

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Interpreter's Mediation of Presuppositions and the Persuasive Force in Chinese Political Press Conferences: a Critical Discourse Study

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### Abstract

Presuppositions are used as a useful strategic tool to increase the persuasive force in political communication. This study explores how interpreters mediate presuppositions and the way that consequential illocutionary forces contribute to the persuasive force of journalists' questions and the premier's responses at the 2011 Chinese Premier's Press Conference. It reveals that through the interpreter's mediation of presuppositional triggers, the overall persuasive force of the interpreted discourse is augmented and thus influences the audience in an implicit way. More specifically, journalists' questioning force is justified through focusing on established facts rather than on confrontation and challenging stance, or the challenging force is reduced to a request for information; the assertive force in answers gets mitigated to avoid absoluteness, thus fostering a cooperative atmosphere for dialogic exchanges and being more persuasive; the persuasive force increases through perspective change or explicated contextual information. The critical discourse study argues that in political communication interpreters' mediation is purposeful, and the strategic language choice aligns with their ideological stances and the temporal constraints resulting from interpreting and spontaneity of Q&A form of communication. This study offers insights into the ways that interpreters help to shape political dialogues between the authority and the international public. The findings contribute to the under-investigated intersection of interpreting studies, pragmatics, (critical) discourse analysis, (international) political communication, and to some extent, answers the recent call for an "outward turn" in interpreting studies.

**Keywords:** interpreter's mediation, presuppositions, persuasive force, Chinese political press conferences, critical discourse analysis



## 1. Introduction

This paper examines how interpreters mediate the persuasive force performed by presuppositions in the Chinese Premiers' Press Conference (hereafter as the CPPC). In pragmatics, presupposed information is presented as something already shared, and usually not stated but encoded in a more 'background' way in a discursive context (Seuren, 2006; Vallauri, 2021), thus less likely to be questioned or challenged than overtly asserted information, especially in rapid language processing. Presuppositions are used for certain purposes such as shaping or reinforcing positions. As a powerful means of implicit persuasion, they are widely adopted in political communication. As any political communication is essentially of a persuasive nature (Wring, 2001; Lane & Pritzker, 2018), nonetheless, studies on the persuasive purposes of presuppositional use are mainly in advertisements and media reports.

Political press conferences featuring Q&A exchanges are an example where rapid information processing occurs. They contribute to political transparency and accountability by facilitating an open dialogue between the government and the public (Yu, 2020), with officials and journalists as their respective spokespersons. Normally, journalists seek to gather accurate and reliable facts about certain policies or events, or ask for the government's stance or positions, resulting in answers with an inherent expected force of being informative or persuasive, to a varying degree. The questioning force may increase to become challenging if sensitive topics are involved, resulting in officials being possibly evasive (Bhatia, 2006; Li et al., 2023). When certain information is presupposed in journalists' questions or speakers' answers, implicit meanings arise. Listeners need to infer the presupposed knowledge necessary to make sense of these implications, thus contributing to the questioning, informative, assertive or persuasive force.

In the context of interpreter-mediated press conferences oriented towards international audiences, how interpreters convey the implicit meaning and in turn the underlying persuasive force becomes particularly significant for the efficacy of communication between politicians and their international audiences. Previous studies examined mostly ideological positions and the influence of interpreters (Gu, 2019, 2022; Gu & Wang, 2021; Zhang, 2021). For example, Li et al. (2023) discuss presuppositions as a linguistic strategy used by officials and journalists to subtly influence their narrative. They examine the role of interpreters during press conferences, noting that speakers may directly refer to interpreters in ways that bring them into the spotlight. This can happen when officials are questioned on sensitive topics, and their responses indirectly highlight the interpreter's role in facilitating communication.

However, as Gu and Wang (2024) have argued that current studies have paid insufficient attention to the relationship between interpreting and the broader "external" socio-political impact, therefore, they call for considering interpreting as an active force in shaping global communication and power dynamics and advocate an "outward turn" for interpreting studies. In this study, we take a similar view and consider the interpreter's mediation as an essential link in China's international communication in terms of transmitting the persuasive force. This case analysis looks into the 2011 CPPC and compares the original and the interpreted discourse by drawing on linguistic notions/means in pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). At the end of 2010, China released its first national-level long-term policy design post-2008 global financial crisis, so the 2011 CPPC offers an opportunity for



international journalists to ask questions, among others, on China's geopolitical (re)positioning, which is a good case for us to look into political persuasion. The study aims to reveal the way that the interpreter mediates presuppositions and how the consequential illocutionary forces contribute to the overall discursive persuasive force of the political communication between political authorities in the face of the international public.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pragmatic presuppositions and their illocutionary forces

Studies on presuppositions in translation and interpreting studies mainly take them as background information and have focused more on explicitation phenomena (Sharma et al., 2024; Murtisari, 2016). As a semantic property of a sentence, presuppositions make the sentence fit for use in certain contexts and unfit for use in others (Seuren, 2006). A pragmatic understanding of presuppositions concerns relations between a form of expression and an implicit meaning assigned by the speaker and can be reached through the process of pragmatic inference by taking contextual information into account (Verschueren, 1999; Cimmino et al., 2023). Presuppositions being part of the sentence meaning that are recognized as known or taken for granted pose problems in cross-cultural communication when background contextual information is not shared by speakers and audiences who are from different cultures.

