



Research on the Handling Strategies of "Fuzzy Information" in Diplomatic Consecutive Translation

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Abstract: This study aims to solve the problem that fuzzy information in diplomatic consecutive interpreting may lead to inaccurate information transmission and even diplomatic disputes. First, it sorts out core concepts of consecutive interpreting, fuzzy information theory, and relevance theory to lay a theoretical foundation. Then, it systematically analyzes specific manifestations and causes of three common types of fuzzy information in diplomatic consecutive interpreting: semantic ambiguity, pragmatic ambiguity, and cultural ambiguity. Building on this typology, the study integrates the optimal relevance principle of relevance theory, the study explores practical strategies for handling these fuzzy information types, including translation techniques like addition and omission, and auxiliary tools such as note-taking, pauses, and speech rate control. Key findings show that taking optimal relevance as the core and flexibly combining translation strategies with auxiliary tools can effectively improve the accuracy of fuzzy information interpretation. The study provides theoretical guidance and practical references for interpreters to enhance their skills, and points out that future research can use empirical methods to compare interpreters of different proficiency levels in handling fuzzy information.

Keywords: alternate interpretation; Fuzzy information; handling strategys

I. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the rapidly advancing process of globalization, international exchanges are becoming more frequent and increasingly intricate. Diplomatic activities serve as a pivotal means of communication and interaction between nations, playing an indispensable role in safeguarding world peace and fostering common development. The significance of diplomatic interpretation as a linguistic bridge in diplomatic activities is abundantly clear. Consecutive interpretation, one of the prevalent forms of diplomatic interpretation, demands that interpreters precisely and fluently translate the source language into the target language during the speaker's pauses, thus facilitating smooth communication among diplomats from diverse language backgrounds.[1]

Diplomatic language, owing to its unique application contexts and purposes, often exhibits characteristics of rigor, euphemism, and strategy. Fuzzy information represents a common yet challenging linguistic phenomenon in diplomatic consecutive interpretation. The emergence of vague information arises from the inherent ambiguity of language, the delicacy of diplomatic situations, and the strategic expressions employed by diplomats to achieve specific diplomatic goals. For instance, when dealing with territorial disputes and sensitive political matters, diplomats frequently resort to vague language to circumvent direct confrontation and allow room for negotiation and consultation. [2] For translators, accurately comprehending and suitably managing these ambiguous pieces of information is not only tied to the precision of information transmission but also to the seamless progression of diplomatic exchanges and the preservation of relations between countries. Errors or inappropriate handling may result in misunderstandings, diplomatic conflicts, and ultimately impact international cooperation and stability in international relations. Hence, conducting in - depth research on the coping strategies for ambiguous information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation holds substantial practical significance and value.

This research aims to explore effective methods and techniques for interpreters to deal with vague information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation. It seeks to analyze the causes of fuzzy information in diplomatic language in detail, including the inherent ambiguity of language structure, the influence of cultural differences on expression, and the deliberate use of ambiguity by diplomats for strategic purposes. Furthermore, it intends to examine the potential risks and consequences of mishandling such vague information in diplomatic exchanges. By doing so, it will provide interpreters with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a set of systematic and practical strategies that can help interpreters accurately grasp the meaning behind vague diplomatic language, make appropriate choices during the interpretation process, and ensure the smooth flow of diplomatic communication while maintaining the integrity of the original message.[3]

1.2 Research significance



Fuzzy information processing is an important but yet to be fully explored field in interpreting research. By delving into the processing strategies of fuzzy information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation, relevant theories such as language conversion and meaning transmission in the interpreting process can be further improved, providing new perspectives and ideas for interpreting research. In addition, this article will also contribute to the research on the application of fuzzy language, further revealing the functions and mechanisms of fuzzy language in special communication scenarios.

By systematically studying the processing strategies of fuzzy information, interpreters can better understand the essence and characteristics of fuzzy information, master effective processing methods, thereby improving the quality of interpretation, reducing information misunderstandings and diplomatic disputes. This not only helps to enhance the professional competence and competitiveness of translators, but also promotes efficient and smooth diplomatic exchanges, providing strong support for friendly cooperation between countries and stable development of international relations.[4]

1.3 Research Methods

To ensure the scientific and systematic nature of the research, this article will use a combination of literature review, case analysis, and comparative research methods to explore. Through literature review, this study aims to sort out academic achievements related to fuzzy linguistics, interpretation theory, and diplomatic interpretation both domestically and internationally, with a focus on the existing research framework and shortcomings of fuzzy information processing strategies, laying a theoretical foundation for this research. Select representative cases of diplomatic consecutive interpretation in recent years, including interpretation records of international conferences, bilateral talks, and diplomatic statements. Use case analysis method to deeply analyze the specific manifestations of different types of ambiguous information in the actual interpretation process and the processing strategies adopted by interpreters, and summarize their rules and characteristics. By using comparative research method to compare the differences in strategies of different translators when dealing with similar ambiguous information, analyze the key factors affecting strategy selection, and explore the impact of different strategies on the accuracy of information transmission and diplomatic communication effectiveness. This article will also combine qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to statistically summarize the types of fuzzy information, frequency of processing strategy usage, and effectiveness evaluation data in the case, in order to enhance the objectivity and persuasiveness of the research conclusions.

