

Gender, Identity, and Power in the Interpreting Classroom

The US-China Anchorage Talks as course material

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ABSTRACT: Interpreting pedagogy has traditionally focused on the training of skills to fulfill market needs. Cultural Studies elements—in particular discourse on gender, identity, and power relations—have rarely been foregrounded in the teaching of interpreting, and even less so in conference interpreting programs. It is an industry-oriented pedagogical practice which has, on the more extreme end, fed into the glamorization of a profession which arguably should be more introspective on its complicity in upholding relations of power. With the aim of providing students with a more rounded education in interpreting, this article documents and discusses a preliminary attempt to introduce cultural studies discourse in a consecutive interpreting course conventionally positioned as a technical one, and one where students are commonly evaluated according to the criteria of accuracy, language, and delivery. By analyzing a real-world interpreting event—the US-China Anchorage talks—using the concepts of gender, power, and identity, the instructor attempts to counter institutional marketing claims of the profession being necessarily conducive to “intercultural communication.” Instead the analysis demonstrates that the claim masks what is in effect displays of power driven by domestic interests rather than target audience needs. It is an analytical account based on a cultural studies theoretical framework not meant to prescribe fixed methods or materials for the classroom. Instead it is offered as an example where alternative methods or materials can be introduced to initiate a line of inquiry for culturally-minded instructors who find the instrumentalist framework of accuracy, language, and delivery restrictive in explaining the dynamics between language and power. The role of the interpreter in the process of communication is thus

problematized; the supposed agency the interpreter enjoys is also questioned. In fact, the analysis suggests that the higher the level of interpreting (i.e. high-level interpreting) the more the interpreter functions in service of power rather than an idealized notion of the common good, a reality that students deserve to understand.

KEYWORDS: interpreting pedagogy, cultural studies, gender, identity, power relations

摘要: 口譯教學歷來注重培訓技能以滿足市場需要。文化研究元素，特別是關於性別、身份和權力關係的論述，很少在口譯教學中得到重視，而在會議口譯教學中更是往往被忽略。若說身為會議口譯，因身處利害關係複雜的語境，更應檢討反省自己在權力關係上所扮演的角色，那麼以業界為導向的教學，反之有可能助長口譯專業過度明星化、行銷化。因此在傳統以技能為重點教學內容的口譯課中，作者引入文化研究話語，以性別、身份和權力關係三種概念，分析一真實的口譯案例(中美阿拉斯加會談)，盼以此提供學生更為全面的口譯養成教育，讓學生了解權力動態關係中，口譯並非像官方一味宣傳的是“促進跨文化交流”不可或缺的角色，反而可能與此主張背道而馳，滿足的其實是國內彰顯權力的目的而非受眾的需求。此一教學案例是引入文化研究話語的初步嘗試，試圖跳脫以往以“準確性”、“語言表述”和“表達技巧”為評鑑標準的傳統教學。因案例分析是基於文化研究理論框架的論述分析，作者並不提昌固定的教學方法或教學材料，而是拋磚引玉，以此案例展現文化研究元素在口譯教學中的可能性，在“準確性”、“語言表述”和“表達技巧”等工具性框架無法滿足口譯教師文化意識層面上的教學需求時，提供可以解讀語言和權力關係的另一選擇，揭示口譯行業並非單純的一面。此案例分析顯示，口譯員的角色反之沒有行使主體性的空間，且愈是牽涉政治高層的翻譯愈是為權力服務而非以達成共同理想為目標。這是口譯實務的現實面，也是身為教育者理應向學生闡述的現實。

關鍵字: 口譯教學、文化研究、性別、身份、權力關係

1. Introduction

Becoming an interpreter is a journey. For the vast majority of interpreters in the market who assume “interpreter” as their professional identity, that journey formally begins in the classroom. In the last eighteen years since this author first embarked on this journey as a student—turned professional

conference interpreter, turned researcher, turned instructor herself, at well-known institutions who take pride in their interpreting programs—interpreting courses proper, to the author’s knowledge, within the author’s own professional and academic networks between the Chinese and English languages, in North American, Chinese, and Taiwanese contexts, have scarcely touched upon the discourse of gender, power, and identity, formally, in those terms, as understood in cultural studies discourse. This is irrespective of the growing importance and visibility cultural studies discourse has seen in mainstream public discourse, especially in light of the global inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a paradoxical disconnect exhibited by training programs staffed by professionals who profess to train students for “the real world” and whose most prominent professional association is offering research grants catch-phrased as “Interpreting the World”(AIIC, 2021).

One may argue that strategies and techniques are what should define a proper interpreting course. Students come for those skills and not to be woke, as claimed by more instrumentalist-minded critics within the profession. But “woke” used in such a manner is disparaging to interpreting programs at the academic Master’s level; it belittles a profession that navigates between power imbalances, their players rarely equal and often in contention. This article is thus a preliminary foray into how an interpreting class may unfold in a dialectic manner if strategies and techniques make way for the concepts of gender, power, and identity. It is a descriptive analysis of one class this author taught under the mandatory course titled “Consecutive Interpreting from Chinese into English.” It is not meant to prescribe a fixed method or material, but offered as an example where alternative methods or materials can be introduced for culturally-minded instructors who find the instrumentalist framework of accuracy, language, and delivery—the three criteria often used to evaluate student readiness for the market—restrictive in explaining the dynamics between language and power that problematizes the role of the interpreter.

