

Skopos Theory Informing Interpreting Strategies: An Analysis of the 2025 Two Sessions Press Conferences

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Abstract

As a pivotal platform for China's authoritative diplomatic discourse, the interpreting quality at the Two Sessions (the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) plays a critical role in shaping the national image and facilitating the global dissemination of China's narratives. Anchored in the Skopos Theory from the Functionalist perspective, this study examines the strategic decision-making and functional pathways in diplomatic interpreting, with a focused analysis of the interpreting practices at the 2025 Two Sessions Premier's Press Conference. The findings demonstrate that Skopos Theory effectively elucidates the reasons for interpreting in high-stakes diplomatic contexts, framing interpreters not as passive conduits but as active agents in China's international communication. This research offers meaningful implications for cultivating a cohort of interpreters aligned with China's diplomatic objectives and enhancing the clarity and reach of its global voice.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, Interpreting Strategies, Two Sessions

1. Introduction

The Two Sessions, a highly institutionalized diplomatic forum, have transformed interpreting from a routine linguistic exercise into an act of political communication aimed at shaping China's international narrative. Skopos Theory, with its focus on the primacy of purpose in translation, provides a fitting framework for diplomatic interpreting, which must balance political accuracy, communicative effectiveness, and real-time delivery. Against this backdrop, this study draws on the 2025 Two Sessions Premier's Press Conference as a case to examine how in-

interpreters strategically apply translational methods under the guidance of Skopos Theory, thereby acting not merely as linguistic mediators but as active participants in conveying state discourse (Wang & Liu, 2025). Beyond explaining interpreting strategies in isolation, this research seeks to offer a systematic, theory-grounded perspective on how Chinese political discourse is strategically communicated across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This is specifically manifested in the fact that, in high-risk political contexts, interpreting at Two Sessions press conferences faces a series of unique and complex challenges stemming from the high sensitivity of political discourse, deep-seated barriers in cross-cultural communication, and the inherent ethical tensions of the translation act itself. However, in addressing these challenges, Skopos Theory can provide a structural response logic for interpreting through its principle system: prioritizing the accurate transmission of national stance as the primary objective, adhering to the fidelity principle as a baseline constraint, adapting to cross-cultural needs via the coherence principle, and requiring interpreters to maintain a high degree of sensitivity to ethical boundaries in real-time scenarios to avoid sliding into ideological propaganda in the pursuit of excessive communicative effects. This process not only tests interpreters' linguistic proficiency but also underscores the composite requirements for political literacy and ethical decision-making capabilities in diplomatic interpreting. Therefore, only by upholding political stance, balancing cultural differences, and strictly abiding by ethical bottom lines within the framework of Skopos Theory can the dual goals of effective communication and stance safeguarding be achieved in high-risk political contexts.

2. An Overview of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory, developed within the German Functionalist School, was pioneered by Katharina Reiss, systematically advanced by Hans J. Vermeer, and later refined by Christina Nord. Its revolutionary contribution lies in shifting the focus from formal equivalence to the primacy of purpose, framing translation as an intentional act in which the intended function determines the methods and strategies employed (Vermeer, 1996). The theory is structured around three core principles: the skopos rule, which holds that translation strategies must align with the target text's intended function; the coherence rule, requiring the translation to be logically consistent and readily comprehensible within the target culture; and the fidelity rule, which maintains that loyalty to the source text should always serve the overall translation purpose (Nord, 2001). By liberating translators from rigid adherence to the source text, this framework positions them as active decision-makers who strategically shape their output to fulfill communicative objectives. It is precisely this clear purpose-driven orientation that makes Skopos Theory particularly suitable for analyzing practice in contexts such as diplomatic interpreting.

3. Features of Two Sessions Interpreting

As a crucial channel for the international dissemination of a country's diplomatic

discourse, diplomatic interpreting serves to articulate foreign policies, address international concerns, and shape the national image. Its distinctive features are closely tied to the political nature of diplomatic engagement, its international scope, and the real-time delivery of discourse. These characteristics are reflected in the following dimensions.