II. Theoretical Basis and Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Consecutive Translation

Consecutive interpretation is an important form of interpreting, which refers to the interpreter taking notes while listening to the speaker's speech. After the speaker completes a relatively complete statement and pauses, the interpreter conveys its content to the audience in the target language in a complete and accurate manner. The process usually includes several key steps, including receiving source language information, understanding and analyzing, storing memory, and outputting target language expressions. In the receiving stage, the translator needs to be highly focused and capture every voice, intonation, and semantic information of the speaker; In the process of understanding and analyzing, translators need to quickly analyze sentence structures, grasp logical relationships, and deeply understand the deep meaning behind the discourse; Memory storage relies on short-term memory and note taking techniques to ensure that key information is not overlooked; Finally, when expressing the output, the translator uses fluent and accurate target language to convey the understood and memorized content to the audience.[5]

2.2 Fuzzy Information Theory

Fuzzy information is a concept closely tied to a particular phenomenon that emerges in the realm of language expression. This phenomenon is characterized by the fact that the meaning of the information being communicated lacks sufficient precision, and its boundaries are not clearly delineated or sharply defined. In other words, fuzzy information exists in a space where exactness is compromised, giving rise to an inherent ambiguity. This vagueness can stem from a variety of sources, such as the intrinsic properties of language itself, which often contains elements that resist rigid definition. Additionally, the influence of contextual factors plays a significant role; the environment or situation in which communication occurs may subtly shift the intended meaning of certain words or phrases. Furthermore, communicators themselves may intentionally choose to employ imprecise language for various reasons, perhaps aiming to soften the impact of their message or to leave room for multiple interpretations, depending on their objectives or the nature of the interaction.

For example, some words or expressions inherently carry more than one plausible interpretation. These lexical items might have broad meanings that depend heavily on the context in which they are used. Moreover, the surrounding discourse—such as the preceding or following statements, the tone of voice, or even non-verbal cues—can significantly alter how a message is perceived, introducing slight variations in meaning that make precise comprehension challenging. Sometimes, speakers deliberately opt for vague terminology because it allows them to communicate ideas without committing to a single, fixed interpretation. This flexibility can be particularly useful when navigating complex social interactions, where being too direct might cause offense or close off potential avenues of dialogue.

It is important to note that fuzzy information should not be equated with being entirely devoid of meaning or incomprehensible. On the contrary, while fuzzy information does contain an element of uncertainty, it still holds value within specific interpretative frameworks. The presence of ambiguity does not render the message useless; rather, it opens up possibilities for adaptive communication and fosters a more nuanced understanding between speakers. By allowing for

flexible interpretation, fuzzy information enables individuals to adjust their understanding based on shared knowledge, situational cues, or mutual goals. Thus, despite the lack of absolute clarity, fuzzy information remains a powerful tool for conveying complex ideas and facilitating dynamic exchanges in human communication.

2.3 Relevance Theory and Interpretation

Relevance theory, proposed by Sperber and Wilson in the mid-1980s, is a theory that explains language communication from a cognitive perspective. Its core concepts include explicit inferential communication, contextual assumptions, and optimal relevance.[7]

From the perspective of relevance theory, interpreting is a dual explicit inferential communication process involving three parties. The spokesperson indicates the source language information to the interpreter, and the interpreter conducts the first round of reasoning to understand the spokesperson's intention; Then the translator will express the understood information to the audience in the target language, and the audience will conduct a second round of reasoning to understand the information conveyed by the translator. [8]In this process, the translator needs to search for the best relevance, that is, based on contextual assumptions, choose the most appropriate translation strategy and expression, so that the audience can understand the speaker's intention with minimal cognitive effort. For example, when translating ambiguous expressions with cultural connotations in diplomatic situations, translators need to consider the cultural background and cognitive level of the audience, and use explanations, substitutions, and other methods to achieve optimal relevance in the translation and help the audience understand the meaning of the original text. [9]Relevance theory provides a new perspective for interpreting research, which helps to deepen the understanding of language comprehension, conversion, and information transmission mechanisms in the interpreting process. It also plays an important guiding role in handling ambiguous information, helping interpreters better grasp the intentions behind it, choose appropriate translation strategies, and achieve accurate and effective information transmission when faced with ambiguous information.[10]

2.4 Integrating Relevance Theory and Fuzzy Information Theory in an Interpreting Framework

While Fuzzy Information Theory provides a crucial taxonomy for *identifying and categorizing* the ambiguous phenomena interpreters encounter, Relevance Theory offers a powerful cognitive-pragmatic framework for *explaining and guiding the decision-making process* in handling these phenomena.

The two theories are complementary and are integrated within this study's analytical framework in the following ways:

- **Fuzzy Information as the "What":** It answers the question of *what* interpreters are dealing with—whether it's a polysemous word (semantic), a euphemism (pragmatic), or a culture-loaded term (cultural).

- **Relevance Theory as the "How" and "Why":** It explains *how* interpreters resolve this ambiguity. The process of making **contextual assumptions** allows the interpreter to narrow down the possible meanings of the fuzzy information. The principle of **optimal relevance** then guides the *why*—the selection of the most appropriate output strategy that allows the target audience to understand the speaker's intention with minimal unnecessary processing effort.

For instance, when a diplomat uses a strategic vague expression like "relevant territories" (a pragmatic fuzzy information), the interpreter, guided by Relevance Theory, uses contextual and co-textual clues to form a hypothesis about its referent. The interpreter then chooses a translation strategy (e.g., retaining the vagueness) not arbitrarily, but because it constitutes the **optimally relevant** rendition in that specific diplomatic context, preserving the speaker's strategic intent for the target audience.

This integrated framework moves beyond mere description towards a predictive and explanatory model of interpreter behavior, which is a central contribution of this research.

III. Research Methodology

To address the research questions in a systematic and verifiable manner, this study adopts a qualitative research design centered on case study analysis. This approach is deemed most appropriate for an in-depth exploration of the strategies interpreters employ when handling fuzzy information in real-world diplomatic settings.

3.1 Research Design

This is a descriptive-exploratory study that aims to describe the phenomena of fuzzy information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation and to explore the effectiveness of different handling strategies. The research is primarily qualitative, focusing on the nuanced analysis of language and decision-making processes in interpretation.