The course material chosen is from the US-China talks in Anchorage, Alaska, on March 18, 2021. As the author’s decade-plus career in conference interpreting between the languages of Chinese and English was predominantly as an interpreter between governments and their many departments and agencies, this is material that the author is acutely versed in as a practitioner, but to which she has chosen to apply the discourse of

cultural studies in her capacity as academic instructor, so that the material may yield theoretical revelations beyond the conventional criteria of accuracy, language, and delivery, according to which students are almost solely evaluated. It is a non-exhaustive attempt to expand a student's understanding of interpreting beyond those three exam-oriented criteria by analyzing discourse to problematize what many believe to be an unproblematic act as "messenger" or "conduit." The particular cultural studies framework from which this article draws inspiration is introduced at the outset. It serves as the basis for the concluding theoretical arguments engendered by the Anchorage analysis in support of integrating cultural studies discourse in pedagogy.

2. Re-articulating Anchorage

2.1 Applying a Cultural Studies Framework

The Cultural Studies approach applied is inspired by Stuart Hall, Jamaican-born British scholar and pioneer in cultural theory, and the theoretical influences he cites in a series of lectures delivered in the summer of 1983 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign under the theme "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries." The choice of Hall stems from the shaping influence of these lectures on the practice of cultural theory—"its interpretation, directions, scholarship, and teaching"—in the American context (Grossberg & Slack, 2016, p. vii). The American context is poignant here because American cultural power, otherwise identified as its cultural hegemony (Venuti, 1998, pp. 158-189), has arguably given the cultural struggles of class, race, and gender a more visible global platform and source of global momentum, witnessed, most recently, in the reverberations of the MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements in France and the controversies in Europe surrounding ethnic and cultural representation in the European translations of Amanda Gorman's Inaugural Day poem (Kotze, 2021). The American context, in particular, has also been a vital site where both Taiwan and China, the two major contesting forces for postwar "Chinese" representation, have drawn both inspiration and fuel for their domestic and international, political and cultural, battles. Thus in addition to the disciplines identified by Grossberg and Slack (2016, p. vii) as having been profoundly influenced by Hall—namely, Communication, Literary Theory, Film Studies,

Anthropology and Education—this article seeks to add Interpreting Studies to the list by way of using the Anchorage example as teaching material in a Chinese-English interpreting course.

Hall's Cultural Studies approach with Marxist origins particularly resonates in the Chinese interpreting classroom because the dynamics of domination/subordination would allow us to see that in the cases of both Taiwan and China, and the particular cultural codification of imperial rule as legitimate in Chinese culture, the divide is not between democracy/communism (i.e. capital/labor) but domination of the ruling class-literati over the (once illiterate) rest. This in turn explains that particular East Asian ethos, the fervor across all classes of studying to pass exams—including the professional exams in interpreting programs—because this behavior is rooted in entering a bureaucratic system regulated by exams to serve the ruling interests of the emperor or to become a part of the ruling class under the ethos of (neo-)Confucianism (Elman, 2000). More straightforwardly, “in service of power” is codified as patriotic and transparently “good” under Confucianism. This means that if an aspiring Chinese student says s/he wants to become a UN conference interpreter so s/he can “give back to the community” (an actual statement encountered in a student application and by no means an anomaly), then we may use cultural studies discourse to point out the paradox in that aspiration and offer the student conceptual tools and methods of inquiry to clarify what it is that s/he actually aspires to: *to serve whom and what?* That would be an ethical act on the part of the educator, one that differentiates us from for-profit training agencies. Ideally, it empowers the student to construct an informed value system as a practitioner and make informed decisions, an objective in line with Kiraly's (2000) constructivist approach for empowerment in translation pedagogy.

At the heart of Hall's cultural project is a political project. His objectives are clear:

Rather than reserving the notion of class struggle only for the moment of the barricades, we need to see resistance as the continual practices of working on the cultural domain and opening up cultural possibilities. This is perhaps *not the most glamorous political work* but it is the work we need to do. The conditions within which people are able to construct subjective possibilities and new political subjectivities for themselves are not simply given in the dominant system. They are won in *the practices of articulation*

which produce them. (2016, p. 206; italics added)

Interpreters list the VIPs, the keynote speakers, the heads of state they interpret for at the top of their resumes for a reason. Interpreting programs promote images of their graduates interpreting for the VIPs, the keynote speakers, the heads of state for a reason. *It is glamorous political work*. To assert that we should leave politics out of teaching is therefore highly problematic if we—the professional and research community—simultaneously call for more interdisciplinary approaches. More aptly, Cultural Studies offers a method of inquiry that helps us re-articulate what it is we think we mean when we talk about “interpreting.”

