

Interpreter-mediated political communication N-Grammed: a corpus-driven discourse analysis of government interpreters' (ideological) use of formulaic language

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ABSTRACT

Formulaic expressions/prefabricated chunks are established as crucial in fluent speech production in psycholinguistics and language acquisition/learning yet have been largely underexplored in interpreting studies, barring a few experimental studies. Formulaic expressions are particularly underexplored from a discursive perspective in interpreting, that is, how interpreters might employ formulaic expressions for discursive mediation. Drawing on 20 years of China's political press conferences data, this study conducts a corpus-driven critical discourse analysis to explore the ideological/discursive properties of the linguistic category using the N-Gram function. The findings reveal that the interpreters' formulaic language use manifests at multiple levels: Instead of being seemingly routine and innocuous, formulaic expressions used in interpreting can be ideologically salient in (re)constructing versions of truth, fact, and reality, discursively further strengthening China's stance in the global lingua franca English. Contextualised bilingual examples are provided to demonstrate interpreters' mediation. This interdisciplinary study contributes to current understanding of government interpreters' agency in a changing sociocultural and geopolitical context.

1. Introduction

DeCarrico 1992; Wray 2002) in different settings. These studies tend to focus on the interactive, interactional and persuasive functions of formulaic expressions in the contexts of (academic) writing, education and communication in general. Lin (2021, 2022) has explored the acquisition and learning of formulaic expressions.

Notably, however, relatively few studies have explored formulaic expressions in bilingual communication that includes translation and interpreting. Of the limited number of studies in translation, Liu and Afzaal (2021) have focused on literary translation (Honglouloumeng) and specifically explored four-word lexical bundles as an indicator of translator's style. In addition, Lee (2013) and Mitkov et al. (2018) have also focused on lexical bundles or multiword units in translation studies from different perspectives. Of the limited number of empirical studies in interpreting (e.g. Eyckmans 2007; Plevoets and Defrancq 2018; Vuorikoski 2004), most have explored the nexus between interpreters' performance and their use of prefabricated chunks. These studies indicate that interpreters tend to utilise prefabricated chunks stored in their brain to allocate attentional resources, alleviate cognitive overload, and, as a result, improve their fluency. Notably, many of these are based on experimental data retrieved from student interpreters' performances. Some of the few studies that do use authentic real-world data from professional interpreters tend to focus on pedagogy, that is, the training of interpreters (Wu, Cheung, and Xing 2021). A few other studies have focused on a (detailed) linguistic description of the features and functions associated with formulaic language use. Using real-world data, Y. Li and Halverson (2022), for instance, investigate 4-gram lexical bundles in interpreting, focusing on a description of some of the features and functions of linguistic formulae. Drawing on consecutive interpreting data, Y. Li and Halverson (2022) zoom in on explicitation in interpreting, highlighting the complexity involved in determining the causal factors that may account for this phenomenon.

In comparison, the category of formulaic expressions remains largely unexplored from the perspective of discourse and ideology in interpreting. As part of a broader trend of interdisciplinary research, there has recently been an increasing number of empirical, product-oriented and critical studies, which explore issues of power and ideology in translation in different settings (M. Baker 2006; Kang 2014; J. Li and Li 2015; Munday 2012; Ping 2022; Valdeón 2005). Parallel to this trend, a relatively small yet growing body of research in interpreting has started to explore the vital agency and mediation role of interpreters in (re)presenting, (re)constructing and (re)narrating knowledge and ideological discourse and, as a result, effecting change in various sociopolitical, historical, diplomatic, journalistic and institutional contexts and settings (cf. Beaton-Thome 2013; Choi 2022; Fu and Chen 2019; F. Gao 2021; Gu and Wang 2023; X. Li 2018; Wang and Feng 2018). Far from being completely neutral participants with little or no agency, interpreters have been found to actively mediate in the process, using a range of discursive means at their disposal (e.g. self-referential terms, modality, lexical labelling). This is evidenced in a small number of (corpus-inspired) discourse studies (Bartłomiejczyk 2022; Gu 2018, 2022; Gu and Tipton 2020; Hu and Meng 2018; X. Li 2018) from different perspectives.

Generally considered to be mundane and innocuous, formulaic expressions/prefabricated chunks have received scant attention so far from a discursive and ideological perspective in interpreting studies and beyond. This is despite the potentially important role and salience of formulaic language in various sociopolitical and institutional contexts (e.g. certain social actors and agents' repeated recourse to formulaic language can

strengthen and/or weaken discourse and as a result ideology). This makes the category of formulaic language potentially interesting to explore from the perspective of CDA. Aiming to bridge this gap and explore the ideological and discursive properties of this linguistic category in interpreting, a corpus-driven critical discourse analysis is carried out in this empirical study, drawing on 20 years of China's political press conference data (1998–2017). That is, in terms of the aims of the study, it seeks to establish how the government-affiliated interpreters might make use of formulaic expressions/prefabricated chunks for discursive (re)construction and ideological mediation in an institutional setting. To do so, corpus linguistic tools (e.g. N-Gram) are used on the corpus data.