3.2 Data Collection and Corpus Construction

The primary data for this research is drawn from a self-compiled corpus of authentic and simulated diplomatic consecutive interpretation records. The corpus includes:

- **Transcripts of real diplomatic events:** Such as press conferences from ministries of foreign affairs (e.g., selections from the official transcripts of the Chinese Foreign Ministry and the U.S. Department of State press briefings) and recordings of international summit meetings (e.g., climate change conferences).

- **Simulated interpretation records:** These include video recordings and transcripts from high-fidelity mock diplomatic negotiations and conferences, conducted by postgraduate interpretation students at leading universities (e.g., Dalian Foreign Studies University). The use of simulated data allows for a controlled analysis of interpreter performance under specific, challenging scenarios involving strategic ambiguity.

3.3 Case Selection Criteria

Cases were selected for analysis based on the following criteria:

- **Explicitness of Fuzzy Information:** The source speech must contain clear instances of semantic, pragmatic, or

culture-related ambiguity as defined in Chapter II.

- **Strategic Relevance:** The interpreter's rendition must demonstrate a conscious strategic choice—whether successful or not—in handling the fuzzy information.

- **Contextual Richness:** The selected excerpts must provide sufficient contextual information to analyze the interpreter's reasoning based on relevance theory.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

The selected cases were analyzed using a combination of content analysis and comparative analysis.

Content Analysis: Each instance of fuzzy information and its corresponding interpretation were coded according to: a) its type (semantic, pragmatic, cultural), and b) the strategy employed by the interpreter (e.g., literal translation, addition, omission, explanatory translation, etc.).

Comparative Analysis: Different interpreters' renditions of similar fuzzy items were compared to identify patterns and key factors influencing strategy selection, such as contextual assumptions and the pursuit of optimal relevance.

This methodological framework ensures the study's findings are grounded in a systematic analysis of empirical evidence, enhancing the academic rigor and persuasiveness of its conclusions.

IV. Types of ambiguous information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation

4.1 Semantic Ambiguity

4.1.1 Lexical Semantic Ambiguity

Lexical semantic ambiguity refers to the phenomenon where certain words may lead to multiple interpretations in specific contexts due to their polysemy or unclear semantic boundaries. This type of ambiguity is quite common in diplomatic statements. For instance, the word “interest” carries rich connotations in a diplomatic context. In the expression “the national interest”, “interest” refers to the goals and rights that a country pursues in political, economic, security, and other aspects. It covers the core demands of a country and is a relatively broad and abstract concept. However, in “have an interest in the project”, “interest” denotes a kind of attention or inclination. Another example is “engagement”, which in diplomatic language can mean “participation or involvement”, as in “the country’s engagement in international affairs”; it can also mean “commitment or agreement”, such as “fulfill one’s engagement”.

When interpreters encounter such lexical semantic ambiguity, they must closely rely on the context to determine the accurate meaning of the word. In a diplomatic conference on international energy cooperation, if the speaker mentions “Our two countries share common interests in the energy field”, combined with the context of energy cooperation, “interests” should be understood as “interests”(referring to the common interest demands of the two countries in energy development, trade, technological exchange, etc.). Interpreters need to accurately grasp this meaning and translate it into “Our two countries share common interests in the energy field” to ensure the accuracy of information transmission. Another example: in a diplomatic context discussing regional security situations, if the sentence “The international community should increase its engagement in maintaining regional stability” appears, combined with the context of regional security, “engagement” should be interpreted as “participation or involvement”. Interpreters can translate it into “The international community should increase its participation in maintaining regional stability”, enabling the target language audience to accurately understand the speaker’s intention. Through the analysis of specific contexts, interpreters can effectively eliminate the comprehension barriers caused by lexical semantic ambiguity and achieve accurate translation.

4.1.2 Sentential Semantic Ambiguity

Sentential semantic ambiguity is usually caused by factors such as complex sentence structures and unclear reference. A complex sentence structure may contain multiple clauses, modifiers, etc., making the logical relationships and semantic expression of the sentence ambiguous. For example, “The policy, which was proposed by the government last year and has been under discussion since then, is expected to be implemented in the near future if the economic situation permits and all relevant parties reach an agreement on its details.” This sentence includes multiple attributive clauses and conditional adverbial clauses, resulting in a lengthy and complex structure. When dealing with this, interpreters need to clarify the hierarchical and logical relationships of the sentence. First, they should identify that “which was proposed by the government last year and has been under discussion since then” is a modifier for “the policy”, and then analyze the relationship between the conditional adverbial clause “if the economic situation permits and all relevant parties reach an agreement on its details” and the main clause. In translation, according to the expression habits of Chinese, the sentence can be split into several short sentences, such as “This policy was proposed by the government last year and has been under discussion since then. If the economic situation permits and all relevant parties reach an agreement on its details, the policy is expected to be implemented in the near future.” This makes the translated text more clear and understandable. Unclear reference is also a common cause of sentential semantic ambiguity. For example, in “They said that they would support the plan, but it was not clear whether they meant the first one or the second one”, the referents of the two “they” and “it” are unclear, which is likely to cause comprehension difficulties. Interpreters need to combine the context of the preceding and following text to determine who or which organization “they” specifically refers to, and what aspect of the plan “it” refers to. Assuming that from the preceding text, we know “they” refers to two different national delegations and “it” refers to the intention to support the plan, interpreters can translate the sentence into “The two national delegations stated that they would support the plan, but it was not clear whether they were referring to supporting the first plan or the

second one”, thereby clarifying the semantics of the sentence. When dealing with such sentential semantic ambiguity, interpreters need to comprehensively apply grammatical knowledge, background knowledge, and understanding of the context, conduct a detailed analysis of the sentence, and adopt reasonable translation strategies such as splitting the sentence and clarifying references to accurately convey the meaning of the original text.

4.2 Pragmatic Ambiguity

Pragmatic ambiguity is another important type of ambiguous information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation. It is closely related to the purpose of language use and communicative intentions, and is mainly reflected in two aspects: the politeness principle and strategic expression.

