

# Mitigating radical ideologies? Interpreter-mediated political discourse in the European Parliament

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This paper presents preliminary results of a larger project which investigates the role of the interpreter in political discourse from a Critical Discourse Studies perspective. The significance of translation and interpreting in the contemporary, multilingual world is clearly evident in politics, where simultaneous interpreting allows for near-real-time communication between parties who do not share a common language. In institutional and educational contexts, the interpreter has been traditionally defined as a “clear conduit”, a messenger who changes the linguistic code of the Source Text but alters nothing in the meaning of the text and remains completely impartial (e.g. Gile 2009). Though this model of interpreting suits employers’ expectations, it appears to be idealized when broader models of communication are considered. Indeed, a growing strand of research has explored the issue of interpreter agency (e.g. Clifford 2004; Monacelli 2009; Beaton-Thome 2013), finding evidence of greater influence of interpreters on the shape of discourses than the conduit model would suggest.

The project builds on these findings by focusing on interpretations of the discourse of right-wing populism, an ideology defined by three primary features: nativism, authoritarianism, and the division of society into “the people” and “the elites” (Mudde 2017). Although right-wing populist politicians have repeatedly expressed views which oppose basic values of liberal democracy (Mudde 2019), they have been given an unprecedented platform in the mass media, and especially on social media (e.g. Bennett 2016; Krzyżanowski & Ledin 2017; Krzyżanowski & Tucker 2018). As mediation through the mass media has been accepted as a significant factor in the normalisation of radical political discourses, then mediation outside of the mass media, e.g. via interpreting, deserves similar attention.

This project attempts to answer the question: Is there a systematic ideological shift between the Source Text and the Target Text in simultaneously interpreted political speeches? Methods of the discourse-historical approach are applied to selected European Parliament speeches made during plenary debates in the 2014 – 2019 term and to their interpretations to analyse possible lexical discrepancies between Source Texts and interpreted Target Texts, and to analyse the potential role of these discrepancies in mitigating radical discourses.

Word count: 348

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