This study, framed within the broader trends of interdisciplinary research in interpreting studies and translation studies in general, promises to contribute to our understanding of institutional interpreters' vital mediation role in China's political discursive articulation against a backdrop of geopolitical tensions and ideological divide between China and the West. This interdisciplinary study promises to add to scholarship in translation and interpreting studies, critical discourse studies, communication and media studies, and the political sciences.

2. Institutional legitimation, reproduction and renewal through discourse: a Luhmann perspective on institutional translation and interpreting

Given the focus of the current study on interpreting in an institutional setting, the role of interpreting and interpreters is discussed here. To do so, we draw on Luhmann's concept of an 'autopoietic system'. An autopoietic system in biology refers to a system that reproduces itself from within (e.g. a plant may reproduce its own cells). For German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1990), this general idea of autopoiesis is also applicable to non-biological social systems (e.g. various sociopolitical institutions, bodies and entities). That is, almost all (sociopolitical) systems are confronted with the necessity existentially to form a unique institutional identity. This highlights the 'imperative to legitimate itself' (Luhmann 1990, 19) on the part of an autonomous and self-regulating institution. Central to this institutional self-reproduction is the articulation of institutional discourse for self-legitimation. In the self-reproduction process, a self-regulating institution or an autopoietic system routinely and recursively 'produces and reproduces the elements' central to itself (pp. 39–40). For instance, global and regional organisations like the UN, EU and NATO may repeatedly reproduce and legitimate themselves for their autonomous and continued existence through the frequent articulation of slogans, institutional visions and policies, and institutional rules and regulations on various occasions, even though the discursive articulations may sometimes be 'logically circular and therefore empty' (41).

Against a backdrop of globalisation and given the necessarily diverse, multilateral and multilingual nature of governments, sociopolitical institutions and diplomatic bodies, institutional self-reproduction and self-justification inevitably entail bilingual and even multilingual discursive engagement in the form of translation and interpreting. As such, translation and interpreting are often central to institutional (re)production and renewal in an interconnected world. The role of institutional translators and interpreters is worthy of scholarly attention in a systematic manner. So far, a relatively small number of studies (Choi 2022; Koskinen 2014; Schäffner 2001) have looked at institutional translation and interpreting from different perspectives. Notably, there has recently been a limited yet

growing body of work exploring institutional translation and interpreting from a critical and discursive perspective (Bartłomiejczyk 2022; Beaton-Thome 2013; Kang 2014; X. Li 2018; J. Li and Li 2015), both within the Chinese and European contexts and beyond. Contrary to the prevailing codes of conduct and the traditional view perceiving translators and interpreters as completely neutral, impartial or even passive participants with little or no agency, these empirical studies have pointed to the active mediation role of translators and interpreters in weakening, maintaining and often reinforcing the institutional presence, identity and ideology of their institutional employers discursively.

3. China's state-sponsored translation practice and discursive power: the case of the institutionalised interpreter-mediated press conferences

In stark contrast to China's economic, social and military developments, there is a sense within China that the country is relatively weak on the discursive front and, as such, China is at times being misunderstood by the international community (Gu 2022). Therefore, against such a backdrop, it is considered a sociopolitical and diplomatic imperative of strategic importance for the country to 'properly tell China's story' (讲好中国故事) and have its voice heard globally. In recent years, the concept of 'state translation program' (cf. Y. Gao and Moratto 2021) or state-sponsored translation practice (国家翻译实践) has gradually come to the fore in the Chinese context. In fact, similar practices have been seen in China for centuries for various political, communicative and cultural exchange purposes. This, among other things, includes the organised translation of Buddhist texts in China centuries ago for religious, cultural and political purposes. As the term 'state translation program' suggests, translation and interpreting have been used as a tool in a state-sponsored way. More recently, the idea of 'state translation program' can be found in the Chinese setting, the aim of which is to help convey China's voice and boost China's cultural soft power and image as directed by the government through a top-down approach. This may manifest itself through translating Chinese literature to other foreign languages (cf. M. Jiang 2021), amongst others.

Mediated by China's institutional interpreters affiliated with the government, the Chinese premier's annual political press conferences broadly speaking are also a prime example of state translation programme, representing a major top-down effort to boost China's discursive power and convey China's official policies and positions. These institutional interpreters affiliated with the government may be seen as vital actors or agents who facilitate such state-sponsored translation and interpreting efforts in the *field* of China's political and diplomatic interpreting. These interpreters over time may have established their (internalised) *habitus* through strict selection processes, frequent practice sessions, and other training and learning activities within the government system (cf. Bourdieu 1977 for detailed discussions on sociological concepts such as *habitus* and *field*). At the press conferences, the Chinese premier answers domestic and international journalists' questions on pertinent issues that range from China's economic development and financial and monetary policies to Sino-US relations and China's official stances on Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Live consecutive interpreting is provided to help translate the Chinese premier's answers from Chinese into English in front of a global audience.