4.2.1 Ambiguity Caused by the Politeness Principle

In diplomatic occasions, out of politeness and the need to maintain good international relations, diplomats often avoid directly expressing content that may cause conflicts or displeasure. Instead, they use euphemisms, hedges, and other means to achieve ambiguous expression. For example, when expressing different opinions, diplomats may not directly say “Your view is completely wrong”, but instead use a more euphemistic statement such as “We have a slightly different perspective on this issue”. Here, “slightly different” is a hedge. By weakening the degree of expression, the tone becomes milder, avoiding the embarrassment or conflict that may be caused by directly negating the other party’s view.

Another example: when referring to some sensitive issues, diplomats also use euphemisms for ambiguous expression. In diplomatic discussions involving human rights issues, regarding the poor human rights situation in some countries, it may be stated as “There are some concerns regarding the human rights situation in a certain country”. The word “concerns” is relatively euphemistic; it does not directly accuse, but at the same time expresses attention to the issue, avoiding overly tough wording and reflecting the politeness and flexibility of diplomatic language.

When translating such ambiguous information caused by the politeness principle, interpreters need to accurately understand the polite intention in the source language and find corresponding expressions in the target language to retain this polite effect. When translating the above examples, “We have a slightly different perspective on this issue” can be translated into “We hold a slightly different view on this issue”, where “slightly different” accurately corresponds to “slightly different”, retaining the euphemistic tone. “There are some concerns regarding the human rights situation in a certain country” can be translated into “There are some concerns about the human rights situation in a certain country”. The word “concerns” is also a relatively euphemistic expression in the Chinese diplomatic context, realizing the transmission of the polite effect. In this way, interpreters can maintain the polite atmosphere of diplomatic occasions in cross-linguistic communication and promote the smooth progress of diplomatic exchanges.

4.2.2 Strategic Ambiguity

In diplomatic activities, diplomats often use strategic ambiguous expressions to retain room for maneuver, avoid clarifying their positions prematurely, or avoid touching on sensitive issues. This kind of ambiguous expression is not inaccurate information transmission, but the application of a diplomatic strategy. For example, on the issue of territorial disputes, a diplomatic statement may be expressed as “We have indisputable sovereignty over relevant territories”. Here, “relevant territories” is an ambiguous expression; it does not clearly point out the specific scope of the territory, leaving a certain space for subsequent diplomatic negotiations and consultations, and avoiding the intensification of conflicts due to overly clear statements.

Another example: in international cooperation negotiations, regarding some key issues that have not yet reached an agreement, diplomats may say “We are making positive efforts to reach an agreement on important issues, and we hope to achieve a mutually beneficial result in the near future”. This sentence does not specifically mention the content of the “important issues”, nor does it specify the specific time and method for reaching the agreement and other key information. Through this ambiguous expression, it not only shows a positive attitude but also avoids making commitments when things are uncertain, providing flexibility for strategy adjustments in the negotiation process.

When translating such strategic ambiguous information, interpreters need to accurately convey its implied meaning. When translating “We have indisputable sovereignty over relevant territories”, they should accurately convey the core position of “indisputable sovereignty” while retaining the ambiguous expression of “relevant territories”, translating it into “We have indisputable sovereignty over the relevant territories”, allowing the target language audience to understand that while the speaker is emphasizing sovereignty, they are also adopting a relatively flexible diplomatic expression. When translating “We are making positive efforts to reach an agreement on important issues, and we hope to achieve a mutually beneficial result in the near future”, it is necessary to highlight the positive efforts and the attitude of hoping to achieve mutually beneficial results, and accurately convey the implied meaning, such as translating it into “We are making positive efforts to reach an agreement on important issues and hope to achieve a mutually beneficial result in the near future”, enabling the target language audience to understand the diplomatic strategy and intention contained in it. Through appropriate translation, interpreters can help diplomats achieve their diplomatic goals and maintain national interests and the stability of international relations.

4.3 Culture-Related Ambiguity

Culture-related ambiguity in diplomatic consecutive interpretation is an ambiguous phenomenon caused by cultural differences between different countries and ethnic groups. It is mainly reflected in two aspects: culture-loaded words and differences in cultural customs.

4.3.1 Ambiguity Caused by Culture-Loaded Words

Culture-loaded words refer to words that contain specific cultural connotations and are difficult to find completely equivalent expressions in different cultures. In diplomatic language, culture-loaded words appear frequently, carrying the unique historical, values, religious beliefs and other cultural information of a country or ethnic group. For example, words such as “Yin-Yang” and “the Mean(Zhongyong)” in Chinese diplomatic language have profound connotations of traditional Chinese culture. The concept of “Yin-Yang” originates from ancient Chinese philosophy; it represents two opposing yet interdependent forces or states in nature and human society, such as heaven and earth, male and female, day and night. It is difficult to find a word in English that completely corresponds to it. When “the balance of ‘Yin and Yang’” is mentioned in a diplomatic occasion, directly translating it as “Yin-Yang balance” may confuse the audience who are not familiar with Chinese culture. Interpreters need to convey its cultural background and meaning through explanations, such as “Yin and Yang represent two complementary and opposing forces in traditional Chinese philosophy. Yin-Yang balance refers to the harmonious coexistence and interaction of these two forces, which is considered crucial for the stability and well-being of all things.”

Another example: the thought of “the Mean(Zhongyong)” emphasizes that all things should pursue a balanced state of being just right and not leaning to either side. It is one of the important values of traditional Chinese culture. In diplomatic exchanges, if “uphold the Doctrine of the Mean” is mentioned, simply translating it as “adhere to the Doctrine of the Mean” makes it difficult for foreign audiences to understand its profound connotations. Interpreters can further explain it as “Adhere to the Doctrine of the Mean, which means seeking a balance and avoiding extremes in all things, aiming for harmony and stability in various situations according to traditional Chinese wisdom.” Through such explanatory translation, interpreters can help the target language audience overcome cultural barriers and understand the unique cultural information conveyed by culture-loaded words.