Cultural Studies finds its closest entry point into translation and interpretation (T&I) research with Toury (1995), who compellingly presents the translator as operating between the norms of the source and the norms of the target (pp. 53-69); and later in Zwischenberger’s (2015) investigation of the passive conduit metaphor as the supernorm being propagated by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), a study in which she also highlights significant research already done on norms in interpreting (Diriker, 1999; Duflou, 2007; Harris, 1990; Marzocchi, 2005; Schjoldager, 2002; Shlesinger, 1989). If interpreting practice and assessment material in the classroom consists of transcripts and scripts, scales and scores, and our professional context is bound by protocol, it would be reasonable to postulate that what makes a successful performance is the automation of the knowledge of norms, from the “correct” translation of terminology and proper names to idiomatic turns of phrases. This means we should re-examine framing and teaching interpreting primarily as a matter of accuracy, language, and delivery. Instead, students also need to learn the normative expectations of language and behavior expected from the “discourse community” (Swales, 2016) they are tasked to *serve*—a verb that denotes the particular struggle of power between interpreter, speaker (source), audience (target), client (agent or middleman), and any other implicated actor in the communicative setting.

The cultural approach then becomes necessarily a political inquiry into those normative expectations; its scientific value lies precisely in the politics and power relations it seeks to articulate within those expectations. This article is therefore a preliminary step in allowing student interpreters the opportunity “to construct subjective possibilities” for themselves in the face of these norms by first applying the high-level conceptual categories of

gender, identity, and power relations to investigate an instance of conference interpreting in the Chinese-English language combination. These three categories are derived from the more conventionally used gender, race, and class to fit the specific example to be discussed. The “level of abstraction” (Hall, 2016, pp. 89-93) concerning these categories is intentionally high because this would be a preliminary construct for the future potential of a “cultural model” in interpreting pedagogy. It is high-level also because the students have yet to be regularly exposed to cultural studies theory, unlike the concepts of “cognitive load” (Gile, 2020, 2009) or “deverbalization” (Seleskovitch, 1989) which are ubiquitous to a fault in classroom discourse (Seeber & Arbona, 2020).

2.2 Gender

One of the more conspicuous juxtapositions between the two female interpreters who respectively represented China and the US at the meeting was the qualitative framing in the Chinese media of the Chinese interpreter being a “beauty” and the American interpreter’s “unprofessional” look because she had “a head of purple hair” (World Journal News, 2021; as cited in United Daily News, 2021). The focus on physical appearance in conflation with professionalism is something that many women face, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, profession, or rank. It would be expected that with the advancement of women’s rights, student interpreters, especially female students, would see the problematic and discriminatory nature of such a depiction, especially given the Chinese media’s seemingly infatuation with “beautiful” interpreters in association with men of power (Du & Wang, 2021).

However, in the Chinese classroom, when the issue of the media representation of female interpreters was raised by the instructor, one female student candidly remarked that she believed it was undoubtedly unprofessional to have purple hair in such a high-level setting. The instructor responded by asking why media coverage of the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Star Wars themed and otherwise colorful sock choices in high-level settings was never called “unprofessional” but widely circulated in photographs and complimented in mainstream media like *The New York Times* (Friedman, 2017) and style magazines like men’s *GQ* (Corsillo, 2017). The ensuing exchange is lightly edited for clarity:

The student: “That’s different. He’s the head of state.”

The instructor unpacks what is “different”: He is a man whose colorful socks are perceived as an expression of individualism, creativity, and diplomatic talent. You, on the other hand, are a woman interpreting on behalf of a man in power, and you shall not challenge his spotlight with artifice, but you may be “beautiful.”

The instructor further asks the class: “How much are you bound up in creative expression of yourself and how much of that are you willing to suppress to pursue this type of high-level conference interpreting, prone to media exposure, where your performance will be judged alongside your alleged beauty?”

This last question is not about directly challenging normative power dynamics. That would be an unfair weight for the student, essentially powerless, to bear. The question is rather about giving the student room to articulate her agency in recognition of these power dynamics. Perhaps she is fine with them; perhaps she is not fine and would be prepared to challenge them; perhaps she is not fine and would like to minimize her exposure to such settings and take her professionalism elsewhere; perhaps she has her own nuanced view to share. This discussion would also be of value to the male student, who otherwise could have been insensitive or unaware of such gender dynamics and their professional repercussions because he occupies the traditional space of male privilege that typically shields him from these types of judgments.

This line of inquiry is meant to be an open template for like-minded instructors to adapt to the conditions and student-makeup of their own particular course, because if dialogue is to be generated in all spheres of life to encourage gender equality, the interpreting classroom should also be a part of that conversation. Political dialogue and speeches may be practical training material for the student interpreter, but if we want to claim that interpreters are not robots and cannot be replaced by machines, then rote practice of set pieces should not deny opportunities to discuss issues like gender dynamics on the grounds of them being impractical. Discussions like these lay the ground for a thinking interpreter, a critical act of consciousness which separates the human from the machine.