Given the high-profile nature of the discursive event, it seems of interest to explore the issues of mediation and agency through the use of formulaic language on the part of

China's government-affiliated interpreters. In particular, it is interesting to see how the interpreters might discursively contribute to the legitimation and (re)production of the system, that is, their institutional employer, using formulaic language (see section below for more details on the press conference corpus data). Notably, the tradition of holding such press conferences by the Chinese premier has come to an end, as announced in March 2024.

4. Theoretical framework, methodology, corpus data and procedures for analysis

Given the political and discursive nature of this institutional event, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed as a general theoretical framework for the present study. Conceptualising language use as a form of social practice, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary and socially oriented approach to the critical and in-depth study of discourse in various sociopolitical settings with a focus on revealing the otherwise hidden ideologies and/or power enacted and reproduced in discourse (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2008). So far, a large number of CDA studies have analysed monolingual discourses (e.g. newspaper) and more recently bilingual discourses (e.g. translated and interpreted discourses).

Initially designed as a more qualitative approach, CDA has been subject to a few weaknesses, where scholars call into question issues of systematicity, objectivity and representativeness (cf. Orpin 2005). To redress the criticisms levelled at the traditionally more qualitative and manual CDA, elements of corpus linguistics (CL) are increasingly incorporated for more systematicity and more objective findings (cf. P. Baker 2012; Mautner 2009). Combining the typically qualitative (CDA) and the typically quantitative (CL), this mixed-methods approach represents a case of triangulation, which gives rise to a useful methodological synergy (P. Baker et al. 2008). Given the nature of the study, a **corpus-driven approach** is adopted to guide the discourse analysis. That is, rather than taking a more top-down approach, a bottom-up approach is taken to allow corpus linguistics software to help generate formulaic language. This serves as an important entry point into the data, which paves the way for more detailed and in-depth analysis on different examples.

To this end, the corpus-driven CDA analysis is used on a large corpus featuring 20 press conferences, covering China's political discursive articulations over one-fifth of a century and three recent periods. That is, the corpus data respectively covers premier Zhu (1998–2002), premier Wen (2003–2012) and premier Li (2013–2017)'s administrations. At these press conferences, such topics as China–US relations, China–Japan relations, China's economic development, GDP growth, economic reform, Hong Kong, Tibet and Taiwan are discussed. Covering a changing sociopolitical and economic landscape, the data, diachronic in nature, also permit some more representative, holistic and thus valid observations on interpreters' use of formulaic language (than focusing on 1 or 2 years). The detailed breakdown of the corpus data can be found in Table 1. More details about the corpus data can be seen in Gu (2018) and Gu (2019).

The fully prepared data are processed using AntConc, a freeware developed by Laurence Anthony. The CL software features functions including concordancing, KWIC sorting, wordlist generation (lexical frequency), keyword generation, and useful tools for

Table 1. Breakdown of corpus data.

China's official discourse in Chinese	China's interpreted discourse in English
127,696 tokens	105,495 tokens

studying collocation. The N-Gram function of the corpus software is used to help generate and retrieve formulaic expressions and/or prefabricated chunks, given the more data-driven and bottom-up approach taken in this study. Notably, in previous individual corpus studies, researchers tend to make conscious decisions to focus mostly on collocations of a certain length, for example four-word bundles (cf. Liu and Afzaal 2021) or 4-Grams (Y. Li and Halverson 2022). While restricting the analysis only to expressions of a certain length might appear more systematic and in-depth, this inevitably means that expressions of other lengths are unaccounted for. Given the limited space and the fact that expressions of different lengths may be of interest ideologically, the researchers decided to strike a balance between 'breadth' and 'depth' and consider collocations featuring two or more words. It is believed that this can better illustrate and highlight the potential discursive and ideological properties of formulaic expressions overall.

Undoubtedly, the N-Gram function can generate a large number of results. However, it is worth noting that not all multi-word units generated are necessarily formulaic expressions. That is, despite the significant overlap, formulaic expressions here have some differences from just any multi-word units, especially considering the focus of this study on the discursive aspects. From this perspective, some units generated can be seen as representing unwanted 'noise' (e.g. 'is not a', 'in a', and 'and a') and these were thus not considered meaningful. These were not eligible for further consideration. Similarly, fixed names (e.g. 'North Korea' and 'the United Kingdom') were discarded. The retrieved formulaic expressions were also further checked for accuracy. Different variants were merged and replicates were deleted at the discretion of the researchers (e.g. a three-word expression retrieved might also be subsumed under a four-word expression). For example, the expressions generated using 7-Gram are presented in Figure 1. Clearly, for instance, the generated patterns 'report on the work of the government' and 'on the work of the government I' can be seen as the same pattern 'the work of the government'. Once eligible formulaic expressions are established, they are placed into different categories, based on function to identify trends.