3.1. Political-Plurality

Diplomatic Q&A sessions, including those held during the Two Sessions, cover a wide spectrum of domains such as global governance, bilateral and multilateral relations, international hotspots, and national development strategies. These discussions span political, economic, security, and cultural dimensions, each characterized by its own specialized discourse system. This encompasses not only overarching diplomatic concepts like the “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” and the “Global Security Initiative”, but also detailed policy measures and rules of participation in international mechanisms. This political sensitivity is particularly prominent in terminology translation. For instance, the term “Taiwan question” must be strictly used instead of “Taiwan issue” (Xiu & Tian, 2018) to uphold the national stance. Consequently, interpreters must possess broad knowledge of international affairs while accurately grasping the nuanced meanings of specialized terminology and diplomatic expressions across various fields, in order to effectively convey content that is both thematically diverse and substantively complex.

3.2. Immediacy

Diplomatic press conferences are defined by their highly contextual and real-time nature. Journalists’ questions often focus on emerging conference topics or even unfolding international events, requiring interpreters to complete the entire process of comprehension and delivery with almost no time lag. This is because at the “Two Sessions” press conferences, the speeches of the Chinese Premier and other speakers, especially the Premier’s remarks, are mostly spontaneous, resulting in a relatively loose organizational structure of their discourse (Kong, 2018). In such an environment, interpreters must demonstrate not only efficient bilingual processing skills but also a keen sensitivity to current international developments. They need to swiftly contextualize questions within the broader framework of the country’s diplomatic stance, ensuring that the transmission of diplomatic discourse is both immediate and fluid, thereby keeping pace with the rapid rhythm of information flow in the global public sphere.

3.3. Political-Positionality

Diplomatic discourse inherently conveys a nation’s sovereignty, core interests, and international image. However, the shaping of a country’s national image is not only political, economic, communicative, and psychological, but also linguistic. Any national act must be narrated, expressed, and understood through lan-

guage (Li & Ye, 2025). Interpretation in press conferences must therefore remain strictly guided by the country's fundamental foreign policies and official positions. When articulating matters of national sovereignty or principles of international relations, interpreters are required to deliver messages with absolute precision, thereby maintaining the seriousness and authority of the state's political stance and preventing any misrepresentation. This ensures the consistency and clarity of China's diplomatic voice on the global stage.

3.4. Cross-Cultural Negotiation

Interpreting in diplomatic press conferences operates at the intersection of differing political narratives and value systems. In diplomatic settings, leaders and spokespersons frequently cite classical quotations such as four-character idioms, allusions, and poems to express diplomatic philosophy, which has become a distinctive feature and standard practice in the dissemination of China's diplomatic discourse (Yang et al., 2023). Beyond linguistic transfer, interpreters must navigate the interplay between ideologies, especially when conveying distinctly Chinese concepts. This often involves creatively adapting expressions to bridge conceptual gaps and counteract potential misinterpretations rooted in differing ideological frameworks. Through such calibrated mediation, interpreters not only enable accurate transmission of political discourse but also facilitate deeper cross-cultural understanding in diplomatic communication.

4. Challenges in Two Sessions Interpreting

While Skopos Theory provides both theoretical grounding and methodological guidance for diplomatic interpreting, its practical application remains subject to profound challenges stemming from the intricate interplay of linguistic, cultural, and political factors. Diplomatic interpreting is not an idealized interlingual transfer, but a complex practice of navigating systemic asymmetry, cultural heterogeneity, and discursive power dynamics within a highly institutionalized international setting. Based on authentic interpreting corpora, this chapter systematically analyzes four core difficulties in Two Sessions press conference interpreting: conceptual equivalence, cultural metaphor, syntactic logic, and rhetorical balance, in order to reveal the structural constraints and the scope of agency underlying strategic decision-making in this context.

4.1. Lack of Conceptual Equivalence

A fundamental challenge in diplomatic interpreting lies in the systemic conceptual asymmetry between the source and target languages, particularly in the realm of political terminology. This mismatch extends beyond vocabulary to the deeper political and cultural frameworks underpinning key concepts. Take the Chinese term “元首外交” (yuan shǒu wài jiāo) as an example. It conveys not only the idea of summit-level engagement but also reflects the specific constitutional and institutional role of China's head of state within its political system. A direct rendering

such as “summit diplomacy” would dilute its distinct connotation of legal authority and formal diplomatic capacity. A more considered translation like “head-of-state diplomacy” thus seeks to approximate a functionally equivalent concept within Western diplomatic discourse (Zhang, 2005). This process demands that interpreters grasp not only the surface meaning of a term but also the structure of China’s foreign policy apparatus and the term’s precise positioning within international diplomatic contexts.