2.3 Identity

Presently, the relative lack of native English speakers as interpreters in the Chinese-English language combination means that, in many cases, the American delegations will be represented by an interpreter who is not Caucasian, but ethnically Chinese, either first generation Chinese (who might have carried different citizenship before immigration) or Chinese born to immigrant parents in the US. The media discourse may crudely, and rightly (on the grounds of citizenship), label the one interpreter “the Chinese interpreter” and the other, “the American interpreter.” The Anchorage example provides fertile grounds for a discussion on identity because here the American interpreter is also “Chinese.” The Chinese student interpreter, especially the Chinese-American student, should be made aware of the contesting space of identities involved in this position. When the Chinese State and American State are at odds, how may this affect the individual psychology of the Chinese-American interpreter? How may this affect the Chinese-American interpreter whose Chinese identity originates from the ROC (now Taiwan) and not the PRC (China); or if it originates from Hong Kong or other Chinese contexts? Since at odds would be a conservative way of putting the relationship of Taiwan and Hong Kong with China, it is necessary that we not pretend all Chinese students in the same program are on a level playing field when it comes to interpreting for the state or international organizations.

The student whose background originates from the less powerful Chinese identities (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other regions with significant Chinese diaspora) should be made aware of how they are more likely in need of changing the characteristics of their Mandarin to fit the dominant version of Mandarin that circulates in both pedagogical and conference contexts worldwide if they choose to work outside their own domestic market. Again, raising the issue opens up space for the students to articulate their own agency as in the instance of gender. The question to the class can thus be similarly structured, but proceeds from the concept of “identity”:

How much are you willing to make your identity pliable for political or commercial purposes coded as “professional”?

This question also allows room for awareness in Chinese students whose more dominant position might have led to unintentional insensitivity to such

issues. Similar to creating a space for gender dialogue, the classroom might be the last space left for candid and reconciliatory dialogue among students whose diverging Chinese identities would not allow for reconciliation in a professional space. If there is any truth in the claim that interpreting can make the world a better place, it likely lies more in the classroom than at the conference table.

2.4 Power

The opening segment of the Anchorage talks provides a rare candid documentation of the position of the interpreter within a context that is often framed in a positive light (i.e. “dialogue”). Because of political sensitivity and confidentiality issues, rarely are recordings of such meetings provided to the public, and even rarer are the interactions between the participants captured on camera to such a degree. But the TVBS footage of the interactions between Zhang Jing, the Chinese interpreter, and Yang Jiechi, the Chinese head of delegation after his 16-minute long diatribe against the US, offers a rich space for discussion on relations of power and how the interpreter and the interpretation function in this instance. (TVBS, 2021: 24:17-24:37; translation in brackets):

- YANG [to China's foreign minister, Wang Yi]: 欸，王毅你說兩句吧 [Eh, Wang Yi, why don't you say something?]
 ZHANG: 我先 ... 我先翻譯一下 [Shall I...Shall I translate first?]
 YANG: 還要翻嗎? [Does this need translation?]
 ZHANG: [laughs]
 YANG: 翻吧，你 [Go ahead, then.]
 ZHANG: 那我先翻一下 [Ok, I'll translate first.]
 YANG: It's a test for the interpreter.
 ZHANG: [laughs]

Yang himself is no diplomatic novice. Could he not have known that it is customary to let his own interpreter render his comments into English first, let alone the fact that he left his American audience waiting for 16 minutes? Though we cannot rule out that it was an innocent oversight, it is an unconvincing one given his diplomatic experience. If it was innocent, then it shows how truly an afterthought the role of the interpreter and the

interpretation plays. This is a major paradox that can be pointed out to the student.

When the interpreter responds, in deference, hesitantly, suggesting that she should probably interpret Yang's comments first, Yang half-jokes whether or not interpretation is needed. The interpreter does not say "yes"—she cannot even confirm—but laughs, submissively, to dissipate the awkwardness of the exchange. "Go ahead, then," answers Yang. He grants her permission. The Americans, the ones who supposedly need to understand the message, have no say in this. It can be pointed out to the student that, counter-intuitively, the supposed need for communication is not what drives the interpretation, it is the interpreter's boss who does, the power he holds, the entitlement he feels to grant release of that message. Moreover, expert commentary (BBC, 2021; Bondaz, 2021) suggests that Yang's Chinese statement was directed more at domestic audiences to demonstrate China's tough stance against the US. If that political analysis stands, it would be a logical explanation to his seemingly careless comment on the necessity of translating his 16-minute lecture. It also demonstrates the fallacy in positing that the interpreter is necessarily working on behalf of audience comprehension or that the audience in front of them is the "target." The student thus sees through the illusion: the "target audience" is a secondary concern, especially when the speaker seeks to render the receptor subordinate.

