

THE PARTICIPATORY ROLE OF NON-PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS: A CASE IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Abstract

The abstract notions of visibility and participation are often used to describe the interpreter's role. The visibility and participation are seen as a matter of degree, assuming that an interpreter may be more or less visible or involved depending on a number of considerations, including the mode and domain of interpreting as well as the interpreter's professional status. Particularly inspired by Goffman's participatory framework and Bourdieu's sociological theory on the whole set of social relations — political, economic, and cultural, the author tries to explore four authentic interpreting cases conducted by non-professional interpreters in English-Chinese educational settings in order to reveal the roles of the ad hoc interpreters and their visibility or active participation in the communicative events. Through detailed critical discourse analysis of authentic interpreting transcripts, it could be concluded that the non-professional interpreters in some educational settings participate more in the communicative events due to their strong academic background and the ad hoc status. Some social factors leading to the involvements are revealed, such as pronoun shifts and cultural capital etc.

Keywords: participatory role, non-professional, educational settings, cultural capital.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent development of interpreting studies, the role of interpreters has been expanded from the traditional invisible language conduit into an active participant mediating and coordinating the interpreted communicative event, in particular with the shift of the focus from conference interpreting to community interpreting. The abstract notions of visibility (e.g. Angelelli, 2004) and participation are often used to describe the interpreter's role, sometimes in a binary fashion, contrasting the idealized, or naive, assumption of an interpreter's invisibility, "ghost" role. In more practical approaches, visibility and participation are seen in a matter of degree, and it is assumed that an interpreter may be more or less visible or involved depending on a number of factors, including the mode, setting, and domain of interpreting as well as the interpreter's professional status.

Settings as the "social context of interaction" (Pöchhacker, 2004, p.13) not only constitute the social context of professional interpreting, but also place certain constraints on interpreting performance. "The educational setting" in this study is defined as a general working environment of interpreter-mediated lectures or workshops on a technical or academic subjects held in universities, hospitals and research institutes etc., where non-professional interpreters are used more often for reasons such as the lack of sufficient budget to hire the professional ones or the handy supply of internal bilinguals.

This paper is aimed at exploring four authentic interpreting cases involving non-professional interpreters in English-Chinese educational settings and analyse the participatory role of the ad hoc interpreters and their active participation in the communicative events based on Goffman's participatory framework and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital.

During the interaction, interlocutors bring their own background, such as knowledge, beliefs and views on interpersonal factors. The interpreters are of no exception, bringing their own set of beliefs and views in the participation in the interaction. The assumption of this research is that with the rich cultural capital, the non-professional interpreters in the educational settings are more likely to participate in the interaction. And the more visible participation, on the other hand, further strengthens their non-professional status. Through detailed critical discourse analysis of the authentic interpreting transcripts, it is revealed that the ad hoc non-professionals in the discussion play a more participatory role in the communication, contributing their own discourses to the interaction.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Non-professional interpreting has not been given much attention since recently. Non-professional or amateur interpreting can mean both “not for-payment performed interpreting services and interpreting providers having no professional training for the task”. (Wadensjö, 2007) In fact, non-professional translators and interpreters have played a very important role in facilitating economic, commercial, cultural and religious exchanges throughout history (Pym, 2000) Harris

(1977) proposed the notion of “natural translation” as early as 1977. Many studies since then have approached the non-professional interpreting as a complex language brokering activity in which bilinguals (often children) interpret for non-bilinguals (usually adults) in institutional settings (Shannon, 1990; Tse, 1995, 1996; Valdés, 2003). Most language brokering discussions focus on bilingual children or adolescents brokering between language minority group ‘insiders’ and majority group ‘outsiders’, finding that child language brokers have more power and responsibilities than children are traditionally believed to have, and that brokers become bicultural to adapt to ‘competing demands of two cultural worlds’ (Weisskirch and Alva, 2002, p.2). Non-professional interpreting, however, is more than bilingual children’s responsibility. Gideon Toury (1986) coined another term “native translation” to refer to those translations done by native translators who pick up behaviors and skills unconsciously from their cultural environment. They build up their translation competence by internalizing the translation strategies and skills in the process of practice. If we look at the history of interpreting, many an interpreter started the profession on the ad hoc basis without formal training. They established the professional status through on-job learning in the multi-language working environment such as diplomatic, economic and other community settings.

