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Mediated political discourse:
Self-presentation on social media and ideological shift in
interpreting

Mediacja dyskursu politycznego: Samoprezentacja w
mediach społecznościowych i przesunięcie ideologiczne
w tłumaczeniu ustnym

Abstract

In the increasingly mediatised and multilingual public sphere, radical political discourses are undergoing cyclical processes of mitigation which normalise their presence in the broader political debate. The recontextualization of such discourses in various social fields has been shown to lead to changes not only in language but also in patterns of perception of current socio-political issues. On social media, hitherto marginal radical voices have been able to find amplification for their policies, while in interpreter-mediated communication, radical political speeches have been weakened in their target language equivalents.

While the mediation of political discourse has received sizeable academic attention, its specific realisations in multimodal social media posts and in interpreting remain underresearched. This article-based PhD thesis attempts to address this research gap by exploring the self-presentation of radical political actors on image-based Instagram and the simultaneous interpreting of ideologically loaded parliamentary speeches. Over its three constitutive papers, this thesis takes the overarching aim of investigating how different types of discourse mediation may result in radical political texts being mitigated for their target audiences. By triangulating theories and approaches stemming from Critical Discourse Studies, studies of social media and Interpreting Studies, the mediation of political discourse is analysed both in new contexts and using novel methods.

Paper 1 (Dobkiewicz 2019) is a case study of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign on Instagram. The analysis of multimodal texts comprising images and their accompanying captions is performed using tools of the Discourse-Historical Approach and analytical categories of visual grammar. Its results suggest that positive self-presentation of the

candidate was foregrounded, while negative other-presentation was limited. The campaign is evaluated for the three features of the populist far-right ideology, of which the populist division of societies between “the people” and “the elites” was visually prominent but superficial, authoritarianism was self-contradictory and nativism was notably underrepresented. It is speculated that visual representation of this final feature, which is based on ethnic discrimination, might have been seen as alienating for potential voters and was thus backgrounded. These conclusions, which stand in partial contrast to analyses of other outlets of the same candidate’s campaign, indicate that discourse mediation via multimodal social media has a highly mitigatory potential in political communication.

Paper 2 (Dobkiewicz, in press) is concerned with mediation of political discourse via simultaneous interpreting between English and Polish in the European Parliament. Specifically, the paper extends the scope of previous case studies of interpreter-mediated, ideologically loaded parliamentary speeches and the phenomenon of “interpreting shift” by analysing debate contributions from political actors across the whole political spectrum in the European Parliament. It also firmly grounds this research in the theoretical frameworks of the Discourse-Historical Approach and Interpreting Studies. The comparative analysis of source text and target text datasets gives further evidence of the wide array of linguistic strategies which contribute to ideological shifts in interpreting, while also indicating that nomination strategies are realised more neutrally in the target texts than predication strategies. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between the presence of ideological shifts and the specific ideological orientation of a source text. That said, numerical trends observed in the data do invite further research of the impact of ideological salience on the occurrence of ideological shifts, as the proportion of ideologically shifted tokens was higher in far-left and far-right texts than in centrist texts.

Paper 3 (Dobkiewicz et al. 2023) is a direct continuation of the previous study, where the occurrence of ideological shifts is analysed in interpretations of source texts controlled for their ideological orientation and produced in an experimental environment. The study includes an exploratory element, where participating interpreters’ political orientations, measured using a reliable questionnaire, are included in the analysis as a dependent variable. The results confirm the numerical trends observed in Paper 2, with higher ideological salience of the left- and right-wing source texts contributing to a higher rate of ideological shifts in the interpreter-mediated target texts than in the case of the ideologically neutral source text. Interpreters’ own political orientations, meanwhile, appears to have no significant effect on the occurrence of

ideological shifts. This suggests that while mediation of political discourse via interpreting is overall likely to lead to radical texts' ideological shift, interpreters' professional neutrality is maintained when tasked with interpreting highly ideologically loaded speeches.

The findings of the thesis suggest that political texts, especially the most ideologically salient and most radical ones, are highly susceptible to mediation-induced mitigation through strategic self- and other-presentation on image-based social media, and simultaneous interpreting of parliamentary debates.