From a rhetorical perspective, presuppositions carry a persuasive force. According to Aristotle's rhetorical framework, persuasion can be achieved by means of resorting to ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic) (Springston et al., 2010). Presuppositions can thus help to realize a persuasive force by resorting to the above three means respectively, through reinforcing the perceived authority of a speaker, evoking emotions by framing a discourse with shared beliefs, or contributing to logical argumentation by embedding unstated premises. Presuppositions have proven effective in social media, advertisements, and media reports. Bouso (2013) claims that in advertisements, presuppositions enhance the conciseness of advertising language and its persuasive force. Similarly, Bonyadi & Samuel (2011) investigate the role of presuppositions in newspaper editorials and conclude that it is of special importance that editorial writers tend to make use of presuppositions and their persuasive force to establish either a favourable or unfavourable bias throughout the text to manipulate their readers' opinions. Thoma et al. (2023) provide experimental evidence that presuppositions can be more persuasive than direct assertions in advertisements and political statements. When background assumptions are triggered instead of being explicitly mentioned in the discourse and need to be accepted by the recipient as true information, and if a presupposition is new to the recipients and they are willing to adapt, then presuppositions can be persuasive. Xu & Lams (2023) investigate the use of presuppositions in the Chinese language news reports on 2018 China-US trade conflicts and reveal its powerful influence on the audience perception. They find that presuppositions can have the functions of "keep[ing] the message concise and hav[ing] an ideological effect in media discourse" (p. 97), specifically, they have identified certain presupposition-triggering devices unique in the Chinese language.



However, although presuppositions used for persuasive purposes have been heavily researched in advertisements and media reports, such research in political communication is surprisingly scant. Among the limited number of studies devoted to presuppositions in political exchanges, Zhi (2010) takes a pragmatic view on presuppositions and looks into the discursive power, manipulation, and ideology that the presuppositions carry in the US and British presidential inaugural speeches, US presidential debates, and Chinese and American press briefings. He systematically categorizes presuppositions at different linguistic and semantic layers and makes connections between the markers and the political functions that they play. Garassino et al. (2022) have analysed some implicit strategies in political communication in a corpus of British and Italian tweets, and find that politicians use presuppositions that allow certain information to be accepted by recipients without directly stating them.

Studies on political Q&A communication, for example, press conferences or political interviews, seem to focus on examining elements of journalists' adversarial questioning force. For example, in Du & Rendle-Short's study (2016) on the characteristics of journalists' question types, they analysed 16 recorded press conferences from 1998 to 2014, by using an adversarial indicator system across four dimensions of initiative, directness, assertiveness, and adversarialness developed by Clayman et al. (2006) to code the questions and assess the level of adversarialness. The focus is on journalistic adversarialness and whether there are measurable differences in the use of adversarial questioning between Chinese journalists and those associated with a free media system. Mahmood (2014) also examines the adversarial questioning force by delving into the pragmatic analysis of yes/no questions in English and explores how indirect responses and conversational implicatures are constructed and understood in the context of a press conference. He acknowledges that interviewees' responses extend beyond simple affirmation or negation. All the previous studies seem to pay little attention to the persuasive force triggered by presuppositions.

## 2.2 Interpreters' mediation of illocutionary forces in political communication

Previous studies have examined the roles of interpreters in political communication. Most of the studies highlight the ways that interpreters shape political discourse through language choices (Gu & Wang, 2021). Schäffner (2018) shows how interpreters, through word choices, influence the perception of political leaders and their messages across languages and cultures. Gu (2019) examines how government interpreters neutralize contentious language to align with the expectations and norms of international audiences. Through selective emphasis, omissions, and reframing, interpreters strategically emphasize the universally appealing aspects of policies while omitting elements that might draw criticism, thereby impacting the manufacturing of consent. Gu & Wang (2021) look into the (re)contextualisation and (re)enactment of interpreter-mediated discourse from the perspectives of CDA and intercultural communication. They find that interpreters tend to use meta-discursive framing, upgrade modality value, add first-person plural pronouns, the concept of 'people', and intensifiers, to shape a global perception of China that counterbalances the dominant Western-centric ideological discourse. Gu (2018) examines the role of interpreters in mediating and reshaping China's development discourse at press conferences by focusing on the key term "reform and opening-up". He adopts corpus-based CDA to analyse interpreted political discourse and finds that Chinese governmental interpreters prefer to use the present perfect continuous in their English interpretations when there are no explicit



relevant markers in its Chinese original, in order to create an emphatic sense of positive self-representation and authoritative proclamation by the enumeration of achievements.