Similarly, some scholars or students work as interpreters on voluntary or ad hoc bases in the educational settings. Some event organizers prefer internal bilinguals in their own institutions without taking the time or efforts to find or interview the external professional interpreters. Others cannot afford the expensive external professionals under the budgetary

constraints. More importantly, they trust the internal bilinguals more since the faculty members or graduate students usually possess thematic knowledge on the communication topic and some even are the experts in the field of discussion. It is the rich background knowledge and community connections of those non-professional interpreters that justify their ad hoc position as an interpreter and facilitate their performance as well.

The notion of “cultural capital” was proposed by Bourdieu as a social relation within a system of exchange (Bourdieu, 1986, p.47). Bourdieu introduces the concept of capital in all its forms to account for the structure and functioning of the social world. Apart from the economic capital recognized by the economic theory, cultural capital is made of forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which gives them a higher status in society. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital expresses itself in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital consists of both the consciously acquired and the passively "inherited" properties of one's self. Cultural capital is not transmissible instantaneously like a gift or bequest; rather, it is acquired over time as it is expressed in the form of one's own habitus (character and way of thinking). Linguistic capital, defined as “the mastery of and relation to language” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.114), can be understood as a form of embodied cultural capital in which it represents a means of communication and self-presentation acquired from one's surrounding culture. Objectified cultural capital consists of physical objects that are owned, such as scientific instruments or works of art. Institutionalized cultural capital consists of institutional recognition, most often in the form of academic

credentials or qualifications, of the cultural capital held by an individual.

The concept of cultural capital is relevant to the discussion of the non-professional interpreters in educational settings, because those bilinguals are in possession of not only the language capital needed for the mediation, but also the intangible cultural capital embodied in various forms of certificates, professional titles or actual recognitions by the organizers and the audience. The rich cultural capital not only justifies the non-professional interpreters to take the interpreting job, but also enhances the interpreting competence to some extent, resulting in better performance and more observed participation in the non-professional interpreting.

Wadensjö (1998) investigation on dialogue interpreting, based on Goffman's (1981) model of the "participation framework" concludes that "in dialogue interpreting, the translating and coordinating aspects are simultaneously present, and the one does not exclude the other" (Wadensjö, 1998, p.105). Her "talk as activity" and "talk as text" are not a contradictory but a complementary way of conceptualizing the interpreter's activity. The presence of the interpreter makes him/her a co-creator of discourse, influencing the interactive sense-making of the primary parties. This conclusion has been echoed by other researches such as Angelelli (2003, 2004), who calls the neutral and invisible role of the interpreter into question. Her studies also show that interpreter's perceptions of their roles are influenced by the settings in which they work, as well as by individual social factors, such as age, education and income etc. (Angelelli, 2004, p.83) It may be wise to call for the possible distinction of professional cross-culture mediation

from that of professional interpreting in community-based settings. What is more likely, however, is the expected coexistence of the two, “side by side, in a constructive, complementary relationship, and even in the same person, provided that the dually qualified professional and his or her clients are aware that the service provided in a given interaction is either interpreting or mediation”. (Pöchhacker, 2008, p.24)

3. THIS STUDY

This study is mainly built upon the analysis of the transcripts of 4 video-taped interpreter-mediated lectures in the educational setting. Data are selected from 4 authentic workshops with a total length of about 10 hours. The languages investigated in the research are English and Chinese. The communicative events are all mediated in the consecutive mode by the non-professional interpreters from English to Chinese, that is B language to A language.

