Speaking in the first-person singular or plural

A multifactorial, speech corpus–based analysis of institutional interpreters

Nannan LIU
Twitter: @liu_notanumber

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Speaking in the first-person singular: a norm of professional interpreting

Political institutional interpreters' first-person pronoun (FPP) plural preference: shifts from source singular, noun phrases, zero, passive syntax, and "they" to the plural

- English–German and German–English SI in the European Parliament (Beaton-Thome, 2010, 2013)
- Cantonese–English SI in the Hong Kong government (D. Li & Wang, 2012)
- Mandarin–English CI in Chinese local and central governments (Fu & Chen, 2019; Gu & Tipton, 2020)

Objectives

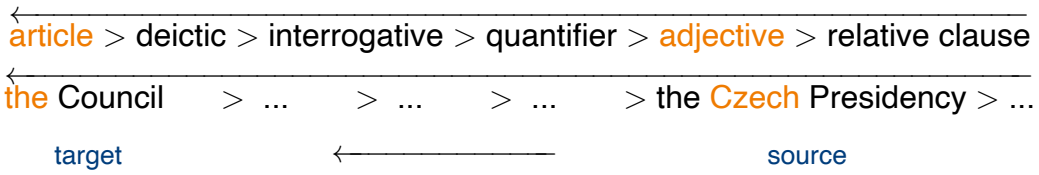
1. identify the factors that influence political institutional interpreters' choices between first-person singular and plural;
2. disentangle the social, cognitive, and linguistic explanations proposed for institutional interpreters' first-person "plural preference."

Social explanations: institutional alignment and situational setting

1. Theory: discourse meaning (van Dijk, 2004)
   * The “ideological salience” of FPP plural: “one of us” or “us versus them” differentiation
2. Data: transcripts (except for Beaton-Thome, 2013)
3. Causes:
   * “ideologically salient” topics, e.g. the Israel–Palestine relationship and Guantánamo Bay detainees (Beaton-Thome, 2010, 2013; Monacelli, 2009)
   * institutional loyalty (Fu & Chen, 2019; Gu & Tipton, 2020)
4. FPP patterns
   * frequency: plural lemma +
   * prosody: $\{\text{stress}, \text{hesitation}, \text{filled pauses}, \text{self-corrections}\}$
     $\{\textbf{we}\ \text{need to}, \text{...we um need to}, \text{we no I need to}\}$
   * referents: source “the Czech Presidency” –> target “the (European) Council” (Beaton-Thome, 2010)

Cognitive explanations

1. Theories: cognitive load (Plevoets & Defrancq, 2018) or cognitive linguistics, including self- and other-priming (Y. Li & Halverson, 2020)
2. Data: transcripts and audio recordings
3. Causes: reduce disfluency and cognitive effort
4. FPP patterns
    * frequency: plural formulaic sequences +
        - *il nous faut* (“we need to”), “we would like to,” “we will continue to”
    * prosody: fluency, phonological integration, and loss of prosodic stress
      {we need to adopt...} (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg, 1990)
    * referents: bondedness hierarchy (Croft, 2003; Hawkins, 2004)



Linguistic diversity: zero-subject versus subject obligatory languages

Source	第二	∅	必须	坚持	以人	为本
Gloss	Second	∅	must	put	people's interests	first
Target	Second	we	will continue to	put	people's interests	first

(Y. Li & Halverson, 2020, p. 13)

Why the usage-based approach?

- Consider how the three explanations interact and override each other
- Internal explanations inferior to external ones in terms of general human characteristics (Croft, 2003; Halverson, 2003)
  - Chunking: the sequential relations fostered when two or more words are often produced together

Grammaticalisation patterns

Frequency-related	+ co-occurrence
Structural	+ priming
Morphosyntactic	+ bondedess
Prosodic	+ fluency
Phonological	+ integration
Semantic	− meaning
Prosodic	− stress
Phonetic	− segments

(Bybee, 2010; Narrog & Heine, 2021)

