Interpreters' Subjectivity in Diplomatic Interpreting: A Sociosemiotic Analysis of China's 14th NPC Press Conference

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how interpreters exercise agency in high-stakes diplomatic interpreting, adopting Morris's (1938) sociosemiotic framework to analyse their role as cultural-political mediators. Drawing on Chinese-English consecutive interpreting data from the 2023 Premier's press conference of China's 14th National People's Congress (NPC), the paper argues that interpreters' subjectivity manifests across three dimensions of meaning-making: as cultural transcoders navigating referential meanings, as discourse restructurers reconfiguring intra-lingual patterns, and as cultural-political mediators contextualising pragmatic effects. The analysis reveals that interpreters do not merely transfer linguistic content but actively mediate cross-cultural communication through deliberate choices in rendering culturally-specific expressions, restructuring discourse patterns, and navigating politically sensitive content. Diplomatic interpreters balance fidelity to source messages with adaptations necessary for target audience comprehension, particularly when handling Chinese political idioms, parallel rhetorical structures, and culturally embedded metaphors. These findings extend our understanding of diplomatic interpreting as a complex act of cross-cultural negotiation rather than mere linguistic transfer, with significant implications for interpreter training and conceptualising interpreters' agency in high-stakes political communication. Future research could examine the universality of these patterns across different language pairs and interpreting modalities.

Keywords: Diplomatic interpreting; Interpreters' subjectivity; Sociosemiotics; Cross-cultural communication; Political discourse

INTRODUCTION

The past three decades of China's reform and opening up have witnessed significant development across political, economic, social, and cultural domains, marking China's progressive elevation as an important player in international affairs. As a major participant in the global community, China has demonstrated increasing capacity in safeguarding international stability, stimulating global economic growth, enriching cultural pluralism, and advancing scientific innovation.

With China's global engagement becoming increasingly intensive, diplomatic interpreting has emerged as a vital communicative bridge between China and the international community. Government press conferences held during the annual Two Sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) constitute an important institutional channel through which international audiences gain first-hand access to Chinese government policies and diplomatic positions. Among these events, the Premier's press conferences are particularly influential. To facilitate communication between Chinese officials and international media, interpreters from the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs provide consecutive interpreting at these press conferences. This institutionalised form of diplomatic interpreting constitutes the empirical focus of the present study.

Interpreters at government press conferences operate under considerable pressure arising from time constraints, unpredictable journalistic questioning, and the highly formalised nature of the occasion. Their primary task is to ensure smooth and effective communication between speakers and target audiences. In fulfilling this task, interpreters inevitably exercise professional judgment and agency, adapting linguistic and pragmatic choices to meet communicative demands. While translator subjectivity has been extensively discussed in literary and general translation contexts (Baker, 2006; Dan et al., 2025; Xu, 2003), and interpreter agency has been widely acknowledged in interpreting studies, existing research has often treated subjectivity in abstract terms or examined isolated linguistic features. Political discourse has widely been recognised as a domain in which power relations are constructed and maintained, often participating in marginalising certain groups while enhancing the authority of others (Khalil, 2020). In such contexts, meaning-making is inherently ideological rather than neutral. Diplomatic interpreting, situated within institutional political communication, therefore operates not merely as linguistic transfer but as a form of mediated participation in power-laden discourse. In particular, diplomatic interpreting, which is characterised by strong institutional constraints, ideological sensitivity, and high political stakes, has received relatively limited systematic analysis that demonstrates how interpreters' subjectivity is enacted across different levels of meaning-making.

The research problem addressed in this study, therefore, lies in the lack of analytically operationalised frameworks capable of capturing interpreters' subjectivity in a comprehensive and empirically traceable manner. Although interpreters are commonly recognised as active mediators rather than neutral conduits, few studies have integrated referential meaning, discourse organisation, and pragmatic positioning within a single analytical model when examining diplomatic interpreting. As a result, interpreters' agency in such settings is frequently asserted rather than systematically demonstrated through coherent analytical procedures. Rather than treating interpreters' subjectivity as an abstract or normative concept, the present study reconceptualises it as a semiotically observable practice that can be analytically traced across multiple dimensions of meaning-making. By doing so, the study shifts the research focus from whether interpreters exercise subjectivity to how such subjectivity is concretely enacted and constrained in institutional diplomatic discourse.

Sociosemiotics offers a productive analytical perspective for addressing this problem. Unlike cognitive models that focus primarily on mental processing mechanisms (Seeber, 2017), Morris's (1938) triadic sociosemiotic model conceptualises meaning-making across three interrelated dimensions: referential, intra-lingual, and pragmatic. This model aligns closely with the multidimensional nature of diplomatic discourse, where interpreters mediate not only between linguistic forms but also between cultural norms, institutional expectations, and political intentionality. In this sense, the present study applies an established sociosemiotic model to systematically examine interpreter-mediated meaning construction in a high-stakes diplomatic context.