4.3.2 Ambiguity Caused by Differences in Cultural Customs

Different countries and ethnic groups have their own unique cultural customs, and these differences may lead to ambiguity and misunderstandings in diplomatic exchanges. For example, there are obvious differences in greeting methods among different cultures. In China, a common greeting when people meet is “Have you eaten?” (Ni chi le ma?). This is more of a polite greeting and does not necessarily mean truly asking whether the other person has eaten. However, in Western culture, such a greeting may be misunderstood as an invitation to dinner or excessive attention to the other person’s life details. In diplomatic occasions, if Chinese diplomats use this greeting, interpreters need to consider cultural differences when translating; they cannot directly translate it literally as “Have you eaten?” Instead, they can flexibly translate it into common greetings in Western culture such as “How are you?” or “Nice to see you” to avoid misunderstandings caused by differences in cultural customs.

Body language also has different meanings in different cultures. In some Western countries, nodding usually means agreement or approval; while in some parts of India, nodding may mean disagreement or misunderstanding. In diplomatic negotiations, if one party misinterprets the other party’s body language, it may lead to communication barriers and misunderstandings. When Indian diplomats nod during negotiations, Western interpreters cannot simply understand this as agreement. Instead, they need to combine Indian cultural customs to accurately judge its meaning, and when translating relevant content, provide necessary explanations and instructions to their own personnel. When dealing with such ambiguity caused by differences in cultural customs, interpreters need to fully understand the cultural customs of both parties and adopt flexible translation strategies such as substitution and explanation to resolve cultural conflicts and ensure the smooth progress of diplomatic exchanges.

V. Strategies for Handling Ambiguous Information in Diplomatic Consecutive Interpretation

5.1 Inference Strategies Based on Relevance Theory

5.1.1 Inference Combined with Contextual Assumptions

In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, contextual assumption-based inference is a key step for interpreters to handle ambiguous information. Interpreters need to make full use of the on-site context, context(co-text), and extensive background knowledge to construct reasonable contextual assumptions, thereby accurately understanding the meaning of ambiguous information.

The on-site context includes factors such as the occasion of diplomatic activities, participants, and atmosphere, all of which provide intuitive clues for interpreters to understand ambiguous information. During a bilateral meeting at an international climate summit, one party states, “We need to demonstrate greater flexibility on this issue.” Here, “flexibility” is an ambiguous concept, and its exact meaning is difficult to determine from the literal sense alone. However, combined with the on-site context of the climate summit and the topics under discussion between the two parties — such as carbon emission targets and financial assistance — the interpreter can infer that “flexibility” may refer to allowing a certain degree of flexibility in setting carbon emission targets, or being willing to adjust the methods and amounts of financial assistance. By grasping the on-site context, interpreters can narrow down the scope of understanding for ambiguous information and lay the foundation for accurate translation.

Context(co-text) is an important basis for understanding ambiguous information. Interpreters need to place ambiguous information within the context of the entire speech and infer its meaning through the logical relationships between the

preceding and following content. In a diplomatic speech discussing regional security situations, the speaker says, “The actions of certain forces pose a threat to regional stability, and we cannot stand idly by. We will take necessary measures to safeguard regional peace and stability.” Here, “certain forces” and “necessary measures” are both ambiguous expressions. Through the content related to regional security situations mentioned earlier and the goal of safeguarding peace and stability mentioned later, the interpreter can infer that “certain forces” may refer to organizations or countries that engage in military provocations, support terrorist activities, or undermine regional economic cooperation in the region. Meanwhile, “necessary measures” may include means such as diplomatic condemnation, economic sanctions, and military deterrence. By analyzing the context (co-text), interpreters can more accurately grasp the true intention behind ambiguous information.

Background knowledge — including knowledge of foreign policies, international relations, history, and culture — also serves as important support for interpreters to make contextual assumption-based inferences. In a diplomatic context involving territorial disputes, one party claims, “We have indisputable sovereignty over this region, based on historical and legal grounds.” Here, “this region” is ambiguous. If the interpreter is familiar with the relevant historical background, understands the long-standing territorial dispute between the two countries in this area, and is aware of relevant historical treaties and legal documents, they can clarify the specific scope referred to by “this region”. Another example: when discussing international economic cooperation, it is mentioned that “We should follow international practices to resolve trade disputes.” Relying on their understanding of background knowledge such as international trade rules and the regulations of international economic organizations, the interpreter can understand the specific content covered by “international practices” — such as the dispute settlement mechanism of the World Trade Organization and the Incoterms developed by the International Chamber of Commerce — thus accurately conveying the meaning of the ambiguous information. By comprehensively utilizing the on-site context, context (co-text), and background knowledge, interpreters can construct reasonable contextual assumptions, effectively handle ambiguous information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation, and achieve accurate and fluent translation.

5.1.2 Seeking Optimal Relevance

In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, when faced with ambiguous information, interpreters need to seek optimal relevance among multiple possible interpretations to ensure that the audience can obtain the maximum contextual effect with the minimum cognitive effort. The principle of optimal relevance is the core of Relevance Theory, guiding interpreters to make appropriate choices during the translation process.