Hypothesis I: comparing the singular and plural

	Social explanation	Cognitive and linguistic explanations
Frequency-related	+ lemma occurrence	+ co-occurrence
Morphosyntactic		+ bondeness
Structural		+ priming
Semantic	+ meaning	− meaning
Phonetic		− segments
Phonological	− integration	+ integration
Prosodic	− fluency	+ fluency
Prosodic	+ stress	− stress
Grammaticalisation	plural < singular	plural > singular

Hypothesis II: comparing the plural/plural constructions in interpreting and non-interpreting

	Social explanation	Cognitive and linguistic explanations
Frequency-related	+ lemma occurrence	+ co-occurrence
Morphosyntactic		+ bondedess
Semantic	+ meaning	− meaning
Structural		+ priming
Phonetic		− segments
Phonological	− integration	+ integration
Prosodic	− fluency	+ fluency
Prosodic	+ stress	− stress
Grammaticalisation	interpreting < non-interpreting	interpreting > non-interpreting

Parallel interpreting corpus: Chinese premier press conferences

Premiers
mainland China,
Taiwan, and international relations

institutional loyalty

Five different staff interpreters of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- CI in 2004–2006, 2013–2015
- original Chinese (OC) and interpreted English (IE) data

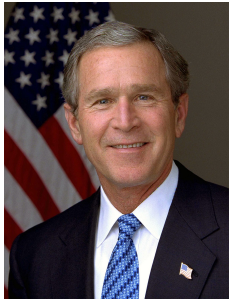
(Liu, 2020)

Congress spokespersons
housekeeping

Reporters
questions

Comparable corpus: native English (NE) data

US President George W. Bush's State of the Union addresses (2003–2008)



President Bush
the Iraq War,
US issues, and
international relations besides the war

1. Mode: read-out from the teleprompter, scripts, or consecutive notes
2. Prosody: delivery rates, degree of phonetic reduction, number of disfluencies
3. Timeframe: in the 2000s and 2010s
4. Duration: 50–60 min of native-language speech delivery
5. Functions: policy debriefing, support rallying, and image management
6. Register: Bush's addresses most similar to that of the interpreted speech compared with 16 other registers (Liu, in press)

Describe the context of FPP choices

2,438 occurrences of FPP subjects that are freely variable between the singular and plural coded for 33 variables associated with the three explanations

- Social Variable: Topic
  - Premiers on Taiwan (“one of us”)
  - Premiers/President Bush on international relations (“us versus them”)
  - President Bush on the Iraq War (“us versus them”)

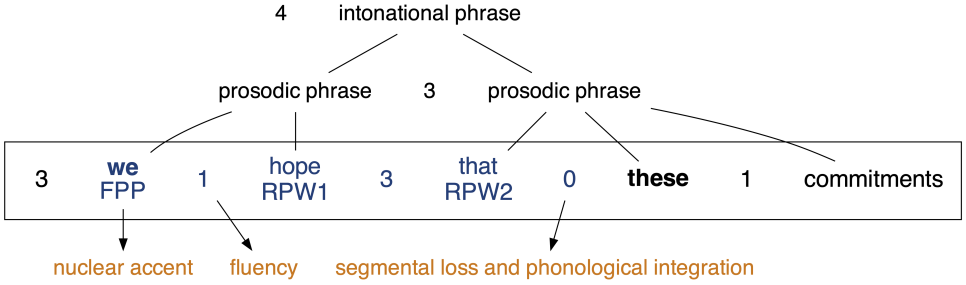
Cognitive and Linguistic Variables

Type	Variable	Levels
Semantic	Negation	Affirmative, Negative
	Modality	Unmarked, Prediction, Obligation, Volition
	Verb Type	Activity, Aspect, Communication, Cognition, Emotion, Existence, Facilitation, Wish
Syntactic	Clause Type	Main, Coordinate, Subordinate
	Sentence Type	Declarative, Non-Declarative
	Voice	Active, Passive
Morphosyntactic	Mood	Realis, Irrealis
Morphological	Aspect	Simple, Perfect, Progressive
	Tense	Present, Past, Future
Prosodic	Delivery Rate	Number of syllables per second
Referential	Bondedness	Article/Bare, Deictic, Adjective/Quantifier, Non-NP
	Group	Inclusive, Exclusive
Structural	Self-Priming	No, Yes
	Other-Priming	Other Pronouns, First-Person Plural, First-Person Singular, NP, Zero