Case 1 is a presentation on the Parkinson therapies given by an Austrian professor and doctor to a group of Chinese doctors from neurology departments. The interpreter is a Chinese doctor in the same field from a Beijing hospital. The other three cases are all in universities. The lecture in case 2 is on the cultural aspect of American country music by a US professional to Chinese graduate students. The interpreter is a professor on US music industry and communications from a Chinese university, Case 3 is a lecture on the topic of digitalization in the globalized media by a British professor. The interpreter is a young scholar from a research institute and former PhD candidate on communications in a Canadian university. Case 4 is a lecture given by a British professor on

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the topic of newspaper paywalls and other business models. The interpreter is a graduate student from a Chinese school of journalism, who just returned from the US and is the only female interpreter in this study. (see table 1)

Table 1. Interpreters in the study

| Case | Gender | Age | Past experience* |
|------|--------|-----|------------------|
| 1 | M | 43 | 5-10 |
| 2 | M | 37 | 5-10 |
| 3 | M | 31 | 1- 5 |
| 4 | F | 25 | 0 |

* *The number of interpreting tasks in the past.*

The interpreters in the study are all non-professional interpreters without any formal translation or interpreting training. As scholars or students in their own academic fields, they work as interpreters voluntarily on the ad hoc basis with little interpreting experience on similar settings. Interestingly, the organizer introduced two of them as assistants to the speaker or co-lecturers rather than interpreters. And they did not claim themselves to be interpreters either.

All the cases analysed in this study show a similar pattern of communication. There were slide presentations on the screen for both the audience and the interpreters. The intervals for consecutive interpreting range from 30 seconds to 3 minutes and the four interpreters all took notes while they listened to

the speech and used them as reference in their deliveries. The interpreters had good views of both the speaker and the audience.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Cultural and social capital

One feature of the non-professional interpreters in the study is that they are in possession of sufficient cultural and social capital, which grants them power and privilege to add their own opinions or even make comments in their own names in the interaction.

The interpreting competence consists of three essential and complementary elements: skills, knowledge and experience. Any advantages in one of them could be used as compensation for the lack of the others. For example, experienced professional interpreters are able to fulfill the interpreting task on a new topic, because the insufficient subject knowledge could be complemented to some extent, by their strong interpreting skills and rich experiences. Similarly, the rich cultural capital of the non-professional interpreter in the study can boost interpreting competence, compensating for the lack of the interpreting skills and experience. It also explains why some non-professional interpreters outperform the otherwise professional interpreters in certain cases.

Example 1 (Case 3)

(S) The Internet supports the horizontal exchanges between participants who interact with the basis of peer to peer equality.

(I) 因特网打破了垂直交流的模式，建立横向交际，他们考虑了交流者的公正和平等。我不知道能不能补充几句。因为我学的是传播政治经济学，大家都读过 Mosco 的那本书上的三化过程，所谓的 commercialization, structurization and spacialization. 商品化，结构化和空间化。刚才很多默多克教授讲的是对空间化的一个诠释。

(The Internet breaks the vertical communication and establishes horizontal exchanges. It shows the justice and equality of the participants. I want to add something more here. I am doing some research on the political economy of communications and I believe most of you have read about the commercialization, structurization and spacialization proposed by Professor Mosco. Professor Murdock just illustrated the concept of spacializaiton.)

The interpreter in Example 1 not only interprets what the speaker says, but also associates the key points in the speech with his understanding of the speech. Equipped with rich cultural capital, he acts as a co-lecturer instead of a mere interpreter and makes himself more visible in the communication event.

Example 2 (Case 4)

(S) From that review, this is the list of dopamine drugs, which clearly show efficacy in controlling the motor symptoms in mono therapy based on high quality randomized control clinic trials. That is Levo Dopa, a list of agonists and two MAO-B-Inhibitors.

(I) 这些药呢都列在这了。部分药物我们国家都已经有了。根据控制运动方面的效果来看呢, 顺序就是按照这个来的, 应该是左旋多巴好于下面的, 它好于它。

(These drugs are all listed here. Some of them are available here in our country. They are ranked according to the efficacy in controlling the motor symptoms. Levo Dopa is the best and followed by these two types.)