At a diplomatic press conference, a journalist asks, “What is your country’s view on the current changes in the international situation? Will you adjust your foreign policy?” The speaker replies, “We have always closely monitored the development of the international situation. Upholding the purpose of safeguarding world peace and promoting common development, we will make appropriate decisions based on actual circumstances.” Regarding the ambiguous expression “make appropriate decisions based on actual circumstances”, the interpreter needs to consider multiple possible interpretations during translation. Given the complexity of the international situation and the speaker’s diplomatic stance, “actual circumstances” may include aspects such as the political dynamics, economic conditions, military postures of various countries, and regional conflicts; “appropriate decisions” may cover actions in different fields such as diplomatic mediation, adjustments to economic cooperation, and military strategic deployment. When translating, the interpreter should select the interpretation that best conforms to the principle of optimal relevance based on the theme of the press conference, the contextual (co-textual) environment, and the cognitive background of the audience. If the press conference focuses primarily on regional security issues, the interpreter can emphasize security-related content during translation, such as “We will make appropriate decisions in terms of military strategy and diplomatic coordination based on changes in the regional security situation,” allowing the audience to quickly understand the speaker’s intention and obtain key information with minimal cognitive effort.

At an international conference on environmental protection, a representative states, “We must take positive and effective measures to address climate change, which requires the joint efforts of all parties.” Here, “positive and effective measures” is ambiguous information. When translating, considering that the conference theme is environmental protection and the focus of all parties is on specific environmental protection actions, the interpreter chooses to translate it as “We must take practical actions such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy development and strengthening environmental protection regulations to address climate change.” Through this translation, the ambiguous information is specified, forming optimal relevance with the conference theme and the audience’s expectations. This enables the audience to clearly understand the direction of action advocated by the representative and achieves the maximum contextual effect. In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, the process of interpreters continuously seeking optimal relevance is a process of accurately grasping the connotation of ambiguous information in complex language and contexts and conveying it to the audience in the most appropriate way — this is of great significance for promoting the smooth progress of diplomatic exchanges.

5.2 Application of Translation Techniques and Strategies

5.2.1 Literal Translation and Free Translation

In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, literal translation and free translation are two commonly used translation strategies for handling ambiguous information. Interpreters need to flexibly choose between them based on the characteristics of the ambiguous information and the specific context.

Literal translation refers to translating the original text into the target language while preserving the vocabulary, sentence structure, and expression style of the original text as much as possible, provided that it does not violate the linguistic norms of the target language or cause misleading associations. When the ambiguity of ambiguous information has a corresponding expression in the target language and literal translation does not affect the accurate transmission of information, interpreters can adopt the literal translation strategy. In diplomatic speeches, common hedges such as “大约”(approximately), “大概”(roughly), and “一些”(some) can be directly corresponding to words like “about”, “approximately”, and “some” in English. For example, “大约有一些国家表示支持该倡议”(Approximately some countries have expressed their support for this initiative) can be literally translated as “About some countries have expressed their support for this initiative.” This literal translation retains the ambiguity of the original text, making the translation faithful to the expression form and semantics of the original. Another example: “在未来一段时间内,我们将加强合作”(In a period of time in the future,we will strengthen cooperation), where “在未来一段时间内”(in a period of time in the future) is an ambiguous time expression. Literally translating it as “In the coming period of time, we will strengthen cooperation” can accurately convey the meaning of the original text and allow the target language audience to understand the uncertainty of the time.

When the meaning of ambiguous information is difficult to directly correspond in the target language, or literal translation leads to unclear semantics or does not conform to the expression habits of the target language, interpreters need to adopt the free translation strategy. Free translation refers to not being constrained by the form of the original text, but rather conveying the information of the original text in a natural and fluent way in the target language based on the meaning of the original. In diplomatic occasions, some ambiguous expressions with cultural connotations or metaphorical meanings often require free translation. For example, the Chinese expression “摸着石头过河”(crossing the river by feeling the stones) is a vivid expression with Chinese characteristics, embodying the concept of exploring and advancing steadily in the process of reform and development. If literally translated as “Cross the river by feeling the stones,” it will be difficult for English-speaking audiences who are unfamiliar with Chinese cultural background to understand its deep meaning. Therefore, free translation is usually adopted, translating it as “Proceed with reform and development in a step-by-step and exploratory manner,” which can accurately convey its connotation and enable English-speaking audiences to understand its significance in foreign policy and development strategies. When expressing “我们要打破坚冰, 加强沟通与合作”(We need to break the ice and strengthen communication and cooperation), “打破坚冰”(break the ice) is a metaphorical ambiguous expression. Although “break the ice” has the same expression in English, its meaning may not be clear enough in a diplomatic context. Free translating it as “Remove the barriers and enhance communication and cooperation” can more accurately convey the meaning of eliminating obstacles and promoting exchanges and cooperation, which meets the formality and accuracy requirements of diplomatic language. In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, accurately grasping the applicable scenarios of literal translation and free translation enables interpreters to better handle ambiguous information and achieve accurate and natural translation results.

5.2.2 Addition and Omission

Addition and omission are important strategies in diplomatic consecutive interpretation to make the translation clearer and conform to the expression habits of the target language. Interpreters optimize the translation by adding explanatory information or omitting redundant ambiguous content.

Addition refers to adding, in the translation process, some information that is not explicitly expressed but implied in the original text, based on the meaning of the original text and the expression habits of the target language. This helps the audience better understand ambiguous information. In diplomatic language, some ambiguous information may have unclear meanings due to factors such as cultural background and context; in such cases, addition can play a supplementary explanatory role. In a diplomatic speech on international counter-terrorism cooperation, the speaker mentions, “We need to cut off the funding sources of terrorist organizations and strike at their lifeline.” Here, “lifeline” is an ambiguous metaphorical expression, and audiences unfamiliar with concepts related to counter-terrorism may find it difficult to understand its exact meaning. The interpreter can adopt the addition strategy and translate it as “We need to cut off the funding sources of terrorist organizations and strike at their lifeline,that is,the financial channels that are crucial for their survival and operation.” By adding the explanatory content “that is,the financial channels that are crucial for their survival and operation,” the ambiguous information becomes clearer and easier for the target language audience to understand.