Building on this perspective, the present study examines how interpreters' subjectivity can be systematically traced across multiple dimensions of meaning-making. Drawing on the Premier's press conference at the First Session of the 14th National People's Congress (2023), the study examines how interpreter subjectivity is manifested through dynamic adaptation across referential, intra-lingual, and pragmatic dimensions. The selection of 2023 reflects a major institutional transition in China's political communication, as this press conference—delivered by

Premier Li Qiang—marked the final occurrence of the Premier's press conference in its traditional format, following which government–media communication has been diversified through alternative channels. The interpreting was performed by Guan Yi, a senior conference interpreter and Deputy Director of the Conference Interpretation Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose extensive experience in high-level diplomatic assignments ensures that the data analysed represent authoritative and exemplary professional practice.

INTERPRETERS' SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY

The notion of subjectivity has its philosophical roots in discussions of human agency and praxis. In Chinese philosophical thought, subjectivity is commonly understood as an inherent human quality manifested through purposeful practice, self-determination, and creative engagement with the external world (Min & Wang, 2018). Y. L. Wang (1995) further conceptualises subjectivity as the externalisation of human nature, emphasising the active role of the subject in shaping and influencing the object through practice. These philosophical formulations provide an important conceptual foundation for subsequent discussions of subjectivity in translation and interpreting studies.

Within Translation Studies, the translator has long been recognised as an active agent rather than a neutral conduit (Tu & Zhu, 2003). Early discussions of translators' subjectivity foregrounded the translators' conscious initiative and creative awareness in the translation process (Xu, 2003), as well as the role of cultural consciousness, aesthetic judgment, and purpose-oriented decision-making (Cha & Tian, 2003). While these formulations were instrumental in challenging the ideal of translators' invisibility, they often remained abstract and insufficiently grounded in specific communicative settings, particularly in institutional and political contexts.

Building on these early conceptual discussions, subsequent research gradually moved beyond abstract definitions to examine interpreters' subjectivity as a situated and practice-oriented phenomenon. Scholars adopting cognitive, pragmatic, and interactional perspectives argue that interpreters actively engage in problem-solving, contextual judgment, and audience-oriented reformulation under real-time constraints (Setton, 1999; Shlesinger, 2011). From this view, interpreters' subjectivity is not merely a philosophical attribute but a contextually enacted form of agency shaped by communicative goals, institutional settings, and interactional dynamics.

More recent scholarship has sought to empirically operationalise interpreters' subjectivity and agency, particularly in political and diplomatic contexts. Corpus-based and discourse-analytical studies provide systematic evidence that interpreters actively participate in meaning construction rather than merely reproducing source texts. Gu and Wang (2021), examining interpreted Premier's Press Conferences in China, demonstrate that interpreter-mediated discourse generates new meaning potentials and is frequently re-quoted in subsequent communicative chains, effectively positioning interpreters as intercultural agents and discursive connecting points. Building on this line of inquiry, Gu (2022) characterises institutional interpreters as "indispensable (re)tellers" of China's Reform and Opening Up meta-narrative, showing that interpreters' shifts consistently reinforce and sometimes intensify official discourse in English, thereby contributing to the reproduction of ideological positioning in international communication.

At the discourse level, recent studies reveal patterned linguistic strategies through which interpreters' subjectivity is enacted. Y. Li and Gumul (2024), drawing on a corpus of Chinese-English diplomatic interpreting, identify recurrent stance-taking lexical bundles such as "I

think" and "we should". These formulaic expressions serve both cognitive functions, facilitating processing under time pressure, and pragmatic functions, foregrounding the speaker's stance and managing interpersonal alignment. Similarly, Xu and Liang (2023), using a corpus-assisted critical discourse approach, demonstrate that interpreters systematically employ interpersonal and appraisal shifts to negotiate intersubjectivity and ultimately reproduce existing power relations in government press conference interpreting. Their findings indicate that modality and pronoun shifts function as discursive mechanisms through which interpreters actively reconstruct political meaning.

Interpreters' subjectivity is further manifested through evaluative and ideological mediation. X. Li and Zhang (2021), applying Appraisal Theory to a Chinese foreign minister's press conference, show that interpreters largely reproduce macro-level power and solidarity relations while simultaneously intervening through engagement shifts to negotiate alignment with institutional authority. These findings resonate with Gao's (2022) review of studies on interpreters' ideological mediation, which emphasises that interpreters' agency and stance-taking have become central concepts in contemporary conference interpreting research.