Phonetic, phonological, and prosodic variables

Tone and Break Indices (ToBI)

1. Prominence (Non-Prominent, Nuclear, Prenuclear)
2. Break Index (0, 1, 2, 3, 4)



Multifactorial Prediction and Deviation Analysis using Regression/Random Forests (MuPDAR[F])

Step 1 identify the social, cognitive, and linguistic conventions in FPP choices of source and comparable/recipient speech

FPP Choice $\sim$ Social Variable + Cognitive (excluding Referential) Variables ~~+ Other-Priming~~

Referent Bondedness	Plural	Singular
Adjective/Quantifiers	350	0
Article/Bare	682	0
Deictic	102	0
Non-NP	316	988

(Gries & Deshors, 2014; Kruger & De Sutter, 2018)

Step 2: deviation analyses

measure IE's deviation from source conventions by applying the source model to predict interpreter FPP choices

- Social explanation: FPP Choice $\sim$ Social Variable + Cognitive Variables
- Cognitive explanations: FPP Choice $\sim$ Social Variable + Cognitive Variables

  Source-Like $\sim$ Predictors of the Source Model

  Deviation Score $\sim$ Predictors of the Source Model

A hypothetical example of IE data following deviation analyses

Social	Cognitive	Actual FPP Choice	Predicted FPP Choice	Source-Like	Deviation Score
S1	C1	Plural	Singular	False	0.7
S2	C1	Plural	Plural	True	0
S1	C2	Plural	Plural	True	0
S3	C3	Singular	Singular	True	0

Step 3: complementing the MuPDAR(F)

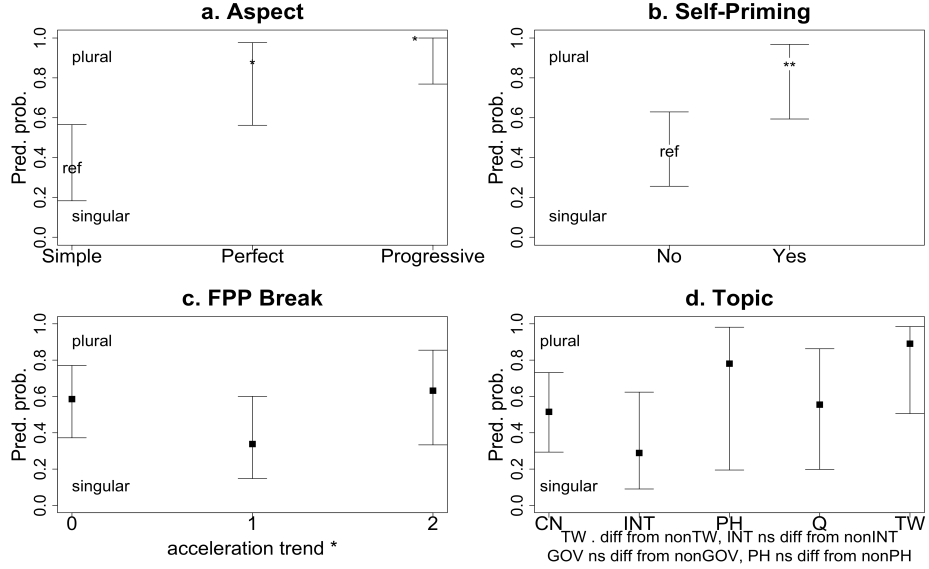
- Interpretational effects: the effects of (non-)interpreting on the plural/plural constructions

  Mediation Status $\sim$ Cognitive (including Referential Variables)