Interpreters' mediation of illocutionary forces are also topics for investigation, but more positioned in community interpreting with an emphasis on the relation between force changes and interpreting quality/accuracy in courtrooms (e.g., Hale, 2007) or healthcare settings (e.g., Angelleli, 2014), and on meaning conveyance and intercultural issues in the interpreting process. Munday (2010) examines the translator and interpreters' mediating role by drawing on the concept of evaluation in Martin and White's (2005, as cited in Munday, 2010, p. 82) appraisal theory. He points out that evaluation is essential for understanding how translators and interpreters mediate illocutionary forces, which involves expressing the speaker's or writer's opinions, constructing and maintaining relationships between the writer and reader, and organizing discourse. Interpreters must recognize and reproduce these evaluative elements accurately. In conference interpreting, the attention is different, with more focus on the cultural, political and ideological positions of interpreters and their influence. Chen & Xiong's (2014) conceptual framework study reveals that interactions among multiple participants are needed for a successful conveyance of the intended meaning and illocutionary forces from the source language to the target audience to achieve perlocutionary effects. They investigate the mechanism underlying the meaning generation process but focus more on the theories and subjectivity rather than an empirical study. Hu (2016) focuses on face-threatening acts in sensitive or culturally nuanced topics such as "proof of consumption" and "basis for the settlement of expenses" at China-UK Business Conference and reveals that interpreters deal with them by omitting the topic of "expense settlement" (p. 48). It sheds light on the importance of interpreters' cultural awareness and adaptability in facilitating effective communication between parties from different cultural backgrounds and points out the interpreter's role as a cultural coordinator. Zhang's (2021) case study of one-year press conference focuses on the interpreter's mediating strategies of both explicitation and implicitation in helping to fill in the presupposed 'background information'. Zhang (forthcoming) contextualizes the interpreted CPPC in a redefined public sphere of meaning, where modern ways of communication bring in blurred frames of interpretation and where meaning negotiation becomes complex. She views interpreting as a link in the international flow of meaning(s) and focuses on the Chinese institutional interpreter's strategies in narrowing the potential discrepancy between the intended and achieved perlocutionary acts, and on how interpreters' linguistic choices are constrained by the situational and broader socio-political contexts. However, little attention has been paid to the interpreters' mediation of presuppositions, which are so prevalent and important in political communication, nor to the working mechanisms of how these mediated presuppositions contribute to the persuasive force in political communication as a whole. The present study aims to discover and interpret the interpreters' behaviour in mediating the overall discursive persuasive force triggered by presuppositional changes. Focusing on the flow of implicit meaning through pragmatic presuppositions in relation to their illocutionary forces, this paper aims to address the following questions:

1. How does the interpreter mediate presupposition triggers in both the journalists' questions and the political authority's answers, and what are the interpreter's strategies?



2. How do the underlying illocutionary forces affect and contribute to the change of the overall persuasive force? What are the interpreter's motivations?

### 3. Data and Analytical Framework

#### 3.1 Data

The CPPCs are held annually in early March until 2023. This article selects the 2011 CPPC as the case for the following reasons. All the 12 questions focus on acquiring the government's stance and positions, making the answers expected to be persuasive for effective and successful communication, or evasive to save face or any political reasons, which offers a vantage point for us to examine the use and interpretation of presuppositions and the resulting illocutionary forces. A series of important policies were issued in the previous year before the 2011 press conference. For example, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, one of China's most important long-term policy designs for its national economic and social development, has aroused the interest of domestic and foreign media about its implementation since 2011. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan is China's first national policy design after the 2008 global financial crisis which has shifted significantly the global financial governance architecture, and China's position in global financial governance in turn impacted international economic cooperation (Zhang, 2013). The CPPC would have served as an opportunity for China to convey its post-2008 geopolitical stance. This includes emphasizing China's commitment to its domestic economic stability and growth, and its broader engagement with the global economy. Of all the 12 questions, six are on the Plan, mainly focusing on China's future planning, the economic impact on Hong Kong and Taiwan, expected difficulties in implementation, and China's impact on the international stage. Another one is the State Council's document on the healthy development of private investment, which draws attention from mainland journalists to the development of private sectors. In addition, foreign media focus on China's monetary policies due to the high inflation rate.

Of all the twelve journalists, six journalists are from foreign media, four from the mainland, one from Hong Kong, and one from Taiwan. One interpreter works consecutively for the premier.

#### 3.2 Analytical framework

Though expressing meaning implicitly, some presuppositions do have linguistic markers that are called presupposition-carrying devices. In our analysis, we adopt the most widely cited categorization of presupposition-carrying devices in the English language, as proposed by Levinson (1983, pp. 181-185) in his work on pragmatics. They include 13 types: definite descriptions, factive verbs, implicative verbs, change-of-state verbs, iteratives, verbs of judging, temporal clauses, cleft sentences, implicit clefts with stressed constituents, comparisons and contrasts, non-restrictive relative clauses, counterfactual conditionals, and questions. Besides, we also add nominalization and scalar notion (e.g., all) that appear in literature on pragmatic presuppositions (Verschueren, 1999). Since the Chinese language is not exactly the same as English, for the Chinese language presupposition-carrying devices, we integrate He and Ran's classification (2009, pp. 127-136) with Xu (2023, pp. 94-107), on which they tailored Levinson's classification to the Chinese context. For example, the Chinese language "de-structure" is embedded into "definite descriptions", while factive verbs, implicative verbs, change-of-



state verbs, iterative verbs and verbs of judging are extended to particles, predicates and expressions beyond just verbs. Besides, some types peculiar to the Chinese language, for example, 白 [bai], S+VO+VC structure (Xu, 2023, pp. 103-107) are added. See Table 1 in Appendix 1 for the complete scheme and typical triggers in both the English and Chinese languages.

As Levinson's (1983) presupposition triggers are more on lexical-grammatical forms and based on the English language, and our study focuses on the illocutionary forces and functions behind these triggers, we look further into classifications by their semantics and functions proposed by Fairclough (2003). On the semantic level, there are existential presuppositions, propositional presuppositions, and value or evaluative presuppositions (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55) that help us to do critical discourse analysis.

Presuppositions in the data are manually picked, coded and categorized following the framework table in Appendix 1. We start with identifying the presupposition-carrying devices on the lexical-grammatical layer in both the questions and answers, and then mark the deviation between the speakers and the interpreters in the form of either additions or omissions, or changes. Then, we will look into the semantics that the interpreter's mediation has brought more on a sentence level, and finally analyse the presuppositional triggering mechanisms that contribute to the fluctuation or landscape of the persuasive force of the interpreted discourse in regard to its original. To improve the reliability of the study, the two authors identify presuppositions and label their forces and functions separately, and then check and discuss the results together. We repeat the same process 30 days later and agree on over 90 percent of cases.

