. From the perspective of sentences, this part analyzes in terms of the translation of ancient sayings or allegorical sayings, sentence splitting and merging, and sentence structure transformation, with the aim of summarizing the translation methods and strategies used by translators. The analysis is intended to meet academic writing requirements.

#### 3.2.1. Translation of Ancient Sayings or Allegorical Sayings

As mentioned at the phrase level, in the translation process of the interpreter, the ancient words or proverbs mentioned by the speaker do not correspond to the words, but directly express their implied meaning. Here're some examples.

12. ST: 三个铜板买房屋, 千两黄金买邻居

TT: A house could be bought with three coppers, a good neighbor is worth 1,000 pieces of gold.

This is a Korean proverb that means "a close neighbor is better than a distant relative." In this part, the translator has adopted the direct translation technique, partly because the direct translation of the original text is also easy to understand and will not cause obstacles to comprehension, and partly because of the limited time for reflection, which is also a limitation unique to interpretation. In addition, there is a conversion of the active to the passive sentence, which avoids adding subjects that do not appear in Chinese, and this is an adjustment that takes account of language differences.

13. ST: 治病还需治本

TT: We must the root cause when treating a disease.

This sentence is an old Chinese saying, which, in a deeper sense, means "solve the problem not only on the surface, but also at the root of the problem", which is directly expressed in the translation.

14. ST: 小船经不起风浪, 巨舰才能顶住惊涛骇浪。

TT: Small boats may not survive a storm, but a giant ship is strong enough to brave a storm.

This sentence includes figurative rhetoric, using the boat to compare each country and region, and wind and waves to compare the risks encountered in the process of development. Although this sentence is literal translation, for most countries, the analogy of wind and waves and boats is relatively common, so that the participants can understand it, and it is also a reasonable application of the interpretation theory.

#### 3.2.2. The Split and Merge of Sentences

In interpretation activities, in many cases, journalists or spokespeople will have a lot of improvised words when they speak. The interpreter may not be able to translate all the words of the speaker into the target language. In this case, interpreters usually split and merge sentences to make the expression more in line with the language habits of the native people. Here are some examples.

15. ST: 西方对俄罗斯日益增长的集体制裁压力将如何影响俄中关系的进一步发展?



TT: The West is ratcheting up sanctions on Russia. How will this affect Russia-China relations?

The original text is a complete sentence, while the translation is broken up into two sentences. This is because in Chinese, a sentence usually uses what is called linear structure, which is directly connected by multiple subject-verb structures. However, English sentences usually use the tree structure, which is only a complete set of subject-verb-object structure to express the most core sentence meaning. Therefore, the interpreter breaks down the long sentences of the original text, which is more in line with the expression requirements of English.

16. ST: 请问中方将为落实第八届中非合作论坛部长级会议成果采取哪些措施? 有外媒认为中国在非洲制造“债务陷阱”。您对此有何回应?

TT: What will China do to implement the outcomes of the Eighth FOCAC Ministerial Meeting? What do you say to those who accuse China of setting “debt traps” in Africa?

In contrast to example ①, there are two sentences in the original, but in the translated version, they are directly combined. Through the analysis of the original text, it can be found that the second short sentence in the original text is just a simple question about the problem described above, so the interpreter uses an attributive clause to combine the two sentences in translation, making the question more targeted and easier to understand.

### 3.2.3. Changes of the Structure

Similar to the above situation, in conference interpreting activities, interpreters usually change the sentence structure to make the meaning clear, such as changing the subject, changing the main and passive of the sentence, etc. Here're some examples.

17. ST: 本来就充满不确定性的国际局势变得更加复杂动荡

TT: An international situation already rife with uncertainties is becoming more complex and fluid.

This sentence reflects the conversion between Chinese and English in the translation process: Chinese sentences are adjectives + nouns, but English uses the accompanying adverbial, which will be more consistent with the semantic order of English than the literal translation of the original sentence.

18. ST: 您延续了中国外长连续 32 年每年首访非洲传统。

TT: This has been the 32nd year for the Chinese foreign minister to make Africa his first overseas destination at the start of the year.

In the original sentence, this sentence adopts the verb object collocation of "continuing the tradition", while in the translated version, "this has been the 32nd year" is used, which directly changes the structure of the sentence. Through analysis, it is found that using this as the subject is more objective, which reflects the respect for the foreign minister. Moreover, the changed sentence also reflects the affirmation of the tradition of the foreign minister's first visit to Africa.

19. ST: 美方去年召开的“领导人民主峰会”被公认不成功, 但美方仍宣布今年举办线下“民主峰会”。请问中方打算如何应对?

TT: Having hosted a “Summit for Democracy” last year that was widely deemed unsuccessful, the US plans to hold another one this year. How will China respond?

This sentence is being translated with "hosted" as the subject, followed by an attributive clause that leads to "that", which reflects the passivity of the original sentence and leaves "America" as the subject in the original Chinese version.

In summary, interpreters conduct real-time consecutive interpretation in conference settings from various perspectives and levels above. The translation process can be generally guided by the three-stage interpretive model. This demonstrates that the essence of interpretive theories lies in providing guidance and reference for interpreting activities, through the interpreter's comprehension, paraphrase, and re-expression of the original message[12].

#### 4. Conclusion

The nature of the Interpretive Theory requires interpreters to strip away the outer layer of the speaker's language and understand the meaning of paragraphs or articles, and then reassemble them based on their own cognition and output in the target language. This study provides insight into the Interpretation Theory used during the "Two Sessions" 2022 Press Conference, highlighting the significance of the Interpretive Theory in achieving the goal of clear and faithful communication. In the process of interpretation, especially in live conference interpretation activities, there are high demands on the interpreters' second language proficiency, understanding, and improvisational ability. The analysis on the lexical, phraseological, and syntactic levels of interpretation indicates that interpretation is influenced by the context, culture, and participants of the communication. In regard to differences in Chinese and English vocabulary, interpreters may need to convert related words or provide noun explanations. Regarding difficulties in understanding certain sentences may require interpreters to disregard language barriers and reorganize or change sentence structures. The study shows that the interpreter(s) deployed various interpretation strategies to represent the original meaning of the speeches accurately and efficiently, suggesting the instructiveness of the Interpretive Theory on conference interpreting.

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