Given the difficulty in simultaneously comparing between the source and target discourses, attention was first focused on the target discourse (interpreted English discourse). Then, formulaic expressions identified were compared with their Chinese originals to identify any salient shifts. The formulaic expressions added by interpreters in the target discourse (not triggered by the source discourse) may be discursively salient from the perspective of ideology. Figure 2 illustrates concordance lines featuring the formulaic expression 'socialist market economy' established. All instances can be compared with the Chinese originals to see what may have been added or omitted. To illustrate, more detailed discussions will be provided in the form of contextualised examples in the 'Data analysis' section.

KWIC	Plot	File	Cluster	N-Gram	Collocate	Word	Keyword	
N-Gram Types		109737	N-Gram Tokens		123369	Page Size	100 hits	
Type	Rank	Freq	Range					
1	the two sides of the taiwan straits	1	18	10				
2	report on the work of the government	2	11	7				
3	between the two sides of the taiwan	3	10	5				
4	leadership of the cpc central committee with	4	8	8				
5	of the cpc central committee with comrade	4	8	8				
6	at the same time we will also	6	7	7				
7	i would like to tell you that	6	7	3				
8	ladies and gentlemen good morning today we	6	7	7				
9	on both sides of the taiwan straits	6	7	7				
10	the leadership of the cpc central committee	6	7	7				
11	the report on the work of the	6	7	6				
12	and at the same time we will	12	6	4				
13	and gentlemen good morning today we are	12	6	6				
14	hong kong and a high degree of	12	6	6				
15	i would like to say that we	12	6	3				
16	kong and a high degree of autonomy	12	6	6				
17	on the work of the government i	12	6	5				
Search Query		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Words	<input type="checkbox"/> Case	<input type="checkbox"/> Regex	N-Gram Size	7	Open Slots	0

Figure 1. A screenshot of expressions generated using 7-Gram.

KWIC	Plot	File	Cluster	N-Gram	Collocate	Word	Keyword	Wordcloud
Total Hits:		9	Page Size		100 hits	1 to 9 of 9 hits		
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context					
1 2001 ...	we done something that should not have done under the	socialist market economy.	I think what I would describe is, they have..I think they h					
2 2001 ...	They don't seem to have got adjusted well enough to the	socialist market economy.	So they are not highly aware of the proper role that they					
3 2005 ...	ina has developed in tandem with the development of a	socialist market economy.	The securities market has made important contribution to					
4 2001 ...	aware of the proper role that they should play under the	socialist market economy.	They have done something that should not have done un					
5 2009 ...	conomic system. Mainly, we want to further improve the	socialist market economy.	To be more specific, we not only need to have strong ma					
6 2001 ...	other departments that meet well with the needs of the	socialist market economy,	we have to reinforce them, particularly, institutions like th					
7 2001 ...	economy more rapidly. Thank you. A: As we develop the	socialist market economy,	we have seen one case after another of fraudulent practic					
8 2013 ...	It is because there is still room for improvement in our	socialist market economy,	there is great space for further unleashing productivity th					
9 2001 ...	government. The function of the government under the	socialist market economy	is to properly supervise over the market operations, stren					

Figure 2. Screenshot of concordance lines featuring 'socialist market economy'.

5. Data analysis

The data analysis is provided in this section. In addition to the general discussions of the two main categories involving propositional and non-propositional formulaic expressions, the discussions will be approached from a quantitative and then qualitative perspective.

Table 2. Propositional and non-propositional formulaic language.

Formulaic language in discourse	Propositional content	Organisations and bodies central to the party and government as well as official policies, slogans and fixed discursive formulations central to the institution
	Non-propositional content	Fixed expressions which play various interactive, interactional, cohesive and rhetorical roles yet may or may not contribute to the core propositional content

5.1. General observations: formulaic language concerning propositional and non-propositional contents

Formulaic expressions or lexical bundles represent a rather heterogeneous and complex category (Biber, Conrad, and Cortes 2004; Sidtis et al. 2015). Based on the expressions generated through the bottom-up and corpus-driven approach using the N-gram function, the retrieved expressions from our corpus tend to fall into two broadly defined categories: (1) propositional content and (2) non-propositional content. The categorisation can be found in Table 2. This categorisation established in the current study is also in line with observations made by linguists from different perspectives (cf. Hyland 2018). This broadly speaking is also aligned with the observations made in CDA that ideological and discursive mediation, monolingual or otherwise, can manifest itself through the manipulation of the actual propositional content (the informational and ideational elements) and other non-propositional elements (cf. Fairclough 1989). That is, while in certain exceptional cases, the distinction between the propositional and non-propositional language use can be blurry and fuzzy as recently recognised (cf. Hyland 2018), these two main categories are relatively standalone groups related to how language users communicate discursively. For the non-propositional elements, some of the formulaic expressions might overlap with the idea of metadiscourse (cf. Hyland 2018; F. Jiang and Hyland 2015). Metadiscursive expressions such as ‘in fact’, ‘the fact that’ and ‘as a matter of fact’ can, amongst others, play various interactive and interactional roles in organising discursive communication.