#### **4. The Interpreter's Mediation of Presupposition Triggers and Strategies in Questions and Answers**

The study finds that the interpreter has mediated presuppositions in both questions and answers. The interpreter's mediation is manifested in the form of additions, omissions, and type changes of presupposition triggers, with specific strategies and effects of objectification, mitigation, explicitation and intensification. Table 2 gives us a rather clear overview of the strategies and effects that the mediated presuppositions bring into the interpreted discourse and helps us to work out the overall persuasive force landscape.

We can see that mediated presuppositions occur in both the journalist's questions and the premier's answers, with 55% and about 67.7% respectively. It can be said that interpreter's mediation is rather prevalent in this case. The proportion of each strategy and effect within all mediated presuppositions is presented separately in questions and answers and both. In terms of strategies and effects, explicitation is the most frequent and then comes mitigation. Mitigation and objectification occur more often in the questions than in the answers. Besides, for form changes, additions appear most, especially in the answers whereas omissions appear more in the questions. Both omissions and type changes are less frequent. We now present some examples to illustrate how the interpreter mediates the presupposition triggers and how meaning is affected.



Table 2: Quantification of Mediated Presuppositions

	In Questions (counts/frequency)	In Answers (counts/frequency)	In Both Qs and As
<b>Total</b>	40/100%	99/100%	
<b>Changed/Unchanged</b>	22 (55%)/18 (45%)	67 (67.7%)/32 (32.3%)	89 (64.1%)/50 (35.9%)
<b>Strategies and Effects</b>	22 (100%)	67 (100%)	Total (frequency)
<b>Objectification</b>	5 (22.7%)	6 (9%)	11 (12.4%)
<b>Mitigation</b>	7 (31.8%)	6 (9%)	13 (14.6%)
<b>Explicitation</b>	8 (36.4%)	48 (71.6%)	56 (62.9%)
<b>Intensification</b>	2 (9.1%)	7 (10.4%)	9 (10.1%)
<b>Form Changes</b>			
<b>Additions:</b>	14 (35%)	50 (50.5%)	64 (46%)
<b>Omissions:</b>	7 (17.5%)	12 (12.1%)	19 (13.6%)
<b>Type Changes:</b>	1 (2.5%)	5 (5%)	6 (4.3%)

#### 4.1 Objectification

Objectification occurs in journalists' questions. Journalists' questions have become more justified and accountable through the interpreter's addition of factive verbs or the "VP+ 的 [de]+NP" construction, and others

Example 1:

J: Mr. Prime Minister, North Africa has been experimenting tremendous changes since the beginning of the year. And the world is now observing China, which is pursuing its course. Can we say that the China has created its own model in term of politics, economy and culture?

I: 总理, (我们看到), 今年年初以来, 在北非的一些国家经历了很大的变化。世界也在关注着 (快速发展的) 中国, 有人认为中国在政治、经济、文化等领域已经创建了属于自己的发展模式。我想问的问题是, 中国的发展模式如何<sup>1</sup>很好地<sup>2</sup>适应变化中的<sup>3</sup>大环境?

Literal translation: [Prime Minister, (we have noticed that) since the beginning of this year, some countries in North Africa have undergone significant changes. The world is also paying attention to (the rapidly developing) China, and some people believe that China has already created its own development model in politics, economy, culture, and other fields. The question I want to ask is, how<sup>1</sup> well<sup>2</sup> does China's development model adapt to the changing<sup>3</sup> environment?]



This question is from a French journalist with *Le Point* who asks for the premier's attitude towards China's current development mode. In this example, two presupposition triggers are added by the interpreter, indicated by the round brackets. According to Fairclough (2003, p. 55), existential presuppositions are assumptions about what exists, while propositional presuppositions are those about what is or can be, or will be the case. The interpreter adds an existential and also propositional presupposition triggered by the factive verb “我们看到” which indicates the information source and presupposes the proposition that some countries in North Africa have undergone changes as a fact and assertion. The interpreter adds the construction of “VP+的 (de) +NP” [快速发展的中国] denoting a definite description with the presupposed proposition that China is developing rapidly, and that the current situation of China's rapid development exists as an objective fact and is true. As existential presuppositions can carry implicit meanings and have persuasive communicative functions (Sbisà, 2021), this added “fast growing” China echoes, in a causal relationship, to its ensuing utterance that China has already had its own development model as its result.

Both the aforementioned additions occur in the journalist's question preface, which helps to pave the way to his question, thus contributing to its questioning force. By including these presuppositions in a question, the journalist implicitly assumes that there is a specific answer or information that can be provided by the respondent.

The last utterance of the question has three presuppositions triggered by: (1) an open-ended question marked by “how” [如何], (2) words of judging, an attitudinal “well” [很好地], and (3) a “VP +的 (de) + NP” type of de-structure “changing environment” [变化中的环境] as a definite description. The three elements trigger the following information: (1) China has its own development model, a propositional and existential presupposition; (2) China can adapt well, a value or evaluative presupposition, and (3) the environment is changing, a propositional presupposition. Value presuppositions refer to assumptions about what is good or desirable, and propositional presuppositions and value presuppositions often are associated with evaluative presupposition triggers (Fairclough, 2003, p55). By changing a polar question to an open question, more space for directed information is provided. By doing so, the interpreter subtly guides the premier to the multifaceted characteristics of China's development model, rather than a simple either affirmative or negative answer to the question. By reformulating the question, the interpreter achieves the effect of enhancing the desirable self-representation.