Interpreters' subjectivity is also evident in the mediation of culturally embedded and politically sensitive content. For example, Qian (2023) applies interpretive theory to a high-level China-U.S. diplomatic dialogue, arguing that skilled interpreters must detach from surface linguistic forms and mobilise expert knowledge and interpretive strategies to reformulate meaning in accordance with target communicative norms. The study portrays interpreters as cultural-political mediators whose subjectivity is enacted through informed and purposeful choices rather than mechanical transfer.

Extending the analytical scope beyond the interpreting event itself, Liang and Li (2024) demonstrate that interpreter-mediated diplomatic discourse may be further represented and reframed in global news media. Their findings suggest that interpreters' choices in explicitation, reduction, and logical restructuring can shape how diplomatic messages are subsequently circulated and interpreted internationally. This perspective highlights the sociosemiotic significance of interpreting as a multilayered process of mediation whose effects extend into the broader public sphere.

Taken together, contemporary research suggests that interpreters' subjectivity is not merely an abstract attribute but a dynamic, context-sensitive practice manifested across referential, discourse, and pragmatic dimensions. Interpreters in diplomatic settings actively negotiate meaning under institutional constraints, drawing on linguistic resources, contextual judgment, and socio-cultural knowledge. This body of research provides a strong empirical and theoretical basis for examining interpreters' subjectivity through a sociosemiotic framework, which allows for a systematic analysis of how meaning is constructed, adapted, and recontextualised in high-stakes diplomatic interpreting.

SOCIOSEMIOTICS

In "Course in General Linguistics", Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) said that language is a symbolic system for expressing concepts, which is composed of two elements: the signified and the signifier. The same signifier has different signifieds, which are expressed in different cultures and even in subcultures of the same culture. It is clear that language is a system of symbols that combines sound and meaning as the tool of human communication.

C. S. Peirce gives a comprehensive account of semiotics, arguing that the sign itself and the object it represents are connected by the interpreter, without whom the meaning of the sign would be unintelligible. Signs are formed and interpreted to a large extent by the interpreter and the context in which they are placed (M. Y. Wang, 2004).

C. W. Morris (1938) systematically developed Peirce's semiotic theory. He divided the semiotics into three aspects: semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic. The semantic relationship refers to the relationship between the sign and the external thing to which the sign refers; the pragmatic relationship refers to the relationship between the sign and the user; the syntactic relationship refers to the relationship between signs. Corresponding to these three relationships are three types of semiotic meanings. Since the semantic relations of signs proposed by Morris are essentially referential relations, and we are studying semiotic relationships in the context of language, these three categories of semiotic meaning can be more explicitly called referential meaning, intra-lingual meaning and pragmatic meaning, which is presented in Table 1. In other words, the referential meaning refers to the objective world reflected in words, sentences and texts; the intra-lingual meaning is the meaning reflected in the relationship between word elements, sentence elements, and discourse, which is often embodied in figures of speech; pragmatic meaning refers to the relationship between the language sign and the user, and the influence of the language sign on people. Pragmatic meaning is the so-called implied meaning or associative meaning.

TABLE 1. Three Categories of Semiotic Meaning

Dimension	Definition	Interpreter's Role
Referential	Sign-object relation (literal meaning)	Cultural transcoder
Intra-lingual	Sign-sign relation (structural coherence)	Discourse restructurer
Pragmatic	Sign-user relation (contextual effect)	Cultural-political mediator

Interpreting is the interpretation of the meaning. According to Morris's (1938) point of view, any symbol is comprised of three substances. It can also be considered as the effect of signs on the interpreter of signs. These relations among the three parts are the three meanings in semiotics. As mentioned before, communication between speakers and target listeners is realised through the combination of the interpreter's dynamic analysis of contextual utterances and his/her encyclopedic information, including intercultural communication knowledge. As the subject of this process, interpreters not only need to accurately understand and convey the basic meaning of source language symbols, but also need to reconstruct the internal logic of the speech while considering the reception effect on target language listeners. Sociosemiotics highly corresponds with interpreters' understanding, reconstruction, and transmission of original meaning during interpreting. Therefore, this paper chooses to use the three meaning dimensions of sociosemiotics to analyse the specific manifestations and realisation mechanisms of interpreters' subjectivity in the interpreting process.

Building on this sociosemiotic framework, the following section details the research design and analytical procedures through which interpreters' subjectivity is empirically examined in the context of diplomatic interpreting. Unlike discourse-analytical or appraisal-based approaches that focus primarily on interpersonal or evaluative meanings, the sociosemiotic framework adopted here explicitly integrates referential, intra-lingual, and pragmatic dimensions within a single analytical model. This integrative perspective allows the interpreting process to be examined in a systematic and multi-layered manner, rather than through isolated linguistic features.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, discourse-analytical research design to investigate how interpreters exercise subjectivity in high-stakes diplomatic interpreting. Rather than aiming for statistical generalisation, the study seeks analytical generalisation by closely examining interpreter-mediated meaning-making in a prototypical institutional setting. The analysis is guided by Morris's (1938) sociosemiotic framework, which conceptualises meaning across three interrelated dimensions—referential, intra-lingual, and pragmatic—thus enabling a systematic examination of interpreter agency beyond surface linguistic transfer.