Like the interpreter in Example 1, the interpreter in Example 2 adds something of his own by saying that “some of them are available here in our country”. The addition comes from his knowledge in the medical field and it helps him to establish a kind of direct emotional connection with the audience. Since most of the audience are doctors from neurology departments, they probably knew the fact that some of the listed drugs have already been used here in China. The interpreter’s own discourse serves as a reminder of his medical background and professional status in the medical field so that he would not be taken merely as an interpreter.

The cultural capital of those non-professional interpreters not only originated from the background information related to the discussion subject, but also from their personal ties with the primary interlocutors. As faculty members, doctors or researchers, those bilinguals in the discussion enjoy relatively higher social esteem than the professional interpreters otherwise. In most cases, the non-professional interpreters in the educational setting are more ready to be addressed by their own professional titles of “professor” or “doctor” instead of “Mr. or Ms. Interpreter”. Their institutional capital makes it easier for them to establish connections with both the speakers

and the audience. Some non-professional interpreters in the study even state in the very first place that they are the co-speaker instead of the interpreter. However, the reluctance to be perceived as an interpreter enhances the ad hoc or voluntary status of those non-professional internal bilinguals.

It can be concluded that the cultural capital of the non-professional interpreters, on one hand, justifies their interpreting activities and builds up the interpreting competence; on the other hand, it strengthens their non-professional proposition by emphasizing more on their knowledge ownership.

The rich cultural and social capital help improve the performance, compensating for the lack of interpreting skills and experiences. The same cultural capital however, could also be a source of pressure for the non-professional interpreters. They are more vulnerable to the Goffman's "face threatening factors" since the stakes are much higher if they make mistakes in the interpreting due to their high social status. The poor performance might lead to losing trust or reputation damages. Therefore, the non-professional interpreters in the educational settings care more about their faces and try the best to save them. A number of examples are observed in this study.

Example 3 (Case 3)

(S) *When Marx published the Critique series, the first volume was subtitled "Critique of Political Economy". What he is criticizing is this free market.*

(I) 当马克思写他的手稿的时候，他就指出了自由市场的这种不平衡性。

(When Marx wrote his manual script, he pointed out the imbalance of the free market.)

The interpreter in Example 3 fails to catch or remember the name of the book mentioned by the speaker. He uses the general term “manual script” to refer to the book instead. It is a good face-saving strategy to use a general term to replace a specific one in interpreting.

Example 4 (Case 1)

(S) *This man has to stop working. He is a priest and this dyskinesia affected his face area and made him grim and nasty looking, particularly when he is performing motor acts. His facial looking twisted even worse when he moves his hands. That's very embarrassing in the public and he has to stop being in the public.*

(I) 那么这个少动是面部表情，如果这个病人做运动的话，这个面部表情就更少动。有时就像是做鬼脸似的。

(This dyskinesia affects his facial expression. If the patient moves, the facial expression is even worse and sometimes it looks like that he makes faces.)

In Example 4, we could see that this non-professional interpreter is challenged by the discourse outside of his professional domain. The word “priest” clearly causes some trouble for him in the interpretation. He successfully preserves

his face in front of the audience, omitting the story related to “priest”, without asking the speaker for further clarification.

While the cultural and social capital promotes the understanding and improves the overall delivery, giving the non-professional interpreters the privilege to actively participate in the interaction, it brings about face-threatening pressures. Therefore, the non-professional interpreters need to work harder to save their faces.

4.2. Shifts of pronouns

The non-professional interpreters are more likely to play multiple roles in oral encounters. Goffman's notion of “participation framework” is a means of analysing the various interactional roles played by different people of a group in a particular place. Each individual holds a particular participation status in the communication and no one is just a simple speaker or hearer. The participation of any interlocutor could be manifested through the use of pronouns in the discourse. Davies and Harré (1990) see the pronoun use as a clue of the person's identity construction and representation in the interaction, which could be a useful perspective to analyse the interpreter's role. In his discussion of the norms of professional interpreting, Harris points out that using first person pronouns to refer to interpreters themselves and second person pronouns to refer to the recipient of the target utterance, while referring to all other participants, including the source speaker and the source addressee, with third person pronouns, if he or she is not identical to the addressee of the target utterance, is more commonly found in the performance of non-professional than professional interpreters (Harris, 1990, p.115-

116). Therefore, the proper use of personal pronouns could serve as a criterion to measure the professionalism of interpreting.