#### Example 2:

P: 而消除腐败的土壤还在于改革制度和体制。我深知国之命在人心，解决人民的怨气，实现人民的愿望就必须创造条件，让人民批评和监督政府。

Literal translation: [The soil to eliminate corruption is to reform the system and institutions. I am fully aware that the destiny of a country lies in the hearts of the people. To address the grievances of the people and realize their aspirations, we must create conditions for the people to criticize and supervise the government.]

I: To eliminate the breeding ground of corruption, we should pursue institutional reform. The hearts of the people are the life of the country. (If we are to) address people's grievances and



meet their wishes, we must create conditions for the people to criticize and supervise the government.

Example 2 is taken from the premier's answer to a US *CNN* journalist asking for China's implementation of its political reform. The interpreter adds a counterfactual conditional "If we are to..." which presupposes that addressing the grievances of the people and realizing their aspirations is hypothetical and has not been carried out yet. However, in the premier's original delivery, creating conditions for the people to criticize and supervise the government is an established premise, which shows a relatively subjective prerequisite-outcome relationship between creating conditions and encouraging public participation in governance. The addition of such a propositional presupposition implies that creating conditions is not a necessary prerequisite for realizing people's aspirations, but only valid under the premise that the goal is to be achieved. The addition of this counterfactual condition, combined with the omission of "I am fully aware", turns an epistemic proposition into an objective assertion and thus a policy choice that provides more conditionalities instead of an absolute commitment.

## 4.2 Mitigation

In political interviews, the mitigation mechanism is also used as a strategy to reduce directness and increase the acceptability of discourse (Vlasyan & Shusharin, 2018). It is about fostering an environment for open dialogue and critical thinking. Example 2 illustrates how the mitigation of an emphatic point is realized by changing a cleft sentence into a simple sentence. By decreasing the absoluteness of discourse, the mitigation strategy allows speakers to share their perspectives with mutual respect and openness.

Example 3:

P:为什么许多非公企业还感到雨点小? 甚至提出存在所谓“玻璃门”和“弹簧门”的现象, 我以为最重要的就是落实不够。

Literal translation: [Why do many non-public enterprises still feel little rain? Even the existence of the so-called "glass door" and "spring door" phenomenon, I think what the most important is that the implementation is not enough.]

I: So why do some private enterprises still feel that they have seen few raindrops and why do they feel that the problems of a so-called "glass door" and "swing door" have not been well addressed? I think this is mainly because we have not fully implemented the policies and measures.

Example 3 is the premier's response to a journalist with *CCTV* and *CNTV* for their question on the development and government support of private enterprises. In the original text, the cleft structure with a superlative "最重要的就是" [what the most important is] presupposes that there are multiple factors leading to the difficulties facing private enterprises, but among these factors, the lack of implementation stands out as the paramount one. The interpreter uses "mainly because" by omitting both the superlative structure and the cleft, thus mitigating the degree of the speaker's assertion. It



suggests that other factors may be equally important. The tone becomes less absolute and the level of importance is reduced.

Example 4:

P: 我以为有两个数字比 GDP 更为重要, 一个是教育经费占国民经济的比重, 一个是研发经费占生产的比重。这两条, 就决定了我们这个民族和国家的创新力量, 这才是最有力、最持久、最可靠的发展因素。

Literal translation: [I think there are two figures more important than GDP, one is the proportion of education expenditure in the national economy, and the other is the proportion of research and development expenditure in production. These two factors determine the innovative strength of our nation and country, these are the most powerful, most durable and most reliable development factors.]

I: I believe two figures are (actually) (even) more important than the GDP. One is the proportion of expenditure on education in GDP and the other is the proportion of research and development expenditure in GDP. Both concern the innovation capabilities of our country. And they both can offer the strongest and most reliable source of China's sustained development.

In the question part of Example 4, a journalist with *Lianhe Zaobao* in Singapore asks the premier for his opinion about the biggest difficulty in implementing the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. The interpreter adds two presupposition triggers: the counterfactual “actually” and evaluative particle “even”, presupposing that great importance has been attached to GDP, and that GDP is a decisive factor. The second half of Example 4 shows the change of verb of judging [决定] “determine” into another verb of judging “concern” of a lesser degree in the decisiveness. Meanwhile, the Chinese particle “only” [才] is an emphasis marker, indicating an exclusiveness that expenditures on education, research and development are ones and the only ones that are considered the most powerful, durable and reliable factors for China's development. This implied exclusiveness in the original answer is cancelled with its omission when the interpreter uses “they both offer”. Here, all the presuppositions involved are evaluative presuppositions. In arguing that education and research rather than GDP are absolute determining factors in pushing society to grow, the assertive force is mitigated through a reduced absolute tone, resulting in a somewhat increased persuasive force in creating a dialogic space (White, 2003).

### 4.3 Explication

Explication is a widely adopted strategy in translation, interpreting, and intercultural communication in general, and it is more related to presupposed background information that does not fit the target culture. Explication triggered by presuppositions in this study is mostly about definite descriptions that semantically relate to existential and evaluative presuppositions in the interpreted discourse.