The empirical data are drawn from the Chinese Premier's press conference held during the First Session of the 14th National People's Congress in March 2023. This event represents one of the most institutionally significant and internationally visible platforms of China's diplomatic communication, where interpreting is performed under strict political, temporal, and ideological constraints. The source language data consist of Premier Li Qiang's original responses delivered in Mandarin Chinese, while the target language data comprise the official English consecutive interpreting provided on-site by an interpreter from the Translation Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The English data analysed in this study consist of the official consecutive interpreting delivered on-site at the press conference and broadcast live through authorised channels. As no official verbatim English transcripts are publicly released for this event, the interpreting output was transcribed by the author from the official video recordings following established transcription conventions for spoken discourse. The transcriptions are therefore researcher-produced representations of officially delivered interpreting, rather than researcher-generated translations.

Given the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study, a purposeful sampling strategy was adopted. Analytical examples were selected from segments involving culture-specific expressions, political idioms, rhetorical reformulation, or interpreter adaptations such as explicitation, omission, and reframing that are likely to influence pragmatic interpretation by an international audience. The basic unit of analysis is the paired source language utterance and its corresponding interpreted output, examined within its immediate co-text and broader institutional context.

The analysis involves aligning source language utterances with their interpreted counterparts and examining each pair through the lens of Morris's sociosemiotic triad. Attention is paid to how referential meaning is rendered, how discourse structures are reorganised at the intra-lingual level, and how pragmatic effects such as stance, evaluation, and audience alignment are negotiated. Observed shifts are interpreted in relation to contextual constraints, including institutional norms, political sensitivity, genre conventions, and target audience expectations. Analytical observations are then synthesised across cases to identify recurring patterns of interpreters' subjectivity.

To ensure analytical transparency, all examples discussed in the paper are drawn from verifiable official data and are presented with both source language and target language texts. The theory-driven analytical framework and the explicit description of data sources and selection criteria allow the analysis to remain methodologically traceable and open to critical evaluation, ensuring that interpreting outputs are grounded in observable linguistic evidence rather than impressionistic judgment.

INTERPRETERS' SUBJECTIVITY IN DIPLOMATIC INTERPRETING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIOSEMIOTICS

Building upon the three-dimensional framework of sociosemiotics, diplomatic interpreting, as a critical nexus for cross-cultural dissemination of political discourse, reveals interpreters' subjectivity through dynamic adaptation to sociosemiotic meaning systems. The following case analysis examines instances from three dimensions—referential meaning precision, intra-lingual meaning restructuring, and pragmatic meaning contextualization—to systematically explore how interpreters demonstrate subjectivity in diplomatic interpreting.

RECREATION OF REFERENTIAL MEANING

Referential meaning concerns the objective world reflected by words, sentences, and texts, which is the "referent" of linguistic symbols. It constitutes the most fundamental meaning expressed in language communication and typically forms the core of linguistic interaction.

Example 1:
Source Language: 虽然现在我们创业的条件、创业的环境、创业的模式与过去发生了很大的变化，但是当时那种筚路蓝缕，披荆斩棘的创业精神是永远需要的。
Gloss: Although now our business conditions, business environment, business model and the past have changed a lot, that kind of entrepreneurial spirit is always needed.
Target Language: Although the conditions, environment and models of entrepreneurship are vastly different today, this kind of pioneering spirit of clearing obstacles and blazing new trails will always be needed.

In this example, the interpreter recognised that an international audience might not comprehend the referential meanings of the Chinese idioms "筚路蓝缕，披荆斩棘" (which literally refer to travelling on rough roads with shabby clothes and cutting through thorns and brambles). To convey the referential meaning effectively, the interpreter integrated these concepts into one universally recognisable concept: "pioneering spirit." The interpreter proactively chose accessible language to help the international audience intuitively understand the referential meaning behind this entrepreneurial ethos.

Additionally, the actual manifestation of this spirit was explicated through "clearing obstacles and blazing new trails." The phrase "clearing obstacles" corresponds to "披荆斩棘" (cutting through thorns), while "blazing new trails" echoes the sense of difficult pioneering conveyed in "筚路蓝缕" (travelling difficult paths). In this rendering, the interpreter abandoned literal interpretation of the idioms but preserved their core function: describing the arduous nature of entrepreneurial endeavours. This approach demonstrates the interpreter's profound understanding of the source speech's essence and flexibility in rendering it appropriately.