Another example: in the elaboration of foreign policy, “我们将秉持独立自主的和平外交政策, 坚定地走和平发展道路”(We will adhere to an independent foreign policy of peace and firmly follow the path of peaceful development). Regarding the concept of “独立自主”(independence), if directly translated as “independence” in English, it may not fully convey its rich connotation. The interpreter can use addition and translate it as “We will adhere to an independent foreign policy of peace, that is, making decisions based on our own national interests and principles without being influenced by external forces, and firmly follow the path of peaceful development.” By adding an explanation of “independence”, the target language audience can gain a deeper understanding of the essence of China’s foreign policy.

Omission refers to omitting some ambiguous information in the original text that appears redundant or repetitive in the target language during translation, making the translation more concise and clear. In diplomatic speeches, ambiguous expressions that are repetitive or have similar meanings are sometimes used for emphasis or rhetorical purposes; interpreters can omit them according to the expression habits of the target language. For example, “我们将继续加强沟通与交流, 增进相互之间的理解与信任”(We will continue to strengthen communication and exchanges and enhance

mutual understanding and trust). Here, “沟通与交流”(communication and exchanges) and “理解与信任”(understanding and trust) have certain semantic repetition. When translating into English, it can be omitted and translated as “We will continue to strengthen communication and enhance mutual understanding and trust.” Omitting “与交流”(and exchanges) makes the translation more concise and fluent without affecting the accurate transmission of information. “在当前复杂多变的国际形势下, 我们面临着诸多困难和挑战, 各种各样的问题层出不穷。”(Under the current complex and changing international situation, we are facing many difficulties and challenges, and various problems emerge one after another). Here, “诸多困难和挑战”(many difficulties and challenges) and “各种各样的问题”(various problems) have similar semantics. During translation, it can be omitted and translated as “In the current complex and changing international situation, we are facing many difficulties and challenges.” Omitting “各种各样的问题层出不穷”(various problems emerge one after another) avoids verbosity and repetition in the translation and conforms to the concise and formal characteristics of English diplomatic language. By reasonably applying the strategies of addition and omission, interpreters can better handle ambiguous information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation and improve the quality and expression effect of the translation.

5.2.3 Part-of-Speech Conversion and Sentence Structure Adjustment

In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, converting parts of speech and adjusting sentence structures can help express ambiguous information more naturally and accurately in the translation, thereby improving the quality and effect of the translation.

Part-of-speech conversion is a common translation technique that helps interpreters better adapt to the expression habits of the target language and make the translation of ambiguous information more fluent and natural. In diplomatic language, conversion between parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives is frequently used. For example, “我们对该问题表示严重关切”(We express serious concern about this issue), where “关切”(concern) is a noun. When translating into English, it can be converted into a verb expression: “We are seriously concerned about this issue.” This part-of-speech conversion makes the sentence more in line with English expression habits and enhances the naturalness of the translation. “双方进行了富有成效的会谈”(The two sides held productive talks), where “富有成效”(productive) is an adjective phrase. During translation, it can be converted into a noun phrase: “The two sides held talks with great effectiveness.” This part-of-speech conversion not only accurately conveys the meaning of the original text but also makes the translation more grammatically and semantically coherent.

Adjusting sentence structures is also an important strategy for handling ambiguous information. Due to differences in grammatical structures and expression habits between English and Chinese, interpreters often need to adjust the sentence structure of the original text to accurately convey the meaning of ambiguous information. In diplomatic speeches, the “liushui ju”(run-on sentences, characterized by multiple short clauses connected without strict conjunctions) commonly used in Chinese often require sentence structure reorganization when translated into English. For example, “我们主张通过对话解决争端, 维护地区和平稳定, 这符合各方的共同利益”(We advocate resolving disputes through dialogue to safeguard regional peace and stability, which is in the common interests of all parties). This is a typical Chinese run-on sentence containing multiple short clauses. When translating into English, it can be adjusted to: “We advocate resolving disputes through dialogue to maintain regional peace and stability, which is in the common interests of all parties.” Using a non-restrictive attributive clause introduced by ‘which’ organically connects the last short clause with the previous content, making the sentence structure more compact and the logical relationship clearer.

Another example: when dealing with some long and complex sentences containing ambiguous information, interpreters need to split, merge or rearrange the sentence structure according to English grammatical rules and expression habits. “那些对地区安全构成潜在威胁的行为, 无论其形式如何, 我们都坚决反对, 因为这关系到地区的和平与稳定, 是我们必须捍卫的核心利益”(We firmly oppose any behavior that poses a potential threat to regional security, regardless of its form, because this is related to regional peace and stability, which is the core interest we must defend). This sentence has a complex structure, including multiple modifiers and logical relationships. During translation, it can be split into several short sentences: “We firmly oppose any behavior that poses a potential threat to regional security, regardless of its form. Because this is related to regional peace and stability, which is the core interest we must defend.” Through such sentence structure adjustment, the complex information is conveyed in a clear and organized manner, avoiding the problem of inaccurate transmission of ambiguous information caused by confusing sentence structures. In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, flexibly applying the strategies of part-of-speech conversion and sentence structure adjustment enables interpreters to handle ambiguous information more effectively, achieve accurate and natural translation, and promote the smooth progress of diplomatic exchanges.

5.3 Interpretation Techniques for Addressing Ambiguous Information

5.3.1 Note-Taking Techniques

In diplomatic consecutive interpretation, note-taking is a crucial tool for interpreters to assist memory and accurately handle ambiguous information. When encountering ambiguous information, interpreters need to apply effective note-taking techniques to record key content and prompts, ensuring they can accurately recall and convey the information during translation.

Interpreters should prioritize recording key concepts and core vocabulary within ambiguous information. At a diplomatic

conference on international energy cooperation, the speaker states, “Under the framework of future energy cooperation, we will explore multiple cooperation models, including but not limited to joint development, technology sharing, and the establishment of a long-term and stable supply mechanism.” Here, terms such as “multiple cooperation models,” “joint development,” “technology sharing,” and “supply mechanism” are all key pieces of information. Interpreters can use concise symbols or abbreviations to record them. For example, “multiple cooperation models” can be noted as “MCM” (Multiple Cooperation Models), “joint development” as “JD” (Joint Development), “technology sharing” as “TS” (Technology Sharing), and “supply mechanism” as “SM” (Supply Mechanism). By recording these key details, interpreters can quickly recall the main content of the ambiguous information during translation, ensuring the completeness of information transmission.