## Example 5:

P: 主动调低经济发展的速度，不仅表明决心和意志，而且是一个重大的举措。就是说，在今后五年以至中国经济发展的相当长时期，我们要把转变经济增长方式作为主线，真正使中国的经济转到主要依靠科技进步和提高劳动者素质上来，着重提高经济的生长的质量和效益。

Literal translation: [Taking the initiative to lower the speed of economic development not only shows determination and will, but also represents a major measure. That is to say, in the next five years and even for a considerable period of China's economic development, we must take the transformation of the economic growth mode as the main line, truly turning China's economy to rely mainly on technological progress and improving the quality of workers, with a focus on improving the quality and efficiency of economic growth]

I: We have set a lower GDP growth target (for the next five years). (I believe) this shows the resolve and will (of the Chinese government). It is (also) a major step (that the government is determined to take). This means that in the next five years and even for a much longer period of time to come, in the cause of China's economic development, we will take the transformation of China's economic development pattern as our priority task so that we will be able to refocus China's economic development to scientific and technological advances and to higher educational level of the labour force and we will be able to in that way raise the quality and efficiency of (China's) economic development.

Example 5 is taken from the premier's response to a mainland journalist with a Chinese official media outlet: *People's Daily*. Here, neither the premier nor the journalist mentions "government" in its immediate context. The interpreter's addition of the definite description "the Chinese government", "the government", "China's", and a verb of judging "determined" explicates the presupposed agent – the government, and its will – strong or not. The interpreter highlights the leading role of the government by making the agent explicit. It emphasizes the position of the Chinese government and the will to implement the economic measures.

What's more, the added iterative words "also" and "refocus" presuppose the existence of certain actions (i.e., existential presuppositions) that the Chinese government has already taken, such as setting a lower GDP growth target and prioritizing the transformation of the economic development pattern. The addition of such existential presuppositions suggests the continuous and sustainable progress of the strategies and Chinese government's sustainable efforts. As a result, persuasive force is increased through the reinforcement of the commitment.

## Example 6:

P: 首先，要发展生产，特别是农业生产，以保障供给；第二，加强流通，特别是要加强农产品流通这个薄弱环节；第三，主要用经济和法律的手段管好市场。我们将持之以恒地把这项工作做到底。

Literal translation: [First, we must develop production, in particular agricultural production, to ensure supply. Second, strengthen circulation, especially the weak link in the circulation of



agricultural products; Third, we should mainly use economic and legal means to maintain good market order. We will persevere in this work to the end.]

I: First, we will develop production, in particular agricultural production to ensure sufficient supply. Second, improve the distribution system, in particular the weak links in the distribution of agricultural products. And third, mainly make use of economic and legal instruments to maintain good market order. We will make persistent efforts to (manage) (the inflation expectations).

In this example, the premier answers about the solutions to inflation problems posed by a US journalist from *The Wall Street Journal*. In other parts of the answer, the premier mentions “inflation” several times. Definite descriptions “这个 (薄弱环节) [the (weak links)]” and “这项 (工作) [this (work)]” appear in the Chinese text. “The weak link” does not involve any translational changes, but “this work” becomes explicit when “the inflation expectations” are added to the interpreted discourse, which presupposes inflation expectations as an existing economic fact. Besides, the interpreter adds an implicative verb “manage”, implying the government’s efforts and difficulty in solving the inflation problems. As a result, the interpreter’s discourse becomes more informative and easier for the audience to follow.

#### 4.4 Intensification

We have also found some cases of intensification, achieved by adding pseudo-cleft sentences, resulting in added existential presuppositions, and by changing a counterfactual clause to an assertion.

Example 7:

P: 中央制定的“十二五”规划都是支持香港的发展， 中央的规划绝不会代替香港的自身的规划。

Literal translation: [The 12th Five-Year Plan formulated by the central government is to support Hong Kong's development, and the central government's plan will never replace Hong Kong's own plan.]

I: What the central government has laid out in the Five-Year Plan about Hong Kong is designed to support Hong Kong’s development. And this arrangement will in no way replace Hong Kong’s own plan.

Example 7 is from the premier’s answer to *Hong Kong Cable Television* on the long-term effectiveness of social measures from the central government in Hong Kong. The pseudo-cleft sentence “what the central government has laid out [...] is” that presupposes the central government has taken certain actions in its Five-Year Plan is added to emphasize the support of the central government for the development of Hong Kong. On top of the already strong tone of the original speaker indicated, “in no way”, the added pseudo-cleft structure intensifies the government’s measures to support Hong Kong’s development. Here, semantically, the added pseudo-cleft structure brings in an existential presupposition, intensifying the actions of the central government and its positive image.



Example 8:

P: 这是中国房地产建设的一大机会，如果丢掉了，十分可惜。

Literal translation: [This is a great opportunity for China's real estate construction. If it is lost, it will be a great pity.]

I: I believe this presents us a great opportunity in developing a (healthy) housing market in China. And we must not miss out on this opportunity.

Question for Example 8 comes from a mainland journalist with China National Radio who asks about the government's implementation of real estate policies. The premier uses a counterfactual "if it is lost" [如果丢掉了] to emphasize the urgency of seizing the opportunity in China's real estate sector, which presupposes the possibility of missing the valuable opportunity for real estate construction. The interpreter omits the counterfactual, as well as the negative prediction and discouraging tone. It shifts the focus onto the potential for developing a healthier housing market by using "we must not miss this opportunity". Besides, the interpreter adds the judging word "healthy", an evaluative presupposition trigger for a positive goal of the housing market. The presuppositional change results in a perspective change from a negative risk-watching to a positive forward-looking, hence intensifying the government's determination.

## 5. The Mediated Illocutionary Forces and their Working Mechanism

This study identifies mainly two types of illocutionary forces triggered by the interpreter's mediation of presuppositions. Journalists' questioning force has been either justified or mitigated, and the assertion in the premier's answers gets mitigated or the persuasive force gets strengthened. All leads to an overall increased persuasive force.