It is worth noting that it is not the intention of the Data analysis section to provide detailed linguistic description of the various functions and properties of formulaic language *per se* in the form of an overly elaborate taxonomy. Some of the features and functions of linguistic formulae have been discussed in Y. Li and Halverson (2022)’s exploratory study focusing on 4-Grams. Given the contrastive nature of the present study and the focus on the social and ideological/discursive aspects of interpreters’ language use in a sociopolitical, communicative, and institutional context, this general categorisation is deemed sufficient. Focusing on formulaic expressions relating to both ideational or propositional content and expressions relating to non-propositional content, this more holistic approach promises to provide a more comprehensive picture in a hopefully systematic way.

5.2. Quantitative discussions

Under the category of propositional content, formulaic phrases such as fixed official slogans, policies and initiatives and other discursive articulations can be found. In other words, phrases in this category are those that contribute to the propositional and

ideational aspect or the 'meat' of China's political discourse. Within this category, formulaic expressions such as 'reform and opening-up', 'peace and stability', 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' and 'one country two systems' qualify. These can be understood as direct and condensed crystallisations of Beijing's official policies and preoccupations, prevalent ideologies and overarching discursive formations. These fixed formulaic expressions can also have a diachronic dimension, which may shift and transform into new forms over time as the prevailing ideologies or policies change. This provides some ideas about China's discursive evolution over time.

In contrast, under the category of non-propositional content, fixed phrases, expressions, and idioms are included. While these are conducive to the discursive articulation and play various important connecting, supporting and discourse structuring, organisation and empowering roles, these expressions are relatively independent of and sometimes may not necessarily contribute to the actual propositional content. However, in certain cases, these fixed expressions and markers can also be meaning-laden and have an impact on how the primary propositional content is articulated and expressed. Within this category, fixed expressions such as 'to be honest', 'as a matter of fact', 'the fact that', and 'the truth is' are included.

The established formulaic expressions in English can be found in Table 3. Clearly, formulaic expressions concerning propositional content ($N = 910$) exhibit more diversity yet feature fewer instances than those concerning non-propositional elements. In comparison, formulaic expressions involving non-propositional elements are more prominent in number ($N = 1,116$) yet feature less diversity. This is understandable given that the former category involving propositional content (e.g. official and institutional policies, slogans and discourses) can be multifarious, wide-ranging, content-specific and ever changing. In comparison, the formulaic language featuring non-propositional content mostly involves a limited number of fixed collocations with limited number of realisations.

Given the focus of the study on discursive effect or whether there may be any discursive shifts or ideologically salient changes after interpreting, the established formulaic expressions in English (TT) are compared with the ST. The comparative analysis shows that interpreters tend to add formulaic expressions/prefabricated chunks in the English interpretation (TT) overall. That is, for formulaic expressions concerning propositional content, 94 out of 910 instances (or 10.33%) have been untriggered by the ST. As far as non-propositional expressions are concerned, 298 instances (or 26.70%) out of 1,116 have been added by the interpreters.

More notably, the interpreters' use of formulaic language manifests at two levels, that is, (1) the repeated production and addition of prefabricated chunks relating to the institution itself and its fixed overarching institutional discourses and formulations (e.g. slogans and policies) that serve to reinforce the institution's ontological existence and continuation and (2) the repeated production and addition of prefabricated chunks that serve to strengthen, intensify and reinforce the original discourse's truth value and 'factualness'. Arguably, both categories are crucial for the government-affiliated interpreters' discursive (re)creation and maintenance of the original discourses in Chinese. While it is not the purpose of the study to establish the exact reasons or motivations behind individual cases of additions, interpreters indeed tend to mediate in the process as far as discursive effect is concerned. In other words, the interpreter-mediated interpretation in

Table 3. Generated formulaic expressions with frequency.