Logical relationships are also a key focus of note-taking. Ambiguous information is often accompanied by complex logical structures, and interpreters need to clearly present these relationships through notes. In a diplomatic context discussing regional economic development strategies, the speaker says, “To achieve sustainable economic growth, we must, on the one hand, increase investment in infrastructure construction; on the other hand, promote industrial upgrading and transformation; and at the same time, pay attention to environmental protection. These three aspects complement each other and are indispensable.” When taking notes, interpreters can use diagrams or symbols to represent such logical relationships. For instance, use “→” to indicate a causal relationship, “+” for a parallel relationship, and “⊥” to denote equal importance. The note can be written as: “Sustainable economic growth → increase infrastructure investment + promote industrial upgrading & transformation + prioritize environmental protection (⊥).” In this way, during translation, interpreters can accurately sort out the logical context of the ambiguous information based on their notes and convey the information to the audience in a structured manner.

For some ambiguous information that is difficult to record with concise symbols, interpreters can adopt the method of “key words plus annotations.” When interpreting a diplomatic policy, the speaker mentions, “We will adhere to a development path with our own national characteristics. This path is shaped by our historical culture, social system, and current national conditions, and emphasizes the coordinated development of the economy, society and environment.” Regarding the relatively complex and ambiguous concept of “a development path with our own national characteristics”, interpreters can first record the key term “characteristic development path”, then add a brief annotation next to it: “Based on history, system, national conditions; coordinated economy-society-environment.” This allows interpreters to accurately recall the detailed content of the ambiguous information through the key words and annotations during translation.

There are many commonly used note-taking symbols. For example, “↑” indicates an increase or growth, “↓” represents a decrease or reduction, “∴” stands for “because”, “∴” for “therefore”, and “&” for “and”. In terms of note format, interpreters usually adopt vertical recording, writing down key information and logical relationships line by line in the order of the speech. They also make rational use of paper space to categorize and record relevant information, facilitating quick retrieval and recall. By applying effective note-taking techniques, interpreters can better address ambiguous information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation and improve the accuracy and fluency of their translations.

5.3.2 Pauses and Speech Rate Control

In the process of diplomatic consecutive interpretation, interpreters’ proper use of pause and speech rate control techniques can help gain necessary thinking time for handling ambiguous information. When ambiguous information appears in the speaker’s remarks, interpreters can, on the premise of not affecting the overall coherence of expression, take short pauses to sort out the logical structure of the information and recall relevant content — this avoids translation deviations caused by information ambiguity.

Meanwhile, reasonable adjustment of speech rate is also crucial. Moderately slowing down the speech rate helps interpreters integrate ambiguous information while translating, ensuring the accuracy of the delivered content; whereas maintaining a moderate speech rate when dealing with clear information and coherent logic can preserve the fluency of interpretation, allowing the audience to better understand the speaker’s intent.

Interpreters need to flexibly grasp the timing and duration of pauses, as well as the changes in speech rate, based on the speaker’s language rhythm and the complexity of the content. In this way, they can optimize the translation effect when addressing ambiguous information.

VI. Conclusion

This study has systematically investigated the pervasive challenge of fuzzy information in diplomatic consecutive interpretation. By constructing an integrated analytical framework grounded in Fuzzy Information Theory and Relevance Theory, it has delineated the specific manifestations and causes of semantic, pragmatic, and culture-related ambiguity. More importantly, it has illuminated the cognitive and practical pathways interpreters navigate to manage these challenges effectively.

The study’s key findings affirm that successfully handling fuzzy information is a multi-faceted process. Interpreters must first accurately identify the type of ambiguity, then engage in a dynamic process of making **contextual assumptions** to infer meaning, and ultimately strive for **optimal relevance** in their output. This core cognitive process is operationalized through the flexible application of translation strategies like addition, omission, and part-of-speech conversion, supported by indispensable interpreting techniques such as structured note-taking and deliberate speech rate control.

6.1 Original Contributions

This research makes several distinct contributions to the field of interpreting studies:

• **Theoretical Integration:** It proposes a novel integrated framework that synergistically links the categorization power of Fuzzy Information Theory with the explanatory power of Relevance Theory, offering a more holistic model for analyzing interpreter decision-making.

• **Empirical Analysis:** It provides a systematic, qualitative analysis of a curated corpus of diplomatic interpretation records, moving beyond theoretical postulation to evidence-based claims about interpreter strategies.

• **Practical Pedagogy:** It consolidates a structured set of strategic recommendations for interpreter training, emphasizing the conscious integration of cognitive reasoning (relevance-seeking) with practical skill execution (strategy application).

6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. Its primary reliance on qualitative case studies, while rich in detail, limits the generalizability of its findings. Future research should therefore pursue the following directions:

• **Empirical Verification:** Conduct experimental studies to compare the performance of novice and expert interpreters when confronted with controlled instances of fuzzy information, using eye-tracking or retrospective protocols to gain insights into their cognitive processes.

• **Cross-linguistic Expansion:** Broaden the scope of analysis to include language pairs beyond English and Chinese to test the universality and cultural specificity of the proposed strategies.

• **Digital Tool Application:** Explore the potential of emerging technologies, such as AI-assisted interpretation tools and large language models, in supporting interpreters in the real-time identification and processing of fuzzy information.

By addressing these avenues, future scholarship can build upon this foundation to further demystify the complexities of ambiguity in high-stakes interpreting, ultimately enhancing the quality and reliability of cross-linguistic diplomatic communication.

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