### 5.1 Justified questioning force

With journalists' questions, the interpreter has more mediation in factive and iterative words, resulting in a more justified questioning force. For example, in Example 1, the type of factive presupposition triggers used by the interpreter, like "我们看到", are also evidential markers that provide information about the speaker's level of certainty or the type of evidence available for the assertion being made (Friedman & Özyürek 2013). Contrary to the previous studies that have concentrated on the adversarial nature of a question's questioning force (Du & Rendle-Short, 2016), this study unveils a justified questioning force by focusing on more established facts rather than confrontation and challenging stance, mainly through adding factive presupposition triggers, also evidential markers, to position the journalist as a bystander or an observer. This has been observed regardless of journalists' backgrounds. Either by describing the facts or increasing the effect of objectivity, the objectification effect in journalists' questions indicates that journalists do not just make subjective assumptions, but instead introduce their views or comments on specific events or phenomena based on facts that have already happened or been observed, and thus increase the audience's attention to the information and background of a specific topic.



## 5.2 Mitigated questioning and assertive forces

Previous studies have identified interpreters' preference for certain mitigating devices when speakers, especially journalists, perform face-threatening acts (Hu, 2016). This suggests that there is a recognized tendency of interpreters to soften the impact of potentially face-threatening content in Chinese political communication. Sometimes, journalists pose questions that could be seen as challenging. The questioning force is mitigated by interpreters to reduce the directness of the question while still maintaining its essential aspects in terms of information. In our study, we have also found face-threatening acts triggered by presuppositions in journalists' questions. The interpreter changes polar questions to open-ended questions, which appear in both the journalists' questions and the answers. Like in Example 1, the polar question "can we say that" could be perceived as somewhat confrontational, as it directly challenges China to either confirm or deny the creation of a unique model. Changing into an open-ended question "how well does it adapt...", it is more like a request for information than a challenge for a position. In our data, this occurs more to foreign journalists who usually want to ask for attitudes and opinions through direct questions while mainland journalists are normally from state-affiliated official media outlets, and their questions are typically framed to elicit responses that align with the policy priorities.

What's more, the interpreter reduces the assertive force of the answer mainly by changing words of comparison, descriptive words and verbs of judging. As in Example 3, the interpreter reduces the original superlative and cleft structure "最重要的是 [what the most important is]" into a simple adverbial clause "mainly because", thus reducing the assertive force. The verb of judging "[决定] determine" in Example 4 is changed to "concern" of a lesser degree, and this modification reflects a strategic use of language that downgrades the degree of assertion in the original sentence. By employing these linguistic strategies, interpreters not only translate the literal meaning of words but also adapt the tone to soften the impact of the speaker's words and avoid any potential negative effects in communication, with the aim to ensure that the message is conveyed in a culturally appropriate and less sensitive manner. In the process of implementing the 12th Five-Year Plan, the government may meet unexpected challenges. The interpreter reduces the degree of an absolute assertion in the answers which may help to avoid the negative impact of a possible failure to deliver one's promises. Adopting a moderate tone may help to foster a cooperative, non-confrontational atmosphere to reduce potential conflicts during communication.

## 5.3 Increased persuasive force

The interpreter helps to increase the persuasive force in the premier's answers. She has mediated the use of cleft sentences (see Example 7), iterative words (see Example 5), counterfactual expressions (see Example 8), implicative words and definite descriptions (see Example 6), to add existential presuppositions or to change evaluative presuppositions to subtly influence the audience. Aligning with the studies (such as Wring, 2001; Lane & Pritzker, 2018) that highlight the inherently persuasive nature of political communication, we have found that adding existential presuppositions and altering evaluative presuppositions help to increase the persuasive force. For instance, in Example 7, the interpreter's mediation of a cleft sentence structure "what the central government has laid out" places additional emphasis on the actions of the central government. This restructuring reinforces the



persuasive force by underscoring the proactive measures taken by the government. Also, in Example 8, the interpreter changes a negative perspective into a positive one by omitting the negative evaluative presupposition and thus increases the persuasive force by avoiding negativity on the government's ability. Besides, in Example 5, the iterative words "also" and "refocus" are added to explain the existence of the actions. In Example 6, the implicative word "manage" suggests the government's efforts to overcome the challenges. By adding the definite description like "the Chinese government" and "the inflation expectations", information gets enriched so that the informative force of the premier's utterances is increased, thus increasing his persuasive force in the sense that the contextual information gets explicated and better chance of getting heeded. In the case of explaining the Chinese government's measures and policies, emphasizing the government's initiative and responsibility is conducive to the construction of the Chinese government's positive image.

## 6. Conclusion

Presuppositions are widely used in the CPPC and in political communication in general. They are found to be mediated by the interpreters to increase the overall persuasive force of the interpreted discourse. More specifically, the journalists' questioning force is justified by objectivizing the journalist as a bystander or an observer of factual information; it is also mitigated to reduce the directness of the questions and thus less likely to cause offences while keeping informational fidelity. In premier's answers, the absoluteness of assertive force is mitigated to suggest a cooperative tone and an open dialogue and to avoid potential negative effects. Direct reinforced persuasive force is realized through changing perspectives, adding cleft sentence structure, or explicating contextual information for attention. All of them contribute to the increased persuasive force of the interpreted discourse and implicitly guide the audience. By giving focus to the government's proactive measurement, a more positive government image is established.

The increased persuasive force is particularly crucial when temporal constraints are imposed by such nearly spontaneous political communication that is prevalent in contemporary society. Temporal constraints also arise from the unique feature of interpreting itself: expected immediate response and fluent delivery, which again requires rapid language processing on the interpreter's part. This proves that the interpreter's mediation is most probably an automatic response through years of professional practice and consequently more indicative of their ideological preferences.