This example fully demonstrates interpreters' subjectivity when handling expressions with specific referential meanings. The interpreter was not constrained by literal translation but expressed the referential meanings based on a deep understanding of the original text and consideration for the target audience. The interpreter successfully balanced "faithfulness" and "flexibility," accurately conveying the referential meaning of the original text while accommodating the receptive capabilities of the target language audience.

Example 2:

Source Language: 说到这里，我就想起在上个世纪八九十年代，在我的老家浙江和江苏，那时候发展个体私营经济和乡镇企业的时候提出来的，打造的四千精神，就是走遍千山万水，想尽千方百计，说遍千言万语，思尽千辛万苦。

Gloss: Speaking of this, I recall the Four Thousand Spirits that were proposed and created in my hometowns of Zhejiang and Jiangsu in the 1980s and 1990s when the individual private economy and township enterprises were being developed. The spirit was to travel thousands of miles, try thousands of possible means, speak thousands of words, and think through thousands of hardships.

Target Language: Talking about this, I remember that back in the nineteen eighties and nineties, when my hometown, Zhejiang province and neighbouring Jiangsu province were developing the private economy and township enterprises, the local entrepreneurs cultivated a strong pioneering spirit to reach their goals. They were willing to explore all paths, go through all troubles, try all means and endure all hardships.

This example, translating "四千精神" (Four Thousand Spirit) as "They were willing to explore all paths, go through all troubles, try all means and endure all hardships," demonstrates interpreters' subjectivity at the referential meaning level. In the source text, "四千精神" consists of four phrases, each beginning with "千" (thousand), creating a parallel structure that emphasises extraordinary effort through numerical repetition. This numerical pattern holds significant cultural value in Chinese rhetoric, where "thousand" represents vastness or completeness. The interpreter strategically decided not to interpret the literal meaning of "四千" (Four Thousand) or preserve the identical parallel structure. Instead, they identified the core referential meaning—expressing comprehensive, exhaustive effort—and recreated this meaning through different linguistic mechanisms in English.

By repeatedly using "all" ("all paths," "all troubles," "all means," "all hardships"), the interpreter effectively conveyed the same sense of completeness and exhaustiveness that "千" (thousand) signifies in Chinese. This repetition maintains the parallel structure and rhythmic quality of the original while making it natural and impactful for the target audience.

This example shows the interpreter exercising subjectivity not by inventing new meaning but by finding functional equivalence, maintaining the core referential meaning while adapting the linguistic form to suit target language conventions and audience expectations.

RECREATION OF INTRA-LINGUAL MEANING

Intra-lingual meaning refers to meaning that emerges from relationships within a language system—the interrelationships between signs. It focuses on how signs generate meaning through contrast, combination, and differentiation within the language system. This type of meaning is based on the logical relationships within the sign system, reflecting the structural and systematic nature of linguistic signs.

Example 3:

Source Language: 人口红利既要看人口数量，更要看人口质量。既要看人口数，更要看人才数。

Gloss: The demographic dividend depends not only on the size of the population, but also on the quality of the population. It depends not only on the population, but also on the number of talents.

Target Language: When assessing demographic dividend, we should look at not just the quantity, but also the quality of the population. We should not just look at the sheer size of the population but also look at the scale of a high-calibre workforce.

This example illustrates interpreters' subjectivity at the intra-lingual level through structural transformation and conceptual reframing. The source text employs the Chinese parallel construction "既要…更要…"(both need to... and more importantly need to...), a rhetorical pattern commonly used in political discourse to create emphasis and establish hierarchical relations through repetition. In the English rendering, the interpreter introduces the framing phrase "When assessing demographic dividend," providing an explicit topical anchor that aligns with English discourse conventions and guides audience interpretation. Meanwhile, the Chinese parallel structure is reorganised as "not just… but also…," preserving functional parallelism while adapting the rhetorical hierarchy to target-language norms. Together, these adjustments reflect the interpreter's informed judgment in mediating structural and evaluative relations across linguistic systems.

The lexical transformation from "人才数" (number of talented people) to "scale of high calibre workforce" represents another significant exercise of interpreter agency. This shift accomplishes several objectives simultaneously: it moves from a direct numerical concept to a more abstract scalar measurement, which aligns with how demographic discussions typically occur in English economic discourse; it transforms the somewhat generic "talented people" into the more specific and professional "high caliber workforce," which better fits international economic analysis frameworks; and it demonstrates the interpreter's awareness of register expectations in international policy discussions.

This example demonstrates how intra-lingual meaning recreation involves not just structural transformation but conceptual bridging. The interpreter must simultaneously manage syntactic patterns, rhetorical effects, register appropriateness, and conceptual frameworks—all while maintaining the speaker's intended emphasis on human capital development over mere population size. This multifaceted decision-making process, accomplished in real-time, exemplifies the complex cognitive and cultural work that underlies interpreters' subjectivity in diplomatic contexts.