Yang inserts in English, almost humorously, that his lengthy opening statement is "a test" for the interpreter. Is this a high-level meeting or a fun experiment to see how your subordinate can jump through hoops? If there were no video footage, one might suspect the Chinese interpreter has the printed opening statement in front of her and she can sight translate. But prior footage shows her continuously taking notes and then she reads through her notes; Yang also rarely looks down, suggesting that the comments were not entirely read verbatim from a document. In consecutive interpreting, a "long or full" segment falls around 2 minutes; a "very long" segment would be over 5 minutes, not common, and is "likely to try the patience of many participants" (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p. 136), not to mention that it would be impolite to keep your audience waiting for over five minutes to understand what you are talking about in a foreign language. Here, the supposed professionalism or expertise of the interpreter that we teach students to embody (i.e. the knowledge that segments should not venture past an ideal time mark) is allowed no room to manifest itself.

The student can see that there is no such thing as “client education”—a concept frequently taught in interpreting courses—in the instance of the Chinese interpreter interpreting for a Chinese speaker in this specific diplomatic context (or arguably in most interpreting contexts encountered by a freelance interpreter at the hands of a paying client). It is pertinent to emphasize to the student that in the Anchorage case Chinese cultural norms impact the interpreter’s ability to exercise autonomy. It could be different if the Chinese interpreter is interpreting for a non-Chinese speaker because cultural expectations concerning deference and professionalism could be different. In the author’s career interpreting for non-Asian entities, there were instances where she felt comfortable enough to stop the speaker so she could interpret. The speaker took no offence and deferred to her judgment. This could be due to the fact that the western interpreter of non-Asian languages enjoys relative respect as a recognized professional who transcends gender and class norms that highly regulate Asian societies under the influence of Confucianism. A Chinese (female) interpreter would thus benefit from this alternative non-Confucius cultural context.

Professionalism defined by cultural expectations of deference (to power) is one of the realities that Chinese student interpreters may face if they have high-level conference interpreting as their goal. The higher the level, the more imbalanced the relations of power between the Chinese interpreter and the Chinese speaker; the interpreter’s primary goal here shifts to making her boss happy instead of audience comprehension. The question to the student can thus be framed:

Is this what you envisioned as your primary goal?

Certainly, for the majority of employees in any profession, making their boss happy is precisely the goal. There is no issue with that per se. The issue is the romantic notion of high-level conference interpreting necessarily being about “bringing people together,” a depiction many students have unproblematically internalized as truth. These students are not novices according to the idealized construct in the popular novice-expert paradigm (Hoffman, 1997; Moser-Mercer, 1997) that lends itself to a skills-based approach to achieving “expert” status. Many Chinese students enter our programs with pre-conceived notions of conference interpreting and layperson interpreting experiences. These experiences are further underscored by a

postcolonial inferiority-superiority complex—manifested as striving for superior English language skills—which needs to be explicitly addressed lest they throw themselves into wanton hours of skills-based “deliberate practice” for a misguided belief in agency, especially since research has already cast a questionable light on the effectiveness of said kind of practice (Macnamara et al., 2014; Tiselius, 2018).

2.5 The Quality of the Interpretation

The US and China entered the Anchorage talks against a backdrop of antagonistic positions. The opening remarks by Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and Secretary of State Antony Blinken make those positions very clear (US Department of State, 2021). How much do the Chinese and the Americans need to rely on “high quality” interpretation to understand each other? The notion of quality is already highly relative and even argued to be a “social construct” by Grbić (2008), whose investigation of quality identifies a particular elitist strain in the agents (the renowned interpreter, Jean Herbert), training institutions (University of Geneva), and systems (AIIC’s membership system) that serve to define and safeguard the idea of quality (241-243). But in operational terms, we can apply the common criteria used to evaluate students in the program where the author teaches—accuracy (50%), language (20%), delivery (30%)—to look at examples from the American interpreter’s performance in Anchorage, which received much more negative commentary in the media (Tian, 2021; Zhou, 2021). The examples concern the remarks of National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The analysis is focused on the underlined text.

1) SULLIVAN: Secretary Blinken laid out many of the areas of concern, from economic and military coercion to assaults on basic values, that we’ll discuss with you today and in the days ahead. [...] We’ll make clear today that our overriding priority on the United States’ side is to ensure that our approach in the world and our approach to China benefits the American people and protects the interests of our allies and partners. [TVBS: 03:22-04:13]

INTERPRETER: 那麼我們可以看到，在這一一個國務卿剛才所提到的這

一些一系列的這個舉措當中呢，也顯示了我們對中國的一些做法的關切。這些包括在經濟、軍事上面以及在民主價值上的一些這個對我們的盟友和朋友的脅迫。[...] 因此我們必須要闡明，這個向世界和中方闡明，美國的一些的這個做法和美國的想法，進一步的促進和捍衛美國人民的利益。[06:13-07:30]