4.2. Interpreting Cultural Metaphors

The rich use of cultural metaphors in Chinese diplomatic discourse requires interpreters to possess dual cultural competency. The translation of traditional cultural elements such as “和而不同” (hé ér bù tóng) and “天下大同” (tiān xià dà tóng) in Two Sessions texts requires explicitation and contextualization (Tan, 2015). For example, “和而不同” is rendered as “harmony in diversity” rather than a literal translation to avoid cultural discount. Meanwhile, when encountering classical poetic lines such as “青山遮不住，毕竟东流去” (No mountains can stop the surging flow of a mighty river.), the interpreter must navigate multiple layers of transposition, from literary imagery to political implication. This entails, first, an understanding of the historical and poetic context of the original verse; second, an insight into the speaker’s strategic intent in citing it within a specific diplomatic setting; and finally, the ability to identify target-language expressions that preserve both the lyrical quality and the intended political message. This process integrates skills from literary translation, political analysis, and diplomatic communication.

4.3. Logical Reconstruction

Political discourse emphasizes explicit logical progression and linear argumentation. Interpreters must transform the paratactic structures of Chinese into hypotactic English through the strategic use of subordination and logical connectives. This demands sharp linguistic perception and rigorous analytical thinking, enabling interpreters to deconstruct source sentences and reconstruct them into syntactically coherent and rhetorically effective English expressions. Meanwhile, translation itself constitutes a form of logical reconstruction. Given that interpreters have their own affiliations and interest inclinations, they employ various translation strategies to adjust narratives, thereby “directly or indirectly strengthening or weakening the content they convey” to serve public narratives favorable to their home countries. Therefore, the reconstruction of the logic of long sentences is of crucial importance in translation (Wei, 2023).

4.4. Rhetorical Balancing

Diplomatic rhetoric often carries nuanced political signals and strategic positioning. When interpreting such expressions, practitioners must strike a balance between preserving the original tone and avoiding unnecessary confrontational

overtones. This is to ensure the readability of the target text and meet readers' expectations; translators need to preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language and strike a balance between cultural transplantation and reader acceptance (Yang & Han, 2025). For instance, rendering "small yard, high fence" as "isolated system" may trigger confrontational interpretations, whereas the literal translation "small yard, high fence" is more aligned with the connotations of the policy. Such rhetorical calibration requires interpreters to accurately assess the contextual dynamics and the diplomatic distance between the parties involved.

5. Skopos Theory as a Framework for Two-Session Interpreting

Skopos Theory demonstrates a profound and structurally consistent alignment with the interpreting practices observed in Two Sessions press conferences. By conceptualizing translation as a purposeful communicative act, its fundamental principle, the skopos rule, directly corresponds to the core mission of Two Sessions interpreting, namely to support national external communication, convey policy positions with precision, and contribute to the projection of a major-country image. The coherence rule, which mandates that the target text be readily intelligible to an international audience, provides a theoretical basis for interpreters to employ adaptive strategies such as the liberal translation of culture-specific metaphors and the logical reorganization of lengthy Chinese syntactic structures, thereby facilitating cross-cultural comprehension. Simultaneously, the fidelity rule functions as a safeguard, ensuring that all strategic adaptations remain anchored to the original political stance and core intent, thus preserving the authority of national discourse even when navigating rhetorical subtleties. Guided by this tripartite framework, where purpose dictates direction, coherence ensures accessibility, and fidelity secures accountability, interpreters are systematically positioned as co-constructors of state discourse, enabling them to make principled and justified strategic choices within the complex demands of diplomatic interpreting (Guo, 2000).

6. Interpreting Strategies Guided by Skopos Theory

The core framework of Skopos Theory, which prioritizes the skopos rule, adapts through the coherence rule, and is safeguarded by the fidelity rule, provides a structured approach to address the four key challenges identified in the 2025 Two Sessions press conference interpreting: conceptual asymmetry, cultural metaphor conveyance, logical reconstruction of lengthy sentences, and rhetorical balancing (Chen & Li, 2011). Based on authentic bilingual examples from the conferences, this section proposes four targeted interpreting strategies. These strategies are designed to achieve the fundamental objectives of accurate political stance transmission, seamless cross-cultural comprehension, and the complete fulfillment of discursive functions.