Example 4:

Source Language: 确实就业是民生之本，但要解决就业问题，我认为最根本的一条还是要靠发展经济。

Gloss: It is true that employment is fundamental to people's livelihood, but to solve the problem of employment, I think the most fundamental thing is to develop the economy.

Target Language: Indeed, employment is the cornerstone of people's livelihood, but ultimately, the solution to job creation lies in economic growth.

The Chinese expression "民生之本" (literally "the root of people's livelihood") is a phrase common in Chinese political discourse. Rather than translating it literally, the interpreter selected "cornerstone of people's livelihood," shifting to a metaphor that functions similarly in English political rhetoric, demonstrating cross-cultural metaphorical awareness and adaptation.

Additionally, the insertion of "ultimately" serves multiple functions: It creates textual cohesion between the two clauses, reinforces the logical conclusion being presented, and compensates for the Chinese emphasis marker "最根本的一条" ("the most fundamental aspect"). Regarding syntactic compression, the Chinese source contains the explicit subjective marker "我认为" ("I believe"), which the interpreter omitted. This reflects awareness that in English political discourse, particularly in interpretation settings, explicit markers of personal opinion are often dropped to create a more authoritative tone. In terms of lexical specification, the interpreter converted "就业问题" (employment issue) to "job creation," specifying the particular aspect of employment being discussed and demonstrating the interpreter's situational awareness of the broader context.

Example 4 illustrates how the interpreter actively reconfigures linguistic structures across language systems while maintaining semantic fidelity. The interpreter's choices reveal a deep understanding of rhetorical conventions in both languages and the ability to reconstruct meaning in ways that preserve intra-lingual meanings for the target audience. The subjectivity demonstrated here primarily enhances discourse cohesion and conceptual clarity while adapting cultural-linguistic metaphors for the target audience.

Example 5:
Source Language: 新一届政府的工作就是要把党中央的决策部署贯彻好、落实好，把二十大刻画的宏伟蓝图变成施工图。

Gloss: The work of the new government is to implement and carry out the decisions and plans of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China well, and turn the grand blueprint drawn by the 20th National Congress into a detailed construction plan.

Target Language: The task of the new government is to implement and deliver on the important decisions and plans laid out by the party's central committee, and turn the inspiring blueprint drawn up at the twentieth party congress into an implementation scheme.

The Chinese expression "宏伟蓝图变成施工图" (literally "turn the grand blueprint into a detailed construction plan") employs an extended architectural metaphor that carries both concrete imagery and political significance. This metaphor creates a progression from abstract planning to concrete implementation using construction terminology familiar in Chinese political discourse.

Rather than maintaining the full architectural metaphor chain, the interpreter made a strategic decision to partially preserve and partially transform the imagery. While "blueprint" was retained (maintaining the initial metaphor), "施工图" (construction/working drawing) was transformed into "implementation scheme." This choice reflects the interpreter's judgment that a direct translation of "construction drawing" might confuse English-speaking audiences unfamiliar with this specific Chinese political metaphor. The relationship between the government and party leadership—fundamental to Chinese political discourse—is preserved but presented in a more internationally palatable format. The interpreter thus balanced metaphorical vividness with communicative clarity, demonstrating his recreation of intra-lingual meaning by managing and transforming the metaphor.

Moreover, the interpreter made a significant syntactic adaptation by transforming the Chinese parallel structure "贯彻好、落实好" (implement well, carry out well) into "implement and deliver on." This consolidation demonstrates the interpreter's judgment about English rhetorical preferences, avoiding the repetitive emphasis common in Chinese political discourse while maintaining the sense of thorough execution.

In conclusion, Example 5 reveals how interpreters navigate complex political discourse that combines administrative precision with rhetorical flourish. The interpreter's subjectivity is evident not just in individual word choices but in the holistic management of political messaging and communicative effectiveness. This demonstrates the interpreter's role not as a passive language converter but as an active agent in intercultural political communication, making complex judgments about how to convey not just words but cultural concepts, political attitudes, and rhetorical effects across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

RECREATION OF PRAGMATIC MEANING

At the pragmatic meaning level, interpreters must consider the reading habits, socio-cultural background, and communicative needs of the target audience to ensure that the interpretation achieves the intended communicative effect in the target language context. This decision-making process demonstrates that interpreters are not merely mechanically replicating the original text but actively engaging in subjective expression and creative adaptation.

Example 6:
Source Language: 对中国经济的前景，我想用八个字来概括，叫做长风破浪，未来可期。对此，我充满信心。

Gloss: On the prospect of China's economy, I would like to use eight words to summarise, called the long wind and waves, the future is promising. I have full confidence in this.