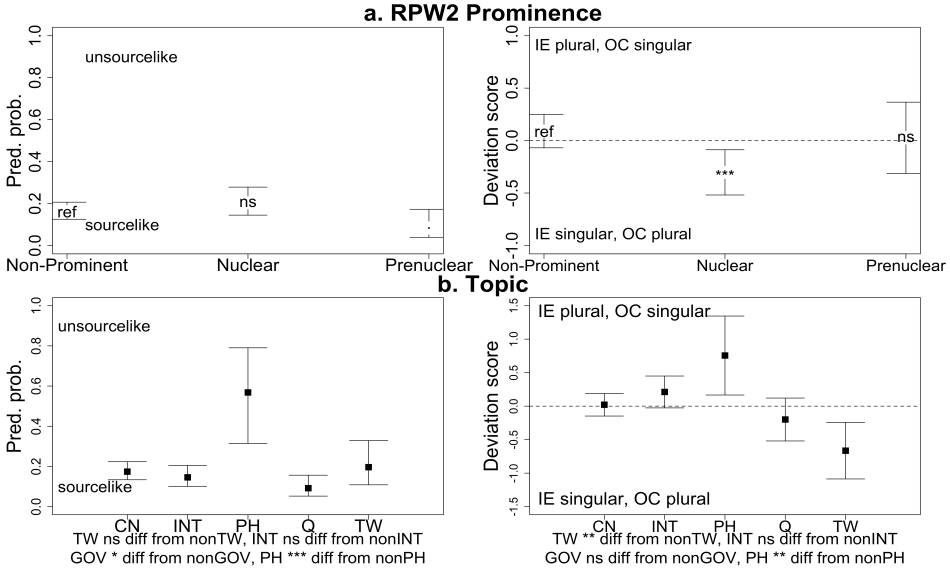
- Contrastive effects: the effects of source–target relations on interpreters' FPP choices

  FPP Choice $\sim$ Social Variable * (Significant Predictors of the Source Model + Other-Priming + Cognitive Variables Measured in the Target)

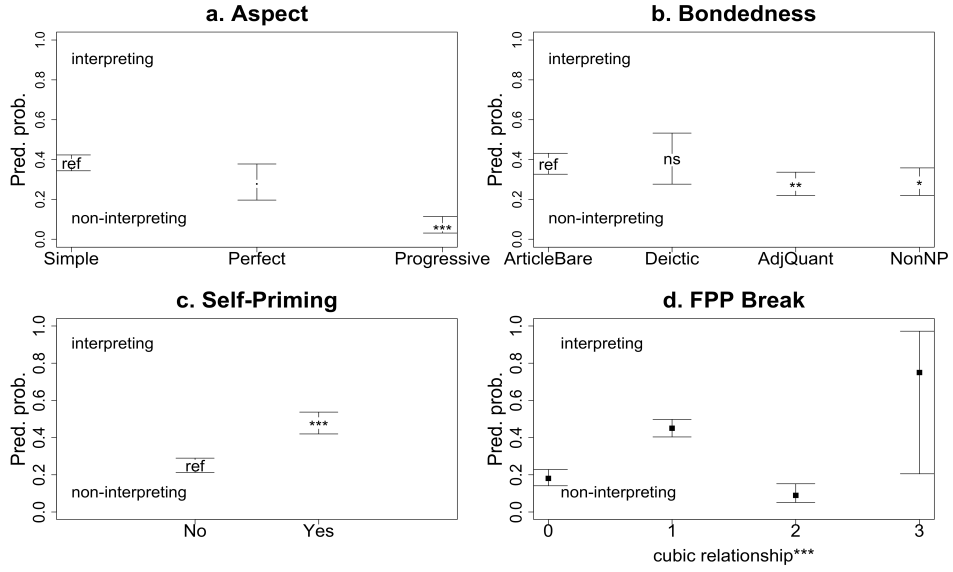
Findings: FPP choices in original Chinese (OC)