We could find evidence to support Harris' argument from the case studies. The graduate student in case 4 uses the third personal pronoun consistently, starting with "he said..." in all the interpretation segments. Though the other three interpreters in the study use the first pronoun mostly to refer to the speaker, some shifts to the third pronouns are also observed.

Example 5. (Case 4)

(S) *This is the most viable mode at the moment and it is the mode most newspapers are considering, but it is not clear yet it will be successful. In my opinion, it won't be successful.*

(I) 他说这种特殊的付费模式能不能成功还真的不知道，而且他个人觉得是不会成功的。

(**He said** *this special pay mode could be successful or not, it is not known yet. And personally, he doesn't think it can be successful.*)

Example 6. (Case 4)

(S) *So the paid-by-article may be possible but newspapers go to the web seeing most of their revenue being taken away by the person who actually distributes the news or deals with the financial transaction.*

(I) Donny 教授就说了在这个模式下，这些中介者，分配者和传播者，他们在这个过程中获得就巨大的利益。

(Professor Donny said that under this model, these middlemen, distributors and communicators got huge profits.)

In the two examples, the interpreter uses the third pronoun or the title to refer to the speaker, refusing to be identified with the speaker by using the first pronoun in interpreting. In the interview, she explains that it was her first time to interpret in such a formal occasion, and she thought it would be more appropriate to use the third personal pronoun to refer to the speaker so that the accountability of what she said would be on the speaker's side rather than on hers. The use of the indirect speech could send a clear signal to the audience that whatever she said is just a representation of what the speaker said rather than her own ideas. In addition, she thinks it would be better to use the third personal pronoun to refer to a male speaker from the tongue of a female interpreter to avoid the embarrassment.

The use of the third personal pronouns is also found in other cases, though not as consistently as in Case 4.

Example 7 (Case 1)

(S)We have more or less, in my country, have stopped using anti-cholinergic because of their poor benefit-side effect ratio. For young patients with tremor, we may still use it as an early stage therapy.

(I)在奥地利，在他们国家的话呢，他们考虑抗胆碱类药物的正作用和副作用。他认为副作用大于正作用所以基本不

再用了。但对于仅仅有震颤的患者的话，他还是同意可以用的。

(*In Austria, in his country, they consider the positive and side effects of anti-cholinergic. And he thinks the side effect overwhelms the positive effect. But for the patients with only motor symptoms, he thinks that this drug can still be used.*)

The interpreter in Case 1 uses the first pronoun with just few exceptions such as in Example 7. When he is asked why he uses the third pronoun in this example. The interpreter admits that he would be embarrassed if he had used the first pronoun to identify himself with the speaker's nationality. Like the gender issue in the case of the female interpreter, the interpreter in this example shows his reluctance to use the first pronoun to avoid awkwardness too, which however, demonstrates the lack of professionalism in interpreting.

More interestingly, the shifts of the personal pronouns are observed in the interpretation in the same chunking.

Example 8 (Case 1)

(S) *So let me finish because I am afraid that I have used up my time. I will summarize the situations for dopamine agonists in PD therapy and we can discuss other interventions that we can use. For the agonist, there are very convincing evidences showing that they can delay motor complications for years. Then they can delay the use of levo dopa and that's why they can delay the motor complications. Pramipexole was chosen to reduce depressive symptoms and generally those agents are very tolerated.*

(I) 那在我结束讲演的时候，让我再把讲的内容回顾一下。左旋多巴治疗帕金森不能够推迟运动并发症的发生，也不能延缓疾病的进展。他认为呢，多巴胺受体激动剂在这方面能延缓和推迟运动并发症的发生。它是一个不错的药，副作用较小而且容易耐受。

(Before I finish, I will recap what I have talked. Levo dopa cannot delay the motor complications or the progress of the illness. He thinks that the agonist can delay the motor complications. It is a good drug with little side effect and good tolerance.)