Target Language: To sum up, I believe the Chinese economy will break through winds and waves and sail toward a brighter future. I have full confidence in that.

The Chinese expression "长风破浪，未来可期" (literally "long winds breaking waves, future full of hope") represents a culturally rich, poetic idiom that carries both literal meaning and emotional resonance. This phrase evokes classical Chinese literary imagery while conveying optimism and determination.

The interpreter demonstrated significant subjectivity in several aspects: First, in imagery preservation, rather than opting for a purely functional translation that might simply state "overcome difficulties and have a bright future," the interpreter chose to preserve the nautical metaphor with "break winds and waves and sail toward a brighter future," maintaining the poetic quality and vivid imagery of the original expression. Second, through cultural adaptation, the interpreter skillfully transformed a Chinese cultural reference into an equivalent metaphorical expression that resonates with English speakers. The nautical imagery of sailing through challenges was universally understood, making it accessible to the target audience while preserving the emotional impact of the source message. Most importantly, the interpreter maintained emotional tone and transferred pragmatic meaning to the audience. The phrases "brighter future" and "full confidence" mirror the positive emotional tone of "未来可期" and "充满信心," maintaining the speaker's resolute attitude. Not only are the confidence and optimism

in the original statement effectively conveyed in the interpreting output, but the interpreter also maintained an appropriately formal register for an international press conference while ensuring the language remains evocative rather than overly technical or bland.

This example reveals how the interpreter acts not merely as a linguistic conduit but as an intercultural mediator who actively engages with both the denotative content and connotative aspects of the message. By recreating the emotional attitude and cultural imagery in a form accessible to the target audience, the interpreter demonstrated significant subjectivity and cultural awareness in the pragmatic dimension of meaning.

Example 7:
Source Language: 两岸同胞是一家人。我们常说血浓于水，打断骨头连着筋的。
Gloss: The compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits are one family. We often say that blood is thicker than water and broken bones are still connected by tendons.
Target Language: Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Straits are members of one and the same family. We share an unbreakable bond of blood and a kinship.

In this example, the most significant manifestation of interpreters' subjectivity occurs at the pragmatic meaning level, where the interpreter navigated the politically and culturally sensitive topic of cross-strait relations. The interpreter faced the challenge of translating two Chinese idioms with deep cultural backgrounds that express familial bonds: "血浓于水" (blood is thicker than water) and "打断骨头连着筋" (broken bones remain connected by tendons). Rather than providing literal translations, the interpreter opted for functional equivalents that convey the emotional and political implications of these expressions to an international audience, translating them as "share an unbreakable bond of blood and a kinship."

Furthermore, the interpreter demonstrated acute awareness of the international political context surrounding Taiwan-mainland relations. The phrase "members of one and the same family" reinforces the One China Principle in diplomatic language suitable for international media, showing the interpreter's sensitivity to the pragmatic function of the statement. The Chinese concept of "同胞" (compatriots/people of the same ancestry) was carefully rendered as "Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan straits," which maintained the original's implication of shared identity while avoiding potentially contentious terminology.

This translation exemplifies interpreters' subjectivity at the pragmatic meaning level, as the interpreter navigates the complex political and cultural implications of cross-strait relations discourse. By making conscious choices about how to render culturally-loaded expressions and politically sensitive concepts, the interpreter becomes an active participant in the communication process, not merely transferring words but mediating meanings between different linguistic, cultural, and political frameworks. The translation successfully maintains the emotional appeal and political positioning of the original while adapting it to international diplomatic discourse conventions, demonstrating the interpreter's expertise not just in language but in intercultural and political communication.

Example 8:
Source Language: 我们一定会推动各级干部多到基层去调查研究，问计于民，问需于民，向群众学习，拜群众为师，帮助基层解决更多的实际问题。

Gloss: We will surely encourage officials at all levels to go to the grassroots level more often to conduct investigations and research, seek advice and needs from the people, learn from the masses, take them as teachers, and help the grassroots level solve more practical problems.

Target Language: We will encourage government officials at all levels to engage more with the local communities to know about what the people need and accept their opinions on the work of the government. They need to learn from the people, take people as their teachers, and help the people solve their actual problems.

This example presents a rich illustration of how interpreters navigate culturally specific political discourse, particularly the Chinese concept of the "mass line" (群众路线) that emphasises close connections between officials and citizens. The source text employs distinctively Chinese rhetorical patterns and ideologically charged terminology that require sophisticated cultural mediation.

The interpreter's treatment of culturally loaded terms reveals significant subjectivity in cross-cultural political communication. Most notably, "基层" (grassroots level) undergoes transformation into "local communities," a term that resonates more naturally with Western democratic discourse. Similarly, the politically charged term "群众" (the masses) is consistently rendered as "the people," effectively neutralising its socialist connotations while preserving its democratic essence. This systematic terminology shift demonstrates the interpreter's acute awareness of how political language travels across ideological boundaries.