6.1. Explication of Political Connotation

Translation entails conveying the meaning and style of the source text in the most

appropriate, natural, and equivalent target language (He, 2021). Centered on the fidelity principle, this strategy addresses the core challenge of conceptual asymmetry in Two Sessions press conference interpreting. It avoids arbitrary addition or omission of key information and prevents distortion of meaning due to linguistic differences, thereby ensuring the accurate transmission of China's diplomatic stances and policy propositions. Rather than pursuing literal correspondence, this approach employs methods such as terminological standardization and explication of implicit meaning to achieve cross-linguistic delivery that maintains consistency in political stance.

Example: 中方将继续按照主席提出的相互尊重、和平共处、合作共赢三原则，致力于中美关系的稳定、健康、可持续发展。

Translation: China will remain committed to the three principles proposed by President—mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation—in promoting the steady, sound, and sustainable development of China-U.S. relations.

The translation of “mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation” achieves semantic equivalence by ensuring precise terminology alignment while maintaining consistency in syntactic function and contextual meaning. The term “mutual” conveys reciprocal equality between states, “peaceful coexistence” reflects the diplomatic principle of seeking common ground, and “win-win cooperation” integrates collaboration and shared gains in a concise form. Rendered in parallel structure, the translation preserves the rhythmic and logical progression of the original, remains consistent across diplomatic contexts, and avoids meaning loss while aligning with English diplomatic conventions, thereby establishing deep functional correspondence between the source principles and their target-language expression.

6.2. Cultural Mediation in Interpreting

The metaphor adaptation strategy, grounded in the coherence principle of Skopos Theory, responds to the challenge of interpreting culture-laden metaphors in Two Sessions press conferences. It aims to overcome cross-cultural cognitive barriers and ensure that the underlying political intent and stance are accurately conveyed to an international audience. Rather than removing cultural connotations, this approach builds a communicative bridge between the source metaphor and target-language norms through techniques such as sense-based paraphrasing, conceptual condensation, and tonal adjustment. By doing so, it remains faithful to the speaker's intended meaning while facilitating clear and fluid cross-cultural communication in real-time interpreting.

Example: 中国有句古诗说得好，“青山遮不住，毕竟东流去”。小院高墙挡不住创新思维，脱钩断链最终将孤立自己。

Translation: As well put by an ancient Chinese verse, “No mountains can stop the surging flow of a mighty river”. Likewise, a “small yard, high fence” cannot suppress the spirit of innovation, and decoupling and supply chain disruption will

only lead to self-isolation.

The treatment of this example demonstrates a systematic transformation of cultural imagery within the framework of Skopos Theory. First, semantic extraction is conducted. The line “青山遮不住，毕竟东流去” is from Xin Qiji of the Song Dynasty. The original line uses natural imagery (green mountains, flowing rivers) to metaphorize the laws of history: although external obstacles (green mountains) attempt to stand in the way, the inherent trend of things’ development (the eastward flow of rivers) will ultimately be irreversible. Rendering it as “No mountains can stop the surging flow of a mighty river”. accurately strips away the literary veneer of the original line and extracts its core political metaphor, that “the laws of history are irreversible”, meaning that no matter what external pressures it faces, China’s inherent motivation and objective trend of upholding peaceful development and advancing globalization will ultimately break through obstacles and remain unstoppable. Finally, it is tone intensification, achieved through the firm expression “cannot stop”, combined with dynamic words like “surging” and “mighty”, accurately conveying the resolute stance of the diplomatic discourse. Throughout the translation process, the communicative purpose remains the guiding principle, ensuring that the rhetorical intent of the original is fully preserved while achieving pragmatic equivalence of the cultural imagery and enabling the effective cross-cultural communication of political discourse.

6.3. Explication of Logical Structure

Press conferences during the Two Sessions often feature Chinese paratactic long sentences and run-on structures that pose challenges in logical reconstruction. The sentence-restructuring strategy, grounded in the coherence principle, addresses this by unpacking semantic layers, adding logical connectors, and adjusting syntactic patterns. This converts the implicit logic of Chinese into the explicit, hypotactic form expected in English, enabling international audiences to quickly grasp core information and follow the line of argumentation.