In this example, we could see the shift from the first to the third personal pronoun within one chunking of interpretation. The interpreter starts with the first pronoun, but he shifts to the third pronoun in the middle of the discourse.

The pronouns shift also occurs when the interpreter wants to express his/her own opinion in the middle of interpreting.

Example 9 (Case 3)

(S) Let me give you some practical examples of these levels of potential control. At the level of infrastructure, two big debates. One is about net neutrality and another is cloud computing. At the level of code, it is about applications. While at the level of content, huge international debate, about intellectual property, about advertising, most importantly about big data.

(I) 下面，我会就每一个控制方面详细给大家介绍一下。在基础设施层面，就像大家幻灯片上看到的一样，有两个非

常重要的内容，一个是关于网络中立性的探讨，另一个是关于云计算的探讨。代码方面，非常重要的是他会讨论一下手机的应用软件。在内容方面讲一下知识产权，广告和大数据。我个人比较期望他这个广告怎么讲，因为广告是政治经济传播学的核心。

(Next, I will explain each control in details. At the level of infrastructure, as you see in the slide, two big parts. One is the discussion about net neutrality and another is about cloud computing. At the level of code, I will talk about the applications in the mobile phone. And at the level of content, he will talk about intellectual property, about advertising and Big data. I am personally interested in the advertisement part, since it is the core of political economic communication studies.)

The interpreter shifts from the speaker's "I" to the interpreter's "I". With the change of footing, his role in the participation framework has also been shifted from talking as a speaker to talking as an independent interlocutor. The visibility of the non-professional interpreter was enhanced as the interpreter inserts his own discourse by using the first personal pronoun.

The non-professional interpreters in the study use the third personal pronouns more frequently, revealing their visibility and participation. The use of third personal pronoun gives them power and space to express themselves and cope with the embarrassment in cases of gender or other identity related issues. In the first place, the interpreters use the third pronoun to refuse to be identified with the speakers. They are not invisible language conduit, as they have their own stance in the discussion even though it is not explicitly stated. Secondly,

they reserve the first pronoun for themselves to speak or make comments during the interpretation. They perceive themselves not only as an “interpreter”, but also as a helper or mediator in the interaction.

5. CONCLUSION

This research takes an interdisciplinary approach to incorporate non-professional interpreting studies into the social linguistics framework. The findings suggest that the non-professional interpreters in the educational settings play multiple roles and they are more actively involved in the communicative events than the professional ones. Their role as interpreters is affected by backgrounds, psychological and behavioral factors. They are not only in the middle between two languages but also serve as the co-interlocutor, contributing their own discourses to the interaction. In another word, the non-professional interpreters are more likely to be viewed as a language and cultural mediator rather than the traditional role of a neutral conduit or an invisible ghost behind the scene.

The cultural capital is essential to build the role of interpreters. On one hand, the rich cultural capital may bring about more “text ownership” and higher interpreter’s involvement, which in turn further highlights their non-professional status. On the other hand, the cultural capital can be a source of pressure due to the higher stakes involved in the more socially interactive setting. Rich cultural capital could be exchanged to interpreting capability, compensating for the lack of interpreting skills and experiences. This exchange of capitals could be enlightening to the interpreting training. Students should be encouraged to acquire more cultural capital by widening their world

knowledge and deepening their understanding of some general fields.

As it is mentioned above, most of the non-professional interpreting studies focus on bilingual children or volunteers in health or other public settings. The non-professional interpreters in this study are more like conference interpreters. Therefore, this study may be supplementary to the existing non-professional interpreting studies at the community level and enhance the understanding of the participatory roles of interpreters as well.

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