Furthermore, the interpreter makes strategic decisions about rhetorical structure that reflect a deep understanding of both source and target communication norms. The parallel four-character phrases "问计于民，问需于民" (seek advice from the people, seek needs from the people), which create emphasis through repetition in Chinese political rhetoric, are consolidated into the more streamlined "know about what the people need and accept their opinions." This compression eliminates what might be perceived as redundancy in English while preserving the core message of governmental responsiveness. Additionally, the interpreter enhances clarity by adding "on the work of the government," an explanatory element absent from the source that ensures international audiences understand the specific context of citizen input.

The expression "拜群众为师"(take people as teachers) contains the verb "拜" (worship/pay respects), which carries religious or reverential connotations that might seem excessive to Western audiences. By rendering this as "take people as their teachers," the interpreter maintains the educational metaphor while calibrating the emotional intensity to suit the target audience's expectations. This modulation extends to verb choices throughout the passage, where "推动" (push/promote) becomes "encourage," presenting governmental action as facilitative rather than directive—a subtle but significant shift that aligns with Western democratic sensibilities.

This example thus powerfully demonstrates how political interpretation involves far more than linguistic conversion. Instead, it requires interpreters to function as cultural mediators who must instantly assess which elements of political discourse can travel across cultural boundaries unchanged and which need explanation or modulation. The interpreter's subjectivity manifests in informed judgments about how to maintain communicative effectiveness and political appropriateness while bridging fundamentally different ways of conceptualising and discussing governance.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined interpreters' subjectivity in diplomatic consecutive interpreting through the lens of Morris's sociosemiotic framework, offering a nuanced understanding of how meaning is negotiated across referential, intra-lingual, and pragmatic dimensions. By analysing the interpreting practices during Premier Li Qiang's 2023 press conference, it becomes evident that diplomatic interpreters are not merely passive transmitters of language but active agents shaping cross-cultural political communication.

The findings underscore the theoretical value of adopting a sociosemiotic perspective to explore interpreter agency. At the referential level, interpreters engaged in cultural transcoding by making strategic decisions about how to render Chinese idioms and political concepts in ways that balance accuracy and accessibility. In the intra-lingual dimension, they demonstrated sophisticated discourse restructuring, navigating the challenges of transferring Chinese parallel structures into rhetorically suitable English equivalents while also adapting metaphorical systems. Most significantly, the pragmatic dimension illuminated interpreters' roles as cultural-political mediators. Their choices reflected an acute sensitivity to emotional tone, ideological alignment, and the diplomatic appropriateness required in high-stakes international settings.

These theoretical insights carry important practical implications for interpreter training. To cultivate the competencies observed in this study, training programs should place greater emphasis on enhancing cultural decoding abilities, especially in handling metaphor and political symbolism. They should also integrate exercises in discourse restructuring that address the asymmetry between Chinese and English rhetorical norms. Moreover, interpreters must be equipped to navigate politically sensitive language through role-play simulations and case-based discussions that promote pragmatic awareness and critical thinking.

Beyond its practical relevance, this research contributes to the broader field of interpreting studies in several key ways. It illustrates that interpreter agency in diplomatic settings is not confined to any single linguistic level, but rather emerges through the dynamic and simultaneous negotiation of meaning across all semiotic dimensions. It also highlights how political and ideological considerations inform linguistic choices at every level, from lexical selection to discourse organisation. In doing so, the study challenges the notion of interpreter neutrality, proposing instead that interpreters' subjectivity reflects informed professional judgment essential for successful cross-cultural communication.

Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. Its focus on a single press conference involving Chinese-English consecutive interpreting constrains the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope by examining different language pairs, especially those with distinct power dynamics, or by comparing interpreting strategies in simultaneous and consecutive modes. Additionally, as interpreting increasingly takes place on remote and AI-assisted platforms, it is important to explore how technology shapes interpreter agency. Longitudinal research could also provide insights into how individual interpreters' strategies and subjectivities evolve over time.

In sum, this study affirms that diplomatic interpreting is a complex act of intercultural mediation, where interpreters' subjective choices are not deviations from objectivity, but essential elements of their professional competence, which can enhance mutual understanding and sustain the delicate balance of diplomatic discourse. This study reconceptualises interpreters' subjectivity not as an individual psychological disposition, but as a context-sensitive, semiotically mediated professional practice enacted through patterned adaptations across referential, intra-lingual, and

pragmatic dimensions under institutional constraints. As global communication becomes more nuanced and politically sensitive, recognising and nurturing interpreters' agency remains crucial to fostering constructive international dialogue in our interconnected world.

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