Example: 相互尊重是国与国交往的基本准则，也是中美关系的重要前提。任何一个国家都不能幻想一边对华打压遏制，一边与中国发展良好关系。

Translation: Mutual respect is a basic norm governing state-to-state relations. It is also an important prerequisite for China-U.S. relations. No country should fantasize that it can suppress China and maintain good relations with China at the same time.

The case demonstrates how parallel Chinese short clauses are split into two independent main sentences. The phrase “It is also” is used to clarify the progressive relationship between “基本准则” and “重要前提”, avoiding the logical ambiguity that a parallel structure might cause in English. Secondly, the comparative logic of “一边……一边……” is transformed into the implicitly contrasting structure of “suppress China and maintain good relations”, with “at the same time” reinforcing the contradictory opposition, aligning with the English rhetorical habit of establishing before refuting. Finally, the core semantic chain of the original text is

preserved. The meaning remains unchanged despite syntactic adjustments, while structural optimization enhances the readability and argumentative force of the translation, achieving a balance between semantic integrity and logical explicitness.

6.4. Adaptation to Diplomatic Context

In addressing the challenge of rhetorical balance in Two Sessions press conferences, this strategy adjusts the intensity of wording and refines the style of expression. It aims to uphold a clear stance while maintaining the nuance required in diplomatic communication, thereby achieving the dual objectives of unambiguous positioning and appropriately calibrated delivery.

Example: 任何极限施压、威胁讹诈，都无法撼动 14 亿中国人民的众志成城，都不能阻挡中华民族伟大复兴的历史步伐。

Translation: No maximum pressure, threat, or blackmail can undermine the unity of the 1.4 billion Chinese people or stop our historic strides toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

“Maximum pressure, threat or blackmail” is adopted as the translation for “极限施压、威胁讹诈”, with the noun-coordinated structure enhancing semantic intensity and accurately conveying China’s firm opposition to external suppression. “众志成城” originates from *Discourses of the States-Discourses of Zhou II* and originally refers to “all people being united as a solid city wall”, representing a typical collectivist cultural image. A literal translation such as “city of iron and wall of bronze” would retain the architectural metaphor yet risk semantic emptiness, as the collective defensive connotation of “city wall” is absent in Western cultural cognition. Instead, the free translation “the unity of the 1.4 billion Chinese people” is chosen: it transforms the abstract concept of “众志成城” into the specific figure “1.4 billion”, using quantification to strengthen the visual impact of national solidarity and echoing the narrative core of the “people-centered stance” in Chinese diplomatic discourse. By abandoning the “城” imagery and adopting the universal term “unity”, the translation ensures international audiences can grasp its political connotation without relying on cultural background knowledge, while avoiding the weakening of positional strength caused by cultural discount. For “历史步伐”, the translation “historic strides” selects words with both dynamism and solemnity, aligning with the gravity of the national rejuvenation agenda. This choice not only reinforces China’s stance but also embodies the confident and composed diplomatic posture of a major country.

7. Conclusion

This study takes the 2025 Two Sessions press conferences as a case study and systematically explores the strategic logic and practical pathways of diplomatic interpreting based on Skopos Theory. The research confirms that the Skopos Theory framework is highly compatible with the core needs of interpreting at the Two Sessions, providing effective solutions to four key dilemmas: the lack of concep-

tual equivalence, the expression of cultural metaphors, the logical reconstruction of long sentences, and the balance of linguistic rhetoric. The four strategies—semantic equivalence, metaphor conversion, syntactic reconstruction, and rhetorical adaptation—work in synergy. They not only uphold national positions and core connotations but also adapt to international contexts and expression habits, verifying the interpreter’s important role as a co-constructor of national discourse. This study not only enriches the empirical research on functionalist theory in the field of political discourse translation but also provides practical references for the training of diplomatic interpreting talents and the international communication of Chinese discourse. In the future, modules such as political discourse analysis and cross-cultural rhetoric can be further embedded in language skill training to enhance interpreters’ sensitivity to ideological differences and train them to quickly balance upholding stance and adapting expression in high-pressure environments. Through closed-loop iteration from research to practice, it promotes the transformation of Chinese diplomatic discourse from passive translation to active construction, and contributes a linguistic solution of Chinese wisdom to global governance.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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