We argue that the interpreter's mediation is purposeful, which means that it not only serves to facilitate communication but also to align with interpreters' ideological stances. As revealed in Zhang's study (forthcoming), apart from the plurality of media audiences, and temporal and cognitive constraints brought along by the working mode of interpreting, the CPPC interpreter's strategic choices are also constrained by the institutional norms as a meta-discourse. From "improving China's soft power"<sup>1</sup> proposed at the 17th CPC National Congress in 2007 to "enhancing China's international communication capacity"<sup>2</sup> initiated by President Xi Jinping in 2013, shaping China's global narrative for the rest of the world to better understand has become the meta-discourse for official translational

<sup>1</sup> Xi, J. (2013, August 19). 习近平在全国宣传思想工作会议上的讲话 [Speech at the National Conference on Publicity and Ideological Work]. [https://www.gov.cn/lhdh/2013-08/20/content\\_2470599.htm](https://www.gov.cn/lhdh/2013-08/20/content_2470599.htm) [Accessed 03/05/2024]

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.cctv.com/china/20071114/107037.shtml> [Accessed on 03/05/2024]



activities in China. Nonetheless, their mediation is not arbitrary but rather grounded on fidelity to the original messages.

The targeted mediation by the interpreter intensifies the persuasive force landscape of the original discourse, and thus helps to realize the intended perlocutionary effect of “telling China’s stories”. Our research, drawing on concepts from both pragmatics and CDA, to a certain extent, answers the “outward turn” call proposed by Gu & Wang (2024) in interpreting studies, as we turn our attention to interdisciplinary investigations into the role of interpreters in political persuasion.

As a result, the role of the interpreter in this communicative dynamic is critical, especially as a link to the international flow of meanings where journalism also plays a key role. In different situated social interactions, interpreters need to work in collaboration with other professionals, which demands their linguistic expertise and also a deep understanding of the contextual nuances and potential implications. Although our study only examines one single case and looks into one single interpreter, our findings, nonetheless, help to promote the recognition of the critical role of interpreters in shaping discourse and international politics, and offer insights into the complicated interaction between discourse and social ideology in the political environment. The current study not only contributes to translation and interpreting studies, but also to pragmatics, (critical) discourse studies, international (political) communication, and media and journalism. Future research could explore how similar mediations vary across different political contexts, such as democratic vs. authoritarian systems and over time, with a view to a better understanding of the role of interpreters and interpreting in an ever-increasing public sphere in which meaning(s) are publicly accessible, negotiable, and thus more indeterminate and subjectively (re)transmitted and (re)contextualized.

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## Appendix 1

Table 1. Pragmatic presupposition-carrying devices in the English and Chinese languages  
(For more detailed examples, see Levison, 1983, p181-p185 and Xu, 2023, p94-107)

Category	Presupposed Information	Typical Triggers in the English language	Typical Triggers in the Chinese language
Implicative	Implied meaning of the words	manage; succeed in doing forget; happen to; avoid;	设法、成功地、好容易、终于; 只好、得; 忘记、碰巧、回避
Factive	Propositions after them are true	realize, know, discover, see, notice, find	抱歉/遗憾、意识到/认识到、知道/获知
Change-of-state	Situation before the state changes	finish, start/begin, continue/carry on, stop/cease	停止、继续、开始、到达、离开、完成、来/来到, 仍然
Iterative	Repeated actions	repeat, come back, return for the n <sup>th</sup> time, another, again, too	还 (indicating “additive”)
Definite descriptions	Presuppositions that fit description content	the; demonstratives (this, that); proper noun; genitive of possession; possessives restrictive expressions	这/那个/些 “的”字结构: (1) “VP+的+NP” type (e.g., 租借的婚纱); (2) “NP +的 +NP” type (e.g., 女儿的桌上)
Words of judging	The speakers think that the assertion follows is true	accuse, criticize, charge, blame	批评、指控、谴责、责备
Temporal clauses	The propositional content	before..., after..., since..., as, during..., while..., whenever...	时间连接词
(Pseudo) Cleft sentences	Content in the “that” clause The focal element is the only element to which the predicate applies	It is/was that... What X do (did) is that...	“de” structure: (1) “S+是+VP+的” type (e.g.她过去是开车的); (2)“S+VP+的是+NP” type (e.g., 最早研究化学的是...); (3) “是+S+VP+NP” type (本文是他写的)
Comparisons and contrasts	Common features	Comparative constructions; relatively	比, 更, 一样
Non-restrictive relative clauses	The propositional content	non-restrictive relative clauses	

	Additional parenthetical information	markers (e.g., wh-clauses)	
Counterfactual conditionals	The content in “if” clause	If... (subjunctive mood)	早/要不是/真的...就好了; 确认类副词 (e.g., 诚然, 的确, 固然, 确实)
Questions	The content in “wh” clause or selection range	Yes/no questions; Wh-questions A or B questions	
Implicit clefts with stressed constituents	Emphasis on content		
Nominalisations	Conversion of verbs/adjectives into nouns	Suffixes v-ing;	“的”字结构: “NP+ de (的)+VP type” (e.g., 腐败的滋生)
Other particles in English	Contrastive/conditional;	only, just, even (scalar) in spite of, in return,	都...还不 (e.g., 你都30岁了, 还不结婚)
Scalar notion	Expression of gradations or scope	all	
Peculiar to the Chinese language	Unique constructions or particles		白 (e.g., 这个手术难道白做了不成?) “S+VO+VC” type (e.g., 跳舞跳得棒极了)