2) BLINKEN: I recall well when President Biden was vice president and we were visiting China. This was in the wake of the financial crisis. There was much discussion then, including with then-Vice President Xi Jinping. And Vice President Biden at the time said it's never a good bet to bet against America, and it's true today. [52:32-52:56]

INTERPRETER: 那麼我記得在金融危機的時候呢拜登總統當時也訪問了中國，與當時的副主席習近平先生有過很多的這個接觸和對話，其中啊他非常的這個嚴肅的說過一句話，打賭美國不行一定是輸的。[55:16-55:42]

The language in the two examples exhibit the same tendency for fillers (這個; zhege) and the trait of translationese expressed as the ubiquitous application of a series of 的 (de) formations, of which many could be seen as stylistically redundant (albeit grammatically correct). The second underlined example (“to bet against America”) is particularly notable in how literal the Chinese translation is. Though there is a very reasonable explanation for the less-than-ideal literalness (under time pressure, the more idiomatic the source language, the harder it is to come up with a satisfactory idiomatic counterpart), it does not change the fact that it would be detrimental to the criteria of “language.” Most technical courses would stop at this type of analysis and call for students to avoid “fillers” and “literalness.”

However, from a discourse-driven cultural studies perspective—which concerns itself with the investigation of power and how it manifests itself—the most interesting instances of interpretation concern the transformation of “*basic values*” into “*democratic values*” in the target; “*benefits the American people and protects the interests of our allies and partners*” becomes “to *promote* and *defend* the interests of the *American people*”; and what Biden simply “said” turns into “said *sternly*.” A nominal application of the criteria “accuracy”—accounting for the heaviest portion of the grade (50%)—might lead one to conclude that there is an over-interpretation on the part of the

interpreter or an insertion of too much subjective reframing of what was being said. However, if one applies the concept of power in discourse, the interpreter can be seen as adhering to the mainstream discourse in American politics and how the American politician appeals to the American voter. She is very accurate in that sense and in that sense these are very good examples of how the subject is a vessel for the power she serves—the interpreter is not translating the text or words she hears for the supposed target audience, but is channeling the position of power the US assumes. That position is maintained in the repetition of keywords in American political discourse, such as “democratic” and “defend” and the “American people”; and in the posturing of “stern.” It is “coherent” under a cultural studies discourse. This analysis would also correspond to the previously cited analysis of China policy experts, in which it was pointed out that the Chinese head of delegation is only nominally addressing the Americans onsite; the intended audience is the Chinese domestic one (not “the target”).

Consequently, the student sees that the technical quality of the interpretation does not change the respective positions of the US and China. The Chinese interpreter may be praised for her supposed “accuracy” or “fluency” and the American interpreter may be criticized for her supposed “inaccuracy” or “disfluency”—concepts often used in interpreting studies to measure quality—but these have minimal bearing on US-China relations themselves, which are grounded in historical and bureaucratic interactions that are far too expansive to be destabilized by what an interpreter said in fragmented instances. It is worthwhile to point out that disclaimers are regularly issued by institutions such as the UN and EU that absolve the interpretation from accountability (European Commission, 2022; United Nations, 2022), which casts the nature of interpretation as unreliable and inauthentic, irrespective of client surveys on quality. Experienced conference interpreters understand exactly why such a disclaimer is needed for self-protection. Is this an excessively cynical stance? If politics is widely derided as cynical and high-level conference interpreting predominantly services the political class, it would be difficult to claim that high-level interpreting actually occupies higher ground, which is a reality our students deserve to understand.

Another issue to consider is the American interpreter’s supposed lack of preparedness. Sullivan was apparently reading a prepared statement in the opening. Could the interpreter not have gotten a copy of the text to spare her from quality issues of delivery and language that could have arisen from

memory and note-taking? If the importance of interpretation and the role of the interpreter at high-level meetings were as important as we feel obliged to teach the students in the classroom, then someone would have made sure she had a copy in time. But it did not sound at all like she did and she alone has to bear the public's criticism of her performance. The student can thus see that her role is far more performative than communicative because high-level talks are the epitome of political performance. Mitt Romney, as an American presidential candidate, once (in)famously remarked: "Corporations are people, my friend." (Rucker, 2011). He never quite recovered from that gaffe. If the student interpreter's desire is to help "people," then analyses as such may help students recognize that conference interpreting does not operate innocently for communication purposes. Within that communicative context, it is often power first and people second. Because like corporations, "states" are not people, either.

3. Integrating Cultural Discourse in Pedagogy

Not all interpreting events lend themselves to effective analyses of gender, identity and power. It is also difficult to carry out these types of discussions on a regular basis when students expect instructors to provide ways to technically enhance their performance if the course has a technical designation. But when suitable material becomes available, it is worthwhile, in this author's experience, to introduce students to cultural studies concepts and modes of inquiry. This puts the technical aspects of interpreting and various claims of the importance of interpreting in perspective and in context. It allows the student to develop an awareness for introspection:

How does training to become an interpreter serve my needs and my goals?

This becomes the question instead of training with the sole notion of servitude to those in power and one that would fill in the data gap identified under humanistic approaches by Sawyer (2004, pp. 74-76).