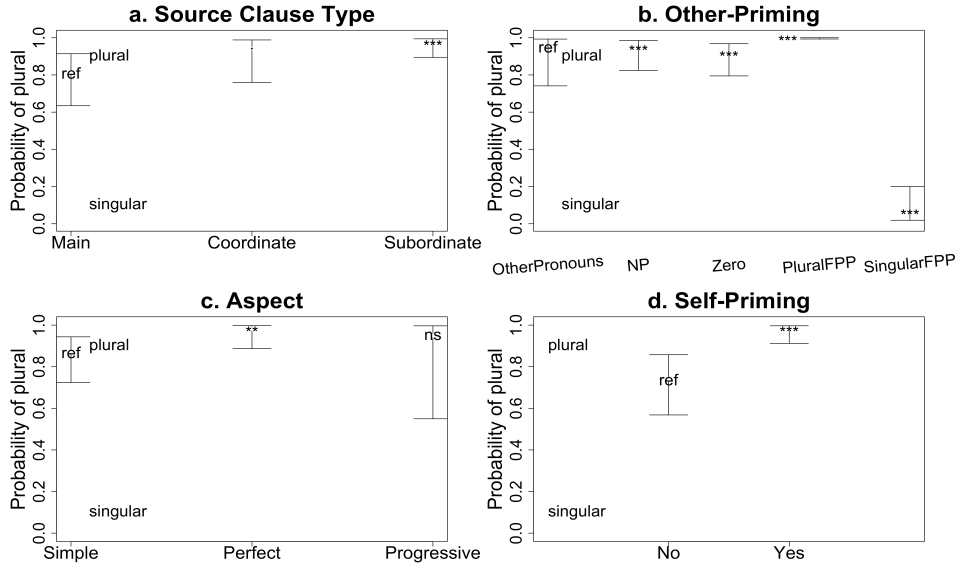
Deviation in FPP choices between interpreted English (IE) and original Chinese (OC)



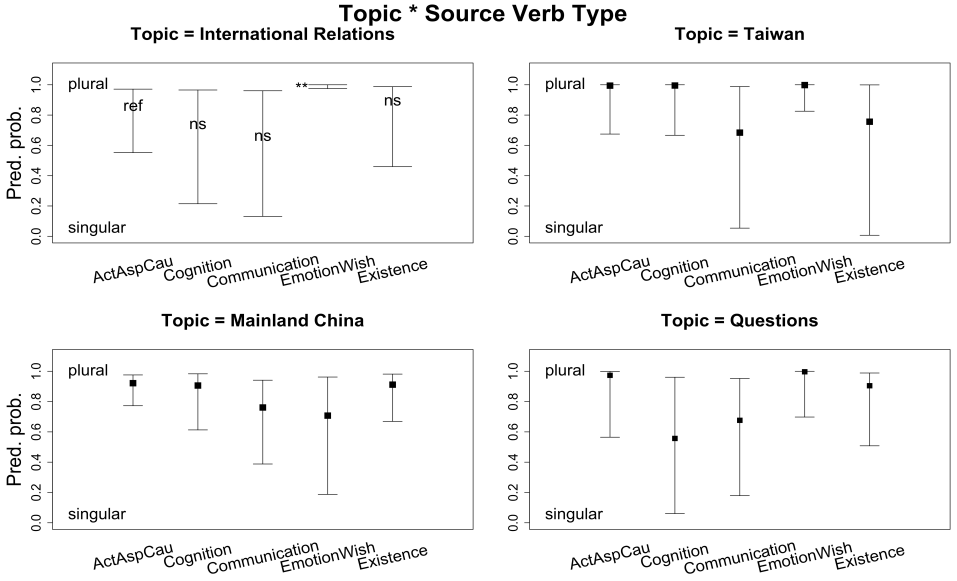
Interpretational effects



Contrastive effects



A unified explanation that considers the social, cognitive, and linguistic together



Conclusions

- First-person shifts best explained by chunking effects when interpreters process complex forms and referents in the source and target and zero-subject source inputs
- The social explanation rejected, except for the interactive effect
  - caveat: comparisons between institutional and freelance interpreters
- Cognitive and linguistic explanations hold sway, supported by the high degree of grammaticalisation of plural constructions in interpreting
  - structural priming
  - morphosyntactic bondedness
  - phonetic erosion
  - fluency