

Diplomatic interpreters in digital space: (In)visibility, popularity and national image

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Abstract

The existing research has revealed how “visible” interpreters can be and the mediation and bridging role they have played in conversational settings. Compared with the interpreters in business occasions, diplomatic interpreters in political arena seem to have less flexibility to convey the messages and manage the communication process. Facing with great pressures from political power, diplomatic interpreters supposedly try their best to make them invisible. However, the digitalization of diplomatic negotiations has exposed the interpreters to the public in different kinds of media. Therefore, interpreters’ activities and performances are to be evaluated, judged and monitored by the audience. Diplomatic interpreters’ visibility in digital space then provides new opportunities to delve into the entanglement of interpreting activity, audience, and national image.

This paper examines diplomatic interpreters’ images and their roles as represented in traditional media and new media from a historical perspective. It specifically looks at two generations of Chinese diplomatic interpreters: the old generation who was active in the 1970s and 1980s and the new generation who emerges in the 2010s and 2020s. By drawing on newspaper, photographs, memoirs, oral history, interviews, and forum discussions, it tries to draw an evolutionary contour of Chinese diplomatic interpreters. The paper contributes to the study of interpreting history by a) proposing a multi-model approach in digital space and b) introducing the concept of “interpreter’s fame”.

Biography

Mr. Hao LI obtained his MA in Chinese Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has presented his research papers at various international translation and interpreting studies conferences. As a nationally certified interpreter and translator, he has a broad interest in translation history and practice. He currently works on a research project that examines the intersection of diplomatic history and translational mediation in modern and contemporary China.