Given the restrictions of a technical course that would limit the expansive nature of discussions, another way to incorporate this kind of course material and line of inquiry is to apply it within a course that is specifically designed to address the broader picture of the interpreting industry. This is often

done under the label of “practicum” courses or “theory” courses. However, segregating the technical from the social is not necessarily effective. Duflou’s (2016) ethnographic study suggests that conventional training methods focusing on one-directional monologic speeches or discourse, at the expense of externalities such as discourse on power, may be effective in training students to pass accreditation exams, but do not constitute what is required for professional competency.

As evidenced by Duflou’s thick description of interpreting at the EU, the Speaker-Interpreter-User model so often applied in studies and in training “constitutes an unjustifiable simplification in the case of simultaneous interpreting” (Duflou, 2016, p. 318). Her study shows that the unit of performance does not come down to the linguistic output of an individual interpreter, but the collaborative and multimodal effort between all boothmates and their coordination with other booths through relay and retour. It effectively deconstructs the effectiveness of the concept of cognitive “expertise” measured in the individual interpreter in that it provides a persuasive answer (Duflou, 2016, pp. 316-317) to Tiselius’s (2013) counterintuitive finding that highly regarded and experienced conference interpreters performed no better according to a quantitative rating system in comparison to their younger selves 15 years prior. It also adds to the argument that the “deliberate practice” of skills does not necessarily make for a more accomplished interpreter though it occupies a “prominent place in interpreting pedagogy” (Tiselius, 2018, p. 132).

Tiselius (2018) surmises that the ineffectiveness of deliberate practice could be attributed to an “incorrectly defined” construct (p. 132). Using a Cultural Studies approach, it can be posited that what is under study in experimental conditions is not “interpreting” but a bilingual language exercise, because “interpreting” only happens when there is an Other (client, boss, foreigners) that activates the conditions of communication. Because the conditions are *asymmetric* between the interpreter and all actors (differences in material and abstract knowledge, agency, power, fluency in the colonial tongue, fluency in industry jargon, etc), the brain is not utilizing cognitive skills that studies on interpreting attempt to designate as corresponding “skills for interpreting” that can be taught in sequence or in components (see Ilg & Lambert, 1996: memory exercises, cloze, paraphrasing, etc.). The brain is instead engaging a fluid and fluctuating set of functions—motor, cognitive, emotive—to address shifting disparities in the communicative context.

The latest findings on “representational drift” in the brain (Schoonover et al., 2021) lend plausibility to prior constructs being faulty in the attempt to map a one-on-one correspondence of mental processes with actions (Cepelewicz, 2021). In interpreting pedagogy, this would be the attempt to map respective interpreting processes with skills triggered by input/stimuli. A faulty one-on-one mapping would explain why a student may fail at many discrete exercises in the classroom (as this author did much to the dismay and disbelief of her instructors) but perform competently in-context. Example of incongruity: How do I effectively paraphrase an auditory input or my own output if I already understand myself and there is no visceral need in the classroom to understand anything in a different way? The practicing of “paraphrasing” to improve interpreting is thus misguided. Similarly, using cloze exercises to improve or determine language proficiency for “interpreting” would also be an ill fit.

What the neuroscientists are experiencing with “drift” is a classic post-structural moment of epistemological rupture. It is then perhaps time for interpreting pedagogy to acknowledge that instead of the supposed unity and one-on-one correspondence between the signified and the signifier (e.g. the “sense” of the “target” arising from the “source”; or “short-term memory” activated by “notes”—processes meant to define what “interpreting” is), the sign “interpreting” can be open to redefinition because language has “no reference to signified meanings but rather as creating these meanings through the play of signifiers” (Derrida, 1978, p. 305). Neuroscientists now have to create a new language (a new set of signifiers) to investigate what eludes them with the old language (old concepts and constructs). In the same vein, interpreting pedagogy may investigate the phenomenon of interpreting with the different vocabulary of Cultural Studies in an attempt to capture what has eluded us as well. Thus can there be a re-imagined way of teaching interpreting for changing times.

What is most relevant to the article’s aim is Duflou’s finding of “the tremendous impact the tendency to conform to common ways of speaking and doing may have on individuals’ discourse and behavior” (Duflou, 2016, pp. 320-321). This suggests that the theoretical notion of interpreting “competency” or “expertise” may very well be, in practice, conformity: when the beginner learns ways of doing and speaking “like the professionals,” which led to one EU interpreter’s rude awakening of interpreting as largely “parroting” and the “lacing together” of “artificial” combinations of “stolen phrases” from colleagues (Duflou, 2016, pp. 194-195), otherwise known

under Toury's (1995) descriptive theory as the conforming power of norms. Tellingly, very little of this has to do with the target audience that we so often teach the students about. The complexity or much celebrated "difficulty" of interpreting can then be explained as the negotiating of norms not yet familiar to the individual instead of it being a special intrinsic skill. This means that the much-recognized construct of the "black box" in process-oriented approaches is a site of struggle under a Cultural Studies one, where the subject undergoes a re-orientation of languages, realizing that theirs is on the lower rung on the hierarchy. The question is not "how do I translate this?" but "what do they want to hear?"