N-Gram	Clusters relating to the propositional content (freq)	Clusters and expressions relating to the non-propositional elements (freq)
2	central government (70); our people (70); economic development (53); State council (41); one China (32); Central Committee (26); five-year plan (22); one-China principle (18); peaceful development (17); two sessions (13); Taiwan question (13); Basic law (13); Hong Kong compatriots (10); Taiwan compatriots (10); international community (9); Communist Party (of China) (9); Taiwan authorities (8); common development (7); our government (6); our compatriot (6); international practice(s) (6); 1992 Consensus (6); socialist democracy (5); Tibetan compatriots (2); socialist development (2); [474 instances]	We must (114); we should (68); according to (41); for example (32); for instance (30); such as (13); in fact (9); [307 instances]
3	Hong Kong SAR (24); Reform and opening-up (22); CPC Central Committee (22); people in Taiwan (21); equity and justice (19); rights and interests (17); peace and stability (15); reform and development (11); compatriots in Taiwan (9); socialist market economy (9); our Taiwan compatriots (9); question of Taiwan (8); National People's Congress (8); peace and development (7); compatriots in Hong Kong (7); people of Taiwan (7); so-called * Taiwan independence (6); stability and development (5); reform, development and stability (2); [228 instances]	We need to (223); as long as (36); with regard to (31); I'd like to (28); (the/this) fact that (20); under the leadership (17); the truth is (7); in other words (5); to be honest (4); I need to (3); we'd like to (2); the reality that (1); [377 instances]
4	Between the two sides (43); economic and social development (16); one country two systems (15); NPC and CPPCC sessions (13); Hong Kong SAR government (13); compatriots in Hong Kong (7); Socialism with Chinese characteristics (5); our Hong Kong compatriots (5); our compatriots in Taiwan (3); [120 instances]	at the same time (113); I would like to (73); will be able to (53); we are going to (42); on the basis of (23); it is true that (22); on the part of (20); in the course of (18); that is to say (16); in the interest of (12); we would like to (6); one and the same (5); we'll be able to (4); [407 instances]
5	the work of the government (23); a high degree of autonomy (7); with comrade * as general secretary (6); one and the same China (5); with comrade * at its core (3); with comrade * at the core (3); our compatriots in Hong Kong (3); Hong Kong special administrative region (2); Hong Kong and Macao compatriots (1); [53 instances]	as a matter of fact (18); make it (very) clear that (7) [25 instances]
6	Hong Kong people governing/administrating Hong Kong (7); leadership of the CPC central committee (8) [15 instances]	
7	The two sides of the Taiwan straits (20) [20 instances]	
Total	910 instances (overall)	1,116 instances (overall)

English (TT) is relatively more 'formulaic' than the Chinese ST, regardless of the reasons. Interpreters may add formulaic expressions intentionally in an ideologically-motivated way. Also, they may do so unintentionally and unwittingly as a result of socialisation and through internalising the various institutional ideologies and discourses as institutional members of the government. Given the strict word limit, a selection of representative examples will be explored qualitatively below for illustrative purposes.

5.3. Qualitative discussions

5.3.1. Interpreters' employment of formulaic language concerning major institution-related propositional content

Comparative analysis between the ST and TT suggests that China's government-affiliated interpreters tend to mediate discursively through using institution-related formulations. This corresponds to the direct mediation on the primary content or the 'meat' of Beijing's discursive articulations. For instance, in Example 1, the Chinese premier makes clear China's position on Taiwan and cross-Straits relations, emphasising the importance of the one-China policy.

Example 1 (2016)

ST: 当然前提是要保持两岸的和平发展, 基石还是'九二共识'。只要遵循这一政治原则共识, 大家都认同属于一个中国, 可以说什么问题都好谈。

Gloss: Of course, the precondition is to maintain the cross-Straits peaceful development and the cornerstone still is the 1992 Consensus. As long as this political principle and consensus is adhered to and everyone identifies with belonging to **one China**, it can be said that all questions can be discussed.

TT: ... business cooperation between the mainland and Taiwan on the premise that there will be continued peaceful development of cross-Straits relations and the bedrock of it is the 1992 Consensus. As long as one adheres to the political foundation of the 1992 Consensus and recognises it, that both mainland and Taiwan belong to **one and the same China**, anything can be discussed.

When rendered into English, the part about the 'one-China policy' is made significantly more emphatic with the use of the formulaic expression 'one and the same China' in this example. The use of the expression in interpreting is also found in several similar cases in the corpus (5 times in total in the corpus). This discursively serves to make China's official stance on the Taiwan question more emphatic and naturalised in front of the global audience. Such strengthening is of particular importance, given the public-facing nature of the discursive event and the fact that the interpreted English discourse is routinely quoted and taken for granted by global media outlets as China's official voice. Without doubt, the interpreter's more emphatic articulation of the government's discourse is also conducive to the reinforcement and maintenance of the autopoietic system overall (cf. Luhmann 1990), which is the government and the institution in this case. The frequent use of the expression (5 times in total in the data) also confirms the interpreters' positioning and stance-taking in aligning with the government's official discursive articulations.

Example 2 (2001)

ST: 所以在现在我们政府的职能, 我刚才讲了, 就是要转变为代表国家来对市场进行监督, 查处, 保护消费者和人民的利益。

Gloss: So, now, our government's function, as I said earlier, is to shift towards representing the country to supervise the market, to investigate and punish and protect the interests of the consumers and people.

TT: The function of the government under the socialist market economy is to properly supervise over the market operations, strengthen regulation, fight against those shoddy goods and fake products and to protect the rights and interests of the consumers and of the people.

A similar phenomenon is found in Example 2. Clearly, the interpreter has added the formulaic expression 'socialist market economy' in the TT untriggered by the ST. This formulaic expression 'socialist market economy' has occurred 9 times in the corpus. In recent decades, socialist market economy represents a major economic policy in China as part of the country's sociopolitical system that is encapsulated in the overarching discursive formulation 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'. Wittingly or unwittingly, by adding, resorting to and internalising the formulaic expressions central to the ruling government's overarching policy, the interpreter has effectively foregrounded and reaffirmed the essentially 'socialist' nature of China, discursively further strengthening and legitimating the active presence and dominance of the government as a standalone autopoietic system (cf. Luhmann 1990).

Proportionally, by emphasising the advantages of the good and people-oriented governance of the central government under a socialist framework, the interpreter's discursive mediation using the formulaic expression also leads to a heightened sense of positive *us* and in-group identity. This is in line with CDA scholar van Dijk (2008)'s Ideological Square. Ideological Square describes a salient discursive pattern commonly found in discursive articulation in various sociopolitical contexts, where speakers and authors tend to emphasise positive-self and negative-other (e.g. their own side being good, right and justified and the ideological *other* being bad, wrong and unjustified).

Such effected change made on the part of translators and interpreters concerning more positive or negative representation is also in line with the observations made in other empirical studies focusing on China's political and diplomatic translation and interpreting in recent years (F. Gao 2021; Gu 2019; T. Li and Pan 2021). The interpreter's positioning in this example is particularly salient, given the government-affiliated interpreter's in-group status as institutional insider and the visible presence of journalists from around the world at the press conference (e.g. BBC, CNN, Sky News, Reuters, Al Jazeera, and RT), who represent and possess different ideologies and worldviews. The discursive (re)construction is also of salience, considering the nature of this discursive event that aims at conveying China's story globally as part of a larger state-sponsored translation programme in China (cf. section 3).

Example 3 (2010)

ST: 气候变化问题关系到人类的生存, 也关系各国的利益, 关系世界的公平和正义。

Gloss: Climate change concerns human survival. (It) too concerns all countries' interests. (It) concerns the world's fairness and justice.

TT: the issue of climate change concerns human survival, the interests of all countries, and equity and justice in our international community.

In this example, the interpreter has rendered the relatively plain and unmarked sentence about climate change in Chinese more emphatically using the salient expression 'international community' (there are 9 instances in the data). Discursively, the addition of the fixed expression shows a degree of conformity to international standards and obligation, illustrating China's global membership as a major player in the global arena. Through using the family-like term 'international community', it indirectly also (re)constructs a significantly more positive image of China being a responsible stakeholder caring about various pressing issues in the world (e.g. climate change and global justice) discursively.

5.3.2. Interpreters' employment of formulaic language concerning non-propositional expressions

The interpreters' discursive mediation also manifests itself in the form of non-propositional formulaic expressions. These non-propositional elements may be understood as the 'tendon' and 'sinew' that play various connective, linking, and smoothing functions to make the messages better organised. This is illustrated below.

Example 4 (2013)

ST: 我访港的时候深感'一国两制'下的香港充满活力。

Gloss: I, when visiting Hong Kong, deeply felt that under 'One Country, Two Systems' Hong Kong was full of vitality.

TT: During the trip in 2011, I was deeply impressed by **the fact that** Hong Kong was brimming with vitality under 'One Country, Two Systems'.

In Example 4, in the interpreter's (re)telling of China's discourse, the otherwise general and unmarked sentence in Chinese is (re)framed and rendered more emphatic using the collocation and metadiscourse marker (cf. Hyland 2018) 'the fact that'. The metadiscursive expression 'the fact that' tends to front-load attitudinal meanings and offer an explicit evaluation of the proposition that follows (F. Jiang and Hyland 2015). In this example,

given the intrinsic property of this expression, the information afterwards ('Hong Kong was brimming with vitality under 'One Country, Two Systems') is portrayed as the truth or fact. From this perspective, thanks to the interpreter, Hong Kong's vitality is (re)framed and foregrounded as undeniable fact for the world to see. This has materialised under the official policy 'One Country, Two Systems'. The interpreter's employment of the formulaic expression serves to further strengthen and boost China's discursive articulations, in addition to indicating their own institutional positioning and alignment as part of the government.

Example 5 (2012)

ST: 群众许多批评的意见值得我们深思,而政府重视和决定的许多重大问题,经常是从群众拍砖里头得到的。

Gloss: A lot of the public's critical views are worthy of our deep reflections and many major issues the government pays attention to and decides upon are often derived from the public's brickbats.