The author's experience as a conference interpreter, often interpreting in the consecutive mode between Chinese and English, in Chinese and Western institutional settings, to a large extent corroborates Duflou's (2016) findings even though Duflou is very careful to say that the ethnographic approach can only account for the specific context under study, which for her is the EU simultaneous setting in general and the Dutch, English, and Polish booths in particular. But if such European and Chinese conference realities can be said to make up the world our students are entering, then it perhaps would be wiser not to relegate "interactional dynamics" and "discursive features" (Duflou, 2016, p. 315) to the periphery in our training as if the dynamics of subordination and domination were not part and parcel of competency/expertise/professionalism.

If competency—from terminology, idiomatic speech, to button switching and turn-taking—is largely learned in-context because of its complex situated nature against relations of power, then it would be nearly impossible to fully replicate those conditions in a classroom setting. If the cost-benefit of full replication is beyond us, it may be wise to redirect some of the many classroom hours fixated on potentially reductive concepts such as "accuracy" between source and target, or intuitive comments (but nativist assumptions) such as "that's not how we say it in X language," and make room for cultural discourse elements. "Accuracy" is reductive because it only addresses Saussure's (1959) "langue," the universal self-contained system (e.g. grammar) of a given language that can be studied and replicated scientifically (e.g. one can produce an entirely "correct" but literal rendition that does not meet the expectations of a discourse community). But interpreting is concerned with "parole"—ways of expression/translation. They are, in theory, infinite, but not exactly, because parole, at the same time, compromises orders of discourse

(Foucault, 1971), which keeps speech in constant alert mode, wary of the rules of inclusion and exclusion. Accuracy, in other words, is not what makes language come alive or, in pragmatic terms, “useful.” Who designates what to be accurate is the issue.

4. Conclusion

By drawing from the theories and concepts in Cultural Studies, this article attempts to complement existing pedagogical approaches so students may possess a set of tools to confront the nature of power and politics, often ugly, which a skills-based or market-oriented approach would mask. Moreover, it would be hypocritical to say that issues of power, identity, and politics should be marginalized in training if conference interpreting predominantly serves the political and capital classes and their stronghold on representation. If many conference interpreting programs are positioned at graduate level in an academic institution, it may be of more educational value to devote some time to training a critical thinker rather than most of the time to produce a market-ready practitioner. If critical discourse analysis is not incorporated, these programs should be certificate programs just as many community interpreting programs have long been sidelined due to discriminatory lower-level expectation from job market forces. A case in point is the Spanish Community Interpreting Graduate Certificate being offered at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. Despite the program being equally robust in content and conceptually well-articulated as many current MA degree-granting programs, it is nonetheless designated as a non-academic certificate program (Mikkelsen et al., 2019, p. 164).

Interpreting is complex and difficult because its presumed excellence is paradoxically premised on the simultaneous suppression of the speaker’s own voice and the interpreter’s own voice, and that suppression is based on relations of power. To investigate those relations means using theoretical constructs and concepts that produce a narrative or discourse that may not be readily quantifiable or validated through statistical-mathematical means, but have equal explanatory power on a discursive level. In this article this is demonstrated in the inadequacies of an accuracy-oriented pedagogical paradigm in explaining the semiotics of cultural studies discourse at the Anchorage talks. The former is premised on the idea that exchange is

objectively symmetrical; the latter aims to deconstruct the exchange to reveal its asymmetries. If, as conference interpreters, we find ourselves balking at the idea that anything we do has anything to do with “constituting the asymmetries of cultural systems and inequities in cultural power” (Tymoczko, 2010, p. 6), then perhaps we should reevaluate the pedestal on which we stand and contend that our technical prowess on the job in comparison to the power of translation and translators in shaping cultures and movements does not have the power we imagined it did—even though in the Chinese curriculum “translation” is often perceived as inferior and a residual category reserved for students who have failed to advance in the conference interpreting track.

Lastly, the areas of concern and the examples chosen in this article are derived from the author’s own particular experience as a student, teacher, interpreter, and the students she has encountered. They also stem from the observations of a muted discourse on humanistic introspection. Except for a nominal argument of human superiority over machines, which cannot be reconciled with teaching methods focused on the automation of technical skills, market-oriented pedagogy remains conveniently silent on issues of power and identity. Hall (2016) frames the foregrounding of personal experience as “giving the story as I understand it,” “as I have experienced it” (p. 1). It is in line with the critical discourse understanding that the researcher is neither value-free nor apolitical in the formulation of the research topic and the object of investigation. For this reason, there is no course plan but rather an invitation for other instructors to draw ideas from the particularities of this article to expose students who formally and formerly lacked exposure to cultural studies discourse and invite them to contribute to the dialogue.

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