TT: I believe that the government must seriously reflect on the critical views that the people have made. **As a matter of fact**, the government has often found food for thought from those critical comments and views made by the public while taking decisions on major issues.

Clearly, the Chinese premier's remarks emphasise the importance of listening to the general public's views and even critical comments. Interestingly, when rendered into English, the metadiscursive expression 'as a matter of fact' is added by the interpreter. As such, a more emphatic and favourable image of the government being humble and open to the people's critical and constructive suggestions has been (re)constructed in the English TT. This might be understood as the interpreter's discursive agency (a kind of agency or mediation evidenced through discursive means), which again is in line with the idea of 'positive *us*' as detailed in van Dijk's (2008) Ideological Square. To some extent, this also illustrates the interpreter's (institutional) identity as the representative of the government and the spokesperson responsible for China's English discourse as part of China's overarching state-sponsored translation practice (cf. section 3).

6. Discussions and conclusion

Drawing on China's interpreter-mediated press conference data spanning over 1/5 of a century, this empirical corpus study explored the discursive and ideological properties of linguistic formulae. To this end, the corpus data was mined to retrieve N-grams of varying lengths. As discussed before, it is found that the interpreters' use of linguistic formulae may manifest at two levels in practice, that is, (1) the repeated production of prefabricated chunks relating to the fixed overarching institutional discourse and (ideological) formulations (e.g. slogans and policies) that serve to reinforce the institution's

ontological existence and continuation and (2) the repeated production of prefabricated chunks that leads to the strengthening, intensifying, and reinforcement of the original discourse's truth value and 'factualness' in an emphatic way. Through these discursive means (e.g. using 'one and the same China', 'socialist market economy', 'the fact that', and 'as a matter of fact'), the institution is greatly maintained, (re)produced and strengthened (F. Gao 2021; Gu 2019) as an autopoietic system (cf. Luhmann 1990).

Beyond the widely explored cognitive aspects and the focus on fluent speech production, the seemingly mundane and innocuous formulaic expressions represent a useful source of discursive mediation at interpreters' disposal alongside other much investigated discursive devices (e.g. modality and personal pronouns). That is, the interpreters' extensive and emphatic use of formulaic expressions (e.g. 'the fact that') can lead to a scenario of positive *us* as mentioned in Van Dijk's Ideological Square. The interpreters' use of formulaic language can also be ideologically salient in helping (re)construct different versions of truth, fact, and reality and further strengthening Beijing's institutional discourse and ideology in the global *lingua franca*, that is, English. The respective strengthening of China's discourse at the televised high-profile discursive event is of salience and might to some extent effect far-reaching changes globally, given the (widening) ideological divide between China and the West and the dynamic and the constantly shifting geopolitical situation.

Despite the discursive effect discussed, it might not be easy to know the precise reasons and exact motivations behind the interpreters' such discursive strategies through a discourse analytical approach alone. However, it is useful to note that the Premier-Meets-the-Press conferences are interpreted by government interpreters in China, who are affiliated with the foreign ministry's Department of Translation and Interpretation. These government-affiliated interpreters are often top graduates from elite universities in China and are required to undergo highly strict and selective processes in order to work as interpreters in the translation and interpretation department. These government-affiliated interpreters, often communist party members, are subject to rigorous high-quality interpreting training and practice on a day-to-day basis with peers and/or under the supervision and instruction of senior interpreters as part of a team. As such, through routine training sessions, these interpreters, as agents and socialised individuals, may over time internalise and embody certain ideological beliefs, discursive articulations, and formulaic expressions that are officially approved and are central to the government's positions and stances. Therefore, these arguably form part of the government interpreters' linguistic repertoire, institutional know-how and (internalised) *habitus* in the *field* of China's political and diplomatic interpreting (cf. Bourdieu 1977 for discussions on such sociological concepts as *habitus* and *field*).

All in all, positioned as part of a series of corpus-inspired discourse studies in interpreting and framed within the broader trends of interdisciplinarity, this study contributes to current understanding of institutional interpreters' vital agency and mediation role in translation and interpreting studies. More broadly, this interdisciplinary study promises to add to scholarship in related areas such as critical discourse studies, communication and media studies, and the political sciences from a sociopolitical lens. Given the word limit, it is not possible to explore these established formulaic expressions in greater detail. Also, it is worth noting that the established formulaic expressions are only true of the corpus data used for the current period. As China's political discursive communication may change

over time, the formulaic language used is also subject to change. As an avenue for future research, formulaic language in China's political and diplomatic discourse may be explored from a longer period and additional datasets may also be used to track any broader diachronic patterns. Going forward, more sophisticated methods and tools may be used to explore formulaic language in a hopefully more systematic and satisfying way. Given the focus of the study on formulaic language, it also has significant pedagogical potential for interpreter training, especially in making interpreter trainers, trainees and practitioners aware of the potentially discursive and ideological aspects of formulaic language in the interpreting process.

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